

## 5. CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAP FOR AFRICAN STUDENTS CONSIDERING BSUIR IN BELARUS

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**Annotation.** This journey map specifically targets African students who are considering pursuing higher education abroad, particularly in engineering, information technology, related technical fields as well as e-economy. These students come from diverse backgrounds, but they share common goals: achieving high-quality education, gaining international exposure, and securing better career opportunities. The map takes into account the unique challenges and considerations faced by African students, such as financial constraints, visa issues, cultural differences, and the need for a strong support system in a foreign country. Understanding these factors is crucial for BSUIR to position itself as an attractive and viable option for these students.

**Keywords.** The Customer Journey Map. African students. Education. BSUIR.

The Customer Journey Map is a vital tool for understanding the various touchpoints and experiences that African students encounter when considering, applying to, and studying at the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR). As global competition for international students intensifies, understanding the needs, concerns, and aspirations of this specific demographic is crucial for BSUIR to refine

its offerings and communication strategies. The journey map may help to highlight not only the practical steps involved but also the emotional journey students experience, from initial consideration to becoming successful graduates and advocates for the university.

In the context of higher education, particularly for international students, the customer journey involves several stages, each with its own set of challenges and decision-making criteria. By mapping these stages, BSUIR can identify key opportunities to enhance its engagement with prospective students from Africa, ensuring that the university meets their expectations and provides a supportive, enriching experience that encourages them to recommend BSUIR to others.

*Stage 1: Discovery.* Key Question: Why do they even start the journey? Who is Looking for Study Abroad? African students are increasingly seeking opportunities to study abroad for various reasons. These motivations are shaped by both personal aspirations and external factors, including the quality of education available in their home countries, economic conditions, and the influence of global trends in higher education. The most common are: academic aspirations; career prospects; personal growth.

When considering studying abroad, African students typically explore a range of countries known for their strong educational systems, diverse cultures, and welcoming attitudes toward international students [1]. Some of the most popular destinations include: United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Russia, Belarus.

So why should African students choose Belarus? Belarus, though not as well-known as some of the traditional study destinations, is emerging as a compelling choice for students from Africa, particularly those interested in technical fields. Several factors contribute to this appeal:

- 1) affordability (lower tuition fees and cost of living);
- 2) quality of education and its international recognition (degrees from Belarusian universities, especially in technical fields, are increasingly recognized worldwide, allowing graduates to pursue careers globally);
- 3) cultural experience (unique heritage, friendly environment);
- 4) visa accessibility: simplified visa process and fewer restrictions compared to some western countries;
- 5) safety (low crime rate).

*Stage 2: Registration.* Key Question: Why would they trust us? Why BSUIR?

As students move from the discovery phase to actively considering specific universities, trust becomes a critical factor in their decision-making process. For BSUIR to stand out, it must effectively communicate its unique value propositions and demonstrate its commitment to providing a high-quality, supportive education experience. BSUIR offers:

1. academic excellence (specialized programs, research and innovation);
2. global recognition (international accreditations, industry partnerships);
3. student support services (comprehensive orientation programs, dedicated international office);
4. success stories and alumni testimonials (alumni achievements, student experiences).

Why E-Economy? When choosing a specialty, students need to be convinced that the program they are considering will meet their academic and career aspirations [2]. For BSUIR's specialties in informatics, radioelectronics, and telecommunications, the following points are crucial: 1) industry demand; 2) curriculum and faculty expertise; 3) research opportunities.

*Stage 3: Onboarding and First Use.* Key Question: How can they feel successful?

The journey from a student's home country to Belarus is a significant step, and BSUIR needs to ensure that this transition is as smooth and welcoming as possible. From visa arrangements to travel logistics, every aspect of the journey should be well-organized and supported.

1. Visa process:
  - visa application support: providing step-by-step guidance on how to apply for a student visa, including a checklist of required documents, the application timeline, and tips for avoiding common pitfalls. BSUIR should also offer personalized support through its international office, helping students navigate the visa process;
  - embassy contacts: a directory of Belarusian embassies and consulates in Africa, along with contact information and links to embassy websites where students can find visa application forms and additional resources.
2. Travel arrangements:
  - flight booking assistance: offering advice on how to book affordable flights to Belarus, including recommended airlines, travel routes, and tips for finding the best deals. BSUIR could also partner with travel agencies to provide discounted rates for students;
  - arrival support: ensuring that students have a clear understanding of what to expect upon arrival in Belarus, including airport pickup services, transportation options to the university, and what to do if they encounter any issues during their journey.
3. Pre-departure orientation:

- virtual orientation sessions: hosting online pre-departure orientation sessions to prepare students for their move to Belarus. these sessions could cover topics such as what to pack, understanding Belarusian customs and culture, and how to manage the first few weeks in a new country;

- student handbooks: providing a comprehensive pre-departure handbook that includes essential information on living in Belarus, the academic calendar, campus facilities, and emergency contacts.

The first few days and weeks at BSUIR are crucial in shaping a student's overall experience [3]. Ensuring that students feel welcomed, supported, and well-informed can significantly impact their academic success and overall satisfaction with their choice of university:

1. orientation program:

- welcome week: organizing a comprehensive welcome week that includes campus tours, academic orientation sessions, and social events. This program should be designed to help students acclimate to their new environment, meet fellow students, and understand the resources available to them;

- mentorship programs: pairing new students with mentors – either upperclassmen or alumni – who can provide guidance, answer questions, and offer support during the initial transition period;

2. academic expectations:

- understanding the curriculum: providing detailed information on the curriculum structure, course registration procedures, and academic requirements. BSUIR should also offer academic advising sessions to help students select courses that align with their career goals and interests;

- grading and assessment: clear explanations of the grading system, assessment methods, and what constitutes academic success at BSUIR. This should include information on how to seek help if students encounter academic difficulties;

3. cultural adjustment:

- cultural orientation: offering sessions on Belarusian culture, customs, and social norms to help students adapt to their new environment. these sessions could also include practical tips on navigating daily life in Belarus, such as using public transportation, shopping, and understanding local etiquette;

- language support: continuing to provide language support through Russian or Belarusian classes, as well as resources for improving academic English. This could include language exchange programs, where international students are paired with Belarusian students to practice language skills;

4. health and wellbeing:

- healthcare services: information on accessing healthcare services, including how to register with a local doctor, understanding the healthcare system in Belarus, and what to do in case of a medical emergency. BSUIR should also provide details on health insurance requirements and coverage options for international students.

- mental health support: resources for mental health support, including counseling services, peer support groups, and wellness programs. Ensuring that students know how to seek help for stress, homesickness, or other mental health concerns is essential for their wellbeing.

*Stage 4: Sharing.* Key Question: Why would they invite others?

As students progress through their studies at BSUIR, their experiences will shape their perceptions of the university and influence whether they recommend it to others [4]. Ensuring that students have a positive, fulfilling experience is crucial for fostering advocacy and word-of-mouth referrals.

1. Academic Satisfaction:

- quality of education: regularly gathering feedback from students on the quality of education they receive, including their satisfaction with the curriculum, teaching methods, and faculty support. BSUIR should use this feedback to make continuous improvements and address any areas of concern;

- research and internship opportunities: highlighting opportunities for students to engage in research projects, internships, and industry collaborations. These experiences not only enhance their education but also increase their satisfaction and likelihood of recommending BSUIR to others.

2. Support Services:

- accessibility of support: ensuring that students feel they have access to the support they need, whether academic, financial, or personal. BSUIR should provide multiple channels for students to seek help, including in-person, online, and through peer support networks;

- mental health and wellbeing: promoting a healthy balance between academic responsibilities and personal wellbeing. BSUIR should offer regular workshops and resources on stress management, mindfulness, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

3. Cultural Integration:

- inclusion and diversity: fostering an inclusive campus environment where all students feel valued and respected. BSUIR should celebrate diversity through events, initiatives, and programs that bring together students from different backgrounds;

- cultural exchange: encouraging cultural exchange between international and Belarusian students through organized events, cultural festivals, and language exchange programs. This helps build a sense of community and mutual understanding.

Understanding what students appreciate about their experience at BSUIR is key to highlighting the university's strengths in marketing and recruitment efforts.

1. Strong academic programs:

- rigorous curriculum: students who thrive on academic challenges appreciate the rigor of BSUIR's programs, which push them to excel and prepare them for demanding careers in technology and engineering;
- research opportunities: the chance to participate in cutting-edge research projects is a significant draw for students interested in advancing their knowledge and contributing to their field.

2. Supportive environment:

- mentorship and guidance: many students value the mentorship and support they receive from faculty and staff, who are dedicated to helping them succeed academically and personally;
- community spirit: the sense of community at BSUIR, fostered through student organizations, cultural events, and social activities, is often highlighted as a positive aspect of the student experience.

3. Cultural and social experiences:

- cultural enrichment: students appreciate the opportunity to experience Belarusian culture, learn a new language, and engage with a diverse student body. This exposure to different cultures and perspectives is often seen as a valuable aspect of their education;

- social life: the vibrant social life at BSUIR, including clubs, sports, and events, allows students to build friendships, explore new interests, and create lasting memories.

For BSUIR to grow its reputation among African students, it's important to encourage current students and alumni to become advocates for the university. Their recommendations can significantly influence prospective students' decisions [5].

1. Positive experiences:

- high satisfaction rates: ensuring that students have a positive overall experience at BSUIR, from academics to social life, is key to encouraging them to recommend the university to others;
- success stories: sharing success stories of African students who have gone on to successful careers after graduating from BSUIR can inspire prospective students and reinforce the university's reputation.

2. Alumni networks:

- active alumni community: building a strong alumni network that keeps graduates connected to BSUIR and each other. This network can be a valuable resource for current students and a powerful tool for word-of-mouth marketing;

- alumni ambassadors: encouraging alumni to serve as ambassadors for BSUIR in their home countries, sharing their experiences with prospective students and participating in recruitment events.

3. Referral programs:

- incentivized referrals: implementing referral programs that reward current students and alumni for referring new students to BSUIR. This could include financial incentives, recognition, or other benefits;
- social media campaigns: encouraging students and alumni to share their positive experiences on social media, using hashtags and participating in campaigns that promote BSUIR's strengths.

*Stage 5: Advocacy and Loyalty.* Key question: why would they stay in touch?

a. Alumni programs. Building a strong, engaged alumni community is crucial for BSUIR's long-term success. Alumni can be powerful advocates for the university, contributing to its reputation, supporting current students, and helping with recruitment efforts.

1. Alumni network:

- global alumni chapters: establishing alumni chapters in various countries, including African nations, to keep graduates connected with each other and the university. These chapters can organize events, offer networking opportunities, and provide support to recent graduates;

- alumni portal: creating an online portal where alumni can access resources, stay informed about university news, and connect with fellow graduates. This portal could also include a job board, mentorship opportunities, and information on continuing education programs.

2. Career support:

- alumni career services: offering career support to alumni, including job search assistance, resume writing workshops, and career counseling. BSUIR could also host virtual career fairs that connect alumni with potential employers;

- lifelong learning opportunities: providing alumni with opportunities to continue their education through online courses, workshops, and seminars. This helps graduates stay current in their fields and maintain a connection to BSUIR.

3. Engagement and giving:

- alumni events: organizing regular events for alumni, such as reunions, networking dinners, and guest lectures. These events help maintain a sense of community and keep alumni engaged with the university;
- giving back: encouraging alumni to give back to BSUIR through donations, volunteering, or mentoring current students. Highlighting the impact of alumni contributions on the university's growth and success can inspire more graduates to get involved.

b) Continuing engagement with African students. Maintaining strong relationships with African students, both during their studies and after graduation, is key to fostering long-term loyalty and advocacy. BSUIR should aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages students to stay connected with the university and each other.

Thus to effectively attract and retain African students, BSUIR should adopt a comprehensive strategy that addresses the unique needs and concerns of this demographic at every stage of their educational journey. Key recommendations include:

1. targeted marketing and outreach:
  - develop marketing materials that highlight BSUIR's strengths in technical education, its affordability, and its supportive environment for international students. Tailor these materials to address the specific concerns of African students, such as safety, cultural adaptation, and career opportunities;
  - engage with African students through online platforms, social media, and virtual events. Use these channels to showcase student testimonials and the unique experiences of studying in Belarus;
2. enhanced support services:
  - provide personalized support to African students throughout the application process, from visa assistance to travel arrangements. Ensure that students have access to clear, accurate information and dedicated staff who can guide them through each step;
  - offer comprehensive orientation programs that help students acclimate to life in Belarus, understand academic expectations, and access essential resources. Continue to support students throughout their studies with academic advising, language assistance, and mental health services;
3. strong alumni engagement:
  - build a robust alumni network that keeps graduates connected to BSUIR and each other. Use this network to support students, facilitate career opportunities, and promote the university to prospective students;
  - implement loyalty programs that encourage alumni and current students to actively advocate for BSUIR. Recognize and reward those who contribute to the university's growth and reputation;
4. cultural and social integration:
  - foster an inclusive campus environment that celebrates diversity and promotes cultural exchange. Support African students in maintaining their cultural identity while also helping them integrate into the broader university community;
  - encourage social engagement through clubs, events, and activities that allow students to build connections, explore new interests, and feel a sense of belonging at BSUIR.

By following these recommendations, BSUIR can strengthen its appeal to African students, enhance their overall experience, and build a loyal, engaged community of alumni who continue to support the university long after graduation.

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