

Building productive relationships with international education agents

Nadia O'Connell

PhD Candidate, School of Commerce and Marketing, CQUniversity, Bruce Highway
Rockhampton, Queensland 4702 Australia
nadiastuart_gibson@yahoo.com

Dr. Ho Yin Wong

Senior Lecturer in Marketing, School of Commerce and Marketing,
CQUniversity, Bruce Highway Rockhampton,
Queensland 4702 Australia
h.wong@cqu.edu.au

Abstract - The purpose of this paper is to look at a particular university and investigate the role of education agents in the recruitment of international students to this institution. The study highlights limitations of agency theory, having reduced utility for appraising and describing education agent and university relations and looks at relationship marketing as a complimentary method of agent governance and relationship building for enhanced business performance.

A case study approach was adopted for this pilot study, using a single case design with multiple embedded units of analysis. In-depth, one on one interviews were conducted with four industry experts from an educational institution. Additional information was sourced through the internet and from government reports. Data was analysed using Nvivo and manual qualitative data analysis techniques.

This paper fulfils an identified research gap through investigating techniques that institutions could adopt to motivate and improve relationships with education agents. No previous studies have concentrated specifically on the recruitment of international students through this channel.

Definitions

For the purpose of this paper the following definitions are given for specific terms used throughout the paper.

International education - the industry of recruiting international students to study at institutions.

Education agents – also commonly referred to as recruitment agents or international education agents, refers to those businesses whose primary mission is to recruit international students into educational institutions, receiving commission for doing so.

Introduction - Industry Brief

International education is an important industry for the Australian economy. In 2007/08, international education contributed \$13.7 billion to the Australian economy, measured through export earnings, including international student expenditure on tuition fees and related living expenses and tourism generated from visiting relatives (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Education is the second largest services export sector and now the third largest export sector overtaking tourism. Over the last 10 years the industry has achieved 15 per cent average growth per annum (Austrade 2008).

The Australian University's International Directors Forum (AUIDF) benchmarking study (2006) showed that 62.3% of students recruited to study in Australia were recruited by an education agent.

Education agents play an integral role in the industry and have developed as businesses through which international students can be recruited to educational institutions. The number of education agents around the world is unknown, however the Education Agent Training Course (EATC), developed in collaboration between Australian Education International (AEI), the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and Australian international education peak bodies has registered nearly 10,000 education agents since 2005 (PIER 2009). Education agents provide students with an array of advice about studying overseas and receive a commission typically between 10 – 25% from the institution for enrolling students, depending on the sector.

Education agents have established as a business in all countries where international students come from, with a higher prevalence in those countries which have more difficult visa criteria to enter Australia as a students, such as India, Nepal, Bangladesh and China.

Despite high international student recruitment through education agents, little has been written about marketing through this channel or how to build strong relations with them.

Aims of this study

Predominantly, this research was driven by the questions:

1. How does *agency theory* lend itself to the education agent/ university relationship and can contributions be made to this theory when examining it from an international education industry perspective?
2. Is a *contract* the most distinct and crucial element in a principal/agent relationship?
3. Is *information asymmetry* an agency problem between education agents and universities or is information sharing between both parties more the norm?
4. What role does *relationship marketing* and *agency theory* play in the relationship between universities and education agents in the recruitment of international students when looked at from the universities point of view?
5. Is *commitment* and *trust* the most distinct variables for building and maintaining a relationship with education agents?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper will look at agency theory and relationship marketing as a theoretical lens to examine business approaches that could be utilised in the management of education agents, including specifically the crucial nature of the contract, information asymmetry and relationship marketing techniques.

AGENCY THEORY

Agency theory is concerned with the use of contractual terms to control and coordinate the relationship between the principal and their contracted agent (Weitz and Jap 1995; Jensen and Meckling 1976). Agency theory is also concerned with

monitoring behaviour, using power and structuring agent incentives to prevent shirking and the instance of information asymmetry (Fama and Jensen 1983; Tosi, Katz et al. 1997; Garg 2000).

Agency theory has been widely applied in the analysis of principal / agent frameworks, however, appears to have limitations which reduce its functionality as a framework for appraising marketing channel interactions (Vermillion et al. 2002).

Agency theory and the crucial nature of a contract

The majority of agency theory literature is concerned with controlling mechanisms such as setting contracts to curtail conflict of interests (Weitz & Jap 1995), monitoring the agents action (Eisenhardt 1988), using power in asymmetric relationships, with the basic axiom of agency theory assuming that agents act opportunistically and the assumption of goal divergence (Jensen and Meckling 1976, Eisenhardt 1989, Garg and Rasheed 2006).

Agency theory was first introduced as a conceptual model to describe the relationship between a principal and an agent where the principal delegates work to an agent (Thompson 1967; Ouchi 1979). Agency theory attempts to describe this relationship using the metaphor of a contract. Jensen and Meckling (1976 p. 6) define “an agency relationship as a contract under which one or more persons (the principal) engage another person (the agent) to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision making authority to the agent.”

Several authors (Fama and Jensen 1983; Tosi, Katz et al. 1997; Garg 2000) state that the most distinct feature and crucial concept of agency theory is the contract, where a system of complex written and unwritten contracts provide an effective disciplinary mechanism for disparate individuals. With the contract aiming to control divergent self-interest of the agent, specifying the rights, obligations, reward structures and monitoring systems between the two parties.

Some authors have already identified limitations, criticising the stressed importance of the contract in agency theory. Mintzberg (1990) states that mathematical models that specify contract conditions, do not truly represent reality, due to the impossibility of capturing all eventualities and the changing nature of the principal-agent relationship. Other authors (Perrow 1986; Eisenhardt 1989) believe that focus on the contract ignores political and interpersonal aspects of the principal-agent relationship. The above noted studies lack empirical evidence to support their claim, being either conceptual studies or based on laboratory design, not representative of an actual business environment. Research regarding the contract in agency theory literature provides opposing points of view, with the contract being either the critical element in a principal/agent relationship or in contrary not allowing for all eventualities and the personal nature of relationships.

This research will look into the critical nature of the contract between an educational institution and education agents to see if it is deemed to be crucial or if relationship management also plays a strong role in governing and motivating education agents.

The next section will look at another issue as defined in agency theory literature - information asymmetry, firstly looking at conceptual, then empirical research conducted on this topic to provide background research on this topic, with the aim of

later seeing if there is a prevalence of information withholding from both institutions and education agents in the international education industry.

INFORMATION ASYMMETRY

Conceptual research into information asymmetry

Information asymmetry is where the agent holds information of value to the principal and the agent will use the incidence of information asymmetry for their own interest (Jensen and Meckling 1976; Huang et. al. 2006; Husted 2007). In the context of this research, the instance of information asymmetry will be viewed not only as the agent withholding information, but the potential withholding or lack of information transferred between both the principal and the agent.

Huang et. al. (2006) provides a conceptual framework of information asymmetry gaps in their bilateral agency relationship model, showing possible instance of information asymmetry in the bank industry. This study states that information asymmetry is an important issue for the sector, but is a very industry specific conceptual paper which provides a model that may not be transferable or relevant to all industries.

Husted (2007) states that many business problems are due to elements of asymmetrical information and analyses this problem using information economics and the principal/agent model, providing possible solutions to instances of information asymmetry. Again this paper provides excellent conceptual ideas, but requires further empirical testing.

Empirical research into information asymmetry

Several empirical studies have concentrated on the prevalence of information asymmetry in a variety of business settings. Studies of other business structures and settings include shareholder arrangement (Rutheford and Buchholtz, 2007), franchises (Doherty and Quinn, 1999), sales manager and sales employee situations (Sridhar et. al 1997) and incentive contract arrangements (Baker et al. 1994). These studies have highlighted the need to take action to reduce the level of information asymmetry between for example board members and shareholders; franchisee and franchisor; manager and employee; or company and worker. Findings from these studies have verified that information asymmetry is an important issue and the need to implement measures to reduce levels of information asymmetry is warranted.

For example Sridhar et al. (1997) article on information asymmetry between sales managers and sales employees found information asymmetry to be an issue in their empirical research of a Fortune 100 organisation. This study is based on the antecedents of information asymmetry that agency theory stipulates agency problems, including information asymmetry arise between a sales manager and a sales employee either because their goals are incongruent or because performance is difficult to monitor or verify. The construct looked at the degree sales employees perceived they had greater information regarding performance outcomes and methods than their supervisor. The study found the greater the information asymmetry the lower the sales employees performance and the greater the dysfunctional behaviour by subordinates. Information asymmetry literature is limited in that studies have been of business settings where one party stands to gain from withholding information. Few empirical studies look specifically at the prevalence of information asymmetry in a business

setting where the agent operates as an independent business from the principal, such as education agents and educational institutions. Studies have also concentrated on looking for the prevalence and effect of information asymmetry rather than prevalence of information sharing and cooperation. With relationship marketing becoming a more contemporary style of conducting business, the author believes that organisations are looking for ways to be more cooperative in their approach to information sharing, for the mutual benefit of both parties. This study will look at the prevalence of information asymmetry and information sharing through interviews with education industry experts and analyse if industry practice contradicts this aspect of agency theory.

Eisenhardt (1989) notes that agency theory could benefit from an additional sociological component and recommends using agency theory in conjunction with complimentary theories. The author of this paper suggests agency theory is limited due to the deemed crucial nature of the contract and the stated prevalence of information asymmetry as a major agency problem and believes that agency theory could benefit from a more holistic and cooperative approach such as relationship marketing, for maximum gain for both parties. While some elements of agency theory are useful in analysing a principal/ agent relationship, a melding of this approach with relationship marketing techniques may prove more useful.

In summary, previous studies have 1) placed too much emphasis on the critical nature of the contract, 2) overstressed the prevalence of information asymmetry and 3) presented contrasting views to contemporary relationship marketing approaches. The next section will look at relationship marketing to examine whether together with agency theory, governance of education agents by educational institutions can be further enhanced.

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

In the international education industry, agents simultaneously represent more than one institution, creating a conflict of interest between whom the agent should favour. In this situation contracts between institutions are relatively similar, therefore institutions must use things other than the contract to govern and influence education agents to recruit for them. This is where relationship marketing may play an integral role, with as will be shown in the below discussion, institutions could compete more vigorously through forging relationships with education agents and using various relationship marketing techniques.

Agency theory and relationship marketing represent contrasting views about channel relationships, from a focus of transactional exchange to a relational exchange, where value is created through collaboration and commitment (Vermillion et al. 2002).

Relationship marketing is concerned with the notion of being a long term “win-win” situation that is non-adversarial (Ganesan 1994) by developing trust, commitment among other variables to develop and maintain a productive relationship (Dwyer et al. 1987, Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Robicheaux and Coleman, 1994; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Smith and Barclay, 1997; Wilson 1995).

The concept of relationship marketing has been called a major directional change in both marketing theory and practice (Morgan and Hunt 1994) and also a genuine

paradigm shift (Kotler, 1991). Practitioners are placing more emphasis on using relationship strategies such as building trust and commitment to maintain continuity rather than the use of authoritative control mechanisms (Weitz and Jap 1995).

Relationship marketing is “the process of creating, maintaining and enhancing strong, value-laden relationships with customers and other stakeholders.” (Armstrong and Kotler 2000 p. 11). In fact, understanding how “to form, maintain and improve relations between customer and service provider has become an essential strategic element in the success of the service enterprise” (Gemunden, Ritter et al. 1997 p. 82). Morgan and Hunt (1994) theorise that the presence of relationship commitment and trust is central to successful relationship marketing and state that commitment and trust are more important than power and its ability to control others.

An extended list of relationship variables which have both theoretical and empirical support include commitment, trust, cooperation, mutual goals, independence/ power imbalance, comparison level of the alternative, adaptation, non-retrievable investments, shared technology, summative constructs, structural bonds and social bonds (Wilson 1995).

Of these commitment and trust are the most commonly included variable in relationship models (Dwyer et al. 1987; Anderson and Weitz 1990; Moorman et al. 1992; Wilson 1995)

Palmatier et al. (2006) meta analysis on factors influencing the effectiveness of relationship marketing found strong support for the fundamental premise of relationship marketing that strong relationships positively affect performance. They found expertise and communication to be the most effective relationship building strategies and commitment and trust ranking the highest variables for service industry exchanges through a channel partner to affect the seller’s objective performance.

Although theoretical and empirical research on relationship marketing is extensive, descriptive information about channel relationships in the real world context has not been exploited and much of the qualitative research has focused on consumer behaviour rather than relationship marketing between firms (Weitz and Jap 1995). Trust and commitment are re-occurring prominent variables appearing in research, but further testing of other key elements, particularly extrinsic elements, to build and maintain relationships between a principal and an agent is required. This research will address these limitations, by looking at relationship in a business to business environment and further examine other possible key elements, in addition to trust in commitment, that effect relationships between exchange partners.

Research methodology/ research methods

Four marketing and recruitment practitioners from an Australian University were invited to participate in one on one in-depth interviews as part of a pilot study. In-depth interviews were selected for greater control over respondent selection, typically resulting in greater context and flexibility in the inquiry process (Cassell and Symon 2004). Interviews allow for greater depth of information through building a close rapport between interviewer and interviewee (Hedges 1985) (Webb 1995) and are appropriate when interviewees are professional people (Tull and Hawkins 1990).

The case study comprised of sales and marketing practitioners from a University involved in international student recruitment. Each respondent was responsible for agents in a different geographical area including China, India, South East Asia and Europe. The University was selected due to an assumed expertise in recruiting international students, given their high international student population of approximately 30%. This assumed expertise was determined through multiple units of analysis (Yin 2003), including an examination of government statistical reports and the University's annual report. These reports were examined to determine the success in international student recruitment of the University under analysis, with an increase in student recruitment and high proportion of international students reflecting the University's strength and expertise in the field.

Each interview lasted for approximately one hour and was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Semi structured interview questions were followed, allowing for similar questions to be asked of each respondent, while allowing participants to speak freely and to be probed on certain points raised (Grbich 1999).

Ethical approval was obtained from the participants prior to the interview and authorised in writing. Validity of the data was ensured by using multiple sources of evidence to establish a chain of evidence and through having key informants review draft reports. Strict procedures and protocol for data collection and storage was adopted to ensure the reliability of the data. Data collected was analysed using content analysis techniques using both Nvivo and manual data manipulation. Methods include pattern matching, explanation building, memoing and use of logic models to extract and express the data collected.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Agent contract not most crucial element

Theme No. 1. All respondents stated that although the contract has a role to play it is not a crucial element in the relationship between education agents and universities.

As discussed in the literature review section of this paper, several agency theory authors believe that a contract is the most crucial element in a relationship between a principal and agent (Fama and Jensen 1983; Tosi, Katz et al. 1997; Garg 2000). This study aimed to verify if this was also true in the international education industry in a relationship between universities and education agents. Overall, respondents believed that although the contract played an important role, it was not the most crucial aspect and therefore contradicts agency theory.

One industry representative explains “*I guess the contract, in as much detail as it has, can't cover everything that can happen. There are extra things that you have to do and you can never really compensate for those extra things you have to do.*”

A second industry representative interviewed explains “*a contract is a piece of paper that isn't personal and the relationship is what gets you the numbers. You can have all the contracts and pay all the commission in the world but if you don't have a relationship, nothing happens.*”

A third industry representative believes that having an onshore presence would be a stronger force than a contract. *“I would think that if we had a representative established offshore this would help in terms of monitoring as well as enforcing what we wanted by more frequent visits. We have a representative offshore in South East Asia. I think that this would be a stronger force than the contract as in most cases once the contract has been signed very few people go back to it.”*

Feedback from experts in the international education industry indicates that although the contract has a role to play, especially in setting up initial boundaries under which agents can operate, it is not considered to be the most distinct or crucial concept as other agency theory authors suggest. As seen in the above comments, international education industry experts responses contradict this aspect of agency theory and contrastingly believe that a more cooperative and personal approach to monitoring and working with agents is important.

Contract seldom referred

Theme No. 2. All respondents stated that the contract is seldom referred to.

Theme two is captured in the experience of one industry expert stating *“I think in reality, a contract is just perceived as a piece of paper, that once it is signed no one is going to look at it and that is probably the reality, so for example having a contract with a particular agent does not mean they are necessarily going to recruit for you. I have discovered when I started working at this institution we had a contract with one of the largest agent in China for five years or so, but they have never recruited a single student for the institution, so to me that is a waste of effort, having a contract in place could mean nothing.”*

A second industry expert stated *“the only time we would be referring to it is when there is a dispute about incentives. Incidences arise when an agent think they have sent a lot more students than they have, so they would be disputing the number of students or the level of commission they should be on.”*

As shown in comments made by industry experts interviewed, although the contract plays a role, it is not the most crucial element in the relationship between education agents and institutions and once signed the contract is seldom referred to. As will be seen later in comments made by interviewees, strong relations between institutions and agents have far greater influence on recruitment levels than the influence of a contract.

Information asymmetry vs. information sharing

Theme No. 3. All respondents did not believe that information asymmetry was an issue between education agents and their university.

Information asymmetry is seen in agency theory literature as a major hurdle between principals and agents. This however, does not appear to be the case in the international education industry. This lack of conflict arising from information asymmetry between education agents and institutions is reflected in the below comments by industry experts. One industry expert said *“I haven’t really stuck anyone who said they aren’t going to give the information.”*

A second representative said, *“There is a bit of sharing of information, they are the eyes, they feel what is happening in the market.”*

The approach taken by the international education industry appears to be more reciprocal in nature than that defined in agency theory literature. A third industry representative said *“in-country marketing managers work hand in hand with the agents. Good agents want to share because they know they will benefit from it.”*

A fourth industry representative said *“the University has more information about courses but we strive to alert the agent in terms of course changes, new products being developed. Also we are trying to involve agents in market research and demand.”*

As seen in the comments from industry experts, the problem of information asymmetry, as raised in agency theory literature, is not as prevalent in the relationship between education agents and this University. The common theme from the interviews is that there is a feeling of concerted effort for information sharing and cooperation between education agents and the University, rather than one party trying to keep information from the other.

Relationship marketing imperative

Theme No. 4. All respondents agreed that building a relationship with education agents was of high importance.

From comments made by industry experts, relationship marketing appears to be the key to increasing student recruitment through education agents.

One industry representative said *“I think some relationships can be built over years of working together to develop into a kind of trust and friendship and you find it is working well and is truly beneficial.”*

The importance of relationship marketing is stressed by a second industry representative interviewed, who said *“I think it is all about relationship. With 90% of my agents it is a relationship of trust and dual commitment from both parties and we have got to a point where agents trust me to work for them and I trust 95% of the agents that work for me. The contract is there and they understand what they can and can't do, but I think being in their face saying don't use my logo unless you run it through my office, has a lot more effect than a piece of paper that states what can and can't be done. So it's about relationships, it's about trust and overall being in their face has a lot more weight.”*

The respondent goes on to say that *“I think relationships are the single most important part of marketing. It is not how much money you put into marketing. You could put a lot of marketing money in and not recruit students as you don't have a solid relationship with the agent. This business is a relationship business; it is how you manage the relationships with your agents, partners and students. I think my style is 100% relationship building, 90% relationship management, 10% marketing.”*

The third industry representative said *“building a strong relationship is probably the most important thing. Honestly if you don't have a relationship I don't think this business works. You have got some people that think they can just walk into an*

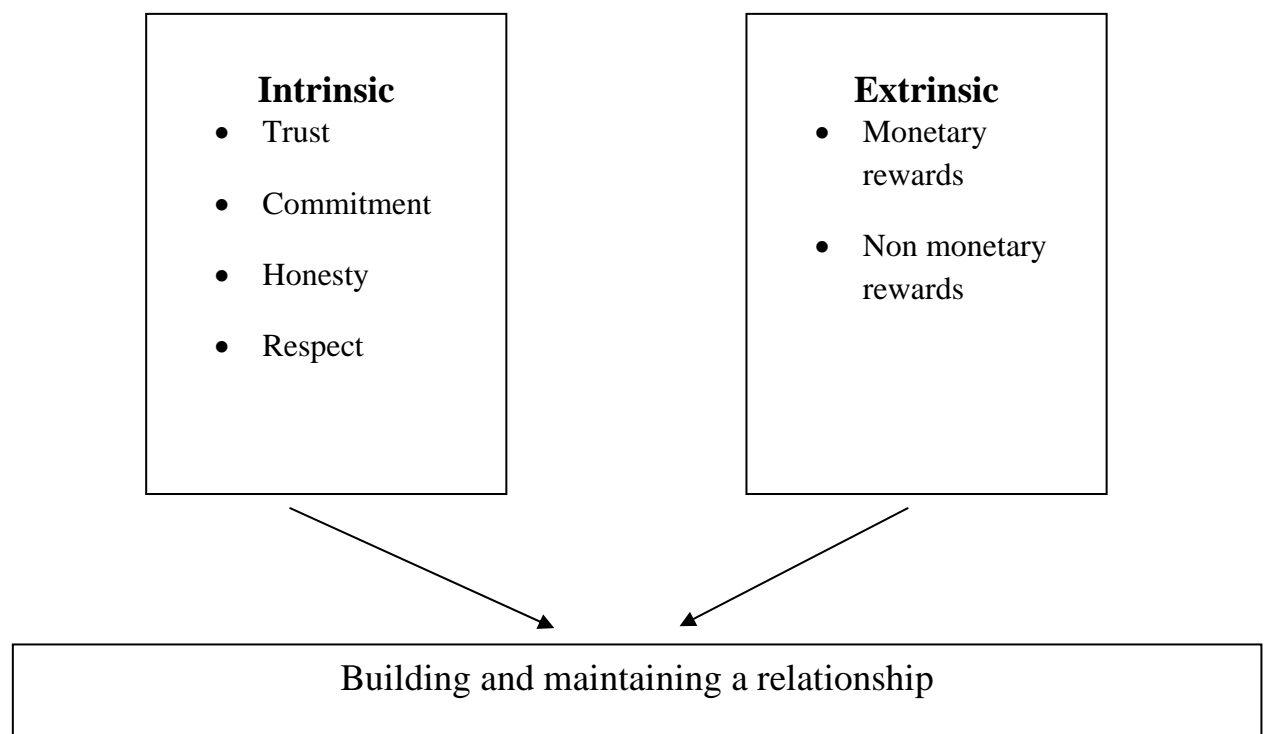
agent's office and tell them what to do. It doesn't work. I have heard agents complain about it, they say he has just walked in here and told me he wants twenty students; I am not going to give him one. Relationship is the most important thing."

Intrinsic and extrinsic elements of relationship marketing

Theme No. 5. Key elements to build and maintain a relationship with an education agent.

The following diagram provides the main clusters of identified responses derived from respondents who were asked a series of questions regarding key elements in building and maintaining a relationship with an education agent. Their responses were grouped into the following intrinsic and extrinsic categories.

Figure 1. Key elements to build and maintain a relationship with an education agent.



Intrinsic elements

In line with other author's empirical and theoretical research, *trust* and to a lesser extent *commitment* were important relationship development strategies mentioned by respondents in this study with *trust* being mentioned by all respondents as essential in building and maintaining a relationship with an education agent while *honesty* and *respect* were terms mentioned by half of all respondents.

Commitment represents a cluster of similar descriptors commonly mentioned by respondents and refers to interaction between education agents and institutions, including such things as the need for regular communication, support, regular contact and visits, reciprocal interactions, essentially engaging a constant relationship between the institution and the agent.

One respondent said *“a good relationship is based on trust in each other, trust that we can support students and deliver things and we have to trust that they can recruit students and aren’t recruiting on false promises.”*

A second respondent believed the key to building and maintain a relationship with education agents was *“honesty, respect, quality, trust and a willingness to go above and beyond what is required.”*

Another industry expert believed the key to developing a good working relationship with an agent is by keeping in constant contact and showing *commitment* to agents. *“I am always emailing or phoning agents pretty much all the time and making sure that there are regular visits and that I participate in their activities. You can’t expect a lot of return if you don’t do a lot with them.”*

Extrinsic elements

Monetary and non-monetary *rewards* are terms clustered around a variety of extrinsic concepts mentioned such as productivity, money, quality, resource allocation, staffing, and training and are the tangible and non-tangible benefits an education agent receives as a result of their relationship with an education institution.

Most industry representative see the main objective of building a strong relationship is to increase student recruitment with the reward for the education agent being a commission payment. A productive relationship with an education agent may take time to develop but as commented by industry experts, it is *“highly important to do so in order to increase student recruitment through this channel.”*

Reward in the form of monetary and non monetary benefits were a variable commonly mentioned in this study but stressed in other literature. This may be due to the nature of the international education industry being 1) largely commission driven 2) focused on the sale of a non-tangible, high credence service that cannot be trialled by agents, as a result non monetary items such as familiarisation tours and other non-monetary rewards being one way to entice education agents to recruit students for a particular institutions.

Relationship benefits

Theme No. 6. Good relationships result in increased student recruitment.

One hundred percent of respondents stated that having a good relationship with education agent’s results in increased student recruitment. One respondent stated *“relationship is what gets you numbers.”* Another stated that they *“pursue a relationship to increase student numbers. Hopefully by supporting them they will be able to increase the number of students they recruit.”* A third respondent stated that *“relationship is the biggest motivator to get an agent to work for you. The agent returns your loyalty. If you have been supportive of an agent, they will go out of their way to recruit for you.”*

From numerous comments made by interviewees, relationship marketing and a cooperative approach appears more prevalent than information asymmetry and there is less stated importance placed on the need for a contract to influence the actions of agents. Although elements of agency theory are seen as mandatory, for example

having a contract established between the two parties, relationship marketing appears to be the layer that produces results, providing the interface and developing the trust between the two parties to enable increased numbers of students to be recruited.

Conclusion

International education to the Australian economy is a multibillion dollar industry (Austrade 2008), with education agents a major distribution channel through which international students are recruited (ACPET 2004). This study was designed to assess the relevance of certain aspects of agency theory to the industry and explore relationship marketing techniques that institutions could adopt to recruit increased international students through this channel.

The case study found that the *contract*, though important was not as critical as discussed in other agency theory literature. The contract was believed to set the boundary between the principal and agent of what can and should be done. In addition *information asymmetry* advocated by agency theory did not appear to pose a major problem for the industry with information sharing being more the norm. An agency relationship between an education agent and a University contradicts the above mentioned studies that found information asymmetry to be an issue, rather than being asymmetrical, the education agents and University have more congruent goals. Both parties strive to recruit increased numbers of international students and performance is easily monitored as it is outcome based. The agent has no gain from shirking as they work on a commission basis, and only stands to increase profits through better performance. These findings suggested the tendency of the adoption of a less rigid or mechanistic approach of handling agents in the university sector.

This research found that *relationship marketing* and the development of a strong relationship with education agents is imperative to recruit increased student numbers through this channel, with *trust, honesty, respect, commitment and developing monetary and non-monetary reward systems* the key to building and maintaining relationships with education agents.

Limitations and future research

There are four main limitations to this research preventing generalisation to a broader context. First the study currently only provides an analysis of one University. This therefore only provides a perspective of one institution and several marketing employees. Further analysis of additional institutions is required to generalise the findings further. Secondly, this research looks at an Australian based university; the study does not investigate education agents and institutions behaviour in competing nations. Thirdly, education agents were not interviewed as part of this research and therefore their perspective on issues cannot be provided. Fourthly, the study concentrates on recruitment of international students to universities. Interviews were not conducted in other educational sectors such as at English language schools, vocational education centres or at high schools and findings may not apply to these sectors. Further research could be undertaken of additional institutions, in different countries and in different sectors and to overcome these limitations.

References

- ACPET - Australian Council for Private Education and Training Austrade. (2008). "Austrade website." Retrieved 4th February 2008, from www.austrade.gov.au.
- Cassell, C. and G. Symon (2004). Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research. London, Sage Publishing.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). "Agency Theory: An Assessment And Review." Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review **14**(1): 57.
- Fama, E. and M. Jensen (1983). "Agency problems and residual claims." Journal of law and economics **26**: 301-325.
- Ganesan, S. (1994). "Determination of long-term orientation in buyer-seller relationships." Journal of Marketing **58** (April): 1-19.
- Garg, V. K. (2000). The relative importance of different agency problems in organising economic activity: An investigation of multiple forms within franchising systems, University of Texas. **PhD**: 1-120.
- Gemunden, H., T. Ritter, et al. (1997). Relationships and networks in international markets, Pergamon.
- Hedges, A. (1985). Group interviewing. Applied qualitative research. R. L. Walker. Aldershot, Gower.
- Jensen, M. C. and W. H. Meckling (1976). "Theory of the firm: Managerial behaviour, agency costs and ownership structure." Journal of Economics and Finance **3**(No. 4): 305-360.
- Mintzberg, H. (1990). "The design school: Reconsidering the basic premises of strategic management." Strategic management journal **11**: 171-196.
- Morgan, R. M. and S. D. Hunt (1994). "The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing." Journal of Marketing **58**(3): 20.
- Ouchi, W. (1979). "A conceptional framework for the design of organizational control mechanisms." Management science **25**(4): 833-848.
- Palmatier, R. W., R. P. Dant, et al. (2006). "Factors influencing the effectiveness of relationship marketing: A meta-analysis." Journal of Marketing **70**(October 2006): 136-153.
- Perrow, C. (1986). Complex organizations: A critical review. New York, Random House.
- Thompson, J. D. (1967). Organizations in action. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- Tosi, H. L., J. P. Katz, et al. (1997). "Disaggregating the agency contract: The effects of monitoring, incentive alignment, and term in office on agent decision making." Academy of Management Journal **40**(3): 584-602.
- Tull, D. S. and D. I. Hawkins (1990). Marketing research: measurement and method. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Vermillion, L. J., W. M. Lassar, et al. (2002). "The Hunt-Vitell general theory of marketing ethics: Can it enhance our understanding of principal- agent relationships in channels of distribution?" Journal of Business Ethics **41**: 267-285.
- Webb, J. R. (1995). Understanding and designing marketing research. London, Dryden.
- Weitz, B. A. and S. D. Jap (1995). "Relationship marketing and distribution channels." Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science **23**(4): 305-320.
- Wilson, D. T. (1995). "An integrated model of buyer-seller relationships." Academy of Marketing Science. Journal **23**(4): 335.