

CREATING A FOUNDATION FOR INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI NETWORKS IN THE FINNISH UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Case: JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Aku Aarva
Pauli Alijärvi

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JAMK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES



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Abstract <p>This bachelor's thesis identifies the theories and structures, which are relevant in the creation of international alumni networks in the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. It also includes a vast quantitative survey and analysis, which aims to identify the views, interests and needs, related to the international alumni network, of the current international degree students, i.e. future international alumni, of JAMK University of Applied Sciences.</p> <p>The thesis identifies several branding and networking theories as the foundation for an international alumni network. The thesis also identifies two current models of alumni networks used in the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, which are not applicable to be directly used as the structure for international alumni networks.</p> <p>The quantitative survey studies the views of the current international degree student about international alumni network structures, services and networking elements, as well as the brand of JAMK University of Applied Sciences. The goal is to find the elements required to create a win-win situation between JAMK University of Applied Sciences and the international alumni and third parties.</p> <p>The goal of the thesis is to identify the elements and solutions through which the creation of a successful international alumni network model in the JAMK University of Applied Sciences is made possible. JAMK University of Applied Sciences is the case example and assigner of this thesis.</p> <p>The conclusion is that it is impossible to create a functioning international alumni network without a strong brand and the correct networking tools and methods. In addition the physical distance of the students required a new approach to the idea of networking. To attract the students in becoming active alumni, and the alumni to stay active, the school needs a wide service pool and the introduction from students to alumni has to start early.</p>		
Keywords International alumni network, networking, branding, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, alumni, networks		
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Tämä opinnäytetyö tunnistaa suomalaisten ammattikorkeakoulujen kansainvälisten alumniverkostojen kannalta oleelliset teoriat ja rakenteet. Opinnäytetyö sisältää myös määrällisen tutkimuksen ja sen analyysin, joilla pyritään tunnistamaan Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulun nykyisten kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden näkemykset, eli tulevaisuuden alumnien, kiinnostuksen kohteet ja tarpeet liittyen kansainväliseen alumniverkoston.</p> <p>Tässä opinnäytetyössä tunnistettiin useita brändi- ja verkostoitumisteorioita, jotka liittyvät oleellisesti kansainvälisiin alumniverkostoihin. Opinnäytetyössä tunnistettiin myös ammattikorkeakouluissa tällä hetkellä käytössä olevat alumniverkostomallit, joita on kaksi, ja joista kumpikaan ei sellaisenaan sovi kansainvälisen alumniverkoston malliksi.</p> <p>Määrällisen tutkimuksen viitekehys oli nykyisten kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden näkemys kansainvälisten alumniverkostojen rakenteesta, palveluista ja verkostoitumiskeinoista sekä Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulun brändistä. Tutkimuksen päämääränä oli löytää keinot, joiden avulla win-win tilanteen saavuttaminen Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulun, alumnien ja kolmansien osapuolien välille on mahdollista saavuttaa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön päämääränä on tunnistaa ne elementit ja ratkaisut, joiden avulla kansainvälinen alumniverkosto on mahdollista luoda Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulussa. Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulu toimii tutkimuksessa esimerkkinä ja on opinnäytetyön tilaaja.</p> <p>Lopputuloksena on mahdotonta luoda kansainvälistä alumniverkosta ilman vahvaa brändiä ja oikeita verkostoitumistyökaluja ja -keinoja. Lisäksi alumnien fyysinen etäisyys vaatii oman lähestymistapansa verkostoitumiseen. Opiskelijoiden houkuttelemisen aktiiviseksi alumneiksi, ja alumnien pitäminen aktiivisina, vaatii koululta laajan tuotetarjonnan ja opiskelijoiden tutustuttamisen alumnitoimintaan tarpeeksi varhaisessa vaiheessa.</p>		
Avainsanat (asiasanat) Kansainvälinen alumniverkosto, verkostoituminen, brändäys, Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulu, alumni, verkosto		
Muut tiedot Määrällinen tutkimus, verkostoitumiskeskus, brändiarvo, tuotetarjonta		

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1 INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI NETWORKS

1.1 Topic introduction

JAMK University of Applied Sciences, like many other Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, is missing a working international alumni network. In addition to being a serious disadvantage for the school, it is directly against the internationalization strategy of the school and the principal recommendations of the Ministry of Education of Finland. (JAMK Strategy 2011, 8; Finnish Ministry of Education 2007, 32-33.)

There has been a lot of research about alumni networks, but the concept of international alumni network is not yet well established, as it is a result of the globalizing world. A different kind of understanding is required to meet the needs of alumni from different cultures, and new techniques and networking models have to be implemented, in order to maintain a connection between alumni living all over the world.

The purpose of this study is to understand the elements behind a functioning international alumni network model, and help in the process of creating one for JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

An essential, but somewhat obvious part, of the study is the focus on different networking models. In addition to discovering the key networking models that enable a working international alumni network, the authors put their focus on branding, as it was viewed as one of the major deal breakers between success and failure of the study.

The study was executed by combining vast theoretical data, which included relevant information about networking models and branding, with an extensive quantitative survey directed towards a specific target group. This allowed the authors to draw conclusions about the relevant aspects of both branding and networking in relation to international alumni networks. In addition, this study is the beginning of an international alumni network for JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

The identification of the pre-existing alumni network models was done via data collection. This resulted in the identification of two commonly used alumni network models.

The views of the international degree students were collected through a quantitative survey, targeted towards the international degree students of JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

1.2 Internationalization of the alumni networks

The word “alumni” comes from Latin and can be roughly translated into “protégé”. The alumni networks have their traditions in the 18th century United States, where they were used to create financial security for the schools through donations. (Tampere University Alumni Strategy 2012)

However, the modern day alumni networks are much more than fund raising organizations. In the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, alumni networks are used to create a connection between business and the institution, giving the school, the students and the alumni the opportunity to benefit from one another.

The challenge faced in the 2nd decade of the 21st century is the internationalization of the alumni networks. As the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences are becoming more and more international, the strategic advantage is given to the universities that are able to attract more international students and hold on to them post-graduation.

These students increase the brand value of the universities, attract local business partners, which are after internationalization, as well as are the potential sources for international business connections after graduation. There is also a big potential in using the international alumni to advertise the institutions in their respective countries to the potential students.

As the international alumni play such a key role in the future of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, it is a surprise to notice that the internationalization process of the alumni networks is still quite inadequate.

1.3 Research problem

JAMK University of Applied Sciences is lacking a functioning and coordinated international alumni network model, which meets the interests and needs of the alumni, the students and the school.

1.4 Research questions

In reference to the research problem, the authors identified the following primary research question and two subsequent questions:

- 1) What are the elements and solutions through which the creation of a successful international alumni network model in the JAMK University of Applied Sciences is made possible?
 - a) How to motivate the students and alumni to become active members of the international alumni network?
 - b) How does JAMK University of Applied Sciences benefit from the international alumni network model?

2 THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF BRANDING AND NETWORKING IN THE FINNISH UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES' INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI NETWORKS

The authors claim, that a successful international alumni network is based on two aspects:

1) Networking

In order to conquer the physical distance and the social and cultural differences of the alumni, the school has to offer optimized networking tools and strategies.

2) Branding

A strong brand is one of the fundamental elements in attracting former students to become active alumni. Without a strong institution brand that is reflected in a strong alumni network, there is little hope of success.

In the following chapters, the authors will attempt to illuminate the theories of networking and branding, and show how they are the principal elements in the process of creating a successful international alumni network.

2.1 The Core of Networking

According to the first definition of the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2012) the word “networking” is “the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions”. The word was first introduced and used in the year 1967. However, this is only one explanation to the term that is more complicated and all-encompassing than we can ever imagine.

In many ways networks are the basic elements that create our world. From the vast and complex networks that create the ecosystem to the World Wide Web

that connects humans from all around the world to each other, it is evident that networks are everywhere in the world surrounding, effecting and manipulating us. (Barabási 2003. 7.)

We should not be fooled by the concept of networking even though it is widely used and popular in the modern era. As almost anything can be and is referred to as networking and almost everything has to do with networking, it can be fairly frustrating to try to pinpoint the term for a certain use. However, this is just what the authors of this study are attempting. (Op. cit. p. 6-9.)

Narrowing the term “Networking”

As the authors observe the term “networking”, it is evident that it requires a correct setting to serve the purposes of the thesis. After researching through numerous different articles, books and other publications referring to networking, the authors familiarized themselves to the writings of Barabási.

Barabási started his introduction to networking through famous mathematicians called Euler, Erdos and Renyi. These scientists were one of the first to mathematically prove theories regarding the forming and functioning of networks, in other words how the networking process works. (Barabasi 2003, 6-19.)

The authors were also introduced to the graph theory, invented by Euler in 1735. This branch of mathematics was first presented by Euler, when he solved the Königsberg problem by using a graph. Today, graph theory is used as the principle way to display how the graphs, or networks, were created in the first place. The graph theory aimed to give an answer about how networks form and what are the structures and ideas behind them. This was later presented in the theory of random networks by Rényi. (Op. cit. p. 10-11.)

It is possible to explain the random networks theory by using a classical example about a party. In this example, a party with a hundred guests is assembled. The guests do not know each other previously. Naturally, the guests will form small clusters of two to three persons and start to get to know each other. If one of the guests is given a hint about a special wine served in the party,

the guest with the information will spread it in the group. Then, as the people wander from group to group, so is the information spread around the party until everyone in the party knows about the special wine. (Op. cit. p. 14-15.)

Figure 1 explains the basic idea of the party example and how people randomly network with each other and spread information.

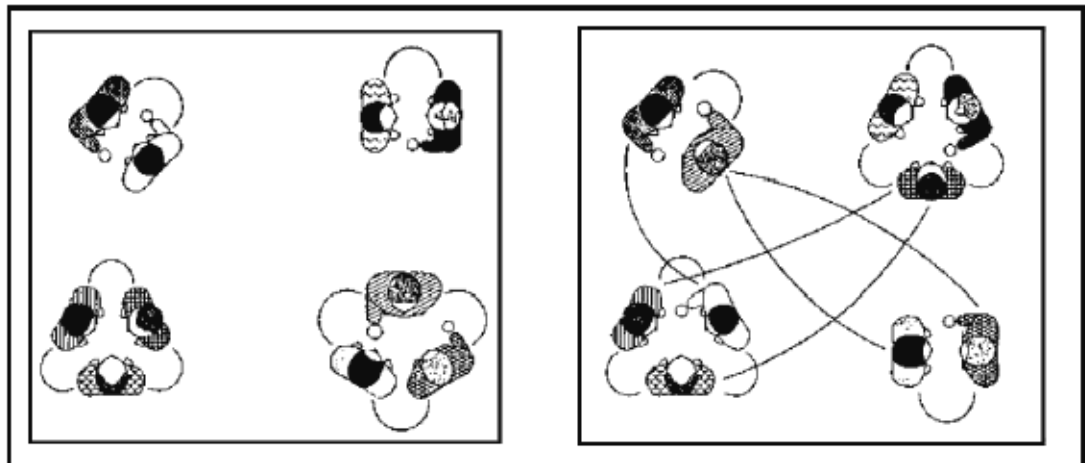


FIGURE 1. The random network in the party. (Barabási 2003, 15)

In the example of the random network in the party, it is possible to witness the invisible links between the small groups of people, or nodes, and the fact that it takes only one person, or link, for the information to spread.

Another key element, from the point of view of the international alumni networks, is the Six Degrees of Separation idea. The main point behind it is, that in the modern world every single person can be linked to each other through six other persons. This, according to Barabási (2003, 39), is the result of the modern technology, the Internet and the constant web of communication via emails and other methods.

These theories and concepts give a strong indication towards the possibilities behind an international alumni network. The geographic limitations have be-

come smaller and the ability to stay connected with people around the world makes the international alumni network feasible.

Networking in the academic surroundings

The international alumni network is somewhat similar to the example of the party presented in the previous chapters. A number of random individuals, from all over the world, are put into the same surroundings, the school, and left there to create social networks. They end up sharing information and getting to know each other. The big question is: when the party is over, meaning the students graduate, how do they keep connected with each other? To make it more complex, the guests not only leave the party, but they also leave the country and spread around the world.

To tackle this issue, the authors turned their focus towards networking methods and research in the academic surroundings. For example, in the article by Tozzi (2008), a company created an exclusive school-network for alumni, where the school and businesses network with each other. Tozzi presents the case of Stephen Loughlin, the founder of the company, and explains how the alumni trust the exclusive network as it is only tied to the school. This is apparently a better option than open social networks like Facebook or LinkedIn. This would indicate that a somewhat closed network, intranet, could potentially be an optimal surrounding for the formal communication between the school and the alumni and other entities.

However, in the article published in Harvard Business Review by Cohen and Malloy (2010), it is stated that the key element is the power of physical networks and that they are more effective in, for example, spreading information in the market. This indicates that also the personal connections students create during their studies are strong enough to be continued in the future and in business life.

Another major player in the international alumni networks could be found in the idea of recommendation marketing. It is the idea, that certain networks or individuals have power to influence the surrounding networks or individuals. To put it another way, some individuals have the ability to motivate others to

act in a certain way. This includes methods such as word-of-mouth marketing also known as customer to customer marketing. (Economypoint.org, 2012)

One of the companies working in the field is RewardStream. On their website they explain the idea behind the concept presented in the following figure.

This is shown in the figure 2.

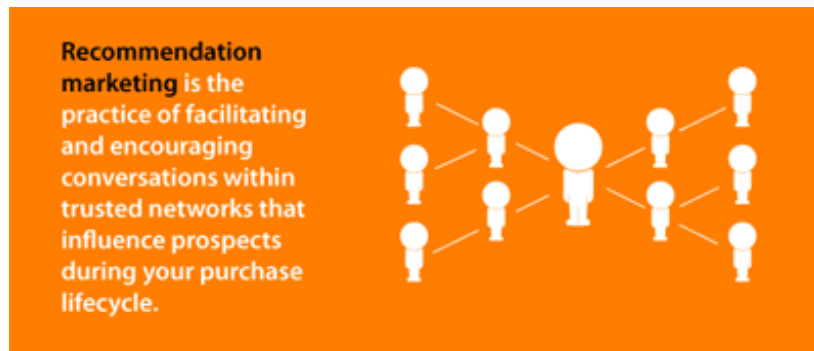


FIGURE 2. Recommendation marketing network. (RewardStream.com.)

Adapting this idea to the international alumni network, the authors of this study saw a possibility in facilitating a system of physical networks the authors decided to call “Local Umbrella Networks”, in countries or areas where several of the former students come from or move to. The leaders of the umbrella networks, named Local Alumni Leaders, would coordinate their umbrella networks and act as the individuals of power that motivate the other alumni to act in accordance with the needs of the international alumni network. It was discovered later that a similar, but not the same idea, was introduced by Ritala (2011) in a presentation about Aalto University alumni networks.

Now let us jump back to Barabási and look at the World Wide Web a bit closer, as it is likely to play an important role in the international alumni network. According to Barabási (2003, 62-63), the World Wide Web is not a random network at all and that goes for our society as a whole too. He refers to Gladwell’s experiment, where a group of four hundred people were studied to receive information about the number of social links they had. The average number was 39 links and the highest was 118 links. If a society was a random network, then the highest number of links could not be so high. If the Web was

a random network, the probability of there being a website with 500 or over incoming links would be basically zero, indicating that hubs do not exist in the random network Web. This is not the case and websites with thousands of incoming links do exist.

As it was noticed, that the Web does have hubs and is lacking in democracy, it was also realized, that the most attention goes to few specific hubs instead of evenly spreading around the Web. This changed how the world saw the Web as a whole.

It lets us understand the reason why Paris Hilton is one of the most followed persons in Twitter, aside from the adult publications she has produced, and gives us an understanding even about how some molecules, like water, are the basic elements participating in numerous reactions. Just like certain individuals act as hubs in our society, there can be identified only a few hubs, or websites, that play an important role in the success story of the Internet. (Op. cit. p. 62-65)

Now what does this has to do with anything, one might ask. Everything, because through understanding the elements of a successful network, the authors will be able to create a foundation to a successful international alumni network. Without understanding the elements behind the Web and society in general, it is not possible to identify the social networking tool that would be a hub for the alumni. In the same way, it would not be possible to create the system of local umbrella networks with local alumni leader acting as hubs for their local alumni.

An analysis of several articles and studies about networking in the academic surroundings showed, that an international alumni network cannot function in the same way as a national alumni network. The simple reason is the fact, that even though the principles behind network are the same, the tools and methods vary. An international institution has to take into consideration different cultural behaviors, like languages, to find a way to create a community. A national institution is, by nature, adapted to the local customs and ways.

Despite the several hundred thousand articles and studies related to alumni networks, it was decided to focus on the before mentioned topics from networking.

2.2 The Core of Branding

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2012), the definition to the word “branding” is “the promoting of a product or service by identifying it with a particular brand”. The word was first used in 1913. Obviously it does not help, if one is unfamiliar with the meaning of the word “brand”. According to the above mentioned dictionary, it is “a mark made by burning with a hot iron to attest manufacture or quality or to designate ownership”. In other words and in a modern setting, a brand is simply an image created around a certain product or product group.

As we now have the basic meaning of the word, we can move onwards and look at the whole idea of brand building and how a strong brand affects a business or, in the case of this study, the school. So how does one start building a brand? The authors went through a lot of different sources, authors and topics to try and find an answer to this question. In the end the best explanation was offered by Keller.

According to Keller’s (2001), the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model is a good place to start. The model is explained in the figure 3 created by the authors based on Keller’s book.



FIGURE 3. The Customer-Based Brand Equity model. (Keller, 2001)

The CBBE model is a tool that is based on the four steps shown in the above figure 3. The first step is to establish an identity for the pursued brand. The second step is to identify a meaning for the brand. As a third step one has to look at the correct brand responses and the final step is to forge the required brand.

Once the above mentioned questions have been successfully answered and the customer likes the answers, one has the basic elements together for a brand. Diving deeper to the idea of brand building, one has to look at customer loyalty and how a strong brand affects it. Here we can see the link between branding and the international alumni networks.

Narrowing the term “branding”

Keller (2001) explains how a strong brand brings great benefits to a company. He brings forth benefits, such as greater customer loyalty and smaller vulnerability to competition and crises. In the Finnish education scene, this is exactly what the schools are after in order to attract new students and business part-

ners and keep the current students from switching schools or quitting altogether.

Keller (2001) also explains how a strong brand affects customer behavior. If a company has to raise prices, a strong brand makes the customer more favorable to the change. Placing this into educational surroundings, it could mean a situation where a change occurs in the education field. This is something that the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences are going through, with the legislative remodeling in the next few years. A strong school brand gives the students and business partners a calm state of mind.

Life is never simple and neither is branding. It is not enough to know the theory behind building a brand, if the product or company in question does not meet the requirements of the customer. This is something that the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences have bumped into the past few years. As the competition between schools increase, false advertising or creating a false brand, has been a recognized issue among the public and the potential students.

Keller's (2001) point of view is that the brand image and character can only be established through a working product. Whatever the product or service is, in order to build a strong brand, it has to meet or go above the expectations of the customers.

The same scenario can be identified to be accurate in the field of education. In the article by Farrell (2005), the brand image of Harvard is noted as the highest ranked in the whole education field. However, even with the strong brand image, the product itself is becoming faulty and it is slowly starting to reflect to the customers. Farrell is referring to a study conducted by the company Spencer Stuart, where it shows that from the year 2004 onwards Harvard was dropped out of the 1st place as the university attended by most CEOs of Standard & Poor's 500 companies. This means, that even though Harvard still has the strongest brand value of all the institutions that provide education worldwide, it no longer has a product that is superior to the rest in the market. The new number one university was identified as the University of Wisconsin.

To the authors this was staggering evidence that a strong brand, like Harvard or Nokia for that matter, will eventually fall if the product is not good enough. This also indicates that with a good product it is possible to create a strong brand.

Branding in the academic surroundings

A strong brand obviously helps to create interest to the product in question. For the case of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, the product they are selling is education and knowledge, both to the students and possible partner companies and other entities.

A working international alumni network is invaluable for any school, simply due to the brand value and marketing channels, which become available through the international alumni. Alumni, who are proud of their school, are a cost effective way to manage the school brand. In addition they can act as a representative of their school, an ambassador of sorts, in their local areas. (Ritala 2011, 5)

Considering the brand of the school, it's not only the alumni who are an effective marketing power. In the future the role of the staff travelling around the world will become increasingly important, as they too can be regarded as walking advertisement for the school. (Ritala 2011, 9)

The authors wondered, if there are any strong educational brands in Finland. One could be identified. The Aalto-University was created in the year 2010 by merging three Finnish universities: The Helsinki School of Economics, Helsinki University of Technology and The University of Art and Design Helsinki. At this moment, Aalto-University has one of the strongest brands in the Finnish education system. It has in total over 76 000 graduates from which one third are in the alumni register.

How did the Aalto-University achieve such a strong brand, that it would attract thousands of alumni from the merging schools to join the new alumni register? It had no proof of high-quality education, no age-old traditions or reputation and a huge competitor, the University of Helsinki, in the same city. Still Aalto-

University could be seen, at least in the alumni point of view, the most attractive school in Finland as it has such a huge number of alumni registered. The view of the authors is that the answer is in the merging process, and the publicity that the Aalto-University gained from high-ranking politicians and members of the education field, public figures and highly regarded individuals nationally and internationally. The brand was consciously or unconsciously created by people, who had very little to do with the school itself.

The big question is, how can JAMK University of Applied Sciences achieve the same brand value among the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences?

2.3 Internationalization of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences

The internationalization process of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences started with the Bologna Declaration in the year 1999. The European level agreement established the foundation, principles and goals of the internationalization process. One of the main goals of the Bologna Declaration is the international mobility of students, staff and researchers. The Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences established the changes according to the Bologna Declaration in the year 2005, and the progress has since been rapid. (CIMO, 2012)

Competition in the education business is increasing globally and nationally. The world is becoming smaller through globalization and this has a huge effect on the institutions of higher education in the 1st World Countries. More and more people from the developing countries seek higher education, and the institutions of higher education compete in attracting the brightest of them. At the same time, these institutions are increasingly interested in the potential education sales markets in the developing countries.

In the study conducted by Garam (2011), JAMK University of Applied Sciences is in many indicators one of the most international Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. However, at the moment it does not have a functioning

alumni network model let alone an international one, even though several studies have been conducted in related fields.

2.4 Finnish alumni network models

Alumni networks in the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences are, in general, still developing due to the short existence of the universities of applied sciences. The first students graduated from the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences between the years 1997 and 1998, and it was only after that the very first alumni networks were launched. (Häkkinen 2008, 15)

In Finland and other Nordic Countries, the foundation of alumni work has until very lately been more about volunteer networking and sharing information than money, but the recent changes in the Finnish university law made alumni donations a profitable fund raising method for the universities. This is most likely the outcome for the modified universities of applied sciences law, as the changes in the laws have always followed each other.

The Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences started to internationalize in the first decade of the 21st century. Today, several of them are in the process of creating alumni and international alumni networks based on the two commonly used alumni network models in Finland. However, to the authors it is clear, that these models do not apply to the international surroundings without modification.

According to the executive director of the alumni organization of Laurea University of Applied Sciences Simo Takanen (16.3.2012), the alumni networks in the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences can be divided into two models:

1) Organizational form

An independent and separate organization from the host school to which all the alumni can voluntarily join. The organizational form is moderated by the alumni themselves and/or hired staff. Funding comes from different

sources, like membership fees or the school. The membership may include a fee, but in most of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences and their alumni organizations membership is currently free. This model is used by, for example, Laurea University of Applied Sciences

2) Concentrated form

The concentrated form is an integrated model, in which the school is directly moderating the alumni network. The administration is usually integrated in one of the existing school management levels, like marketing or student services. It is typically a high level operation, which does not include lecturers and other staff. All the graduated students can be automatically included in the alumni register and receive information targeted to the alumni from the school. This model is used, for example, in Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences and JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

The two forms are presented in a figure created by the authors. Figure 4 explains the basic structure of the two models.

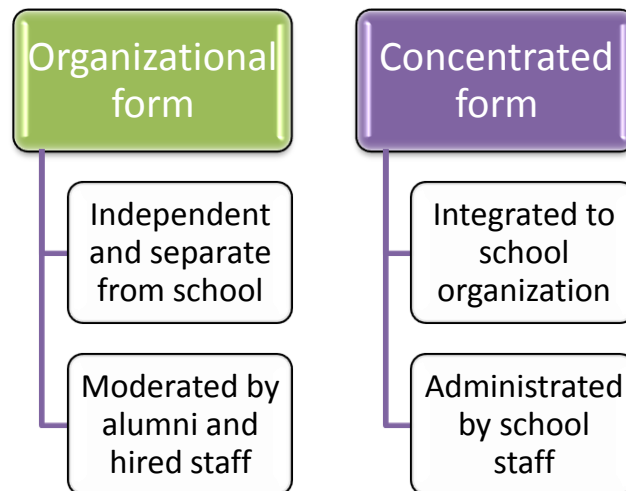


FIGURE 4. Organization forms of alumni organizations in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences

These two forms of the alumni networks are the basic forms used in Finland. Obviously there are differences between schools. As the development varies between organizations and structures, requirements and implementations are different. Some of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences and their alumni organizations have specific alumni strategies and some of them do not.

2.5 Issues in the existing alumni network models

The alumni network models used in Finland are not designed to serve the needs of the international alumni. The authors identified some obvious issues for the international alumni network that should be kept in mind.

Examples of these issues according to the authors:

1) The distance factors

The physical distance of the international alumni and the host school can be a great issue when the former students spread around the world post graduation. Modern technology has made it possible to stay in touch with people around the world with ease. Social media, like Facebook and LinkedIn, email and other communication tools can serve as a great tool, but they cannot replace the physical lack of presence caused by the geographic distance. Alumni meetings, visiting the former schools and other physical contact are far more difficult.

Time zones are also a thing to consider. When a person is feeding messages to Facebook in Jyväskylä during office hours, an alumnus living in the United States is fast asleep. Instant communication is therefore difficult and the message is doomed to drown in the constant pool of updates in the Facebook wall. This is just one example of the difficulties faced due to the time zone differences.

2) The cultural factors

Globalizing world creates cultural clashes. For example, the way Finnish people communicate differentiates from the way Chinese people communicate with each other. Food culture, language, religion, business culture and many other topics are culture dependant and therefore possible issues.

Even though the former students have become more international and familiarized with other cultures during their time in the host school, the issues might occur if they return to their home countries and adapt back to their native cultures due to social pressure.

3) The social integration factors

A vast number of potential professionals leave Finland and return to their home countries or some other country that is more appealing. (CIMO Faktaa Express 2/2012)

One of the main national goals of the internationalization process of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences is to integrate the international students and turn them into work force in the local areas of the universities of applied sciences. Strong international alumni networks can be essential, as they can be used as support networks for the graduating students and help the alumni find jobs and fit into the culture permanently.

The issue with the two existing alumni network models is the small effort put into the international alumni. The information sent to the alumni is in most cases only in Finnish, the meetings and events are held and targeted mostly to the Finnish students and there is a lack of awareness in targeting the international students. (Simo Takanen, 16.3.2012)

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Research methods and approaches

The research was conducted using a quantitative method, but as a complete enumeration survey due to the relatively small population or target group of 198 students. The data was collected by a survey, which mainly consisted of structured questions on the Likar Scale and the Staple Scale, but some open questions were also included. (Kananen 2011, 90)

The survey was aimed to answer the two following research questions:

- a. How to motivate the students and alumni to become active members of the international alumni network?
- b. How does JAMK University of Applied Sciences benefit from the international alumni network model?

3.2 Population and sample

The population of the quantitative survey consisted of the international degree students of JAMK University of Applied Sciences, who had given a permission to use their email addresses on the ASIO software. The address source was the JAMK University of Applied Sciences ASIO Student Register.

Retrieving the answers straight from the current students of JAMK University of Applied Sciences helps the authors determine the answer to the main research question. The authors found it critical to have the current international students as the target group, as there was no previous research targeted towards them in JAMK University of Applied Sciences under this topic, and they are the future international alumni.

According to Kananen (2011, 94), if the number of cases is small, all of them can be included in the study. If the number is great, you have to consider including only part of the cases. Due to the small population there was no need to apply any sampling method, but instead a complete enumeration method was applied, meaning that the sample comprises all the cases in the population.

3.3 Data collection

The survey was created by using the Digium Enterprise, an internet based program, which allowed the authors to collect and handle the data without risking the anonymity of the cases.

The survey was sent to 198 students from a contact list of 209 names on Wednesday 4.5.2012. The 11 students were left out due to being non-attending, with invalid email addresses. In the first five days after the survey launch 49 responses were received. A reminder was sent on Monday 16.5.2012 and 22 responses more were received. Out of the 198 students who received the survey, 71 students or 36% answered the questionnaire. The survey was closed on Monday 30.5.2012.

“Non-response” refers to the failure to obtain data from a case or cases selected for the sample. (Kananen 2011, 99) In this case, where the sample equals the population and was 198 students, the response rate is sufficient for valid interpretations. Out of the target group of 198 students 20 % studied logistics engineering, 16% nursing, 19% facility management, 20% music and media management and 25% international business.

The structure of the survey was divided into four parts; JAMK International Alumni Network - Student POV, International Alumni Network, International Alumni Network Brand and the background data. In total the survey consisted of 33 questions.

The first part was aimed to determine the views and knowledge of the students about the alumni networks in general. The second part was related to

networking and specifically the methods that the students would prefer to use in the international alumni network. The third part focused on the brand of JAMK University of Applied Sciences and what the school could offer to the alumni and what the alumni could offer to it, so that a win-win situation could be achieved. The last part was background data including the age, citizenship, and gender and degree program.

3.4 Reliability and validity

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and repeatability of the research results, and validity refers to whether we have researched and measured the right things. (Kananen, 125) This is explained in the figure 5.

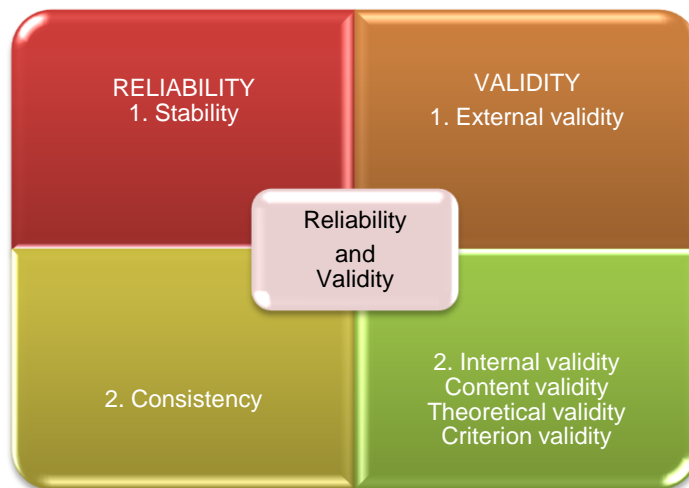


FIGURE 5. Reliability and Validity (Kananen 2011, 125)

Validity has multiple sub-groups. One of the most important is external validity, which refers to the generalization of the findings to the population. It means that the survey results are valid in similar situations. Content validity refers to whether the measuring that is used measures what it is supposed to measure. Theoretical validity refers to how well the concepts of the study have been

derived from existing theories. Criterion validity is based on the use of other researchers' research results to support your own results. (Kananen 2011, 126)

The survey was conducted with the Digium Enterprise system, which provides statistical and accurate data. It was chosen as the executing tool of the survey due to its ability to acquire data anonymously, contact respondents anonymously and also because of the reliable nature of the program.

In the planning stage, the survey was examined by the employer of the thesis and the international office staff of JAMK University of Applied Sciences. A test group was also used to test the survey, so that the validity would increase and also to ensure that the form worked correctly.

The selection of the target group has an impact in the validity of the research. It was determined, that the group would consist of both the Finnish and foreign nationals of the international degree programmes of JAMK University of Applied Sciences, as this would ensure the authentic views of all the parties that would eventually join the international alumni network. The response rate of 36% is also a clear indicator of validity, as well as the distribution of the responding students to all the degree programmes.

TABLE 1. Target group compared to people in the ASIO student register.

Degree Programme in	% - of people in the ASIO register	% - of people who answered the questionnaire
International Business	25	27
Logistics Engineering	20	15,5
Music and Media Management	20	15,5
Facility Management	19	25
Nursing	16	17

There are a few visible spikes in the table. The biggest variation is in the facility management students' response rate. There can be several reasons for the

spike, such as the time the survey was sent or the technical form the survey was executed. Overall this is not a very big risk to the validity of the research.

In general the respondents affect the outcome of the survey. There are several kinds of people within the population and their attitudes towards the topic can have an influence in the way they answer the questions. Some people might be interested in the topic and some see it as irrelevant.

It is also possible that the non-response rate, meaning the people who did not reply to the survey, means that the views of some people are ignored and therefore the research is more unreliable.

Another thing, that is causing concern in validity, is the number of female respondents: 68% of the respondents were female. This might be, because the females were more interested in the survey or the degree programs had more females than males. This means, that the full picture is perhaps not seen when interpreting the results.

Overall the reliability and validity are in a good level in this survey, at least from the point of view of the authors.

4 SURVEY RESULTS: JAMK INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI NETWORK – STUDENT POINT OF VIEW

4.1 Background data

The questions about gender and degree programme were analyzed in the previous sections of the thesis. Therefore, it is not repeated here in order to save the reader from repetition. The background data starts from figure 6, age distribution.

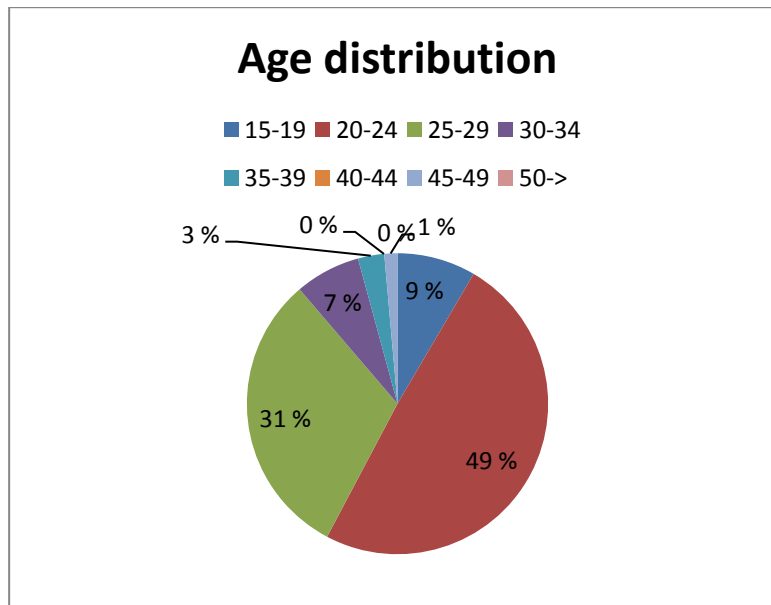


FIGURE 6. Age distribution.

49 % or the majority of the respondents were 20-24 years old. The biggest age group after that was 25-29 years old with 31 %. This is what is to be expected when the population consists of degree students in the bachelor level.

For the validity point of view, it is good that the age distribution is not too homogeneous, as it gives a broader view. Something that should be kept in mind is that the responders' age might affect their answers. It is possible, that by analyzing different age groups one could see variation, but this was not seen as a requirement for this study by the authors.

After analyzing the affects of the age distribution it is time to move take a look at the citizenships of the respondents. This question was included in order to see the ratio of the respondents that were Finnish compared to non-Finnish. The results are presented in the figure 7.

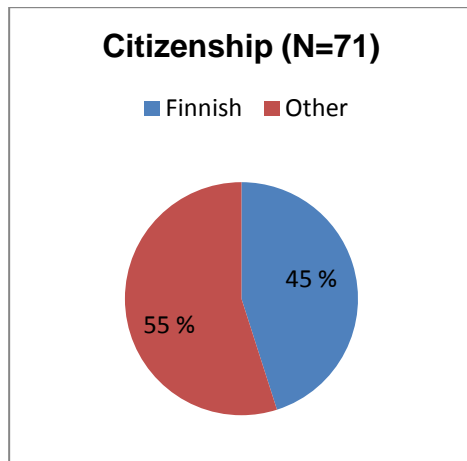


FIGURE 7. Citizenship.

45 % of the respondents were Finnish. There is a chance that the nationality and cultural differences might affect the answers of the responders. However, in this research this matter was left untouched. As the difference between Finnish and non-Finnish is relatively small it shows that the views of the foreign respondents are also included in the study. This increases the reliability of the study.

Moving forward in the survey to the figure 8, gender of responders, it can be seen that female respondents were a majority. The option “other, please specify” was also included in the survey as it is politically correct these days.

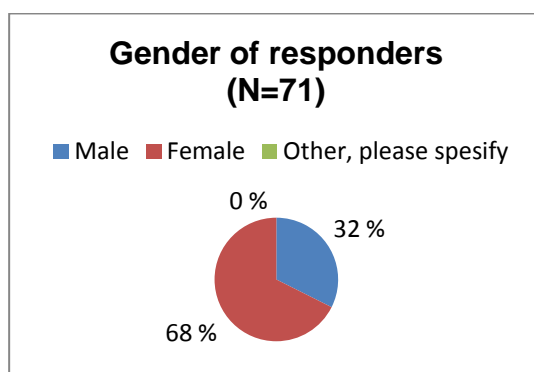


FIGURE 8. Gender distribution.

The affects of gender was analyzed in the previous section of the thesis. 68% of the respondents were female and 32% were male. Degree programme, displayed in figure 9, is the next topic to be looked upon.

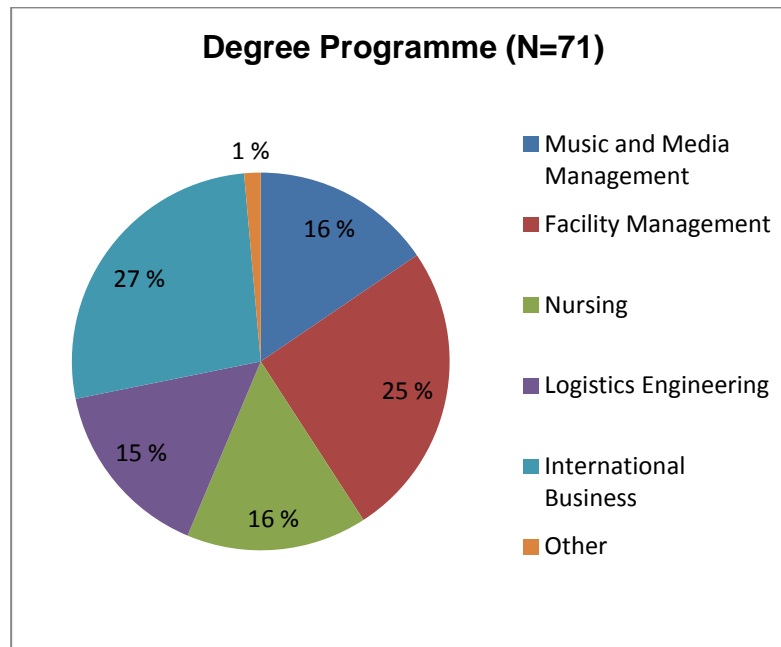


FIGURE 9. Degree Programme.

The affects of the degree programme was analyzed in the previous section of the thesis. 27% were Music and Media Management students, 25% were Facility Management students, 16% were nursing students, 16% were International Business students and 15% were Logistics Engineering students. The 1% “other” was a student who had previously studied nursing and was now studying logistics engineering.

4.2 JAMK International Alumni Network – Student POV

The purpose of the question series was to determine the current situation of the international alumni network in JAMK University of Applied Sciences, and give an indication about what the respondents want, in regards to the development of the international alumni network. The first one was figure 10.

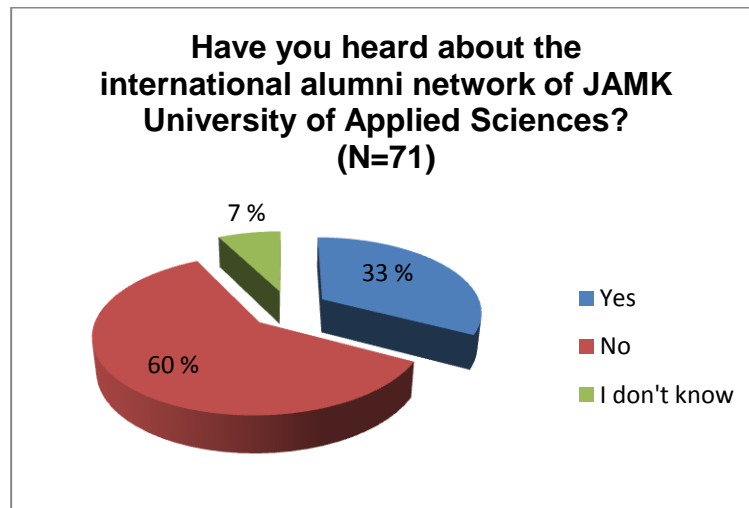


FIGURE 10. Have you heard about the international alumni network of JAMK University of Applied Sciences?

Only one third of the respondents had heard about the existing international alumni network of JAMK University of Applied Sciences. 60% of the respondents had not heard of it and 7% did not know if they had heard or not.

The result is not a huge surprise as the network is advertised only in one page of JAMK University of Applied Sciences website, which has not been situated to the section of the website where respondents are, in the opinion of the authors, likely to visit.

It can be determined, that according to this survey the current students do not receive enough information about the alumni network possibilities during their studies. This can have a negative effect, when the students graduate and turn into alumni, as they currently would fail to join the alumni network.

In the figure 11, the question related to the time when the school should approach the students about the possibility of joining the international alumni network is the focus.

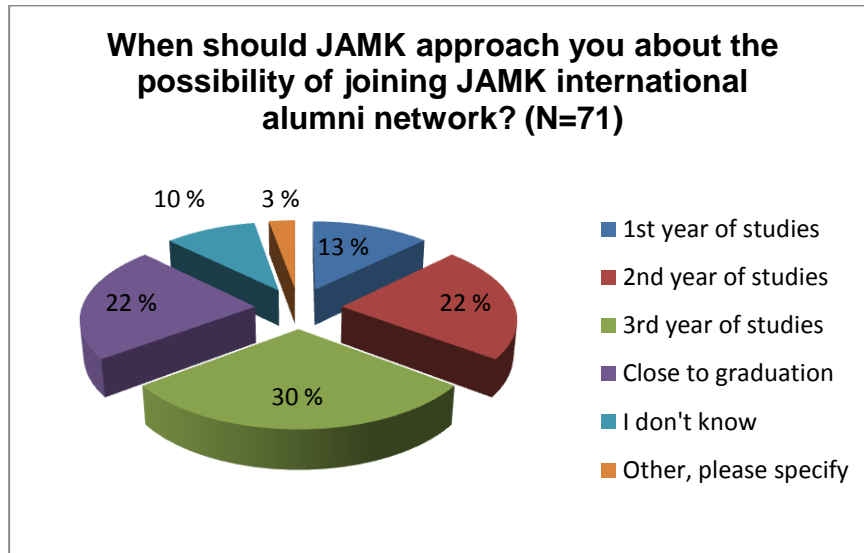


FIGURE 11. When should JAMK approach you about the possibility of joining JAMK international alumni network?

A vast majority of the respondents stated, that they should be contacted during their studies and not at the end. This is a strong indicator towards the idea, that the students are interested in creating networks with the school and the alumni already during their time in the school, and not just join the network upon graduation.

52 % of the respondents replied that they should be contacted during the 2nd or 3rd year of their studies. This could be the starting point of a process, which results in the fluent transformation from student to alumnus.

The next question, displayed in figure 12, illustrates the views of the respondents about who should be the person contacting them about the international alumni network.

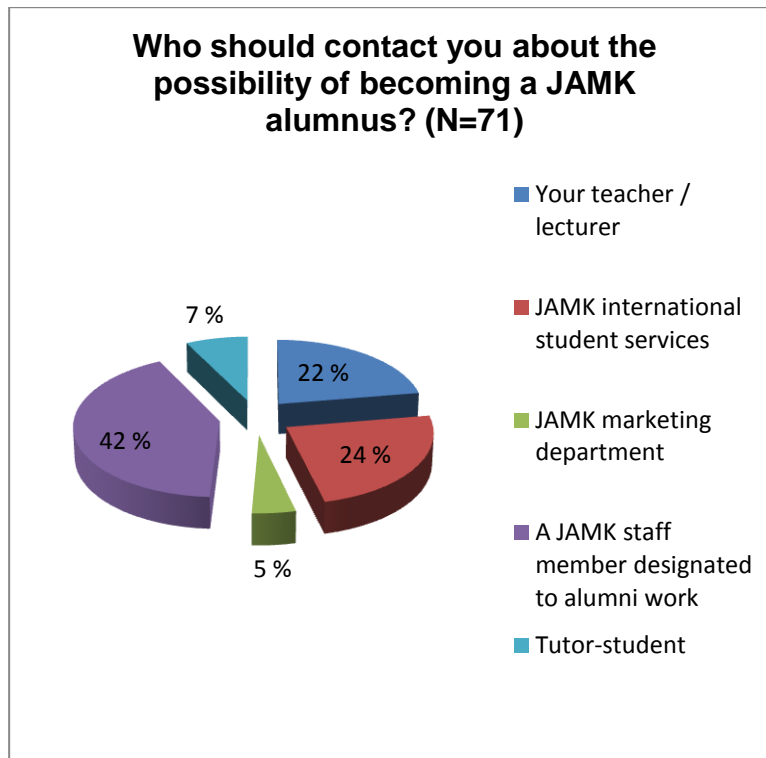


FIGURE 12. Who should contact you about the possibility of becoming a JAMK alumnus?

Figure 12 indicates, that only eight percentages of the respondents would prefer JAMK marketing department to contact them about becoming alumni. 22 % wanted their own teacher or lecturer to contact them and 24 % prefers the international student services to do so.

42 % wanted a JAMK staff member designated to alumni work to contact them. There is a possibility, that the question was misleadingly formed, as this could also refer to the options: teacher / lecturer, JAMK international student services and JAMK marketing department. All in all, it can be determined, that the least favorite options were tutor-student and the JAMK marketing department.

According to the respondents, it can be determined that the person contacting the student should be someone relatively close to the student. This reflects to the idea, that the school should not move the alumni network too far from the teaching staff and alienate the students by doing so.

Determining the interests of the respondents gives an idea about the future interests of the alumni. This is displayed in the figure 13.

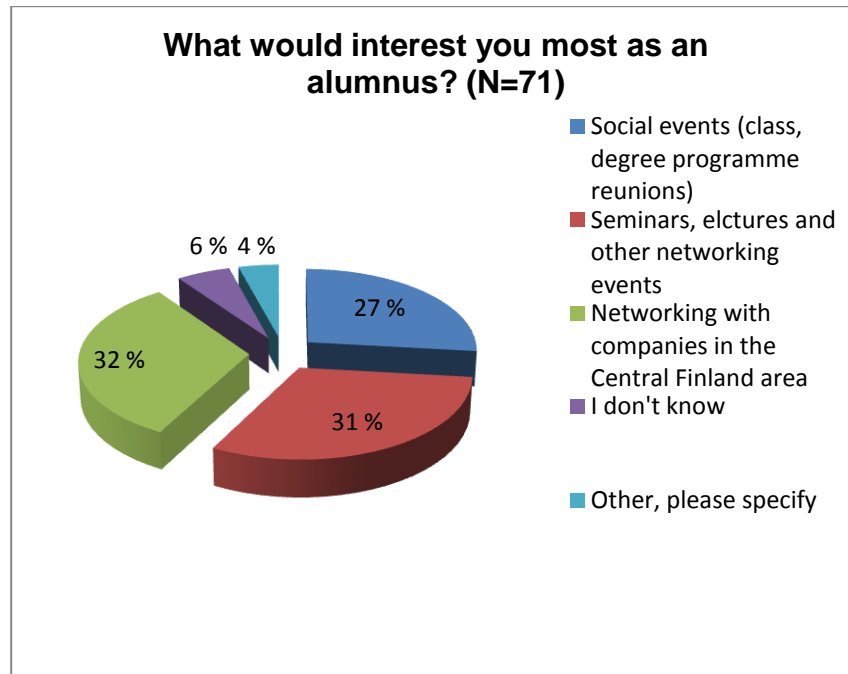


FIGURE 13. What would interest you most as an alumnus?

The question was aimed to determine the interests of the respondents. The results are quite even and indicate that the school has a broad category to offer to the alumni. In the section “other, please specify”, the respondents stated, that all the options were equally interesting and international networking in general was interesting.

According to the respondents, it can be claimed that in order to attract the alumni, the school has to have a broad selection of worthwhile services for the alumni. However, it is also good to keep in mind that these were only a few examples and the correct pool of services can only be determined by communicating with the alumni constantly. There is also the possibility, that the respondents would change their views after graduation. The answers were intentionally structured so that the three options would go from casual towards a more professional approach.

Knowing the amount of respondents that would currently be interested in joining the international alumni network is valuable. This gives an indication to the direction that has to be taken depending on the answer. This is illustrated in the figure 14.

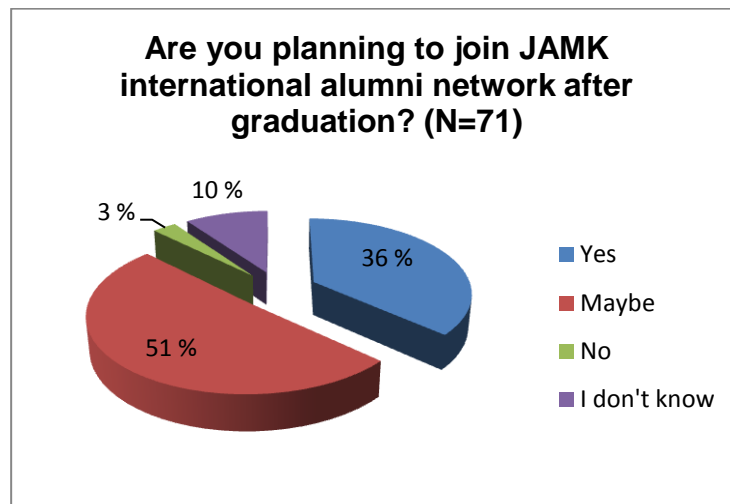


FIGURE 14. Are you planning to join JAMK international alumni network after graduation?

A clear majority of respondents showed interest in joining the international alumni network. Only 3% stated that they are not planning to join. The 10% of respondents who replied “I don’t know” probably have either not decided or do not have an opinion of the matter. This is an indication of a slight “I don’t know” –dilemma. (Kananen, 86)

The authors are able to determine, that there is a huge interest in the international alumni network within the respondents. This can also be seen as a message for JAMK University of Applied Sciences to use this interest and the benefits the working international alumni network could offer.

One of the basic questions related to the creation of the international alumni network is the structure of the network. The respondents were not as specific with these responses, portrayed in figure 15, than they were with many others.

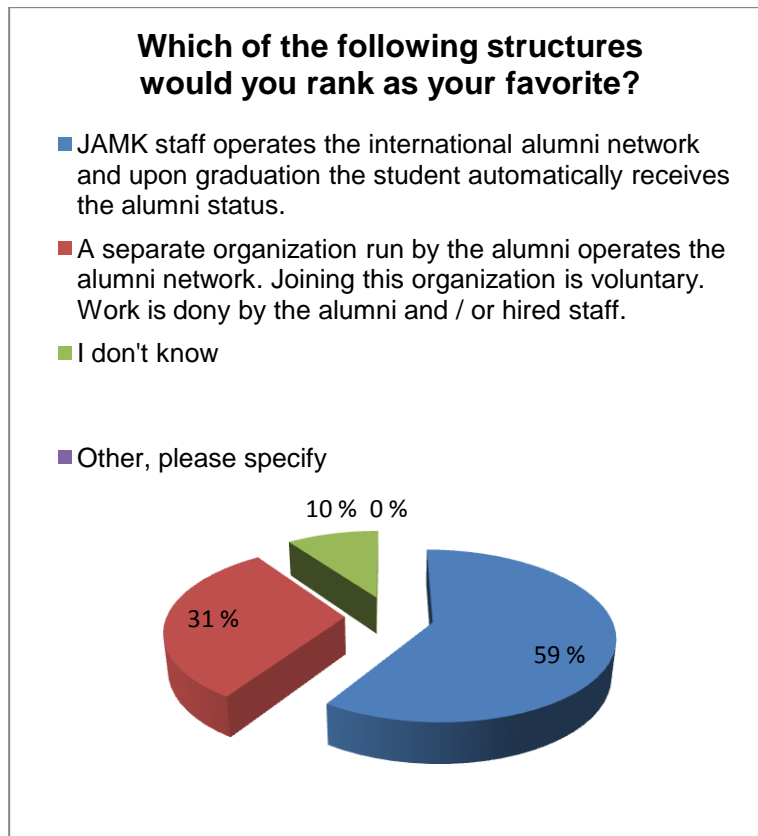


FIGURE 15. Which of the following structures would you rank as your favorite?

As the study is partly based on the two existing models of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, this question is rather important. It is possible, that the respondents saw this question as somewhat difficult, but the authors did their best in testing and evaluating the question in the planning stage.

59% of the respondents stated, that a school run operation was their favorite. 31% stated that a separate organization is better. There is a visible indication, that a strong school presence is desirable, and that the school should be in control of the alumni operations.

However, the number of respondents who prefer the separate system could mean, that a system where the alumni can influence and be active also in the structures of the network is desirable to the respondents.

Therefore, it can be suggested that the international alumni network should be school operated, but include the willing and active alumni into the operations as much as possible.

4.3 Networking

The second part of the survey is related to networking and specifically the methods, which the students would prefer to use in the international alumni network. The first question to be analyzed is the respondents' interest to use the alumni intranet. This is displayed in the figure 16.

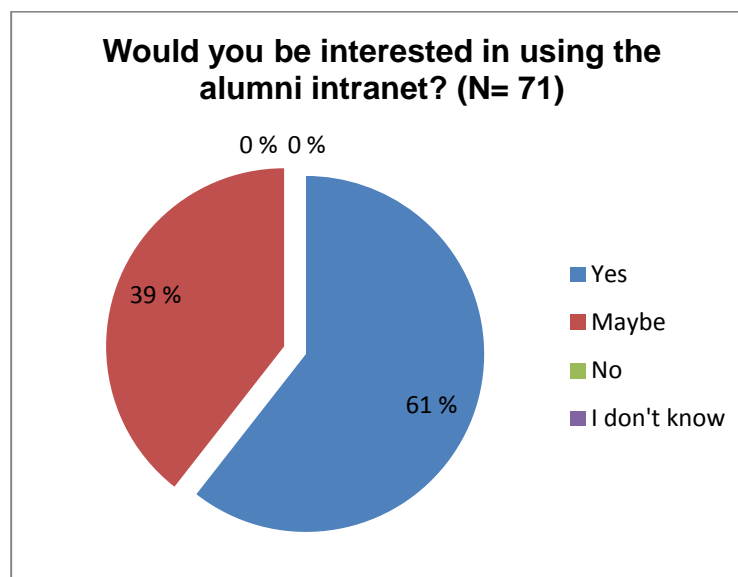


FIGURE 16. Would you be interested in using the alumni intranet, which would include news sections, information about upcoming events and a possibility to network with students, staff and other alumni?

The idea of an alumni intranet came up in the JAMK task group during the year 2011. The idea was to create a new website for JAMK and in the process add a segment to the website, which would include an intranet for the students, staff, strategic partners and alumni. This would be used to create networking and cooperation options for all of them. (Aku Aarva, 2012)

As shown by figure 16, a staggering 61% of the respondents replied that they would be interested in using the alumni intranet and 39% would think about it. It can be determined, that an alumni intranet would be welcomed by the respondents as one of the strongest possibilities for a structured networking tool for the international alumni network. This is also supported by the earlier theories of networking.

The frequency the respondents use social networking tools was also a subject to measurement. The outcomes are outlined in the figure 17.

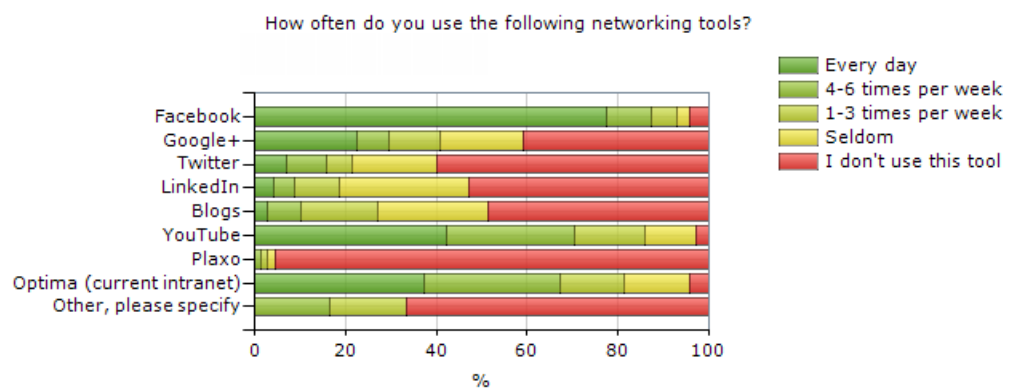


FIGURE 17. How often do you use the following networking tools? (N=71)

Figure 17 shows how often the respondents used the social media tools in question. The most often used social media tools were Facebook, YouTube and Optima, which was labeled as a social media tool due to the possibilities to interact through it. The least used were Plaxo and Twitter, most likely because they have not yet properly landed in Finland.

It can be assumed, that the most used social media tools are the ones that are popular worldwide at the moment. The authors wish to make a remark about the fact that these tools are subject to changing trends, meaning that a tool that is popular now will most likely be outdated and replaced by a new one in a short time period. Therefore, it is wise to adjust the feasibility of these results to the present day by repeating the survey frequently. However, at the time this study was conducted, these tools were the most popular.

After stating the frequency the respondents use specific tools, a question about their usability for the international alumni network purposes was presented. The results are stated in figure 18.

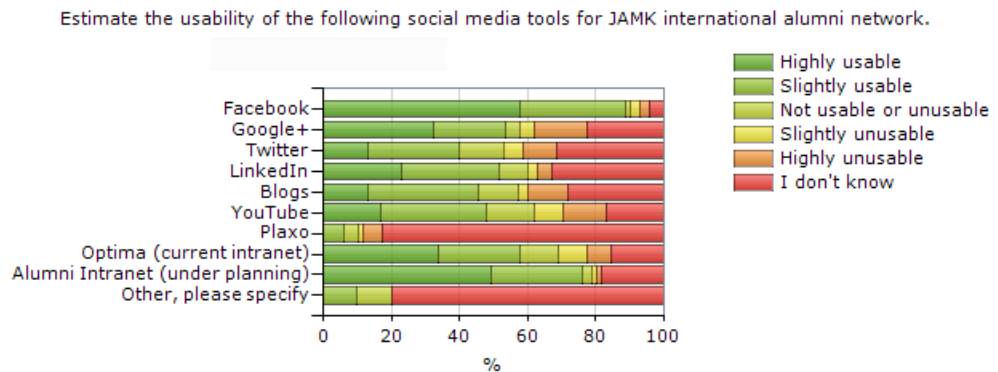


FIGURE 18. Estimate the usability of the following social media tools for the JAMK international alumni network. (N=71)

Figure 18 shows what social media tools the respondents considered most usable for the international alumni network. A majority of the respondents considered Facebook a highly usable social media tool. The alumni intranet was also ranked as highly usable by 50% of the cases. On average, most of the social media tools were seen as somewhat usable, with the exception of Plaxo, which is most likely quite unfamiliar for the respondents.

The results show a correlation between figures 17 and 18, especially when looking at the most used social media tools Facebook and Optima, the current intranet used by JAMK University of Applied Sciences. The popularity of the social media tools may have affected the respondents more than the actual usability of the tool itself. However, it can also be determined that the most used social media tools would be good options for the international alumni network, as they would eliminate the need to get the alumni actively using a new separate system but instead keep using the existing ones.

LinkedIn would be a valid existing social media tool, but it seems that over half of the respondents do not use it at all. However, they see it as a quite potential tool as over half of the respondents saw it at least slightly usable. JAMK Uni-

versity of Applied Sciences already has a profile for certain alumni groups in LinkedIn and some active conversations exist there. This network can be considered international and as it is upheld in English and all the alumni can join it. (Alumni Network of JAMK University of Applied Sciences, 2011)

In this question the same remarks about the contemporary nature of the tools are valid.

One of the most interesting questions in the survey was the question about local umbrella networks, as it was something new that the respondents did not know in advance. The figure 19 presents the surprising results.

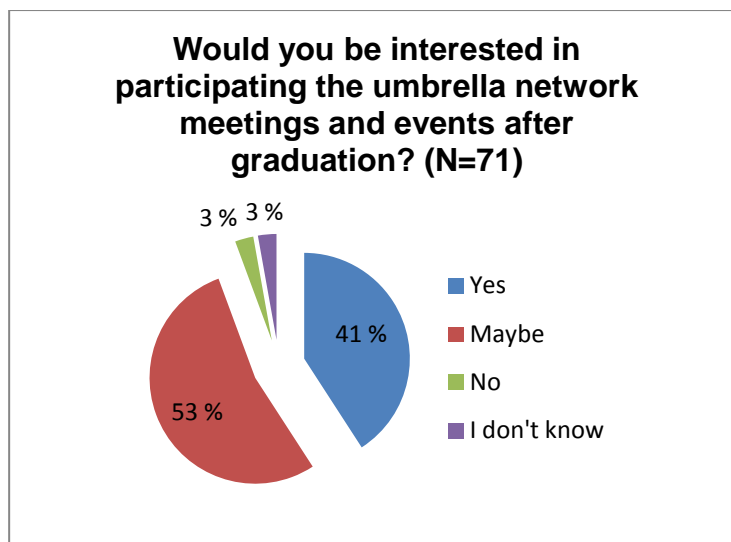


FIGURE 19. Would you be interested in participating the umbrella network meetings and events after graduation?

The Umbrella Network system was something that the authors of the thesis came up with during the background studies for the thesis. The basic idea of the umbrella network is a system where foreign JAMK alumni, upon returning to their home countries or some other country, contact and create a loose network with their local alumni. The idea is that even though the physical distance between the alumni and the school might be great, there are always a few other alumni close by to network with. This could be a valuable tool for JAMK to keep the alumni interested.

In figure 19 a staggering 41% stated that they would be interested in participating in a local umbrella network meeting. 53% stated that they would consider it. Only 3% answered that they were not interested and another 3% said they do not know. This clearly shows, that the respondents are interested in maintaining a connection with the school and especially with each other if they leave Finland.

The local umbrella network cannot function without leaders. Hence a question about the interest to act as a leader was asked from the respondents. The results are presented in the figure 20.

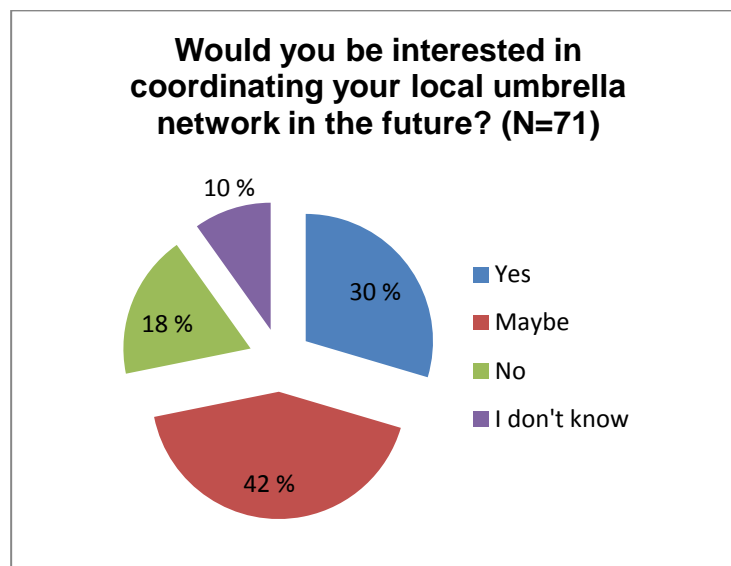


FIGURE 20. Would you be interested in coordinating your local umbrella network in the future?

Going deeper into the umbrella network system, 30% of the respondents said they would be interested in coordinating their local networks and 42% would consider it. 18% were not interested in coordinating it and 10% did not know if they would be. It is a very positive thing to have over 70% of the respondents at least considering the option of coordinating the umbrella networks, as the whole system is based on the idea that the alumni themselves must be active. It is not very realistic to assume, that the school could send a staff member to each country it has alumni in very frequently.

The Local Umbrella Network system is a valid tool in maintaining contacts with alumni that are not living in Finland. Furthermore, it can be stated that it can be used to activate the alumni and further increase the win-win situation between the school and the alumni.

Third parties are also a point of view that has to be taken when talking about international alumni networks, which have huge potential in helping local companies internationalize. The results related to this question are presented in figure 21.

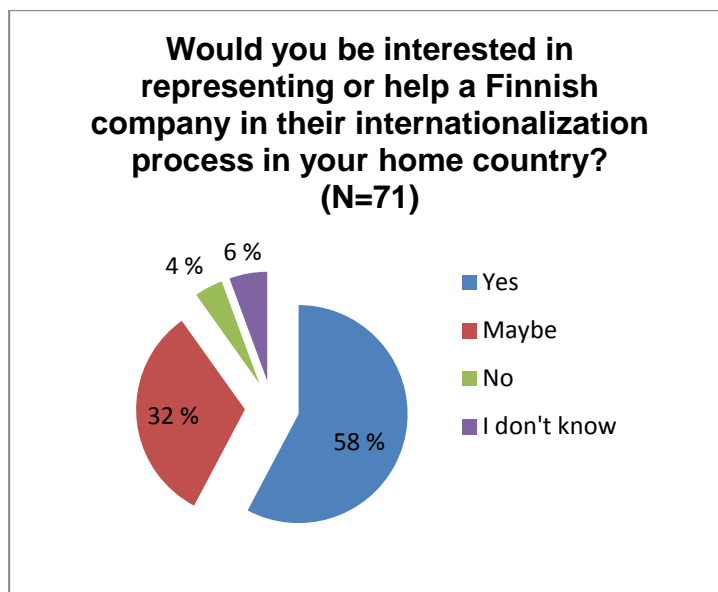


FIGURE 21. Would you be interested representing or help a Finnish company in their internationalization process in your home country?

Figure 21 shows to what extent the respondents would be interested in representing or helping a Finnish company in their internationalization process in the home countries of the respondents. 58% of the respondents replied they would be interested in it and 32% said they would consider it.

Consequently it can be determined that the respondents are strongly motivated to be of assistance for the local and national companies of Finland. This is a source of help that should not be left unused. It is also a strong indicator for

the school to increase the networking possibilities of the current students, alumni and companies in Central Finland.

The authors view this as one of the strong points of the alumni networks in general, as this brings added value to the whole idea of the network as a developing tool for the surrounding area of the school. The will of the students combined with the right tools could be of great value for all and create a true win-win situation.

4.4 Branding

The third part of the survey focused on the brand of JAMK University of Applied Sciences, and what it could offer to the alumni and what the alumni could offer to it to achieve a win-win situation.

Knowing the views the respondents had about JAMK University of Applied Sciences creates a starting position. Figure 22 illustrates the starting position.

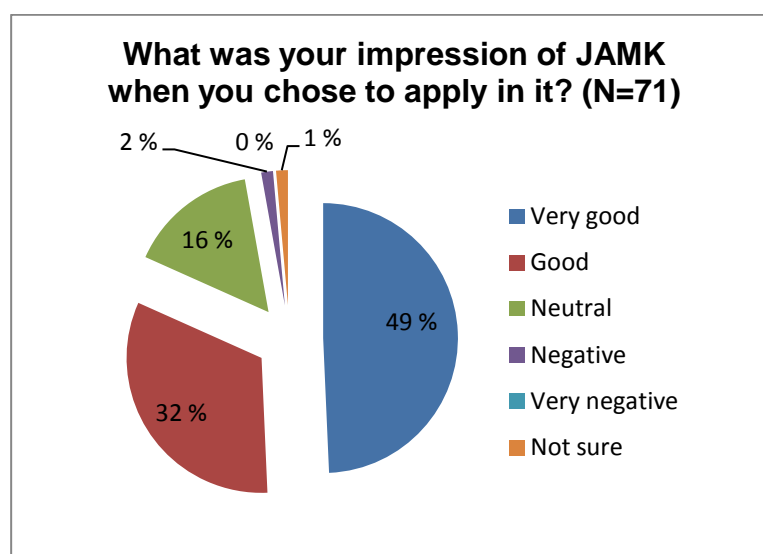


FIGURE 22. What was your impression of JAMK when you chose to apply in it?

The point was to determine the starting level impressions the respondents had about JAMK. 49% had a very good impression and 32% a good impression. Negative impressions were only marginal.

It can be determined, that in the application stage the respondents had a very positive view of JAMK University of Applied Sciences, which would indicate the school has done a good job in promoting itself. The view the respondents have of the school is an excellent starting point in the process of branding the school and a strong indicator of the quality of education.

Even more important than the starting impression is the impression the respondents have about the school the present time. These results indicate the likelihood of joining and starting potential of the international alumni network. The results are presented in the figure 23.

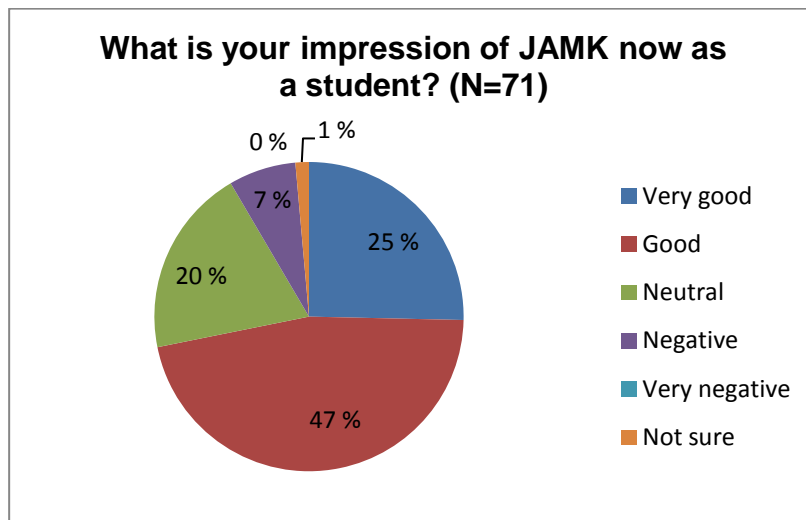


FIGURE 23. What is your impression of JAMK now as a student?

The respondents were asked to state their impressions about JAMK as a student. 25% had a very good impression and 47% good impression about JAMK. Negative impressions had 7%.

Comparing the figures 22 and 23, it can be seen that the amount of respondents with very good impressions of the school had reduced, but on the other

hand the amount with good impressions had risen. It can be determined, that the image the school is presenting in the application period does not match with reality as there was a decrease in the number of respondents, who had a very good image and also an increase in the amount of respondents with a negative view. The image and the reality do not completely meet in JAMK University of Applied Sciences, but it is not a very drastic difference in the end.

The results of the two figures can be used to evaluate how the school should communicate towards the applicants to give a more truthful image, or to see that some improvements are required to match the image displayed outside of the school.

A general statement about brand value can be made by screening how many respondents could say they are proud of being a student in the school. In figure 24 the results are displayed.

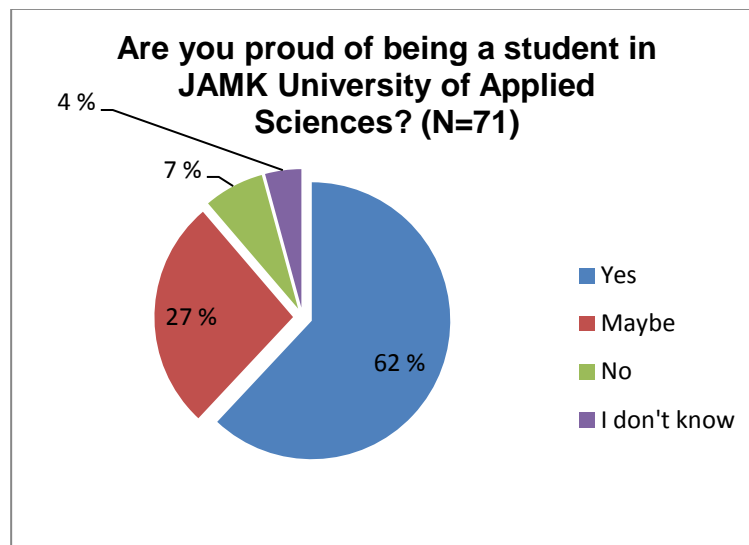


FIGURE 24. Are you proud of being a student in JAMK University of Applied Sciences?

62% of the respondents state, that they are proud of being a student in JAMK. 27% state are not sure and only 7% replied no.

It can be stated, that according to the respondents the school has a strong brand value, which is a very important thing for the international alumni net-

work. If the students are proud of their school, they most likely will be proud and interested in becoming active alumni.

Furthermore, this is an indication that there are potential alumni that can be used to advertise the school further for potential new students in their native countries.

Moving from the school brand forward, it is time to turn the attention to the interests and needs of the future alumni. The respondents had a chance to state their interests to several different services that JAMK University of Applied Sciences could offer. The results can be seen in figure 25.

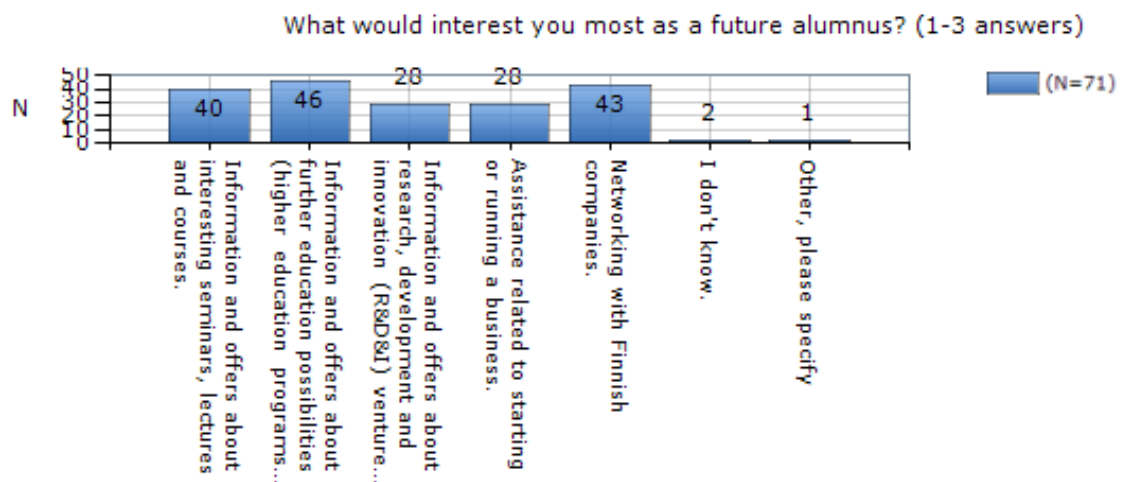


FIGURE 25. What would interest you most as a future alumnus?

The respondents had the option to prioritize one to three given options depending on their interests. The options chosen as most interesting were “information and offers about interesting seminars, lectures and courses” and “information and offers about further education possibilities (higher education programs etc.)” and “networking with Finnish companies”.

Further education possibilities and connecting with Finnish companies were the most interesting options for the respondents. It can be determined, that the respondents, representing bachelor level degree students, are interested in building careers in Central Finland and educating themselves further in JAMK.

This is a good indicator that many of the respondents are interested in staying in Central Finland.

It is equally valuable to understand, what the respondents would be willing to offer to the school. These are the elements required to create a win-win situation between the school and the alumni. Figure 26 illustrates what the respondents would be interested in to offer to the school.

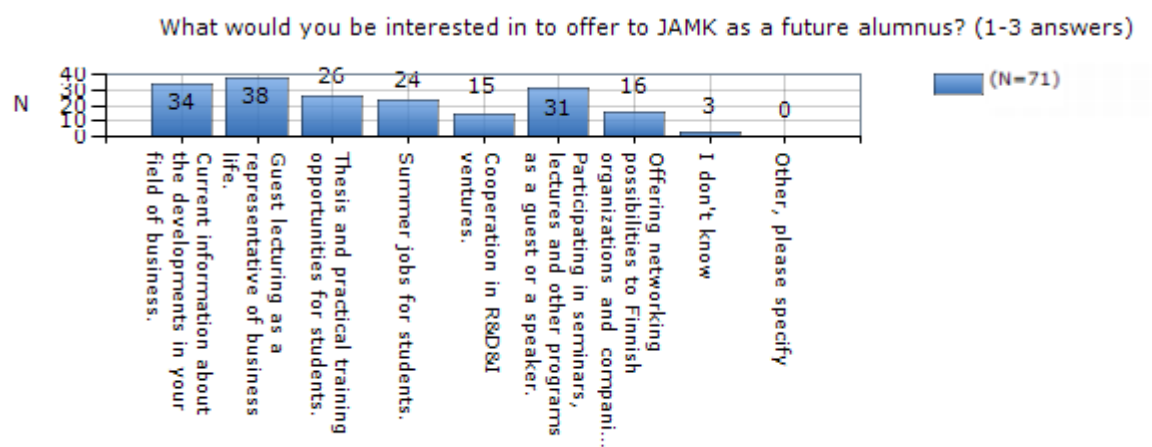


FIGURE 26. What would you be interested in to offer to JAMK as a future alumnus?

The respondents also had a chance to state their interest in what they would most like to offer for JAMK as alumni. The most popular choices were “guest lecturing as a representative of business life” and “current information about the developments in your field of business” as well as “participating in seminars, lectures and other programs as a guest or a speaker”.

It can be determined, that the respondents would prefer an active role as alumni and that they prefer to give an input towards JAMK in the form of bringing current business knowledge back to the school after graduation. Cooperation in R&D&I ventures were among the least favorite choices, but this could also be due to the unfamiliar nature of the choice.

The amount of respondents who claimed, that they would be interested in offering the students summer jobs and help Finnish companies in their internationalization process are also notable. It can be said that, according to this survey, JAMK University of Applied Sciences has a lot to gain from the alumni.

Somewhat a curiosity question, but nonetheless an invalid one, is the question about the permanent email address. It is a style used mainly in old universities like Harvard or Oxford or MIT, but could be implicated to JAMK University of Applied Sciences as well. The results are displayed in the figure 27.

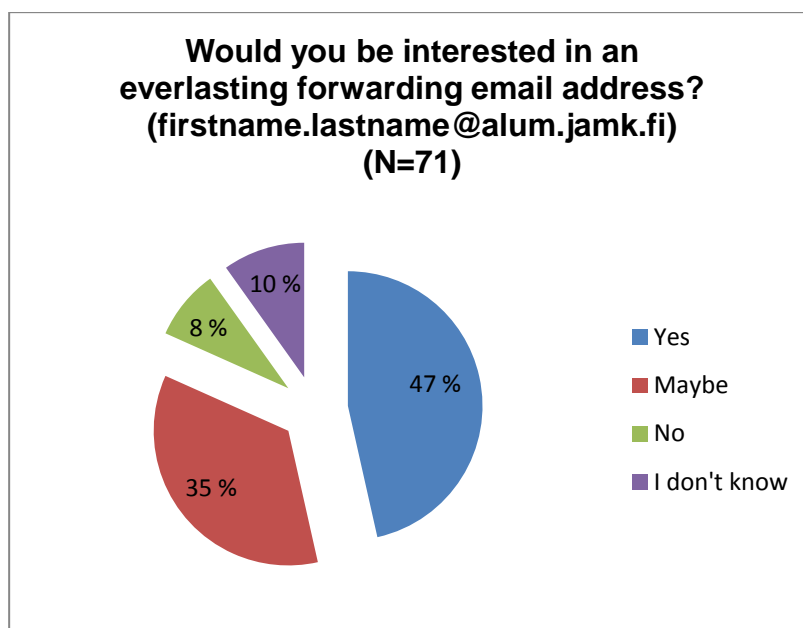


FIGURE 27. Would you be interested in an everlasting forwarding email address? (firstname.lastname@alum.jamk.fi)

As a bit of a surprise, a vast majority of the respondents would be interested in an everlasting forwarding email address that would state that they are JAMK alumni. These results compared with the figure 26 results is a very positive outcome and a strong sign towards the fact that JAMK has a good pool of students interested in becoming international alumni. It is up to JAMK to take the next steps.

End remarks about the survey

The survey included more questions than what has been analyzed in this study. The questions were included in the survey as per request by the employer of the study to be used later.

The questions included in the analysis were the ones that the authors felt had the most relevance to the topic of the study. The subsequent use of the survey as a whole will be analyzed in the discussion of this study.

5 PROPOSALS FOR INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI NETWORK STRUCTURE FOR JAMK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

The goal of this study was to identify elements and solutions, which would help JAMK University of Applied Sciences to create an international alumni network. The study was based on the idea, that an international alumni network requires a strong brand and the proper tools and methods for networking. After identifying the existing alumni network structures in the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences and conducting and analyzing a vast quantitative survey it is time to draw some conclusions.

Proposals related to branding

As portrayed in the theory section of this study, a strong brand plays a vital role in the success or failure of any company or product. This is also the case of JAMK University of Applied Sciences and its international alumni network. According to Keller (2001), a strong brand creates customer loyalty, reduces the risks coming from competitors and makes it easier for the customers and business partners to trust the company. All this applies to the academic surroundings and to JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

If the school brand is strong, it will attract more potential applicants and has the ability to hold on to them during and after studies. This creates a strong backbone for the international alumni network.

An example from Farrell (2005), related to the idea that a brand in itself cannot support the company for too long. The example was based on Harvard and it showed that even though it has the strongest brand in the academic world, the results, i.e. the product, is no longer the strongest. However, according to the results of the survey conducted as a part of this study, JAMK University of Applied Sciences has, in the eyes of the respondents, a very strong brand. Furthermore, it was shown that the school is ranked high in many indicators of the Ministry of Education of Finland.

These findings are evidence, that JAMK University of Applied Sciences has a brand that is strong enough to support the creation of an international alumni network. According to the survey in this study, the respondents had a very good view of the school during the time they were applicants and it did not change much after they were admitted.

The survey also showed that the respondents were interested in participating in alumni work after graduation. The respondents were interested in providing the school with services like guest lecturing and participating in research, development and innovation work, and in receiving services from the school like further education opportunities and networking opportunities with Finnish companies. This is further evidence, that the respondents view JAMK University of Applied Sciences as a school they are interested in helping and developing further, and that they have created an emotional link to the school. All of these factors are basis for an international alumni network.

Branding an international alumni network is a long process. In addition to a strong brand, it also requires a structured way to introduce the international alumni network to the current students of the school. According to the survey only 33 % had heard about the possibility of joining an alumni network after graduation and 60 % stated that they had not heard about it. Steps have to be taken to create the brand of the international alumni network.

According to the survey, 35% of the respondents would like JAMK University of Applied Sciences to approach them about the international alumni network during the first two years of their studies. 52 % would like to hear about it during the 3rd year or close to graduation. This could indicate that it would be a

good idea to introduce the international alumni network to the students slowly and step by step during the time they study in the school.

The authors created an example of a possible structure based on the views of the respondents of the survey. It is based on the idea that the alumni are present from application period to graduation and the presence increases the further the studies goes. The role of the school is to act as a link between the alumni and the students. This role can be played for example by the teachers, JAMK International Student Services or a specific member of the staff designated to alumni work, as per the results of the survey.

An example of the introduction to the international alumni network is presented in the figure 28. It shows step by step how the students are familiarized to the international alumni network.

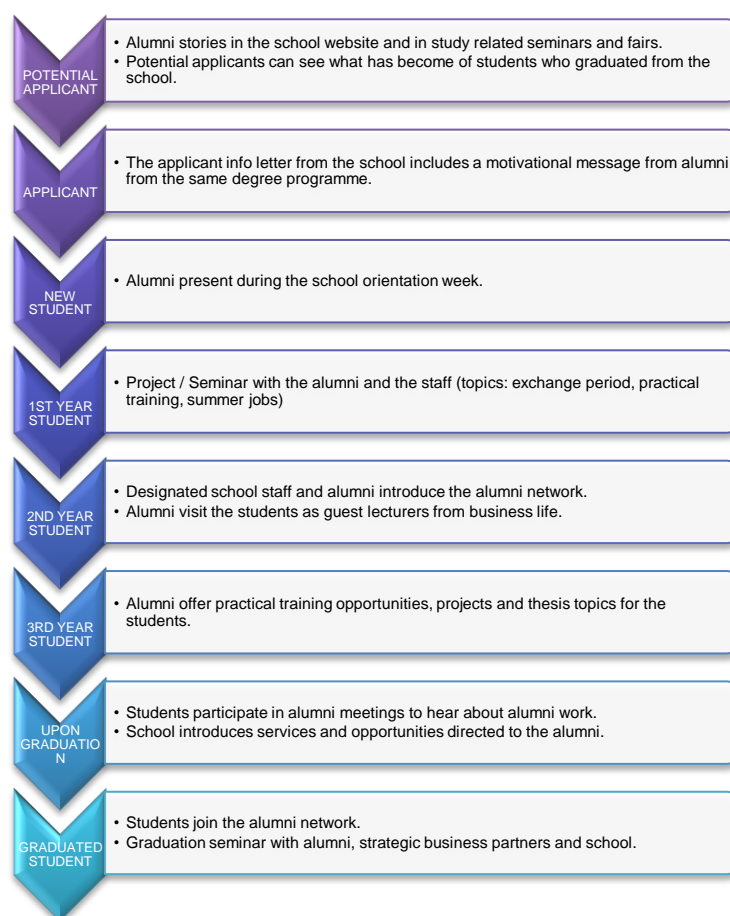


FIGURE 28. Introduction to the international alumni network in JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

The authors claim, based on this study, that brand wise and from the will point of view, JAMK University of Applied Sciences have all the requirements for a successful international alumni network. The respondents are already interested in being active participants in the international alumni network, thanks to the strong brand of the school. With a correctly created pool of services this motivation can be upheld as long as the networking options are selected properly.

Proposals related to networking

The obvious criteria for a working international alumni network are the networking methods and tools used to create and uphold it. In this study, the authors first identified the correct surroundings to use the term “networking”.

Comparing the theory of random networks by Rényi, introduced by Barabási (2003), to the international alumni network, questions arose about how the networks could be upheld after the students graduate and spread around the world. However, the Six Degrees of Separation theory showed that even though people are spread around the world, it is still possible to create networks linking people thanks to modern technology. This gave the authors assurance, that an international alumni network could be created and maintained by using for example social media tools. In the survey the respondents verified this and stated many tools, like Facebook and LinkedIn, to be plausible for the use of the international alumni network. These were also the tools that were most popular among the respondents.

Another networking tool, the alumni intranet, was presented in the article by Tozzi (2008). This exclusive network could potentially be used to maintain the official alumni register, introduce exclusive offers and services directed towards the alumni and give the alumni a chance to offer their services to the school. In addition to linking the alumni with the school staff, it is also possible to use the intranet to link the alumni to the students and the strategic business partners. This could create opportunities for all the users of the intranet and present the alumni with an opportunity to help the Finnish companies in their

internationalization process. According to the survey results, a majority of the respondents would be interested in helping local companies internationalize and a majority of the respondents were also interested in using the intranet if it became available.

Regardless of the combination of the networking tools and methods, the international alumni network offers possibilities to bring together the school staff, strategic partners and students with the alumni, who act as the binding tie between all of them. This is presented in the below figure 29.

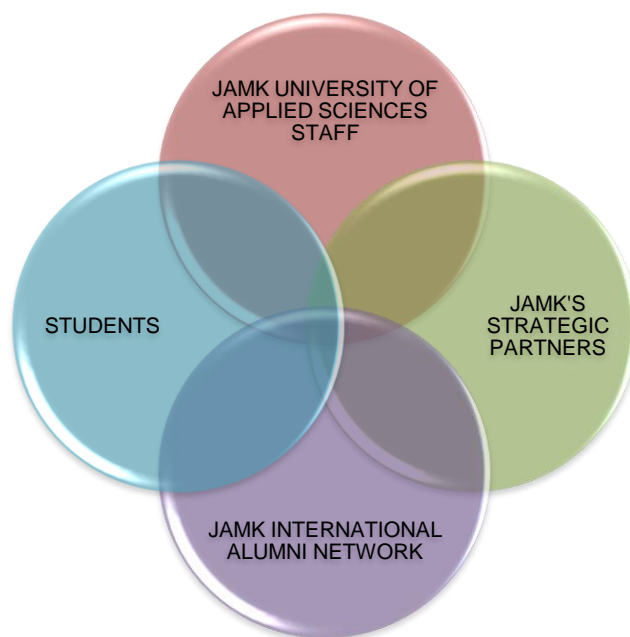


FIGURE 29. JAMK University of Applied Sciences' Intranet Hub.

Through the intranet it is possible to create a networking hub for all the participants to benefit from. The intranet is a superior system compared to the popular social media tools, because it can outlive the social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn. Still, a presence in the social media tools is recommended due to the low entry level and high usage they currently have.

However, a working combination of online social networking tools is not enough to create a working international alumni network. According to Malloy's article in Harvard Business Review (2010), physical networks are in a

key role in spreading information in the market. In other words some form of physical network is required to maintain the links between alumni and the school.

The idea of physical networks combined with the theory about recommendation marketing brought to life the idea of Local Umbrella Networks. These networks could be formed by alumni abroad, in specific areas where the alumni population is dense. They would be run by Local Alumni Leaders, who represent the core idea of influential individuals in the network, following the theory of recommendation marketing. In the survey these views were supported by the respondents, as they were interested to participate in the Local Umbrella Networks and to some extent also interested in acting as the Local Alumni Leaders. The basic structure of the international alumni network is presented in the figure 30.

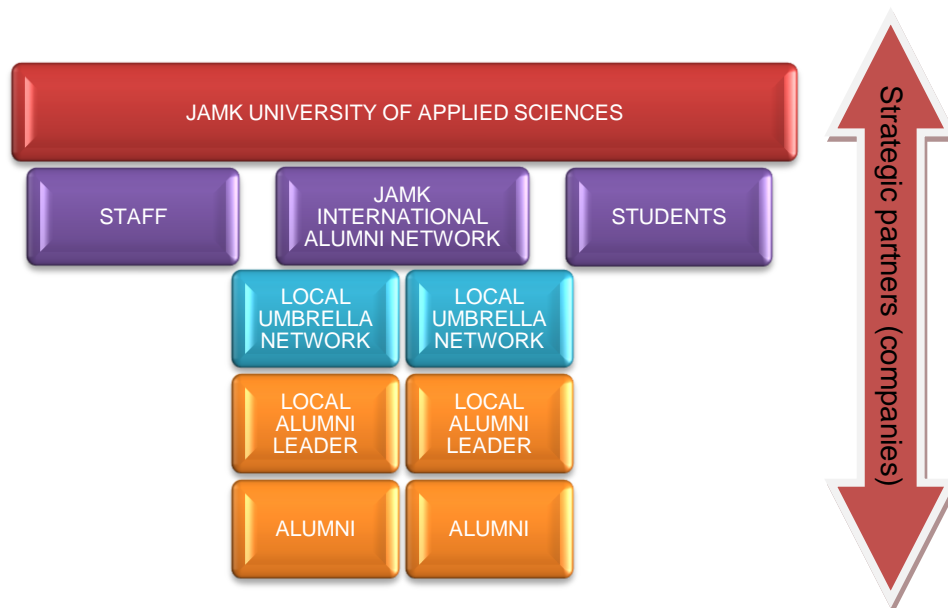


FIGURE 30. Basic structure of the international alumni network.

JAMK University of Applied Sciences is in the top level and its role is to act as the enabler of the international alumni network. In the next level are the staff and students together with the international alumni network. The role of the staff is to coordinate the work of the network, and act as a link between the students and the network. The students have an active role in the structure, as

they are future alumni, but also because during their studies the students have a chance to work with the alumni.

Under the international alumni network are the Local Umbrella Networks, coordinated by Local Alumni Leaders. The Local Umbrella Networks act as the local physical networks of the alumni and the Local Alumni Leaders coordinate their operations together with the staff members of JAMK University of Applied Sciences. On the side are the strategic partners, companies, who work together with JAMK University of Applied Sciences and their staff and students and the alumni of the international alumni network.

A combination of physical networks, social media tools and the intranet would, according to this study, bring the most out of the international alumni network. The social media tools are, in essence, not as important as the way they are used, but the authors still wanted to paint a picture of the possible combination of the networking tools for the use of the international alumni network. In the figure 31 the basic layout and relations of the networking tools is presented.

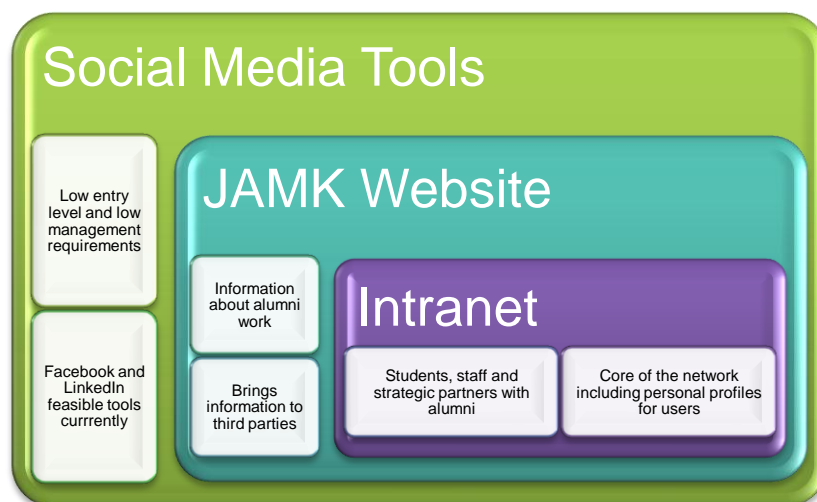


FIGURE 31. Networking tools for the international alumni network.

The idea of the different networking tools is that they support each other. The social media tools have the lowest entry level as they are, according to the respondents, currently in high usage. The school website could act as a surface of information for third parties like potential applicants, business partners

and others. The intranet is the core of the networking tools and should allow the students, staff and business partners of the school to network with the alumni.

Other suggestions

Creating a win-win situation between the alumni and the school should be a priority and a target from day one in the creation of the international alumni network. An essential part of attracting alumni and maintaining the level of interest in the members of the alumni network is the product range JAMK University of Applied Sciences is offering to the alumni. On the other hand, the services the alumni can offer to the school are invaluable.

Based on the survey results, the authors created examples of possible win-win situations reachable through the international alumni network. These are presented in the figure 32.

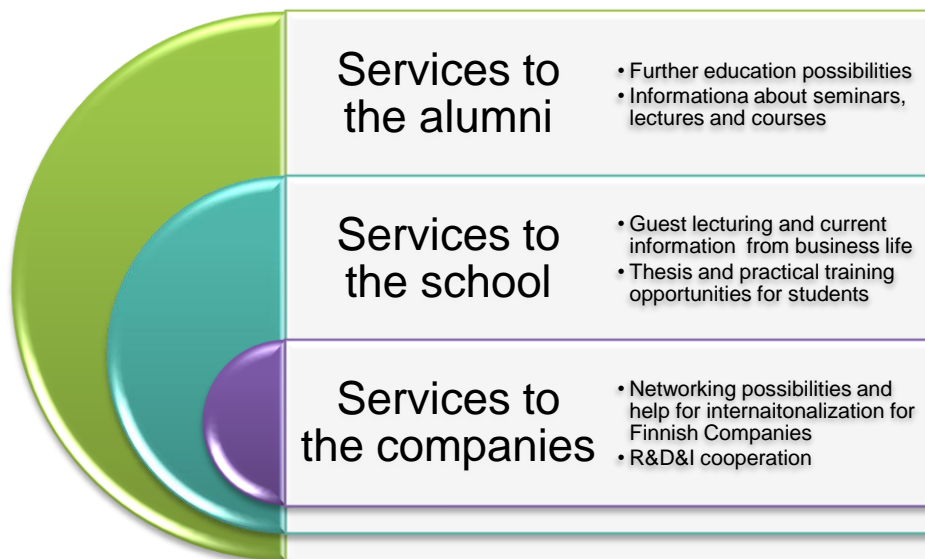


FIGURE 32. Service pool between the school, the alumni and the strategic partners.

According to the respondents of the survey, a majority of 58 % would be interested in helping a Finnish company in their internationalization process and 32

% would consider it. In addition the respondents identified the services they would be interested in offering to the school and the services they would like to receive from the school. It can be said that, according to this study, a clear win-win situation can be reached. It is also possible to create a pool of services, or a product range, that can benefit the school and its students, the alumni and the companies working with JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

End remarks

The key elements in the creation of an international alumni network are portrayed in this study. In the end, it is a matter of will and effort coming from JAMK University of Applied Sciences, which will make the difference. The potential is, according to this study, enormous and the possibilities near endless.

6 DISCUSSION AND IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

There is wisdom in understanding, that a study is never really finished. The background theory, as well as the material collected in the survey of this study, has so much more to offer for the interested, but at some point one has to put the final remarks down and let the study go. Before this is done, in the case of this study, the authors wanted to write down some ideas for the future and recollect the whole process of writing this study.

This study paints a picture of the elements and structures that help build an international alumni network. The core of this study is the way the theory of networking and branding are bound to the current situation of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, using JAMK University of Applied Sciences as a case example, through a vast survey.

However, this study is only a narrow example of a much wider topic, which is the internationalization of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. In the future it is not enough to measure internationalization only through the num-

bers of international students in the school. It will also be measured by the number of international active alumni, who can provide exclusive competitive advantage to the schools. Furthermore, this study creates an image of a potential future for JAMK University of Applied Sciences. Growth can be sought in areas that are not yet active today.

In regards to measuring the success or failure of the international alumni network, it might be a good idea to think about some indicators for the international alumni network. This could be done by measuring the brand value of the school and the international alumni network. The effectiveness of the network can be measured for example by testing how many alumni are active in the forums or how many participate in the Local Alumni Networks. The brand value can be measured with indicators related to how many people apply to the school and how many people join the alumni network from that group.

This study creates a path for further research. The authors tapped only the surface of the potential the survey results could offer, and adapting the principle ideas of this study further can bring forth more ideas to benefit the whole institution. For example, tracking down the current alumni, that have made name for themselves, and keeping a close eye on those that have the potential to do so, is something that could well be a topic for further research.

The possibilities in the cooperation between alumni, students and strategic business partners are almost a limitless source of new ideas for the school. A study including these parties might be the next step in the international alumni network. In the end, the alumni might one day be the strategic business partners themselves.

As the final remarks, the authors wish to state, that this study holds great value not only to JAMK University of Applied Sciences, but to the whole network of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. Even though none of the schools are identical, the basic principles that are the backbone of this study can be adapted to fit all surroundings.

The last big question is the following. Are the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences going to jump at this opportunity?

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APPENDICES

JAMK International Alumni Network – Student POV

JAMK International Alumni Network - Student POV

Welcome to the survey!

1. Have you heard about the international alumni network of JAMK University of Applied Sciences (in future: JAMK)?

Alumnae (pl. alumni) = graduated student

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

2. Where did you hear about JAMK international alumni network? (1-3 answers)

- JAMK website (www.jamk.fi)
- JAMK staff member
- Tutor-student
- Classmate
- Social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Blog)
- Other, please specify _____

3. When should JAMK approach you about the possibility of joining JAMK international alumni network?

- 1st year of studies
- 2nd year of studies
- 3rd year of studies
- Close to your graduation
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

4. Who should contact you about the possibility of becoming a JAMK alumnus?

- Your teacher / lecturer
- JAMK international student services
- JAMK marketing department
- A JAMK staff member designated to alumni work
- Tutor-student
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

5. What would interest you most as an alumnus?

- Social events (class, degree programme reunions)
- Seminars, lectures and other networking events

- Networking with companies in the Central Finland area
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

6. Are you planning to join JAMK international alumni network after graduation?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I don't know

7. There are two main structures forming the alumni networks today. Which of the following structures would you rank as your favorite?

- JAMK staff operates the international alumni network and upon graduation the student automatically receives the alumni status.
- A separate organization run by the alumni operates the alumni network. Joining this organization is voluntary. Work is done by the alumni and/or hired staff. Funding comes from the school..
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

A critical part of a functioning alumni network is the member register. The key requirement for an up to date register is that the members update their information regularly.

8. In your opinion, what would be the best option for JAMK international alumni network member register?

- A separate register upheld by JAMK administration and updated by the alumni for example via an electronic form or intranet profile tool.
- A social media network (LinkedIn, Facebook) where the alumni can join with their personal profiles.
- A combination of both the separate register and the social media networks.
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

JAMK is planning to update their current website www.jamk.fi. The updated website might include an intranet for different JAMK interests groups including alumni.

9. Would you be interested in using the alumni intranet which would include news sections, information about upcoming events and a possibility to network with students, staff and other alumni?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I don't know

10. How often do you use the following networking tools?

Comments:

	Every day	4-6 times per week	1-3 times per week	Seldom	I don't use this tool	
Facebook	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Google+	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Twitter	()	()	()	()	()	_____
LinkedIn	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Blogs	()	()	()	()	()	_____
YouTube	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Plaxo	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Optima (current intranet)	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Other, please specify	()	()	()	()	()	_____

11. Estimate the usability of the following social media tools for JAMK international alumni network.

	Highly usable	Slightly usable	Not usable or unusable	Slightly unusable	Highly unusable	I don't know	Comments:
Facebook	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Google+	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Twitter	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
LinkedIn	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Blogs	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
YouTube	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Plaxo	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Optima (current intranet)	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Alumni Intranet (under planning)	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____
Other, please specify	()	()	()	()	()	()	_____

JAMK Ambassadors act as the messengers of JAMK in the countries they go to for exchange or practical training during studies. This position might include visits to local schools with the purpose of advertising JAMK, attending local education seminars and other similar work.

12. Would you be interested in acting as a JAMK Ambassador in your respective country?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I don't know

13. What would motivate you to become a JAMK Ambassador? (1-3 answers)

- Status of ambassador
- Connecting with other ambassadors
- Connecting with JAMK staff and students
- Services and support from JAMK customized to your specific needs
- Contacts to companies from Central Finland
- Rewards (money, seminar tickets)
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

JAMK international alumni network might in the future include so called umbrella networks where JAMK alumni living in the same area / country have a chance to network via meetings coordinated by JAMK. These umbrella networks could also be coordinated by alumni and upheld via social networking tools.

14. Would you be interested in participating in the umbrella network meetings and events after graduation?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I don't know

15. Would you be interested in coordinating your local umbrella network in the future?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I don't know

16. What kind of support and coordination your local umbrella network would require from JAMK in your opinion? (1-2 answers)

- Funding
- Umbrella network starter package (instructions, ideas, tools etc.)
- Contacts to companies in Central Finland
- Designated JAMK staff member per umbrella network
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

17. Would you be interested in to represent or help a Finnish company in their internationalization process in your home country?

and the student union JAMKO (International Club, Generator, Pointpotential.fi, Jobstep.net) are useful and interesting.

JAMK delivers what it promises.

() () () () () () _____

21. Are you proud of being a student in JAMK University of Applied Sciences?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I don't know

22. Explain your answer above.

23. What would interest you most as a future alumnus? (1-3 answers)

- Information and offers about interesting seminars, lectures and courses.
- Information and offers about further education possibilities (higher education programs etc.)
- Information and offers about research, development and innovation (R&D&I) ventures JAMK is organizing and participating in.
- Assistance related to starting or running a business.
- Networking with Finnish companies.
- I don't know.
- Other, please specify _____

24. What would you be interested in to offer to JAMK as a future alumnus? (1-3 answers)

- Current information about the developments in your field of business.
- Guest lecturing as a representative of business life.
- Thesis and practical training opportunities for students.
- Summer jobs for students.
- Cooperation in R&D&I ventures.
- Participating in seminars, lectures and other programs as a guest or a speaker.
- Offering networking possibilities to Finnish organizations and companies in your respective country.
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

Several highly regarded universities give their alumni infinite email addresses.

For example MIT gives to its alumni a forwarding email address (firstname.lastname@alum.mit.edu). This email can be used as a status symbol in several different ways (business cards etc.).

25. Would you be interested in an everlasting forwarding email address (firstname.lastname@alum.jamk.fi)?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I don't know

26. JAMK offers different services that aim to aid the students in different areas of their educational and professional aspirations. Which of the following you would be interested in using after graduation? (top 2 answers)

- JAMK Generator
- Pointpotential.fi (osumia.fi)
- Jobstep.net
- Theseus.fi
- I don't know
- Other, please specify _____

27. In your opinion how could JAMK further improve its brand and image in the eyes of international degree students and alumni?

28. What is your age?

- 15-19
- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50->

29. Are you a Finnish citizen?

- Yes
- No

30. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other, please specify _____

31. What is your degree programme?

- Degree Programme in Music and Media Management
- Degree Programme in Facility Management
- Degree Programme in Nursing
- Degree Programme in Logistics Engineering
- Degree Programme in International Business
- Other, please specify _____

32. Do you wish to hear more about JAMK international alumni network developments?

- Yes
- No

33. Do you wish to hear more about JAMK Ambassador organization developments?

- Yes
- No