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Imagine Education au/in Canada:
Executive Summary of Qualitative Research
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Executive Summary

Background and research objectives

Edu-Canada (International Promotion of Education in Canada) is in the fourth year of a five-year initiative to promote Canada as a study destination. DFAIT proposed the Edu-Canada initiative, as a strategy to better align a fragmented education sector, to enhance Canada's profile abroad and to increase the number of international students attending Canadian universities and colleges.

The research was designed to gather insights to support the further development of the "Imagine Education in Canada" brand on a qualitative basis among target audiences in three key markets, Brazil, China and India.

The research objectives were to:

- Gather feedback from prospective students on the resonance of the Imagine Education au/in Canada graphic platform and key messages;
- Identify social values and behaviour impacting decisions about whether and where to study abroad; and,
- Test key themes and messages about educational opportunities in Canada to further refine and improve the Imagine Education au/in Canada brand communications.

Summary of key findings

Canada is a not top-of-mind destination for foreign study for participants in any of the three countries except with Brazilian participants interested in language studies as well as the Brazilian advisor focused on Canada.

There is no awareness that Canada has world-class educational establishments, indeed, apart from a few mentions of University of Toronto there is very little awareness of any Canadian educational establishments. While participants believe that Canada as a developed country must have an adequate level of education, there is no perception of a Canadian education advantage compared to others.

Given that the presence of world-class educational establishments is the leading factor that drives the choice of a foreign destination for education, this lack of prominence is a serious obstacle.

The United Kingdom and the United States dominate conversations about preferred destinations, due to their reputation and history in higher education, their occupancy of most of the top ranks on world rankings, and the prestige and advantages that their degrees are seen to confer on recipients. However, some other countries do succeed in gaining prominence due to their traditional focus and excellence in a particular area of education or by virtue of their presence and outreach towards advisors and prospective students.

Canada needs to put more effort into communicating its post-secondary education advantages. Participants in Brazil made a point of saying that Canada has had some success with regard to promoting its exchange programs in their country, and suggested that this was an indication that such efforts could be successful.

The Imagine Education in/au Canada brand has some weaknesses which need to

be addressed. Mainly, it is confusing and not seen as sufficiently linked to education and Canada. The absence of a clear national brand, which is present among Canada's competitors, leaves participants wondering who the sponsor of the communications is.

Likewise, the creative concepts that were tested need to be improved. Their main flaw is that, in general, they are not specific enough to Canada: they do not stress unique aspects of the country; they could be applied to any other country that wants to attract international students. The concepts should present texts that emphasize the excellence of studies in Canada, and provide information about what kinds of courses are offered. As many participants don't have high awareness of Canada when it comes to education, they are expecting to see some more specific information, relating to Canada's educational advantages, such as:

- School ranking in the world,
- Top majors and academic advantages
- Presence of world-class infrastructure
- Famous/successful people who have Canadian credentials
- Scientific publications, information about Canadian institutions in scientific magazines or the general media

Materials should also provide information about Canada's practical advantages, such as leisure and cultural opportunities, high quality of living, good value for money, natural beauty of the country, etc.

One of Canada's perceived unique strengths is a liberal immigration policy. [Although participants with lower levels of knowledge think that the visa application process is easy, those with more direct experience suggest otherwise.]

The much more positive reactions elicited by the brochure demonstrate that exposure to specific and relevant information can change peoples' mindset.

Through the study it is clear that there is a great potential to be explored by Canada in order to appeal to international students, through advertising and marketing campaigns.

Specifically:

- Higher advertising of Canadian teaching quality (mainly to undergrads and grads)
- Advertising Canada's advantages for scientific research
- Advertising/marketing about the wide variety of courses offered and particular areas of specialization or excellence
- Adding greater value through communicating appealing features and benefits of studying in Canada (e.g. leisure and cultural opportunities, high quality of living, good value for money ratio, natural beauty of the country, etc.)
- Offering English/French courses/support for students who are not fluent in English, but interested in higher education courses in the country
- Greater outreach/partnership between the Canadian embassy and international student exchange agencies

- Providing advisors with materials and arguments about the advantages of Canada
- Advertising higher education to foreign students who are already in Canada studying languages or on high school exchange programs
- Partnership between the Government of Canada and other countries' Ministries of Education for offering affordable educational and housing costs
- Advertising cultural events in the country (e.g. Arts, dancing, music festivals, etc.)
- Advertising innovations in several areas (e.g. Not only in terms of higher education, but also with regards to fashion/design/architecture, in order to emphasize the image of a country in constant motion, where trends and novelties are set)
- Advertising/marketing using successful Canadian personalities or international personalities with Canadian credentials in several areas
- Stronger presence in social networks (e.g. marketing via Twitter, Facebook pages, etc.)
- Partnership with specific blogs (e.g. Fashion blogs advertising fashion courses, architecture blogs advertising architecture courses, etc.)
- Advertising of research centers, laboratories, cutting-edge universities, etc. in print media (e.g. in renowned publications focused on specific areas of law/business administration/medicine, etc.)

The total contract value of this research was \$176,500 excluding HST.

Methodology

Ipsos Reid conducted qualitative research consisting of focus groups and one-on-one interviews. The fieldwork for this research took place during March and April 2012.

This included 11 focus groups, with four groups in each of Brazil, China and three groups in India. Within each market, the groups were split among three broad target audiences, prospective students, parents and educational advisors of university students. The audiences of students were further segmented on the basis of level of study (college and undergraduate students as compared to post-graduate students).

The reader is reminded that qualitative research findings are not projectable to larger populations.



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