

## Article

# Towards Sustainable Internationalization of Higher Education: Innovative Marketing Strategies for International Student Recruitment

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**Abstract:** Globalization and internationalization have received increasing attention from researchers in the field of education management over the past decade, who have found that internationalization is an indispensable component in the sustainable development of higher education (HE). This research aims to construct Innovative Marketing Strategies (IMS) for international student recruitment and contribute to the sustainable internationalization of higher education (IoHE). A literature review was used to construct an Innovative Marketing Strategies questionnaire. Data collected from 300 international students studying in Taiwan were used for a feasibility analysis in order to construct the final questionnaire, and survey data collected from 522 participants were used for more in-depth statistical analysis of the final strategies. The research results indicate that combining the marketing mix 4C with an innovative strategy (IS) approach provides sustainable recruitment marketing strategies toward higher education institution internationalization from a customer-oriented perspective. The IMS in this study includes 2 dimensions, 10 strategies, and 32 indicators. Additionally, a comprehensive analysis demonstrating the perspectives of international students with respect to the strategies was also conducted. This research contributes to the theoretical development and practical implementation of sustainable HE internationalization management. Discussions and recommendations based on the results of this study are also given.

**Keywords:** Innovative Marketing Strategies; sustainable internationalization; higher education; international students

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## 1. Introduction

Globalization trends are now fundamental for education reform in many nations. The 2019 OECD statistics indicated that the number of students in study-abroad programs rose from 2 million per year in 1998 to 5.3 million per year in 2017 [1]. This surge has been accompanied by an increase in income among educational institutions, especially in Western countries.

Businesses that provide educational services in such countries (e.g., the U.S., Canada, Australia, and the U.K.) have received greater recognition for their profit generation. Educational services rank fifth in U.S. profits in terms of weights, earning more than USD 17 billion in 2009 and over USD 27 billion in 2014. The U.S. is also the most ideal destination for international students, with an international student population twice that of the second-ranked country, the U.K. [2]. However, despite the introduction of several marketing hypotheses in generic marketing and sufficient time and opportunity to implement changes, higher education institutions (HEIs) have not developed a set of proper marketing strategies for such services [3]. Given specific backgrounds, the marketing of higher education (HE) at an international scale requires a thorough understanding of both cultural diversity and the perspectives and ideals of students.

Some scholars disagree on what approach educational institutions should take. For example, Hofstede's [4] research on cultural and individualism/collectivism aspects has been widely debated. Different cultural aspects result in different responses to the marketed message [5]. As such, understanding the different responses to the marketing message from future international students is particularly important for gaining the necessary competitive advantage that enables institutions to apply this knowledge [6]. Applying various understandings is effective, especially in the online environment, as students tend to gather a broad range of information before deciding which destination is most suitable. However, research on the marketing message for the general cultural body has mostly focused on marketing content rather than studying the different viewpoints coming from both the suppliers and consumers of educational services [7].

Meanwhile, the internationalization of higher education (IoHE) in Asian countries is led by the most developed nations/regions, such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, followed by China and other developing countries. International education has become crucial for HE services around the world, as it can enhance accessibility to further HE and narrow the knowledge gaps between developed and developing countries. However, whether it is undertaken depends entirely on the economic capabilities of students to utilize global education resources. In addition, the internationalization of education entails several drawbacks that can endanger the growth of many HEIs in developing countries [8]. Nevertheless, whether considered from economic, societal, or political viewpoints, in general, HE remains the key to elevating one's income and quality of life. Even in underdeveloped countries, students who have benefited from being educated in developed countries can make numerous contributions to their societies as a whole. Leaders of HEIs should, therefore, have a broader view of the services they are providing. In particular, educational leaders in more developed countries should also incorporate their country's technological advantages and multicultural experiences into their teachings, research, and services [9].

Foreign educational service providers in West and South Asia have made efforts to increase accessibility to HE, life-long education, and continuous career development in many developing countries [10]. Bohm et al. [11] have predicted that the Asian region will dominate in terms of offering international HE services by 2025, accounting for meeting approximately 70% of the global demand [12]. Asian countries such as China and India have been predicted to become leaders following this trend. The shift toward studying abroad in Asia, as well as the need to internationalize education services, has created a new educational environment that is exceedingly different from traditional universities, focusing on acquiring a student body targeted at the local and regional scales. The level of competition has increased and changed in nature; thus, cooperation is needed between prospective students and those receiving them to accommodate the new international student market. Cooperation between educational service leaders is thus crucial in order to formulate the best decisions in the face of the increasing complications expected to arise from the future international education market [13].

Taiwan's educational marketing in HE bodies remains primarily focused on the domestic segment of the market rather than the international market, especially in terms of developing appropriate marketing strategies and proper support services for existing higher education institutions. Since martial law was lifted in 1987, the growth of HE in Taiwan has reached a golden period, in which progressive policies have allowed more HEIs to be formed, thus significantly increasing the chances of many students attaining HE levels. However, this situation is a catch-22. Although the educational background of the general public and life expectancy have been enhanced, due to the effects of the generational transition, Taiwan's declining birth rate has become a severe problem, resulting in falling numbers of university students and subsequent attendance rates at HE levels [14].

In recent years, the population structure of Taiwan has faced many serious changes—as reflected in the population's transition from the traditional expansive pyramid-shaped structure to the inverted pyramid—for which it is certain that the nation's low birth rate

situation is the cause. As recorded over the years, the number of newborns in Taiwan dropped from 326,547 in 1995 to 206,465 in 2005. By 2010, that number had halved to 166,473, reaching the lowest point in 20 years [15]. Despite the slight rise to 213,093 in 2015, Taiwan's overall birth rate has decreased by 40% over the last two decades. Scholars have predicted that the situation would become very serious for primary and secondary education in 2016 and 2019, respectively, and would grow even more complicated by 2022. The predicted effects resulting from the impact of low enrollment in secondary education are expected to reach HEIs by 2025 [15]. The initial consequences of this event would be either the merging or closing of schools, which could make their operational plans for the future more challenging [16,17]. The current dwindling number of applicants for HEIs may already be attributable to this low birth rate scenario [14]. Notably, this phenomenon is not unique to Taiwan but is also occurring in other Asian countries, including Japan and Korea. Should this problematic trend continue to go unaddressed, it will become the prime challenge for the sustainable growth of HE.

The majority of marketing strategies of HEIs in Asia, including Taiwan, have been based on those developed and applied in Western regions. Mistakes made by educational supervisors are usually related to cultural diversity, where differences in perspectives may change a customer's understanding of the marketing message, thus producing a failure in communication [6]. Such mistakes can deter organizations from achieving their desired marketing objectives, which, in the case of HEIs, is to attract enough students and meet recruitment criteria. Understanding how to resolve these differences can prevent this from happening to the marketing message while, at the same time, granting a competitive edge in the form of multicultural development of the organization [3]. Other than the contrasts in the educational environment, marketing strategies in universities and colleges in Asia still employ traditional methods, such as the 7Ps and 4Cs, without any creative adjustments to fit their young target audience in an age of continuous technological development. Therefore, creativity is an attribute that this research wishes to include in its proposed marketing strategies for every Asian country and, more importantly, for Taiwan.

HE marketing is a key component of the internationalizing process of a country's education system. Even so, political conflicts between nations and unexpected crisis events may become major obstacles to recruiting students from abroad. Various decisions by U.S. President Donald Trump to limit the internationalization process after his inauguration in 2016 and the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 are two examples of major issues that can limit the growth of this trend, thus hindering modern-day efforts to attract international students.

This study was carried out under the aforementioned circumstances. From the customer-oriented perspective and international market entry mode theories, this study aims to create innovative recruitment marketing strategies toward sustainable IoHE, that are applicable to HEIs in Asia, in general, and Taiwan, in particular, where the study's quantitative surveys were conducted.

From the research background, research gap, and research motivation mentioned above, the research objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. Develop suitable IMS for Taiwan and other Asian countries in order to increase the admission rates of HEIs;
2. Investigate the perspectives of international students towards the IMS.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. International Marketing of HE

#### 2.1.1. Service Marketing in HE

Kotler's [18] theory postulates that organizations employ five concepts when conducting their marketing strategies; production, product, selling, marketing, and societal marketing. Higher education services marketing has a long history of development as scholars continue to discuss the fact that for-profit and non-profit organizations alike have

marketing needs. Kotler and Fox [18] have outlined the details of education marketing with some general knowledge and practices, including what is needed for market analysis, suggesting that HEIs should adhere to a few general practices while developing an efficient marketing strategy. Necessary processes include analyses of the institution's internal and external environments in order to identify the institution's primary marketing possibilities and how to proceed with limited resources. In addition, educational institutions should have well-defined marketing goals, with consideration given to factors such as the market segment, admissions goals, and positioning and demography of target consumers. Scholars have further suggested three essential methods for the development of an effective marketing strategy following the completion of a market analysis: market segmentation, target market selection, and product positioning [18,19].

A number of studies have suggested that when the demand for marketization of HE services in Western countries grows robustly, "marketization is not marketing, etc., and universities today appear to be based on rather archaic marketing theories," even when they emphasize marketing [20]. Marketing theories have changed over time, as has been underscored by Shaw and Jones [21] in their discussion of marketing history. An increasing number of theoretical studies and practices for HE marketing have been conducted, and various approaches have been employed. For example, Vukasovic [22] has conducted a limited-scope study to investigate efforts to improve the brand values of several universities based on the available theories that might be adopted in this service market. In his research on HE services marketing, Egan [23] has asserted that the observed qualitative approaches could improve the effectiveness of education marketing, especially in the execution of relationship marketing strategies, which are essential in HE service marketing [24]. From the customer-oriented perspective service marketing in HEIs has also been considered and analyzed.

#### 2.1.2. Customer-Oriented Perspective

At present, HEIs operate in a dynamic and fiercely competitive environment, thus enabling students worldwide to choose the best place for their education from among an unprecedented array of options. As neoliberalism involves the commercialization of education, it makes sense for students to simply transfer the market's "customer" paradigm to their perception of their relationship with the university [25].

This shift has resulted in an increasing number of HEIs adopting customer-oriented approaches that prioritize serving (rather than challenging) students. For instance, some contemporary HEIs place a premium on professional job-seeking rather than academics [26]. Desai et al. [27] suggested that because students as consumers have expectations and requirements regarding their professional outputs, these demands, and needs must be better understood and satisfied to provide an improved educational experience. Several scholars have asserted that the key to successfully incorporating marketing concepts and customer orientation into HE is to examine student impressions of an organization's commitment to determining and addressing their needs [28]. Additionally, existing research has suggested that HEIs should place a greater emphasis on students, as the students themselves (as customers and recipients of HE) are the best judges of what they want from HE. As a result, there are those who claim that HE should be student-centered to enhance educational quality [29].

Some scholars believe that a consumer orientation does not belong in education due to the risk of promoting high-value beliefs that erode and ultimately replace the supremacy of academics [30]. Even so, neoliberalism and the development of globalization position "market orientation" at the very heart of fierce competition; education is increasingly regarded as a service like any other, and neoliberal advocates now hold powerful positions in university advisory organizations. Furthermore, the reaction of universities to the commercial interests of their clients may be considered supply-side leverage [28]. Considering the fierce competition in the HE markets, it is logical that HEIs prefer to adopt a customer-oriented approach for business reasons. Consequently, as some studies have

suggested, many HEIs are embracing a student–client orientation that focuses on the motivations of international students to study abroad [31]. As a result, admissions planners of world-class universities around the globe consider customer orientation a crucial factor in their international marketing strategies.

## 2.2. Innovative Marketing Strategies for International Student Recruitment

Chapleo and O’Sullivan [32] have argued that students will continue to develop strong voices in HE as government funding for universities decreases and universities become increasingly reliant on student tuition payments to maintain their operations. Concerns about student learning and teaching experiences have become increasingly important for universities that embrace the marketization of HE. Universities operating in an increasingly uncertain environment face new challenges in the 21st century—not the least of which are cost pressures across the board [32]. In this situation, HE marketing and debates about HE marketing have become the focus of numerous research papers that seek to identify and evaluate new theories and best practices. Likewise, this study argues that conventional marketing theories and methods are no longer capable of explaining student behavior and decision-making [32]. We aim to outline the major contemporary issues in HE marketing and marketization, in order to enable researchers to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing modern HE marketing.

This study argues that an innovative and comprehensive marketing strategy—rather than the generic strategic concepts used in previous education marketing—is required to adapt to the current educational internationalization environment and to meet the unique needs of international students. This innovative marketing strategy, founded on both traditional and modern marketing theories, adopts a customer-oriented perspective and is situated within the context of internationalization.

### 2.2.1. The 4Cs Marketing Mix

When discussing the traditional marketing mix, most scholars refer to strategies such as the 4Ps or the 7Ps. However, the 4Cs model is another variation in the marketing mix. This model is more consumer-oriented, making it appropriate for attracting international students as customers. The 4Ps and 4Cs can be viewed as two sides of the same coin, with one representing the buyer’s perspective and the other representing the seller’s perspective. Examining the marketing mix through a 4C perspective is not a purely semantic exercise; rather, it reflects a paradigm shift that encourages marketers and executives to view their entire process and value chain through the customer’s perspective.

According to Newman and Jahdi [33] and McCarthy [34,35], neither the 4Ps marketing mix—which is the most popular and widely accepted—nor the 7Ps strategy is the optimal marketing mix for HE markets, as both of these marketing strategies reflect the seller’s perspective. Lauterborn [36] argues that the 4Cs marketing mix is more relevant to HE markets, as it is more consumer oriented.

In this study, the 4Cs strategy (customer needs, cost, communication, and convenience) is viewed as an effective traditional marketing tool for an international student audience—particularly in the context of HEIs in Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Singapore, China, and Taiwan.

### 2.2.2. Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning Models

Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) marketing denotes a three-step process that examines a company’s products or services and how they communicate their benefits to distinct customer segments [37,38]. The STP marketing model entails segmenting a particular market, marketing to specific customer segments with campaigns that align with their interests, and tailoring one’s position to the wants and expectations of those segments [39]. Academics have argued that this approach is effective as it focuses on dividing the customer base into smaller segments, which enables the development of

highly targeted marketing strategies to reach and engage with each specific target audience. Indeed, 59% of customers have reported that personalization influences their purchasing decisions, while another 44% stated that a personalized shopping experience influences their decision to become repeat customers of a particular brand [37,40]. STP marketing is a phase in the evolution of marketing that changes from product-centric to customer-centric approaches. This shift provides businesses with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their ideal customers and how to reach and appeal to them. In short, the more targeted and personalized one's marketing efforts are, the more successful they will be [40].

Additionally, empirical and theoretical studies have made specific recommendations regarding well-established marketing tools and strategies in the business sector [41], and numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of these same strategies in the HE sector [42]. The majority of international students enrolled in HEIs in Asian countries, such as Taiwan, are from Asia themselves. Given this situation, school-based recruitment agencies should employ these strategies to analyze and plan their marketing strategies prior to diving into the specific marketing content.

### 2.2.3. Collaboration

Concerns about the ability of universities to co-create and collaborate with students have been raised as a result of the expansion and marketization of global education services [42]. Although numerous articles have discussed the value or benefits of collaboration between students and faculty, less attention has been paid to practical strategies for fostering partnerships [43]. Dollinger and Lodge [44] have again emphasized, in their follow-up study, that collaboration between students and faculty can enhance the student experience and that value can serve as an appropriate lens, through which we may further investigate how value is created and measured in the student experience. Additionally, cooperative relationships between educational institutions and between on-campus faculty and international students provide critical strategies, as they address customer needs from the perspective of international students as customers [44].

On the other hand, university–business collaboration is a development strategy adopted by numerous HEIs, including HEIs in developing countries throughout Asia. Tran and Vu [45] have studied the effects of the direction of collaboration between universities and businesses on the performance of universities—specifically considering the effects of alliance scanning, coordination, and learning on university performance in comparison to innovative and market performance. The results of their ground-breaking study showed that all aspects of alliance orientation are significantly correlated with innovative performance.

### 2.2.4. Eclectic Theory

Entry mode choice is a critical strategic decision for businesses expanding into international markets, as it has far-reaching implications for their performance. The majority of research on this subject has concentrated on for-profit businesses, whose primary objective is profit maximization. Despite an increasing number of non-profit organizations (NPOs), such as HEIs, engaging in commercial revenue generation, the literature on the application of knowledge of entry mode into the NPO field is scant. Notably, the emerging internationalization trend in the non-profit sector has demonstrated new avenues for document expansion [46].

By applying this theoretical framework to the analysis of creative strategies in university marketing at 12 selected universities, Naidoo and Wu [46] have discovered that the mode of international market entry chosen by NPOs may not always be explained by the existing literature, which is primarily for-profit-oriented. The broader definition of equity investment abroad, in particular, stands in stark contrast to previous research on entry modes, the majority—if not all—of which are based on a for-profit context. Additionally, they identified some appropriate strategic factors for NPOs that this thesis

incorporates into a creative marketing strategy, including brand image (and reputation) and international experience. These factors are relevant not only when analyzing offshore non-profits but can also be applied to these institutions in terms of academic exports or, in this case, international recruitment for HEIs.

#### 2.2.5. Brand Image

Branding is a marketing concept that has become popular in recent decades. A brand can be thought of as an extension of both product and promotion policies, and, in the context of HE, it possesses the following characteristics. When discussing brands in HE, it is necessary to consider the relationships between concepts such as branding, reputation, and image. Although “brand” and “reputation” share some features, they are not interchangeable terms; whereas “reputation” is frequently viewed as a status that develops naturally over time, a “brand” is more defined by marketing campaigns [47]. Furthermore, although reputation is viewed as the collective representation of an organization’s previous images established over time, image (and, by extension, branding) is viewed as a collection of meanings associated with an organization [48]. For universities, their reputation is at the heart of what they sell on a daily basis [49].

Branding is frequently associated with the creation of an image with the objective of increasing sales. The purpose of branding in HE is not to sell products and services, but rather to communicate the institution’s “corporate identity” with the aim of increasing student attraction and loyalty [50,51]. Once again, this demonstrates the distinction between marketing concepts applied to the business sector and those applied to HE. Notably, due to the high degree of homogeneity in the HE sector, it is difficult to differentiate and create a distinct brand for most HEIs.

There is a significant amount of research on branding and reputation building for HEIs, as well as the effects these factors have on student loyalty—particularly among target audiences (i.e., students from other countries) [52–55]. According to Wu [56], the reputation of British universities is the primary reason why Chinese students choose to study in the U.K., while another significant study on Vietnamese students, conducted by Nghiệm-Phú and Nguyen [55], has demonstrated that, compared to their country of origin, students assess foreign institutions as being better overall, with a more favorable perception of the host country’s image and university campuses.

#### 2.2.6. International Experience

International experience is one of the factors that contribute to an ownership advantage [46]. Extensive research on international entry modes has demonstrated that, in today’s global business environment, the international knowledge and experience of an organization provide an incalculably valuable source of competitive advantage. Numerous scholars have observed that organizations with little international exposure are often risk-averse and prone to underestimating the potential benefits of internationalization. In contrast, organizations with international experience have been shown to be more proactive in their market entry strategies [46,57]. This is because the administrative and coordination costs associated with internationalization are high for organizations with limited international experience, resources, and capacity, whereas organizations with more international experience develop the confidence and competence to manage the uncertainty and costs associated with overseas operations [46,58].

In other words, organizations with extensive experience in foreign market expansion typically commit to a broader range of modes of access, while organizations lacking relevant international experience frequently prefer less resource-intensive entry modes. In prestigious universities in developed countries, international experience, in addition to international enrollment experience and experience cooperating with foreign institutions of HE—in this case, partnering with educational institutions in developing countries—also helps to promote innovation in HEIs in emerging industrialized developing countries [59,60].

### 2.2.7. Online Marketing

Growing recognition of the importance of online marketing in general—as well as online promotion in particular—for HEIs has been reflected in the emergence of various online agents who specialize in providing exclusive online marketing services tailored to the needs of these types of institutions. Globally, HE has surpassed other industries, in terms of utilizing Google AdWords to drive traffic to organizational websites, due to the benefits of high search volumes, opportunity targeting, and transparent tracking tools [61].

All marketers are aware of the benefits of using the internet in their marketing activities. The online environment provides an impressive array of online tools that enable the development of novel and exciting marketing strategies. Online and digital marketing concepts are becoming increasingly popular as HEIs demonstrate an increased interest in utilizing direct marketing tools online as part of their marketing strategies. This is in response to the challenges confronting HEIs at present, particularly given the dramatic changes in the environment in which HEIs operate in recent years [46]. Even if additional debate is necessary to clarify fundamental concepts of HE marketing, such as the concept of students as customers and the marketing department's role in the institution's operations, businesses offering educational services are becoming increasingly aware of the critical nature of marketing direction in their operations. In HE, which has yet to be clearly defined academically, experts have recognized the potential benefits of applying a marketing perspective to the sector [46,62].

For instance, many studies have shown that while the majority of international students view the university website as their primary source of information, they also consider direct contact information from the institution to be optimal and extremely helpful when selecting an institution [32,63,64]. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when countries restricted social exposure, this marketing medium outperformed traditional admissions marketing channels [65]. Consequently, social media gained increasing acceptance not just as a marketing tool but also as a teaching and learning tool by HEIs during the pandemic period [66]. The importance of social media as a platform for social interaction and marketing continues to grow.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research Design

Stage 1: A mixed-method methodology has been employed in many studies in the field of social sciences [67]. In the first stage of this paper, we provided a literature review of other studies with similar topics in search of a potential research gap. Then, with this gap as the main focus, the research objectives were presented.

Stage 2: During this stage, we conducted further analysis of other related works, which laid the foundation for the questionnaire used in the quantitative research. As the second stage is closely tied to the collection of data for the questionnaire, the work performed in this stage was considered as a feasibility study, aimed at constructing the appropriate instruments to be used as the final questionnaire in the main study. Within this stage, expert validity, reliability analysis, and factor analysis were implemented in the process of building the aforementioned research instruments.

Stage 3: At this stage, we initiated the data collection process necessary for the analysis in the main study. With the aid of the international student affairs office at each institution, fundamental statistical analysis methods, such as descriptive analysis, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA), were performed once the data had been retrieved and returned to the author. Reliability and factor analyses were then employed, in order to help identify the final official contents of the IMS.

### 3.2. Population and Sample

The study subject of this research consisted of international students currently residing in Taiwan and studying at Taiwanese educational institutions. According to the



Taiwan Ministry of Education, the country currently hosts approximately 65,000 international students who are pursuing HE degrees, ranging from a bachelor's to a Ph.D. [68]. Thus, random sampling was applied in this research.

The questionnaire was distributed online with support from the offices of international affairs/international offices at the selected universities and social media groups reposted by alumni from various countries, such as Facebook and Line. The participants all received a link that allowed them to access the questionnaire. To effectively increase the response rate of those who completed the questionnaires, five were selected at random to receive shopping coupons with a value of 1000 New Taiwan dollars, and, as the grand prize, a pair of Apple AirPods were given to one participant in the data collection process for the main study.

In the feasibility study, the questionnaires were inspected for validity by experts before being sent to 1000 members of various international student social media groups from different nationalities living in Taiwan. The purpose of this phase was to increase diversity in the opinion of the international students—both potential students and graduates—thus focusing on data collection through social media channels. MacCallum et al. [69] have suggested a sample size of at least 300 to ensure the stability of statistical analysis. Given the time allotted for this study, we formulated a schedule that allowed the sample size to meet such a standard. The survey period was from 10 August 2021 to 25 August 2021. A total of 300 valid response samples were used for the analysis in this phase (response rate: 30%).

The subject of the main study was consistent with the survey in the feasibility study. According to Morse [70], the sample size for the main study should be within the range of 500–1000. In this study, the questionnaire survey in the main study was made available for two weeks from 27 August 2021 to 12 September 2021. Online questionnaires were sent to 1500 participants. This time, in order to increase diversity, accuracy, and comprehensiveness, in addition to sending questionnaires through social media, we also sent questionnaires to international students by email after being provided access to e-mail accounts belonging to the departments of international affairs of the selected universities. Finally, statistical analysis was conducted on 522 valid responses (response rate: 34.8%).

Detailed personal characteristics of the research participants are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Personal characteristics of the research participants.

	Questionnaires ( <i>n</i> = 522)	
	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Nationality</b>		
Vietnam	207	39.7
Malaysia	107	20.5
Indonesia	109	20.9
Other	99	19.0
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	290	55.6
Female	232	44.4
<b>Type of university</b>		
Private school	315	60.3
National school	207	39.7
<b>Location</b>		
Northern	286	54.8
Central	128	24.5
Southern	108	20.7
<b>Degree</b>		
Bachelor	237	45.4
Master	183	35.1

Doctoral	102	19.5
<b>Information source</b>		
Friend	106	20.3
Family	128	24.5
Internet	131	25.1
Agency	103	19.7
Other	54	10.3

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. International Student Perceptions of the Innovative Marketing Strategies

An analysis of the mean scores (ranging from 1 to 5) in Table 2 revealed the levels of agreement of the international students with the IMS developed in this research. The survey results revealed that the IMS's strategic contents were found to be suitable, relatively important, and appreciated by international students (mean > 3.5). The levels of consent with the ten main strategic items included in the research were ranked in descending order of importance, from the item of highest concern, cost (mean = 4.4), to the most relatively, consistently agreed one (standard deviation, SD = 0.68) to the least concerning item, STP (mean = 3.5; SD = 0.716). Among the top five strategies most appreciated by international students were: cost (mean = 4.4; SD = 0.68), brand image (mean = 4.2; SD = 0.721), international experience (mean = 4.2; SD = 0.768), social media (mean = 4.2; SD = 0.769), and communication (mean = 4.1; SD = 0.689). The others were regarded as less important; however, the difference was insignificant, ranging from 0.1 to 0.9.

**Table 2.** International student perceptions of different IMS strategies, ranked by Mean ( $n = 522$ ).

Code	Strategy	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
STP	Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning Model	3.5	0.716	10
CON	Convenience	3.6	0.682	9
CUN	Customer needs	3.9	0.693	8
COL	Collaboration	4.1	0.737	7
WEB	Website	4.1	0.770	6
COM	Communication	4.1	0.689	5
SOC	Social media	4.2	0.769	4
INT	International experience	4.2	0.768	3
BRA	Brand image	4.2	0.721	2
COS	Cost	4.4	0.680	1

##### 4.1.1. Customer Needs

Meeting customer needs is one of the fundamental strategies developed in this research, based on the customer-oriented perspective, which makes students the focal point of the HE service of the IMS. Statistics indicated that the importance of the three indicators in this strategy valued by international students, ranked in descending order, were: course content needs (mean = 4.02; SD = 0.792) > needs for living support (mean = 4.01; SD = 0.797) > needs for career counseling (mean = 3.56; SD = 0.843). This indicates that students perceive researching the course content to be a crucial step when reviewing and ultimately selecting a learning program offered abroad. In addition, the difference in the level of student agreement with course content needs and living support needs (0.01) was smaller and insignificant, compared with career counselling needs (0.46). Such a gap means that students tend to pay more attention to the former indicators. However, all three indicators had high rates (mean > 3.56; SD < 0.843), proving that they consistently held a certain level of importance in student perceptions of education service.

#### 4.1.2. Cost

Costs, or financial considerations, are a crucial factor that all students, both domestic and international, must take into consideration. In addition, parents often influence decisions about which programs students apply to and help to plan their children's education. Cost is the factor about which students demonstrated the greatest concern, as revealed by the survey results presented in the above section (Table 1). Three indicators related to the cost strategy are tuition, scholarships and financial support, and cost of living. The survey results indicated that the importance of these indicators (in descending order), as assessed by international students were: cost of living (mean = 4.39; SD = 0.834) > scholarships and financial support (mean = 4.36; SD = 0.839) > tuition (mean = 4.34; SD = 0.819). This means that students view learning about the cost of living as important when considering an overseas country/region for study. Furthermore, the differences in agreement with these indicators were minor (ranging from 0.02 to 0.05), indicating that students regularly expressed concerns about these three indicators. All three indicators had high scores (mean > 4.34; SD < 0.839), proving their importance in student perceptions of educational institutions as well as a level of consistency in their opinions.

#### 4.1.3. Convenience

This is one of the underlying strategies in the 4C marketing mix, applied in this research to develop a new IMS strategy based on a customer-oriented policy that views students as the core of HE services. Three indicators that fall under the strategy of convenience considered by international students include the convenience of the admission application, the convenience of the location, and the convenience of obtaining a visa. The descending order of importance of these three indicators, as evaluated by the international students, was: convenient location (mean = 3.62; SD = 0.785) > convenient admission's procedure (mean = 3.61; SD = 0.791) > convenient visa process (mean = 3.61; SD = 0.815). This indicates that international students in Taiwan find it relatively important to study the location of their selected country and school; however, the mean rates were quite even among three indicators (mean = 3.61–3.62), which means that students regard all three to be of similar importance.

#### 4.1.4. Communication

This is also one of the fundamental strategies developed in this research based on the customer-oriented policy from the 4C marketing mix, which considers students as being central to the success of HE services to develop the IMS. Three indicators under the communication strategy considered by international students include communication between school staff and students, communication between faculty and students, and communication between domestic and international students. The descending order of importance of the three indicators, as evaluated by international students, was: communication between faculty and students (mean = 4.27; SD = 0.821) > communication between domestic and international students (mean = 4.20; SD = 0.839) > communication between school staff and students (mean = 3.85; SD = 0.869). This demonstrates that students perceive the relationship as well as the communication between faculty and students as highly valuable when choosing an overseas learning program. Additionally, the differences in agreement (0.07) regarding the importance of communication between faculty and students and communication between domestic and international students were insignificant, meaning that students equally appreciated these two indicators. On the other hand, the difference between the scores of the first and the third indicators was 0.42, proving that more attention was placed on the two former indicators than the latter. However, all three displayed high values (mean > 3.85; SD < 0.869), signifying the certainty and consistency of their importance in terms of student perceptions.

#### 4.1.5. Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning Model

This is one of the strategies developed in this research based on previous relevant research in the field of marketing for HE. The theoretical background is the STP model theory, which focuses on segmenting international students. The three indicators under STP strategy considered in this research are student market segmentation, targeting different international student groups, and school positioning. The descending order of their importance, as evaluated by international students, was student market segmentation (mean = 3.54; SD = 0.831) > school positioning (mean = 3.53; SD = 0.831) > targeting different international student groups (mean = 3.51; SD = 0.811). However, their rates were quite similar (with differences among the mean values of only 0.01 or 0.02), meaning that the indicators were of the same importance to the students. Among those, the mean value for targeting different international student groups (mean = 3.51) was relatively lower than the other two indicators, which means that international students placed slightly less emphasis on targeting different international student groups in Taiwanese HEI marketing strategies than on the other indicators.

#### 4.1.6. Collaboration

For sustainable development in international integration pathways, HEIs in Asian countries have started to place more emphasis on development collaboration; in particular, international cooperation. Three indicators under the collaboration strategy considered by international students in this study include collaboration between universities, collaboration between universities and industry, and collaboration between staff and students. The descending order of their importance, as evaluated by the international students in Taiwan, was: collaboration between universities (mean = 4.10; SD = 0.838) > collaboration between university and industry (mean = 4.09; SD = 0.879) > collaboration between staff and students (mean = 4.07; SD = 0.852). However, all three indicators notably had similarly high scores (mean > 4.07; SD < 0.879), demonstrating the importance of these indicators in student perceptions as well as the consistency in their opinions about each indicator.

#### 4.1.7. Brand Image

Brand image is a crucial development strategy, appreciated by HEIs around the world, and has been discussed in various studies. The four indicators under brand image strategy valued by international students in this research were country image, school image, department image, and school reputation. The descending order of their importance, as valued by international students, was country image (mean = 4.30; SD = 0.900) > department image (mean = 4.27; SD = 0.874) > school reputation (mean = 4.24; SD = 0.901) > school image (mean = 4.17; SD = 0.901). This demonstrates that the students found learning about a host country prior to undertaking overseas education to be essential. On the other hand, the differences in agreement among the indicators were minor. All four were highly appreciated (mean > 4.17; SD < 0.901), supporting the supposition that these indicators are particularly meaningful for student perceptions, and that students express consistent opinions about brand image.

#### 4.1.8. International Experience

International experience is an essential factor in international investment businesses. For non-profit organizations, such as HEIs, the experience in international cooperation and recruitment is non-substitutable and important, as has been affirmed by Dunning's eclectic theory [45]. This research uses customer-oriented policy, which regards students as the core of the HE services, to develop the international experience strategy in the IMS. Three indicators under this strategy valued by international students in this paper include experience in recruiting undergraduate international students, experience in recruiting postgraduate international students, and experience in international cooperation with foreign institutions. The descending order of their importance, as appreciated by

international students, was: experience in recruiting postgraduate international students (mean = 4.31; SD = 0.907) > experience in recruiting undergraduate international students (mean = 4.24; SD = 0.911) > experience in international cooperation with foreign institutions (mean = 3.56; SD = 0.843). All indicators had high rates, with only minor differences (mean > 4.18; SD < 0.928). In other words, these indicators had equal importance in student perceptions, and the consistency in their opinions toward each of them was strong.

#### 4.1.9. Website Marketing

Website marketing is an established online marketing strategy that has been adopted by many business managers and education institutions. It works particularly well with young clients, such as students. This strategy was applied in our research as a principal element in online marketing to develop the IMS, given the foundation of a customer-oriented approach that places students at the center of the HE services. Four indicators related to website strategy are creative website content, creative web form designs, easy-to-use webpages, and webpages in multiple languages. The descending order of their importance, as appreciated by international students, was creative web form designs (mean = 4.11; SD = 0.882) > creative website content (mean = 4.11; SD = 0.910) > easy-to-use webpages (mean = 4.08; SD = 0.917) > webpages in multiple languages (mean = 4.07; SD = 0.934). The indicators of creative website content and web form designs had higher rates than the other two indicators (mean = 4.11); nevertheless, all four indicators were well-recognized by international students (mean > 4.07; SD < 0.934), proving their certain importance in student perceptions, as well as the regularity in their opinions about indicators under website strategies.

#### 4.1.10. Social Media

Based on online marketing strategies for HEIs, this research uses social media as one of the fundamental strategies to develop the IMS. The three indicators belonging to social media strategy that were valued by international students in this paper are analyzing social media data, using social media to connect with students, and focusing on marketing content on social media. The descending order of their importance, as appreciated by international students, was: using social media to connect with students (mean = 4.22; SD = 0.919) > analyzing social media data (mean = 4.21; SD = 0.889) > focusing on marketing content on social media (mean = 4.20; SD = 0.944). Among these, the first was recognized by students as the most important indicator, which reflects their needs for connecting with HEIs. However, all three indicators had high rates and the differences among them were not significant (mean > 4.20; SD < 0.889), which proves their certain importance in student perceptions, as well as the consistency in their opinion concerning social media.

Detailed statistical results regarding international student perceptions of the IMS are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3.** International student perception of the IMS ( $n = 522$ ).

Code	Strategy/Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
<i>MM</i>	<i>Marketing Mix</i>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>0.508</b>	
<i>CUN</i>	<i>Customer needs</i>	3.90	0.693	8
CUN1	Course content needs	4.02	0.792	1
CUN2	Needs for living support	4.01	0.797	2
CUN3	Needs for career counseling	3.56	0.843	3
<i>COS</i>	<i>Cost</i>	4.40	0.680	1
COS1	Tuition	4.34	0.819	3
COS2	Scholarship and financial support	4.36	0.839	2
COS3	Cost of living	4.39	0.834	1
<i>CON</i>	<i>Convenience</i>	3.60	0.682	9

CON1	Convenient to apply for admission	3.61	0.791	2
CON2	Convenient location	3.62	0.785	1
CON3	Convenient to obtain a visa	3.61	0.815	3
COM	<i>Communication</i>	4.10	0.689	5
COM1	Communication between school staff and students	3.85	0.869	3
COM2	Communication between faculty and students	4.27	0.821	1
COM3	Communication between domestic and international students	4.20	0.839	2
<b>IS</b>	<b><i>Innovative Strategy</i></b>	<b>4.10</b>	<b>0.561</b>	
STP	<i>Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning Model</i>	3.50	0.716	10
STP1	Student market segmentation	3.54	0.831	1
STP2	Targeting different international student groups	3.51	0.811	3
STP3	School positioning	3.53	0.831	2
COL	<i>Collaboration</i>	4.10	0.737	7
COL1	Collaboration between universities	4.10	0.838	1
COL2	Collaboration between university and industry	4.09	0.879	2
COL3	Collaboration between staff and students	4.07	0.852	3
BRA	<i>Brand image</i>	4.20	0.721	2
BRA1	Country image	4.30	0.900	1
BRA2	School image	4.17	0.901	4
BRA3	Department image	4.27	0.874	2
BRA4	School reputation	4.24	0.901	3
INT	<i>International experience</i>	4.20	0.768	3
INT1	Experience in recruiting undergraduate international students	4.24	0.911	2
INT2	Experience in recruiting postgraduate international students	4.31	0.907	1
INT3	Experience in international cooperation with foreign institutions	4.18	0.928	3
WEB	<i>Website</i>	4.10	0.770	6
WEB1	Creative website content	4.11	0.910	2
WEB2	Creative web form designs	4.11	0.882	1
WEB3	Easy-to-use webpage	4.08	0.917	3
WEB4	Webpages in multiple languages	4.07	0.934	4
SOC	<i>Social media</i>	4.20	0.769	4
SOC1	Analyzing social media data	4.21	0.889	2
SOC2	Using social media to connect with students	4.22	0.919	1
SOC3	Focusing on marketing content on social media	4.20	0.944	3

#### 4.2. Innovative Marketing Strategies for International Student Recruitment

##### 4.2.1. Reliability Analysis

To ensure the absolute reliability of the questionnaire and the suitability of collected data for more specialized analysis, we reanalyzed the Cronbach's alpha reliability of the questionnaire from data collected with 522 participants. Analysis of Table 4 shows that the Cronbach's alpha values for the questionnaire's dimensions and the entire questionnaire were both larger than the standard reliability of 0.6 [71]. The reliability of the former was greater than 0.7, with most dimensions having Cronbach's alpha above 0.8. This demonstrates the reliability of the questionnaire and, thereby, the suitability of the data collected for this research.

**Table 4.** Reliability analysis of the Innovative Marketing Strategies questionnaires.

Code	Cronbach's Alpha	n of Items
CUN	0.814	3

COS	0.755	3
CON	0.816	3
COM	0.751	3
STP	0.837	3
COL	0.824	3
BRA	0.820	4
INT	0.790	3
WEB	0.867	4
INT	0.790	3

#### 4.2.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

**EFA of Marketing mix:** Table 5 reports the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin KMO as 0.858, which means that the data were suitable for factor analysis. For Bartlett’s Test, as  $p = 0.000$  (sig. < 0.001), the observed variables were correlated to the common latent factors. The Total Variance Explained (TVE) *cumulative percentage* was 55.622%, higher than the required 50% [71], meaning that 55.622% of the variance could be explained by the six factors.

**Table 5.** EFA of Marketing mix.

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy					0.858
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity					2247
Approx. Chi-Square					66
df					0.000
Sig.					
Code	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	
CON2	0.769				
CON1	0.764				
CON3	0.757				
CUN2		0.811			
CUN1		0.799			
CUN3		0.686			
COM3			0.765		
COM2			0.705		
COM1			0.642		
COS2				0.750	
COS3				0.740	
COS1				0.600	

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring; Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

**The EFA of Innovative strategy:** Table 6 reports the KMO as 0.928, which means that the data were suitable for factor analysis. For Bartlett’s Test, as  $p = 0.000$  (sig. < 0.001), the observed variables are correlated to the common latent factors. The Total Variance Explained (TVE) *cumulative percentage* was 59.162%, higher than the required 50% [71], meaning that 59.162% of the variance could be explained by the six factors.

**Table 6.** EFA of Innovative strategy.

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy					0.928			
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity					Approx. Chi-Square		4958	
					df		190	
					Sig.		0.000	
Code	Factor							
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
WEB4	0.808							
WEB3	0.794							
WEB1	0.780							
WEB2	0.738							
BRA2		0.879						
BRA1		0.675						
BRA4		0.629						
BRA3		0.619						
STP3			0.794					
STP1			0.783					
STP2			0.761					
COL2				0.780				
COL1				0.770				
COL3				0.760				
INT2					0.879			
INT3					0.645			
INT1					0.642			
SOC2						0.753		
SOC1						0.731		
SOC3						0.679		

Given the results of the statistical analysis, we finally propose the Innovative Marketing Strategies for international student recruitment, with 2 dimensions, 10 strategies, and 32 indicators, as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Innovative Marketing Strategies for international student recruitment.

Dimension	Strategy	Indicator
Marketing Mix	1. Customer needs	1. Course content needs
		2. Needs for living support
		3. Needs for career counseling
		4. Tuition
	2. Cost	5. Scholarship and financial support
		6. Cost of living
		7. Convenient to apply for admission
	3. Convenience	8. Convenient location
		9. Convenient to obtain a visa
		10. Communication between school staff and students
	4. Communication	11. Communication between faculty and students
		12. Communication between domestic and international students
Innovative Strategy		13. Student market segmentation
		14. Targeting different international student groups



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5.	Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning Model	15.	School positioning
6.	Collaboration	16.	Collaboration between universities
		17.	Collaboration between university and industry
		18.	Collaboration between staff and students
		19.	Country image
7.	Brand image	20.	School image
		21.	Department image
		22.	School reputation
8.	International experience	23.	Experience in recruiting undergraduate international students
		24.	Experience in recruiting postgraduate international students
		25.	Experience in international cooperation with foreign institutions
		26.	Creative website content
9.	Website	27.	Creative web form designs
		28.	Easy-to-use webpage
		29.	Webpages in multiple languages
		30.	Analyzing social media data
10.	Social media	31.	Using social media to connect with students
		32.	Focusing on marketing content on social media

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## 5. Discussion

The ranking of the IMS's ten key strategies, as evaluated by international students, indicates that the cost factor elicited the most attention. In other words, no matter which location students choose for their education abroad, their ability to finance their studies is one of their top concerns. This is in line with many previous studies, including not only those conducted in the context of Asian higher education (e.g., Li et al. [72]), but also those in Western education [73,74]. Similarly, the second-highest valued strategy was brand image, which has also been confirmed in other previous studies. This reflects the common concern of students when making decisions regarding studying abroad.

It is notable that HEI strategies, based on international experience and drawn from research backed by Dunning's eclectic theory, as seen in Naidoo and Wu [46], have been appreciated by students beyond expectation. This is explained by the results of interviews: international experience would help HEIs to gain a better service foundation as well as provide better educational services to international students who come from different cultural backgrounds. It is also the key to maintaining international students' satisfaction with their educational program and loyalty to a particular educational institution. In addition, social media is regarded as one of the most crucial communication tools for younger generations around the world. Various surveys have demonstrated that the Asian younger generation is inclined to spend more time on the internet using smartphones and other electronic devices. Strategies that make use of social media for recruitment marketing have been mentioned in previous studies [75–77], and its role in higher education marketing was again confirmed in this research.

One of our initial predictions was that students would value the strategy of meeting customer needs above all others. However, it turns out to be ranked 8th, a much lower position. Part of the reason for this is that students experience this need after enrolling at a specific university. Meanwhile, other strategies focus on affecting student decision-making processes and are related—at a certain level—to selection criteria that draw the attention of students and their families before dealing with their more specific and necessary needs once they join schools. Nevertheless, meeting customer needs remains an important strategy, with a relatively high level of agreement in the surveyed students (mean = 3.9; *n*

= 522) and should be emphasized in the strategies of HEIs for sustainable development in the international context.

### 5.1. Marketing Mix

Among the various marketing mix strategies, cost drew the most attention from students, followed by communication, customer needs, and convenience. The importance of addressing financial concerns has been highlighted in many previous studies on international recruitment and student institution choice (see, e.g., [73,78,79]). Notably, the cost of living is the number one concern in a student's decision-making process, followed by other factors such as scholarships, financial support, and tuition. This means that the cost of living in the general vicinity of HEIs that students wish to attend is taken into consideration alongside other financial factors. Studying at HEIs, in Taiwan particularly and in Asia generally, is considered affordable for students from regional countries. One of the reasons why Asian students choose other Asian institutions is the lower cost of living in these countries, compared with the U.S. or U.K.; this is a significant advantage that HEIs should promote and emphasize in their recruitment strategies. Brand development and image improvement are also essential criteria to attract not only domestic but also international students. Experience obtained from the IoHE should also be considered and analyzed thoroughly, especially when the HE environment in Asia is not yet as open as it is in Western countries.

Apart from re-confirming the importance of the cost strategy, this research has, for the first time, indicated the roles of other strategies, especially communication. Among the various tactics for appealing to international students, communication between faculty and students concerns students the most. This affirms that the relationship between lecturers and students is always what students living far from home care about most, especially those pursuing graduate degrees. The reason for this is that such relationships partly affect their education pathway.

For the strategy focusing on the basic needs of students—that is, customer needs—the need for course content drew the biggest interest, in line with previous studies.

As for the convenience strategy, marketing focused on advertising the convenient location of the university is an important factor in attracting the attention of students. This is in line with many previous studies that have confirmed student concerns about the convenience of travelling between their home and host countries [80–82]. Furthermore, other factors, such as the convenience of obtaining a visa for the host country and ease of admittance to the school, have been mentioned in relevant studies.

### 5.2. Innovative Strategy

Specific strategies under the IS dimension were relatively appreciated by and had similar importance for the students participating in this study. Among those, brand image, international experience, and social media were more highly recognized than the other three strategies. In particular, country image, experience in recruiting postgraduate international students, and using social media to connect with students were the top-valued indicators under the abovementioned strategies, respectively. Even though previous studies [46,55,59,60,72] have mentioned these factors, this research has, for the first time, fully developed such definitions and surveyed students to gather their opinions regarding these indicators.

Although the respondents still agreed with the importance of STP strategies under the IMS in general, the statistics showed fairly low scores, compared with other strategies under the IS dimension. This was partly because the concept requires technical expertise and, despite being simplified and specified for application to develop the IMS, it is difficult to fully capture its meaning from a non-technical viewpoint. Therefore, this strategy is still valuable for HE marketing, if applied properly by experts. However, based on student ratings of various strategies—which reflect their perceptions—student market segmentation is still the most important, which should be noted for professional strategists.

While using social media in marketing strategies is not a novel strategy, its potential has not been fully exploited in international marketing in general HE. This has partly limited the efficiency of communication between universities and students. Our research results have demonstrated that placing more focus on the two important strategies highly appreciated by students—that is, social media and communication—as well as combining them effectively, will likely improve recruitment results for HEIs in Taiwan, as well as in Asia in general, in the future.

## 6. Recommendations

The analyzed results from the research revealed that one of the strategies under the IS dimension which should receive more attention from HE marketers is brand image. From the viewpoint of the customers—international students in Taiwan—the image of the host country is what they considered when choosing the destination for their education. Therefore, building up the brand for a HEI should involve marketing using the country's image (i.e., the host country brand) and improving advertising of the image, reputation of the school, and departments to the right targeted students. This is a long-term strategy instead of a temporary one and could be carried out through information sources from alumni who graduated from the schools, to their friends and families, or through social media online channels.

Furthermore, the international experience of HEIs in recruiting undergraduate and graduate students, as well as cooperating with local educational institutions for enrolling students should also be improved through practical activities. Accumulating such experience will enable HEIs to more easily capture insights into the market and customers (i.e., students), thereby effectively providing educational services and earning student loyalty. Therefore, it could help to improve the circulation and value of brand image strategy by using a word-of-mouth method.

HEIs should also pay attention to improving their adaptability by analyzing big data collected from social media, in order to apply newly emerging marketing tools more effectively. There should be orientation and planning to develop unique and more attractive, rather than traditional, marketing content. While such content is being delivered to potential students by means of social media, traditional online marketing tools such as the websites of schools, departments, or even the government could also become information-spreading channels, provided that they are widely advertised and easy to access. In this way, the ultimate goals of better connection and communication with global customers could be achieved.

In the context of globalization, collaboration for win-win situations between parties is a natural tendency, that cannot be resisted by not only for-profit businesses but also non-profit organizations such as HEIs. This includes collaboration between schools, especially HEIs in different countries, profitable cooperation between schools and industry, and micro-relations between university staff and students. The linkage between schools and industry creates opportunities for both international and local students to find jobs upon graduation and helps enterprises obtain stable labor sources. This, therefore, will improve the reputation of the training effectiveness of schools and the country. Furthermore, education planners and managers should make further efforts to harmoniously combine various IS strategies for optimal results.

## 7. Limitations, Implications, and Contributions of the Research

This research was conducted through questionnaires given to international students studying in Taiwan. Due to the researcher's lack of resources, the scope of this research has not been able to reach a larger body of international students in other Asian countries. However, although the viewpoints of students considered in the IMS may be more suitable for Taiwan, they may also be applicable for reference on the scale of HEIs in Asia, where there are similar educational policies and cultural backgrounds.

Education marketing allows HEIs to identify the needs of students and prepare actions to boost their competitiveness. However, most marketing strategies that HEIs are employing worldwide have failed to consider the features of the education sector. Notably, HEIs in Asia utilize almost the same business strategies, despite the undeniable importance of marketing in a globalization context. This results in HEIs encountering more competition when enrolling students, especially when it comes to international recruitment. The reason behind this is a lack of suitable theories and models for educational marketing [83].

This research has made a significant and novel contribution to the literature by developing IMS based on a customer-oriented perspective and theories for penetrating the international HE markets. HEIs in Taiwan, as well as in Asia, could adopt the innovative strategies developed in this research and adapt them as necessary to benefit their own organizations. They should also conduct a comprehensive analysis of their advantages and disadvantages in order to achieve optimal results.

The practical implications of using the strategies and features of tendencies could support HEIs in their strategic development. These tendencies enable them to design innovative practice plans, helping to maintain sustainable innovation in HEIs in order to provide better services to students, staff, and communities. Determining new tendencies of higher education, highlighting innovation indicators or successful practices, and identifying features of dimensions and sub-tendencies are undeniable contributions of this research to promote innovation in higher education.

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