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The co-creation of Russia's image value by Brazilian students

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The co-creation of Russia's image value by Brazilian students

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ATA DA DEFESA DE DISSERTAÇÃO DE MESTRADO EM ADMINISTRAÇÃO da Senhora **ANA CAROLINA SILVA FERREIRA**, REGISTRO Nº 727/2021. No dia 04 de junho de 2021, às 9:00 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 27 de maio de 2021, para julgar o trabalho final intitulado "**THE CO-CREATION OF RUSSIA'S IMAGE VALUE BY BRAZILIAN STUDENTS**", requisito para a obtenção do **Grau de Mestre em Administração**, linha de pesquisa: Estratégia, Marketing e Inovação. 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 à candidata para apresentação de seu trabalho. Seguiu-se a arguição pelos examinadores com a respectiva defesa da candidata. Logo após, a Comissão se reuniu sem a presença da candidata e do público, para julgamento e expedição do seguinte resultado final:

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ABSTRACT

This empirical-theoretical study sought to understand the co-creation of Russia's image value by Brazilian students. The research was based on a case study, using a descriptive qualitative methodology. The method of semi-structured interviews and content analysis technique were used to make it possible. Theoretical contribution from recent studies and theoretical frameworks on topics such as Image and Value Co-creation in the S-D Logic were used for substantiation. It was possible to observe that defining the created image of Russia from the different notions that students have, especially before traveling, was somewhat difficult because of the lack of information or distortion thereof. Furthermore, this study sought to present the difficulties faced by students in Russian universities. Ofttimes, the cultural differences between the two countries make Brazilians find difficulties adapting. However, many choose to stay in the country for the opportunities perceived. This study also observed the various contributions of academic tourism to the personal and professional development of the subjects. Plus, it was possible to see how the co-created image was being built in a very particular way, starting from the trajectories of each subject, their experiences, the imaginary, and their visions for the future. Finally, the answers to the research questions were obtained, resulting in contributions to studies on this topic. The Russian university and the country itself are institutionally responsible for control and coordinator, but these are only two of the players involved in the exchanges. Brazilian students are beneficiaries, but they respond individually and in a subjective manner. As a result, a need to ensure balance in value proposals has been noticed. For future comparison, further research may be conducted with other groups of individuals, including Russians living in Brazil or students of other nationalities studying in Russia.

Keywords: Image; Value co-creation; Academic tourism; Brazil; Russia.

RESUMO

O presente estudo empírico-teórico buscou a compreensão da co-criação de valor de imagem da Rússia por estudantes brasileiros. A pesquisa foi baseada no estudo de caso, a partir da metodologia qualitativa descritiva. Utilizou-se do método das entrevistas semiestruturadas e da técnica da análise de conteúdo para a viabilização. Para a fundamentação, foi utilizado aporte teórico de estudos recentes e marcos teóricos sobre os temas: Imagem e Co-criação de valor na Lógica S-D. Constatou-se uma dificuldade da definição sobre a imagem criada da Rússia, partindo das diferentes concepções dos estudantes, principalmente no momento pré-viagem devido à falta ou a distorção de informações. Além disso foi apresentada as dificuldades enfrentadas pelos estudantes na Rússia. Muitas vezes, as diferenças culturais entre os países fazem com que os brasileiros encontrassem problemas de adaptação. Todavia, percebeu-se que muitos optam por continuar no país devido as oportunidades percebidas. Perceberam-se as diversas contribuições do turismo acadêmico para o desenvolvimento pessoal e profissional dos sujeitos. Além disso, obteve-se a visualização da imagem co-criada sendo construída, de forma particular. Partindo das trajetórias, das experiências de cada um, do imaginário e da visualização de cada um no futuro. Obtiveram-se, então, respostas para os questionamentos da pesquisa, resultando em contribuições a serem acrescentadas nos estudos sobre o tema. Novas pesquisas poderão ser realizadas com outros grupos de indivíduos, inclusive com russos que moram no Brasil ou com estudantes de outras nacionalidades que estudam na Rússia para que sejam realizadas futuras comparações.

Palavras-chave: Imagem; Co-criação de valor; Turismo acadêmico; Brasil; Rússia.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Brazil and Russia are part of the BRICS – a group of emerging countries formed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It is important to highlight that one of the reasons why these countries are part of this group is their interdependence in financial, productive, commercial, and technological affairs. Also, geographically speaking, these are large countries that play an increasingly important role in the international scenario for their large share of agricultural, industrial, and service production capacity (RODRIGUES et al., 2018). Brazil and Russia, more specifically, have many differences in the level of capitalist development and as regards to democratic freedom (BAUMANN et al., 2010).

The cultural differences between the two countries are also evident. Naumov and Pusser (2000), based on a study conducted by Hofstede (1996), considered Russia culturally individualistic. However, they pointed out how the country is undergoing changes over the years due to changes in the political regime, while still keeping the marks of communism, hence the great cultural dynamics of contemporary Russian society. Furthermore, the authors also suggest that the hierarchical model of power is being replaced by new patterns of market behavior being developed in the country, and they bear the mark of Russia's unique cultural dimensions. In conclusion, the findings evidenced that for its long political history, Russia occupies an unusual position among the world's main cultures. On the other hand, according to Santana et al. (2014), Brazil is, culturally speaking, extremely collectivist, with people intertwined under a strongly democratic political regime.

Another fundamental point is the cultural and educational relationship between Russia and Brazil. In 1987, the Brazil and the Russian Federation Governments signed the Agreement on Cultural and Educational Cooperation to establish cultural, sports, and academic exchanges between the two countries, which led to an increase in the number of Brazilian students in Russia, and vice-versa (BRASIL, 2017). This narrowing of relationship ties sought to increase their strategic partnership, as Russian Chancellor Igor Ivanov stated in a speech:

The main tasks include intensifying cooperation in the fields of trade, economy, investment, science and technology; diversifying the trade exchange agenda; carrying out programs and projects in high-tech areas, such as aerospace, nuclear energy, telecommunications, energy and fuel complexes; and elaborating appropriate financial mechanisms. (BRASIL, 2003, p. 318).

The search for cooperation between the two countries and their narrowing of relationship ties are crucial to understand a process of enhancement of the country's image through co-creation of value. Co-creating value means creating it together (VARGO; LUSCH, 2004), which implies an integration of resources and actors capable of operating the resources to the satisfaction of all parties involved. A positive image of a country, in turn, has a positive effect on one's intention to visit it (CHUNG; CHEN, 2018) and a co-creation of value between tourists and the destination. Ergo, one can relate the construction of a country's image – in this case, Russia – to the idea of co-creation of value in the light of the Service-Dominated Logic (S-D Logic) (VARGO; LUSCH, 2004).

S-D Logic proponents have developed a theoretical framework (lexicon) capable of capturing, through the integration of resources and actors, possibilities of co-created value. The focus is on the creation of mutual benefits on the basis of an exchange-based relationship. Thereby, thinking about the relationship between co-created value and the formation of a country's image implies assuming that all resources and actors must be integrated, so that the experiences lived by one actor will match the proposals made by another.

Anholt (2013) notes that image is inherently related to current beliefs on an organization, and emphasizes the importance of structured and qualified marketing for positive organizational image. According to Iasbeck (2007), image is associated with identity, being the result of the production of affinities between the discourse and the impressions of receivers. In modern society, image is built amid discourses of the media, community leaders, politicians, and artists, among others.

The definition of image, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1995), refers to a mental metaphor, i.e., a representation of an idea, thought or conception. Mental image, in turn, is a construction formed by the dynamism of imagination, an impression of the real (IASBECK, 2007). Still, people and organizations have various images, identities and reputations that can change all the time (BROMLEY et al., 2000). As occurs with identity, Machado (2003) reveals that image changes under different circumstances, with transitions caused by different temporalities, represented by past, present and future. Hence, an image is characterized as a mental construction or configuration based on experiences, past visions, sensations and affectations; therefore, it is ephemeral and time, environment and context-dependent.

It has been observed that a country's image can be affected by discourses disseminated worldwide (CHAULAGAIN et al., 2019). Therefore, the same way consumers assimilate

images of a specific product or service, images are also formed of the different countries as providers of economic products and as tourist destinations and attractions as well. Consequently, having a positive image is important for any country interested in internationalizing its economy, especially as a potential exporter of goods and services, including receiving tourists (SOUZA et al., 2014).

Destination Image Theory (ALEXANDER et al., 2005) also suggests that specific interethnic stereotypes derive from perceived patterns of competition, power difference, and cultural status of each group. Therefore, the nation to which an individual belongs impacts the assessment one makes of a destination and the process of value co-creation. It should be emphasized that the value is necessarily determined by the beneficiary, in a process that involves a service ecosystem with different actors and resources.

Therefore, the question that underlies this work is: How do Brazilian students contribute to the co-creation of Russia's image value?

1.2 General Objective

Understanding how Brazilian students collaborate to the co-creation of Russia's image value.

1.3 Specific Objectives

- a) Analyzing the factors of construction of Russia's global image by Brazilian students;
- b) Describing students' motivations to study in Russia;
- c) Presenting how value can be co-created by the actors' value propositions;
- d) Clarifying the main difficulties and opportunities for Brazilian students in academic tourism in Russia;
- e) Describing the expectations of Brazilian students after obtaining a Russian degree.

1.4 Justification

The topic of this study came to me as a result of my participation, as a researcher, in a partnership between the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) and the Peoples' Friendship University (RUDN) in Moscow, Russia, under a BRICS agreement. RUDN signed an agreement with UFMG – with the Center for Graduate Studies and Research in

Administration (CEPEAD), more specifically – as a requirement for obtaining a double Master's Degree. During the five-month study period at RUDN, I had direct contact with the Russian culture, language, typical foods and educational system. This time was paramount to begin to understand what Russians think about Brazil, how they assimilate the country to the tropical climate, the dances, the fresh fruits, and the forests.

Therefore, the Brazil-Russia tourism relationship was one of the questions I asked during the exchange program, since Russia is not a usual tourist destination for Brazilian students, given the small number of Brazilians in Russian universities, whether in an exchange program or enrolled in a full undergraduate degree, and the few Brazilians who choose to travel to the country. In addition, the agreement through which I participated was the first between UFMG and RUDN. Therefore, understanding the experience of Brazilian students at the Russian university is essential to evaluate perceptions and promote new academic agreements between the two institutions. By evaluating this issue, one can also think of expanding student tourism relations between the countries.

The image of a country is an important factor for a tourist destination, especially for countries where tourism is one of the main economic activities (JOVICIC, 2019). In this context, understanding the image of a destination is important to attract new residents, investors, foreign buyers, tourists, businessmen and entrepreneurs from different sectors, and students. Plus, studying tourism, which is a key service sector and one of the most important industries for local development, is of utmost importance. Still, tourism is reflected in several other sectors of the economy, such as food, transportation and clothing (ITAUSSU, 2004).

It is important to mention how the tourism relationship between countries impacts their culture, as it results in exchanges between tourists from different parts of the world, with different views, each bringing their own history and customs (CHAGAS, 2009). Russia, in particular, has a huge history and cultural framework, which Brazilian students can benefit from by having contact with the country.

From a historical point of view, in an international scenario, Echter and Ritchie (1991) point out that constructed image is the number one reason why someone chooses a given destination. However, Itaussu (2004) states that despite the increasing number of researches on the subject over the years, the gaps that need to be filled in order to improve knowledge and broaden the debate on this matter continue to exist. In this sense, Chaulagain et al. (2019) recently stated that notwithstanding the large number of articles dedicated to country image, its application to tourism research is still limited, specially to understand the impact on destination image, familiarity, and intention to visit. Still, Woo (2018) exposes how the existing

literature from over six decades of country image studies still contains several research gaps.

Some important studies on country image formation, found in a search made in October 2020 in the Web of Science, are listed in the following table.

Table 1 - Studies on country image

Andager and Drzewiecka (2002)	This is a study on United States and South Africa image formation. The results showed that destinations that have more characteristics in common with the country of origin are more likely to be visited.
Kastenholz (2004)	This is a study with potential tourists to Portugal. The author uses subjects who have already been to the country to understand how likely they are to revisit and recommend the country.
O'leary and Deegan (2005)	The authors measured the satisfaction of French tourists when visiting Ireland and how the image of the destination was reshaped after such visit.
Lin et al. (2009)	The authors used as sample students who had never visited China. Their intention was to measure respondents' global affective and cognitive image from what they searched about the country in search and communication channels.
Pan and Li (2010)	The study aims to understand how North Americans construct the image of China, by searching for information online, in order to understand how likely, they would be to visit the country.
Woo (2018)	The study aims to understand the relationships between South Korea, China, and India, and to provide greater interrelationship between the images. The author studies how the image of the countries is formed based on products, such as electronics and fashion items.
Chaulagain et al. (2019)	The authors examined the United States-Cuba relationship as regards to tourism. In order to do this, they developed and tested a theoretical model that examines the image of Cuba – a country that has ongoing political conflicts with the USA – as a tourist destination, and North Americans' intention to visit Cuba.
Yilmaz e Yilmaz (2020)	This is a review of studies published between 1999 and 2019 on tourist destination images. It is divided into two strands: pre-travel image formation and post-travel image formation separately.

Source: Prepared by the author.

No studies were found on the perspective of Brazilians visiting Russia during this search for academic works, reinforcing the contribution of this work to fill the knowledge gaps on this topic. Therefore, all the studies differ from the proposition of this work. In this sense, it reinforces the need to understand how the success, or failure, of the tourism industry of a given country depends heavily on the image that potential travelers have of such country and the effective management of these images.

For this reason, it is paramount that investigating the image of a country like Russia from the perspective of Brazilians be placed very high in the order of priorities in order to measure and obtain important results for future promotion of tourism between these two countries and expansion of relations, including in the education area. Therefore, through this study, it will be possible to define the perception of Brazilians in relation to Russia and, consequently, draw strategies for co-creation of value. With a set of marketing actions, it is easier to define viable solutions to improve the quality of experience and the desire to visit a given tourist destination.

Furthermore, from a managerial point of view, a greater perception of Russia by Brazilians may also foster the exchange of students between these countries, thus increasing the exchange of experiences that influence the improvement of the country's image. It is also important that Brazilian agencies that attract and attend to students who wish to study in Russia become aware of such perception, the difficulties and the reasons that made such students choose Russia, in order to attract more students

1.5 Research framework

This work is divided into five parts: The first, the introduction, outlines the context and aspects of the topic, in addition to general and specific objectives. The second part focuses on the theoretical reference of this project, which involves two theoretical axes and the important concepts and implications that underlie this study: the construction of the image of a tourist destination and the co-creation of value based on the dominant logic of service. The third part, in turn, introduces methodological paths, pointing out possible methods and techniques to be used in this research. The fourth provides an analysis of data with theoretical interference in the results obtained. And, finally, the fifth and last part is reserved for the final considerations on this research.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The topics that guide the construction of this study were highlighted to discuss the central theme. Therefore, the first part of this study presents the general aspects and concepts of image, as well as the image of a tourist destination and the construction thereof. The second part, in turn, defines the dominant service logic as a new marketing paradigm, mainly supported by the contributions of Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2014, 2017, 2018).

2.1 The Image

The concept of image was created in ancient Greece, with the contribution of philosophers Plato and Aristotle, who were instrumental in finding the important arguments on this subject. In Plato's view, image is a creation formed by the individual. In contrast, Aristotle argues that in order form an image, one must understand the external reality.

This has been a controversial concept until day. One of the main reasons is the dimension of the universe for which the word is used. With research being conducted on this topic, it is possible to have a better understanding of these universes and of image formation (CHAGAS, 2009). Furthermore, studies on this topic are conducted in various areas of knowledge, as Philosophy, Semiotics, Theology, Communication, Economics and Marketing (ITAUSSU, 2004), in addition to research from the Psychology and Geography perspectives (ECTHNER; RITCHIE, 1991).

Image itself is crucial in influencing people's choices of products, services and destinations. From a more practical perspective, location marketing and branding may contribute to image formation; therefore, a deeper understanding of country and destination images could help developing more effective approaches to destination positioning and branding (ZHANG et al., 2016).

Countless studies have been conducted on image; however, because this is such a broad concept, many conceptions do not address the subject with due theoretical importance. For instance, marketing researchers have currently suggested that there is no longer room for a new country image approach. However, country image is now subdivided into multi-level image variables that share complex relationships with each other. Therefore, we must ask ourselves if country image remains a crucial factor when the brand itself has a strong influence, or modern industries have evolved into a highly brand-dominated environment, and, consequently, consumer myths and trust on information about the country of origin could be weaker than they were in the past (WOO, 2019).

For this work, we start from the concept of image as an ensemble of multiple, uncontrollable and influential constructions and reconstructions over time (RINDELL; STRANDVIK, 2009). Hence, the concept of image, from this point of view, is formulated based on perception and imagination from the meaning given by the subject (CHAGAS, 2009). Furthermore, "images have been defined by psychologists as a different way of processing and storing multisensory information in working memory" (ECTHNER; RITCHIE, 1991 p. 39). Ergo, image modifications occur according to transformations of the subjects. In this sense, image is the whole of a reflection of reality and a projection the subject makes of it (WOO, 2019).

2.2 Image from the Marketing perspective

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA, 2013), marketing is an activity, a set of processes that involve creation, communication and delivery of value to consumers, as well as management of the relationship with them, in a way that benefits the organization. Still, marketing occurs in a social context; therefore, it requires that consumers be considered in groups according to social class, relationships, lifestyle and culture. (HUNT, 2002).

One of the crucial points in Marketing studies is brand value. The term "brand equity" emerged in the 1980s, coined by American advertising professionals whose goal was to convince executives of the importance of long-term advertising for customers to associate value to a brand. Backer (2010, apud Aaker, 1996, p. 7) defines brand equity as "assets and liabilities linked to a brand name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a company and/or its customers".

Thus, the image associated to Marketing could be considered an image of value, mainly researched from the perspective of consumer behavior analysis (MACHADO, 2005). In this case, the social actors (consumers) contribute to the dissemination and creation of a positive image. The image of value in Marketing is closely related to analysis, planning, verification and implementation of activities seeking to build long-lasting and favorable exchange relationships (LEITE; OLIVEIRA, 2020).

In this sense, consumption by this individual is analyzed based on perceptions, that, in turn, determine the purchase decision process (MACHADO, 2005). In Kienholz's (2004) findings the image inferred by the term in Marketing is broad as regards to the objects of analysis, which can be found in product image, brand image, organizational image, consumer

image and country image (LEITE; OLIVEIRA, 2020).

The image of a given place has complex concepts because of its particularities. It is studied by several authors within the Tourism Marketing perspective under the name of Tourism Destination Image (TDI) (ECTHNER; RITCHIE, 1991). TDI is the result of a broad process, such as, for instance, the formation of a national identity, relations the country has with other countries, history, related news. In other words, the whole social, economic, cultural and political set. Moreover, it is formed based on a repetition of ideas and discourses of different interlocutors (BIGNAMI, 2002). Contemporary tourism has become intensely competitive and marketing professionals must find and apply approaches and techniques that effectively communicate the unique identities of their destinations. Destination marketers need to discover methods to convey positive images in order to increase and motivate visits by tourists (ZHANG, 2016).

It is quite possible that tourists' perceptions of a specific destination involve both the content and the context in which the information is found. Therefore, a more relevant and valid understanding of destination image is needed to zoom in on specific destination contexts. The three cognitive components of image formation are the functional, normative and aesthetic, and emotional dimensions. The four components of country image, in this case, lead to connotations of intended behavior and, more specifically, a person's intention to travel to a country (CHAULAGAIN et al., 2019).

Nowadays, information has become more accessible; therefore, Marketing is essential to consolidate the notoriety of countries, regions and cities through digital media, social media and search engines. The consequent result is attracting potential tourists, who are fundamental to drive the economy and for the management of cities (LAGES et al., 2018).

2.3 Tourist destination image

Destination Image is one of the most popular topics in tourism research and is defined in various ways. In one of the most current definitions, the concept of destination image is presented as a tourist's overall impression of a destination, where the combined knowledge, feelings, and affective impressions of tourists and visitors shape the image of a tourist destination. As with country image, destination image is also multidimensional in nature (ZHANG et al., 2014). Among the various dimensions, studies have examined the relationship between destination image and preference and intention to visit (PRAYAG, 2009), while others have focused on the impact of previous travel experience on destination image (KIM;

MALEK; KIM; KIM, 2017) and on changing destination image (FOROUDI et al., 2018).

While many aspects of country image and destination image share similarities, it is generally accepted that destination image is largely centered on attribute-based evaluation measures, such as functional (e.g., weather), psychological (e.g., welcoming people), and destination characteristics that are interconnected to create an overall impression (STEPCHENKOVA & SHICHKOVA, 2017). Many destination-level attributes and information sources contribute to destination image, resulting in a dynamic construct (HAHM et al., 2018). According to several researchers, destination image consists of three components: cognitive, affective, and conative, in addition to a fourth component called overall image (CHUNG; CHEN, 2018).

Tourism consumption is abstract, because it is presented through descriptions, narrations, media and photographs. Still, these factors induce consumers to buy and travel to a particular destination based on the image formed (BIGNAMI, 2002). Swarbroke and Horner (2002, p. 24) define tourism as "a short-term movement of people to places some distance from their normal place of residence to indulge in pleasurable activities".

Dias and Cassar (2005, p. 56), in turn, define tourists as "those who stay overnight in a place other than their place of residence, occupying a collective or private accommodation in the place visited for more than 24 hours". Thereby, tourists foresee experiences they intend to have in the moments prior to the trip, based on feelings the destination evokes in their memory, either by comments from friends, family, reading or advertising. Therefore, decision is determined by the image they value and hope to find. Consequently, choosing a destination will largely depend on favorable images the consumer has of that place (ECHTNER; RITCHIE, 1991).

Otherwise, tourism consumption is not performed (BIGNAMI, 2002; LEISEN, 2001). In order to meet consumer expectations and understand tourism consumption behavior, there has been more and more research in this area and models being developed, including the study of image formation. These models go through three stages, with different levels of descriptions and designations for each: (1) pre-purchase, (2) purchase and (3) post-purchase (SWARBROOKE; HORNER, 2002).

In the pre-travel moment, affective elements are the most influential on potential tourists. Profile, familiarity with the place, level of motivation and attraction, perception of values, cultural values and beliefs are other points to be analyzed, as they directly influence the choices and formation of the image of a particular tourist destination (YILMAZ; YILMAZ, 2020). In this sense, image has great relevance for a sustainable development of

tourism. For a place to stand out in the international scenario, it must develop an attractive image for the consumer market. It has become clear that country image extends to marketing and consumer behavior (CHAULAGAIN et al., 2019). Therefore, scholars have created methodologies to understand image formation (ECTHNER; RITCHIE, 1991), (CHAULAGAIN et al., 2019).

Country image, for instance, was first studied by Schooler (1965), who defined it determinant to foster tourism, which, in turn, results in higher income, thus contributing to a country's economy (LOPES and GIRALDINI, 2014). Chagas (2009) demonstrates that a location or tourist destination that adds more value to consumers tends to have greater competitive advantage, standing out from the crowd. Moreover, there will always be people who are interested in visiting new places and having new experiences capable of satisfying their desires and needs (ALMEIDA et al., 2012).

Thus, the image of a tourist destination is considered by many authors as the perception or impressions of a particular place (ECTHNER; RITCHIE, 1991). In fact, one of the fundamental reasons for choosing a tourist destination is the image that that social actor has built of it. Similarly, Añaña et al. (2018) reveal this importance and its association with effects on consumer behavior before, during and after the trip.

Therefore, the image formation process has two fundamental stages. The first is the creation of an organic image, assimilated with information on economy, politics, weather, media culture in general, such as news articles, magazines, books, newspapers or the point of view of other individuals, as friends and family. The second, on the other hand, is the mental construction promoted by travel agencies, tourism-focused social networks, travel guides, photographs of tourist sites or brochures (ECTHNER; RITCHIE, 1991).

In this regard, Chagas (2009) divides this formation process into stimulants and personal factors. External information, such as advertising and promotion, are stimulants; therefore, travel agencies are essential influencing agents when it comes to the image formed of a destination. Gândara (2008) explains that accumulation of quality information is stimulating, as it enables tourists to form an image more compatible with reality.

Personal factors, on the other hand, involve emotions, subjectivity, motivation process, and the tourist profile, which includes ethnicity, marital status, socioeconomic status, education and cultural values. In this sense, the way people live show different social groups with visible indicators of consumption patterns (CHAGAS, 2009).

It is important to divide these groups by interest levels, with emphasis on identifying specific lifestyles. Therefore, a detailed mapping of consumption activities, media habits,

attitudes and opinions are essential to have a more detailed view of the potential consumer within the company's marketing perspective. Certainly, consumer culture is also another strategic element when designing appropriate marketing strategies (HUNT, 2002).

2.3.1 Destination image attributes

A set of holistic and non-holistic attributes are required to form the image of a tourist destination. Each of these components of the destination image contains functional and psychological aspects. The main functional components that should be analyzed are attractions offered, infrastructure, tourist facilities, information and price. Psychological aspects, in turn, can be separated into cognitive and affective image, and come from a subject's emotions, imagination and desires (ECTHNER; RITCHIE, 1991), (ALMEIDA, 2012).

This concept is also supported by the studies conducted by Stepchenkova and Shichkova (2017). According to the authors, although many aspects of country and destination image share similarities, destination image mainly focuses on evaluation based on attributes such as functional (e.g., weather) and psychological (e.g., how welcoming the nationals of that country are). Together, these characteristics create an overall impression of the destination.

2.3.2 Destination image formation process

The same destination may have various different images and possibilities of transformation based on new situations (CHAGAS, 2009). The table below represents this perspective:

Table 2 - Possible image-related situations

Type of image	Characteristics
Overly Attractive	Those few destinations that are excessively attractive. They require greater control and responsibility when promoted, as they may have problems supporting so many people interested in visiting.
Positive/attractive	An image that favors the destination. It strongly encourages tourists to visit. There is no need to change the image, only to spread the word to more potential markets.

Contradictory	It gives room to different image analysis perspectives.
Poor / weak	Low attractive potential, either due to lack of advertising or lack of natural/artificial resources for tourism.
Neutral	It does not provoke any feelings of attraction or repulsion in the tourism consumer.
Negative	One or more unfavorable aspects are more pronounced among the target audience than possible favorable aspects.
Mixed	A mix of attractive and repulsive components. It arouses interest and causes feelings of uncertainty or reservation regarding one or more aspects at the same time.
Stereotyped	A stereotyped image occurs when some aspect of the destination has taken such large proportion to the point of becoming an “icon” of representation.
Distorted / confused	It presents a certain overvaluation of some unfavorable aspect(s), not necessarily expressing the truth.

Source: Chagas (2009).

The image built is capable of making the individual choose or not choose a given tourist destination. In this sense, tourism marketing professionals have the role of finding strategies to have tourists notice and conceive a certain place through an attractive or positive image (CHAGAS, 2009). On the other hand, a negative image will largely reduce the attractiveness and promotion of a place.

Another important point is the fact that country image is built by a multifaceted concept (PERLIM et al., 2017) focused on three dimensions: political, economic, and technological. It is important to observe population aspects, due to similarities between countries and communication channels (AYROSA, 1998). Furthermore, image definitions depend on the products manufactured by a given country, which can generate a positive or negative image from consumers' perspective.

Therefore, the following propositions are suggested: 1) Country image has a positive effect on destination image, 2) Country image has a positive effect on intention to visit, and 3) Familiarity has an effect on the construction of destination image value and intention to visit.

A positive image can economically contribute to the organization of companies and

international exchanges, as well as to a good economic relationship between different countries (WOO, 2018). The level of development is an important factor for image construction, Almeida and Drouvot (2009) state that countries like the United States, Japan and Germany stand out for having a positive image. On the other hand, countries like Mexico, Thailand, and Taiwan have a negative image when economy is concerned. However, this may vary if tourist attractions are taken into account.

The image of a destination or country can be distorted. In this case, a distance between the image formed and the reality is created. This is quite usual, as an image created by a subject or a group of individuals has no commitment to reality. It can also be related to the evaluation of a specific product or brand of the country, which the consumer uses to make a parallel with the construction of the total image of the country (PERLIM et al., 2017). It can also be a poor image, since little information about a given destination results in ignorance and invisibility. This is most certainly caused by the absence of experiences, beliefs or references from an external population (O'SHAUGHNESSY; O'SHAUGHNESSY, 2000). Stereotypes can also harm a destination, that is only recognized by certain characteristics and only attracts people interested in them. With this in mind, it is important to pay attention to the information disseminated, which can distort the image of a country and the attractions of a destination, and may, consequently, underestimate or devalue each location (ALEXANDER et al., 2005).

Another negative factor is that the image of a country can be long-lasting and difficult to change, as people usually resist to adjusting cognitive structures or previous knowledge when confronted with new facts, particularly when they have little involvement and fail make an effort to correct misconstrued views, thus sticking to beliefs that confirm their expectations and ignoring what challenges them, in a process referred to as confirmation bias (ALEXANDER et al., 2005).

Generally speaking, familiarity is the state of being familiar with something. Degrees of familiarity and contact with the familiar reduce the risks to which consumers are exposed during consumption (CHAULAGAIN, 2019). Thus, the more familiar a consumer is with a product or service, the more positive their evaluation will be. Beliefs are directly and positively altered by the level of familiarity (ORBAIZ; PAPADOPOULOS, 2003). Familiarity with a destination can be further seen as a multifaceted construct formed by the combination of informational, experiential, and self-described familiarity (PRENTICE, 2004). However, a one-dimensional construct can be applied to the notion of familiarity, mainly focusing on the processing of information, thus resulting in the amount of knowledge acquired by the consumer (FULLERTON et al., 2017).

The effect of familiarity with a country directly influences the destination image formation process. Individuals who are more familiar with the destination have the ability to infer functional images that consist of tourist attractions and facilities, and identify important attributes based on their knowledge. Familiarity refers to the level of exposure to concepts related to a destination, including a series of secondary information sources (i.e., social communication media, mass media, news, travel guides, friends and family, word of mouth, etc.), each with the ability to influence cognitive evaluations and perceptions that affect the construction of destination image. As a result, greater familiarity is directly related with one's intention to visit a given destination (BALOGLU, 2001), (CHAULAGAIN et al., 2019).

The different quantity and types of information sources act to form an image in the individual's mind. This image, in turn, is one of the factors that help forming the image of a destination. People with different motivational patterns, such as leisure or social interaction, may have different cognitive and affective images of a certain destination (YILMAZ; YILMAZ, 2020). Induced information sources have a positive influence on cognitive image, but not on the affective and unique images of destinations (SANTANA & GOSLING, 2018), which act as cognitive precedents of destination image (KIM; KERSTETTER, 2016). Furthermore, movies and celebrities are autonomous and influential sources of formation of affective destination image and a dimension of cognitive image (LEE et al., 2015).

It is important to emphasize that governments have the role of facilitating the distribution of resources, information, and deciding on the measures to be adopted regarding tourism. Furthermore, the private sector is one of those responsible for familiarizing the subject with the destination, based on the construction of a strong and attractive image through marketing services, such as advertising (BALOGLU, 2001). In this sense, strategies as slogans, phrases, opinions and visual symbols are used to convey an image of a destination (BIGMANINI, 2002). Communication channels, including direct sale of trips by travel agencies, promotion of concerts, sports events, the exhibition of soap operas, movies, series, social networks and music, are also used (KIM; KERSTETTER, 2016). Finally, Marketing specialists are responsible for creating strategies to attract foreign tourists (JENKINS, 1999).

Because of these factors, having up-to-date researches capable of identifying the image of a country abroad is of paramount importance, since a well-structured tourism marketing plan can promote national development and, if well oriented, will attract tourists who wish to visit, study or live in that country. Hence the importance of having a government body responsible for the tourism industry that is aware of the destination image conveyed to consumers (SILVA-LACERDA et al., 2018).

2.4 Co-creation of value in Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic)

S-D Logic is a new theoretical lens developed with the collaboration of authors Vargo and Lusch (2004). The idea is to explain value through the exchanges of competencies and skills. It was developed as an alternative to traditional logic (POHLMANN; VALTTERI, 2017). Also, this logic discusses exchange relations through the acquisition of products, under an economic focus, in which value is incorporated based on product supply (VARGO; LUSCH, 2008). This concept, developed by Stephen Vargo and Robert Lusch in 2004, is based on the notion that "all economies are service economies" and "service is the fundamental basis of exchange".

Undoubtedly, this line of thinking helps us better understand the exchange of relationships between customers and suppliers, and can be used in all social and market situations. According to Vargo and Lusch (2004), the key is to understand that from this perspective, customers do not buy products, but experiences that aim to make life easier or satisfy desires. Furthermore, the authors point out that S-D Logic has gone through theoretical twists and turns, its foundational premises were changed, and it was consolidated into a smaller set of axioms, as it continues to move towards becoming a general theory of marketing.

Vargo and Lusch (2004) discuss logic as a continuous form of co-creation of value in an integration of resources and exchange of services, in which all social actors involved, such as producers, companies, individual customers and families, are active participants in the construction process. According to the authors, to advance this perspective need for further theoretical development in academic circles, with opening for future research in the Marketing area.

Value co-creation, in S-D Logic includes the actions of service providers and customer. Consequently, the service provider and the customer are always considered co-creators of value (GRONROOS and VOIMA, 2013). The value created, for these authors, should be conceptualized as something that differs from the perception of each customer or provider. Value, based on this approach, is a set of integrated resources in which all economic actors of the service provision are involved and the value co-created with the customer is delimited in a unique manner, being delivered via "things" or "services" (VURAL, 2017). Exchange value, when introduced into a product, posits tangible goods as manufacturing outcomes (VARGO; LUSCH, 2004).

Moreover, all the actors of a system can collaboratively participate in the construction of value. Within marketing, S-D Logic can be spread through various vectors, such as *branding*, customer relationship, and social marketing, among others. The creation of resources and the application through reciprocal exchange, differential access and integration are the key to value co-creation (VARGO; LUSCH, 2017).

The service-dominant logic view is based on how activities performed by people, based on knowledge and skills, bring benefits to people, with focus on the co-creation of value. Furthermore, this co-creation is based on two interconnected orientations, (1) the service ecosystem, which reveals how interactions are not isolated, but part of a network of actors, and (2) the institutional theory, which refers to a co-creation of value facilitated by mechanisms that allow the integration of resources for the exchange of service activities for services (VARGO; LUSCH, 2004). It is important to observe that this new marketing paradigm stands out in major research fields around the world (VURAL, 2017). In a first moment, Vargo and Lusch (2004) used eight premises to substantiate the S-D Logic. These premises were later extended to eleven (RITTMEYER, 2016). Five of the foundational premises presents in their latest research are axioms and underpin the S-D logic. According to these authors, such axioms are fundamental to understanding how all social actors are placed in an exchange process. Table 3 highlights the axioms and the foundational premises related to each of them that were developed by the authors.

Table 3 - Axioms and Foundational Premises of the Service-Dominant Logic

Axiom 1: Service is the fundamental basis of exchange
Premise 1
Premise 2: Indirect exchanges masks the fundamental basis of the exchange.
Premise 3: Goods are a distribution mechanism for service provision.
Premise 4: Operating resources are the fundamental source of strategic benefit.
Premise 5: All economies are service economies.
Axiom 2: Value is co-created by all authors including always the Beneficiary
Premise 6
Premise 7: Actors cannot deliver value, but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.
Premise 8: A service-centered view is inherently beneficiary oriented and relational.
Axiom 3: All social and economic actors are resource integrators.
Premise 9

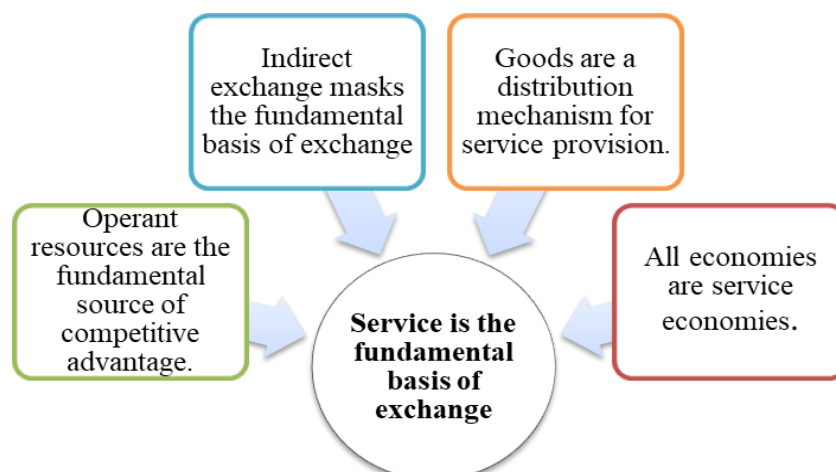
<p>Axiom 4: Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary</p> <p>Premise 10</p>
<p>Axiom 5: Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements</p> <p>Premise 11</p>

Source: Adapted from Vargo and Lusch (2014, p. 54).

Axiom 1 posits service as the common denominator of exchange and remains related to premises two, three, four, and five, as highlighted in Table 1. Such axiom encompasses indirect exchanges that mask the service, since they involve individuals and apply their skills for the ultimate benefit of another social actor (Premise 2); goods are vehicles for service provision that is under-coordinated (Premise 3); operating resources are sources of strategic benefits, in which operant resources must be adopted before the benefit is realized (Premise 4); all economies are service economies, with service provision being the basis of all economic aspects (Premise 5) (BAKER; SAGE, 2010).

Service then becomes the center of attention in a buying process in which providers keep focus on interaction; therefore, it always goes through what is exchanged. This growth is associated mainly with two factors: (1) adherence to the dominant paradigm centered on economics, business (2) outsourcing, the result of continuous improvement in specialization and market access (VARGO; LUSCH, 2018).

Figure 1 - Axiom 1 and its foundational premises



Source: Prepared by the author.

As regards to the second axiom, which is in premise six and states that value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary, one is able to observe that its relationship with premises seven and eight that value is always co-created. The customer, in turn, is always an active participant in the value creation process. Also, premise seven reveals how actors cannot deliver value, but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.

In this sense, the service provider cannot add value, but can offer value propositions (VARGO; LUSCH, 2014). Premise eight exposes that a service-centered view is inherently relational and beneficiary-oriented from a mutual application of operant resources. In this sense, each actor participating in the exchange forms different conceptions for the desired and received value. Therefore, this is done individually (VARGO and LUSCH, 2004).

Figure 2 - Axiom 2 and its foundational premises



Source: Prepared by the author.

Axiom three delimits premise nine. In this case, Vargo and Lusch (2014) state that organizations are integrated, for instance, through a supplier network. In this context, different economic and social entities that combine different resources are formed. Axiom four (Premise 10) lays down implications for the concepts of value in use and value in context. This mainly a reflection of the way the service is used by the customer. Vargo's (2018) findings discuss if value is co-created not only by the organization and/or the beneficiary, but by other actors, since value depends on use and context. Therefore, value cannot be determined by the service provider.

The last axiom, supported by the conceptions of Vargo and Lusch (2016), discusses

institutions; yet, as highlighted by Veiga and Urdan (2017), there is a possibility of institutional perspective for application of S-D Logic. To this end, it is important to clarify that the role of institutions is fundamental for value creation according to the ecosystem's perspective.

2.4.1 Co-creation of value for academic tourism

For this research, it is important to understand that co-creation in tourism is of utmost importance. This is a way to recognize the active role of tourists in creating their own experiences based on the interaction process between the subject and the tourist destination. In this sense, service providers must find marketing-centered solutions to create customer-focused value, as discussed by Blazquez-Resino (2015). Therefore, tourists should be seen as co-creators of value. Thus, their evaluations and suggestions should be systematically sought and analyzed (SILVA-LARCEDA et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is important to develop key variables to obtain a relationship between the academic tourism industry and co-creation issues.

It is also important to highlight the conceptions of Dollinger and Coates (2018) on co-creation of value within the educational perspective, in which the objective is showing how the active role of students in collaboration with educators allows an interaction from feedback, opinions, with institutional resources that result in an exchange of mutual value and an improvement in the beneficiary's experience of the service, in this case that of the student enrolled in a higher education course. The authors point out that a close relationship between teachers and students increases the quality of learning, educational history, and the ability to personalize each particular experience.

In view of competition and the scarcity of good jobs, undergraduate students are increasingly looking for universities that allow their resources to be integrated with organizational resources to facilitate activities and integration that can lead to best practices for their professional future and innovations, thus adding value to their degrees. These resources include students' intellectual abilities, study habits and methods, sense of responsibility and personality and, with them, one is able to shape the service based on students' profile. Thus, both the service provider and the receiver no longer play the traditional roles that allows for greater involvement of the consumer who can complain, share opinions and suggest ideas (DOLLINGER; COATES, 2018).

3 METHODOLOGY

This section will discuss the justifications for the methods chosen to conduct the study. The type of research is defined and the techniques of data collection and analysis are mentioned.

3.1 Research definition and characterization

This descriptive qualitative research was used to search for the meaning and interpretation of a phenomenon, based on meanings that people attribute to it. There is greater proximity to the object of investigation, for example, in case studies that make an in-depth analysis of the individuals studied (CHIZZOTI, 2006). According to Minayo (2001, p. 22-23), qualitative research "works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, processes and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables". As the author comments, every individual has a conception of the world, even if generic. They postulate a set of meanings from an individual's actions based on legitimations. From these legitimations it is possible to explain and validate each subject's attributions of meanings (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 1985).

The method chosen was the case study which is "the in-depth and exhaustive study of one or a few objects in order to allow for a broad and detailed understanding thereof" Gil (1991, p. 58). For Yin (2001), the case study is represented by an empirical investigation. It is a comprehensive method in which there is logic of planning, data collection, and data analysis.

According to Triviños (1987), in a descriptive study one can fairly accurately describe facts of a certain reality. Gil (2008), on the other hand, shows that descriptive research is effective in describing certain subjects or phenomena, while concerned with beliefs, opinions, and starting from the observed reality.

In this sense, this study takes into consideration the holistic nature of the image, as presented by Echtner and Ritchie (1991). Moreover, with qualitative research one can understand the perceptions of individuals based on the subjectivity of being (Cresweel, 2006). Therefore, given the main objective of this research, the qualitative approach will be valuable in interpreting the phenomenon, as it offers a wide spectrum of investigative possibilities, to

describe meanings in the lives of those who are researched, as pointed out by Tuzzo and Braga, (2016). These same authors understand qualitative approach as an unstructured proposal, which leads the researcher to use creativity and imagination to explore new approaches and investigative possibilities in order to describe the dynamics of the subject, the object and the phenomenon.

The intention of a qualitative study, in this research, is to know what respondents think and feel when it comes to their experience in Russia and the country's image formation, in addition to understanding how value is co-created based on their perspectives under the service-dominant logic.

In summary, we seek to conduct the methodology, as defined by Godoy (1995), subdivided into six fundamental points: (1) credibility, in the sense of internal validity; (2) it is transferable, not in the sense of generalization, but in the sense of a describing the phenomenon in such a way as to allow other researchers to successfully replicate it in other contexts; (3) trust, in relation to the processes chosen by the author; (4) reliability of results, which consists of the coherence of research results and data obtained; (5) careful explanation of the methodology; and, finally, (6) the relevance of the research question.

3.1.1 Research participants

The individuals who were participated in this study are Brazilian students in Russia. Participants were selected based on their profile. They were contacted on social networks, such as Facebook groups, Instagram profiles and through the researcher's own contacts. The snowball technique was used for referrals made by research participants themselves.

All participants have lived in Russia for at least one year, so they share a common reality. However, dissimilar experiences and attributed meanings differentiate them. Twelve of the respondents are female; eight are male. The average age is 24. The respondents were numbered from one to twenty (R1 to R20), thus ensuring anonymity. Further information about the participants is provided in the following table.

Table 4 - Profile of research participants

Respondents	City	How long have they lived in Russia?	Course
R1	Saint Petersburg	3 years	Master in Business Relations
R2	Olianovisk	1.5 years	Russian Education
R3	Kursk	6 years	Medicine
R4	Vladivostok	3 years	Medicine
R5	Vladivostok	3 years	International Relations
R6	Moscow	8 years	International Relations
R7	Samara	2 years	Mechanical Engineering
R8	Samara	4 years	Engineering and Aeronautics
R9	Moscow	4 years	PhD in Russian Education
R10	Moscow	5 years	Master in Russian Education
R11	Kursk	1 year	Medicine
R12	Kursk	2 years	Medicine
R13	Kursk	4 years	Medicine
R14	Moscow	1 year	Medicine

R15	Saint Petersburg	5 years	Master in Politics
R16	Kursk	1.5 years	Medicine
R17	Kaliningrad	5 years	Medicine
R18	Kursk	2.5 years	International Relations
R19	Kaliningrad	4 years	Medicine
R20	Chelyabinsk	1 year	Master of Design

Source: Prepared by the author (2021).

3.1.2 Data collection instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, i.e., when questions are pre-determined, but conducted spontaneously, and the interviewer intervenes seeking greater interaction and informality while trying to obtain the answers to the questions (GIL, 2008). Respondents were initially contact, via telephone or e-mail, in order to schedule an interview for the best possible moment, in order to be efficient as possible.

The interviews were scheduled for the period from January 10th, 2021 through March 02, 2021. Each interview lasted 30 minutes in average. All of them were recorded with participants' consent. They were later transcribed in full. Digital applications, such as Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp or Google Meet were used due to the distance between the researcher and the respondents. All participants were given the option to choose their preferred platform. All interviews were conducted via videoconference on these applications in order to try to better understand students' perceptions through discourse observation.

3.1.3 Data Analysis

The collected material was examined based on Bardin's (1977) qualitative content analysis that provides for a technique to analyze communications from messages transmitted by the sender. To this end, the analysis was divided into three stages: 1) pre-analysis, 2) exploration of material, and 3) treatment of results. First, the collected data was submitted to a

quick reading, followed by selection and exploration. Then, each section of the interview is progressively grouped, comparing them with the objectives of the study to be achieved. The initial categories are then refined, resulting in intermediate and terminal categories. Finally, the data from the last category achieved is inferred based on implicit and explicit interpretations, adopting a sequence of steps demonstrated by Bardin (1977) in his studies.

For the purposes of this research, Content Analysis seems to be an appropriate method for the treatment of data found in the investigation. This is justified by the fact that the selected technique ensures a logical structure of analysis in which it is possible to access the subjective realities of participants. Content analysis is defined as a "set of techniques for communication analysis" (quantitative or not) that bets on the rigor of the method as a way of not getting lost in the heterogeneity of the object, and aims to obtain, through systematic and objective procedures of description of the content of messages, indicators and knowledge relating to the conditions of variables inferred in the message (BARDIN, 1977, p. 31).

Table 5 - Strategies for qualitative data analysis

Script preparation	Based on the theoretical framework, understanding major issues regarding co-creation of value in S-D Logic and formation of destination image addressed by the authors.
Pilot interview	Beginning to understand a subject's reaction to the research.
Contacting the selected participants	Keeping contact with Brazilian students in Russia via social networks.
Conducting the interviews	Getting acquainted with the respondents and their perceptions of the experience of living in Russia.

Transcription of interviews	Grouping of similar passages in respondents' interviews.
Data refinement - selection and exploration	Comparing them with the objectives to be achieved in the study.
Reach of the initial categories	They resulted in intermediate and terminal categories. The data from the last category achieved were inferred based on implicit and explicit interpretations and literature.

Source: Prepared by the author (2021).

Data was analyzed by comparison of information collected. As each subject has a different conception and worldview, it is understood that they attribute different meanings to the same phenomenon. Through this technique, it is possible to understand the routine, the difficulties, and the situations experienced by Brazilian students in Russia, and to understand how the co-creation of value occurs in the process of academic tourism based on S-D logic axioms. As in the S-D logic proposal, in their first publication in 2004, Vargo and Lusch mentioned how different consumers attribute different values to the same service depending on their experiences. Therefore, in-depth interviews followed a semi-structured script with nineteen questions that contemplated an intersection of the theoretical proposal of value co-creation and the construction of Russia's image as an academic destination with the research objectives. The script also considered the proximity with Vargo and Lusch's (2004) idea, as exposed below:

Table 6 - Semi-structured script

	AXIOMS				
Objectives	Actors	Resource	Service	Value	Institution
Identifying the social actors' reasons and the image created.	1 - What made you study in Russia?	2 - How do you see academic tourism and Russia's image?	3 - Do Russian institutions meet your expectations?	4 - What makes you stay in Russia? 5 – How do you evaluate tourism in Russia for Brazilians?	
Presenting how value is created through experiences in Russia.		6 - What are the benefits of studying in Russia?		7 - How would you evaluate your experience in Russia? 9 – Does studying in Russia have a value that matches your expectations as a student?	8 - Do you feel safe in Russia? 10 - What are your expectations once you obtain a Russian diploma?
Analyzing what attracts Brazilian students	11 – Would you recommend Russia to other students?	12 – What resources do Russian institutions provide for students?			13 - How are Russian institutions for Brazilian students?
Discussing difficulties and advantages of studying in Russia	14 - What do you see as a difficulty in Russia? 15 - How did you feel when you decided to study in Russia?	16 - How do you deal with difficulties?	17 - Have you ever felt you had advantages for studying in Russia?	18 - Do you regret choosing Russia?	19 - What are the main differences between Brazil and Russia?

Source: Adapted from Cavalcanti (2017).

Table 7 - Summary of analysis categories

Initial Categories	Intermediate Categories	Terminal Categories
Study opportunities Study abroad Affordable price Easy entrance exams Universities that do not require entrance exams Scholarships	Search for opportunities abroad Universities more affordable than Brazilian ones Future job opportunities	Choice motivations (Actors/Resources)
History Culture Similarities with and differences from Brazil Nature Political system Food Weather Russians Bureaucracy Lack of or distorted information	Characteristics of the country's image Interaction between different cultures Distortion of Russia's image Image characterization Functional and psychological aspects	Brazilian students' perception (Service)
Fear Airfare price Language Lack of sun Cold Vitamin D Distance Good courses Learn a new language Friendships The country's grandeur Tourist sites Accommodations	Difficulties in attracting and retaining Brazilian students to Russia. Differences between Brazil and Russia.	Perceived difficulties and opportunities (Actors/Resources)
International diploma Job market expectations European diploma Receptivity Problems in the education system Good universities.	Advantages and disadvantages of Russian tourism for Brazilians Tourist sites in Russia. Study abroad.	Perceived value of the Russian diploma (Value/Institution/Resources)
More information Dissemination Scholarships for undergraduate courses University agreements Classes taught in English	Enhancing the image of Russia in Brazil. Accessibility for students.	Proposals to attract Brazilian students to Russia (Value/Resources)
Going back to Brazil Working in Russia Working in a European country Validating the diploma	The work as a physician in Russia. Work in Russia compared to Brazil.	Expectations for the future (Actors/Resources)

Source: Prepared by the author (2021).

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Six terminal categories were achieved: (1) choice motivations, (2) perception of Brazilian students, (3) perceived difficulties and opportunities, (4) perceived value of the Russian diploma, (5) proposals to attract Brazilian students to Russia, and (6) expectations for the future.

4.1 Choice motivations

Eight of the twenty respondents mentioned that the low cost of universities was one of the reasons that made them choose Russia. This justification can also be understood as a result of the course that six of them attended: Medicine. In Brazil, private medical schools are, financially speaking, considered unaffordable for many. According to the *Guia de Carreira* (Career Guide) (2021) website, monthly fees cost US\$1,200 in average. According to R13, this is equivalent to one semester at the university where he studies, in the city of Kursk. Another point highlighted by two of students was the fact that Russian entrance exams are usually easier or that many universities do not require a specific entrance exam. As a result, students would need less study time in order to start an undergraduate course. These perceptions can be seen in the interviews with R12, R13 and R3:

So, at the time I was studying for medicine and I started looking for universities abroad. I watched some videos of Russia and I choose it because it was more affordable (R12).

The price of the monthly fee in Brazil is the same as an entire semester in Russia (R13).

(...) it is worth taking the course here because it is simpler to get in. It saves the time lost in preparatory courses (R3).

The findings that evidence the reasons why Brazilian students choose Russia for academic tourism raise the country's proposal value and attract students to this destination. Another often mentioned motivational factor for studying abroad is the possibility of getting to know new cultures, people, and having a new experience. These points also strengthen the narrative of value co-creation, since the destination offers exactly what the beneficiaries are looking for. Thus, the premise that actors can only make value propositions, but this is perceived by the beneficiaries (VARGO; LUSCH, 2016), finds applicability in the context of academic

tourism.

The motivations for living in another country and having contact with other cultures can be identified in the following excerpts:

Well, I always dreamt of living abroad. I started Journalism in Curitiba and, in the third year of college, I decided to move abroad to study (R6).

I've always wanted to study abroad, to go on an exchange program. In Brazil I started Mechanical Engineering in an excellent federal university, but I wanted a different knowledge, in new cultures (R7).

The curiosity to have contact with the Russian language was also mentioned by five Brazilians, three of them specializing in Russian language teaching and two others studying International Relations. Familiarity with the Russian language was reflected in the intention to visit and the reason for choosing the destination (CHAULAGAIN, 2019). Therefore, proposition three of this study is confirmed when it argues that familiarity has an effect on the construction of destination image value and intention to visit.

What attracted me to come back was that first year I spent there. I had really liked the language, its sound and characteristics attracted me (R9).

I chose Russia because I had great interest in the language, and the best way to learn Russian is being in Russia. (R18).

The scholarships — an incentive offered by the Russian government to foreign students — were brought up by two students as crucial in making them choose Russia as an academic destination. According to R5, the government annually offers scholarships to be distributed to students interested in enrolling in Russian educational institutions. These scholarships act as institutional resources, as exposed in the last axiom (co-creation of value is coordinated through institutions generated by the actor and the institutional arrangements), supported by Vargo and Lusch's (2016) conceptions. For the authors, it is important to clarify that the role of institutions is fundamental for value creation according to the ecosystem's perspective.

Well, there are scholarships all over the country. The government makes them available once a year, which is very important (R5).

Once I got the scholarship, this added up to the decision to come here (R7).

Hence, Russia establishes a form of exchange control through an incentive that attracts students to the country. This form of institutional coordination is based on the possibility that

students may not be able to get a scholarship. In this sense, the country protects itself by preventing the admission of a large volume of immigrants, which also goes against the country's own security policies.

The cost of living in Russia was considered cheaper by all twenty respondents when compared to Brazilian capitals, as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo (as stated by R15) or Brasilia (mentioned by R8). A cheaper cost of living was a crucial for students choosing Russia over other European, such as France and Germany. Participants emphasized the quality of the public accommodation, the low cost of food, and the possibility of living in smaller cities like Kursk, Chelyabinsk, and Samara and spending less than in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

Once more, the financial issue is seen as an important component in their decision to live in the country. Within the S-D logic, money can be perceived as an operand resource, i.e., a material resource operated by those who have the competence and skills, in this case, the students. Considering the premises that integrate resources and value, it is possible to see how value depends on use and context. Hence, as they perceive advantages in the application of available resources, students increase the co-creation of value as they see the advantage of studying in a foreign context in an accessible manner.

The cost of living is relatively cheap, I pay the same amount for a 3-bedroom apartment here as would pay for a studio in Brazil. Based on the city where I live, I believe larger cities should be more expensive (R13).

Now living in Russia, I see that it is cheaper compared to European cities and you can live well without having so much money (R18).

We would not have the same standard of living in Brazil with what we spend here; I pay \$200 dollars for a furnished apartment, with Internet, electricity and water included. This would not be possible in Brasilia (R8).

Here is much more affordable than Europe, or even some cities in Brazil, like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo (R15).

A major problem experienced in the Brazilian context is the high unemployment rate among young people. This was mentioned by R20, who pointed this as his main motivation to study in Russia. For R20, Russia offers the possibility of gaining experience and, consequently, having better chances of getting a good job in Brazil in the future:

I really only chose to go to Russia because I had no job and because I met Russians who told me about these scholarships (R20).

Therefore, the main reasons for choosing Russia as a destination were: cheaper

universities, affordable cost of living, easy entrance exams, the interest in the language, the desire to study abroad, and the scholarships. The motivations reported by students add the potential for value co-creation since, as beneficiaries, the option to study in Russia is, in objective terms, perceived as feasible.

It is possible to identify the integration of resources and actors in students' motivations. This is possible due to the correct experimentation of the value proposition made by the country through its institutional arrangements. Objective motivations are easily distinguishable from subjective ones, since at an objective level there is agreement from more students pointing out the same reasons. Objectively, issues related to accommodation costs, educational costs, and the opportunity to learn a new language prevail.

4.2 Brazilian Students' Perceptions

The image of a country is reconstructed when different situations are faced, as, for instance, having an unknown image and then, later in the future, being more familiar with the country. The concept of image, as used in the research, is based on perception, imagination and the meaning attributed by the subject (RINDELL and STRANDVIK, 2009). Consequently, the students were asked how their perception of the image of Russia changed before and after the trip. Fifteen respondents exemplified situations experienced and how they had different views of Russia before and after. Some excerpts are provided below.

The image I had was of a dangerous country, where you can be robbed, killed. And when I came here, I was simply surprised, because everything was quite the opposite. I found friendlier people than in Brazil (R2)

The vision I had was very basic and simple, just television stuff. I knew about ice skating, about the war, cold and vodka, basically. The image changed completely after I came to Russia. I saw it is not only that (R3).

Before I went to Russia, I thought it was a very closed place as far as information was concerned. That there would only have old buildings and no ordinary stores, like restaurants, clothing stores. And when I got there, I saw that it wasn't quite like that. Today I Russia as a very open country, especially for foreigners (R4).

Respondents R2, R3 and R4 showed how the vision they have of Russia changed as compared to the vision they had before, bringing new ways of interacting with the country, a new look at the context in which they are inserted. This is mainly due to the distorted, negative image that the subjects had of the country, for its history of wars in the former Soviet Union, for having a culture that is quite different from the Brazilian, i.e., an image that is

completely unrelated to the current reality of the country. As stressed by Perlin et al. (2017), this situation in which the image of a country built by a subject or a group of individuals has no commitment to the reality is not uncommon.

This fact was also evidenced in R11's interview. He reported that he studied the wars in Russia at school and, consequently, associated the country to this context. Later, when he had the opportunity to visit Russia, he had a different image construction of the country.

The image I had before was that it would be a very closed country. Because it turns out that what we study is only the Napoleonic invasion, communist revolution, World War I, Cold War... I think there is a lot of war in between (R11).

And now that I've spent some time there, I see that the architecture is charming, that everything is very bright, with lots of light (R11).

This happens mainly due to dissemination of the image by the media, movies, social networks, news articles, magazines, books, newspapers or the points of view of other people, as friends and family, an image taken as organic. Movies, sources of information – as pointed out by R5 and R11 – and celebrities are extremely influential in forming a destination image (LEE et al., 2015). In R11's interview, he mentions: "everything gives you this image of coldness, distancing or even emptiness". From these words one can understand how these media are influential in forming an image.

(...) the Hollywood view in which the Russians are always the villains. And they are like that only in the movies. In real life they are much more open than I imagined (R5).

And in the movies the Russians are also described as villains, crooked, cold, they want to dominate the world, the scenes always have this half-blue filter, without much color, with a lot of snow... So, everything gives an image of coldness, distancing or even emptiness (R11).

R11 also highlights this situation by showing how the influence of the United States in Latin America can distort the construction of a positive image of Russia. This is due to the relations between the countries and how American movies portray Russians as villains, and how American songs, books and movies are references for Brazilians.

All our cinematographic references are from the USA, and they always paint a negative picture of Russia. So, we are not used to reading Russian writers, listening to Russian music as we do with American ones (R11).

This lack or distortion of information about the country is also a problem in the

BRICS context. Therefore, it is important to have the interest of strengthening educational, commercial and tourism partnerships, as set forth in the Agreement on Cultural and Educational Cooperation made by and between the Government of Brazil and the Government of the Russian Federation (BRAZIL, 2017). R2 highlights this problem, and R6 reminds the similarities between both countries and the importance of having more information to leverage this commercial problem.

I think tourism is not very common largely due to Brazilians' ignorance concerning Russia. I think that this is a huge problem, especially because we have the BRICS, which is a partnership that includes both countries (R2).

I would love Brazil to pay more attention to Russia. Commercially speaking, these are countries that complement each other a lot, but the volume of commercial exchange between them is very low due to lack of knowledge (R6).

By reconstructing the image of the country or "losing the stereotyped view", as stated by R15, the image becomes more attractive or positive. In this interview, he makes very clear how he rediscovered Russia when he lived there, mentioning how it became an interesting and passionate country. This repositioning is fundamental. As highlighted by Woo (2019), it is an aspect that narrows the relationship between countries. Hence, it also influences an individual's receptivity towards a destination. It is important to mention that this study argues that a positive country image has a positive effect on destination image and value co-creation (CHUNG; CHEN, 2018).

When you lose the stereotyped view that Russia is just a very cold place with drunks and bears walking down the street, with post-Soviet facilities falling apart, you discover that it is a very interesting and exciting country (R15).

Two of the respondents in this study had visited Russia before, as tourists. Both mentioned that while in the country they had important image transformations. Naumov and Pusser (2000) state that the hierarchical model of power is being replaced by new patterns of market behavior being developed in the country. Based on this, according to the authors, Russian have a unique culture marked by the past and with new dimensions according to the present, which is characterized as two extreme positions. This can also be noticed due to the changing political regime in the country. This can be noticed in R15's statement:

My image of Russia changed over time because I've had a history with the country since 2003. So, when I went there right after the 90s, the "problematic 90s" as they

say, compared to the other times I went back, the country changed a lot. It's different, more open to foreigners, internationalized, globalized (R15).

In the quest to change the image of Russia in Brazil and have more real information, three students mentioned that they created YouTube channels and personal profiles on Instagram to show their routine, Russian cities, and what it is like to be a Brazilian in the country. As is cited by Foroudi et al. (2018), these sources conveyed by websites and promotional videos have positive impacts on the image of a destination.

I really enjoy living with Russians, and I show this on my YouTube channel, I make videos every day to show my routine in Russia (R5).

There is a very unique tourist repertoire, a very diverse historical heritage, with good art museums. On Instagram, I usually show this to Brazilians, the cities of Russia and their particularities. The good thing is that it is real information about the country (R10).

So much so that I even created a channel to try to change this a little. For now, there are only two videos, but I have plans to change this (R12).

R10 and R12 say they already had a positive image of the country, which made them consequently choose Russia as a destination for academic tourism. R12 also highlights the World Cup, which was extremely important to increase the dissemination of information and the conceptions about Russia in Brazil, given the number of Brazilians who are interested in soccer competitions.

Initially, what attracted me in Russia was the culture, the literature, I always liked it and that's what got me to study Russian in my undergraduate degree (R10).

So, the World Cup was happening at the time that I decided to go to Russia. So, everybody was talking about Russia and I created a good image of the country (R12).

A neutral image (CHAGAS, 2009) was exemplified by R6, as he declares he was impartial with respect to Russia before traveling, since he only chose the destination because of the low education costs and the opportunity to study abroad.

The image I had of Russia, I'll be quite honest, was the unknown. I didn't have much information before coming here (R6).

The influence of family and friends is also a fundamental for the construction of the image of a certain destination. As R11 highlights, external opinions made her have a certain

impression of Russia before traveling, as her family members created this conception of Russia as a dictatorship and Russians as xenophobic. Consequently, she describes a feeling of fear even before she got to know the country. This proves how affective elements influence potential tourists, as discussed by Ecthner and Ritchie (1991).

When I said I was going to Russia, part of my family said "Wow! They have a dictatorship there, they are very closed, they must be xenophobic. It almost gives you the feeling that you are going to be attacked (R11).

In the same line of thought, R14 confirms that the fact that his father graduated in Russia brought positive influences that made him create an attractive image of the country. As he had always heard his father saying favorable things about the country, the image created started in childhood, and was subsequently amplified until he decided to study Medicine in the institution his father had studied. Since childhood, R14 always saw his father as a reference, something natural considering the parent-child relationship legitimation, as studied by Berger and Luckmann (1985).

Consequently, throughout his life, because of this strong identification with his father – and the paths he took in life – he builds an image value of having a Russian diploma, which led him to making a projection of himself in the future, studying in Russia, even before choosing a career or start working. R14's conception also proves Chagas' (2009) findings on how personal factors, including emotions, subjectivity, the motivation process, as well as tourist profile, such as ethnicity, marital status, socioeconomic status, education and cultural values directly influence the construction of an image.

I've always wanted to study in Russia, I've always been attracted to the country. My father went to medical school there and I identify with him a lot. So, this is something that comes from my father and I've always wanted (R14).

Furthermore, in order to understand the image of a country one must understand the functional and psychological aspects in respondents' views (STEPCHENKOV; SHICHKOVA, 2017). Therefore, functional aspects, such as the attractions offered, infrastructure, tourist facilities, information and price should be analyzed. The psychological aspects, in turn, can be separated into cognitive and affective images, coming from the emotions, imagination and desires of the subject (ECTHNER; RITCHIE, 1991), (ALMEIDA, 2012). In this research, functional aspects can be exemplified as the Russian weather or

infrastructure, while psychological aspects are how Brazilians feel based on how receptive Russians are or their affective ties to the country. This is exemplified in the table below, which shows excerpts taken from some of the interviews.

Table 8 - Functional and psychological aspects in forming an image of Russia

Functional Aspects	Psychological Aspects
<p>The cold is very severe (R5).</p> <p>The seasons are well-defined and it is very beautiful, plus the buildings, statues and huge Soviet constructions (R8).</p> <p>I can only think of the cold as a characteristic (R17).</p> <p>My view is that Russia is wonderful, for its history and philosophy (R19).</p> <p>A country with a very beautiful architecture and a very interesting culture (R20).</p>	<p>Russians are really much less accessible, but only when you don't know them (R5).</p> <p>I would say Russians are serious, a little suspicious, but once they get to know you, I would say that they are even very similar to Brazilians (R8).</p> <p>People are distant and a little aggressive too (R17).</p> <p>People are open to new friendships, they are interested, Russians are good friends (R19).</p> <p>The image I had and still have is that people are serious and reserved, especially in the city where I live (R20).</p>

Source: Prepared by the author (2021).

When discussing the psychological aspects, R5, R8, R17, R19 and R20 demonstrate the relationship with Russians through the impression and the image created. The different conceptions of Brazilians about Russians were remarkable. R19 says “People are open to new friendships, they are interested, Russians are good friends”. On the other hand, R20 reports: “The image I had and still have is that people are serious and reserved, especially in the city where I live”. Based on this, each one of them selects facts to justify their opinion. These facts, selected and discussed by them, when intertwined, show the formation of an image.

When it comes to functional aspects, the students mentioned the Russian architecture, which encompasses infrastructure; the country’s typical weather, with an extremely harsh winter; its history and philosophy. As stressed by Naumov and Pusser (2000), the particular history of the Russian Federation, of past conflicts and the separation from the former Soviet Union.

In this context, it is also important to make a counterpoint to what Russia proposes to

these students, based on what they experience, and how this contributes or not to the process of value creation by the beneficiary through exchange relationships, as exposed by Vargo and Lusch (2016). Similar to premise seven pointed out by Lusch and Vargo (2014), the dissemination of the Russian image results in value proposition, and this value will only be confirmed through experiences of exchange. This can be seen in the table below:

Table 9 - Image Value Propositions

What Russia proposes	What students experience
Being a country with a lot of surveillance	Russia is much safer than here, like robberies, going out at night, you feel the difference (R3).
Practicality	They want everything on the spot and fast and don't have much patience (R2).
Being a cold country	In winter I caught -30° temperatures, the sea freezes! (R3).
An important country for history	I had the chance of visiting Moscow on vacation and I was delighted. You don't even have to go into a museum because the city is like an open-air museum (R11).
A country with a democratic political regime	Russia is still a pseudo-democracy. Wages for any profession are still very low, so there is not much incentive or foreign labor (R19).
A non-English speaking country	Most Russians don't speak English and I didn't know anything about the Russian language. The teachers themselves don't speak English; it was very difficult (R13).

Source: Prepared by the author (2021).

From these accounts, we can identify how the subjects dealt and deal with the experience of living in Russia – in relation to each reality – in different ways. As seen, some of them changed the way they saw the country before and after the trip, while others kept a positive or negative image. Psychological and functional aspects were also identified as being key in forming the overall image. This has huge significance to the findings observed here,

since destination image – like value creation – is also formed by experiences and familiarity with the destination.

In this regard, we understand that the relationship between image and value requires the participation of several actors who make proposals and experience it. We must understand that more objective and less flexible issues, such as the geography and weather, official language, politics, and history of the locale can and should be observed before making a decision about living in that country. One realizes at this point that the experience about the encounters/experiences lived in Russia needs to be valued considering that objective aspects of these experiences are publicly available and can be studied before choosing the country for academic tourism.

4.3 Perceived difficulties and opportunities

In relation of the challenges faced by residents in Russia, all respondents stated difficulties due to the differences with Brazil, especially as regards to language and weather, since winter in Brazil is not so harsh winter and the Russian language is very different from Portuguese, either by the sound of words or the different alphabets. However, it is important to reaffirm that these perceived difficulties are already pre-conceived knowledge in the pre-travel moment, since they are accessible information about Russia that influence the image formation at the moment before choosing the tourist destination.

So, the first difficulty I had there was the language. I had a lot of problems with it. It's normal when you are learning a language, but there were a lot of ignorant people who didn't want to help (R3).

Russian language is a very difficult challenge. It's an extremely complicated language, it's not simple like English, that you get to speak within 3 months (R4).

On the other hand, after living there for 3 years, winter has already become something unbearable. There is a lack of sun, vegetables, fruits and even meat (R10).

R10's comments on problems adapting to the Russian winter because of the lack of sun, vegetables, fruits, and meat are justified due to the fact that he is Brazilian. Because of Brazil's predominantly tropical climate, these items are rarely absent in the daily lives of its nationals. This observation supports the importance of institutional arrangements. Through wide and unrestricted publication on Russia's most stable issues, competent governments can ensure the value proposition made to students. The weather condition, for instance, is

something given; the perception of those who experience this condition, however, depends on subjective factors of this individual.

Furthermore, twelve of respondents mentioned the cultural differences between Brazil and Russia and the fact that Brazilians, generally speaking, are quite open to making new friendships and talking to unknown people. This was mentioned as one of the difficulties of studying in Russia and being Brazilian in Russia as, according to them, Russians are not so accessible. From these experiences, it is possible to infer that the narrative of a co-created value is not sustained because of the subject's subjectivity in creating a conception about Russians, a negative one, in this case, considering that the result is positive in the process of co-creating value (VARGO; LUSCH, 2014).

It is important to stress that this may also come from a stereotyped image, given the differences between each subject, whether Russian or Brazilian, and their realities, which is difficult to have a standard and to classify based solely on nationality. This is exemplified in R17's interview, as she states: "Because our Brazilian culture is very different". By using "our", she includes all Brazilians as being more welcoming and not rude, which can be characterized as a stereotyped image (CHAGAS, 2009). This can also be justified by Hofstede's country culture studies, in which he found that Russian culture in the mid-1990s seemed supported by individualism, masculinity, and detachment from the unknown (NAUMOV; PUFFER, 2000) while Brazilian culture is collectivist, according to the authors. R17 adds that "Some aspects of the culture and people, like them being colder and ruder, for example. Because our Brazilian culture is very different".

This cultural difference issue was also evidenced by R7 and R8, when they mention that Brazilians often interpret Russian incorrectly, due to differences in the way people treat each other, such as expressions, tone of voice, and forms of communication.

Especially after you realize that you have this image of Russians as being cold and distant simply because they are different from Brazilians (R7).

So, there are many things here in Russia that Brazilians interpret as lack of education, ignorance, and it is just their way of being, like their expressions, and the tone of voice they use are not tones we would use in Brazil (R8).

If, on the one hand, some students mentioned having received a colder treatment, five other respondents mentioned how well they were received for being Brazilians, mainly due to the soccer and UFC culture, as mentioned by R16 when revealing how some Russians are fans of Brazilian athletes and consider them global references.

According to R1, Russians are also curious about and appreciate Latin American culture, dances and capoeira. This creates an opportunity for interaction with Russians and, consequently, the possibility of a satisfactory image formation between Russians and Brazilians. Russians and Brazilians, in this case, are part of the social actors participating in the process; therefore, there are favorable exchange relationships for construction of the image of value, as proposed by Leite and Oliveira (2020).

But they like Brazilian UFC a lot. They are fans of the fighters and of soccer players too. They talk a lot about Pelé, the World Cups (R16).

People are usually curious when I say I'm Brazilian. They start asking me about it, they are curious, much more for the Latin American culture, the dance, the capoeira, the samba. All this is very famous here! (R1).

These differences in perception evidenced in the interviews reveal how cultural and tradition values can influence the co-creation of value and, consequently, the formation of the image of Russia by Brazilian students. Openness to new experiences and a more positive or negative view of the unknown may be linked to the way of seeing the world and experiencing phenomena. This corroborates the findings of Cavalcanti (2017), who pointed out that different users may have different perceptions of the same service, as a result of expectations they create and the proposals made upon having contact with the offer.

Personal growth was mentioned by one of the respondents as a perceived opportunity. This is the result of him becoming more mature for living in another country, away from family members. In learning how to clean, cook, wash, and pay bills, the subject (social actor) gained knowledge and uses the resources he obtained while living abroad to his benefit, thus ensuring the co-creation of value.

At least for me there was a lot of learning involved. I had to learn to take care of myself, clean, cook, wash, pay bills (R3).

Like R3, R4 also emphasized this process of becoming more mature, and added that this happens to other Brazilian students living in Russia “they all say they live in Russia for 6 months and feel as if they had aged 5 years”. By mentioning this, R4 includes other social actors to justify something she experienced:

You will become a stronger and more determined person. That's what happened to me and what happens to most Brazilians. They all say they live in Russia for 6 months and feel as if they had aged 5 years (R4).

R7 also emphasizes how important this experience was for him to overcome challenges, and that is why he saw Russia as an opportunity to get out of his comfort zone in Brazil to have access to a new world view. The result of this is a joint creation of opportunity to have an international experience and its internalization. The subject feels, as a consequence, challenged and developed as a person. In this case we have the following premise proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2014) proposal: actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.

I believe that Russia did me a lot of good, the experience of living here made me grow a lot as a person and face challenges that I would not have in Brazil. It was an opportunity to get out of my comfort zone and seek something beyond (R7).

Fifteen participants – eleven of them were women – reported the feeling of safety as an opportunity. As already evidenced, the image of a safe country corresponds to the experience that most participants have, resulting, therefore, in a satisfactory exchange relationship in this regard. Safety in this case involves surveillance, feeling safe to walk down the street at any time, in public transportation, and in closed environments or places.

For women, more specifically, a comparison when it comes to crime and sexual violence – both very present in Brazil – was more common. However, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), Russia is the fourth country with the highest number of feminicides, while Brazil ranks fifth (UOL, 2020). It is interesting to point out this fact because since this research proposes to investigate the perception of the country from the students' experience, one realizes that objectivity is not always present when it comes to speaking of image from someone's perception. Brazilian students in Russia, for example, affirmed they feel safer in Russia than in Brazil, as follows:

As a woman, I have never felt as safe walking anywhere as I do in Moscow. This is very attractive to me. When I think about the future, I think about this (R9).

I feel very safe. I even joke that I'm going have to re-learn how to live when I go back to Brazil (R5).

It is a very safe country. If you're a woman you can walk around at night and nothing will happen to you. This kind of safety is something we don't have in Brazil (R18).

In general, I feel safe when it comes to harassment and thefts (R20).

Another opportunity mentioned by the respondents was getting to know more about Russian culture and tourism, for the country's beauty, history, and grandeur. R1 mentioned

the importance of the former Soviet Union for world history and how interesting it is to get to know the Russian population better and how they are living after this milestone, the changes and the remnants of socialism. R5 highlighted the opportunity to witness Russian architecture and its unique characteristics.

I think Russia is such an interesting country, and the change from the former Soviet Union, I always wonder how it was and how the Russians' minds were affected by such a rapid change (R1).

For tourism, Russia is very interesting because it has a very unique architecture, very characteristic (R5).

Four of the respondents cited Russia's geographical location as an opportunity, as it gives access to both Europe and Asia, depending on the city where you are located. According to data from *Brasil Escola* (2021), the Russian Federation has the largest territorial extension in the world, with 17,075,400 km², and is located in Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. Consequently, airline or train tickets to visit other nearby countries are more accessible, which is a way of fulfilling the need and desire to visit countries with different cultures, as mentioned by R6 and R19.

With this, Russia is able to meet the expectations of these students by facilitating access to other countries due to its location. As a result, value is created by the subject as beneficiary of the experience of visiting other destinations or taking extra courses. This line of thought follows the proposal developed by Vargo and Lusch (2014) in premise eleven in S-D logic.

Living in Moscow I got to know practically the entire European continent, several countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and so on (R6).

I take advantage of my geographical position to take some extra courses in Poland, Lithuania and Italy, the doors that open to Europe itself (R19).

Living in the city of Kursk, in Russia, specifically, was considered an opportunity for three of the respondents, considering the large Brazilian community in the city, which facilitates coexistence, communication and reduces the challenges of creating new relationships due to cultural and language barriers, plus increases their chances of having access to Brazilian particularities, such as food and culture. According to R3, there are currently 256 Brazilians at Kursk University. This considerable flow made Kursk known as “the city of Brazilians” in Russia (UOL, 2020).

The city's main attractions are its quality education and much more affordable prices than those of private Brazilian universities, medical schools, as previously discussed. Brazilian residents of Kursk mentioned the existence of Brazilian restaurants, parties especially made for this public, cultural attractions, study groups, and how easy making new friends in the city is. Given this large number of Brazilian students, it is justifiable that most of participants in this research reside in this Russian city, since participants suggested other participants for this research.

Because there are a lot of Brazilians in the city, they form a group of friends. There is always someone helping out with doctors, documents, even trips our tours (R3).

In Kursk, it is possible to interact with Brazilians only, because there are so many, especially those who studying Medicine. There are Brazilian parties, restaurants where you can eat feijoada, for example (R18).

Being in contact with people from different cultures and countries was also mentioned as a one-of-a-kind opportunity by four of respondents. Because of Russia's geographical location and government incentives, to the country attracts many foreign students. Therefore, seeing students from different nationalities in Russian institutions is not uncommon. Brazilians then have the possibility of engaging in cultural interactions with people from different countries, which reflects in changes of position, vision and image of different countries and contexts, as mentioned by R11 and R14.

I have friends from South Africa, Nigeria, Colombia, Thailand. This would not be possible in Brazil. I discovered that several languages are spoken in India, for example. There are two Indians in my class who are from the same region and speak totally different languages. There are also many Muslim women; some wear veil, others don't (R11).

A positive side is the cultural diversity you have here in Russia, because it's a country that has bonds with almost every country in the world. There are many foreigners here (R14).

Transportation in Russia was commented as an opportunity perceived by four respondents. They also mentioned the quality as being superior when compared to Brazil. According to the National Association of Urban Transportation (NTU), only 52% of Brazilian municipalities have urban transportation. According to Brazilian newspaper *Estadão* (2020), some large cities, such as São Paulo and Curitiba, invest in exclusive lane for buses, which in itself favors those who choose to use public transportation; however, there is often no invest in the structural system to improve the quality of service.

The subways are very good, they serve almost the entire city, unlike Brazil, so it's much easier to get around (R6).

It's cheap and the quality of the subway is very good, it's never late, it has good coverage (R10).

Another point highlighted as a perceived opportunity was the accommodation at Russian institutions. It is affordable for students and it is very well-located. These residences are offered to foreign students by most universities. In S-D logic, the accommodation offered acts as a resource in exchange relations, and contributes to formation of the destination image, since they are environments in which the students who choose this kind of accommodation spend most of their time.

All universities here have accommodations. Some are of inferior quality, others are very good, like the one I lived in (R5).

The university and the dormitory are in the central region, so you have everything you need close by. There are markets, 4 shopping malls (R11).

Two different cases were noted in this category: the difficulties and the opportunities perceived. The difficulties highlighted were mainly knowledge that helped build the image of Russia in a pre-travel moment, since they are functional aspects of the country, such as language, weather. However, the respondents also reported challenges that influence the creation of image value for psychological or subjective aspects, such as the relationship with Russians and the particular experiences of each student. The opportunities, however, stood out in relation to the challenges. Many opportunities were mentioned: getting to know up close the grandeur of Russia and its population, the perception of safety, the geographical position, the cultural immersion and, specifically in the city of Kursk, the contact with other Brazilians, transportation, and the university accommodation.

4.4 Perceived value of Russian education and degree

The significance of the Russian diploma and education was discussed by the participants as being fundamental or not for their academic education. Based on this, R7 and R8, who study engineering in Samara, Russia, stressed how the course is superior to those offered in Brazil, mainly due to the fact that the Russians are pioneers in the aerospace and aeronautical industry, as commented by R8.

By having this experience, they acquire important knowledge for their specific area of

study through these institutional resources, which allow the beneficiary to create value with respect to Russian education and obtaining a degree. In this context, engineering educational institutions in Russia are part of an ecosystem of services that reveal how interactions are not isolated, but rather part of a network of actors (VARGO; LUSCH, 2014), therefore, having a pioneering history in engineering facilitates the quality and development of education in this area in the country.

In this case, studying engineering in Russia brought improved intellectual development and attitudes through value co-creation to these students. This co-creation, according to Donovan et al. (2017), may take place in classrooms. With this, students can co-create their educational experience based on how they understand the institutional setting and based on exchange relationships.

Whether you like it or not, in some areas, such as engineering, Russia is much more developed than Brazil, which offers great opportunities (R7).

So, the possibility of having classes, experiments, acquiring knowledge from people who are in a country that is one of the pioneers not only in the aerospace industry, but also in aeronautics, is very interesting. The professors have authority to talk, an authority that you can't find anywhere else (R8).

In this category, six respondents proposed value to the Russian diploma because it is valid in other European countries and because they are able to have an international diploma, with classes taught in another language, which would make them stand out from other Brazilian students. This is confirmed by R12: "I have the opportunity to work all across Europe, because my diploma is recognized" and R20: "My expectation is that I get to stand out in the job market with this diploma. In this case, the diploma being recognized or making its holder stand out in the job market is a resource that R12 and R20 (social actors) use to create positive value image. This operand resource is the source of a strategic benefit, as suggested in premise three of S-D logic (VARGO; LUSCH, 2014).

Studying in Russia opens many doors for me, I have the opportunity to work all across Europe, because my diploma is recognized (R12).

I believe Russia has a great education system and welcomes Brazilian students very well. My expectation is that I get to stand out in the job market with this diploma, I have more opportunities with this specialization (R20).

As regards to education in Russian universities, seven students mentioned quality problems, especially in the medical school. For these subjects, Russian universities are very

bureaucratic, they use outdated teaching methods, and professors are often inflexible, since they do not accept suggestions from students or the introduction of new forms of teaching. This problem is discussed by Dollinger and Coates (2018) about university education and the traditional view of learning. The authors cite the active role of students in collaboration with educators as fundamental, as it allows interaction from feedback, opinions and with institutional resources that result in an exchange of mutual value, thus improving the experience of the service beneficiary. In this sense, the skills, ideas and intellectual abilities of the subjects are resources that should be used to enable a satisfactory exchange relationship between the student and the educational institution.

In Russia, everything is very hierarchical and mechanized. The student is not encouraged to develop their own ideas. It's all based on repetition, on memorizing, without much practice (R10).

The teaching method is very rigid, with very old standards and methods, many from Soviet Union times. Another thing is also that the teachers are very strict, so they do not accept new techniques, new medications. This makes it difficult for students who do not want to pursue a career in Russia (R17).

This finding regarding Russian education is in line with Hofstede's findings that Russians have a rule-based behavior that tends to be unclear, inconsistent, and difficult to control. In this situation, people can make do with a formal structure, as seen in educational institutions (NAUMOV; PUFFER, 2000).

For those who intend to return to Brazil to work, one of the differences of the diploma is the possibility of future validation, as pointed by R8. Moreover, in this same context, R17 commented the Russian medical degree is better seen by Brazilian educational institutions than other courses in South American countries, such as Argentina.

When educational tourism is concerned, I think it is good for Brazilians. The universities are good and we can validate the diploma in Brazil (R8).

For those who want to study Medicine, it's better study in Russia than in other South American countries, like Argentina (R17).

Overall, Russian diploma and education value perceptions were mentioned in a sense that refers to the co-creation of value by the possibility of having an internationally recognized diploma that can be validated in Brazil, and the distinction of having an engineering diploma issued by a Russian institution. Negative aspects, in turn, compromise the co-creation of value when problems are perceived in the quality of education because of the

bureaucratic regime, and the lack of interaction between students and professors, especially in medical school.

4.5 Proposals to attract Brazilian students to Russia

One of the objectives of this research was to stress how to attract more Brazilian students to Russia. In order to meet this objective, the students were asked how they believe it is possible to promote this academic tourism between the two countries. Eight students mentioned the importance of disseminating more information about Russia as a country and its universities in Brazil.

As mentioned in this paper, lack of information may contribute to the generation of a null or distorted image of a country (CHAGAS, 2009). To have students interested in having the experience of studying in Russia, it is important to communicate attractive resources to potential tourists. In this sense, one respondent stated:

Yes, I think that if there were partnerships between Brazilian and Russian agencies or even partnership of the Brazilian and Russian Ministries of Culture aiming at a more widespread dissemination of information, because I think lack of information the biggest problem (R10).

Information on the existence of resources capable of sustaining the narrative of co-creation of value has the potential to increase the interaction between the subject and the tourist destination, and, consequently, the image value. The role of Marketing in communication should be developing key variables in order to obtain a greater informational relationship between countries (SILVA-LARCEDA et al., 2018). Such relationship should be supported by the communication of incentives such as projects and scholarships offered to foreigners, as mentioned by R1, R9 and R12.

I think it's something that needs to be shown more, because they have a lot of projects in which the universities give many opportunities, such as scholarships. And what we really need is to show that these projects exist. Many people are afraid to take risks (R1).

I think working on the image of Russia. If the Russian government invested a little more in publicizing everything that Russia offers this would greatly increase tourism among students (R9).

With more information, I think, which was what I felt, people don't trust so much because they are not so sure about things. So much so that I even created a channel to try to change this a little. For now, there are only two videos, but I have plans to change this (R12).

This is also mentioned by R6 as he highlights how there are scholarships for Brazilians in Russian universities left over simply due to lack of knowledge. If better publicized, scholarships as resources for co-creation of value among social actors could facilitate the promotion of value for beneficiaries.

Look, take RUDN and MDU, for instance. They offer many scholarships for Brazilians every year; they are quite accessible scholarships that are often not filled because many people don't know they exist (R6).

It should be emphasized that three students commented on the importance of greater government incentives and partnerships between universities in order to strengthen academic and tourism relations and provide more knowledge to potential tourists. The role of these institutions is fundamental. As discussed by Baloglu (2001), governments have the role of facilitating the distribution of resources, information, and deciding on the measures to be adopted regarding tourism. Once more, this finding dialogues with Vargo and Lusch's (2016) institutional premise that discusses the role of institutions as being fundamental for value creation. According to an ecosystem perspective, Veiga and Urdan (2017) point out that the institutional perspective is capable of increasing the exchanges made among social actors. R7, R13 and R20 expose this situation:

Look, I think that in order to increase this offer and attract more students here, a direct partnership between universities would be necessary (R7).

There's lack of government incentive from (R13).

I believe I am the first Brazilian student in my city. So, they need to establish partnerships with other universities, so that people get to know about it (R20)

Universities and governments, as mentioned, denote how to strengthen institutional arrangements, and this is crucial to keep Russia attractive to Brazilian students. Sustaining a narrative of co-creation of value requires understanding value as created and shared. Thus, it is also up to said institutions to establish arrangements to attract an audience capable of strengthening the image value of that place. In this sense, R7 highlights negligence on the part of Brazilian universities in creating more partnerships with Russian universities in order to establish these institutional links.

Talking to the department staff at the Samara State University, I asked about this possibility and they told me that there was lack of commitment on the part of

Brazilian universities. They had tried to develop partnerships and get in touch, but it was all made difficult by the Brazilian party (R7).

Studying in Russian was mentioned by most of the students as one of the main difficulties they had. With that in mind, two respondents commented that Russian universities should invest more in courses taught in English. According to these respondents, this would facilitate access and increase the interest of Brazilian students in the country.

In my opinion, they should offer more scholarships for courses taught in English, because the universities usually have courses taught in Russian only (R4).

First, I think the language is the main obstacle to attract students. Russian is not an easy language and it is not widespread in South America. So, to attract more people, they need more courses taught in English (R15).

Therefore, according to the respondents, the ways to attract Brazilian students include optimized communication of true information about the country and its universities, scholarships opportunities, closer relations between the governments and educational institutions of both countries, and investing in more courses taught in English.

4.6 Expectations for the future

When it comes to expectations for the future, one makes a projection of him/herself from what was experienced in the past and is experienced in the present, an ensemble of the different times (MACHADO, 2003). The respondents were asked to comment if they will or will not continue in Russia, if they intend to continue in the academic area and pursue a postgraduate or master's degree, to comment on the job market, and personal decisions for the future.

It was possible to notice that most respondents who created a positive global image tend to see themselves living in the country, either working or visiting other Russian cities. On the other hand, those who for different reasons created a negative global image intend to return to Brazil as soon as they graduate or to work in other countries, such as the United States. This is better displayed in tables 10 and 11.

Table 10 - Students who do not intend to continue in Russia

Negative aspect of Russia's image	Expectations for the future
Everything is a matter of experience. I went through some health problems in Russia and that marked me a lot. I think Russian people are rude (R3).	In my history, Russia has a date to end (R3).
I don't recommend studying in Russia. The company that takes you to study there says it's all a bed of roses, but it's not, really (R16).	So, there is no point in staying in Russia. The best thing you do is graduate there and go to another country, like the US (R16).
People are distant and a little aggressive too (R17).	I'll go back to Brazil and revalidate my diploma (R17).
The image I had and still have is that people are serious and reserved, especially in the city where I live (R20).	I didn't adapt to the culture. I wouldn't choose Russia again. I'll go back to work in Brazil (R20).

Source: Prepared by the author (2021).

From R16's statement, it is possible to identify that he hired a specific agency for academic tourism in Russia that created very high expectations for this trip. In fact, the expectations created were much higher than his own experience, as he says: "The company that takes you to study there says it's all a bed of roses, but it's not, really". This statement is linked to the imaginary formed by the subject of what would be his experience in the country and, thus creating an anticipated image. This imaginary is discussed by Berger and Luckmann (1985) as being the whole set of symbols and artifacts used by subjects to justify the way they think and act.

Expectation connected to construction of the imaginary is also something that can be observed in R13's statement. In this case, the student expected a more developed country and, in

the city, where he lives, more specifically, he noticed traces of communism and little development.

Even though I went there without much expectation, I thought it was a super developed country, but I still see traces of communism, at least in my city (R13).

When R3 says she had health problems in the country, she evidences an experience that marked her in a negative way. In this case, no matter how many advantages and positive functional aspects she perceived in choosing Russia, psychological aspects prevail. For this reason, co-creation in the exchange relationship between her, as beneficiary, and Russia, as service provider, is not satisfactory. A positive final result is required for co-creation of value to occur, which did not happen to some of respondents.

Table 11 - Students who intend to continue in Russia

Positive aspect of Russia's image	Expectations for the future
<p>Russia has a very, very rich history. You have seen it yourself, when you go to a subway station and it looks like a museum. The architecture is fascinating! The country's grandeur, the nature and so much history that you can't even describe... You just have to come and check it out! (R1).</p>	<p>Well, if they open the borders, I'll go to Brazil, spend some time, and then go back to Russia to stay for good! (R1).</p>
<p>Now living in Russia, I see that it is cheaper compared to European cities and you can live well without having so much money (R18).</p>	<p>This is one of the things that makes me want to stay in the country, even after I graduate (R18).</p>
<p>I don't regret it within this whole context, because I really like it here. I feel very safe. It's an incredible cultural experience (R5).</p>	<p>The university for me was an excuse to live here. After I graduate, I think of living here for another year, free, or working or maybe working and taking a light course at the same time (R5).</p>
<p>There were the recommendations also. I met a lot of people who came here and conveyed a very positive image. I met few people who had misfortunes here. And I liked it too (R14).</p>	<p>I intend to stay here for a while and visit other cities nearby (R14).</p>

<p>I can say this at least for in my area. My impression is that there is no lack of work, there never was, and it's very well-paid. Here I think that, maybe, I don't know, there is also the agility of things, which could be something else to talk about, I think things here in Russia are faster, more agile, more practical (R2).</p>	<p>I intend to return to Brazil just to visit my family and come back to work in Russia (R2).</p>
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Source: Prepared by the author (2021).

In these cases, the exchange relationship was satisfactory, since despite any challenges perceived students hope to remain in Russia after graduating. The imaginary country image created by these students met their expectations.

Another point mentioned by four students was that working in Russia after finishing medical school was impossible because the profession is not really valued in the country, considering the low salaries and the high workload. In this case, a positive value image may have been built for several aspects, either functional or psychological, but because of a career choice and the need to feel valued, the student prefers to pursue a career in another country. According to the *Guia de Carreiras* (2020) website, the average monthly salary of a physician in Russia is USD \$1,032.00, while in Brazil it is USD \$3,520.00.

I don't regret it, I dropped out of a federal university. I'm almost graduating now and I like it a lot, but I don't intend to stay because physician wages are very low (R13).

Physician salaries are still very low, so there is not much incentive (R19).

Those who went to Russia seeking better future opportunities because they could not get a job in Brazil, hope to see themselves differently, in another environment, with more opportunities to practice the knowledge acquired in their studies in order to be able to perceive the change before and after the decision to study in another country.

To stand out in the job market, having more opportunities with this specialization and with the experience of living abroad (R20).

I think Russia opens a door for students. They have a lot of experience in my area, for instance, so I hope that opportunities will open up in the future and I will see myself as a more well-rounded professional (R8).

Despite being said by different respondents, the phrases “more opportunities with this specialization” and “I will see myself as a more well-rounded professional” show the

professional image the subjects expect to have. This is mainly due to the fact that respondents will feel different once they have completed the course in Russia, showing that in fact there was a need to change the country, to recognize themselves and be socially recognized for having graduated abroad, including as regards to remuneration.

Based on this recognition, students become co-creators of value when it comes to Russian academic tourism, as they envision themselves with more future opportunities based on resources such as the quality of education and the experience of living abroad. Upon envisioning a different future, they create acceptance strategies that smooth the challenges of the present. From their statements, it is possible to summarize those respondents who had a satisfactory experience studying in Russia are more likely to stay in the country in the future, while those who did not adapt expect to return to Brazil or go to another country as soon as possible. Other points discussed were the low physician salaries and the expectation of more future opportunities once they have a Russian diploma.

The analysis was carried out using data collected from the interviews. Added to theoretical-empirical foundation, the analysis sought to answer the question posed in this research: Understanding value co-creation and image based on respondents' experience. The theoretical support was used to make inferences and connections between image and value co-creation in S-D logic from the selected speeches.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As we reach the final considerations of this study, it is important to highlight the results achieved by this research, its academic and managerial implications, main study limitations, and recommendations for future research. First, the results found were synthesized. Next, the theoretical and methodological contributions of the study are presented, which may contribute to the advancement of knowledge on the subject. Subsequently, the managerial implications of the research for planning and managing the marketing communication of tourist destinations are also presented. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed based on the evaluation of the research instruments used and the material and operational working conditions. Recognizing these limitations is an opportunity to conduct future research on the subject, according to the suggestions presented.

Based on the results obtained in the analyses, not only the main objective of this study “How Brazilian students collaborate to the co-creation of image value of Russia” was answered, but the specific objectives that had been delimited were as well.

When it comes to students' motivations to choose Russia as a study destination, the opportunity to study abroad at affordable prices is worthy of highlight. This factor increases their possibilities of standing out in the job market based on their experiences that suggest that studying in Russia is a form of distinction.

The research also showed a strong family influence in one of the respondent's choice of country, given the importance of the social environment where each individual is inserted in order for them to feel like they belong and are accepted. Plus, the quality of education of Russian engineering undergraduate courses was also observed, most likely because they are pioneering and reputable courses, which expands one's employability conditions.

When Russia's overall image is concerned, this study observed that functional and psychological aspects must be separated, considering that subjects' subjectivity reflects on the formation of an affective image of the country according to functional aspects. Image formation was then shown in unique ways, distorted in relation to the others, due to each subject's experiences and imaginary.

Furthermore, attention to value co-creation narrative commitment, in the lines of S-D logic, is important for the formation of an image of Russia by Brazilian. While institutions communicate their value propositions, they must also ensure coordination so that individual experiences occur as proposed. Should this fail to occur, it is possible that those who experience it under unanticipated expectations have a negative image of Russia.

Another point observed was how the image built by the subjects before and after travelling was transformed. In the different temporalities, the subjects demonstrated different constructions and reconstructions of their image of Russia. This happens mainly due to a distorted country image presented by the media, movies and books, which may have resulted in a negative image of several aspects, such as Russia being a dangerous country because of the wars. Some of respondents mentioned that they have been trying to change this image by transmitting information to their families and on social media, such as YouTube. This discourse transmitted via websites and promotional videos are sources that are directly related to the image of a destination (KIM; KERSTETTER, 2016), (FOROUDI et al., 2018).

Furthermore, this study evidenced, through the descriptions, that the experience of attending an undergraduate course in Russia brought new perspectives, knowledge, and new relationships among them and with society in general. Some respondents mentioned they wish to seek new opportunities, to grow professionally, and be recognized, and directly relate these opportunities to the fact that they study in Russia. The trajectories of these Brazilians differed a lot, which is natural, considering that each subject's comprehension is built in a very particular

way, as a result of the social groups they belong to, the way they relate to Russia and Russians, their perception of the quality of education, and expectations for the future. Based on this, they built and co-created the image of Russia and, as a result, stated if they intend or do not intend to continue in the country once they finish their studies.

5.1 Academic and managerial implications

The work developed in this master's dissertation provides methodological and theoretical advances for the investigated study area, since it presents, as an unprecedented contribution, the investigation of the image of Russia by Brazilian students through perception of destination image in value co-creation. With the importance of country image studies in mind, this study contributed to increasing the number of investigations within this proposition. This study also clarified how tourist destination image is key in consumers' purchase decision process. At the same time, managing impressions of a given image is one of the greatest challenges of tourism management. The difficulty of projecting a favorable image to an audience relates to a number of factors that often cannot be directly controlled by tourism managers. Among these factors one must consider travel accounts and country impressions shared among friends and acquaintances. Through word-of-mouth communication, tourist destinations gain fame and reputation, they become popular (or unpopular) among potential travelers. Tourist accounts of their travel experiences have a wide public reach. Furthermore, the media, including social media, movies, and television news, play a crucial role in characterizing a country, which influences political, economic and social aspects.

In the new consumer society context, marketing and promotion strategies must be used to explore tourism relationships between countries, given the importance of tourism for economies. By doing so, it is possible to attract more students interested in studying in Russia, more Brazilian tourists, and, possibly, narrowing the relationship of these countries. As for Russian institutions and the problems reported, being more dynamic and interactive, allowing and motivating students' participation would be recommended. This relationship should aim at expanding processes of co-creation and a positive image.

Another important point is creating interaction proposals, such as tools to ensure greater control of these exchanges between students, as beneficiaries, and the service providers. For example, consulates – or even travel agencies responsible for attracting students – could offer an "immersion" week in which those who are interested would have the

chance to have contact with the Russian culture and physical aspects of the country before travelling. This it would allow them to be more acquainted with the country before travelling and create true image conceptions.

As for the problems experienced by some Brazilian students in Russian institutions, it would be interesting that these institutions were to make some of questions raised by Dollinger and Coates (2018) to allow for a co-creation of value within universities: (1) How do students integrate their knowledge, experiences, and resources? (2) Does the student have equal access to the development of the higher education institution's value proposition? (3) What is the quality of the interactions between the student and the institution of higher education to integrate resources and co-create the value proposition in higher education?

Based on these educational value co-creation resources, it is possible to shape the service based on students' profiles. With the Brazilian case in mind, for instance, one can take into account the particularities and differences of the two cultures, allow for greater involvement by students, who can complain, share opinions and suggest ideas. As stressed by Dollinger and Coates (2018), there is a sharing between consumers and the organization that acts as a critical mechanism inserted in the co-production process that allows for the identification of current and future needs. Thus, it is possible to better meet students' expectations, especially foreigners, who tend to have more difficulty adapting.

Moreover, a relevant theoretical contribution of this research was the possibility of relating value co-creation aspects to subjective perceptions as a result of different cultural contexts. Therefore, an approximation between studies on country culture and characteristics is suggested as a challenge to institutional arrangements. Hofstede's studies were cited for their pioneering role in cultural research. There is also the possibility of aligning the debate between management and marketing aspects, since the arrangements for exchange control and coordination demand multidisciplinary work.

5.2 Research limitations and suggestions for future studies

It is possible to argue that a limitation of this study was the fact that it does not study all factors that contribute to forming the image of the country abroad, such as advertising, which has its importance in this process. As already described, advertising plays an important and decisive role in the image construction process, and this includes news broadcast in the media, personalities known worldwide, exported products, political decisions, among several other factors. A survey that covered not only the perception of Brazilian students would

certainly be more comprehensive. However, this was not the proposal of this study due to time and resource constraints.

Drawing a parallel between the theory and the data analyzed was somewhat difficult due to lack of literature on country image construction, especially the construction of Russia's image by Brazilians. Despite the fact that both countries are part of the BRICS, researches relating the two countries in the lines of the proposition of this study were not found.

It is important to mention that finding Brazilian students living in Russia who were willing to participate in this study was also somewhat difficult. Furthermore, although previously scheduled, some of the interviews never happened because the participant failed to show up. Other interviews were shorter than duration previously agreed, which may have jeopardized the obtaining of information. Notwithstanding the adversities, this study seeks to make the best of the data collected.

As regards to the translation of the interviews, when translated into English some typical Portuguese may not seem coherent. However, the translation sought to convey the closest possible idea. This is because this study will be presented to the Russian university RUDN as a requirement for obtaining a double degree.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent difficulty to access to the university environment, the researcher also chose to conduct this research with students living in Russia only. The initial idea, however, was to also have students from Brazilian universities and analyze their intention to study in Russia and the image they had of the country, which could either be unknown or a previously formed image. This, however, may be a possibility of a research in a future moment.

It is also imperative to suggest that future researches investigate other factors responsible for image formation and value co-creation in the Russia-Brazil relationship context, such as news broadcast in the media, social and economic political events, exportation and use of imported products. Such studies could contribute to having a better the understanding the how image co-creation process occurs and, from this, make new inferences and reflections. Conducting research with Russians living in Brazil would also be interesting, as it would allow us to understand their experiences and their country image creation process.

Finally, it is also important to recommended that similar studies be conducted with students of other nationalities to understand the image of Russia as an academic destination and, thereby, making comparisons and aligning the best strategies to manage its image abroad, and for educational institutions to better understand the needs and peculiarities of foreign students, understanding the particular view of students from different countries.

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