Inclusivity? LSE's outreach program

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Introduction

Research Questions: How inclusive, in terms of socio-economic background, is the work of the LSE Student Recruitment/Marketing division, in relation to the number of UK undergraduate students enrolling in the LSE each year? How does their work inform the perception of LSE to prospective students to choose the LSE as a university?

An institution with over 70% international students, LSE is recognized globally as a high-ranking educational institution.[i] However, understanding the experiences of local students, specifically students from lower socio-economic background, is important, as it shows how this global institution includes its national students. The focus on socio-economic background is essential as it is the biggest discriminator in the market for higher education presently.[ii] According to prior research in this field, the two main factors contributing to this trend are : (1) basic education differences and (2) asymmetrical information when it comes to how to access university and the benefits of further education. Our research focusses on LSE Marketing Division as they fundamentally affects the latter.

Inclusivity is the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources or people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. Inclusivity is not solely defined by the number of offers extended to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, but as the number of enrollments at the LSE as simply receiving an offer does not sufficiently bridge the socio-economic divide. Hence, we will focus on efforts made by the Marketing team in attracting students at the application process stage, rather than inclusivity during university life. Lastly, 'Inclusivity' of students across different social groups and the researchers encourage further study into those fields.

Methodology

To understand the inclusivity of LSE's marketing team, we have taken a two-pronged approach. Firstly, we quantitatively measured the correlation between the presence of student recruiters at schools and the school enrollment rate at LSE from 2010-2020. We categorized schools into state selective, state non-selective, and private, substituting students from state non-selective schools as from relatively lower socio-economic groups.[iii] Secondly, to enhance this analysis, we interviewed 6 students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to understand their relationship with LSE Student marketing, how this impacted their enrollment and perception of

LSE. Braun's and Clarke's Thematic Analysis was used to extract meaning and find patterned responses.[iv]

Findings

1. The aim of student recruitment and marketing is not to increase student numbers (as LSE is a selective school), but to attract students who fit the academic profile whilst simultaneously discourage students who do not fit this profile. This is evidenced by LSE's outreach initiatives stating that "LSE will maintain a clear focus on **quality rather than quantity**" as they can only successfully enroll 12,000 full-time students annually.[v] Hence, while a direct correlation cannot be made with offer rates and marketing trends, correlation between enrollment rates and marketing trends provide a valuable insight. In this process, the way the LSE Marketing creates its brand image is crucial.

2. There is a high positive correlation between the number of student recruiters sent and the average number of students enrolled, implying that sending more student recruiters increases the number of students enrolled. Furthermore, it makes logical sense that more students on average per school enroll at state selective as they have pre-existing requirements, unlike independent schools which may exclusively take fees rather than running entrance exams to take the brightest students. This, however, shows a bias toward independent over state non-selective as they should theoretically both have similar numbers of students sent, so one of the determining factors in their difference must be the number of student recruiters sent. Following this logic, if more student marketing members visited state non-selective schools, it can attract students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as well.

3. The exception to the aforementioned rule is at state non-selective schools around London, as these students enroll at LSE as commuter students. Marketing events targeted at these students is more effective in comparison to the rest of the country.

4. Interviews reveal that UK students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have a perception of LSE 'elitist', corporate-focused, full of high competitive high achieving students

Image 1: Correlation between number of recruiters sent to school and enrollment at LSE
Y – Axis; average number of students enrolled per school,
X - Axis ; number of student recruiters sent to each school type
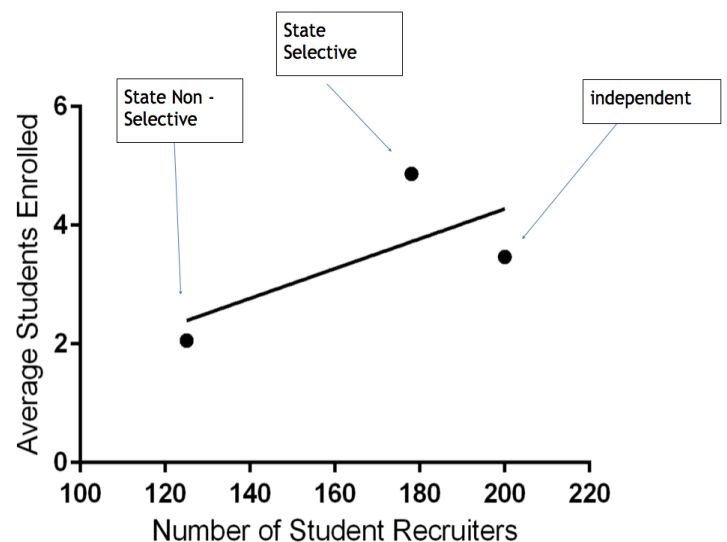
(who they are not on par with), and richer international students, which make them hesitant to apply. The primary categories their perception are depicted below:
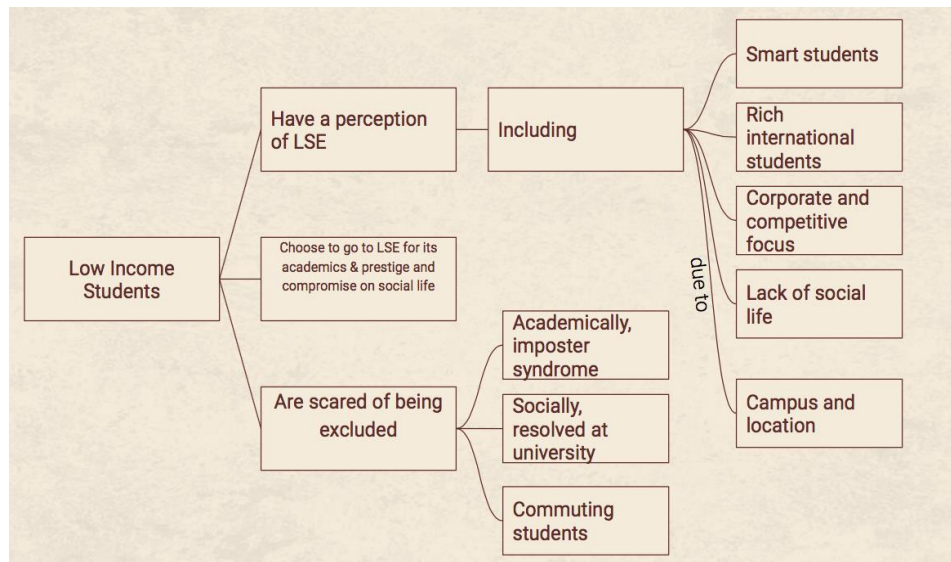
Image 2 : Perception of LSE by students of lower socio-economic background from UK

These perceptions are emphasized by LSE's central location in London associated with wealth and its competitiveness to enter associated with elitism. Students now at the LSE chose their university largely due to the prestige associated with the institution and its academics, but compromise on social life.
These students are scared of being excluded academically and socially. The academic exclusion could be associated with imposter syndrome ongoing through the degree. Social exclusion however is often only a perception issue, and those students end up finding like-minded people at the university. However, low-income students are more likely to be commuting students, and this can exclude them from social activities.

5. Efforts for inclusivity in marketing are being done and recognized by students. Personal interactions, such as student ambassadors, Offer Holder days on campus, speaking with students and teachers, and student voices are the most effective type of marketing. Marketing through social media isn't very impactful according to interviews.

Recommendations

1. LSE Student Marketing should encourage the presence of LSE recruiters at state-schools in the UK by consistently contacting them to increase their presence in local schools. They should increase transparency on communication with state-school representatives and actively seek to increase participation in schools annually. One such way this can be achieved is by collaborating with other UoL institutions while approaching state-schools, to increase the probability of the presence of recruiters if more universities are involved.

2. LSE student marketing should tackle the perception of LSE as an international institution primarily for higher-socioeconomic students by encouraging promotional material which highlights stories of local students as well. This can be done by having more detailed information about commuter student narratives, and tips to adjust to multi-cultural environments while being a local student.

3. LSE Open Day events are successful for students around London, and hence they should increase the frequency of these events, and reduce the bureaucracy to receive funding for transportation and stay for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

4. Personal interaction with students is one of the best ways to create a positive impression of LSE, so Student Marketing and Widening Participation should increase the number of online avenues for interaction with student ambassadors.

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