

# Online Communication Strategy for the Geert Hofstede Consortium

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## Graduation Assignment

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## Executive Summary

This research project was conducted for the Master of International Communication joint programme, given at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen, The Netherlands. This project was written on the request of the programme director, Iekje Smit, in order to recruit more students for the programme through online means. The objective of this project was to produce an online communication strategy for the programme director of the MIC, which seeks to attract more students via online communication, particularly students from countries of strategic interest for the programme. These countries are: Mexico, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia; and are referred to as NESO countries by governmental and educational entities in the Netherlands.

The research was carried out in several different ways in order to evaluate the gathered data via triangulation. Triangulation consists of gathering data about a specific topic via different means in order to compare them and to reach conclusions based on which responses enhance or diminish the validity of each other. In this project the data was gathered by different means; literature was reviewed, in depth interviews and a questionnaire took place and the NESO online behaviour reports were analysed. All of these responses were contrasted and compared via triangulation, in order to create recommendations that are tailored for the MIC programme.

The literature review was based on three main fields: online communication and marketing, decision making behaviour and student recruitment strategies. Based on the result of the theoretical data, the interviews and questionnaire were established. The interviews took place with several experts on the three fields previously mentioned. These experts enlightened the researcher into knowing what the best practices in each field are and how they are applicable to a master programme. The questionnaires were sent out to current and former students and the answers of this questionnaire described which tools are more appropriate to reach higher education students. Finally, the NESO behaviour reports clarified which tools and platforms are appropriate to exploit per country and per field of study.

The literature review provided the researcher with tools that were used both for the framework of further research and for final recommendations for the MIC. The in depth interviews provided the researcher with tools of a more practical nature, from which tailored recommendations for the MIC could be established. The questionnaire's answers explained which tools are indeed the most appropriate ones and which tools are not as successful as previously thought.

Within the recommendations made by the researcher based on all the gathered data; the following are paramount. Firstly, it is recommended to follow the advice of several authors and experts by publishing testimonials and 'who is where' lists for prospective students to get a real grasp of what former students liked about the programme, and what life after the MIC can be. Also, a blog should be accessible for everyone to read and for current students, alumni and staff to post.

Additionally, the MIC should review their website visual and content wise. A consistent image through the different online platforms is also strongly recommended. Moreover, it is highly recommended to create a short congratulating video to be sent to those students that have been unconditionally or conditionally accepted into the programme.

It is strongly recommend the MIC to focus on the three countries which showed the highest interest in the field of communication; Russia, India and Mexico, but also on those countries that showed the highest amount of students seeking master degree; India, Mexico and Indonesia, and the highest amount of students able to pay for their tuition without the help of a scholarship; China, Korea and India.

Finally, it is recommended to not only use alumni as ambassadors online and offline, but also to have short testimonials published every other day on the different platforms of the MIC. This can be an eye-catcher for a prospective student who is looking for a different and enriching experience.

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## 1) Project Context

We currently live in a fast developing world where contact can be established between a person in China and someone in the Netherlands within seconds, and through a single click on a website. World citizens are more and more available online disregarding age, gender and location. According to the Worldometers website more than 2.5 billion people are online at any given moment, and this number rises by the second (2013)

In other respects graduate students are becoming more and more eager to pursue further studies, in both postgraduate and doctorate studies. According to the OECD, 60% of the graduates in the Netherlands further their studies with a post graduate programme and from this 60% roughly 7% are international students (Education at a Glance, 2013).

All of these facts lead to The Geert Hofstede Consortium and to the purpose of this research. The Geert Hofstede Consortium offers the Master of International Communication (MIC) at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences and three other partner universities across Europe. The programme director of the MIC believes that there is potential to have more students enrol in the programme. However there are many factors that influence the enrolment rate; for instance the increase of the tuition fee of the programme and the little availability of scholarships for prospective students (I. Smit, Personal Communication, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013). There are many different ways in which this problem can be approached and in this project, the online strategies that could reach and potentially encourage more students to enrol for the MIC programme are examined. It is important to highlight that the researcher will only examine those potential students who can apply to a scholarship through a NESO office (Netherlands Education Support Office) by agreement with the MIC programme director. Even though the research is largely focused on the MIC programme at the Hanze UAS, the final recommendations and strategy can be tailored and applicable to the other partner universities of the MIC. This limitation is further explored on Section 5: Research Strategy.

In the Netherlands there are two different types of postgraduate education. According to the NUFFIC (2012), Higher Professional Education (HBO, by its acronym in Dutch) and Higher Academic Education (WO) have varying numbers of students at all levels. The focus will be in HBO data because the MIC is given at a HBO University in the Netherlands. In their Mapping Mobility research paper, the NUFFIC explains that out of the 28.000 international students enrolled in an HBO University in the Netherlands during the academic year 2011-2012, only 1.087 were enrolled in a master's degree. Hence, 4% of the international students in the Netherlands are doing a master's degree at a HBO level; which leaves plenty of room for improvement and expansion.

The NUFFIC, Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation, aims at the mobility and diversity of students in and from the Netherlands. The NUFFIC gives scholarships to higher education students that meet a specific educational profile. According to their website, those countries in which there is a NESO office imply a strategic importance for the NUFFIC (2013). Hence, this project will focus on prospective students that come from a NESO country. According to the NUFFIC website the NESO countries are: Mexico, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia. According to Mr van der Wal Taiwan used to have a NESO office, however for budgetary reasons the Dutch government has decided to close this office, and for the same reason the office in Vietnam will be closed in the coming year (2013). By consequence, these two countries are not considered part of the target group of this research. Another reason for this research to focus on NESO countries is that

according to Ms Gutierrez, the Hanze UAS has had for the past four years an average of 60 students from NESO countries (2013) and some of these students have already been part of the MIC programme.

## 2) Organisational Context

The MIC is a joint programme offered in four different universities across Europe. These four universities are: the Hanze University of Applied Sciences (Hanze UAS), University of Language and Communication of Milan, Vilnius University and Leeds Metropolitan University. This research project will focus mainly on the Hanze UAS because of the previously specified target group and its direct correlation with Dutch universities. However the researcher believes that the strategy given can be tailored per partner university based on their own interests’.

According to their website the MIC aims at preparing communication professionals to develop in an international context filled with cultural differences (2013). The key of the development of the students is the diversity, not only of the four partner universities, but also of the students and teachers themselves.

The latest Marketing Analysis of the MIC states that every year there are more nationalities and thus more diversity in the programme (February, 2013). Additionally, the report explains that a growth in applications and enrolment is visible in the four years that the programme has been available. However, this growth seems to have stagnated at an average of 100 applicants, with a definitive 26 students enrolling per year in all four partner universities. Through the last three academic years, excluding the current one, the programme has had on average 5 students from NESO countries each year. These numbers reflect the capability of growth of the programme.

## 3) Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a key part of the research development since it aims at shedding light into the different theoretical aspects that have an influence in the final strategy of this project. This section is aimed at gathering information on specific fields that were defined through the Research Objective and the Research Questions. First; the online communication and marketing theories are presented followed by decision making processes and theories and finally, recruitment strategies are presented. The researcher believes that presenting the theories first sets a framework which defines the ways in which the rest of the research takes place.

### 3.1) Online Communication Theories

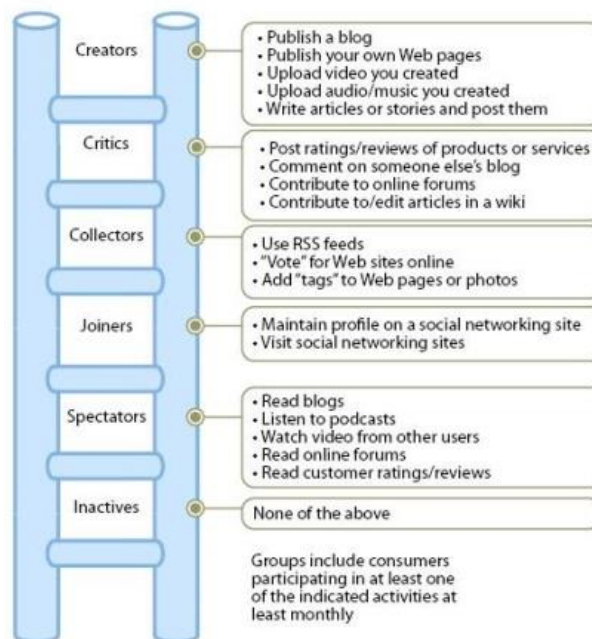
Online communication theories are presented within this subsection. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is defined as the communication that happens through technological devices between two or more people (McQuail, 2005). Research on CMC studies the ways in which people relate and develop impressions of each other through these channels of communication.



In his article *Impression Development in Computer-Mediated Interaction* (1993) Joseph Walther explains that asynchronous online communication allows users to be more deliberate when creating their messages. Additionally, in his paper *Selective Self-Presentation in CMC: Hyper Personal Dimensions of Technology, Language and Cognition* (2006) Walther explains that users tailor their messages considering who the receiver is and how it is more appropriate to approach them. The MIC could take advantage of the asynchronous communication by taking the time to deliberately elaborate proper messages for the different online platforms that can be used and by taking in consideration the type of language that end users expect from them. The relevance of CMC lies on how the MIC can get their message across adequately through the different online platforms.

The Social Technographic Ladder (Figure 1) is a ladder figure which defines the different type of social media users that can be found online (2008). Li and Bernoff explain that this ladder is based on the amount of activity each user has within a time frame of a month, the more the user does online, the higher in the ladder that user is. The authors explain that through this ladder a corporation can understand better the online behaviour of their target group, and thus have a better chance at approaching the target group in an appropriate way and with the right content. By understanding the behaviour of the six types of users, and applying each concept to the behaviour of the target group, a comprehensive strategy could be established for the MIC.

Figure 1



Kotler and Fox (1995) present a new marketing perspective for education in their book *Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions*. This perspective is integrated by 7 Ps which form what the authors believe should be the core of any marketing effort coming from a higher education institute. According to the authors, the 7Ps are; programme which stands for the quality, type and structure of the programmes being offered and also of the reputation of the university, price that stands for tuition fees and other expenses, like application and visa fees. Place which stands for the availability and accessibility of the campus, promotion that stands for maintaining a dialogue with prospective, current and former students, but also with stakeholders, teachers and researchers. Processes are "the way things happen in an institution" (p. 30) such as application procedures, management,

enrolment, etc. Physical facilities such as those found on campus; classrooms, sports facilities, computers and printers, and finally, people which are the staff of the institution; both administrative and teaching. The 7P's of the MIC are clearly defined; however their crucial integration into their marketing and communication strategy is not entirely visible.

Gibbs (2006) in his article *From the Invisible Hand to the Invisible Handshake: Marketing Higher Education* published in the *Journal of Research Post-Compulsory Education*, explains that a more human approach to the marketing mix is paramount for the development of a successful strategy. The author explains that a humanistic approach takes into consideration the complexity of the product; knowledge and education, the economic role of the institution; 'student-centred funding' and the financial performance; where the student is the key investor. The author explains that these factors should integrate the new marketing mix which aims at looking at the student as what he really is: and investor who exchanges his money for education and his future.

According to Tim O'Reilly, the Web 2.0 is an interactive and creative World Wide Web where users join virtual communities, produce own content and share content (What is the Web 2.0, 2005).

In addition Scolari defends that new definitions of communication theories are paramount for the academics who study the new media (2009). In his article *Mapping Conversations about New Media: the Theoretical Field of Digital Communication* the author thoroughly explains how this can be done, and he also further explains three core factors that have changed drastically with the existence of the Web 2.0. The researcher finds that only these core factors are relevant for this study and thus the new definitions and theorizations of digital media are excluded. Scolari analysed the production, the content and the consumption of the Web 2.0 and came to the conclusion that in the new digital media the consumer plays a bigger role. The production, still created by large companies and journals, is now also made by consumers in the means of citizen-journalism; and according to the author this production also created new professional profiles, such as community managers and webmasters. The content is largely created by the user and it has greatly changed manners of expression online. And the consumption has become interactive, tailored and personalised thanks to the Web 2.0. Scolari explains that these factors need to be further scrutinised and supported by new theories which explain the trends that take place online. It is recommended that the MIC takes advantage of the interaction made possible by the Web 2.0 in order to establish a greater amount of contact with their prospective students.

The Web 2.0 has opened new opportunities and ways of communicating; what used to be word of mouth by talking to a friend or a relative has now changed into online word of mouth. Brown, Broderick and Lee studied the credibility that users give to online word of mouth (WOM) in their article *Word of Mouth in Online Communities: Conceptualising the Online Social Network* (2007). The authors evaluated three aspects which they believe are essential for WOM to take place in online communities: tie strength, homophily and source credibility. According to the authors, tie strength is based on the strength of the relationship between two people online, homophily is the sense of belonging to a group of people which have the same attributes as the user himself and source credibility is based on the perceived expertise of the informant and the bias of the user. Furthermore, the study evaluated the information exchange between users and came to the conclusions that users tend to have greater ties with websites than with users and that word of mouth can be influence greatly consumers when it comes to selecting products or brands online. This

can be used to the advantage of the MIC; which could establish its website as the most credible source containing information about the programme but also where the prospective, current and former students, and even the staff, could share their experiences and opinions about the programme for the rest of the users to see. The website could also be used as a source of information regarding international and intercultural communication; which would give a sense of reliability to students.

Additionally, Gallant and Boone in their article *Communicative Informatics: A Social Media Perspective for Online Communities* (2008) study active individuals online who create content and act as negotiators of their social actions online. Their four propositions on the audience of the Web 2.0 are that the audience is active, creative, interactive with technology and negotiates its' place online. This is strongly related to the Social Technographic Ladder in which Li and Bernoff; explain the activity levels of the different users of the Web 2.0. Gallant & Boone and Li & Bernoff state that there are different types of users online, however the first authors are more concerned with the overall use of the Web 2.0, while the second authors are more concerned with the actual usage of the Web 2.0 by each of the users.

The propositions of Gallant and Boone of the audience are also similar to what Scolari presents as the three core factors of the Web 2.0; where audiences are active and creative in generating their own content online. Gallant and Boone conclude that the online environment is "actively created as people engage others in social communities, react to the technology, and negotiate new notions of time and place" (p. 2). The MIC could take advantage of this active and creative audience by involving the staff and the students of the programme into an exchange of ideas online, which could take place in the blog of the MIC, where prospective students can easily see the opinions and ideas of everyone who is part of the MIC.

### 3.2) Decision Making Behaviour Theories

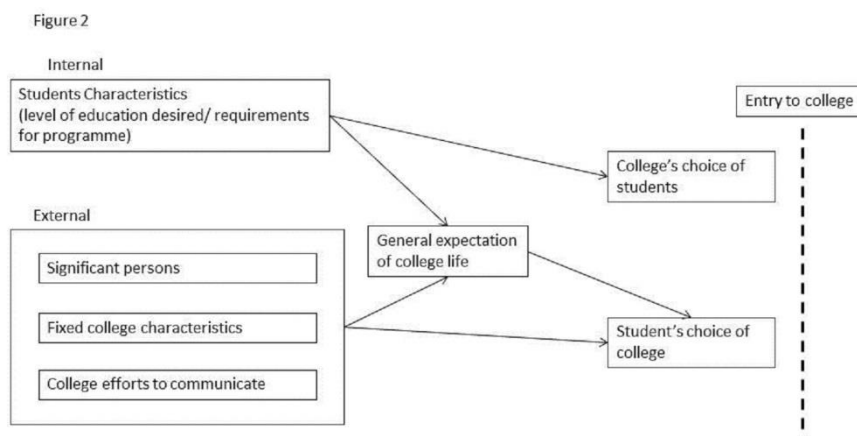
Likewise, decision making behaviour theories based on higher education students are explored. According to Moogan, Baron and Harris (1999) the decision making behaviour of higher education students can be seen as the decision process of a standard buyer looking for a product. As described by Kotler in *Principles of Marketing* (2009) the Buyer Decision Process is a five step process in which: the buyer recognizes the need for a new product, searches information of different brands, evaluates the different alternatives, makes a purchase decision, and finally is satisfied or dissatisfied with the products performance (post purchase behaviour).

According to these five steps of Kotler, students behave the following way when choosing for a higher education programme or university. The need for a product becomes the need or desire to specialise in one particular field. Searching information becomes searching the different programmes offered in the field and the different universities which offer these programmes, and also reviewing statements from former students and online forums. Evaluating different alternatives would be evaluating and comparing the different programmes that are the most attractive for the prospective student, within this step the decision to apply to different programmes could also be included. The purchase decision becomes choosing and finally enrolling in one particular programme (based on the assumption that students apply to more than one programme). Finally, the post purchase behaviour

is based on the dissatisfaction or satisfaction of the student regarding the programme which can result in un-enrolment from the programme or finishing the studies and graduating.

Chapman, in his article A Model of Student College Choice (1981) for the academic Journal of Higher Education develops a flowchart through which the students make the decision on which college to assist (Figure 2). Even though the model was developed based on high school students who were making the decision for their bachelor programmes during the 1980s, the researcher believes the model is applicable to the decision making process for post graduate studies; with some minor changes. The model dictates three main influences in the process: the students personal characteristics; such as his socioeconomic status, aptitude and the aspiration to a certain level of education, the fixed characteristics of the institution; such as the location, costs, availability of desired programme and environment, and finally the efforts of the institution to communicate with the students; such as the marketing tools. At the time this article was written brochures were the most common way to communicate with students; nowadays it is believed that websites and Open Days are the best way to communicate with students (Brolsma Baard, 2013).

The figure below (Figure 2: adapted) shows the decision making process according to Chapman. As it can be seen the institution can control only two of the many factors that influence the decision. These two factors, as presented by the MIC, will be thoroughly examined under Section 6.2: Empirical Results.



Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman explore the reasons why students choose international campuses in the United Arab Emirates in their article Student Choice in Higher Education: Motivations for Choosing to Study at an International Branch Campus (2011). Even though their study is exclusively focused on the UAE; the push and pull factors they present can be generalized for international students decision making process when going abroad. The authors claim that the push factors which 'push' the student outside of their native countries are: availability of desired studies, lack of opportunities in home country, home country employers' preference for foreign education and unavailability of desired programme in home country. The pull factors which 'pull' the student towards foreign countries are: perceived quality of education abroad, improved employment perspectives abroad, opportunity to improve or learn a second language and experience a different culture. Some of these pull factors could be easily exploited by the MIC; the perceived quality of education can be shown by genuine testimonials of the alumni; the employment perspectives can be presented by posting 'who is where' lists and by doing some follow up on alumni. And finally

experiencing different cultures is the Unique Selling Point of the MIC (Marketing Analysis, 2013) by having to study in two different universities located in two different countries in Europe.

Shaw, Kobrin, Packman and Schmidt present in their article Describing Students Involved in the Search Phase of the College Choice Process: A Cluster Analysis Study (2009) factors associated with student college choice in the United States of America. By analysing these factors and the surveys and interviews the authors concluded that prospective college students can be classified in six different clusters. Since these clusters are solely focused on US prospective students for undergraduate programmes, the researcher decided to focus on the factors which the authors analyse. Shaw, Kobrin, Packman and Schmidt argue that when it comes to choosing a university and a programme, the factors that influence the students the most are: academic achievements of previous studies, gender, ethnicity, first and second language, parental income and parental education level and location of residence. These factors will be further explored in Section 6.2: Analytical Results.

Additionally, Gomes and Murphy in their article An Exploratory Study of Marketing International Education Online (2003) present the most sought information by students from abroad who wish to pursue their undergraduate and/or postgraduate studies in Australia. Once more, even though the research by Gomes and Murphy was focused entirely in Australia, the researcher believes the results can be applicable to international programme taught in English. The authors explain that 70% of the students sought information online first, and half of these students did so through search engines. One out of three respondents claimed that they sent emails to the desired university, and over four out of five of these students claimed that the personalised email contact influenced their decision towards choosing a particular university. However, only 10% claimed that they found all the information needed online, thus 90% of the students needed to actively seek information via other means that the university's website.

According to Gomes and Murphy the most sought information by students is: reputation of institution, lifestyle of foreign country, safety, availability of scholarship and work, visa processes and costs, recognition of personal qualifications and independent sources of information about the university. This study leads to the conclusion that when it comes to recruiting students from abroad it is important that all the information is available online, and that this information is easily found. Once again, this online behaviour will be further analysed in the Analytical Results (section 6.2), where a comparison between what the theory claims should be online, and that the students actually look for online can be established.

### 3.3) Recruitment Strategies

In like manner, recruitment strategies for students of higher education institutions are explored. Even though there is extensive literature available regarding different recruitment theories, the researcher has decided that a literature review concerning recruitment of students in the higher education level is more appropriate for the final outcome of this project. The following literature review will take into consideration different strategies that are currently being used by other universities to recruit international students.

The Guardian's writer Whitehead interviewed recruiting experts from four different universities across the globe and established five key questions that recruiters ask themselves before starting any recruiting effort (2012). These 5 key questions are as follows: first 'what' does the recruiter want to promote? What does the programme or university offer that makes it unique? Second 'to whom' does the recruiter aim the strategy? What type of students is the recruiter looking for? Third 'how' does the recruiter find them? Through which tools is the recruiter more likely to find this particular target of students? Fourth 'why' does the recruiter want to attract this particular target through these particular tools with this particular message? And finally 'where' is the university or programme located, and how this is an advantage for the potential student? Despite these five steps being very basic to any communication campaign, it is paramount for the researcher to be aware of them in order to establish an effective strategy for the MIC.

Furthermore, Hanover Research (2012) studied recruitment strategies for international students in universities located in Anglophone countries. Even though the research is specific for Anglophone countries the strategies applied by these universities can be generalised into strategies that universities use through the globe. The research explains that the universities should no longer send out information to every potential student out there, but it recommends to instead specify the target of international students that the university wishes to recruit. The research explains that this can be done through the use of the "Cylinder Model" (Yam et al, 2007). This model encourages universities to explore their own goals and strengths in order to understand which type of student is more likely to be attracted to their universities and by consequence develop a recruitment strategy that is most suitable for both the university and the prospective students.

The Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) reviews every year trends of recruiting and marketing practices of universities which offer postgraduate programmes. In their report of 2012; 359 schools and faculties participated and 34% of these were from outside of the United States of America. According to their results, the most targeted groups by all universities and programmes in 2012 were: working professionals, foreign students and women. Even though most of the survey of the GMAC is focused on MBA programmes, the Council also obtained results from a number of marketing and communications programmes which are mainly located in Europe. From these programmes, the most targeted groups were: foreigners, undergraduate students and prospective students with work experience. Furthermore, 56% of the marketing and communications programmes targeted foreign students and also 56% of the programmes did not expect any funding to come from employers. These numbers leave plenty of room for expansion, but also confirm that prospective students are willing to travel far distances to pursue postgraduate education. Finally, and more specifically in Europe, most of the students came from India and Russia; which are two of the countries that form part of the target group of this research project.

One of the highlights from the research report of the GMAC is that the median number of students per class, per year in marketing and communications post graduate programmes is 31 students. During the past three years the MIC has had an average of 26 students a year; which is close to the median of the rest of the European programmes, but still leaves room for some improvement.

On their article Student Recruitment and the World Wide Web: An Analysis of the Supply of and Demand for Online Information in Planning (2002) Chapin and Fitzgerald looked into the ways that online recruitment is done through the World Wide Web and analysed the demand and supply of



information regarding programmes and universities. According to the authors, the most sought out information online is: programme description, description of courses, application procedures, courses list and basic admission information. These results differ from those of Gomes and Murphy that have been previously mentioned, which could be due to the different countries that the research took place; Gomes and Murphy's research took place in Australia with students that came mainly from Eastern Asia, whereas Chapin and Fitzgerald's research took place in Southern East USA with national students only. The differences could also exist because of the different approaches of the research, the methodology or even the analysis and own perspectives of the authors. However, the researcher believes that both results are equally applicable to the MIC; when it comes to recruiting foreign students online all the information mentioned by both Gomes & Murphy and Chapin & Fitzgerald should be available for the students. Thus the MIC should consider this information when updating or reviewing their website.

Finally, Bugeja in his article *The New R&R: Recruitment and Retention of Students* (2013) explains the recruitment strategies he believes have been successful in attracting and retaining new students at the Iowa State University. The author recommends to have 'student information packages'; which could be online brochures or PDF files that come with all the necessary information about the programme, from admission and visa requirements to job and employment rates and testimonials. Bugeja further recommends having a student blog where prospective, current and former students can express their opinion about the programme, or the city. He also recommends having staff involved in this blog, in order for students to see how active the teachers are in their research and online. The author further recommends sending regular emails to prospective students in order to keep them up to date with the activities and events that take place at the university, and also to have programme ambassadors who assist events in high school or Open Days to meet prospective students. Finally, Bugeja recommends having a standardised congratulations video to be sent to those students who have been accepted into the programme. The MIC could apply some of these strategies, since according to Bugeja they have proved to be fruitful, for instance the student blog where every student can post questions or testimonials. Additionally, the MIC could also create a short congratulating video to be sent to those students that have been unconditionally or conditionally accepted into the programme, for them to start getting a grasp of what the programmes is, and who is part of it. Further insight into these strategies and how they can be implemented by the MIC will be discussed in Section 8.2: the Strategy

## 4) Research Design

### 4.1) Research Objective

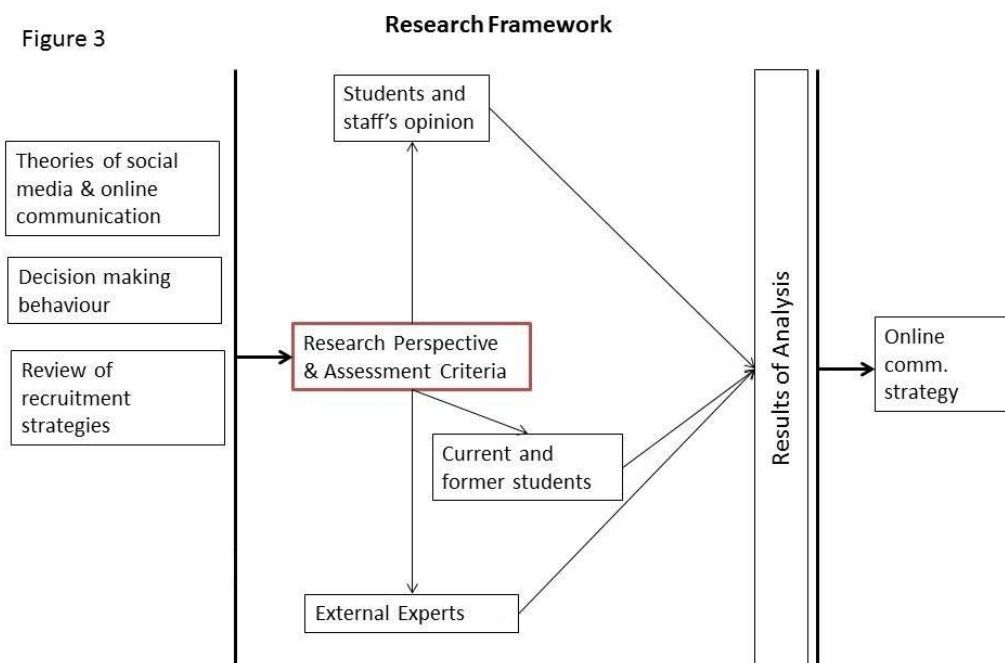
There are several stages in which a problem can be tackled and researched; Veschuren and Doorewaard refer to this as the intervention cycle in their book *Designing a Research Project* (2010). Since the programme director of the MIC is already aware of the problem and the causes of said problem have already been looked into (I. Smit, Personal Communication, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013), this project fits into the "design" stage. According to the authors, the design stage is the stage in which a plan is "developed in order to find a solution to the problem" (p 48).

The objective of this project is: to produce an online communication strategy for the programme director of the MIC by the 9<sup>th</sup> of January of 2014 which contributes to the current communication

efforts being used and at the same time seeks to attract more students from NESO countries to the programme. This will be done by analysing online communication theories, decision making behaviour processes, reviewing the literature available on recruitment strategies, considering the ways in which intercultural differences can affect communication efforts and also by examining the opinion of their staff, students and experts on the field of communication and recruitment of students, and finally by analysing the reports on market information from the NUFFIC and NESO offices.

#### 4.2) Research Framework

Based on the objective previously defined and the guidelines given by Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010) the following research framework has been developed. The research framework seen on Figure 3 is: A study of online communication and decision making behaviour theories, and a review of recruitment strategy altogether with the results of the preliminary research, by means of which the opinion of the staff, students and external experts will be evaluated. A scrutinised comparison of these results will lead to further recommendations and the design of the online communication strategy for the MIC.



The research perspective of this project will be a 'design oriented perspective' which according to Verschuren and Doorewaard is the perspective of developing a "practical plan to obtain certain structural [...] solutions" (p 77). The assessment will be defined through the in depth research of theories and strategies.

#### 4.3) Research Objects

The research objects that will be analysed in this research project are: the staff, the current and former students and external experts in the field of communication and recruitment of students. This



section explains in further detail how these research objects contribute to the development of the final online communication strategy.

### **Staff**

The staff of the MIC provided detailed explanations of their current communication efforts and expressed their opinions about these efforts. The staff also gave insight on the real communications issues that the MIC could be facing which the researcher might have not seen from an external perspective.

### **Current and former students**

Current and former students gave insight on whether the communications efforts of the MIC are being fruitful by using their own experience as an example. By analysing their opinions, it can be defined how it is more appropriate to contact them and through which means.

### **External Experts**

External experts gave the researcher insight into successful and unsuccessful strategies used by them in the different fields that are of value for this research. Communication professionals and recruiting experts provided the researcher with information regarding appropriate strategies; messages and platforms that can be used for certain target groups. These experts currently work at the Hanze UAS as part of the marketing and communication team, which gave the researcher insight into best practices on the field of marketing higher education and international communication with students abroad.

Furthermore, graphic designers and community managers recommended best practices for higher education institutions presence online. Additionally, these experts explained from their professional point of view how a higher education programme should handle their online image. These experts were external to the Hanze UAS since an unbiased opinion was considered more valuable for the final results. The reasons behind these decisions are explained on Section 5: Research Strategy.

Additionally, NUFFIC employees gave further understanding as to how the NESO offices communicate with prospective students in particular countries and particular fields. Two of these offices had direct contact with the researcher, while the rest provided the researcher with web behaviour and online portals reports. All of the data gathered is analysed on Section 6.1: Empirical Results.

## **4.4) Research Questions**

Based on the research objective and the research framework, the following research questions have been developed. These questions are answered throughout this research report.

### **Theoretical Question**

The theoretical question and sub questions aim at discovering how literature defines certain concepts and how these concepts are of relevance to this project. The theoretical question and sub questions of this project are:

-What is known from literature regarding online communication theories, decision making processes and recruitment strategies that could be used in the development of the assessment criteria?

- a) Which online communication theories are relevant for this research?
- b) What does literature identify as paramount in the decision making process of students?

These topics have been dealt with on Section 3: Theoretical Framework. Whether these questions have been answered is discussed under Section 7: Conclusions.

### **Empirical Question**

The empirical question and sub questions were defined through the results of the Theoretical Question. The answers of these questions help the researcher in creating clear framework of best practices in the different fields.

-Based on the established criteria, how effective are the communication efforts of the MIC in the eyes of their staff, students and external experts?

- a) Based on the interviews with the experts, what is considered as a successful online communication effort?
- b) How do the different cultural aspects (of the MIC externally and the prospective students) affect the communication efforts of the MIC?

### **Analytical Question**

Finally, the analytical question and sub questions aim at comparing and contrasting all data gathered by answering the Theoretical and Empirical Questions. These data was compared via triangulation (Section 5). With the thorough comparison of the data a tailored strategy is developed for the MIC programme.

-How can the comparison of the theoretical and empirical results be helpful to the development of an online communication strategy for the MIC?

- a) What are the most noteworthy differences between the theories and the opinions held by external experts?
- b) How do all of these results contribute in the making of an online communication strategy?

## **5) Research Strategy**

The research strategy and methodology presented in this project were based in the strategies suggested by Verschuren & Doorewaard (2010), and Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009). This project is of depth, instead of breadth; since it aimed at developing an online communication strategy specifically tailored for the MIC and their interest in particular countries. It is of qualitative data-analysis, and not quantitative, because of its in-depth nature. The researcher collected the data through two different strategies; via desk research in order to gather theoretical data and via interviews and a survey in order to gather empirical data. The analytical data is based on the

comparison of the theories, the interviews and the survey results by means of triangulation. These decisions are further explained within this section.

The project is in-depth since it aims at developing an online communication strategy for the MIC at the Hanze UAS, focused on countries that portray a strategic interest for the programme and the Hanze UAS (I. Smit, Personal Communication, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013). However it may also be applicable to the partner universities of the MIC programme by using the same line of thought and by tailoring the recommendations to their own universities based on the online behaviour of their preferred target group. Nevertheless, these recommendations and strategies might not be applicable entirely to other programmes or universities.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornill (2009) in their book *Research Methods for Business Students*, explain that there are two ways to analyse qualitative data; through a deductive approach or through an inductive approach. Based on the recommendations of the authors, the more adequate analysis of the data is the deductive approach since the data gathered for this project was gathered from books, articles, interviews and a survey. This entails that the researcher established a theoretical framework from which the rest of the data was sought, classified and further analysed (Saunders, Lewis and Thornill). The authors explain that the advantage of a deductive approach lies on the capability to start from an 'existing body of knowledge in the subject area' (p. 521). Considering this research is on the 'design stage' (Section 4.1) a deductive approach gives the researcher knowledge on best practices and preliminary knowledge for the comprehensive analysis of the empirical data which led to the thorough development of the final strategy.

With regards to desk research Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010) explain that it is based on information found in books, journals, and reliable websites on the internet; such as research institutions and experts who give their opinions online. The authors further distinguish two styles of desk research: literature survey and secondary research. This project focuses on secondary research, since it is based on the evaluation of different publications and their definitions of concepts. The articles and books used for this project were chosen based on the three areas defined in Section 4.2: Research Framework which are the paramount areas to be studied before the development of the online communication strategy. By studying the different definition of concepts and best practices given by different authors in the three areas previously specified the researcher is able to establish a framework from which empirical data can be evaluated.

Furthermore Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) explain that there are several types of interviews. The researcher used semi-structured interviews; these types of interviews consist of a list of subjects and potential questions that the interviewee isn't restricted to answer, hence the interviewee is free to extend or restrict the conversation. The interview questions vary from expert to expert since the experts interviewed were specialised in different fields of interest for the development of the communication strategy for the MIC. Experts in the field of online communication, recruitment strategies and international marketing were given the questions of the interview before hand to help them prepare their answers; moreover these experts were given more or less the same questions due to the similarities of their fields. Furthermore, these questions aimed at knowing what they believe are best practices in the field of international and online communication. Experts in the field of graphic design and community management were asked to give their professional opinion on the different platforms of the MIC. These experts weren't asked any pre meditated question, since the

interviewer wanted an unbiased and professional opinion based on first sight about the online communication efforts of the MIC.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed unless the interviewee stated the contrary; in which case the interview transcript is presented in the form of minutes taken by the interviewer during the meeting. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the interviewees' responses (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The minutes were typed and sent to the interviewees shortly after the meeting for confirmation of the accuracy of their own responses. Most interviews took place in the interviewees' office, in order to create a comfortable environment for the respondents. Some interviews took place through Skype; due to time and location differences between interviewer and interviewee.

Additionally, a survey was sent to current and former students in order to grasp a general idea of their opinion and experience regarding certain aspects of the communication efforts of the MIC. The survey was distributed online since current students are spread in four different universities and former students are more likely to be in their home countries. The survey was distributed via emails; addresses were acquired from the communications manager of the MIC with permission of the programme director of the MIC. The questions were based on theoretical and empirical results of student decision making and behaviour online, and were also previously approved by the programme director of the MIC.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) explain that questionnaires distributed online might have low responses rate, high probability of having the correct person answering and low probability of the answers being contaminated by third parties, which make online questionnaires reliable and valid. The limitations of the questionnaire sent out for this research can be found on Section 5.1: Limitations.

The researcher believes that triangulation is the most appropriate method for the comparison of results found on theoretical and empirical data. According to Rothbauer (2008), triangulation is the comparison of results given by different methods which lead to a similar result and by consequence gives validity to said results. In this project the triangulation will be done between (1) theoretical results, (2) the opinion of experts and the staff members of the MIC, and (3) the survey responses of the students. By contrasting what each of these explain and believe are best practices in the different fields analysed; the final results are more likely to be reliable and applicable to the development of the online communication strategy.

### 5.1) Limitations

Within this project there are certain limitations that need to be considered at the time of designing an online communication strategy, especially if the reader wishes to apply the given recommendations to other programmes or universities.

One of these limitations is that most of the experts knew the MIC programme before the interviews took place, especially those working at Hanze UAS, and thus the researcher believes that some answers might have been tailored for the benefit of the project. However, this does not diminish the validity of their answers for this project.

According to Hofstede, own culture defines the way people see the world and it defines the way people behave and understand the things around them (National Cultures in four Dimensions, 1983). Because of this the researchers' own culture could affect the way in which some results were analysed and the way in which the results were laid out.

Another existing limitation is that most interviewees' native language was Dutch while the native language of the researcher is Spanish; this could have created constraints in the way the interviewees expressed themselves and the way the interviewee interpreted their answers. Furthermore, the interviews that took place on Skype did not allow the interviewer to evaluate body language, and thus the interviewer could have missed some cues.

All NESO offices were contacted, however only the offices of India and Mexico had the time to fill in the small survey and send it back to the researcher. The NESO information on web behaviour given on this report was based almost entirely on market analysis reports given by the NUFFIC to the programme director of the MIC.

Finally, the survey also presented some limitations. Out of 60 surveys sent, 27 were answered and only 23 were valid answers. The researcher considers that 26% of answers rate gives validity to the answers; however it is important to consider that all of these students were part of the MIC programme. Students from other masters were not included in the survey due to time constraints; the researcher believes that these could be a point for further research.

## 6) Research Results

### 6.1) Empirical Results

#### 6.1.1) Interviews and Surveys

In this section the empirical results will be presented and the empirical research question and sub questions will be answered. The empirical data was gathered through means of interviews and surveys, as explained on Section 5: Research Strategy. The summaries and minutes from said interviews can be found on the Appendix, and the summary of the report of the survey can also be found on the Appendix, section: Survey. First, the opinions of the staff of the MIC will be explored, followed by the opinions of the former and current students of the MIC. Second, the opinions and current practices of professionals in the fields of recruitment, communication, graphic design, community management and international marketing are be presented, all to be concluded by the cultural aspects that potentially affect the communication efforts of both the MIC and the prospective students.

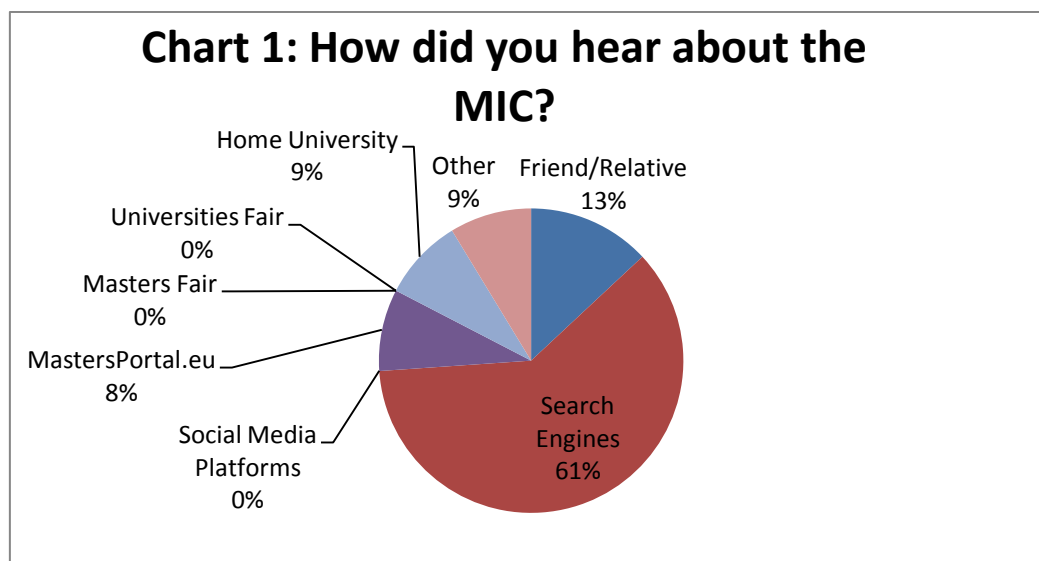
The communication efforts of the MIC are mainly online, since most of their students come from abroad (Marketing Analysis, 2013). However, students who already study at either of the four partner universities are given information via offline means, such as brochures, and they're also invited to join the current students of the MIC for a 'day-as-a-MIC-student' experience.

According to the communications manager of the MIC, Mr Pruiksma (2013), several activities take place online: the programme has a website with all the important information on it, the programme also has profiles on different social media platforms and is also part of the 'HODEX'; a listing software that lists all the different programmes of several Dutch universities in several different search

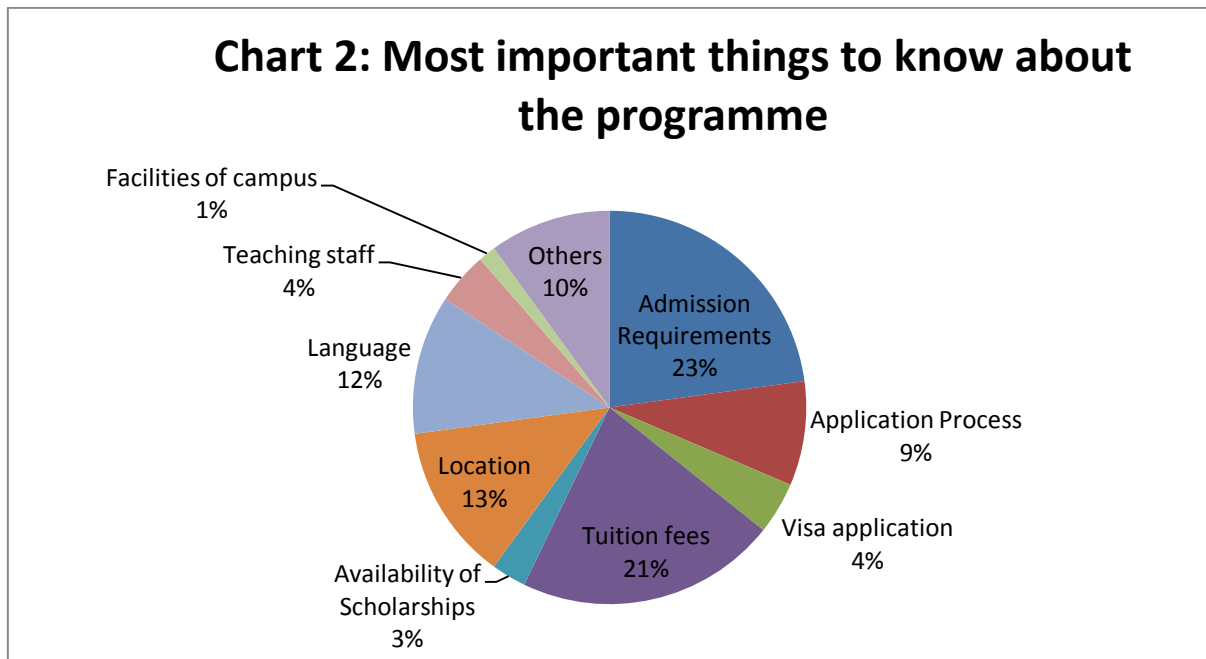
engines platforms of higher education in Europe. According to Mr Pruiksma some information is updated every year on the website; such as deadlines and admission requirements, whereas some other information is not updated often; such as the programme and courses description. Mr Pruiksma claims that there is no need to update the latter; as this information hasn't truly changed since the beginning of the programme. The communications manager further states that there are standardised emails for acceptance, rejection and inquiries; however these emails are tailored per student based on the different needs and inquiries they present. Mr Pruiksma also states that the social media sites of Facebook and Twitter are updated on a weekly basis; with what he considers to be interesting articles about the current news in the field of communication, but also with personal testimonials and with current events that the MIC students are being part of in all four partner universities. The YouTube platform is updated less often and mainly when Ms Smit has made a new video, the communications manager however seeks to keep it updated by making playlists and by promoting the existing videos in the other social media platforms.

Regarding the effectiveness of these online communication efforts, the communications manager believes that the MIC has reached its peak in recruiting a certain amount of students per year, and wonders if all of these efforts are 'too much' and potentially overwhelming the users (2013). Mr Pruiksma finally explains that the ways in which they communicate as MIC programme do affect the decision making of the students, but greater factors such as the tuition fees and the mandatory mobility of the student are more determinants for the student.

The students' opinions are explored in order to understand better their wants and needs regarding the MIC programme. The limitations of this survey can be found under Section 5.1: Limitations and the results that will be presented in this section will be further discussed in Section 6.2: Analytical results. As seen in Chart 1, 61% of the students heard about the programme through search engines, while 13% heard about it through relatives and 9% through their home university. It is important to notice how none of the students heard of the programme through social media sites or through university fairs.



The most important factors that students took into consideration when choosing the MIC programme were: admission requirements, tuition fees, location and course curriculum (Chart 2). The least important factors for students when choosing a programme were the teaching staff and the availability of scholarships. This last factor loses validity to a certain extent since all the students who answered this survey were part of the MIC programme, thus students who were not accepted or did not have the means to afford the programme were not considered in this survey.



Furthermore, 74% of the students did not have a scholarship while 26% of them did. From this 26% of students, two of them had a scholarship from Erasmus Mundus (European Union) and one of them had a StuNed scholarship, given by the Dutch government through the NUFFIC to Indonesian students only. The main reasons of why students choose the MIC lay in the student mobility, the practicality of the study and the different specializations offered. Some students stated that the importance given to intercultural differences made the decision a 'no-brainer' (Appendix: Survey), some other students claimed that the possibility to get a double degree by studying in two different universities which are located in different parts of Europe were very attractive. Finally, many students claimed that the practical side of the programme and the possibility to work directly with clients made the programme appealing to their international and professional profiles. All the answers of the questionnaire can be found under the Appendix: Survey.

Different experts from different fields of work were interviewed and even though not all of them agreed to be recorded, the summaries and minutes of their interviews and their job titles can be found in the appendix of this research project. Their points of view and opinions of best practices will be discussed per topic.

Regarding website management, Ms Brolsma Baard explains that Search Engine Advertisement (SEA) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tend to be more effective when establishing the first contact, whereas social media platforms are more useful when establishing a relationship with the students (2013). She further clarifies that SEA is more effective than SEO; because SEA is less time consuming and it can be easily set up with different platforms, while SEO has to be done by an expert on the



field. Mr Reitsma (2013) suggests that action words and inclusive sentences are more inviting and appealing to users, and finally Mr Smyth claims that a professional looking website has to be complementary to the offline strategy of any university or programme (2013).

With regards to E-mails, Ms Brolsma Baard recommends following up on leads and prospective students with rather personalised emails, which can help them greatly in making the final decision. Both Mr Smyth and Mr Bazzanella claimed that personal and inclusive emails are more efficient than standardised emails because they invite the user to more personal communication (2013).

Social Media Platforms are vital for an online strategy since these platforms are mainly used to connect with friends and relatives. Mr Smyth (2013) claims that active staff attracts master level students since prospective master students are interested in knowing how active the staff is, and not only what have they done, but also what they can do for the students if they join the programme. He claims that active staff online is more attractive than an outstanding CV because it enables students to ask direct questions about their area of expertise to the staff and teachers on a more personal way. Both Mr Smyth and Mr van der Wal agree that alumni as online and offline ambassadors are the most effective way to promote any programme or university; since students who have done the programme are less likely to lie about it (2013). Ms Brolsma Baard claims that social media platforms should be used to nourish the already existing relationship with students (2013). However, Mr Bazzanella (2013) claims that social media platforms also have to be beneficial for former students, the community manager of an organization needs to ensure that the things being published are also attractive to those students who have already done the programme and who are likely to promote it. Finally, Mr Bazzanella claims that consistency through the different platforms is paramount since it shows one consistent and strong image to the users.

Some NESO offices were interviewed (for details Appendix: Q&A and Section 5.1: Limitations) and the insight brought from these interviews helps the researcher in understanding the online behaviour of the target group of this research. NESO India (2013) explained that they do what they consider standard online activities: SEO, banners and social media platforms, however most of the contact with prospective students takes place through email exchanges, and also through landline phone calls and Facebook private messages. NESO Mexico (2013) furthers the topic by explaining that even though most of the contact with prospective students starts via email, most students request a Skype meeting, especially those who cannot travel to the city where the NESO office is located. The representative of NESO Mexico explains that Latin American students, and particularly Mexican students, need human contact in order to trust the organization, hence the Skype meetings have been the most successful for this office.

Both NESO offices agree that no universities or programmes are promoted in the offices; however both NESO India and Mexico receive brochures from different universities and programmes in the Netherlands. NESO Mexico further clarified that if a student actively asks about a programme or university from which they have a brochure, they would give it to the prospective student. NESO Mexico also explained that brochures aren't always as successful; the representative explained that social media platforms are the second most common way to have contact with students since Mexican students are very active in these platforms. More insight into the activities and recommendations of NESO offices can be found on Section 6.1.2: NUFFIC NESO reports.



Four students that answered the survey are from a NESO country; two are from Mexico and two are from Brazil. Three of these students found the programme through a non-specified search engine, whereas one of these students heard about the Hanze UAS through her friends. Three of these students were looking for a programme of communication in Europe, whereas one of them was looking for a programme in Culture and Arts, also in Europe. For these four students the most important aspects were varied, however the mentioned aspects most were: admission requirements, application process and tuition fees. Only one of these students had a grant from Erasmus Mundus, while the rest of them did not have any sort of external funding (Appendix, Survey). All of these results are further analysed on Section 6.2: Analytical Results.

Finally, and to answer the final empirical research sub question; the researcher will explore the cultural aspects that can differ, even in online communication, between people from different cultural backgrounds. The communications manager of the MIC claims that his message construction is non-elaborate and standardised (2013). Mr Pruiksma further explains that acceptance and rejection emails are usually standardised, with little changes such as the name and last name of the receiver, and first contact emails tend to also be standardised, but tailor made to answer the inquiries of prospective students. Moreover, messages for social media platforms are usually one or two non-elaborate sentences which explain an article or a new blog post. Mr van der Wal and Mr Smyth agreed that when the contact takes place offline, for instance during a higher education fair, the cultural differences are always taken into consideration.

Marieke de Mooij (2014) explains that even when communicating online, there are great differences in the ways people express themselves; differences that are ultimately defined by the users' culture. The author further states that in high context cultures users are more likely to use forums and blogs online, whereas in low context cultures users are more likely to actively seek the information via search engines. It could be inferred that the MIC should actively use both techniques in order to attract a global market of students.

### ***6.1.2) NUFFIC-NESO Reports on Online Behaviour***

The NUFFIC provides Dutch institutions with market information regarding the countries that portray a strategic position for the Dutch government (NUFFIC, 2013). In this section the results of some research reports that contain information regarding the target group of this research project will be presented. Firstly the report Prospective Students in NESO Countries written by Kolster, an Education Research Officer from the NUFFIC, will be analysed in order to establish a general overview of all the target countries; followed by online behaviour and recommendations made by NESO offices in each of the target countries (Section 1: Project Context).

#### **Prospective students in NESO countries**

According to Kolster (2012) most prospective students use mainly the World Wide Web to find information about pursuing studies abroad. The author explains that according to a survey responded by prospective and current students in NESO countries, the most important aspects when choosing a studying abroad destination are the reputation of the country on a specific field, affordability of tuition & cost of living and the availability of scholarships.

Furthermore, the author claims that the countries which show the highest amount of students interested in master degrees are India (77%), Mexico (71%) and Indonesia (65%). Moreover, only 5%

of the students do a study in the field of Mass Communication and Information Science. Overall, Russian students are more likely than others to pursue a degree in this field, followed by students from Indonesia and Mexico.

In addition, the countries which show the highest amount of students able to pay for their tuitions without the help of a scholarship are from China, Korea and India. And most of the students are more likely to start thinking about pursuing a degree abroad during their final years of studying in a higher education institution (70%) or after graduation (64%).

Finally, the most important reasons for studying abroad were broadening own view of life and world, improving chances of an international career and gaining international experience. However, Kolster explains that these reasons vary from country to country due to cultural reasons. Overall, the most important source of information for most of the students was the internet and this is particularly true for students from China, Russia and Thailand.

### **Web portals and online behaviour, per country**

The NUFFIC presents several research reports on web portals and online behaviour in the different NESO countries. There are some recommendations that can be generalised since almost every NESO office recommended them in their reports. These recommendations are: a mobile version of the website of the institution, landing pages in particular languages, brand awareness through banners in the most popular websites of each country, use of Facebook ads and Google AdWords and finally social media profiles in the most important social media platforms per country. The results and recommendations presented per NESO office per country are the following.

According to NUFFIC NESO Brazil (2013):

- 94.2 million Brazilians access the Internet on a weekly basis, making it one of the most active countries online. This is about 45.6% of the population in Brazil.
- The top three most visited websites are: Facebook, Google Brazil and Google
- The top three social media platforms most used in Brazil are Facebook, Ask.fm and Orkut. Twitter is placed number 5th. Instagram has been growing since 2012, however is not so common.
- While on Facebook, Brazilians prefer sharing pictures, liking pictures and reading updates from friends and pages.
- Brazilians lead the worldwide market of blogs; with 96% of their users actively using the blogosphere. Banners and paid articles on important blogs are a very effective way to reach users. Usually, students look for information about studying abroad in specialized blogs; such as educational or travel blogs.
- 60% of the students interviewed claimed that online advertisements motivate them to know more about studying abroad.
- NESO Brazil recommends the use of images and videos in their social media profiles. They further recommend having mobile versions of their websites. Also making the online ads and particularly the Facebook and Google ads in Brazilian Portuguese to reach a wider group of

prospective students. Finally, they recommend showing a human side in social media profiles.

According to NUFFIC NESO China (2013)

- The most visited websites and social media platforms in China are mainly in Mandarin and/or Cantonese only. Also, the most visited and used search engines are entirely in Mandarin and/or Cantonese.
- By the end of 2012, 564 million Chinese citizens were active online. This is 42.1% of the Chinese population.
- Even though 94% of the students use the computer (laptop or PC) to seek information about studying abroad, some of them also use their mobile devices for the same purpose.
- NESO China recommends establishing direct contact with their office in order to have targeted advertisements in recommended websites and search engines. They also highly recommend the use of online banners and ads.

According to NUFFIC NESO India (2013)

- 150 million internet users; from which 87 million of these are on mobile devices. However, this only accounts for 11% of the population.
- 73% of internet users watch videos online.
- The most popular websites are Google, Facebook, YouTube and BlogSpot.in
- Online study portals are a paramount source of information for students who wish to study abroad. From the top 10 most visited study portals; three of them are worldwide and available in English: StudyAbroad.com, StudyOverseas.com and Infozee.com.
- NESO India recommends banners in study abroad websites, since they create awareness and high rates of visitors. They further recommend the use of Facebook ads, since they have proved to be the most cost efficient online tool. Also the use of Google ads which, even though are more expensive than Facebook Ads, bring a great amount of visitors.

According to NUFFIC NESO Indonesia (2013)

- 61 million people in Indonesia are active internet users. This number represents 24% of the population
- According to Indonesian students, the most important information sources are: the Internet (overall), education support offices and own school/university information sessions.
- The country has 47 million profiles on Facebook, and 30 million accounts on Twitter. Moreover, Jakarta is the capital city which produced the largest amount of tweets in 2012 worldwide.
- Students usually gather initial information from Google and Wikipedia. More detailed information is usually retrieved from websites of the universities abroad, educational support offices and agents.
- Since the internet speed in Indonesia is rather low, websites that aren't 'heavy' are recommended. Websites should also be compatible with mobile devices.
- NESO Indonesia recommends the use of banners in popular websites and also the use of Facebook ads. They further recommend the use of games and competitions to gain followers

and potentially creating brand awareness. Also, information should be accurate and presented in an appealing and attractive way to the students.

According to NUFFIC NESO Mexico (2012)

- 40.6 million Mexicans are active online; which represents 35% of the population in Mexico.
- The most commonly used websites on Mexico are: Facebook, Google México and YouTube. Followed by Google on the 4<sup>th</sup> place and Twitter on 5<sup>th</sup> place.
- From the 40.6 million Mexicans online; 90% have a Facebook profile and use it on a daily basis, while 60% have a YouTube account and 77% uses it daily, and finally 55% have a Twitter account and 61% uses it daily.
- The most common usage of the internet for Mexican students is sending and receiving e-mails.
- Dutch institutions are recommended to create Facebook ads in Spanish, and also encouraged to make use of the NESO Mexico profile on Facebook in order to promote their own activities.
- NESO Mexico recommends the use the different Facebook pages and profiles they have, the use of alumni, paid advertisements in both Facebook and Google and the use of SEO. Finally, they strongly recommend doing such activities in Spanish, since it is more likely to reach more students this way.

According to NUFFIC NESO Russia (2013)

- The internet is used by 42 million Russians; which represents 67% of their total population. 40% of this online population accesses the internet from a mobile device on a weekly basis.
- The most popular social media site is V Kontakte; whose content is mainly in Russian.
- Facebook however, is the second most popular social media site in Russia. This platform is more often used by people with internationally oriented backgrounds and profiles.
- The use of banners is only recommended for the creating of brand awareness, since it has proved not to be effective cost wise in Russian web portals.
- The most used search engine in Russia is Yandex, followed by Google.ru. However, Yandex's population is growing rapidly while the use of Google.ru is declining.
- NESO Russia recommends being part of the web and study portals in Russia, which usually don't charge fees for uploading programme or university information. They further recommend the use of Facebook ads, and ads on other Russian social media platforms.

According to NUFFIC NESO South Korea (2013)

- NESO South Korea is the only office that published a report that does not contain the online population of their country. However, the researcher believes this number to be large since the most popular social media platform has 16 million active users.
- Naver, a blogging site, is the most used social media platform. Followed by Facebook and Twitter.
- Korean students are more likely to trust pages which allow testimonials and comments from the public. They are also more likely to look into pages which their friends have 'shared' or 'liked' on social platforms.

- The online environment of South Korea is highly competitive; a banner in the most popular social media platform can cost up to 20.000€ per hour.
- NESO South Korea recommends the use of banners in less popular websites; such as study portals. They also recommend Dutch institutions to send brochures to Korean Universities, since they play an important role in the decision making of students. Finally, they advice having a mobile compatible website.

According to NUFFIC NESO Thailand (2013)

- There are 25 million users on the internet from Thailand
- Thai students need large amounts of information before making decisions, particularly when decision involves living in another country for a long period of time.
- Facebook is the most important social media platform. 88% of internet users log on Facebook every day and 53% of them claimed to use Facebook to seek information about products and services.
- Thai users of Facebook are more likely to access a page that has been 'liked' or 'shared' by a friend or relative.
- 40% of Thai users access the internet through a mobile device. They recommend having a mobile-friendly website.
- The most used search engine in Thailand is Google. Hence Google AdWords can be successful in retrieving new visitors to a website.
- NESO Thailand has seen a steady decline in the effectiveness of banners, and claims this happens because Thai users are more likely to seek the information themselves.
- NESO Thailand considers that 'likes' are no longer enough to be known on Facebook; they claim that 'talk about' is now far more important. Thus, attractive content is paramount for success on this platform.

## 6.2) Analytical Results

In this final section of the results, a comparison between theoretical and empirical results will be established and based on this comparison an online communication strategy for the MIC can be developed. By comparing theories with the results of the interviews and the questionnaire, the researcher is able to contrast what the theory claims as effective and what experts believe is effective in the fields of communication, decision making processes and recruitment of students. First, the differences between results will be presented, followed by the similarities found in both. The last research sub question will be answered instead on Section 8: Advice & Strategy.

The most noteworthy differences between what theories state should be done and what experts do are the following. The articles analysed established strategies based entirely on theoretical frameworks and later proved or disproved these via focus groups or trial versions. However, experts are more practical about their approaches and strategies. For example, Kotler and Fox's (1995) 7P's of marketing higher education are based on the 4P's of marketing developed by Kotler (2009); and these 7P's have proved to be the core of many successful strategies of higher education institutions. On the other hand, Mr Smyth explains that the strategy of the Hanze UAS is to internationalize the different institutes; and the way this is done falls entirely on the different members of the marketing and communications team (2013). The researcher has the impression that for experts, strategies

establish an overall picture of “where we should be” while best practices are decided via trial and error of different plans and activities that take place both offline and online.

Furthermore none of the theoretical articles that were analysed considered cultural differences whereas the experts interviewed were very aware of this. The researcher believes that this has much to do with the different environment in which the articles were written, and how some of the articles were nation-wide and did not consider international students. For example, the article of Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman (2011) was based on students that chose international campuses while staying at the United Arab Emirates and the study of Shaw, Kobrin, Packman and Schmidt (2009) was based on students from the United States of America who chose to study in the same country. However the experts who were interviewed work in an international environment and go to international fairs in the countries of interest for the Hanze UAS, such as Mr Smyth and Mr van der Wal, and are by consequence in constant contact with international people; which makes them more likely to be aware of cultural differences (2013).

It is important to notice that more similarities than differences were found when comparing the results. The most noteworthy similarities between theories and empirical results are the following. Recruiting and communications officers showed a certain understanding of decision making processes of students and claimed that certain tools were used during the different stages of the process. Gomes and Murphy (2003) presented in their study the most sought information by students and concluded that all the essential information about the programme and the university must be available online. By doing this, universities ensure spreading the correct information when students are in the “attraction” phase (as described by Kotler, 2009, Section 3). Ms Brolsma Baard explained that from her point of view the most effective tool during the attraction phase is SEA, whereas social media platforms are more likely to be successful when the student is already on the “desire” phase (2013), thus the purchase decision as explained in the theoretical framework (Section 3).

Although the researcher describes in the Theoretical Framework a student decision making process developed by Chapman (1981) which defines the process through which students go when choosing a higher education institution (Section 3), it appears that marketers of higher education institutions are more likely to use the buyer decision making process as described by Kotler (2009), when designing strategies in order to recruit more students.

Theory highlights the effectiveness and benefits of word of mouth on online communities and experts agree indirectly by recommending the use of alumni as online and offline ambassadors. One example of this is the article written by Brown, Broderick and Lee (2007) which studied the behaviour of online communities and concluded that word of mouth has a great impact on consumers when it comes to choosing and judging different products online. Mr Smyth (2013), Mr van der Wal (2013) and Mr Bazzanella (2013) recommend the use of alumni as online and offline ambassadors for the MIC; which would in a way be spreading the word, mouth to mouth, about this particular programme in particular countries and universities.

Both theoretical and empirical results showed that a human touch is necessary when communication is established online. Gibbs (2006) explained that the marketing approach from higher education institutions as a whole should be more human and more tailored towards the needs of the students and the needs of the institutions. Mr Bazzanella (2013) claims that social media platforms are there



to interact with the users in a more human nature and Mr Reitsma (2013) takes it one step further by recommending action words and inclusive paragraphs to make the user feel welcome to the online platforms of the institute or programme. Furthermore, the representative of NESO Mexico explained that particularly Latin American students need the human touch more often than other students, and thus Skype meetings are likely to be the most successful online tool for NESO Mexico (2013). NESO India also has contact via telephone and Skype, even though they did not express how successful this tool proves to be for them, it could be argued that the answer lays also in adding a human touch into the online communication (2013).

Theories, experts and staff have more or less the same view on recruitment strategies online. Theory recommends the use of blogs, having an updated website with all the information necessary for students who are coming from abroad and downloadable information packages with all the information a prospective student could need or want from the programme and university (Bugeja, 2013). Experts recommend personalised follow up emails which show interest towards the interested student (Ms Brolsma, 2013), active social media platforms which are used as a platform for the exchange of information and ideas (Mr Bazzanella, 2013) and a proactive approach in the overall communication strategy (Mr van der Wal, 2013). On the other hand, the communications manager of the MIC claims he has both a reactive and a proactive approach via the use of HODEX and the social media platforms of the programme respectively. Mr Pruiksma also uses rather personalised emails for rejection and acceptance into the programme and for general inquiries about the universities and specializations of the programme (2013).

The analysis of the responses of the students and its comparison to theoretical and empirical data is not considered a similarity or a difference. The researcher objects that comparing these results to both theories and empirical data via triangulation is more fruitful for the composition of the online communication strategy for the MIC.

Considering that 61% of the students heard first about the MIC through a search engine brings into light that indeed the most effective tools could be SEA and SEO as stated by Ms Brolsma Baard (2013) and several NUFFIC NESO offices (2013). Additionally, out of the four NESO students who took the survey, three of them found the programme via an online search engine; this confirms that SEA could be the most efficient tool in certain countries or fields. By making sure the keywords related to the MIC lead to the website of the programme, SEO and SEA could easily create greater awareness about the programme in the minds of several prospective students around the world.

As explained on Section 3: Theoretical Framework; Gomes and Murphy (2003) claim that the most sought information by students is: reputation of institution, lifestyle of foreign country and safety; whereas Chaplin and Fitzgerald (2002) claim that the most sought information by students is: programme description, course description and application procedures. The answers of the students prove Gomes and Murphy wrong, while proving Chaplin and Fitzgerald slightly correct. The most sought information by MIC students is: admission requirements, tuition fees and location (Appendix: Survey). The four NESO students that were part of the survey also highlighted these aspects as the most important aspects sought. The researcher believes that even though this might be the most sought information by students; all information should be made available, and easy to find within the website of the programme.

Regarding the 26% of students having a scholarship, the researcher believes the number stands for the amount of expansion that could be done. For example, by promoting the different scholarships offered by different governments, such as the Danish and Canadian government (Appendix: Survey), but also offered by the European Union, such as the Erasmus Mundus, or the Erasmus funding given during internship placements in Europe (Appendix: Survey). One of the NESO students who took part in the survey had an Erasmus Mundus scholarship, which confirms that indeed students who are part of the programme are capable of finding external financing.

Shaw, Kobrin, Packman and Schmidt (2009) claimed that the most influencing factor for students to choose a programme are based on their previous academic achievements, gender, ethnicity, native language, etc. However the reasons to choose the programme given by the students are very different. Some students claimed that the opportunity to travel, learn and get a double degree within 18 months made the programme very attractive, and some others claimed that providing them with unique opportunities that are rarely found in other master programmes (Appendix: Survey) the MIC was also appealing. The results of this question on the survey will be further discussed under Section 8: Advice and Strategy as tailored recommendations for the online communication strategy for the MIC.

## 7) Conclusions

This research project was aimed at providing the MIC with online communication strategy through the analysis of theoretical and empirical data. In this section the results are briefly summarised and the main research questions are answered. Through this discussion, it can be evaluated if the objective of the project has been met.

### **What is known from literature regarding online communication theories, decision making processes and recruitment strategies that could be used in the development of the assessment criteria?**

Literature identifies several best practices and recommendations in the fields of communication theories, decision making processes and recruitment strategies. Kotler and Fox (1995) explained that the thorough definition of the 7P's is paramount for any communication strategy of a higher education institute. Scolari (2009) and Brown, Broderick & Lee (2007) concluded that the Web 2.0 presents an advantage to interact with users that can be effective, and at the same time encompasses the human touch recommended by Gibbs (2009). Furthermore, Brown, Broderick and Lee studied the advantage of Word of Mouth online which can lead to stronger ties between the users and the website.

Gallant & Boone (2008) and Li & Bernoff (2008) concluded that taking advantage of the new creative and active online audience can be effective for attracting new students. Whereas Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman (2011) concluded that a communication strategy can be tailored by analysing the pull factors that a university or programme presents.

Moreover, Gomes & Murphy (2003) and Chapin & Fitzgerald (2002) concluded that the availability of adequate and important information online can make the difference for prospective students who are choosing a university abroad. Finally, Burgeja (2013) explained that certain inclusive and proactive recruitment strategies, both online and offline can be successful when retaining students.



In conclusion, the theories explored present a framework of best practices and recommendations based on results of the authors themselves which in consequence presented an assessment criteria through which the empirical results could be analysed. Hence, the researcher believes that the theoretical research questions and its' sub questions have been answered adequately. Further tailoring of these conclusions and recommendations for the MIC can be found on Section 8.1: Recommendations.

### **Based on the established criteria, how effective are the communication efforts of the MIC in the eyes of their staff, students and external experts?**

Mr Pruiksma, the communications manager of the MIC programme stated that the different online platforms of the programme are updated on different basis, and testimonials and current news are promoted through all platforms. The communication manager believes that his efforts are somewhat effective, as the MIC has reached its' peak of students per year (Marketing Analysis MIC, 2013)

Moreover, the experts interviewed made certain recommendations that could be applicable to the communication efforts of the MIC programme. For instance, Mr Smyth (2013) and Mr Bazzanella (2013) claimed that personal and inclusive emails are efficient, since they invite the user to a more personal level of communication. Mr Bazzanella further claimed that consistency through the different platforms shows a strong and reliable image to the users. Finally, Ms Brolsma Baard (2013) concluded that social media platforms should be used to nourish the already existing relationship with students. Furthermore Mr Smyth, Mr van der Wal (2013) and Mr Bazzanella recommend the use of alumni ambassadors of the programme.

The staff of the MIC claimed that they are doing everything they can do communicate with students; however they question themselves whether these efforts might be overwhelming (Pruiksma, 2013). The recommendations of several experts lead the researcher to believe that they are not necessarily overwhelming, but more likely inadequate for the nature of the programme. The opinions' of former and current students demonstrate that certain communication efforts are indeed effective, while other efforts could be strengthened (Appendix: Survey).

According to all NUFFIC NESO results the following can be concluded. Most prospective students use the internet to gather information about studying abroad, some students are more likely to seek information on master degrees while other focus on undergraduate degrees. Moreover, a small amount of students are interested in the field of Mass Communication and Information Science. The most important reasons for choosing to study abroad can vary greatly depending on the country of origin. Furthermore, the analysis online behaviour of the different target countries can determine the ways in which a communication strategy can be tailored per country. The general and particular recommendations should be taken into consideration in online communication strategies for these countries.

It can be concluded that the communication efforts of the MIC point towards the right direction, however further tailoring and development based on the recommendations of experts and the NUFFIC NESO offices could create greater awareness and application rates for the programme.

## How can the comparison of the theoretical and empirical results be helpful to the development of an online communication strategy for the MIC?

In conclusion, by comparing the results of all data gathering activities the researcher was able to contrast what the theory claims as effective and what experts believe is effective in the fields of communication, decision making processes and recruitment of students.

Theory recommended the use of blogs, having an updated website with all the paramount information regarding the programme and downloadable information packages. Experts recommend personalised follow up emails which show interest towards the prospective student, active social media platforms which are used as a platform for the exchange of information and ideas and a proactive approach in the overall communication strategy. On the other hand, the communications manager of the MIC claims he has both a reactive and a proactive approach via the use of HODEX and the social media platforms of the programme respectively, Mr Pruiksma(2013) also uses rather personalised emails for rejection and acceptance into the programme and for general inquiries about the universities and specializations of the programme.

Further discussion of this answer takes place in Section 8: Advice & Strategy.

## 8) Advice & Strategy

### 8.1) General Recommendations

In this section some general recommendations will be proposed to the programme director of the MIC. Further tailoring of these recommendations for the MIC can be found on the following section (The strategy)

The MIC should clearly define the 7P's before starting any new communications effort. By doing this, they can ensure that all the paramount information for students is available online. Furthermore, it is recommended to follow the advice of several authors and experts of publishing testimonials and 'who is where' lists for prospective students to get a real grasp of what former students liked about the programme, and what life after the MIC can be. Moreover, the MIC should take advantage of the active and creative audience by involving the staff and the students of the programme into an exchange of ideas online. This exchange should take place in the blog of the MIC, and this blog should be accessible for everyone to read and for current students, alumni and staff to post.

Additionally, the MIC should review their own website and ensure that the paramount information as defined by students, experts and authors is available and easily accessible. The number of clicks within the website should be reduced and the visual feedback of these clicks should be evident.

It is highly recommended to create a short congratulating video to be sent to those students that have been unconditionally or conditionally accepted into the programme, for them to start getting a grasp of what the programmes is, and who is part of it. This video could be standardised, however it is recommended to make it in a way that the name of the student could be included in it.

Furthermore, it is recommended to use action words in the website and the different social media sites. I highly recommend the use of Hootsuite.com for the adequate management of all the different

platforms in which the MIC already has an account. A consistent image through the different online platforms is also strongly recommended.

I also recommend the use of Facebook Ads and Google AdWords according to the different recommendations made by the NESO offices. I particularly recommend the MIC to focus on the three countries which showed the highest interest in the field of communication; Russia, India and Mexico, but also on those countries that showed the highest amount of students seeking master degree; India, Mexico and Indonesia, and the highest amount of students able to pay for their tuition without the help of a scholarship; China, Korea and India.

The answers given by the students on the question “Why did you choose the MIC?” could be used to the advantage of the programme via advertising. For instance, a few students claimed that the intercultural aspect of the programme was very attractive, some others liked the practicality of the study and the client based projects of the programme. Several students explained that the double degree opportunity in a short amount of time was also highly attractive. A few students claimed that the opportunity to participate in different events and the placement opportunities offered made the programme interesting. I recommend to not only use alumni as ambassadors online and offline, but also to have rather short testimonials published every other day on the different platforms of the MIC. This can be an eye-catcher for a prospective student who is looking for a different and enriching experience.

## 8.2) The Strategy

In this section, I present a strategy tailored specifically for the wants and needs of the MIC joint programme. Even though some actions recommended here are already underway, I feel it is valuable to mention them altogether as an online communication strategy for the MIC programme director in order to recruit more students from NESO countries.

### *What needs to be done?*

#### **Refreshment of the main website**

Even though the website is very professional I recommend a refreshment of not only to the way it looks, but also of certain functional aspects. I recommend the use of far less ‘clicks’ in order to access information, the standard visit is of three clicks thus application information and programme information should be accessible in three or less clicks. Furthermore, I recommend the development of an ‘apply online’ form, where students can apply to the programme through the website. This way, the application process will be faster for students and the process would be more organized for the admissions manager. Also, I recommend the use of visual feedback in order to have a clear path where the user can easily go back and surf through the different pages.

Moreover, I strongly recommend to make the external links on the website (to Facebook, Twitter, etc.) customised to be open in external windows. And to make the logos of the four partner universities links to the main site of each of the universities.

#### **Hootsuite.com**

I strongly recommend the use of this portal for the management of the different social platforms of the MIC. One of the main characteristics of Hootsuite.com is that through this website a community manager can establish times and settings for his/her preferred platforms and change the messages

depending on the different platforms; for instance the use of hashtags and reduced links in Twitter, and the visibility of images on Facebook (instead of links). Also, through Hootsuite.com the MIC can see the reach and progress of their messages via the reports that the site makes. Finally, Hootsuite.com has the advantage of being able to share the different profiles throughout an organization, thus making the inclusion of the partner universities easier.

## Consistency

It is paramount that all the different online platforms of the programme portray the same consistent image throughout. I strongly recommend the definition of the official logo, colours and background images of the MIC. Even though the images cannot be exactly the same due to the layout of the different websites, the MIC needs to portray a consistent image. Thus Twitter, YouTube and Facebook should use more or less the same images as profile pictures, backgrounds and banners.

Moreover, in order to show the links between the pages I recommend the use of the “boxes” to be found on Facebook (Figure below). These boxes (highlighted with the red box below) can be tailored to be specific links. I recommend not only to link all social platforms in these boxes, but also to find which applications within Facebook can be beneficial for the MIC



## Content

Content wise, many things need changing within the MIC platforms. Firstly, the refreshment of the content in the main website is imperative. Not only is it recommended to use action words, but also it is recommended to steer slightly the direction of the website into a more welcoming site for prospective students, instead of the governmental-like site it currently is. For instance, the heading “Study at two different universities in Europe” could be changed to “Experience two different cities in Europe, while learning how to be a master of international communication!”

Furthermore, the way in which the messages are written on social media sites need to be changed. Most young students use the social media platforms to connect with friends and have fun, thus the messages sent by the MIC need to be professional but also fun and interesting. I suggest the use of action words and inclusive messages with the words ‘we’ and ‘us’ which are more appealing to the audiences. For example, the post published on Facebook on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013 “*Business Goals For Sustainable World Economy: Beyond Growth, Greed and Quarterly Results: lecture by Geert Hofstede*” could be changed into a more appealing text by saying instead “Want to know the opinion of Geert Hofstede on sustainable economy?” or perhaps “A Lecture on sustainability by Geert Hofstede that you cannot miss!” this way, the user is made curious and interested in the information.

Moreover, I strongly recommend the personalisation of messages per platforms, as explained previously. On Twitter the use of hashtags and reduced links while on Facebook the use of actual images. By doing this, the MIC appeals to the different audiences in the appropriate way on their favourite platforms. It is important to remember that Twitter is for reaching larger audiences through the use of hashtags and Trending Topics, while Facebook is for nourishing already existing relationships with current and former students.

Generating content for YouTube can be more time consuming than for the other two platforms. However, the use of Animoto.com strongly lowers the time that must be spent in the making of promotional videos.

Finally, I recommend the use of “information packages” which should come in the form of PDF files that aren’t excessively heavy. In this information packages, the MIC can include programme information, application procedures and all other information considered paramount for prospective students. Also, testimonials should be added in order to give a ‘real feel’ to the prospective student. This PDF files should be available on the home page in an eye catching way for the users.

### *Ads*

Several experts and NESO offices recommended the use of Facebook ads and Google AdWords. I recommend further research which countries portray a higher interest for the MIC in order to establish the target group of these ads appropriately. Facebook ads tend to be cost efficient, whereas Google AdWords are more likely to reach a vast amount of people.

Furthermore, the MIC could consider advertisement in the different portals highlighted by the NESO offices in their “web portals and online behaviour” reports. Banners could also pose an opportunity for the MIC, however I recommend further research in this particular area to establish which websites could be the most fruitful and cost effective for the programme.

Finally, the use of SEO could prove effective for the MIC. By making sure every key word searched that is related to the programme leads to the main website of the programme, the MIC could benefit from a greater deal of visitors. However, SEO is time consuming and very demanding in the terms of expertise. Hence, I only recommend this tool if the MIC believes it to be feasible.

### *Alumni*

Currently, the MIC is doing efforts to create ambassadors of the programme through the alumni network. Even though this takes place offline, I recommend encouraging the existing ambassadors to also be online ambassadors, for instance by publishing testimonials or sharing pictures of their lives as MIC graduates. It is recommended to start nourishing the relationship with the ambassadors from the moment they begin this programme by trying to keep them active in the social media platforms.

I recommend as further research having a focus group session with the current students to understand how willing they would be to do this, and how they think they can benefit from promoting the programme they’re studying.

I recommend changing the settings of the current blog of the MIC. The current blog only allows posts from the webmaster, which appears in the eyes of the audience as the only person who publishes. I recommend giving the freedom to the current and former students to log in and be able to publish content themselves. This can be monitored by the webmaster in the case of inappropriate content

being published. Furthermore, by giving the opportunity to log in and publish content, the MIC creates an online database of current and former students. With this database the MIC could easily stay in contact with their alumni. The MIC could also send out online newsletters with news, information and announcements to make sure they know that alumni are as important as prospective and current students for the MIC.

### *Chat sessions*

Finally, I recommend the use of live chat sessions. This chat sessions could take place through the website (extension within the site, can be found free of cost online) or via Facebook. If done through the website, a greater amount of people could be reached. The advantage of a chat session is that it shows that the MIC is interactive and concerned about their prospective students. These chat sessions could be even more fruitful if staff and teachers from the partner universities could take part on the initiative.

For example, it could be promoted on the different platforms of the MIC that a specific teacher specialised in a specific field will be online during certain hours on a particular day. That way, all sorts of students could ask questions and truly see the expertise of the teachers. These chat sessions could also imply a way to involve all four partner universities in the online communication efforts of the MIC.

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## Appendix

### Summary 1: Didi Gutierrez

Meeting with Didi Gutierrez; works at the International Student Office at the Hanze UAS

- Numbers of NESO students at the Hanze UAS can be found on the table below.
- The ISO and the STAD do not know/ do not control how many students receive scholarships
- From the current academic year on, the ISO will only keep track of exchange students; and the STAD will deal with the full-programme students
- The ISO doesn't keep track of which students come back for further programmes.
- The ISO deals entirely with administrative processes of the students (visas, housing contracts, insurances, etc)
- Mrs Gutierrez recommended talking with: Petra Zemeering; who deals with the NFP scholarship at Hanze, Tjerk Heikens, who probably has the numbers of students of the current semester and someone at the marketing department to know the marketing activities of the Hanze UAS.

Students from NESO countries, at the Hanze UAS

<b>Sep 2012</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	4	0	4
Brazil	7	1	8
Russia	3	0	3
India	1	1	2
China	55	1	56
South Korea	2	1	3
Taiwan	0	2	2
Thailand	0	0	0
Vietnam	1	1	2
Indonesia	9	0	9

<b>Feb 2012</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	0	0	0
Brazil	0	1	1
Russia	1	0	1
India	0	2	2
China	15	0	15
South Korea	0	0	0
Taiwan	0	0	0
Thailand	0	0	0
Vietnam	1	0	1
Indonesia	1	1	2

<b>Sep 2011</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	2	1	3
Brazil	1	1	2
Russia	11	1	12
India	0	3	3
China	35	3	38
South Korea	7	0	7
Taiwan	0	3	3
Thailand	0	0	0
Vietnam	3	0	3
Indonesia	5	1	6

<b>Feb 2011</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	1	0	1
Brazil	0	0	0
Russia	2	0	2
India	1	0	1
China	22	1	23
South Korea	0	0	0
Taiwan	0	1	1
Thailand	0	0	0
Vietnam	1	1	2
Indonesia	0	0	0

<b>Sep 2010</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	0	1	1
Brazil	1	1	2
Russia	9	1	10
India	1	3	4
China	57	3	60
South Korea	3	1	4
Taiwan	1	1	2
Thailand	0	0	0
Vietnam	4	3	7
Indonesia	3	4	7

<b>Feb 2010</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	1	0	1
Brazil	0	0	0
Russia	1	0	1
India	0	1	1
China	18	1	19
South Korea	0	0	0

Taiwan	0	0	0
Thailand	0	0	0
Vietnam	0	0	0
Indonesia	0	0	0

<b>Sep 2009</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	2	0	2
Brazil	3	0	3
Russia	6	0	6
India	2	1	3
China	38	3	41
South Korea	4	2	6
Taiwan	0	1	1
Thailand	0	3	3
Vietnam	3	3	6
Indonesia	7	1	8

<b>Feb 2009</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	0	0	0
Brazil	1	0	1
Russia	1	0	1
India	0	0	0
China	18	3	21
South Korea	0	0	0
Taiwan	0	0	0
Thailand	0	0	0
Vietnam	0	0	0
Indonesia	0	0	0

<b>Sep 2008</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	0	1	1
Brazil	3	0	3
Russia	4	1	5
India	1	2	3
China	32	5	37
South Korea	10	0	10
Taiwan	0	0	0
Thailand	0	1	1
Vietnam	2	1	3
Indonesia	7	3	10

<b>Feb 2008</b>	Bachelor	Master	Total
Mexico	0	0	0

Brazil	1	0	1
Russia	0	0	0
India	1	0	1
China	11	2	13
South Korea	0	0	0
Taiwan	0	0	0
Thailand	1	0	1
Vietnam	0	0	0
Indonesia	6	0	6

## Summary 2: John Smyth

Meeting with John Smyth; a Student recruiter for the Hanze UAS

- John works on international basis, he assists international fairs, but he is mainly focused on China and Russia. Some other colleagues go to other NESO countries, except South Korea, India and Brazil where they haven't been as IST before. (At the time of the meeting, a plan to Brazil and Colombia was scheduled.
- Masters at HUAS started being openly promoted since last year, when the IST starting having a budget for this activity. Before; they would take brochures and information, but their main focus was usually the bachelor programmes
- The HUAS actively visits universities from their target group (NESO + Colombia, Bulgaria and Romania), give lectures/presentations, information sessions and/or walk-in sessions. It usually lies on the hands of the university hosting them to arrange what will be done and how. Also; sometimes the presentations are just about programmes and some other times they include the Dutch education system, etc.
- The IST has a mixed and intertwined strategy of online and offline communications. Mr Smyth claims that the online communication gives support to the offline communication; which then helps the students to make their decision.
- The amount of students are specified by the schools within the HUAS based on the diversity their programmes have and the diversity they're looking for within these programmes, and that way the IST knows where to promote which studies.
- Even though Mr Smyth doesn't deal closely with the online communication of the HUAS, he believes that a professional website and active social media accounts are what attract students into seeking more information about the programmes/universities.
- Mr Smyth also believes that online communication isn't only about pushing information, but more about giving that personal touch that you give when speaking face-to-face.
- Offline contact with students happens usually through university, agents and fairs. Online contact is more direct: from the student to the IST directly.
- The HUAS website is offered in several languages; deeply detailed in Dutch and English, and basic information in the other languages. Having a detailed website in other languages is very time consuming and the IST doesn't have the capacity to do it.
- Mr Smyth assures that the effectiveness of fairs changes very quickly; they used to be super successful in certain countries and now they aren't anymore. Now the IST is directing their

efforts towards Latin America because they believe this market is booming for studying abroad.

- The NESO countries are now considered 'master countries' by the IST
- The NESO offices help with the promotion in their respective countries; by reposting the info of the universities, or by simply advertising them in their website.
- Mr Smyth argues that prospective bachelor students don't look for specific people to contact, but more for the availability of information: they don't mind speaking to a fellow student, a teacher or the Dean. However, prospective master students prefer speaking to teachers, staff or the coordinators of the programme; which can be more time consuming and difficult to set up. He further explains that prospective master students are interested in knowing how active the staff is, not only what have they done, but what can they do for the students if they join the programme? He finally claims that active staff online is more attractive than an outstanding CV; because this way students can ask the staff questions about their area of expertise directly and so on.
- Direct quote: *"you know is very nice to have a beautiful CV, but as a Masters you know have they published recently? Have they, are there speaking engagements? Have they been invited somewhere? Have they been involved in a seminar at Hanze?... and I think is more about that knowledge, of showing that the Master programme is in a complete different level, and that is something Hanze would be"*
- Mr Smyth recommends the promotion of the programme through the Symposium; ask teachers to show their current and previous teachers and have outstanding current students/ alumni show what they've done and what they liked about the programme. This way the guests indirectly become some sort of ambassadors of the MIC. However, he claims that it shouldn't be too "pushy", but instead human and inviting to seek more information.
- Mr Smyth argues that the most important things that should be online and easily accessible are: *" price, what are we going to give them in return and also in using alumni to really further the cause, that we start from an very early stage in developing these online ambassadors where they're going to take the message back home"*

### Summary 3: Denise Brolsma Baard

Meeting with Denise Brolsma-Baard; the Coordinator of online activities at the International Student Team; which forms part of the Marketing and Communications department of the Hanze UAS

- During the years before, the IST was focused mainly on bachelors and seldom promoted masters. Now they promote them both equally with their new inclusive strategy.
- Ms Brolsma-Baard organises the online campaigns for the HUAS.
- She sees the service the IST offers as a customer service; where prospective bachelor students can contact with all sorts of specific questions, but also for general questions or just genuinely talking with one student to see what it'd be like. She further explains that the leads for the master programmes are always forwarded to the master administrator themselves, and that way they do their own follow up.
- Ms Brolsma-Baard explains that the prospective master students prefer talking to staff members or current master students rather than talking to a bachelor student or an IST staff member who may not know *everything* about the programme. The IST considered employing master students to work together with them, but she explains that master students tend to be too busy with their programmes to have a job apart from it.

- Before joining country-specific social platforms, the IST analyses their market share within that country and analysis how much investment needs to be put into these sorts of website, for instance language barriers, etc.
- The HUAS has: ads online, SEO & SEA, referral sites (such as EuroGates), information available in masters & bachelors websites (such as mastersportal.eu), profiles in all sorts of different social platforms (both international and country-specific)
- During the previous year, the IST didn't have a tailored strategy per country. From this year on however, they're aiming at tailoring the strategies down per country since it is the first time they actually have a budget to do it.
- Ms Brolsma-Baard believes that the most efficient online tool is SEA, because it is a pull-marketing instrument. She explains that social platforms are useful in the "desire" phase of the student in order to create a relationship; whereas the SEA forms part of the awareness phase.
- The HUAS outsources its SEA with a company called Storm MC
- Ms Brolsma-Baard claims that since most of the international students can come for the Open Days, the information online has to be updated and complete. Plus a contact email/skype is also paramount.
- The IST assists a master fair in Germany, Bulgaria, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.
- Ms Brolsma-Baard gets the (cultural) input from the recruiters who go abroad, and that way she tailors the online strategies per country.
- The IST is looking into the different scholarships that they could offer depending on the programmes of the HUAS; and they're also looking at how to transform scholarships into a marketing instrument

#### Summary 4: Simon van der Wal

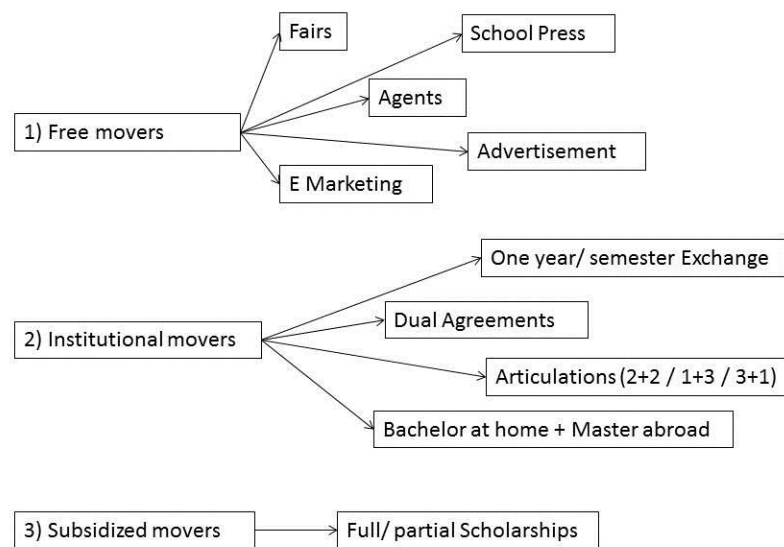
Meeting with Simon van der Wal; who is an International Marketing Officer at the Hanze UAS

- NESO office in Taiwan is closed; and office in Vietnam will be closed
- 3 different types of students that compound the student mobility; image below
- Mr. van der Wal believes the best students to target are the institutional movers and the subsidised movers.
- Mr. van der Wal thinks that the agreements between universities shouldn't only be for Erasmus Exchanges (of 6 months); he firmly thinks that the mix of programmes/years (articulations, see image) is the future of student mobility internationally.
- Mr. van der Wal explains that the scholarship system within the HUAS is complete chaos; there's not appointed person for specific scholarships, and everything that has to do with scholarships is dealt with reactively: when a student asks for it, information is given.
- Mr. van der Wal explains that the scholarships should be used as ways to open a new market: giving a full scholarship to a student; who goes back home and acts as an ambassador of the university that paid for his/her studies.
- Direct quote regarding alumni/ambassadors: *"on the MIC, what I learn from students, [is that] they're extremely happy, but that is not what we can sale, that has to be spread out by the students themselves and you create face and you also create ambassadors, having a good alumni policy, alumni will be easily the absolute top instrument to recruit new students so you have to invest in your alumni network; travel around the world, organize dinners, conferences or whatever"*



- Mr. van der Wal thinks that the programme managers of MIC and MBA don't dedicate enough time to have constant contact with prospective students. He thinks that the contact is very much ad hoc (again, reactive) and it should be more proactive, coming from the programme managers themselves, and not from interested students only.
- MR van der Wal explains that the recruitment officers and representatives from the Hanze are aware of the cultural differences of each country they visit, and take these differences into careful consideration when talking with prospective students

Image below: Student mobility according to Mr. van der Wal.



### Summary 5: Lennart Pruiksma

Interviews with Lennart Pruiksma; who is the Communications and Admissions Manager of MIC

From the 1<sup>st</sup> Interview:

- MIC receives (roughly) 100 applications per year, only 50 are suitable according to their CV & English requirements and by the end only 25-6 enrol for the programme
- Currently most contact is done online- mainly through emails with inquiries
- Tuition raised by 40% is a problem; 13.500€ against a 2000€ against a research university for EU students. Mr Pruiskma believes that if the tuition is lowered, there would be more students enrolling and they could truly start having revenue. Because of this, the MIC doesn't offer scholarships
- There are agents and contacts from Hanze who go/are abroad for international university fairs and students recruitment. Mr Pruiskma recommends to talk with the department of marketing communications to see how they do the recruitment
- Mr Pruiskma has the control of the website, but doesn't update it very often. He also controls the social media platforms, and updates them as often as he can. Other partners

and current/former students have been asked to participate; however this participation has been very little

- Marketing plans are being developed at the university by different staff members of the HUAS; none of them have been approved or put into action currently.

From the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview:

- Most of the contact is through email. Mr Pruiskma receives emails everyday with inquiries about the programme. The answering-time usually depends on the day of the week, but it never takes more than 7 days.
- Information updated every year: courses, admissions, application forms, testimonials, carriers of alumni, deadlines. Information barely ever updated (Mr Pruiskma claims there's no need to update it): practicalities of the study, programme description, etc.
- Homepage (pictures) are updated when there're special event happenings or particular news which are considered relevant. Mr Pruiskma will make the images "clickable" ASAP.
- Social media sites:
  - FB & Twitter
    - Updated every week, a few times a week. Mr Pruiskma does not want to overwhelm the audience.
    - Mr Pruiskma asks what should be posted and how often
    - He further feels like personal information gains more attention than academic matters, thus confusing him as to what type of information should be posted
    - He wonders why the pages aren't getting new followers
    - Mr Pruiskma suggests that perhaps more tailored/personal messages would be a way to go, but he doesn't know that what extent an *academic* programme should do this
    - Staff from the consortium isn't involved in the social media sites
    - Partners of the consortium do not contribute enough to the social media sites, except from Hanze, which is where Mr Pruiskma is.
    - Content wise: most of the times Mr Pruiskma requests content from alumni and staff, and he merely posts them into the blog and social media platforms. Most of the posts of the blog are written by students, but posted by Mr Pruiskma
    - There's no deep, thoroughly thought way of creating the messages
  - YouTube
    - Mainly made by Ms Smit; who controls the budgets and the movie making processes
    - Ms Smit tells Mr Pruiskma when new videos are posted/available on YouTube, and he then posts these on other social media platforms
    - Mr Pruiskma handles the layout and the organization of the playlists of YouTube
- Mr Pruiskma has a standard message (see email) for first contact/follow up through email; which are then further tailored to answer the questions of the prospective students
- Mr Pruiskma organizes his emails as "leads" to know who has to be followed up during March/April/May season for Skype meetings with Ms Smit and Mr Pruiskma

- Mr Pruiskma has considered having the scholarship information on the website, but two things restrain him: the NUFFIC scholarships can only be given to students who start their studies at the Netherlands; which would create competition between the partners, and if there're too many applicants, the MIC wouldn't have the capacity to process all of them, especially since the rate of rejection for scholarships is so high.
- The three other partners of Hanze UAS don't have scholarships to be offered (or don't know about the scholarships their governments offer)
- Mr Pruiskma estimates that for every student who sends an email, 100 others looked at the website. He further explains that most visits are of 4 clicks, the last of the pages being tuition fees.
- Mr Pruiskma believes that the Unique Selling Points of the programme are: the double degree at two universities, the practicality of the studies and the cultural side of it
- Mr Pruiskma wonders; could it all be too much? (The social platforms, the website, the blog, etc.) Could it not have the desired quality?

### Minutes 1: Petra Zemeering

Petra Zemeering; the coordinator of the NFP scholarships at Hanze UAS

[Ms. Zemeering requested not to be recorded. Notes were taken by interviewer during the meeting]

[Note: personal notes are written in *Italic*]

- Ms. Zemeering is a NFP scholarship officer at the HUAS since 2005
- At the time of the meeting Ms. Zemeering wasn't sure whether HUAS was going to be part of the NFP scholarship the coming year since there're many budget cuts from the government. Decisions will be made during the current academic year (2013-2014), however she personally thinks that they will not stop having the fellowship
- The process of selection is far longer than shown on the website of the NUFFIC. The criteria eligibility is absolutely paramount for the process
- From September 2014, there will be new focus points in choosing students, also new procedures and rules. This new focus has new fields, such as water management and sustainable energy; for instance someone who works for a water management company could apply for an NFP scholarship in the field of communication. [*Hence, it doesn't depend on the field ITSELF, but on the company's field of expertise and the specialization which the student wishes to pursue*]
- Ms. Zemeering recommends focusing on embassies; they could give out the information of the programme to prospective students and they could give the MIC information on the type of candidates the embassy is looking for.
- Ms. Zemeering recommends talking to someone at IBS who handles the scholarship applications and information distribution.
- Ms. Zemeering recommends looking into all the scholarships offered by the NUFFIC to tailor the search of external experts.
- Ms. Zemeering recommends talking so Simon van der Wal about the scholarships and also talking to Lammert Been regarding the Tempus and Erasmus Mundus scholarships.
- When it comes to joint programmes the students do get their monthly allowance (in the case that they have a scholarship) only if the study abroad is absolutely mandatory for the programme. However, visa costs and travelling costs are on the student).

- Ms. Zemeering gave the interviewer the number of student applications, the country of origin and the number of students who received a scholarship at the end of the process. These are available in an excel document that the interviewer holds. These documents are to be treated confidentially.
- The new procedures mentioned before aim at making the process (of selection) more transparent and objective, by defining the needs of the company and the countries (through the embassies). Ms. Zemeering further explains that this is being done because embassies play a big role in the selection of students, and the NUFFIC has very little control over the objectivity that the embassies might have.

Final suggestions from Ms. Zemeering

- Promote the available scholarships on the website of the MIC
- Encourage students to apply
- Get in touch with the scholarship officer at the embassies and see what can be done regarding the MIC [*merely as diffusion of information*]
- Check out the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for further information on websites and contact details.

## Minutes 2: Andries Reitsma

Andries Reitsma; a Graphic Designer at “We love it when a plan comes together”

[Mr. Reitsma requested not to be recorded. Notes were taken by interviewer during the meeting]

Mr. Reitsma was asked to give a professional opinion regarding the website of the MIC and its user-friendliness. The following are his personal recommendations as a graphic designer and website developer.

- Lack of enthusiasm at first sight. The site looks boring
- It looks as a governmental website (very professional, however lacks enthusiasm)
- It also has an informational overload
- Mr Reitsma recommends more context in the pictures of the main page. He says that they're mere pictures and need more context (or perhaps links to articles). He further claims that the pictures are a waste of space since they don't have links for their explanation. He says that one idea could be to split the site under the blue tiles in two, thus leaving space for the news and the pictures on one side, and having application procedures and “how to apply” links on the other side
- A “how to apply” button should be centrally located, easy to find and eye-catching
- Deadline for application procedures should also be part of the homepage. This is paramount information.
- The website lacks of programme information that is easy to access (need to scroll all the way down or click several times to find it)
- What's on offer should be a welcoming text, with a link to online application.
- SEO is paramount for the website. There is an obvious lack thereof
- All information on the homepage is missing context. Is almost as the information was thrown in there the way it was written for governmental organisations.

- Under the “study at two universities in Europe” there should be more specific information about communication, for instance: study communication at two universities in Europe. This also helps enhance the SEO.
- Mr. Reitsma proposes a map of Europe in which people can see where the four partner universities are, this gives an overview to students who know little about locations in Europe.
- Action words; instead of “admission” have “apply now” or “how to apply”
- Admission text should be reviewed and proof read.
- It is recommended to have an online application procedure. Thus instead of having to download the form and fill it out, students could be able to fill said application online, and upload the documents as well.
- Mr. Reitsma also recommends to have in one same page all the information (applies for all buttons on blue tile) instead of having the links on the right side. This makes it more user friendly by making the user click less. The text could also have a “back to top” link.
- Visual feedback of the links gone through are recommended (see picture below)
- Switch from corporate website to actual programme website, content wise and visually. Having an educational concept; the website isn’t easy user friendly and is fairly boring. Mr. Reitsma further recommends to make it more personal for students
- Instead of having a blog where only one person can publish, it is better to have two separate sections: news and testimonials. The current blog posts could be divided between what has been going on lately at the MIC and the testimonials of the alumni.
- The links under the logos of the partner universities don’t do anything. Either remove the hyperlink or make it take you somewhere that explains something about the partners, or even the partners’ main page of the MIC
- Content-wise, the explanation at the Hanze UAS website is more specific and better written than that of the consortium website. The same happens with the website of IULM
- Content-wise, Mr Reitsma recommends making the text more personal and by highlighting that the student gets out of studying the MIC programme.
- When looking at the university websites that offer the MIC, Vilnius U was the only one which didn’t have a direct link to the MIC website.
- Social media sites also need further improvements; the explanation of the website page is very corporate, and Mr Reitsma recommends a more student-like explanation of the programme. He further explains that the Facebook page should be a tool to reach students informally.
- The switch between “Geert Hofstede Consortium” and “MIC” happens often and unexplained. There should be a more obvious description of what both of them are, how they are related and IF they are interchangeable

Visual feedback:

[International](#) / [Schools](#) / [School of Communication, Media & IT](#) / [Programmes](#) / [Master Programmes](#) / [International Communication](#) / [Unique joint programme](#)

### Minutes 3: Carlos Bazzanella

Carlos Bazzanella; a Community Manager at “Grupo Sanz”

[Mr. Bazzanella requested not to be recorded. Notes were taken by interviewer during the meeting]

The recommendations of Mr Bazzanella were based both on effective best practices and the current communication efforts of the MIC. The only information he had about the programme was retrieved by him looking at the website and social media platforms during our meeting.

This meeting took place in Spanish; which is the native language of both the interviewer and the interviewee. Some translation misunderstandings could potentially diminish their usability; however the researcher believes it to be useful information for the further development of the online strategy for the MIC.

- Unify the platforms to create a consistent look. The YouTube site has very different images and banners than Facebook and Twitter sites.
- In the case that the communications manager does not have new material for YouTube, but wishes to have updates every now and then; Mr Bazzanella recommends the use of "Animoto.com", a platform which does post production of videos, and can help create new material from pictures or unpublished footage.
- Mr Bazzanella notices that publication dates on Facebook and Twitter tend to consistently be the same days of the week; he recommends the use of Hootsuite.com. This platform is used by professionals to manage all the different social platforms of a company. Messages can be scheduled, and they can also be tailored made per platform. Furthermore, hootsuite.com also creates reports on "likes" and "retweets".
- Mr Bazzanella recommends including the alumni and showing them through the social platforms that the MIC pages are also useful for them. He claims "what's in it for them? You need to show them this through your social media platforms"
- He also explains that Facebook is used to get "likes" and "fans"; while Twitter should be for establishing conversations with the followers and getting "retweets".
- Mr Bazzanella recommends the use of action words and interesting titles, such as "How to..." or "discover..." or "did you know..." he claims these type of action words make the user attracted to the information.
- He recommends creating a protocol of usage of the social media sites. This protocol should include 'do's and don'ts' per social media platform, the personality and image of the organization and also general rules and regulations of what should and should not be posted.
- Mr Bazzanella understands that communication managers not only have to deal with online communication, so he recommends creating a schedule. Thus for example, if the communications manager has three hours a week for online platforms, he or she should dedicate half the time to looking for or creating new content, and the other half of the time to organizing this content in Hootsuite.com for it to be published throughout the week in the different online platforms. He also recommends the use of Scoop.it; a platform of content curation; which could bring all sorts of new content and points of view, and can also be tailored with personal perspectives.
- He finally recommends the use of a short video of acceptance. Maximum 30 seconds; where two or three members of the staff welcome the student into the programme. The video can be the same for every student, although he recommends including the name of the accepted student in the beginning and/or end of the video.

### Q&A 1 : NESO India

These questions were sent and responded via email. Nothing was changed from the respondents' answers.

- *What online activities take place, other than website, for the promotion of studying in the Netherlands? (SEO, SEA, social media platforms, etc)*

We do SEO, online banners, use social media such as "Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Google hangouts, Pinterest and Instagram", google adwords, Facebook ads etc.

- *What is the most common way in which students contact NESO India?*

They mostly send us a mail or call on our landlines, second in line is sending us offline messages on Facebook.

- *Do students establish contact first with NESO India, or with Dutch institutions?*

It is more or less 50-50; sometimes students get admissions and come to us looking for scholarships. Sometimes the students directly come to us.

- *Which role does NESO India play when it comes to students wanting to study in the Netherlands? (Provide them with information, contact details in Dutch institutions, visa requirements, programme details, etc)*

We basically provide the student with all the information that would be required for them to first look for Universities that can offer them a programme based on their interest, once they choose from the various Universities we provide them with a contact, visa requirements (doesn't apply in the case of Dutch Universities as the University takes care of this process). Programme details links we provide to the students... Based on the students' interest we give them names of different Universities and the student can choose a University based on his/her discretion.

- *Does NESO India promote particular programmes or university? (Through brochures or online) If possible, please explain why.*

No NESO India does not promote any particular programme or University, but based on the availability of hard copies available we give them away during fairs to students so that they can have something to refer to from the Universities that offer programmes based on the student's interest. Also based on the online brochure links we have, we provide the same to students who are looking for something in particular and it matches the programme offered by the University.

## Q&A 2: NESO Mexico

These Q&A took place via Skype; some answers might be different since the conversation took place in Spanish: the native language of both the interviewer and the interviewee. However the researcher believes the results can be of great help when designing the online communication strategy.

- *What online activities take place, other than website, for the promotion of studying in the Netherlands? (SEO, SEA, social media platforms, etc)*

Very active social media platforms; since youngsters in latin America and especially in Mexico are online a lot of the time. They have 20.000 "likes" on Facebook; which makes them the NESO office with most likes, and the educational support office in Mexico with most likes.



They have recently started doing SEO. They have newsletters that are published 4 times a year and are made available online; these newsletters have news, but also testimonials from alumni or from students who are currently in the Netherlands. They claim that involving the alumni and publishing their testimonials in all their sites helps current students in making their decision and also in choosing programmes or universities.

They have also started an Instagram account; an idea which they took from NESO Russia. This account is given for one month to a Mexican student that is in the Netherlands, and that way the followers (or prospective students) can see how life in the Netherlands is. Each month, NESO Mexico chooses a different Mexican student in the Netherlands. They have also added a widget to the NESO Mexico website, so those people who are online can also see the pictures that are being published on the Instagram account.

They aim at keeping a consistency between their different platforms online, and they also seek to have all the information available in all the different platforms. Plus, in all their platforms; they have links to the other different platforms.

*- What is the most common way in which students contact NESO Mexico?*

Emails; which usually leads to a visit in the office. The students that are not in the city where the office is prefer Skype sessions or phone sessions with them. The interviewee believes that Skype sessions are very fruitful, since they have a certain human touch but can still be done online and free of expenses. NESO Mexico also hosts presentations almost every month in their office with information about studying in the Netherlands.

*- Do students establish contact first with NESO Mexico, or with Dutch institutions?*

Most students that contact NESO Mexico already know what they want to study, but aren't aware of all the different programmes and universities that might offer courses appealing to them. Usually, students who are looking for full time programmes use the NESO as a source of information, however students who do academic exchanges at Dutch institutions do not need to have any contact with the NESO; since the universities handle all their paperwork and arrangements.

*- Which role does NESO Mexico play when it comes to students wanting to study in the Netherlands? (Provide them with information, contact details in Dutch institutions, visa requirements, programme details, etc)*

NESO offices are mainly to give out the information about studying in the Netherlands; they claim that they give the students the different tools they need in order to make a decision on where to study. Visa arrangements are usually done by the Dutch universities. NESO Mexico sees itself as the provider of information, the entity that shows which doors are open for students. They do, however, follow up on every student that has contacted them up until the moment they come back to Mexico after their studies.

They further encourage students to establish the first contact with Dutch universities, but if the student doesn't receive an answer within two weeks, NESO Mexico calls the university and asks them

to please take the time to answer the emails of that particular student. They firmly state that the communication should be always between the university and the student.

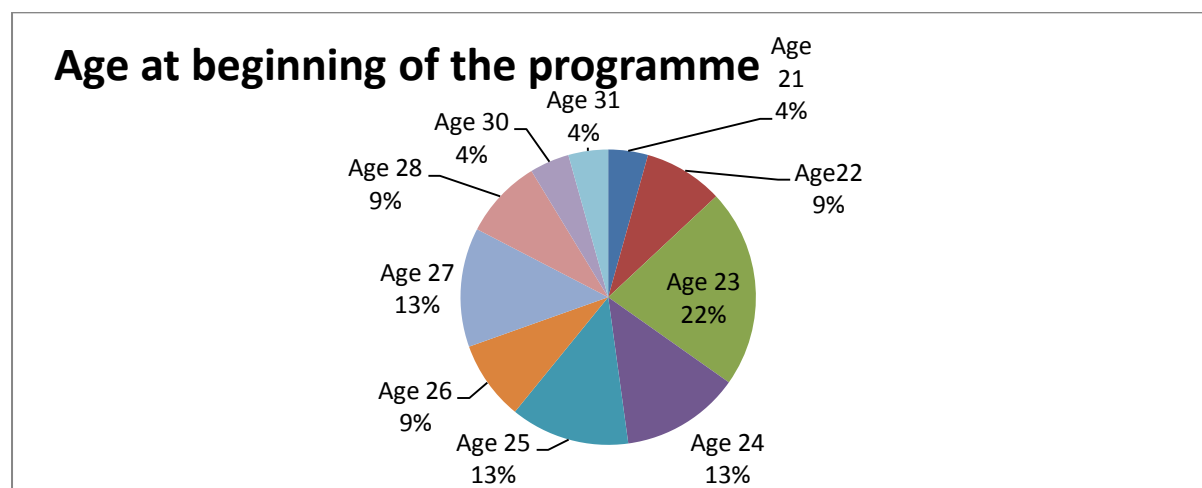
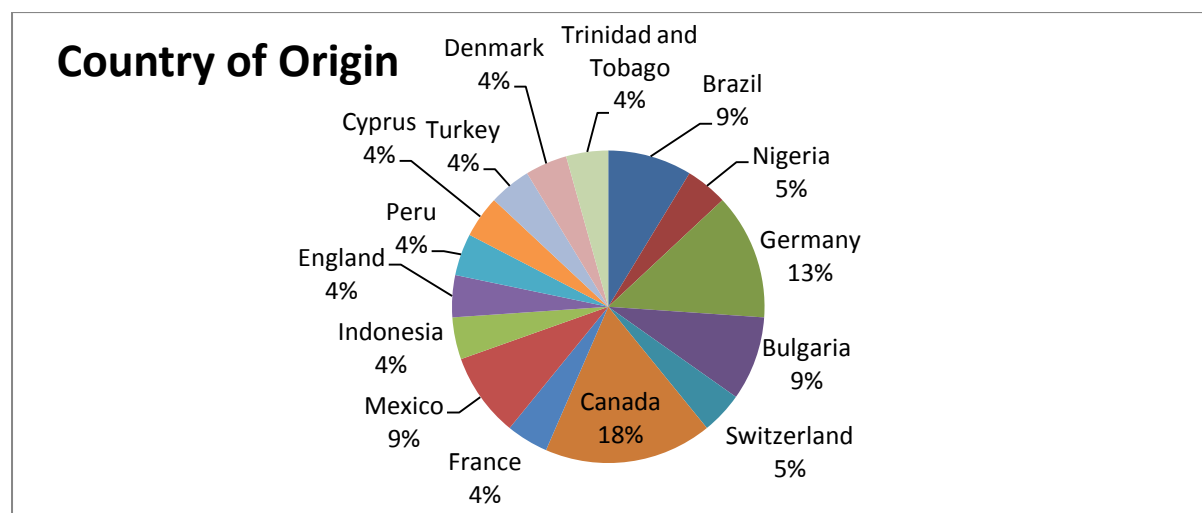
- Does NESO Mexico promote particular programmes or university? (Through brochures or online) If possible, please explain why.

They are not allowed to promote any particular programme or university. However, if a programme or university sends them brochures, they would make them available for prospective students. Also, if a particular student asks about a particular programme and NESO Mexico happens to have a brochure from that, they would give it to the student.

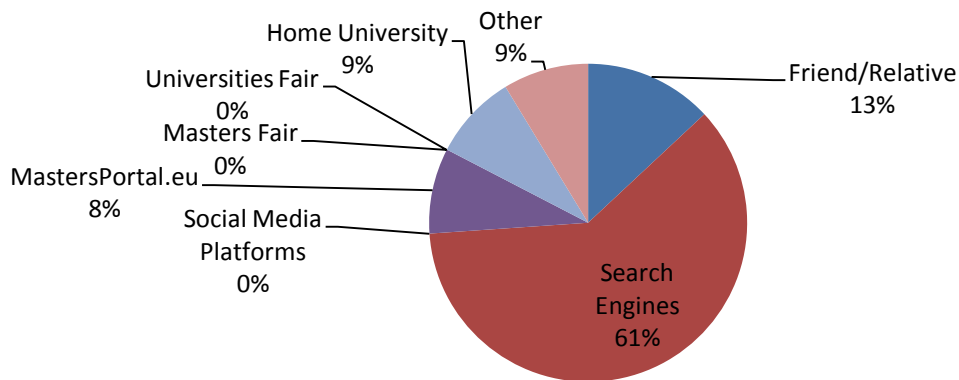
## Survey

This survey was compound with X questions and there were 23 valid responses.

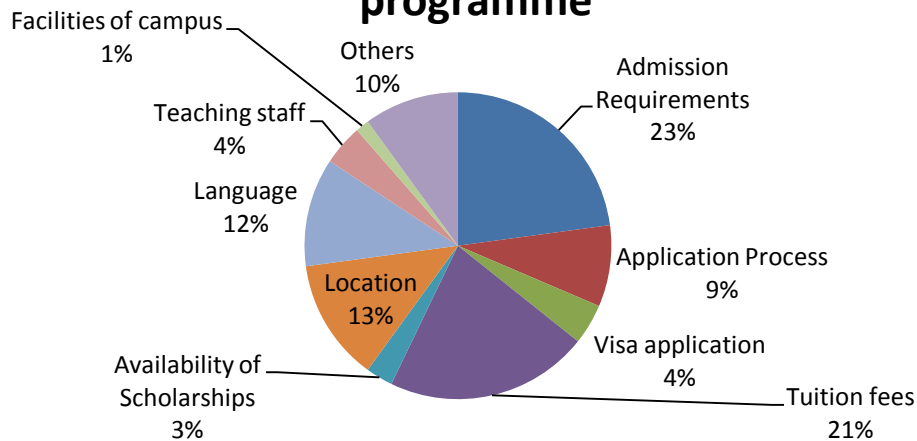
### Closed questions



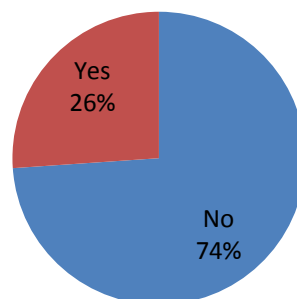
## How did you hear about the MIC?



## Most important things to know about the programme



## Percentage of students who had scholarships



The students, who had scholarships, had them from:

Danish government	1
Quebec government	1
StuNed (NUFFIC)	1

Erasmus Mundus	2
New Bulgarian University	1

Note: One student more claimed to have a scholarship from Erasmus Mundus during the period of his/her internship. This was accounted as a “No” in the previous question, since this scholarship is only given for students who are doing internships as part of their study programme.

## Open Ended Questions

### Why did you choose the MIC?

1. Because of the course programme.
2. The opportunity to learn in different countries/contexts
3. Interesting curriculum, taught in English
4. Because I wanted to study exactly Master International Communication. After that there was the fact that it was located in my home country (Bulgaria) and in UK, where I also wanted to study.
5. The fact that it was not simply Communication studies, but also in relation with intercultural issues really attracted me.
6. I chose the MIC program because it blends academic theory with practical aspect of the PR industry. The client based assignments are fantastic because it gives you a chance to use the theory you learned in class and solve a real problem faced by a company. I was also attracted to the idea that you could study in two countries within in 18 months and walk away with a degree from each country. This was very important to me as I continue to build my international profile.
7. I liked the idea of living in two different places in just a year of program. I have been also very interesting in the specialization they offered
8. Because of the double master
9. Because it was an interesting course with modules that were related to my field of interest in communications and it gave me the opportunity of living in two different countries.
10. Interactive, brave and flexible programme.
11. It's the only programme offering specializations in international communication.
12. The Netherlands and another European Country
13. I wanted to study a masters in communication outside of the UK and have the opportunity to travel
14. Because of the study plan and the locations
15. Really good reputation and a really nice experience of meeting new people and studying in two different universities
16. Because my fiancé got accepted at Rug, so it was our option for staying together.
17. because of two-country, two diploma opportunity
18. concept of the programme (to study in two different countries, practical orientation of the programme)
19. Opportunity to study in two different countries and it seemed to have a practical rather than theoretical approach to communications
20. Because it was short, about communication and allowed me to travel.
21. I looked at Communications programs all over the UK and the opportunity to study at 2 schools caught my attention. Further research into the program and opportunities such as the NRG and Health Challenge in Hanze and placement opportunities and just how dynamic the whole thing is

made the decision a no-brainer. It is the best program for understand communications in a global context.

22. Two degrees, close to home, more specialised than the Bachelor of Int. Communication

23. The programme doesn't exist like it does anywhere else in the world - studying and two different universities and getting both a degree and a certificate with hands on learning.

**How did you choose for first and second semester option?**

1. I wanted to live in the Netherlands and where the base of the programme was. For the second one was really because of the specialisations Leeds offered.
2. Specialisations and location
3. Based on the specialization and location, as well as the reputation of the university
4. First: my home country (New Bulgarian University) Second: I chose Leeds Metropolitan University because I wanted to study in UK and because of the studies there
5. For both Leeds and Milan: -A good way to improve the language spoken in the country. English is essential to work in the international sector. Italian is a national language in my country. -I love both cultures. -Leeds seemed very qualified for PR; Milan offers me the specialization I want to build my career.
6. I chose my university for the second semester first based on my interests. I then chose the first university
7. I choose first Milan as first choice and Groningen as second. As there was not a first semester [offered] in Milan they changed me. I was finally very happy of the two choices.
8. Because of my interest and the location
9. By the specialization focus and according to cultural references E.g., cities that I guess I would be more easily adapted
10. I chose the first one to be located in my hometown - New Bulgarian University. I preferred IULM Milano as second one because of the location and the subjects.
11. I chose the two universities based on the specializations and the locations.
12. I wanted to learn Dutch and Italian
13. To be honest, I thought Groningen was compulsory but probably still would have chosen it; I wanted to experience the Netherlands for some time. I chose Lithuania because it was the most different location on the programme
14. The first (Vilnius) because I find it a different destination. The second (Milan) because I like the specialization and wanted to practice my Italian.
15. First: I am already studying in Leeds and it would be easier Second: The modules that the university provided
16. Leeds, because the degree there is Master in Arts and because I wanted to improve my English. Netherlands because me and my boyfriend would be living in the same city.
17. Based on academic recognition of universities and living expenses
18. preference of countries and specialization
19. The second I chose based on the specialisation. The first one based on where I have always wanted to live for a while
20. Based on countries I most wanted to live in.
21. Leeds Met because I felt comfortable in the UK, it was an opportunity to travel and learn in a different country but starting somewhere I was familiar with such as the UK would be an easier transition. Second biggest student city in the UK, friendly north...just an amazing school. I picked

Hanze for the second because I wanted adventure but Lithuania and Bulgaria were a little too remote for me.

22. Based on their reviews and the available specialisations

23. Based on specializations