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## **Анализ стратегий цифрового рекрутинга иностраннных студентов Российской академии народного хозяйства и государственной службы (РАНХиГС)**

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### **АННОТАЦИЯ.**

Данное исследование посвящено анализу цифровой инфраструктуры и стратегии набора иностранных студентов Российской академии народного хозяйства и государственной службы (РАНХиГС). С помощью метода комплексного анализа была рассмотрена цифровая экосистема РАНХиГС, которая включает в себя структуру веб-сайта, присутствие в социальных сетях, содержание информации на сайте и внедрение технологий. Данное исследование выявляет пробелы в стратегии приема иностранных студентов в РАНХиГС. На основе проведенного анализа было выявлено, что существуют существенные недостатки, а именно ограниченное присутствие в социальных сетях, недостаточно полное описание процесса подачи заявки, низкое качество англоязычного контента и относительно слабые стратегии таргетинга на конкретные международные рынки. Обладая значительными управленческими активами, такими как высокая репутация в Российской Федерации, поддержка администрации президента и разнообразие предлагаемых учебных программ, РАНХиГС не в полной мере использует возможности цифрового набора иностранных студентов, тем самым ослабляя свои конкурентные позиции на международном рынке высшего образования. Визовые трудности, языковые ограничения и острая конкуренция со стороны западных университетов также могут быть отнесены к основным препятствиям для приема иностранных студентов. Для повышения эффективности набора иностранных студентов необходимо, с одной стороны, усовершенствовать технические возможности РАНХиГС, а с другой - обеспечить взаимодействие всех структур на уровне руководства, разработку профессионального контента, постоянное внедрение аналитики, а также дифференцированный подход к приему студентов из разных стран. Результаты исследования показывают, что инвестиции в цифровую инфраструктуру и создание культурно адаптированного контента призваны значительно укрепить международные позиции РАНХиГС.

**Ключевые слова:** набор иностранных студентов, РАНХиГС, цифровой маркетинг, цифровая стратегия, высшее образование.

# Analysis of digital recruitment strategies for international students of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA)

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## ABSTRACT.

This study is devoted to the analysis of digital infrastructure and the recruitment strategy of international students of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA). With the help of the method of complex analysis, RANEPA's digital ecosystem was considered, which includes the structure of the website, the presence on social networks, the content of information on the site and the introduction of technologies. This study identifies gaps in RANEPA's admission strategy for international students. Based on the analysis, it was revealed that there are significant disadvantages, namely a limited presence on social networks, an insufficiently complete description of the application process, poor quality of English-language content and relatively weak strategies for targeting specific international markets. With significant management assets, such as a high reputation in the Russian Federation, the support of the presidential administration, and the variety of study programs offered, RANEPA does not fully utilize the digital recruitment opportunities for international students, thereby weakening its competitive position in the international higher education market. Visa difficulties, language restrictions, and intense competition from Western universities can also be attributed to the key barriers to admitting international students. To improve the effectiveness of the international student recruitment it is necessary, on the one hand, to improve the technical capabilities of RANEPA, and on the other hand, to ensure the interaction of all structures at the management level, professional content development, continuous implementation of analytics, as well as a differentiated approach to admitting students from different countries. The results of the study show that investments in digital infrastructure and the creation of culturally adapted content are designed to significantly enhance RANEPA's international position.

**Keywords:** *Recruitment of international students, RANEPA, Digital marketing, Digital strategy, Higher education.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

RANEPA, being one of the most prestigious higher education institutions in the Russian Federation, occupies an honorable position in the education system of the Russian Federation. Founded in 2010 by the merger of the Academy of National Economy and the Russian Presidential Academy of Public Administration, it is an institute for training the elite of Russian society in the field of public administration, economics and business. The strategic importance of RANEPA is proved by the fact that it operates under the direct control of the Presidential Administration [1]

RANEPA is a member of various international educational associations and maintains close partnerships with more than 100 foreign academic institutions [2].

RANEPA has students from 53 regional branches of Russia and international students from 74 countries, making it the largest educational institution in Russia and one of the largest in Europe. The mission of this institution is not only to provide higher education, but also to provide advanced training programs for existing

civil servants and businessmen, which also indicates that RANEPA is an important node in the transfer of economic and managerial knowledge in Russia and occupies an important position in the infrastructure for developing the administrative potential of the Russian Federation [3].

In the practice of university marketing, the recruitment of international students on a digital basis is significantly increasing. The digital revolution has significantly changed the way students are recruited to higher education institutions. Students search for information about universities, evaluate admission options and make appropriate decisions based on the digital platforms of universities [4].

The federal program "Export of Education" aims to increase the number of foreign students studying in Russia. This initiative is a key component of increasing Russia's international influence [5].

The admission of international students contributes to the development of many strategic goals for Russian universities, including enhancing international reputation, stimulating cultural exchange and developing future ties, both diplomatic and economic [6].

In addition, the competitive situation in the post-Soviet education market has recently intensified, as the higher education market in the post-Soviet space has undergone significant changes, students have a greater choice of universities to enter, and foreign institutions are using more complex strategic approaches to attracting students [7]. Such competitive pressure forces not only RANEPA, but also other Russian universities to modernize their strategies for attracting international students, primarily to introduce more digital channels [8].

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of RANEPA's digital infrastructure and its recruitment strategies for international students, as well as to evaluate their effectiveness.

The following methods were used for this study: synthesis of scientific literature on digital marketing in higher education, content analysis of RANEPA's digital resources aimed at admitting international students, as well as comparative analysis with digital infrastructures of similar institutions of higher education, which allowed us to provide a descriptive assessment of the current practice of admitting international students to RANEPA.

## **2. SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE RANEPA INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT**

### ***2.1 Target Markets for International Student Recruitment***

CIS countries such as Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan have been traditional sources of foreign students supply to Russian universities, including RANEPA. This situation reflects Russia's historical ties and current strategic priorities in relation to these countries. Currently, there are relatively simplified procedures for admitting CIS citizens to Russian universities, but the ever-growing competition from other universities requires from Russian academic institutions to adopt more sophisticated marketing approaches [9].

Today, RANEPA has become more active in developing Asian markets, especially such as China, India and Vietnam. For example, China sends the largest number of its students to various countries, and the success in recruiting Chinese students is largely due to the use of digital strategies, as well as the university's digital presence on Chinese platforms such as Wechat [10].

Another growing segment of international student recruitment is India, especially for management, economics, and technical degree programs. More often, Indian students choose institutions with international accreditation and English-language programs, which creates certain difficulties for Russian universities.

Technical specialties are especially in demand among students from Vietnam. The Vietnamese government significantly supports the admission of its students to foreign universities by awarding scholarships. In terms of attracting Vietnamese students to enroll in Russian universities, digital content, which contains reviews from other Vietnamese students about their studies in Russia, is especially popular [11].

African markets also represent significant potential for Russian universities, as Russia has historical educational ties with many African countries, such as Ghana, Morocco, Egypt, Nigeria, and others. Attracting

students from Africa requires investments in digital content in English and French and partnerships with African educational institutions [12].

Limited English-language content, as well as cultural and political factors, put RANEPA in a less favorable position to attract students from Western Europe and North America. However, there are some niches for attracting such students, especially those interested in learning Russian and politics, economics and the history of Russia, but in this case, special accents for a Western audience on unique programs are required [13].

Thus, each educational market should be considered as a separate one and a specific student recruitment strategy should be applied to it [14]. At RANEPA, the strategy of regional differentiation is not used enough to attract international students.

## **2.2 *RANEPA's Partner Ecosystem***

The development of a network of educational agents, which act as intermediaries between institutions and applicants, plays a significant role in recruiting international students worldwide, but such a network is not well developed at RANEPA. Improvement of the digital equipment of the agent network is especially required. World practice shows that leading foreign universities, as a rule, provide their educational agents with online portals containing information about programs, tracking the status of student applications and having means of feedback communication. At RANEPA, communication with potential students is conducted mainly by e-mail or during rare face-to-face meetings, but the development of a comprehensive portal for educational agents could ensure a consistent and targeted distribution of information about educational services, which would ultimately attract a significantly larger number of international students [15].

RANEPA maintains partnerships with more than 100 foreign universities. However, the use of digital platforms supporting this partnership is used at least [16].

Another important tool for recruiting international students, especially from developing countries, is international scholarship programs, especially those supported by the State. However, the awareness of potential students about the availability of these programs often remains low. The digital promotion of these programs could significantly increase the influx of international students to RANEPA.

The most important tool for recruiting international students for an educational institution is their participation in international fairs. Today, it is possible to hold virtual educational fairs, which provide universities with expanded opportunities for digital promotion of educational services. RANEPA showed poor performance at virtual educational fairs, as it had had limited investments in strategies for interactive interaction with potential students and in the design of virtual stands [17].

## **2.3 *Barriers to Attracting International Students to RANEPA***

First, language barriers are the main obstacle to increasing the enrollment of international students at RANEPA. Although RANEPA has significantly expanded its English-language programs, there is still a problem of limited availability of such programs, and English, like no other language, is the lingua franca of international higher education [18].

Russian language courses are offered at RANEPA to enable students to study in Russian, but few international students see the Russian language proficiency factor as significant for their future career advancement. Digital marketing could significantly help in communicating to potential international students the value of acquiring Russian as a new career opportunity.

There are also certain difficulties in obtaining visas, which prevents some potential students from enrolling in RANEPA, especially those who have alternative options for studying in other countries. Improving digital information about visa requirements, visa deadlines, and assistance services from other institutions will help reduce the uncertainty and anxiety of potential international students about this process [19].

Now, competition from Western educational institutions, especially in attracting capable foreign students with financial resources, remains high. RANEPA must compete with Western universities in many aspects, including the availability of education and the availability of unique academic prospects. Digital marketing is designed to articulate the value of learning in RANEPA [20].

### **3. THE DIGITAL STRUCTURE OF RANEPA**

#### **3.1 *Official RANEPA's Website (ranepa.ru)***

The quality of the website and the availability of information in the native language for potential students directly increase the number of applications to a particular university [21]. Official RANEPA's website (ranepa.ru) is the main portal for admitting international students, which makes it an important asset of this educational institution. The multidimensional structure of the Academy's educational services is reflected in the complex information structure of the website, which presents bachelor's, master's, and executive training programs at various levels. There are also separate portals for regional branches. However, such a complex organizational structure of the site sometimes causes navigation problems for international students who are unfamiliar with the structure of higher education in Russia. The English-language version of the RANEPA website lacks practical information on what procedures potential students should go through to apply, on housing costs and student support services. In addition, some pages of the site contain literal translations from Russian into English, which cannot effectively convey information or violate the genre aspects of information presentation, that is, sometimes the official business style of content presentation is violated.

Today, the use of mobile devices is no longer an option in higher education marketing, as most university applicants receive their initial information on mobile devices [22]. The adaptability of the RANEPA website to mobile devices has improved significantly in recent years, but the download speed for international connections remains low.

For Russian students, it is possible to filter and search for information about study programs. However, for international students, the functionality of the program catalog is not so accessible, they face difficulties when viewing programs available in English or when choosing which branches they can enroll in. There is often no clear information for international students about the language requirements for a particular program, tuition fees, and application deadlines, but clarity of the application process is the most important aspect when recruiting students to higher education institutions [23].

#### **3.2 *RANEPA's Presence on Social Media***

RANEPA is actively present in VK, one of the main social networks in Russia. The RANEPA account has more than 150,000 subscribers. It contains publications about university events and student achievements, as well as about studies and campus life. Publications are published frequently, sometimes several times a day, but the quality of the content varies significantly.

Audience coverage often has a strong bias towards today's students, as well as graduates of RANEPA, the account places less emphasis on attracting potential students, while losing its instrumental purpose as a recruitment channel. The content lacks segmentation for different audience groups, and information for international students appears fragmentary, showing the lack of a coherent strategy for recruiting international students.

Posts in English appear quite rarely. The involvement of graduates and influencers is relatively low, but RANEPA has trained more than 1,000 prominent civil servants and businessmen who occupy a high position in modern Russia, but their stories rarely appear on social networks.

#### **3.3 *Integration with Specialized Student Recruitment Portals***

RANEPA actively cooperates with the largest Russian educational portals, such as Postupi.online and Vuzopedia, which combine information about study programs at Russian universities and admission requirements. This makes it possible for Russian students to apply through centralized systems. However, international students often cannot use these platforms, as they contain mostly Russian-language content.

RANEPA's representation in international educational online reference, such as StudyPortal and MastersPortal, is also incomplete and fragmentary. And this fact can be considered as a missed opportunity to attract international students.

Even though the academy has developed panoramic tours of some of its facilities, they do not have comprehensive coverage and their technical quality varies.

Online open days are mainly aimed at the domestic audience. Virtual events aimed at a foreign audience are mainly presented in the form of presentation webinars, which lack interactive aspects. It does not allow potential students, for example, to ask questions directly. And interactive formats, creating connections between peers and considering differences in time zones, are an important factor in attracting international students [24].

### ***3.4 Digital Advertising***

Queries in Yandex RANEPA show strong visibility, however, as for similar English-language queries, visibility becomes much weaker. Thus, the effectiveness of search engine optimization (SEO) of RANEPA shows a significant asymmetry between targeting domestic and international students. Using sophisticated demographic and behavioral targeting for Russian-speaking students, RANEPA does not use it effectively to attract international students, especially those with high potential. And the high positioning of the RANEPA brand in the search results reflects its strong reputation in the Russian market of educational services but limited international recognition. When querying in English, RANEPA's visibility is often obscured by competitors or general information about Russian education.

## **4. RANEPA'S CONTENT DELIVERY STRATEGIES**

### ***4.1 Structuring information on RANEPA's website***

The description of the training programs on the website is quite complete, clear and precise. Especially flagship programs describe faculty profiles, provide course samples, learning outcomes, and career prospects. However, some other programs in lesser-known areas, and especially in regional branches, are not fully described, and thus the value of such programs is significantly lost.

For potential international students, some programs are described quite clearly, but the description of other programs is fragmented, for example, the website suggests that potential international students contact the admissions office to obtain the main information on a particular program. In addition, some pages of the RANEPA's website contain terms that suggest that students are familiar with the educational terminology adopted in Russia, but many international students are not familiar with such concepts as, for example, "targeted admission" or "state financing", and some of the qualifications that students can acquire exist only within the framework of Russian education. Thus, many potential international students who read the program description in English may have difficulty understanding it. This fact indicates that an explanation of the institutional and national context is required when promoting a particular program.

Emotionally attractive descriptions of programs that show students' experience and professional growth lead to potential students accessing such university websites more frequently. [27]. Many descriptions of RANEPA's programs are purely formal and official, which leads to a loss of opportunities to attract potential international students.

The profiles of individual faculties also play a role in attracting international students. Many well-known scientists work at RANEPA, and RANEPA conducts extensive international cooperation in the field of education and scientific research, but this information is practically not reflected in English-language publications.

Highlighting student life is also a very important aspect for attracting potential international students, but international students need more information about their possible cultural adaptation, their participation in international student communities, support services, and extracurricular activities in general. International students care about their quality of life in another country and about their cultural experience, which is one of the main decision-making factors when applying to a foreign university [28].

In addition, future potential international students are often very interested in information about renting housing and living expenses, and obtaining visas, but this information is often only available in Russian on the website, and information about housing or the applying procedures is fragmented. Information about obtaining visas is minimal, this process is completely not explained on the website.

## **4.2 Multimedia in RANEPA**

Even though RANEPA has created promotional videos and recorded events, there is no targeted video content strategy to attract international students. The existing video content does not show the prospects of studying at the university at all, and the quality of video content can vary significantly.

Virtual reality technologies and panoramic images are partially used in RANEPA. However, the coverage is incomplete, and only individual objects are represented. In addition, there are technical limitations, such as insufficient optimization of mobile devices and slow loading time of video content.

RANEPA uses visual representation of data and infographics, but the presentation of such data is very fragmented, and international students would greatly benefit from providing visual information that reduces their dependence on textual understanding of information.

Podcasting has become an evolving tool for attracting potential customers to higher education, but we have not identified RANEPA's investments in this content format.

## **4.3 Content Adaptation**

The quality of translation is a proxy signal of the quality of the educational institution itself for potential international students [29]. However, the quality of translation of RANEPA's Russian-language content into English shows significant variability, starting with professional translation and ending with literal machine interpretations, which significantly disrupt the understanding of information on the site and significantly damage the reputation of the academy.

Some information presupposes knowledge of cultural contexts, otherwise such information may deter potential international students from admission. Content adaptation for specific regions is also required, which is also missing from the overall RANEPA international recruitment strategy. Individual approaches are required for different markets, it is necessary to appeal to specific markets, highlight certain features of programs and provide information about the life and studies of students from different regions. Adapted content for potential international students makes the institution's culture and values accessible to a diverse audience [30].

The use of international student ambassadors has also been gaining popularity recently, but at RANEPA this practice is very limited and unsystematic. But peer-to-peer communication is one of the most effective tools for attracting new students. The International Student Ambassadors Program allows potential students to receive authentic information about their studies and thus present themselves as part of the student community [31].

# **5. INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES AT RANEPA**

## **5.1 Customer Relationship Management System and Application Management**

The Customer Relations Management System (CRM) allows institutions to track the actions of potential students, automate communication, thereby optimizing the recruitment processes. Domestic students gain significant advantages when interacting with RANEPA websites and platforms. International students, on the other hand, must navigate through fragmented pieces of information, looking for descriptions of application processes and downloadable forms. Also, for the RANEPA international student enrollment, the possibilities of tracking applicants' actions and application analytics remain very limited. The integration of RANEPA digital platforms with government systems greatly facilitates the internal recruitment of students, however, without solving the problems of admission for international students. Although the development of parallel platforms for international student recruitment requires investment, it would significantly improve the percentage of international students enrolled in the academy. The international student recruitment system should be integrated into domestic institutional databases, but it should consider the unique characteristics and admission procedures of international students.

## **5.2 Using AI and Chatbots**

In recent years, the use of artificial intelligence applications in the recruitment of students to higher education institutions has progressed significantly. Chatbots are one of the most advanced technologies in this regard, they

can provide round-the-clock automated answers to the most common questions, which provides an almost instant response to potential students' requests. Chatbots also free up human resources for more complex jobs when recruiting students. Modern applicants generally rate interaction with chatbots positively, but they would like to have an unhindered switch to communicating with real people to discuss more complex issues [32].

At RANEPA, the introduction of artificial intelligence and chatbots is minimal, especially when recruiting international students from different time zones, there is a lack of round-the-clock automated response to the questions they ask, and this may prompt them to look for alternative admission options. In addition, chatbots have multilingual support capabilities, they can understand and respond in a variety of languages. The development of multilingual chatbots, of course, requires significant investments, but even an English-language chatbot programmed to solve common issues could significantly increase the number of international students enrolled in RANEPA.

One of the most advanced applications of artificial intelligence in student recruitment is content personalization technologies, which allow content to be adapted based on user characteristics, which would be an important means of maintaining communication with international students.

### **5.3 Using Data Analytics**

A consistent analysis of data analytics could reveal the stages at which RANEPA has the largest turnover of international students and further identify opportunities for improving the admission of international students at these stages. Tracking the behavior of international students on the academy's website could provide comprehensive information about their information needs and the issues they are particularly interested in. Web analytics tools, such as heat maps or recordings of an applicant's communication sessions with a website, would provide a deeper understanding of their behavior. The creation of predictive modeling for the recruitment of international students could significantly advance the recruitment strategy of international students, this would identify candidates for admission at an early stage. However, of course, such analytics require investments in technology.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The introduction of digital technologies in the admission of foreign students to Russian universities is currently a strategic requirement that needs investment and constant attention.

As a result of this comprehensive study, it was revealed that RANEPA has significant assets for admitting international students: the support of the presidential administration, a strong reputation within the country, a variety of study programs, and historical scientific and educational ties with other foreign universities.

However, we have identified several groups of shortcomings in the digital infrastructure and recruitment strategies of international students at RANEPA: stripped-down English-language web content, which is often poorly translated into English, limited presence on social networks, especially in foreign ones, limited use of multimedia content, lack of marketing automation and customer relationship management systems, lack of data analytics, weak implementation of artificial intelligence in the process of admissions of international students, lack of market strategies, reflecting the preferences of the target audience, an almost complete absence of attractive emotional content containing infographics and describing the experience of international students.

The Academy could be positioned as the preferred destination for international students who want to receive high-quality Russian education in public administration and economics, as well as other related fields. This requires a combination of the academy's organizational strengths, its strategic positioning, and the expansion of its digital capabilities.

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