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PEDRO HENRIQUE DE CARVALHO GUIMARÃES

**USING SERVICE-DOMINANT LOGIC TO COMPARE HOW TWO PUBLIC  
UNIVERSITIES CO-CREATE VALUE WITH THEIR INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENTS**

Belo Horizonte

2023

**PEDRO HENRIQUE DE CARVALHO GUIMARÃES**

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UNIVERSITIES CO-CREATE VALUE WITH THEIR INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENTS**

Dissertation presented to the Center for Graduate Studies and Research in Administration of the Federal University of Minas Gerais as a partial requirement to obtain the title of Master in Administration.

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### ATA DE DEFESA DE DISSERTAÇÃO

ATA DA DEFESA DE DISSERTAÇÃO DE MESTRADO EM ADMINISTRAÇÃO do Senhor **PEDRO HENRIQUE DE CARVALHO GUIMARAES**, REGISTRO Nº 768/2023. No dia 07 de junho de 2023, às 7:30 horas, reuniu-se remotamente, por videoconferência, a Comissão Examinadora de Dissertação, indicada pelo Colegiado do Centro de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisas em Administração do CEPEAD, em 19 de maio de 2023, para julgar o trabalho final intitulado "**USING SERVICE-DOMINANT LOGIC TO COMPARE HOW TWO PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES CO-CREATE VALUE WITH THEIR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**", requisito para a obtenção do **Grau de Mestre em Administração**, linha de pesquisa: **Estratégia, Mercadologia e Operações**. Abrindo a sessão, o Senhor Presidente da Comissão, Prof. Dr. Ricardo Teixeira Veiga, após dar conhecimento aos presentes o teor das Normas Regulamentares do Trabalho Final, passou a palavra ao candidato para apresentação de seu trabalho. Seguiu-se a arguição pelos examinadores com a respectiva defesa do candidato. Logo após, a Comissão se reuniu sem a presença do candidato e do público, para julgamento e expedição do seguinte resultado final:

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the need to internationalize higher education institutions has brought them closer to companies from other sectors concerning marketing strategies. Marketing literature applied to internationalization of universities focuses mainly on consumer behavior and relationship marketing, while student attraction strategies have yet to receive much attention. Another aspect of this field is the concentration of research in the global North: Europe and the Anglo-American context. In contrast, this study analyzed service marketing strategies to attract international students in Brazil and Russia. Based on Service-dominant logic and its five axioms, qualitative research was performed, with multiple case studies, evaluating the Brazilian Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) and RUDN, a Russian university, to compare their approaches in co-creating educational and service experience to attract students from other countries. From the perspective of international students, findings include five final categories in co-creation of value from the internationalization experience: motivation to seek internationalization; benefits beyond the diploma; entry experience; university experience; and factors for choosing the university. The results corroborate SDL literature applied to educational service, which argues that the experience must consider several aspects beyond academic services. In addition, universities must identify and reduce the distance between what the universities see as benefits and what students expect to benefit from that educational experience, the so-called ideology gap. At managerial level, the most important implications are the increasing need to treat students as crucial actors in co-creating educational services and the need for universities to integrate more with other relevant actors and institutions in developing the internationalization service to expand the perceived benefits by students.

Keywords: high education marketing, service-dominant logic, value co-creation; Brazil; Russia.

## RESUMO

Nos últimos anos, a necessidade de internacionalização das instituições de ensino superior se aproximou de empresas de outros setores no que diz respeito às estratégias de marketing. A literatura de marketing aplicada à internacionalização de universidades concentra-se principalmente no comportamento do consumidor e no marketing de relacionamento, enquanto as estratégias de atração de estudantes ainda não receberam muita atenção. Outro aspecto do campo é a concentração das pesquisas no norte global: Europa e o contexto anglo-americano. Em contrapartida, este estudo analisou as estratégias de marketing de serviços para atrair estudantes internacionais no Brasil e na Rússia. Com base na Lógica Dominada por Serviço e seus cinco axiomas, foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa, com estudos de casos múltiplos, avaliando a Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) e a RUDN, Universidade Russa da Amizade dos Povos, para comparar suas abordagens na cocriação da experiência educacional e de serviço para atrair estudantes de outros países. A partir da visão dos estudantes internacionais, os resultados contemplam cinco categorias finais na cocriação de valor a partir da experiência de internacionalização: motivação para buscar a internacionalização, benefícios além do diploma, experiência de admissão, experiência universitária e fatores para escolha da universidade. Os resultados corroboram a literatura do SDL aplicado ao serviço educacional, que argumentam que a experiência deve levar em conta diversos aspectos além dos serviços acadêmicos. Além disso, as universidades devem identificar e reduzir a distância entre os benefícios que a universidade pensa oferecer e o que os alunos esperam como benefícios da experiência educacional, a chamada *ideology gap*. No âmbito gerencial, ressalta-se a necessidade de tratar cada vez mais o aluno como ator crucial na cocriação de serviços educacionais e a necessidade de as universidades se integrarem cada vez mais com outros atores e instituições relevantes na construção do serviço de internacionalização para ampliar os benefícios percebidos pelos alunos.

Palavras-chave: marketing para educação superior, lógica dominada por serviço, cocriação de valor; Brasil; Rússia.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the globalization process accelerated, from the 1990s, the internationalization of higher education gained strength over the years (MOROSINI, 2006). As a topic of study, internationalization and globalization of higher education are significantly expanding in academia – and it is a very diverse field. One of the factors that led to this agenda is the complex nature of the topic, where explanations and classifications are difficult to define in a short time (LEE; STENSAKER, 2021).

Higher education worldwide is influenced by economic, cultural, and global educational forces, and, in a two-way street, such institutions become notorious international actors with significant global influence (MARGINSON; RHOADES, 2002).

These complex and hitherto unprecedented competitive forces have accumulated pressures that require institutional change in universities towards internationalization, which has come to be identified as a strategic priority for higher education institutions (BARTELL, 2003). Lee and Stensaker (2021) highlight that the economic perspective of internationalization and globalization is multifaceted but tend to focus on the competition between countries and higher education institutions where knowledge and innovation are generators of economic growth and social development.

It is worth mentioning that, in general, internationalization and globalization in higher education are treated differently by most authors. Tight (2019) debates the several distinct views of the terms in his article and, despite the absence of consensus, globalization is seen as a process of economic context, flow of people, trends, and power, while internationalization is more often related to formulation of policies for student recruitment, competitiveness among institutions, students' needs, among others. This study uses the concept closest to management practice; hence, the term internationalization was preferred.

Marginson and Rhoades (2002) note that studies on university internationalization focus primarily on government policies or national higher education systems. Another predominant aspect is the role in market pressures, such as the demand from students and employers in these systems, and consequent educational migration flow. Research on universities' internationalization policies and practices is concentrated in the global North: in continental Europe and in the Anglo-American context, considered dominant systems (RHOADES et al., 2019).

Changes implemented by higher education institutions, such as introduction of student prospecting strategies, brand building, and other marketing efforts for recruitment of

international students, have brought HEIs closer to the corporate world, seeking to increase their financial and performance gains in relation to other institutions (JAMES; DERRICK, 2019).

More recently, the intense use of higher education marketing has been increasingly drawing the attention of the academia; topics such as consumer behavior and relationship marketing have been the object of more significant interest, while recruitment of international students and the perspective of universities are left on the back burner (ROSS ET AL., 2013).

NG and Forbes (2009) argue that when an educational institution seeks to attract a student, it needs to create an educational experience genuinely capable of satisfying this student's needs, and this experience, according to the authors, is co-created.

"Having a marketing orientation does means not merely mean quality assessments, processes, systems, and promises of a pedigree education. It means understanding the elements of delivering an outstanding service, knowing where systems end and people take over, and respecting the cocreation of the learning experience" (NG AND FORBES, 2009, p. 21).

Providing a theoretical understanding of how companies, customers, and other market actors co-create value through services and their interactions, the service-dominant logic (SDL) proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004) interprets service as the central purpose of exchanges (KARPEN ET AL., 2011). Note that the authors re-signify "service" as the application of competencies, skills, and knowledge, integrating resources in co-creating value to benefit the counterparty or oneself. Thus, the value obtained collaboratively in the exchanges is not created unilaterally because it always involves a unique combination of resources and determination of idiosyncratic value, with the client as co-creator (VARGO and LUSCH, 2008). Akaka, Vargo, and Lusch (2013) highlight the potential of service-dominant logic as a robust theoretical foundation that allows international marketing researchers to develop better theories to understand complex contexts of exchange.

Díaz-Méndez et al. (2019) suggest that students' perspectives as consumers is not sufficient for the learning process, as they may not have clear objectives, they may be less involved with their education, they may only be interested in a title or a ticket to a better job, they may be seeking to improve professional skills, etc. Therefore, it is important to understand their attitudes and motivations, as well as how the institution's service affects their perceptions.

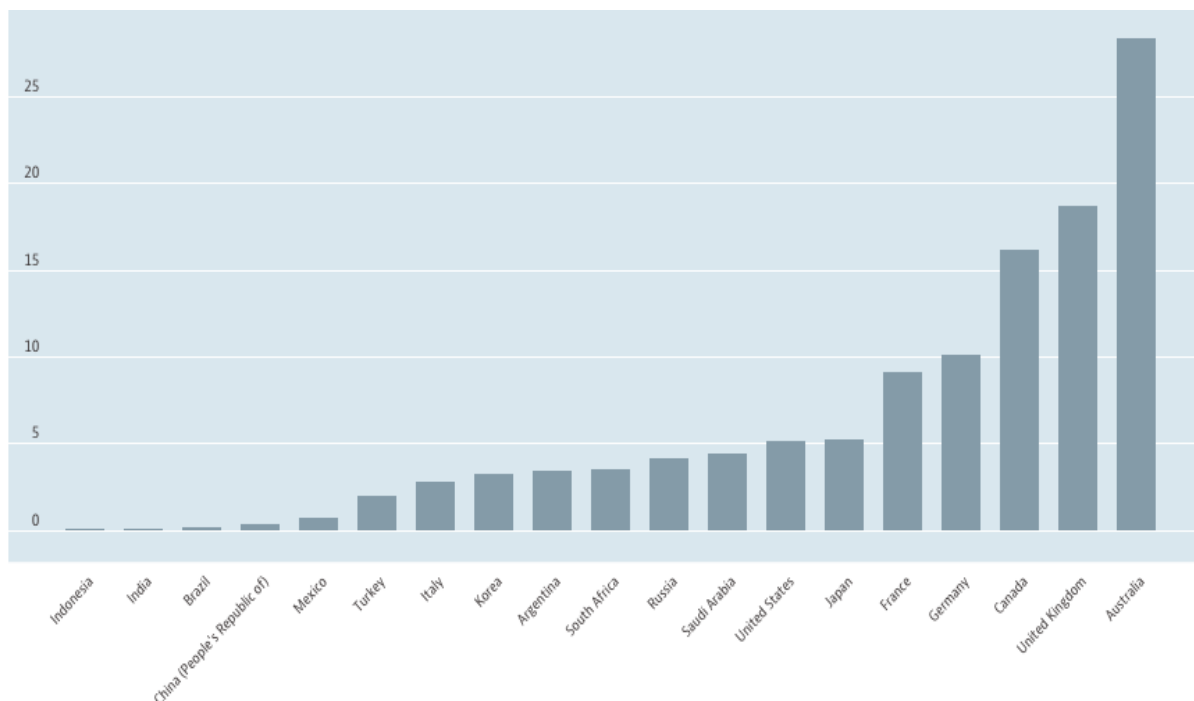
To fully understand the dynamics of exchanges between international students and higher education institutions (in this case, service providers), one must first understand what HEIs offer and how they deliver their offer to their audience. In other words, to achieve strong

marketing performance, they must understand what will satisfy the international student and what they perceive as value. (ROSS ET AL. 2013).

Having SDL as a foundation and the possibility of testing some of its premises in a specific context that contributes both to its theoretical expansion and its applicability, this study proposes to compare the service experience of international students in two higher education institutions in different contexts: UFMG (Federal University of Minas Gerais), in Brazil, and RUDN (Russian University of Peoples' Friendship), in Russia.

Unlike what happens with students from rich countries, the ranking of universities in the destination country is a factor of greater weight for students from lower income countries, as students perceive a greater benefit and have more incentives to migrate to countries in a better economic situation than their own country of origin (ABBOT and SILLES, 2016). According to the OECD Student Mobility Index, considering the percentage of foreign students enrolled in relation to the total number of students enrolled in higher education, in 2019, Russia and Brazil (4.2% and 0.2%) ranked ninth and seventeenth in the G20, respectively. Comparatively, Australia, that topped the ranking, had 28.2% migrants among the total tertiary students enrolled.

**Figure 1 - Tertiary Student Mobility**



Source: OECD (2019)

Compared to the Soviet Union period, Russia had a sharp drop in the number of foreign students. The proportion of foreign students in relation to the total number of students enrolled

until the early 1990s was 10.8%. One of the reasons for such decrease is the fact that the state quota policy to attract students by means of agreements signed with other nations was replaced with a system of independence of higher education institutions that, as result, rely on their own resources to attract international students (PIS'MENNAIA, 2010).

In Brazil, university internationalization is firmly based on federal government initiatives, through scholarships. With the investment to expand *stricto sensu* graduate courses in the 1980s and 1990s, the internationalization of Brazilian universities is based mainly on international graduate-level academic cooperation agreements (LIMA; CONTEL, 2009).

In view of this context, the guiding problem of this research is to answer the following question: *"How are the processes of value co-creation in the internationalization experience of students at UFMG (Federal University of Minas Gerais) and RUDN (People's Friendship University of Russia)?"*

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

The general objective, that is, explaining the value propositions offered by UFMG and RUDN to international students, requires the achievement of three specific interrelated objectives:

- Describing the role of international students in the process of co-creation of value in the two higher education institutions, based on Service-dominant Logic (SDL).
- Describing marketing strategies used to attract international students, from students' perspective.
- Comparatively analyzing UFMG and RUDN's approaches to attract international students.

Research results will be obtained by qualitative analysis of multiple case studies, comparing the service marketing strategies of both universities.

### **1.2 Justification**

Higher education service, the object of this research, comprises the provision of programs, teaching, educational experiences, etc. (Smørvik & Vespstad, 2020). With SDL as the guiding theory of this study, it will be possible to broaden the understanding of marketing exchanges related to UFMG and RUDN's internationalization programs from international students'

perspective, considering that the value is idiosyncratically determined by the beneficiaries (VARGO; LUSCH, 2007).

Akaka, Vargo and Lusch (2013) stress that a study through the lens of service ecosystems enables researchers to analyze international and global markets in their cultural contexts permeated by multiple levels of networks and associated institutions in the co-creation of value and service-for-service exchange. From a theoretical point of view, this research aims to contribute to the progress of the Service-Dominant Logic theory, as pointed out by Vespstad and Clancy (2019), on the need for SDL premises to be tested at micro level.

The value co-creation process states that customers cannot predict their experiences and the value generated as a result (PRAHALAD; RAMASWAMY, 2004). The value co-creation, in the internationalization experience context, demonstrates that universities need to shift their focus from seeking to determine what is beneficial to students to the ability to plan and reconfigure resources in real time to in order to accommodate the ever-changing desires of students and the personalized co-creation experiences.

When testing value co-creation blocks (PRAHALAD; HAMSEY, 2004) in the higher education context, more specifically in the learning process, Smørvik and Vespstad (2020) identified in the dialogue block that in groups of students with different cultures and backgrounds, it is important to reduce student- student and teacher- student barriers. As regards to access and transparency, communication and easy access to information facilitate the exchange of resources between actors. Finally, regarding the perception of risks and benefits, students should be encouraged to take risks to use their own resources to contribute value co-creation process. Thus, their perception of exchange benefits increases.

Furthermore, NG and Forbes (2009) suggest that the teaching experience and other services add hedonic and social experiences beyond the classroom. Universities have some control over the experience environment. Facilities such as accommodation and campus can be seen as more than mere support for academic activities, but rather as facilitators of socialization and of a more pleasant environment. In this sense, this study contributes to understanding the role of students in the co-creation of value in an educational environment, specifically in higher education internationalization programs, regarding a broader context of the learning experience.

This research aims to generate important feedback for the management of the institutions covered by this study and all universities that offer international programs in a similar context to developing countries that have a leading role in their continents. The results may impact the development of internationalization programs and communication strategies to make higher education institutions more attractive to international students.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

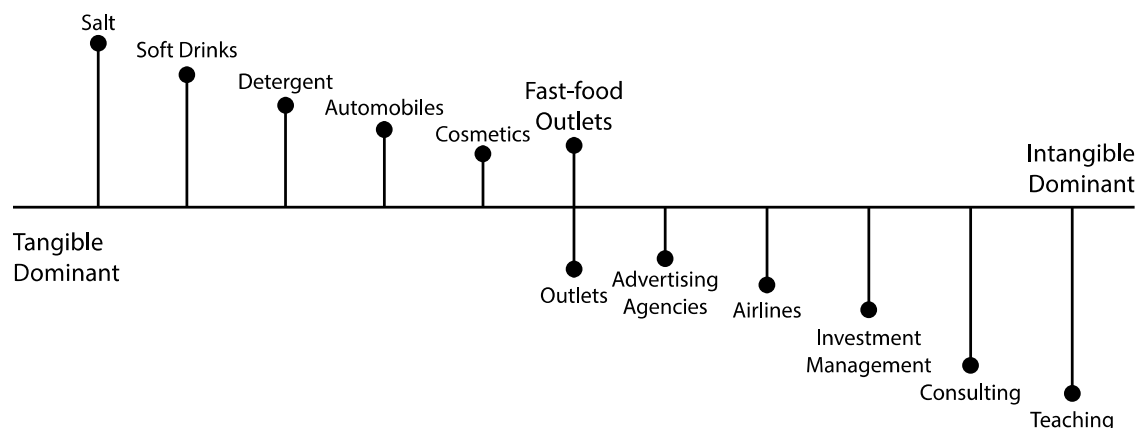
This section will delve into the theoretical foundations that underpin this research. Specifically, it will explore the Service-dominant Logic (VARGO; LUSCH, 2004) which proposes a new paradigm for marketing, tracing its evolution and application in the co-creation process. The text will also cover the premises and axioms that constitute its theoretical framework. Furthermore, the SDL will be examined in the context of international marketing and marketing aimed at international students, which are the focal points of this research. Later, the methodological session will employ the theoretical framework to identify relevant studies in the higher education context, which comprises the basis for data collection and analysis.

### 2.1 Service-Dominant Logic (SDL)

The first step to understand the definition of service lies in distinguishing goods and services from the service marketing perspective. In general, goods can be defined as objects, devices, or things, while services can be defined as deeds, efforts, or performances (BATESON; HOFFMANN, 2010, p. 4). Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2014) describe services as acts, processes, and performances offered or co-produced by one entity or person for another entity or person.

Another perspective for differentiating goods and services is using a scale of market entities. It distributes products (which encompass goods and services) according to their levels of tangibility, starting from goods in which tangibility is dominant to dominantly intangible services.

**Figure 2 - Scale of Market Entities**



Source: Adapted from Shostack (1977, p. 77).

The scale of market entities reveals that nothing is purely a product or purely a service; products are a set of tangible and intangible elements that combine to varying degrees (Bateson and Hoffmann, 2010, p. 6). Also, according to Bateson and Hoffman (2010), service marketing, which was considered subordinate to marketing of goods, became the predominant force in marketing. Marketers who have adopted Service-dominant Logic (SDL) believe that the primary role of goods is delivering services.

However, a change in perspective where service is seen as an intangible good or vehicle to add value to goods did not happen quickly, and there were a few steps until it arrived to SDL. According to Vargo and Lusch (2008), the emergence of subdisciplines in marketing, such as B2B marketing, services marketing, and international marketing, is a result of the limitations and inability of the G-D-logic-grounded marketing theory. This theory fails to provide a strong foundation for comprehending value creation and exchanges.. In contrast, SDL provides a comprehensive framework that cuts across these subdisciplines, maintaining a cohesive logic.

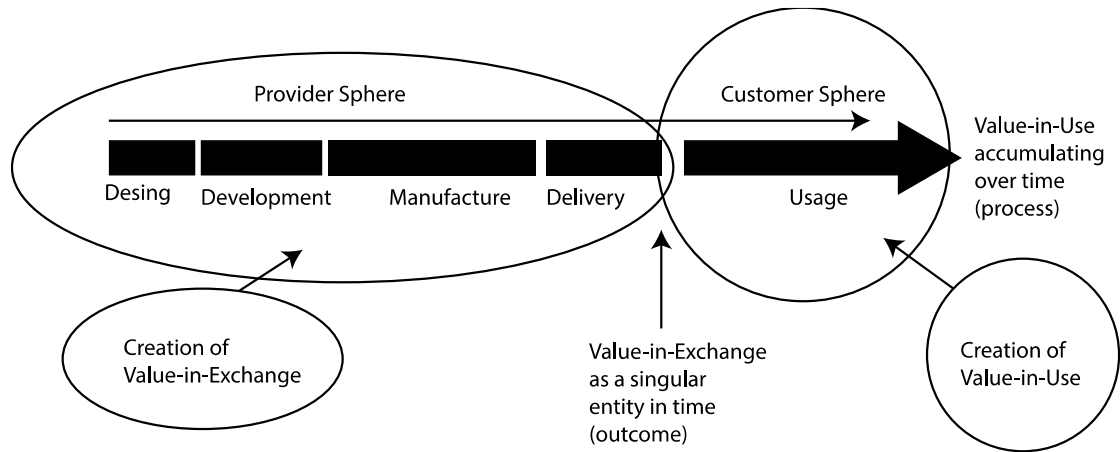
The SDL, proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004), suggests a new way of thinking marketing. From an inherited perspective of economy based on the exchange of tangible goods (Good-Dominant Logic - G-D) to a model focused on intangible resources, co-creation of value and relationships (Service-Dominant Logic - S-D), marketing shifts its orientation from producer to consumer (VARGO; LUSCH, 2004). The idea of service as a fundamental concept of the marketing activity implies a change in its purpose and process. This new logic defines companies as service providers to their stakeholders (VARGO; LUSCH, 2006).

The most critical distinction between a logic dominated by goods and the SDL lies in the conceptualization of service that, from this theoretical perspective, is defined as the application of competencies (knowledge and skills) for the benefit of another party. Using the term service, in singular, is intentional and non-trivial. It represents a shift from the way value is thought in terms of operable resources, usually tangible, static, and that require action to generate value, into operative resources, commonly intangible, dynamic, and capable of creating value. The *locus* of value creation changes from the producer to a co-creation process between the parties (VARGO; LUSCH, 2008).

Grönroos and Voima (2012) note that although value creation is not explicitly defined in the SDL literature, the co-creation process, as it is treated in theory, includes actions of both the service provider and the customer and is therefore considered as co-creators of value. Plus, although it is widely accepted that the customer determines the perceived value based on use value, this would not be possible since the service provider's actions are then involved. Similarly, the concept of value in return does not apply because customer's actions are involved.

The authors then propose a model in which value for the customer is created in a second moment, over time, through consumer experience.

**Figure 3 - Comparison of the nature and locus of value-in-use and value-in-exchange**

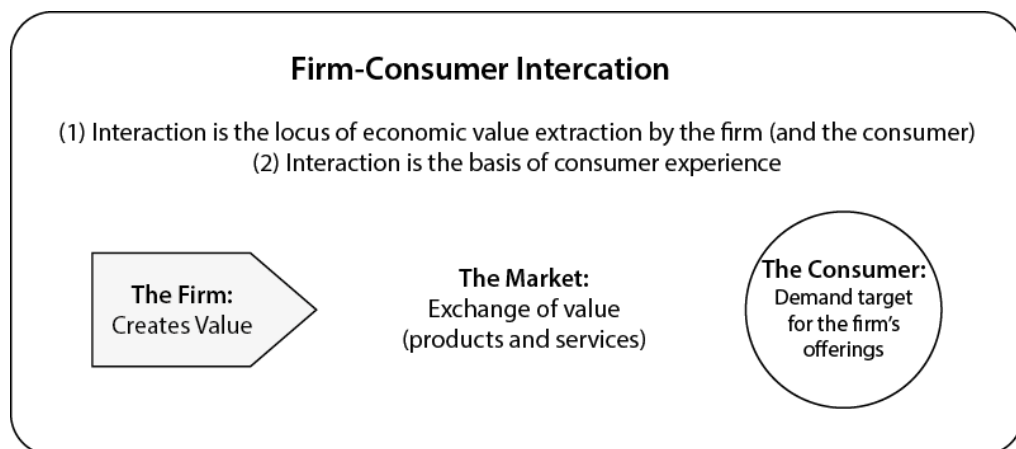


Source: adapted from Grönroos and Voima (2012).

## 2.2 Value Co-creation in SDL

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) present the traditional conception of value creation as a process in which the client is "outside the firm." The creation of value occurs internally through the activities of the company. In this approach, company and customer have distinct roles of production and consumption, respectively.

**Figure 4 – The traditional Concept of a Market**

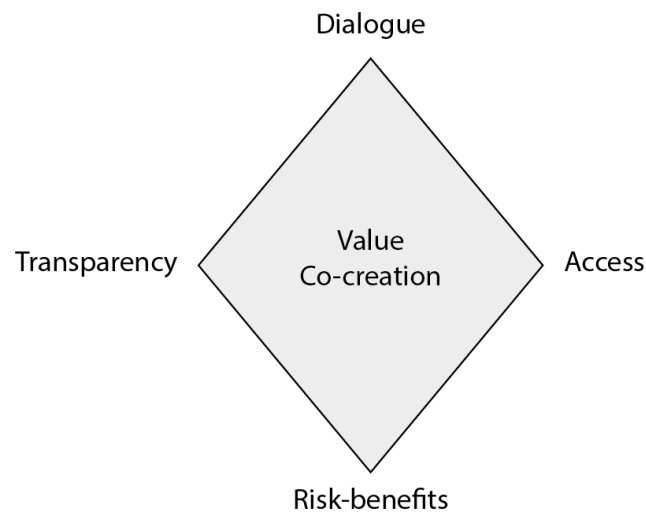


Adapted from Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004)

In this system, companies decide the products and services to be produced. Therefore, they decide the value for the consumer: the consumer has a reduced role in creating value (PRAHALAD; RAMASWAMY, 2004). In contrast, Service-dominant Logic (VARGO; LUSCH, 2004) proposes an evolution in the marketing approach in which interactivity, integration, and co-creation are the bases of value creation in exchanges.

The co-creation experience as basis of value creation, considering both company and consumer as joint actors in this process, implies a change of paradigm in which the company acts individually to satisfy customers. To explain a system in which value is co-created, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) propose an approach through blocks of interaction between company and customer that facilitate the experience of co-creation.

**Figure 5** The Building Blocks of Interactions for Value Co-creation



Adapted from Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004)

The DART value co-creation model involves dialogue, access, risk-benefit, and transparency. Dialogue implies interactivity, engagement, and the sum of the two parties' willingness and ability to act. Access and transparency concern the level and reliability of the information available in the interaction, being the bridges for a more effective dialogue, which, together, allow the consumer to have clarity as regards of the risk-benefit ratio of the exchange and, therefore, to make a decision and propose a course of action (PRAHALAD; RAMASWAMY, 2004).

The Service-Dominant Logic, proposed later, articulates the co-creation of value regarding the exchange of service for service (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). In SDL, value results from the benefit of applying operant resources, that may also be transmitted by operable

resources or goods. Thus, value is co-created by the combined effort of companies, employees, customers, stakeholders, and any other entity related to an exchange; however, value is always determined by the user (VARGO; MAGLIO; AKAKA, 2008).

### 2.3 The fundamental premises and axioms of SDL

Regarding the theoretical character of SDL, Vargo and Lusch (2019) propose that Service-Dominant Logic consists of a theoretical framework formed by 11 fundamental premises capable of explaining value creation through the exchange of service for service. According to the authors, such premises are assumed to be true because it is a theoretical framework. Five of the 11 premises are treated as central and are, therefore, considered axioms. They are:

**Axiom 1/FP1: Service is the fundamental basis for exchanges.** Unlike Goods-Dominant Logic (G-D), SDL implies that service is everything performed for the benefit of an author. Goods are not defined as units of product, but rather as support to the beneficiary in the process of value creation. In addition, *G-D Logic* limits services as an add-on to goods rather than a process that provides benefits. Ultimately, *G-D Logic* fails to capture the two-way dynamics of exchanges: I do something for you, and you do it for me.

**FP2: Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange.** Actors benefit in the labor market by exchanging skills/knowledge for currency with economic value. Such economic value will not necessarily be used immediately for service exchanges, revealing, at that moment, an indirect process of exchange for service. Hence, the currency is an asset that results from the exchange for future service.

**FP3: Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision.** This premise states that the value of goods is not in their inherent characteristics, but rather because they are service provision tools.

**FP4: Operant resources are the fundamental source of strategic benefit.** Operating resources (tangible goods and natural resources) need operant resources (knowledge and skills) to achieve their potential. Thus, operant resources are key to the benefit.

**FP5: All economies are service economies.** Derived from axiom 1, this premise counterintuitively points out the notion that a service economy is not something new, but rather the only form of economy that has ever existed.

**Axiom 2/FP6: Value is cocreated by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary.** Value co-creation is a process of gaining an actor's benefit by integrating available resources from a service ecosystem. Thus, the co-creation of value is not optional.

**FP7: Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.** Derived from axiom 2, this premise points out that unlike G-D Logic, value cannot be created individually by service providers, so they can make or endorse value propositions, these being guarantees of value or a potential benefit.

**FP8: The service-centered view is inherently beneficiary oriented and relational.** The firm, also classified as a service provider in G-D Logic, does not establish a starting point for co-creating value. That implies a primary role for the "client", which is an active and equally relevant subject in the process.

**Axiom 3/FP9: All social and economic actors are resource integrators.** All actors should integrate resources into the provision of services. Resources in SDL can be either from the market, private, or public, depending on the institutions and institutional arrangements. Regardless of the source, resource integration represents the combination of resources to create new resources.

**Axiom 4/FP10: Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.** The value of any service provision is variable and depends on the actor involved in the process.

**Axiom 5/Premise 11: Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.** In SDL, institutions play an important and particular role in creating and determining value, integrating resources, and exchanging service for service, resulting in an actor-coordinated system to avoid conflicts.

## 2.4 International Marketing and Service-dominant Logic

International marketing refers to the performance of business activities designed to plan, price, promote and direct the flow of goods and services from a company to its consumers in more than one country to generate profits. The difference between domestic marketing and international marketing is that the latter has its activities in more than one country (CATEORA et al., 2020 P. 10). At first glance, it seems to be a slight difference, it brings tremendous impacts on marketing activities, to the extent that several factors, internal and external to countries, must be considered when developing marketing strategies.

It is crucial, however, to emphasize that this study starts from the perspective of Service-dominant Logic. Therefore, just as it is necessary to differentiate domestic and international marketing, it is important to conceptualize international marketing from the service perspective concerning domestic services. Clark et al. (1996) differentiate international from domestic services in two aspects, mainly: 1) they necessarily involve an element beyond national borders, and 2) they have some kind of engagement with a foreign culture.

Unlike tangible goods, services imply unique characteristics, such as a high level of intangibility and the fact that it cannot be transported, touched, or stored. Another characteristic is its inseparability and perishability, that is, they are consumed when produced. Finally, services are heterogeneous, given that their performance is never totally identical to another (KNIGHT, 1999, p.3).

The international service marketing is dedicated to service internationalization, how companies establish themselves in foreign markets, and the specific problems of offering services at international level (LÉO; PHILIPPE, 2001, p. 6). In this context, Léo and Philippe (2001) describe the difficulties arising from the characteristics of internationalization services. Since customers cannot examine a service before its provision, they rely on their own experiences and on the provider's reputation. Therefore, communication has an essential role. Despite the difficulties of promoting itself in different locations, communication must be adapted to the country's level of development, the target audience, and product-related needs.

Akaka, Vargo and Lusch (2013) in their article *The Complexity of Context: A Service Ecosystems Approach for International Marketing*, present a framework that applies the service ecosystem, based on Service-dominant Logic (SDL), to the context and characteristics of international marketing. The authors identify a shift in the international marketing research scenario, from an initial complexity based on differences between countries to a more recent phase based on the dynamics of interactions in global exchange systems, for example.

**Table 1** - Sources of Complexity in International Marketing (IM)

<b>MI Phases</b>	<b>Complex Aspects of IM</b>
Early Developments: Transactional Differences	Problems related to operation or expansion in foreign environments
	Problems related to moving goods in different countries
	Consumer preferences across cultures
Recent Development: Dynamics of Global Exchange Systems	Intangible resources (e.g., brands, services)
	Convergence and divergence of communications and logistics networks
	Emergence and growth of regional and global markets

Source: Akaka, Vargo and Lusch, 2013, p. 5

SDL and its axioms (see topic 3.3) offer an alternative *framework* for advanced exploration of the context of international exchanges and value creation or as a complex phenomenon from some central constructs: service exchange, integration of operant resources, co-creation of value and value-in-context. (AKAKA, VARGO AND LUSCH, 2013, P. 6).

Chandler and Vargo (2011) draw attention to the fact that marketing researchers traditionally focus on goods as resources and consider marketing activities as supplementary to central production processes; that is, marketing processes are traditionally seen as an "addition of value" to goods. However, from a new perspective, resources were then discussed in more broader terms, being controlled and accessible by multiple actors. Take the brand positioning of a business as an example. This resource is built externally and is dynamically determined in the context in which it is found. The example represents an indirect or service-for-service exchange by intermediaries (CHANDLER; VARGO, 2011).

The service ecosystem presents an approach for the study of interaction and service exchanges among various actors (stakeholders and institutions) in value creation. The implication of this approach for international marketing is a deeper understanding of the hidden

mechanisms of interaction that form unique social contexts where value is created (AKAKA, VARGO; LUSCH, 2013). Thus, a new concept of central international marketing understandings is proposed.

**Table 2** - Extending core concepts in IM from the service ecosystems perspective

<b>Core Concepts</b>	<b>Early Development</b>	<b>Recent Development</b>	<b>Service ecosystems</b>
Exchange	Import/export	Network interactions	service-by-service
Resources	Tangible assets	Brands and Services	Primarily operating
Value and Value Creation	The firm's view of value/value exchange	Customer view of use/value	Multiple views of value/value in context
Context	Domestic and foreign countries	Local, national, regional, and global	Micro, meso, and macro

Source: Akaka, Vargo and Lusch (2013, p. 7).

## **2.5 Marketing to international students and SDL**

Over the last twenty years, the global engagement of universities has significantly increased in magnitude, range, and intricacy. These endeavors encompass an array of initiatives, from the traditional study-abroad programs, which provide students with an opportunity to acquaint themselves with foreign cultures, to facilitate access to higher education in countries where domestic institutions cannot fulfill the demand (ALTBACH; KNIGHT, 2007).

At present, global economic, cultural, and educational factors are exerting an impact on higher education worldwide, and higher education institutions, along with their individual departments and constituents, are assuming a more global role, spreading their influence throughout the globe (MARGINSON; RHOADES, 2002).

The internationalization process in universities enhances their competitive position in the global market by increasing the number of international students, improving brand reputation, and attracting partnerships internationally and locally (VOLKOVA; PLAKHOTNIK, 2021).

Moreover, higher education institutions placed significant importance on identifying themselves as global universities, which they believed was demonstrated by the enrollment of international students diverse faculty from around the world, and distinguished reputation for research on a global scale (FINDLAY et al. 2017). In this sense, Universities have adopted new management practices, including marketing programs, to extend their brand's reach beyond national borders and increase the attractiveness of their programs to international students.

As prospectors of international students, institutions enact public performances to present themselves educationally, economically, and socially, including beyond the nation (RHOADES et al. 2019). Asaad et al. (2015) identified that universities with an export market orientation should be aligned with students' expectations and offer assistance services such as accommodation and visa processing. Universities have branding tools in their favor, such as rankings and the image of the country where they are located.

However, the use of marketing strategies by universities varies, based on several factors, including external ones, such as government policies. James and Derrick (2019) have found that institutions' internationalization level heavily depends on their unique capabilities. These capabilities include the institution's capacity to allocate resources towards attracting international students, operational expertise in implementing activities and practices, and adaptability to respond to national policies and competitive strategies. Moreover, their organizational culture is crucial for their performance in international markets.

NG and Forbes (2009) argue that a marketing orientation could help universities compete in the global arena under well-applied practice. The authors point out that if an institution aims to attract students, it must provide an educational experience that can truly meet these students' needs so that they become a key component in the co-creation of the core service experience.

Seen from the Service-dominant Logic (SDL) perspective, students are not merely passive consumers; instead, they play an active role in their learning process by engaging in various activities to improve their outcomes. Regarding value co-creation, students' contribution involves active participation in the educational process and working with higher education stakeholders to integrate the resources available to them (DÍAZ-MENDEZ et al., 2019).

Co-creation represents a culture of sharing and collaboration in which all parties involved have the opportunity to contribute. In this context, students bring their unique resources, such as prior learning experiences, knowledge, and cultural background (SMØRVIK; VESPESTAD, 2020). The application of SDL in a marketing approach requires a vision in which students are heard and considered leading actors in the co-creation of service, even if they are beneficiaries.

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

For this study, qualitative research was chosen because it allows greater understanding of how certain higher education institutions (HEI) are organized to meet their objectives and the differences and similarities of the marketing approaches employed to attract international students in specific contexts.

In order to achieve the objectives defined in this research, it is important to capture the contextual richness of these approaches and the reactions and thoughts of the people responsible for these institutions in the circumstances presented.

#### 3.1 Comparative Case Study

According to Welsch et al. (2010), the case study as a methodology is established in international business research: "The prevalence of the case study is not surprising, given its potential to generate novel and groundbreaking theoretical insights" (WELSH et al., 2010, p. 2).

Research on strategy may require different methods in the search for interdisciplinary and holistic production. Among the various possible empirical approaches, the case study is one of the options for empirical investigation in response not only to environmental complexity but to the complexity of strategic systems and processes (BULGACOV, 1998).

Yin (2001) specifies that the researcher chooses the case study method when they wish to deal with the contextual conditions considering that they are highly pertinent to the studied phenomenon. He identifies three purposes of case studies, only one of them inductive (exploratory, in his terminology). Two are descriptive, in which there is less interest in the author; the other is explanatory, in which the approach is of greater interest to the author, as described in the following excerpt: "The proper application of analytical techniques enables the researcher to converge on a set of causal relationships, isolating them from the broader context of the case" (PIEKKARI; WELCH, 2017, p. 349).

Yin (2001) points out that "what" questions have an exploratory nature and are aimed at surveying hypotheses and propositions. On the other hand, "how" and "why" questions are more explanatory, as they deal with operational links that need to be traced over time.

This study seeks, through case study, to deal with these two types of questions: first, when working on its problem, the question "*How is the process of co-creation of value in UFMG and RUDN students' internationalization experience?*" has an exploratory nature;

subsequently, , it has an explanatory nature when searching for how these strategies are employed and why, from the perspective of Service-dominant Logic.

Furthermore, this approach makes it possible to understand and differentiate the context of organizations through a comparative analysis, systematically organizing the processes involved and relating theoretical concepts and empirical observations.

### **3.2 Locus of Research**

In the case of a multiple-case study, two higher education institutions that have different management methods, organizational culture, and market contexts were selected, the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), in Brazil, and the Russian University of Peoples' Friendship (RUDN), in Russia. Because both institutions were more open to the processes involved in this research, this was also the most convenient choice.

Created in 1927, the Federal University of Minas Gerais has 91 undergraduate courses, 90 graduate programs, and 860 research centers. It was considered the fifth best university in Latin America in 2022 in the 2022 edition of the Times Higher Education (THE) world ranking. Its institutional actions aimed at internationalization and exchange with other higher education institutions are coordinated by the university's Department of International Relations (DRI). The DRI periodically opens calls for student internationalization at undergraduate and graduate levels. In its latest internationalization report, the DRI (2021) reported agreements with over 460 higher education institutions in 61 countries.

Founded in 1960 by the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) government to make quality higher education accessible to students coming from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, RUDN is organized into six main faculties: Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of History and Philology, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Physics, Mathematics, Natural Sciences and, finally, the Faculty of Economics and Law. In 2010, UNESCO awarded the university with the gold medal for its contribution to the training of specialists for developing countries or emerging economies. RUDN has in internationalization the purpose of its creation; therefore, it has over 250 agreements with universities and research centers in other countries.

### **3.3 Unit of Analysis**

Scientific research requires time and resources; therefore, it is important to ensure its dimensions fit the means provided. Yin (2001) establishes that the unit of analysis refers to the

primary unit of what will be studied and the feasible limitations of the study. The case selection should relate to the initial questions of the research and its propositions, and should consider time limits, data collection, and analysis.

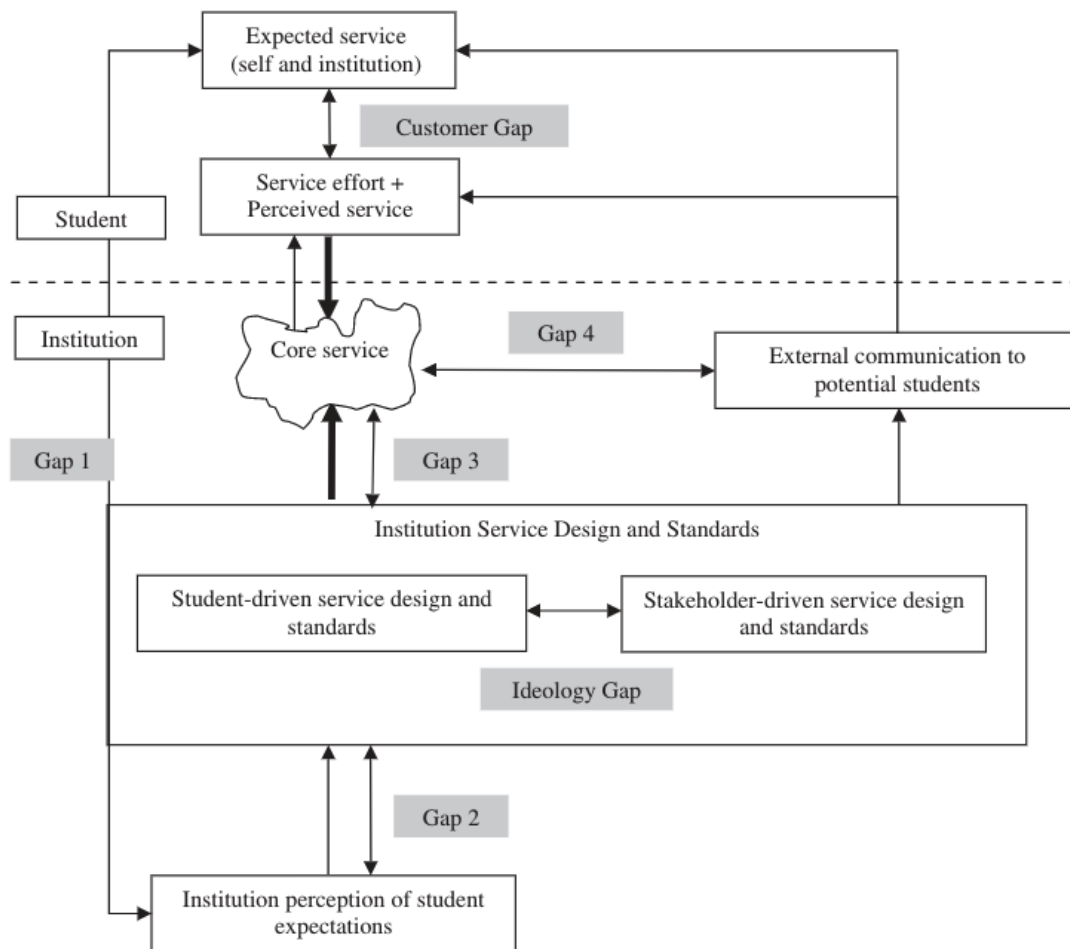
In this context, the case study proposed in this research aims to identify and analyze the elements of co-creation of value of higher education institutions for international students under the Service-dominant Logic's five axioms, as shown in the table below:

**Table 3 - SDL Axioms**

<b>Axiom</b>	<b>Utterance</b>
A1	Service is the fundamental basis of exchange.
A2	Value is co-created by multiple actors, including the beneficiary.
A3	All social and economic actors are resource integrators.
A4	The beneficiary solely and phenomenologically determines the value.
A5	Co-creation of value is coordinated by actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.

Source: Adapted from Vargo and Lusch, 2015, p. 4.

The Service-Dominant Logic also serves as basis to delimit the marketing dimensions to be researched. NG and Forbes (2009) created a new proposition of the Service Quality Gap Model (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, 1990), adapting it to the university experience. The GAP Model produces interesting observations so that institutions also shape students' expectations about universities and themselves through their brand and communication strategy, which, in turn, are shaped by the ideology of the institutions in question (Ng and Forbes, 2009). Thus, the proposed Gap Model brings the Gap of ideology, since this is a determining factor for brand positioning and the institution's communication orientation.

**Figure 6 - Ideological gap**

The gap model is adapted to the university as a service—source: NG and Forbes, 2009.

Students are not static entities with pre-established short-term needs. They have a long-term focus, with latent and emerging needs. Thus, for universities to deliver a student-oriented experience, it is necessary to guide and manage what students expect from themselves and from educational institutions, and ensure the service is delivered through designs and standards of teaching and curriculum development (NG; FORBES, 2009). The co-creation of value in education as a service requires that consumers be understood and seen as part of the outcome, so that students' expectations and motivations concerning the internationalization process are assessed.

Axiom 4 of Service-Dominant Logic expresses that value is solely determined by the user. Díaz-Mendez et al. (2019) emphasize that from the SDL perspective, the benefits achieved by students relate to their own operating resources, such as intellectual ability, engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy, as well as their social characteristics, peer-to-peer interactions, and teaching methodologies, in addition to resources offered by the university,

build the learning experience. As students have different levels of resources and come from different backgrounds, it is crucial to understand the expected benefits as a way of developing mentoring programs that can improve academic performance.

Other important dimensions to investigate the internationalization experience of international students were identified in other SERVQUAL frameworks (PARASURAMAN et al., 1985). Abdullah (2006) identified, in his instrument to measure the service quality in the higher education sector, the HEDPERF, non-academic aspects of quality that address essential items to enable students to complete their obligations. Non-academic teams manage these aspects. Subsequently, Icli and Anil (2014) developed the HEDQUAL scale, that expands quality factors to an MBA context . It was broader in this study, since it considers both undergraduate and graduate students. This scale addresses the quality component of administrative services, including the process of admission, registration, orientation, and communication with students by administrative teams.

When revisiting frameworks to measure service quality in higher education, such as HEdpPERF (ABDULLAH, 2006) and HiEdQUAL (ANNAMDEVULA; BELLAMKONDA, 2012), Alfay and Abukari (2019) identified the multidimensionality of academic services that goes beyond course design and instruction, including educational technology, which now encompasses classrooms, technological resources, library, among other physical structure elements.

The last dimension concerns the institution's brand image. This factor goes back to the ideological gap noted by Ng and Forbes (2009) in the search to identify what the institution believes students seek as experience. From this premise, Pinar et al. (2011) point out that the university's brand and its associated meanings represent a promise of experience and influence students' expectations. In a later work, the authors defined brand value dimensions in the context of brand recognition, perceived quality, brand associations, trust, learning environment, emotional engagement, and university reputation.

The framework (see Table 5) was developed from concepts previously addressed by each author, gathering dimensions for constructing the research protocol. This instrument is a guide for collection of data, its propositions, and its previous classification according to the Service-dominant Logic:

**Table 4 - Hierarchy of analysis, dimensions, and initial propositions**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Service Dimension</b>	<b>SDL</b>	<b>Application to Internationalization in Higher Education</b>
NG; Forbes (2009)	Students' expectations of themselves and of the service.	Actors	Motivations and expectations regarding the service (internationalization).
Díaz-Méndez; Paredes; Saren (2019)	Benefits expected/obtained from the service	Use value or value in context	The expected benefits resulting from the internationalization experience.
Icli; Anil (2014)	Quality of non-academic services	Value creation	Quality of administrative services: visa information, agreement, registration, documentation, etc.
Alfy e Abukari (2019), NG; Forbes (2009)	Service Experience and Experience Facilitators	Value measurement	Academic services: facilities, coursework, teaching methodology, teachers, libraries, etc.
Pinar et al. (2011, 2019).	Ecosystem and Brand Value	Perception of the Institution's brand	Brand recognition, associations and university reputation .

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedures

A multiple-case study should be holistic, containing subunits of analysis. Each case should serve similarly to multiple experiments, with similar or contradictory results. (YIN, 2018, p. 97). "The case study typically combines data collection methods such as archives, interviews, observations with both qualitative (words) and quantitative (numbers) evidence, or both" (EISENHARDT, 1989, P. 534).

### 3.4.1 Interviews with Students

Each case study included a series of interviews with students ( $n = 18$ ), that is, in each educational institution, nine students were interviewed on their internationalization experience, according to the proposed dimensions. The study used a convenience-based sampling strategy, according to students' availability and willingness in the period of the study, and who complied with the following criteria: having internationalized via formal programs made available by institutions between 2021 and 2023; regularly attending undergraduate or graduate courses; able communicate well in either English or Portuguese. From these criteria, we seek to obtain homogeneity resulting from life experience, more specifically, participants' internationalization (ROBINSON, 2014).

The sample number was based on similar qualitative studies in education (LUO; LAM, 2019, JAMES; DERRICK, 2019, HALL; WITERK, 2016). The average age of respondents is 24. To ensure the interviewees' anonymity, they were numbered from one to 18 (S1 to S18), being the first nine from UFMG, and the last nine from RUDN. One interview was invalidated because communication in English or Portuguese was not satisfactory for analysis. A substitute interview was conducted later to reach the desired number. The course, age, and country of origin of each respondent can be checked in the following table:

**Table 5 - Profile of Participating Students**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Course</b>
S1	Spain	28	UFMG	Electrical engineering
S2	Peru	22	UFMG	Civil engineering
S3	United States	25	UFMG	Education
S4	Russia	25	UFMG	Ecology
S5	Panama	23	UFMG	Speech therapy
S6	Equatorial Guinea	25	UFMG	Economy
S7	Portugal	21	UFMG	Administration
S8	Colombia	23	UFMG	Visual arts
S9	Peru	25	UFMG	Mechanical engineering

S10	Turkey	23	RUDN	Electric engineering
S11	Spain	23	RUDN	International marketing
S12	Bolivia	23	RUDN	Business Management
S13	China	24	RUDN	International Marketing
S14	India	27	RUDN	Journalism
S15	Greece	23	RUDN	International Marketing
S16	Brazil	23	RUDN	International Relations
S17	Sierra Leone	29	RUDN	International Relations
S18	Thailand	26	RUDN	International Marketing

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

#### 3.4.2 Interview with Managers

In addition to interviews with students, the second source of data will be two managers responsible for international student recruitment strategies ( $n = 2$ ), one at each university. Respondents are decision-makers on strategy development, implementation, and support in specific internationalization programs (JAMES; DERRICK, 2019). In this case, the sampling will be intentional, as it involves identifying and selecting proficient and informed individuals about the concerned phenomena (ETIKAN et al., 2016).

#### 3.4.3 Data Collection Instrument

For data collection, a research protocol was created for semi-structured interviews. The same topics are covered in this format in each interview, but the form each topic is presented was not structured (CORBIN; STRAUSS, 2015). Thus, it is possible to direct questions so that interviewees could better reflect on the central themes of the internationalization experience. The protocol was prepared in English and translated into Portuguese for respondents who speak only the official language in Brazil. Interviews were conducted remotely, between December 2022 and March 2023, via Microsoft Teams conference, with average duration of 30 minutes, depending on interviewee engagement.

### 3.4.4 Ethics and Personal Data

The interviews were conducted via video calls and recorded for transcription and analysis of the answers. Before each interview, participants were informed about the research procedure and were given the option to agree to participate. If they agreed, they were invited to record such agreement by signing the Term of Free and Informed Consent.

### 3.5 Method of Analysis

Yin (2016) explains that qualitative data analysis occurs in five phases. The first consists of compiling the data on a database and organizing it methodically. The second phase concerns dismantling the data from the database for encoding. Third, there is a reverse movement: organization new data from *insights* and patterns observed by the researcher. The reorganized data is interpreted in the fourth phase, and, finally, in the last phase, the resulting conclusions are elaborated.

Content analysis was adopted. In line with the logic of qualitative data analysis by Yin (2016), Bardin's (2011) content analysis consists of a set of communication analysis techniques that, through systematic and objective procedures of description of the content of messages, aims to obtain indicators, either quantitative or not, that allow the inference of knowledge related to these messages.

Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) describe qualitative content analysis as the exercise of systematically transforming a large amount of text into a concise summary of core results. According to Bardin (2011), there are three chronological phases of content analysis: 1) pre-analysis, 2) exploration of material, and 3) treatment of results, inference, and interpretation.

The initial step consists of reading and rereading the interviews and documents to get a general sense of the answers of interviewees. This reading is essential to have an idea of the main topics and ideas expressed (ERLINGSSON; BRYSEWICZ, 2017). This process is described by Bardin (2011) as floating reading, an activity to get to know the text by letting impressions and orientations invade oneself. Also, according to (ERLINGSSON; BRYSEWICZ, 2017), the second part consists of dividing the text into smaller parts, into units with particular meaning. The third step is to label units of meaning by formulating codes, and grouping those codes into categories. Finally, depending on the study's objectives and data quality, the categories can be transformed into themes in order to present the results. Table 7 summarizes the strategy used for content analysis based on Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) and Bardin (2011).

**Table 6 - Stages of Content Analysis**

1	Transcription and organization of interviews
2	Division of text into units of meaning.
3	Formulation of codes based on the theoretical framework of reference.
4	Grouping codes into common groups and categories.
5	Progressive grouping of categories: initial, intermediate, and final.
6	Interpretation of categories supported by the theoretical framework.

Source: Prepared by the author based on (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017).

The interviews were transcribed with the aid of Microsoft Stream, then reviewed, edited, and organized into a single, formatted document, totaling 120 pages of transcribed material. Then, each interview was reorganized, and the text was divided into parts in the Atlas.TI Software for coding and tabulation. In the following phase, the emerging codes were quantified and categorized by similarity of meanings.

Initially, 138 codes were identified. After a second analysis, with the merging of redundancies and codes with very similar meanings, this number dropped to 67, that were later grouped according to the literature and inductive reasoning, and classified into the following categories:

**Table 7 - Summary of analysis categories**

<b>Initial Categories</b>	<b>Intermediate categories</b>	<b>Final Categories</b>
Search for a university during the pandemic Free course Learn a new language Getting to know a new country Improving employability Academic opportunities Research opportunities Sports practice	International experience Employability Academic opportunities Training during the pandemic	Motivation to seek internationalization

<p>Acquire knowledge in the area of expertise</p> <p>Acquire fluency in a new language</p> <p>Giving back to the country of origin</p> <p>Curriculum enhancement</p> <p>International experience</p> <p>Living alone</p>	<p>Professional Opportunities</p> <p>Skill Acquisition</p> <p>Personal Growth</p>	<p>Benefits beyond the diploma</p>
<p>Evaluation of the admissions' office</p> <p>Language barrier in procedures</p> <p>Waiting time and complex registration</p> <p>Obtaining information</p> <p>Institutional support</p> <p>Financial problems</p>	<p>Experience with registration and documentation</p> <p>Experience with administrative services</p> <p>Obtaining information and support</p>	<p>Admission experience</p>
<p>Positive evaluation of teachers</p> <p>Language difficulties</p> <p>Experience with the course</p> <p>Course schedule flexibility</p> <p>Accommodation experience</p> <p>Adaptation to the place/culture</p> <p>Integration into the university</p> <p>Influence of the pandemic</p>	<p>Experience with teaching</p> <p>Experience with complementary services</p> <p>Adaptation and integration to the HEI</p>	<p>University experience</p>
<p>Agreement with the university/country of origin</p> <p>University with high ranking</p> <p>Choosing a HEI for the city where it is located</p> <p>Referral of Friends</p> <p>International Recognition</p> <p>Search for information</p>	<p>Factors that influenced the choice of a HEI</p> <p>Brand reputation</p> <p>Brand associations</p> <p>Search for information</p>	<p>Factors for choosing the university</p>

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Service-dominant logic is summarized into eleven premises. The five most important, called S-D logic axioms, are:

- "Service is the fundamental basis of exchange."
- "Value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary."
- "All social and economic actors are resource integrators."
- "Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary."
- "Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements."

S-D logic is an alternative framework for explaining transactions through value co-creation resulting from the exchange of service for service. S-D logic argues that to create value, that is, to maintain and increase well-being and viability, actors engage in interdependent and reciprocally beneficial service exchanges. It is important to remind that 'service', in this context, means applying operant resources (primarily knowledge and skill) to benefit oneself or another actor. The focus on service steers attention towards the process, patterns, and gains of exchange rather than towards the units of output (e.g., goods). The network of actors around the service exchange is a service ecosystem that entails collaboration among multiple actors, such as the university, its faculty, students, personnel, and practitioners.

Studying abroad can be a life-changing experience that offers many benefits. It can help to acquire new skills, learn a new language, gain international exposure, and broaden personal horizons. The student can also earn a unique perspective on different cultures and ways of life. Besides, independence, self-confidence, and adaptability should develop as new problems and challenges are successfully overcome. Lastly, studying abroad enhances one's resume and employability in the global job market.

In the following sections, each of these aspects related to the experience of studying abroad will be presented and discussed. From the collection and analysis of semi-structured interviews about the experience of co-creation of value by UFMG and RUDN's international students and the application of Bardin's (2011) content analysis technique, five main categories were reached: (1) motivation to seek internationalization; (2) benefits beyond the title; (3) entry experience; (4) university experience; and (5) factors for choosing the university.

#### 4.1 Motivation to go international

As a central component in creating the service experience, the factors that lead the student to enter the university are heterogeneous in terms of orientation, level, and type of effort required to achieve their goals.

These factors determine what the student values in core and supplementary services (NG; FORBES, 2009). For example, the authors point out that a knowledge-oriented student would not be concerned about hedonistic rewards, while a student oriented by social aspects would have a more significant concern in tourism and social activities.

The results show that interviewees' motivation for internationalization is primarily linked to the perspective of having an international experience: discovering a different country and experiencing a different culture. This perspective was brought up by most respondents from both universities, as seen in interviews S1, S11, and S12.

Yes, yes, because my options were Venezuela, Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil [...] of the countries that I knew the least was Brazil. I knew almost nothing. Brazil is a very big country, a lot of cultures, a lot of history, and it caught my attention for this (S1).

I will apply for one of these programs because I just love to go abroad and to meet new cultures and to experience that part (S11).

Yes, it was a lot of that too, of wanting to see new cultures and, in any case, cultures, languages and experiences of other countries, as people live. This helps us expanding our knowledge (S12).

Similarly, academic motivations were another preponderant factor for internationalization, especially for UFMG's students, when compared with RUDN's. Academic opportunities are connected to the expectations of attending the desired classes, enrolling in a high-quality course, and having the opportunity to do research in areas of interest, as mentioned by S2 and S5:

But when I was in a civil engineering course, I found my specialty, which is transportation, and there is a lot of research in Brazil to learn and to see that we do not have here in my country. So all this became a reason to go to Brazil (S2).

I always knew that I wanted to study Speech Therapy, and Brazil is a reference of Speech Therapy, so I chose it. I am the only person in my class who came to Brazil, to this side of the South (S5).

In contrast, internationalization motivated by the possibility to increase one's employability is pointed out exclusively by RUDN students. These students, in general, expect that internationalization will increase future chances of employment, either by including international experience in the curriculum or, more specifically, for the course they have chosen, as can be observed in the S10 interview:

For example, in the future, let's say that I started to work as a sales manager or sales engineer. That means that I need to communicate with other people from other countries, so I would know how to communicate with Russian people right now better than anyone, because I know their culture, how they like to get treated. It will help me a lot I think (S10).

Finally, one motivation not anticipated but pointed out by students from both universities was the search for a university during the pandemic. Some students decided to go international as a strategy to meet their educational expectations during the pandemic, as reported by S12:

What drove me to come here was the issue of my country, how universities were not very prepared for the pandemic and many universities closed for a long time. That's what drove me to look for ways out in other countries, abroad.

The driving force for studying abroad clearly expresses the role of the fourth S-D logic axiom ("*value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary*") due to the diversity of answers and the difference in importance given to the possible gains.

Such argument is evidenced by the quotation of specific attributes, such as the search for free college courses abroad that favor the practice of sports. These conditions are mandatory for some students, only. On the other hand, the importance of experiencing another culture and learning or improving one's knowledge of another language is often quoted as essential motivation, even though the weight of these benefits depends on personal preferences.

From the point of view of the managers interviewed, in general, at UFMG, there is a higher expectation related to the quality of teaching and research opportunities in specific fields in which the university is a reference, as highlighted in the following excerpt:

These people come here to be able to study in an institution that they believe is better than theirs, that can provide a better academic experience than they would have, that is, to specialize a little further (UFMG Manager).

Teaching quality was also cited as a central element by the manager of RUDN, with emphasis on their prominent faculty and the recognition the university enjoys in specific courses:

We have professors who have a good experience. We also have some professors from other universities, Russian universities, who also are very interested in this sphere or professional. We have some professors from other universities, from our partner universities. To be high qualified specialist students should practice the knowledge of their specialty or even the atmosphere. We try to make this partnership and students can have opportunity (RUDN Manager).

Finally, the managers of both universities, even if secondarily, considered the experience of studying in a new country, with a different reality, living with people of other nationalities as a driver for internationalization.

This result also emphasizes the seventh foundational premise of SDL in the way that universities cannot deliver value isolated, but only offer value propositions. The relevance of motivators beyond the academic environment reveals the role of institutions more as a participant than a creator of value. Considering the motivation to go international, the appeal to the experience of living in a new country and culture was the most cited by students in both universities. It is not seen as a more critical factor than academic opportunities, but it is seen as a great attraction factor. This result also reinforces the existence of the ideological gap between what institutions see as greater student interest, a long-term orientation towards academic and professional opportunities, and what students are most interested in, a short-term orientation to pleasure (NGUYEN; ROSETTI, 2013). and

However, this gap is limited, since long-term academic and professional motivations appeared in most interviews. Moreover, managers have shown that they are aware of this attraction, even if this is in the background. Finally, profile differences among the students interviewed is evident. While UFMG has attracted a more academic profile, RUDN has students who aim for the professional benefits of the experience. The distribution of codes is shown in the table below:

**Table 8** - Distribution of codes: motivation to go international

<b>Motivation to go international</b>	<b>RUDN</b>	<b>UFMG</b>	<b>Total</b>
Academic opportunities	3	9	12
Discover a new country	4	6	10
Discover a new culture	5	5	10
Improve employability	5	0	5
Search for a university during the pandemic	1	2	3
Free education	1	2	3
Obtain a new title	3	0	3
Learn a new language	1	2	3
Practice of sports	0	3	3
Research possibilities	0	2	2
No professional expectations	1	0	1

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

#### 4.2 Benefits beyond the title

SDL's axiom 4 defines that the beneficiary is the only one capable of determining the value of a service. Therefore, to fulfill the objectives of this study, it is necessary to point out the benefits that students, as users of the service, obtained from the internationalization experience. Universities offer a value proposition that is experienced subjectively by students (beneficiaries), defined as value-in-use, that is influenced by a cultural and social context, defined as value-in-context (DÍAZ-MENDEZ et al., 2019).

When we focus on different benefits other than obtaining a certificate, we, again, tend to consider the heterogeneous views on the value of the studying abroad experience. A number of people prioritize acquiring different skills and knowledge, and have a singular notion of personal growth. In other words, as the product of students' idiosyncratic appraisal and preferences, *the qualia of the value of studying abroad are strongly connected with the fourth S-D logic axiom.*

In this respect, students from both universities have similar views. The benefits cited by interviewees are primarily linked to the expansion of professional opportunities. By living in another country, the interviewees believe their workforce will be valued, and their resumes will

be more attractive in the job market, including in the country of origin. This perception is illustrated in interviews S7, S14

Companies like international experiences. There's a benefit. It wasn't my reason. In fact, I didn't even consider it (...) but I assume there is an advantage (S7).

You also need to differentiate your CV as another one. If you show that you moved to another country, you were able to face all these difficulties (S11).

Of course. This course is for international course. I think it's a good benefit in my country. I study at international level (...) I think the better benefit is this one (S14).

The second most cited benefit in both universities relates to acquiring new knowledge in the area of study, especially learning or using a new language. Interviews S2 and S15 illustrate how internationalization is seen as an opportunity to develop new skills:

Yes, absolutely, because like I said, I knew I would going to find a lot of research on my specialty, which is transportation. I knew there were books, investigations, magazines and all, but all in Portuguese. They were not translated into Spanish (S2).

OK. First of all, I think I improved my English on the courses and some skills, PowerPoint or stuff like that on the computer (S15).

A less mentioned but no less critical aspect is the contribution of internationalization to students' personal growth. Living alone and having to adapt to a new environment was cited as drivers of maturing and personal growth by some students. The opportunity to work in the country of origin or in the country of exchange was also mentioned, but with fewer occurrences.

Regardless of how complex it is to understand value from an individual standpoint, the management of foreign universities must measure how well their guest students fulfill their expectations and accomplish their existential goals. Service quality management must ensure that the quality of the university experience matches or exceeds exchange students' expectations. Marketing segmentation should be used to target students whose profiles and expectations are more compatible with the institutional strategic identity and resources.

Moreover, Diaz-Mendez et al. (2019) advocate that higher education institutions change their focus from *value-in-exchange* to *value-in-use*. This claim goes beyond the competencies developed in the educational experience that could be exchanged in the labor market, like

character development, future career, and learning abilities. Expanding the concept to value-in-context internationalization is an opportunity to transform students and contribute to society, more than enhancing their résumés.

In the category of benefits beyond the title, the data showed a balance between students of both universities, as described in the table below:

**Table 9** - Distribution of codes: benefits beyond the title

<b>Benefits beyond the title</b>	<b>RUDN</b>	<b>UFMG</b>	<b>Total</b>
Have an international experience	7	5	12
Curriculum appreciation	5	5	10
Acquire fluency in a new language	5	3	8
Acquire knowledge in the field	3	4	7
Live alone	2	3	5
Return to the country of origin	1	1	2
Work in the exchange country	0	2	2

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

### 4.3 Entry experience

The second S-D logic axiom ("*value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary*") calls attention to cooperation and coordination processes among the university's personnel and the student body. Institutional services must provide suitable conditions for fruitful exchanges to enrich the university experience.

As described in the chapter dedicated to the methodology, the HEDQUAL framework (ICLI; ANIL, 2014) classifies the quality of administrative services as an essential factor for student satisfaction. In an internationalization context, services and communications aimed at the process of admission to the university become critical factors for an excellent academic experience.

Moving to a new country is an experience that can cause insecurity in students who actively seek information regarding documentation, deadlines, and procedures as a way to mitigate this effect. Difficulty to obtain information was reported in both universities in different phases of

the internationalization process, both in registration and in finding where the classrooms are in order to attend classes. Respondents S6, S11 and S12.

And also the way of living in Brazil, because it is very difficult for us foreigners when you still do not know how to get or issue some document. These are the things I had in mind (S6).

It's true that, for example, RUDN could develop guide or orientation weeks to welcome future international students, so they'll know they have to go somewhere and do something. Sometimes I really felt like in a game, going to the administration, going to different buildings and asking for help all the time (S11).

We don't have the entry date, we don't have any of that, because they take a long time to send it. For the same reason I told you: they have too many students (S12).

Other students had a positive experience delivering documentation and information needed for registration. According to reports, it is possible to conclude that this experience varies according to the student's country of origin and the program or agreement to which he is part.

An important point – and exclusive of RUDN – is that students report problems relating to lack of communication in English by the administrative staff. Both universities do not have institutionalized service in a foreign language, but the fact that RUDN offers courses in English cause students to expect that they will have the service in a foreign language. Students S14 and S15 described this difficulty, as follows:

Otherwise, dormitory department is not understanding for English. Always speak to only Russians. That's the main challenge (S14).

Also because of they don't speak English. When I tried to go to the dorms, because I stayed in the dorms, they didn't speak English, so I'm trying to learn some Russian. It wasn't that good (S15).

Service-dominant logic's axiom 5 exposes the role of institutions in co-creating value, which is a process coordinated through actors, institutions and institutional arrangements (VARGO; LUSCH, 2016). Considering the higher education internationalization service ecosystem, the data showed how the set of norms, laws, and state agencies, in addition to the university, affect the coordination of activities in the co-creation of value, strongly affecting students' perception of value.

The differences in the process between countries and cooperation agreements result in a unique enrollment experience for each student. In an international marketing context, SDL recognizes the multiple institutions that impact the service ecosystem's value co-creation, so that relations and dynamics between countries, HEIs, and institutional arrangements are not exogenous or static. Instead, they are continually reproduced through actors' practices to ingrate resources (AKAKA; VARGO; LUSCH, 2013). As much as inbound service is standardized and delivers predictable results, the practice reveals personal and various experiences in both universities.

Positive experiences with student services offices are also pointed out, in addition to the institutional support offered by the university, with individual monitoring and accounts of other students helping during the process, showing, once again, the role of out-of-class actors in the experience of entering both universities. Interviews S8 and S11 illustrate this experience:

They also helped me a lot with a lot when I got there. I didn't know the city, I didn't know anything, so they helped me with this, they gave me tips, how to get around the city, for example, how to get the visa and all (S8).

I could apply for that and people from RUDN were always super nice and answering within two days. I really choose RUDN just because of that. I mean, I also saw that both of them were great universities. I would be good in any of them. It was really differences. I thought that they were more close and also I saw it was a Super International University with people around the world (S11).

Both university managers reported that the institution has specific processes for international students. However, these processes are approached in different ways, both in the organizational aspect and in the communication with students. At UFMG, documentation and registration procedures are centralized with a specific internationalization department, the DRI. In general, students have similar service processes. They all go through an orientation week, in which legal registration procedures, documents, enrollment, and cultural and academic issues are addressed. The DRI is also in charge of issues such as housing and student grants.

RUDN has two distinct phases: first, the university's international office carries out standard document registration . In a second moment, documents are sent to the student's faculty, where two tutors are assigned: one for educational matters and another one for non-educational matters, such as housing and financial aids. The explanation given by the manager is followed by the perception that these initial moments really are complicated for newly-arrived students:

But for international students, we try to pay a lot of attention. And we understand that sometimes it can be hard to understand everything in another country (...) If students come by cooperation between universities, we always in contact with the representative of our partner and we make some documents for coming students (RUDN Manager).

UFMG manager also describes how the department is always striving to qualify and improve the service capacity of administrative staff in the office dedicated to international students:

We have this technical-administrative staff training process. We send them to our various universities, not only partners, for technical visits and to learn. There is a movement, an attempt to foster our participation, participation of technicians, in international congresses on internationalization (UFMG Manager).

Most students reported difficulties or long waiting time regarding the process. The universities reported having a well-structured process and qualified staff dedicated to international students; nonetheless, other institutions are involved, as the government, consulates, and the universities of origin. The vision of the university as an integrator of these entities, carrying out communication with students and the necessary steps for the registration phase, even before their arrival, is able to mediate expectations and improve their perception of the process. Although the educational institution is not responsible for managing all phases of the process, they end up being the only interface to which students have access.

It is important to watch over all administrative processes, such as student selection, registration, academic support, dissemination of school calendar information, etc. Furthermore, students expect some help to deal with the adaptation difficulties of moving to a foreign country.

As stated by the fifth axiom of S-D logic (*"value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements"*), managing the service ecosystem properly is crucial to fulfill the needs and expectations of international students. In this sense, state policies and the support of non-governmental organizations should be used to benefit students, by offering scholarships and financial aids, for instance. Moreover, a specialized multilingual online office coordinating school services to support international students could be helpful. The distribution of entry experience category codes is shown in the following table:

**Table 10** - Distribution of codes: entry experience

<b>Entry Experience</b>	<b>RUDN</b>	<b>UFMG</b>	<b>Total</b>
Difficulties faced in trying to obtain information and/or register	4	7	11
Long registration process	3	7	10
Language difficulties throughout the process	9	0	9
Easy registration process	4	4	8
Institutional support on admission	4	4	8
Positive evaluation of the students' office	3	3	6
Lack of department support	5	0	5
Help from other students with the process	2	2	4
Competitive selection process for the program	1	1	2
Government program	1	1	2
High cost of travel and documents	1	1	2
Difficulties faced during Covid pandemic quarantine	1	0	1
Economic sanction issues	1	0	1

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

#### **4.4 University experience**

The Second Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) axiom considers that value is co-created by multiple actors, including the beneficiary (VARGO; LUSH, 2006). Therefore, service without the participation of students as co-creators, and their role of motivation, interactions, and behavior, would provide a limited experience (ALFY; ABUKARI, 2019).

For the purpose of this study, the university service does not only encompass the aspects directly linked to teaching and structure, but also internationalization aspects that influence students' efforts and skills, elements that affect the performance and quality of the service (NG; FORBES, 2009).

Regarding the teaching experience, the most frequently cited academic factor was the quality of teachers, most frequently at UFMG, while at RUDN, this factor also appeared as teaching quality. Interviews S6, S7, S10 and S16 illustrate this perception:

The faculty is also very good, very nice, very friendly, very cheerful, these are things that attract people a lot (S6).

I thought it was very good and I think it was something that Portugal should learn from Brazil. Professors are much better than in Portugal, and the system (...) There are more options of subjects and you can choose what to follow (S7).

We processed that way (...) in other hand, there was really good lectures, really good professors. For example, (...) I was the only student for one lecture and he gave me that lecture every week just for me. It was really special (S10).

It was a good experience, professors were very good, the subjects were very good, the way they were teaching was also good, the regularity of the classes was also very good (S16).

On the other hand, the language barrier reappeared, this time related language difficulties during the classes. While at RUDN, the cases cited relate to the fact that certain subjects were not available in English, at UFMG, the initial difficulty was attending classes having a low level of understanding of Portuguese, since the university does not offer full programs in a foreign language.

The UFMG Manager mentioned that the university is quite limited in terms of offering more vacancies or having greater demand from students due to the absence of programs offered in a foreign language:

We offered this transversal training, because we can offer it both extra training to the UFMG student (...) and also offer a greater number of subjects in other languages (...) this is our great impasse. In order to welcome students who do not speak Portuguese, these students have to attend class, they have to write (...) We intend to expand the reception of international students to the university (UFMG Manager).

The fact that RUDN offers courses in English not only makes it possible, but also reinforces the choice of this HEI by international students, since English is considered a standard language in academia. This, however, does not prevent students from learning Russian, as the university offers Russian classes to international students, in addition to the programs taught in English. UFMG, on the other hand, depends on students who wish to learn Portuguese. Although this factor is attractive, as seen in the category reasons to go international, it is also a limitation that the university works to mitigate.

Still, in the teaching experience category, the difficulty or ease of taking credits was cited in the case of both universities. Some students report difficulties when they cannot take the entire workload of studies or the subjects in their universities of origin, as exemplified below.

I found a little difficult to choose the subjects to enroll, because here in Spain all subjects have six credits (...) 150 hours. These 150 hours include class hours, exam hours, independent study hours. At UFMG there are no six-credit subjects. We have two, three, four-credit subjects (S1).

Only thing I had problem was the learning agreement [00:06:56]. I'm not sure if you are familiar with that term. It's basically a document that says what classes you are going to take in RUDN and what's the equivalent of those classes in your home country (S10).

Other students, on the other hand, described a positive experience with the credits, which is also an attraction factor for students, as cited by S8 and S15:

I also researched about the visual arts program at UFMG and I thought it was similar, it was very similar to my program here. It was easier for me to have subjects that I would be more easily homologated, I don't know if that's how we say it (S8).

I find some courses in my university that they has similarities with Russian university. If I have marketing on my study program, I must find marketing on the Russian university; find the similarities on the schedule (S15).

SDL's axiom 3 states that "*All social and economic actors are resource integrators*". In addition to professors in the classroom, aspects such as scholarships, housing availability, co-habitation, routine and integration with their peers are important factors for an internationalization experience. Higher education institutions provide operand and operant resources that will be utilized by all actors. Resource integration is a broad interaction process between all parties involved (DZIEWANOWSKA, 2017) .

Receiving financial aid or scholarship was one of the categories most cited by interviewees. It is a factor that enables or improves students' internationalization experience in both universities. Despite its lower incidence, reports of non-existent or insufficient financial aid often generate bad experiences. At UFMG, the importance of the aid relates to provision of free housing and transportation, while at RUDN, the financial aid is in the form of tutoring. Interviews S1, S3, S15 and S17 portray this perception:

I thought it was good, because I didn't have to pay. For example, if a Brazilian person arrives in Spain, the housing will not be free (S1).

For me, I could not believe that housing was free (S3).

And then again in the Greek university, if they agreed to go there for one semester of the courses. We get paid from Erasmus too to live abroad (S15).

Your government processes it's will not 100% qualify you to get the scholarship unless you qualify or go through the processes of the Russian Federation. Then you'll be fully satisfied that you've got the scholarship 100% (S17).

These benefits vary according to the agreement and internationalization modality. As reported by UFMG students, these subsidies come in the form of university housing and food

and transportation aid. RUDN offers subsidized housing and financial aid, but it depends on student's assessment by the tutor, as reported by RUDN Manager:

Another tutor who is responsible for your activity, maybe for your dormitory, for your medical insurance, if you can pay, not pay, if you want to go to the excursion, if you, I don't know, all the all the questions, and this tutor will help you to find information (RUDN Manager).

The structure of universities, as facilities and technological resources, was little cited, with higher incidence among RUDN students. On the other hand, most students at both universities cited their impressions of the dormitories, as it was mostly used by international students, as addressed in the discussion about grants and scholarships. Most students had a good experience in the accommodations, as shown in the S2, S12, and S14 interviews:

I liked the accommodation because I stayed with three other people, two from my country and one from Colombia (S2).

You have everything you need, stores, really, everything we need, in order to make us feel at home (S12).

The situation is very good and accommodation and everything is very good in RUDN. Most Russians (are) very friendly (S14).

Nevertheless, when students do not adapt to their roommates or face structural problems, this factor becomes a significant problem, as described by S1, S11 and S15:

At first, housing it was a little tough, because I had to live in a room with three other people (S1).

Some people were complaining about. They were small or they had to share with a lot of people. But it's how the country is made and how it's established there. It makes kind of the experience, and you cannot expect when you go abroad to have the same things that you have at home (S11).

Also, I asked a lot of times to get a room only for me. Another small problem was that I was in the 5th floor without elevator. My luggage, everything I must climb (S15).

Adapting to the university, the city, how easy it is to integrate with the academic community, and the offer of extra activities are essential factors for the internationalization experience. In this category, the universities showed a more significant difference. Firstly, all UFMG students interviewed reported having a positive experience with the city, and half of RUDN's. This perception was reflected in UFMG interviewees portraying Belo Horizonte as a quiet and safe city, while RUDN students highlighted the fact that Moscow has many services and places to visit.

Despite the excellent evaluation of the city, most students reported adaptation problems, either language-related, routine, customs, or even public transportation. RUDN students also mentioned the weather. Despite the number of occurrences, the reports are seen as a natural process by the students, that they were able to manage, as cited by S2 and S18:

But when we traveled, we stayed in a hostel for a week. All the staff spoke Portuguese. They spoke neither Spanish nor English. We didn't know what to say. We were looking for a translator and everything (S2).

So, for to deal with Russian people, it's not that hard if you know the language. It's not that hard, you just speak. And you will get, uh, you will pass that situation well, but to deal with (S18).

An important category that emerged from the interviews with UFMG students was how easy it was to integrate with the academic community and to take extra activities. In addition to possible cultural aspects, students mentioned the importance of the sponsorship program in which a local student "adopts" a foreign student to help them integrate, and cultural activities and specific workshops for foreign students developed by UFMG'S internationalization department, as cited by S3 and S6:

I met many Brazilians who did not know the sponsorship program, and I think it would be nice to hold public events for anyone from Brazil to come and meet international students, especially those who did not speak Portuguese and did not have many Brazilian friends (S3).

When Brazilian students see that you are a foreigner, they treat you like a freshman, they accompany you if you need to know something, so, very friendly. This is one of the benefits that, in fact, Brazilian universities have. In this case, it was UFMG, since I haven't visited another university (S6).

The occurrence of integration difficulties or extra activities at RUDN contrasts with the activities the university has to offer on this topic. The period in which the interviewees went international, the level of access to information, and even the seasons, specifically in RUDN'S case, can interfere with students' search for extra activities. RUDN Manager exemplified some of these initiatives:

Sometimes we have also exhibitions of (...) like cultural exhibitions of different countries. It means that all the countries have their own place and they use their national clothing, cook national food and they make this special place and explain and tell other students about the country (RUDN Manager).

RUDN Manager pointed out that these activities allow students to better integrate into the university environment. In addition, groups of students of the same nationality are set for mutual help, with the presence of a student leader.

In addition to the extra activities, as previously reported, UFMG has a sponsorship program and a characteristic the university manager defines as an open and welcoming environment:

UFMG is a very welcoming environment for the international community. We have staff that in the accommodation, which also helps the international student to feel at home. I think UFMG has this concern (UFMG Manager).

SDL proposes that an organization cannot create or deliver value unilaterally. Both actors create value collaboratively (Vargo and Lush, 2008). That is, students have roles of equal importance in generating value from the university experience. Factors that are outside the university should also be considered by institutions when designing the service. As much as the offers are designed to meet these needs, universities need to go further and understand whether international students are aware of and have access to opportunities that can enrich the service experience.

Finally, the interviews also brought up accounts of how the pandemic affected students' academic experience. While at RUDN some students had to attend classes online, even though they were in the city. In Brazil, students could attend classes in person, provided that they were wearing a mask. This effect relate to the last two-year period of exchange and to the measures taken by each country to reduce the spread of the virus.

The other S-D logic axioms draw attention to different points of concern. The first (*"service is the fundamental basis of exchange"*) shows that the concept of service is crucial to manage the scholar experience of international students. Special care is needed to mitigate culture shocks, facilitate communication, and rapidly adapt international students to new routines. The second axiom (*"value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary"*) points to the need for training and empowering school personnel and faculty to solve immediate problems that afflict students. Lastly, S-D logic postulate concerning resources (*"all social and economic actors are resource integrators"*) calls attention to guaranteeing that academic resources are effectively available for all service ecosystem actors, mainly through information systems and intelligent devices. In the table below, it is possible to check the distribution of codes in this category:

**Table 11** - Distribution of codes: university experience

<b>University Experience</b>	<b>RUDN</b>	<b>UFMG</b>	<b>Total</b>
Positive experience with the city	5	12	17
Positive experience with professors	5	8	13
Receiving grants or scholarships	5	7	12
Adaptation problems	6	4	10
Easy to join the community	1	8	9
Language difficulties in classes	3	5	8
Difficulties regarding subjects or credits	3	4	7
Positive evaluation of the dorms	4	3	7
Positive evaluation of the HEI structure	5	1	6
Extra activities	0	5	5
High maintenance cost	4	1	5
Absent or insufficient financial assistance	3	2	5
Difficulties regarding the dorms	3	1	4
Easy to understand the course credits and subjects	2	2	4
Teaching quality	3	1	4
Experience affected by the pandemic	4	0	4
The pandemic did not affect the experience	0	4	4
Difficulties in integrating	1	1	2

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

#### **4.5 Factors for choosing the university**

The difference between students' expectations and what the institution believes students expect or want from the service (university ideology) is what NG and Forbes (2009) called the Ideological Gap. Paradoxically, students' expectations must be shaped by the institution's communication strategy, which, in turn, is guided by the university's ideology.

As in any service, the educational experience as a process is the sum of student-faculty, student-administration/staff, and student-student interactions, and each of these points of

contact has the potential to impact the perception of quality, experience and, ultimately, the perception of that university's brand (PINAR et al., 2011).

In the interviews, an emerging category covered factors that led students to choose the universities selected for the study. The codes were classified into four intermediate categories: brand associations, market reputation, influencers, and students' search for information.

Most respondents in both universities cited agreements with other universities or internationalization programs between the two countries. This category contributes both to brand association, in the sense that the institutions of origin present the destination university as an option for students to have the first contact with the brand, and as an influencing factor, to the extent that the agreement can determine which university the student should go to, or in aggregating the credibility of the student's home university or program (such as PEC-G and ERASMUS). Students S3, S9, S13, and S15 illustrate this factor in their speeches.

My program accepts 40 people to teach in Brazil's universities. They can be public, federal, private, and we can't choose. There are people in Acre, Rio Grande do Sul, and a month before I arrived in Brazil, they put me at UFMG (S3).

The university offered many universities to choose from. At first, I chose Mexico, Brazil and Chile, but Brazil was the priority for me, because I know that the best universities in Latin America are in Brazil (S9).

Actually, no, but there are some university in China with official corporate cases with RUDN, like some universities in Shandong province, which is in the northeast of China (S13).

Yeah, I did my Erasmus there. We had a list of the universities that my uni has a connection and I had also Lomonosov or (...) I'm not sure (...) from like five universities in Moscow, I chosen RUDN (S15).

As pointed out by NG and Fobes (2009), students see great risk in their decisions when it comes to higher education. The agreements help reducing this risk as they deliver the credibility of the home university's brand to the host institution. The managers of UFMG and RUDN pointed this strategy as the most important in terms of expanding the reach of the university's brand and attracting international students. UFMG, for instance, selects the universities of interest for a bilateral internationalization agreement. In addition, there are several offers of government scholarship programs at federal and state level, such as PEC-G and Minas Mundi.

RUDN already has many partner institutions and seeks to expand its reach through participation in significant cooperation agreements between universities within the BRICS, for instance, to which Brazil is also part; Shanghai, with China; and Erasmus, which covers Europe.

The third axiom of Service-dominant Logic states that all actors are resource integrators, which means that universities use resources from governments and cooperation agreements to

achieve their internationalization goals. The agreement is a form of mutual benefit between universities insofar as they can receive and send students, being a way of offering internationalization to national students.

In addition, each university has unique resources that make them attractive not only to students, but also to other universities. The physical and academic structure of the HEI and its reputation are assets that impact the success of internationalization.

In a micro-level, other influential aspect, at UFMG specifically, recommendations by friends appeared as another factor that impacts the choice for the higher education institution, as mentioned in the S5 interview.

I already had a friend who was here, who graduated from my school, she tried a kind of a scholarship, but it's not a scholarship, she tried a program called PEC-G, which is an agreement Brazil has with Honduras. She said it was very good and said she is studying psychology here, at UFMG, too (S5).

The city where the university is located, pointed out as an essential factor for the academic experience, was also pointed out as an attraction factor for students when deciding on the university. While Moscow was cited as a city that students would like to visit, because it is a metropolis, Belo Horizonte was cited as a quieter and safer city. The UFMG Manager recognizes this advantage, as described in the following excerpt:

I believe they think Belo Horizonte would be a slightly smaller city, a little easier to adapt, despite being a capital (UFMG Manager).

These results reinforce that an additional foundation for positioning is the university's location, which involves establishing a robust connection between a university and the desirability or benefits of a particular geographic area. This includes resources inherent in being situated in a major city, as founded by Kethüda (2021).

Brand reputation is another important factor of influence when choosing an institution. The perception or awareness that the institution is well placed in its country and region was cited by students from both universities, but in a larger number by UFMG. However, RUDN was also remembered for its international recognition, as a multicultural university, both by students and managers, as observed in the following answers:

We have students from 162 countries (..) more than 700 documents of partnership with different universities all over the world. It's our good side of our university (RUDN Manager).

UFMG is the third best university in Brazil. We are among the five best in Latin America. The two best ones that usually stay in front of us are USP and Unicamp. They are in São Paulo, then, a much larger metropolis. (UFMG Manager).

These findings are also in line with Kethüda (2021) in the sense that the strategy of communicating a higher ranking position shows the higher quality of a university in the eyes of its prospective student, since ranking is a sign of unobservable service characteristics.

Finally, it is essential to highlight the subordinate role of the institutions' social networks and websites as means for students to search information. Although rarely mentioned, it was more prevalent among RUDN's students. The distribution of codes in categories was as follows:

**Table 12** - Distribution of codes: factors for choosing the HEI

<b>Factors for choosing the HEI</b>	<b>RUDN</b>	<b>UFMG</b>	<b>Total</b>
Agreement with home university	7	8	15
High-ranking university	3	6	9
HEI chosen for the city where it is located	3	4	7
Friends' recommendations	1	5	6
Free education	1	2	3
Insufficient information on the HEI's website	2	1	3
International recognition	2	1	3
HEI assessment by social networks	2	0	2

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The question that guided this study was: "how does the process of co-creation of value take place in the internationalization experience of UFMG and RUDN students?" Through qualitative research, using in-depth interviews with international students from different countries and realities in the two universities, it was possible to investigate and analyze the value co-creation process of international students, contributing to theoretical and practical advances in the application of Service-dominant logic to higher education, more specifically in the internationalization scenario, a field still little explored with the SDL.

Through this study, it was also possible to observe that organizations need to move from a traditional view of marketing, that sees the student as a consumer who needs to be recruited,

maintained, and have their experience managed, which generates the ideological gap pointed out by NG and Forbes (2009), to a service-oriented strategy that sees students as active actors in the process, with their expectations and actions taken as determining factors of the value resulting from the experience.

Despite the differences in the background of universities, and the social and cultural context of the countries in which they are located, both institutions play relevant roles as hubs of internationalization in their regions, as is expected in leading nations on the world stage. Both universities had good strategies to enrich the students' internationalization experience, but many initiatives did not reach them or did not work the way they were designed in practice.

The study identified that a short-term benefit orientation, such as visiting a new country and experiencing a new culture, was the most cited motivator among students of both universities. This result only partially endorses Nguyen and Rosetti's (2013) argument that universities can find ways to design a service that expands the value related to these expectations while delivering the pedagogical or long-term value, related to education and improved employability.

It is important to note that while UFMG tends to attract more academically focused students, RUDN students tend to prioritize employability. When questioned about the advantages of their education beyond obtaining a degree, students from both universities expressed similar sentiments. They stated that the primary benefit of their international experience was gaining valuable skills and improving their resumes.

The difficulties of gathering the required personal documentation and the long waiting time to be accepted by the foreign university are factors of significant impact on the internationalization experience. Students' level of information defines the level of anxiety and their perception of the service offered by the university. A higher number of UFMG students have reported difficulties in acquiring information about the documentation process. Conversely, at RUDN, which provides courses in English, there is an expectation of receiving administrative assistance in a foreign language. Despite the universities' efforts to guide students, it is apparent that some students are unaware of or unfamiliar with the procedures for seeking assistance from the internationalization departments

Service-dominant Logic identifies the role of institutions as facilitators of actors in achieving higher levels of value co-creation. The more actors engage with the institution, the greater the potential for coordination to create benefits among them (VARGO; LUSCH, 2016). Thus, universities can work with the state organizations involved to improve the level of information available of students and, even if the waiting time is still long, a constant and effective flow of communication can transform a phase perceived as problematic into one that

students see as natural, as reported in some cases in which this period was somewhat easier. In this sense, the role of student services offices and institutions become much more prominent in the internationalization experience; therefore, greater attention should be given to these sectors. Furthermore, requisites that are not crucial should be suppressed, thus simplifying bureaucratic matters.

The academic experience, as seen in the motivation category, was influenced by factors beyond the classroom and university facilities, that although well-evaluated in both universities, had a lower weight than aspects related to adaptation to the new environment. Impressions of the city, integration with the academic community, adaptation to a new country, and the weight of financial aids, including the use of university dormitories are determinant factors for a positive internationalization experience. An unfavorable evaluation of these aspects may result in a bad experience. The language barrier has proven to be a bigger problem at RUDN because the university offers foreign language programs, but the entire service ecosystem is not adapted to this reality. On the other hand, UFMG does not offer such programs. Student already assume that their entire journey will be in the official language of Brazil.

Both universities have implemented initiatives to integrate international students. UFMG designates national students to sponsor international students, while RUDN assigns "leading students" of each nationality to assist their fellow countrymen. Additionally, both universities organize various multicultural events. However, it was reported that only UFMG students utilized these mechanisms widely, resulting in a more effective integration with the academic community.

Government agreements and courses are the central channels to disseminate scholar programs and the brands of both universities. Students pay little attention to marketing channels like websites and social networks. They usually value more what the exchange city offers and the opinion of their peers, who have comparative similar experience. The few students who sought information via digital means were not satisfied, showing that both universities need to evolve the connection between channels dedicated to internationalization information and channels dedicated to the courses and materials offered.

RUDN is a university that has been established with a global focus, whereas UFMG is currently undergoing a phase of development. In the realm of marketing, several well-established strategies could be employed to engage with potential students directly, including social media advertising and relationship marketing initiatives. These actions can not only reduce dependence on agreements but also enhance outcomes, as students will have the opportunity to become familiar with the universities' brand through other channels, as is already being done by private universities.

## 5.1 Contributions and Management Implications

This study was a contribution to broaden the available literature on Service-dominant Logic within the context of higher education, specifically investigating the value co-creation process in student internationalization.

A case study that encompassed two higher education institutions, UFMG and RUDN, from two developing countries located outside the traditional marketing of international higher education exchange allowed us to test the ideological gap proposed by NG and Forbes (2009), while applying the S-D logic axioms to analyze student experience, especially the most recent, and the supporting role of institutions and institutional arrangements to result in value co-creation (VARGO ; LUSCH, 2016).

Internationalization is vital for universities that target the global education market. Nevertheless, the schools' marketing strategies are built on state policies and are limited by national legislation. On the other hand, the students seek short and long-term benefits. For full attainment, more coordination of interactions and better service management are needed to meet expectations.

From the managerial point of view, this master's thesis may contribute to helping managers of educational institutions get acquainted with S-D Logic tenets, which highlights a service design that treats the student as a partner, co-responsible for the performance of an educational service and sole judge of the value resulting from this process, being, therefore, an indispensable actor for a differentiated value proposition, in particular, in the context of this study, the experience of internationalization. From the service-focused mindset, reducing the ideological gap is possible if beyond- classroom aspects and academic and professional expectations are appropriately treated.

Though this study, it was also possible to observe that the prospective experience of internationalization makes students hopeful about having various benefits, such as visiting a new country and experiencing a new culture. This factor is an excellent opportunity for universities to participate and enrich students' overall perceived service value.

As regards to students' beyond- classroom experience, administrative services were a decisive aspect for a good or bad perception of the internationalization experience, since moving to a new country is a challenge in itself.

The study also provides insights into seeing former and current exchange students as agents of dissemination and influence of the university experience, revealing the opportunity for universities to stimulate referral among students to attract new ones.

Finally, the study showed that attraction of international students is closely linked to agreements made by the universities and countries. However, dissemination of information about the city and previous students' experiences when choosing a target university are strategies capable of influencing the one's choice, even when the number of options is limited. To enhance the reach of the HEI brand, implementing a more proactive social media marketing approach, including the utilization of ads, could prove beneficial.

## **5.2 Limitations and Future Research**

In addition to the theoretical and managerial contributions of the results obtained in this study, it is important to highlight their limitations and research context.

Firstly, data collection took place between November 2022 and March 2023, with international students in their last two academic years. This cut tends to reflect a diversified and heterogeneous internationalization experience, impacted to greater or lesser intensity by the COVID-19 pandemic and other macro factors, reflecting state health policies.

Secondly, the interviews with managers were carried out with a minimal sample that may not represent the institutional view fairly. These interviews only helped to complement the understanding of students' testimonies.

Finally, it is essential to note that natural differences between the two universities, in terms of culture and organizational configuration, should be deeply investigated in further studies. Of course, this limitation and the type of research design do not authorize those results to be generalized to other universities and countries.

Future research may use a greater variety of institutions outside regions with high concentration of research, such as North America and Europe, with a more representative sample of students and school managers, including faculty.

A mixed design combining qualitative and quantitative research should produce even more relevant and helpful results, contributing to strengthening the management of exchange of international students and testing hypotheses based on S-D logic.

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## 7. APPENDIX A - Research Instrument

### **Professors and Managers involved in student attraction strategies:**

Institution's perceptions of students' expectations regarding the internationalization experience.

- In general, why do students seek internationalization in academic and personal terms?
- What are students most looking for in terms of internationalization offers? Which programs or modalities are most important?
- What, in terms of structure to live and study, do students expect to find in the city of destination/university?

About the service design offered:

- What are the internationalization modalities offered by the institution/department?
- What are the facilities offered for the admission of international students to the institution? Which ones are considered most important?
- What are the channels and means of communication available for students to be informed about the programs and internationalization process?
- How is the international student welcomed?
- Are there processes to monitor students during internationalization?
- How has the Covid-19 pandemic altered the internationalization process of the Institution?

Communication strategies aimed at potential students

- How does the university position itself internationally? How does it stand out in relation to other universities in the country and neighboring countries?
- What strategies does the university develop to become known internationally?
- What strategies does the internationalization department use to publicize the programs and modalities of admission of foreign students to the institution?
- What do you believe are the main factors that lead a student to choose your institution?

### **Students:**

About their expectations regarding the internationalization experience

- What motivated you to participate in the internationalization program?
- What academic benefits do you hope to gain from the internationalization experience?

- And non-academic benefits?
- Why did you choose this institution?
- How do you believe choosing this institution will benefit you?
- What are the biggest challenges you expected to encounter in order to be able to go international?
- What did you think the process would be like?

About the internationalization experience

- How did you hear about the opportunity?
- How was the application/selection process in the process?
- How was/is the internationalization experience in academic terms?
- How was/is the experience of internationalization in personal terms?
- What did you think of the structure of the foreign university?
- What are your perceptions of the city where the university is located?
- How do you believe the exchange will add to your professional life?
- What are the biggest challenges you've encountered in participating in the internationalization program?
- What would you change in the process or in the institution?

### **Portuguese Version**

#### **Professores e Gestores envolvidos nas estratégias de atração de estudantes:**

As percepções da instituição sobre as expectativas dos estudantes com a experiência de internacionalização.

- Em geral, porque os estudantes buscam uma internacionalização em termos acadêmicos e pessoais?
- O que os estudantes mais buscam em termos de oferta de internacionalização? Quais programas ou modalidades são mais importantes?
- O que em termos de estrutura para viver e estudar os alunos esperam encontrar na cidade/universidade de destino?

Sobre o design de serviço oferecido:

- Quais são as modalidades de internacionalização oferecidas pela instituição/departamento?
- Quais são as facilidades oferecidas para o ingresso do aluno internacional na instituição? E quais delas são consideradas mais importantes?
- Quais os canais e meios de comunicação disponíveis para os estudantes se informarem sobre os programas e processo de internacionalização?
- Como é feita a recepção ao aluno internacionalizado?
- Existem processos de acompanhamento do aluno durante a internacionalização?
- Como a pandemia causada pelo vírus Covid-19 alterou o processo de internacionalização da Instituição.

#### Estratégias de comunicação direcionadas aos alunos em potencial

- Como a Universidade se posiciona internacionalmente? Quais os seus diferenciais em relação a outras universidades do país e dos países vizinhos?
- Quais estratégias a Universidade desenvolve para se tornar conhecida internacionalmente?
- Quais estratégias o departamento de internacionalização utiliza para divulgar os programas e modalidades de ingresso de estudantes estrangeiros na instituição?
- O que você acredita ser os principais fatores para o estudante escolher a sua instituição?

#### **Estudantes:**

##### Sobre as expectativas da experiência de Internacionalização

- O que te motivou a participar do programa de internacionalização?
- Quais benefícios acadêmicos você espera ter com a experiência de internacionalização?
- E benefícios não acadêmicos?
- Por que você escolheu essa instituição?
- Como você acredita que a escolha por essa instituição irá te beneficiar?
- Quais os maiores desafios que esperava encontrar para conseguir a internacionalização?
- Como você acreditava que seria o processo?

##### Sobre a Experiência de Internacionalização

- Como você ficou sabendo da oportunidade?
- Como foi o processo de inscrição/seleção no processo?
- Como foi/está sendo a experiência de internacionalização em termos acadêmicos?
- Como foi/está sendo a experiência de internacionalização em termos pessoais?
- O que você achou da estrutura da universidade estrangeira?
- Quais são suas percepções sobre a cidade da universidade?
- Como você acredita que o intercâmbio irá agregar para a sua vida profissional?
- Quais são os maiores desafios que você encontrou em participação do programa de internacionalização?
- O que você mudaria no processo ou na instituição?