

Communicating University Brand via Social Media

Case: Communicating Lahti University of
Applied Sciences Brand to International
Students Using Social Media

LAHTI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED
SCIENCES
Faculty of Business Studies
Degree Programme in International
Business
Bachelor's Thesis
Autumn 2015
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Bachelor's Thesis in International Business, 233 pages, 7 pages of
appendices

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ABSTRACT

The Finnish University Act 2009 has brought about a tide of change across all higher education institutions in Finland. From state-owned entities, Finnish universities are transforming and reshaping their structure into corporations subject to public law or foundations subject to private law. Obeying the law as well as responding to the mega trends in educational sector, in 2015, Lahti UAS changed officially into Lahden Ammattikorkeakoulu Oy (equivalent to Lahti University of Applied Sciences Limited- Lahti UAS Ltd). Since then, Lahti UAS has adopted corporate-like business model with an appointed CEO to manage its international affairs. The school is also interested in applying business practices, especially in branding, to enhance its international images.

This dissertation expresses the authors' aim to explore and provide specific guidelines to Lahti UAS which may be implemented on its social media channels. These guidelines are to leverage Lahti UAS' attractiveness to potential international students via social media. Through the comparison with benchmark universities, findings will be drawn from collected information to enable the authors to propose detailed recommendations that will satisfy their main research question in this paper.

The authors select a deductive approach to conduct this dissertation, and they will utilize a mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect and analyze the raw data. To obtain primary data for research, the authors will use survey and observation as two main techniques. Secondary data will be gathered through publications such as books, electronic journals and also from Internet sources.

The findings show that when compared to other benchmarks, Lahti UAS is on the right track in managing its social media presence and is investing an acceptable amount of effort into promoting its international image. However, there is still room for improvements in different aspects. Lahti UAS may consider reaccessing some channels among its social media assets to apply possible changes which will enhance the effectiveness of its brand communication to international students on social media.

In a nutshell, the authors are successful in fulfilling their research objectives in this dissertation, which is finding recommendations for Lahti UAS to improve its social media performance. The results are researched and analyzed in a structured manner and are highly valid and reliable. In addition, because the study in this dissertation has an iterative nature, Lahti UAS can reuse the knowledge provided in this dissertation in the future.

Key words: branding, social media, university brand, communication, international students, metrics, social media audit, international students preferences, benchmarks, survey

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude towards Ms. Satu Hyökki, Mr. Hannu Kaikonen and Ms. Hanna Mikkonen for their support in the creation of this thesis' topic.

Also, the authors would like to send their sincerest thanks to Ms. Lotta Koivula for her guidance during the course of this dissertation. Without her help, it would not have been possible for the authors to complete this paper at the most desirable state.

Our wholehearted thanks are also to Mr. Keith O'Hiobhaird who helped us to have a look at our language usage to improve it even further.

Finally, our families and friends are the ones whose encouragement has been with us from the start, and we thank them for everything that we achieve today.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the authors would like to introduce the following issues: background or the identification of interested phenomenon, introduction of research objectives and research questions, description of research methods as well as assessment of research scope and limitations.

1.1 Background

In the past few decades, the education sector worldwide and in Finland has witnessed significant changes. Some megatrends that should be mentioned are the increasingly easy accessibility to education systems, the international orientation in all aspects of education, the international mobility of learners, and last but not least the decentralization in management of higher education institutions. Due to these trends, higher education institutions have found themselves in a harsh competition with each other, vying for the most talented students and staffs. To confront the severe rivalry of other institutions as well as the big waves of transformation in the education sector, higher education institutions have gravitated towards a business-like model and adopted business practices in marketing and branding to stand out from their competitors (Bunzel 2007, 152-153).

From a business perspective, in essence, higher education institutions have many similarities with service providers and their students are their customers. In fact, potential parents and students have already behaved like customers, comparing different characteristics of institutions and making decisions based on a list of prioritized features. In addition, potential parents and students also have similar attitudes toward higher education brand as a product or service brand. They view the brand as a representative, a spokesperson for the whole institution. Therefore, like a product or a service, higher education institutions nowadays need a brand that can consolidate the institution's characteristics and can be expressive enough for its customers to understand what it wants to say. (Curtis et al. 2009, 405.)

The world education sector has been undergoing a dramatic transformation, and the education system in Finland has witnessed and been affected by those mega trends. Finnish government has orchestrated revolutionary movements to modernize its national education system. The University Act in 2009 freed Finnish higher education institutions from the tight control of the State to become managerial- and financial-independent entities. Now, Finnish higher education institutions can be active in building their own strategic path, seeking financial sources other than governmental subsidies, innovating pedagogical methods and teaching curriculums, recruiting its own talent pool as well as adopting business models and practices to become more efficient and competitive in the education market (Education: Education Policy: University Reform, accessed on January 15, 2015).

Heeding the signals of an education revolution, Lahti University of Applied Sciences (hereafter, Lahti UAS) has initiated strategic moves to satisfy the expectations from the labor market as well as to contribute to regional competitiveness and development. In 2015, it changed officially into Lahden Ammattikorkeakoulu Oy (equivalent to Lahti University of Applied Sciences Limited – Lahti UAS Ltd). Lahti UAS also adopted a corporate-like organizational structure, and its internal affairs are managed by the board and the president, Dr. Outi Kallioinen, who was also appointed as the CEO of Lahti UAS Ltd (About Us: Our Organization, accessed on March 27, 2015). This event marked a turning point in Lahti UAS history as well as Lahti UAS commitment to be an innovative organization. Following this event, a series of strategic plans and projects are drafted and implemented to build up an international profile for Lahti UAS in both marketing and academic perspectives (About Us: Strategy – Facts and Figures of Lahti University of Applied Sciences, accessed on February 23, 2015). This commitment is expressed explicitly in the Lahti UAS International Strategy 2013 – 2016.

Aligned with the goal of Lahti UAS branding, broadcasting Lahti UAS image, especially its international image via social media, is an essential strategic move to enhance the visibility of Lahti UAS brand in Finland and

worldwide. However, the topics relating to Lahti UAS branding has been concerned only after Lahti UAS transformed from a state-owned entity to a business-like organization. Therefore, the process to build Lahti UAS as an international university is at the infancy stage and huge planning and efforts are needed for this objective to be successful.

1.2 Research Objectives and Research Questions

This dissertation is created to study what were the preferences of international students at Lahti UAS when choosing a university overseas. Specifically, the authors would like to discover which factors were crucial in persuading the students to select Lahti UAS as their optimal alternative. Moreover, as social media has become an essential channel to reach for audiences and potential customers worldwide, the authors also want to study the social media performance of Lahti UAS at a deeper level as they seek a holistic assessment of Lahti UAS' current social media profiles through auditing and benchmarking processes. From the knowledge gathered in problem identification stage, the authors aim to formulate a detailed guide for Lahti UAS to broadcast successfully its image on social media and to be more attractive in the eyes of their potential students.

Research questions: *How can Lahti UAS use social media to attract potential international students?*

In order to find the relevant answer, the research question is broken down into smaller sub-questions listed below:

- 1. What were preferences of current international students when deciding to choose Lahti UAS?*
- 2. What are the good practices from benchmark universities regarding using social media to attract potential international students?*

By answering these sub-questions, the authors hope to be able to find solutions for the main problems, which are identifying applicable practices that fit the current situation and available resources of Lahti UAS as well as helping the university improve its performance on social media.

Before going deeper into the realm of research methodology, especially the research design for this study, the authors believe it is necessary to explain the concept of international student. According to the definition of OECD and Eurostat, international students are referred to “those who are not residents of their country of study or those who received their prior education in another country”. Moreover, a student is considered as internationally mobile in case he or she has move to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for educational-specific purposes for a period of at least three months. (International Mobility, accessed on October 7, 2015.) Regarding the context of this thesis, the authors believe that this definition is the most suitable. Particularly, in the case of Lahti UAS, non-Finnish degree students and exchange students are defined and referred as international students throughout this paper.

1.3 Research Methods

Figure 1 illustrates the research methodology implemented to study Lahti UAS case, called the research “onion” of Lahti UAS case. This diagram is created based on the “onion” research model of Saunders et al. (2009, 108). The authors’ motives and reasoning behind the Lahti UAS research methodology model are also explained in this chapter.

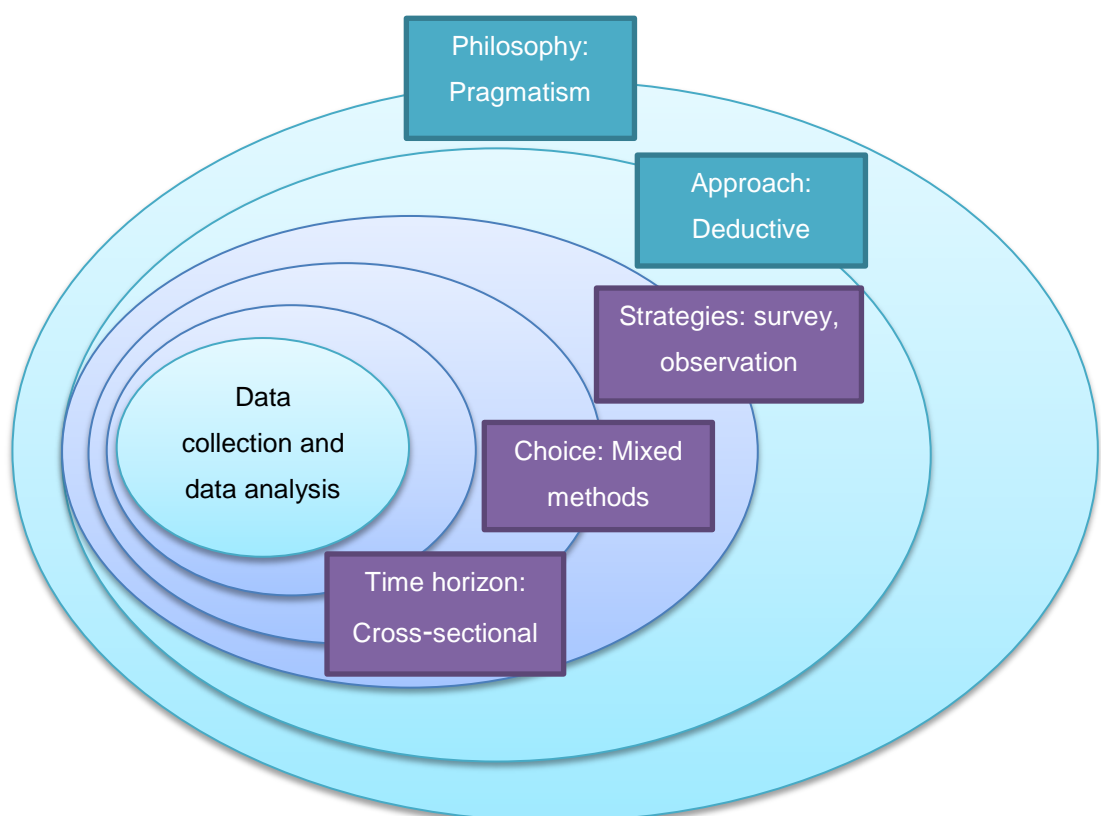


Figure 1. The research “onion” of Lahti UAS case (adated from the “onion research of Saunders et al. 2009, 108)

The most important goal of conducting a research is pursuing the truth (Hair et al. 2011, 3). Therefore, researches, especially empirical researches require a systematic plan of operation to ensure the objectivity of the research (Taylor et al. 2010, 45). Concerning conducting research, people usually think immediately of research methods, data collection methods, data analysis etc. However, in Guba’s and Lincoln’s opinion (1994), these aforementioned points are secondary to applicable paradigm of the research. They stated:

”Both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm. Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.” (Guba and Lincoln 1994, according to Saunders et al. 2009, 106.)

Saunders et al. (2008, 108) proposed a model that outlines issues underlying the choice of data collection methods and data analysis techniques. The model is displayed below.

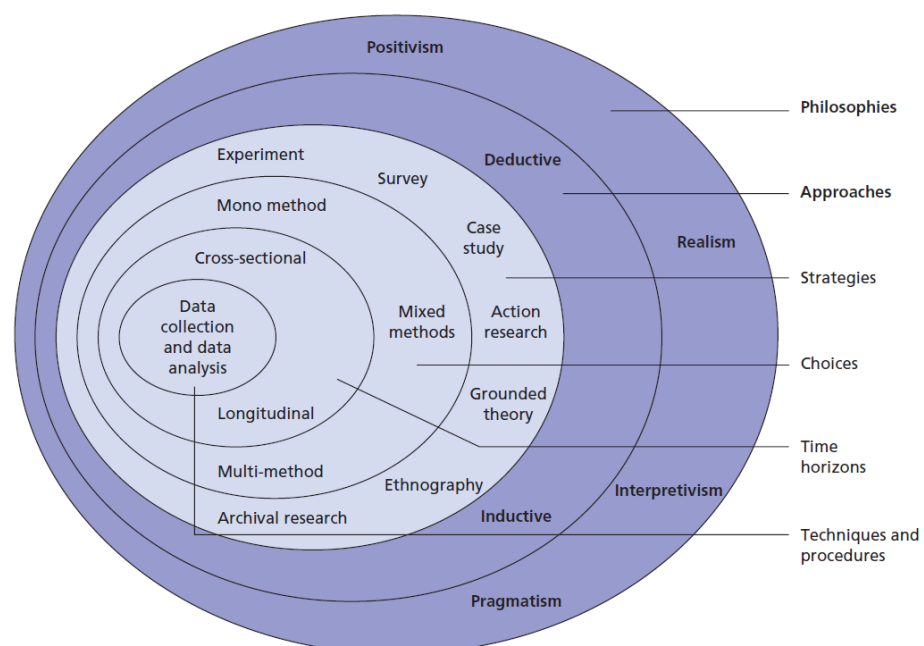


Figure 2. The research onion (Saunders et al. 2009, 108)

The authors agree that paradigm is as important as the methods and techniques used to conduct research. Therefore, the authors would like apply the research onion model as a guideline for designing and explaining their own model for this research. In this chapter, the applicable research onion for this dissertation will be presented, and the authors' intentions behind the chosen methods of conducting the research will be explained carefully.

1.3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy and research method constitute research paradigm, which is defined as “a perspective that is based on the set of shared assumptions, values, concepts and practices” (Research Paradigm and Philosophy, accessed on March 15, 2015). Research philosophy covers assumptions, values and concepts of the research; in other words, research philosophy indicates the way knowledge is acquired and the nature of knowledge. Each and every research philosophy begins with a set of assumptions about how the world should be perceived and understood. These assumptions construct the foundation of research philosophy and are also embedded in the choice of research strategy and research methods. (Saunders et al. 2009, 107.)

Moreover, it is necessary to emphasize that there is no research philosophy that is best or one research philosophy is better than another. Each research philosophy has its own advantages and is most suitable depending on the research questions that need to be answered. (Saunders et al. 2009, 107.)

At present, there are four principal research philosophies: positivism, interpretivism, realism and pragmatism.

- *Positivism*: This research philosophy adopt philosophical position of nature scientists, assuming that the world consists of regularities that can be detected through observation (Theory of

Science – What Is Positivism?, accessed on March 15, 2015). Positivism emphasizes strongly on facts or “observable social reality”; therefore, research methods, techniques and designs applied must be free from researcher’s “feelings” or stance concerning the research topic to ensure the objectivism of the study (Saunders et al. 2009, 113).

- *Interpretivism*: Opposite with positivism, interpretivism believes that social world of business and management is too complicated to be generalized under definite laws as in natural sciences. Interpretivists accept that each individual is unique and employ empathetic stance to explore and understand the research topic from their research subjects’ point of view. Interpretivism is considered as highly appropriate in business-related studies, especially in marketing or human resource management as they involve directly with humans and differences in perception and behavior. (Saunders et al. 2009, 116.)
- *Realism*: Realism followers construct their philosophy from both positive and interpretive perspectives. They believe that there is a reality independent of human mind. Realism assumes a similar stance with positivism: development of knowledge (e.g. data collection and data analysis) must be achieved through scientific approach. Moreover, similar to interpretivism, realism followers also believe that the knowledge of reality “cannot be understood without social actors involved in the knowledge derivation process”. (Dobson 2002, according to Saunders et al. 2009, 115.) It accepts diversity in human behaviors depending on different circumstances (Research Paradigm and Philosophy, accessed on March 15, 2015).
- *Pragmatism*: Pragmatism followers think that researchers should “study what interests them and is of value to them, study in different ways in which the researchers deem to be appropriate,

and use the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system” (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998, according to Saunders et al. 2009, 109). They argue that assumptions, relevant knowledge fields, roles of researcher’s values and judgments etc. should be chosen according to the research questions, and researchers do not need to adopt and follow one research philosophy solely (Saunders et al. 2009, 109). Concerning research methods, pragmatism followers recognize that every method has its own pros and cons, and different methods can be used complementarily instead of contradictorily (The Four Main Approaches, accessed on March 15, 2015).

Linked to the research presented to this dissertation, the authors would like to adopt pragmatic philosophy due to the following reasons:

- The authors agree with Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) that the most important thing in conducting research is finding the appropriate answer to the research question, and all the aspects involving research design – specifically, the based assumptions, applicable knowledge field, the authors’ stance regarding the studied matters etc. – must be in accordance with the nature of the research questions.
- Pragmatic philosophy grants the authors freedom and flexibility in designing the research and analyzing the phenomenon. The authors are able to incorporate advantages of different research methods and techniques to ensure that the most useful solutions can be reached; at the same time, the authors do not need to compromise the credibility of the research.
- As the nature of this dissertation is applied research and the ultimate goal is finding practical solutions to the identified problems, the authors believe that both natural laws and observable phenomena can provide acceptable knowledge.

Moreover, the integration of various perspectives in interpreting data can give the authors a holistic understanding of the problem and the current state of the studied affair, in this case, the preferences of Lahti UAS students in choosing an overseas university and the present development phase of Lahti UAS social media performance.

- The authors reckon that international students will follow the consumer decision-making process mentioned in chapter 3. However, as the objects of the research are international students at Lahti UAS and they all have unique personalities, preferences and backgrounds, the differences in perception and behaviors should be understood and taken into consideration. It is advisable to the authors to explore the subjective motivation hidden in the studied objects' behaviors and their diverse opinions in the same affairs and more specifically the different priorities regarding choosing a particular university in another country.
- In order to find appropriate answers to all research questions and sub-questions, the authors intend to adopt both quantitative and qualitative data collection and interpretation methods. The two data collection methods the authors have in mind are survey, which requires quantitative analysis techniques, and observation, which calls for qualitative analysis techniques.

Based on these reasons, it is natural and reasonable for the authors to choose pragmatism as the underpinning philosophy for their choice of research strategies.

1.3.2 Research Approach

When conducting research, it is necessary to decide which research approach to be implemented. The research approach is usually chosen

aligning with research philosophy. Research approach can be divided into two categories: deduction and induction. (Saunders et al. 2009, 124.)

Deductive approach is “concerned with developing a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theory, and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis” (Wilson 2010). In other words, it uses a general theory to explain specific cases in reality. Deductive approach is dominant in scientific fields as it allows laws to pose as basic explanations, enabling phenomena to be anticipated, predicted and controlled (Collins and Hussey 2003, according to Saunders et al. 2009, 125). Some important characteristics of deductive approach are listed below.

- Deductive approach seeks explanation for casual relationships between variables.
- It highly encourages the use of structured methodology.
- It demands that the researcher be independent of what is being researched. For example, to ensure the objectivity of the research, researchers should be careful in wording of the questionnaire to avoid misleading respondent into selecting a certain option.
- Concepts are translated into quantitative data for collecting and measuring.
- Sample size should be sufficient for generalization of the results. (Saunders et al. 2009, 127.)

On the other hand, inductive approach moves from specific observation to generalize theory (Deduction and Induction, accessed on March 15, 2015). Inductive approach is favored in social sciences due to its exploratory characteristics. Other important characteristics of inductive research are mentioned below.

- Inductive approach highly concerns about the correlations between the context and the occurring event.
- It allows a flexible research structure and allows changes of research emphasis in research progress.

- Small sample size is sufficient to work with as the goal is to establish different views of phenomena. (Saunders et al. 2009, 126.)

Concerning the research for this dissertation, the authors mainly employ deductive approach. The authors use available theories in the field of consumer behaviors and branding to isolate factors that have power to manipulate consumer choice among available alternatives. These theories are applied to test the sub-question 2, which can be formulated into the following hypotheses:

1. *There are identifiable list of preferences followed by international students when deciding to choose Lahti UAS*
2. *There are the applicable practices from benchmark universities that Lahti UAS can implement to attract potential international students on social media.*

Both of these research questions are constructed based on the understanding of contemporary literature in business study. The first research question is answered by conducting a survey in multiple-choice format to reveal decisive elements which encourage international students to choose Lahti UAS over other institutions. The design of the survey was carefully planned and the wording of the questions was rigorously reviewed to avoid imposing the authors' opinions towards the problem as well as correcting potentially misleading or ambiguous phrases. Moreover, all the concepts and alternatives tested in the survey can be quantified so that the authors are able to implement quantitative analysis techniques. However, qualitative method is also employed to analyze statuses and comments on various social network sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube...) to discover missing-but-potentially-important factors in consumer decision-making process.

The second research question is examined using a social media audit, which will gather raw materials by observing, measuring and comparing certain metrics and analyzing contents in social network sites of five selected higher education institutions. The chosen institutions are Harvard University, National University of Singapore (NUS), Ecole Polytechnic Federale de Lausanne (EPFL), Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) and Lahti University of Applied Sciences (Lahti UAS). Although the knowledge to answer this research question is acquired through qualitative methods, the audit is designed in a structured manner and is exempted from the subjective viewpoints of the authors. Notably, some metrics in the audit are measured in quantitative format.

Until now, the authors have peeled off the first two layers of the research “onion”: research philosophies and research approaches. They describe the reasoning system that leads to specific data collection methods. Now, the authors will study the research design process, which is systematic planning to answer the research questions. In the following sessions, they will continue to explore the next three layers of the “onion”: research strategies, research choices and time horizons.

1.3.3 Research Strategies

When considering the research questions, the authors think simultaneously of the purpose of their research. Does it try to view the matter in a new angle? Or does it intend to describe a current situation? Or does it seek the explanation for the matter? Answering these questions means dealing with decisions concerning research purpose and strategies. Research purpose is usually classified into three categories: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory study. Depending on the research purpose, researchers develop appropriate strategies to give practical meanings to the predetermined purpose. Notably, the purpose and corresponding strategies does not have to fall neatly into only one category; it is possible for a research to have more than one purpose (Saunders et al. 2009, 139).

- *Exploratory studies:* An exploratory research aims at how to find out “what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light” (Robson 2002, according to Saunders et al. 2009, 139). Like an explorer in uncharted land, exploratory studies “tend to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done” (Brown 2006, 43). There are three main ways to conduct an exploratory research: literature research, expert interview and focus group interview (Saunders et al. 2009, 140).
- *Descriptive studies:* A descriptive research tries to “portray an accurate profile of persons, event or situations” (Robson 2002, according to Saunders et al. 2009, 140). A descriptive study may precede an exploratory study as it paints a clear picture of the matter before any further assessment can be done. In business and management studies, explanations for the studied phenomenon are often required, even in descriptive researches. These studies are called descripto-explanatory studies (Saunders et al. 2009, 140).
- *Explanatory studies:* Explanatory studies investigate the casual relationship between variables. Explanatory researches usually employ quantitative methods such as quantifying data, applying statistical techniques to discover the correlation between variables. (Saunders et al. 2009, 140.)

Concerning this dissertation, the research questions the authors have to answer are:

1. *What were preferences of current international students when deciding to choose Lahti UAS?*
2. *What are the good practices from benchmark universities regarding using social media to attract potential international students?*

In the first research question, the authors want to attain a detailed picture

of motivating factors which led current students to choose Lahti UAS in the past; thereby the authors, with some cautions, can predict the preferences of the potential students and draft a suitable branding strategy to attract them. In the second research question, the authors wish to study good practices from benchmark higher education institutions in the matter of using social media as a tool to reach out for future international students. Both research questions aim at portraying individual perception (in the first research question) and sketching current social media landscape of the chosen institutions (in the second research question); therefore, the authors believe that descriptive study is the most suitable research strategy for this dissertation.

1.3.4 Research choices

According to the research “onion”, research choices consist of mono method, multi-method or mixed methods. Before the authors can understand these terms properly, a basic knowledge of the two main focuses in data collection techniques and data analysis procedures is compulsory. One focus is on numeric data, which is later elaborated into quantitative method and another is on non-numeric data, which is developed into qualitative method.

As suggested in the name, in quantitative method, variables and data are collected and coded in numeric format and statistical techniques are applied to analyze the data. Quantitative method aims at providing tools to make valid and objective descriptions of the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, quantitative method also offers the credible instruments to generalize results, which are drawn from the sample, into principles and laws that can apply to a much bigger population. (Taylor et al. 2010, 152.) Survey is the most common data collection technique in quantitative method (Saunders et al. 2009, 151).

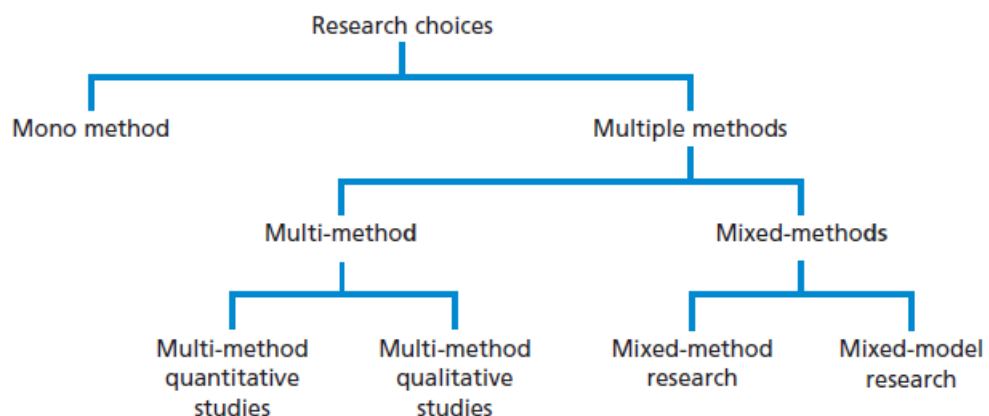
Unlike quantitative research that focuses more on the “nature” side of the phenomenon (i.e. laws and principles); qualitative research concentrates more on the “human” side. It aims to “describe multiple realities, develop

deep understanding, and capture everyday life and human perspectives” (Trumbull et al. 2010, 62). Interacting directly with studied objects to collect data is eminently encouraged in qualitative research methods (Trumbull et al. 2010, 62). Therefore, observation, ethnographic research, content analysis and interview are the main primary data collection techniques in qualitative methods (Hair et al. 2011, 187).

As stated above, the chosen research strategies in this dissertation are survey and observation. Thus, the authors will only provide relevant information concerning these two data collection methods and present them in the Data Collection Methods section.

It is worth emphasizing now that the authors intend to collect data using both survey and observation. However, in methodology theories, they are from totally different branches of research methods, with totally different research philosophies, different ways to gather information, different techniques to handle data etc. Is it possible for such a combination of research methods? That is the issue the authors wish to explore next.

According to Saunders, et al. (2009, 151), it is not necessary to stick to a



single research method. Researchers can choose to use either mono method or multiple methods to generate and analyze data. Mono method uses only one data collection technique and its corresponding analysis procedures and they should belong solely to one research methods brand, either quantitative or qualitative methods. Whereas, multiple methods allow the employment of various data collection techniques and analysis

procedures, which can be from different research method branches in a single study. Multiple methods are further divided into multi-method and mixed methods.

The following figure describes the branches of research choices.

Figure 3. Research choices (Saunders et al. 2009, 151)

Even though multi-method allows the possibility of involving different data collection techniques and analysis procedures, they are restricted to either quantitative or qualitative method. An example for multi-method is that a researcher intends to use observation and interview to collect data (data collection techniques in qualitative method); then, he or she can only investigate the data using qualitative data analysis techniques. On the contrary, in mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative data collections and analyses can be used at the same time (parallel) or one after the other (sequential). The qualitative data can be quantified and analyzed using statistical techniques and vice versa. (Saunders et al. 2009, 153.)

Remarkably, in either multi-method or mixed methods, quantitative data is analyzed quantitatively and qualitative data is analyzed qualitatively. It is not acceptable and impossible for analyzing quantitative data qualitatively and vice versa. (Saunders et al. 2009, 153.)

In studying Lahti UAS case, the authors wish to employ mixed methods to inspect the data gathered from survey and observation. Some of qualitative data will be converted into numeric format and examined using statistical analysis. The details of how the data is analyzed using mixed methods will be discussed carefully in the Data Analysis section.

1.3.5 Time Horizon

Before reaching the very core of the research “onion”, which are data collection and analysis, the authors have one more important decision to make: the time frame of our research, or in other words, how long the

authors want to study the objects of the research. Based on time frame, researches are classified into two categories: cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies. It is also worth mentioning that time horizon and the strategy are independent to each other. (Saunders et al. 2009, 155.)

Cross-sectional studies resemble a “snapshot” of the studied phenomenon taken at a particular time. Survey is usually adopted to describe the phenomenon in a particular period of time. In contrast, longitudinal studies have longer time frame as they aim to take into the changes and developments of the studied objects (Saunders et al. 2009, 155). Social science researches, especially business studies prefer longitudinal studies as they enable patterns and trends to be spotted and observed (Hair et al. 2011, 150).

Concerning Lahti UAS case, the authors wants to study the profile of Lahti UAS brand at present as it offers a better understanding of the current situation and a more accurate prediction for the near future. Moreover, there is time constraint imposed on this research. Hence, it is more reasonable for the study to be cross-sectional than longitudinal.

Now, the authors have reached at the core of the research “onion”: the data collection and data analysis. How is the data for Lahti UAS case generated? How are the survey questions designed? What is the structure for social media audit? How is the data analyzed? These questions will be answered now in Data Collection Methods and Data Analysis Methods section.

1.3.6 Data Collection and Data Analysis

In order to achieve a holistic answer to the research questions in this dissertation, the authors consider analyzing data from both primary and secondary sources. The information acquired through secondary sources such as books, journals and publications equips the authors a general understanding of the current landscape of education sector, especially the rising trends of international student mobility, as well as the contemporary

perspectives concerning the implementation of business practices into education sector. More importantly, secondary sources provide theoretical foundation for the authors to design survey for this research.

The primary data is attained specifically for the purpose of answering the research questions posed in this dissertation. The primary data is acquired by using two different data collection techniques:

- A survey is designed to give the author a general picture of international students' decision making process and the decisive factors affecting the final choice.
- A social media audit is crafted to evaluate how successful Lahti UAS is in using social media to attract international students. Including in social media audit is a benchmarking plan, aim at comparing the performance of Lahti UAS on social media with other academic institutions; thereby, the authors can provide good practices and suggestions to enhance the attractiveness of Lahti UAS to potential international students.

The data accumulated in the survey will be analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2010 and IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 22. The social media audit is derived from a six-step procedure suggested in the book "Measure What Matters" of Paine (2011, 84-96). The audit also uses various metrics as a common ground to judge the performance of different academic institutions on social media. A detailed description of the designs for both the survey and the social media audit will be portrayed in the empirical part of this dissertation.

1.4 Research Scope and Limitation

As stated in the "Research Methods and Data Collection" part, this research mainly aims at examining the preferences of international students of Lahti UAS when they pursue their study at the most suitable institution. The data collection phase is conducted by drawing arbitrarily a number of elements from a larger population to form a sample; therefore,

there is possibility that the sample does not represent perfectly for the entire target population. The sample size should be extremely large and cover majority of the population to be able to generate the most accurate results. Hence, the generalization of the results should be treated with cautions and it is most relevant when applying to cases that bear the similar preconditions and surrounding environment with Lahti UAS in Lahti city of Finland. Moreover, in the survey, the main groups of preference factors and their corresponding variables are extensively analyzed. However, any potential relationships among groups of preference factors and between variables and their interactions are not probably covered.

Consumer taste and preferences is the realm of subjectivity, depending a lot upon personal feelings and perceptions. Although the international students try to employ as much rational reasoning as they can when choosing a university, preferences are still present and have a considerable power to influence the final choice. As a result, although a general list of preferences can be sketched, outliers in data are unavoidable and should be reasonably justified as deviations in consumer perceptions. Furthermore, consumer taste and preferences are subjected to change due to many internal and external factors; the results of this research may become obsolete over time. Therefore, the authors suggest Lahti UAS should repeat this survey in regular intervals of time to reflect more precisely the current preferences of the international students.

Another section in the empirical part of this dissertation is the social media audit. From the audit, the authors can identify room for improvement in social media management of Lahti UAS. Apparently, the main purpose of the social media audit is to evaluate the social media performance and to recommend overall guidelines for revamp. Lahti UAS still needs to create a detailed plan for daily implementation. Moreover, these suggestions are specifically designed basing on the authors' knowledge of current situation at Lahti UAS. In case other institutions would like to use these suggestions, the authors recommend making an internal assessment of their own operations first and then selecting the most suitable practices for their school.

The timing of the audit's observation is another limitation that the authors would like to mention. The month of July is effectively the summertime for many institutions, and the benchmarks in this research are no exception. This means if conducted at another time of the year, the research might have gained more data than the extent it got now. However, since this audit plan is iterative in nature, Lahti UAS can reuse the design at any later time it considers suitable.

Language barrier is one last limitation that restricted the authors from analyzing some certain data. The authors will perform the analysis of the social media content that is in English. As English is also the commonly used language among international students; therefore, the authors' decision of analyzing English content is justifiable.

2 REFORMATION OF EDUCATION

As the world has become flatter in many aspects, education sector has also experienced many significant changes. Therefore, in this chapter, the authors would like to discuss about leading trends that have shaped the current education sector worldwide as well as in Finland and how both the world and Finnish education institutions have reacted to these trends.

2.1 Reformation of Education Worldwide

In the past, the right of being educated was reserved only for a small privileged population from aristocracies and wealthy classes. Many things have been changed since then. Some of the most considerable changes are listed below.

Openness and ease of accessibility of education: Nowadays, education is recognized as one of the most basic human rights and placed on priority lists of many governments. With the booming of schools and academic institutions, education is accessible to the majority. Moreover, to satisfy the demands of the labor market as well as the emphasis on life-long learning, education programs are diversified: programs for different ages, programs for full-time and part-time participation, distant learning, vocational schools for particular job trainings, and universities for academic studies and researches etc. (Altbach et al. 2009, 37.)

Globalization: In the past two decades, the appearance of international-related activities in university's curriculum increased significantly (Altbach et al. 2007, 295). These activities vary from traditional study-abroad programs to activities aiming at improving international awareness, cross-cultural understanding and language proficiency for the students. According to Altbach et al. (2007, 290), the international involvement of education is an inevitable product of globalization occurring in economic, political and societal aspects. The rise of service sector, the increasingly sophisticated products and the ever-growing demand for well-educated personnel etc. have diverted global capital into knowledge industries

worldwide, including higher education and advanced training with a record-breaking amount.

International mobile students: As one of the results of internationalization in education, the number of people being able to pursue higher education and even study abroad continues to surge year after year. According to a study of UNESCO Institute for Statistics concerning global flow of tertiary-level students, in 2012 at least 4 million students opt for studying abroad option, which is a 100% increase in comparison with the figure from 2000. (Education: Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, accessed on January 11, 2015.)

Top 10 destination countries	Top 10 countries of origin of mobile students	Regions that host the largest number of mobile students
United States (18% of total mobile students)	China (694,400 students studying abroad)	North America and Western Europe (57% of total mobile students)
United Kingdom (11%)	India (189,500)	East Asia and the Pacific (20%)
France (7%)	Republic of Korea (123,700)	Central and Eastern Europe (10%)
Australia (6%)	Germany (117,600)	
Germany (5%)	Saudi Arabia (62,500)	
Russian Federation (4%)	France (62,400)	
Japan (4%)	United States (58,100)	
Canada (3%)	Malaysia (55,600)	
China (2%)	Vietnam (53,800)	
Italy (2%)		

	Iran (51,600)	
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Table 1. Distribution of international mobile students in 2012 (adapted from Education: Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, accessed on January 11, 2015)

As can be seen in the table, the United States and countries in Western Europe such as United Kingdom, France etc. are still strong magnets attracting students who are seeking high-quality education. However, their thrones in education market have been threatened by emerging competition from other countries that may offer diverse but more affordable study programs.

Decentralization of education: Though its advantage is debatable in terms of education quality, decentralization in education still plays an important role in education reform of many countries due to the following benefits:

- Satisfying labor market demand by aligning flexibly the teaching curriculum with changing requirements of labor market
- Facilitating management efficiency at all levels: central, regional and local
- Encouraging democracy in education
- Improving service quality (Weidman et al. 2011, 2.)

All the changes in education have become a pressing nudge for universities worldwide to modernize. Decentralization gives the universities more autonomy either in administration and/or in financing. At the same time, it puts more responsibilities on the universities' shoulders as the government is expected to see the achievements that are equivalent with the amount of empowerment they has entrusted the universities. Now, many universities have to restructure their operations, review their budget planning, and revamp their teaching methods as well as their curriculums to be more efficient. (Weidman et al. 2011, 4-5.)

Moreover, the universities are no longer responsible for only the education of the population surrounding their confined geographical location. The

international mobility of students has given them a bigger playground in exchange for more intense competition with more demanding customers. Potential customers of educational services nowadays have greater bargaining power as there are many institutions vying for their attention. How to differentiate an offer of one institution from other competitors has become a critical question for the survival and success of a school. “No customers, no businesses”; no students, no schools. Under the pressure of being distinguished, the universities has turned to economic theories of branding for guiding as these theories have been implemented and testified by many businesses for decades and have provided wonderful results in building up outstanding images, attracting customers and retaining customer loyalty. (Bunzel 2007, 152-153.)

2.2 Finnish education reform

Going along with the powerful tide of change in education sector around the world, Finnish education has also been subjected to significant transform, beginning with the adoption of Universities Act 2009. Unlike America education system in which universities have been provided managerial autonomy and financial independency from the state, Finnish education, for a long time, was put under the control of the government and was solely financed from national budget. With the enforcement of the Universities Act, the autonomy of Finnish universities have been expanded, especially in term of finance, as they changed their status from state-owned entity to either corporation subject to public law or foundation subject to private law. Finnish universities are now able to seek other financial sources such as donations or business activities. The tightening of public funding for education is expected to lever Finnish universities' competitiveness in international environment as they have to strategically develop their own profile, compete boldly for international research fundings, innovate continuously in teaching methods, and search actively for cooperations to strengthen their role in the educational system. (University Reform, accessed on January 15, 2015.)

Furthermore, the Universities Act also dictated certain changes in administrative model of Finnish universities. In the past, both academic and administrative aspects of the school were managed by the university senate, comprising of rectors (i.e. vice-chancellors or presidents) who were elected by their counterparts. Having perceived this administrative model as the possible hindrance of change, the Universities Act restricted rector's responsibilities to governing academic issues of the universities, and the administrative side was managed by another "director of administration" (Dobson 2008). The board of a public university now consists of 14 members at most and at least 40 percent of the member must be selected externally (University Reform, accessed on January 15, 2015). Explaining for this change, Minister Henna Virkkunen reasoned that the reform provided the universities flexible responses to the challenges emerging with their new financial status (Minister Henna Virkkunen: The Universities Act Promulgated, accessed on January 15, 2015). Notably, the new administrative model is similar to that of a corporate board of directors, commented by Dobson (2008).

Regarding human resources management, the universities takes over the State's role as the employers of their own staff (University Reform, accessed on 15 January, 2015). Now, one of the universities' best interests is to improve their attractiveness as an employer; thereby, secure their competitive advantage by recruiting and retaining talented employees. One suggestion for this matter from Whelan and Wohfeil (2006) is that "higher education institutions need to be managed more and more as corporate brands" (Chapleo 2010, 172). Attracting and retaining best personnel are one of the benefits of a powerful brand. When people have a deep emotion toward a brand, they strongly desire to be part of the brand community or belong to the organization that owns the brand. (Hammond 2008.)

3 DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Consumer decision-making process has been an intriguing topic for scholars from economics and other social science branches. When faced with myriads of choices, what mechanism does a consumer obey to be able to select the most suitable option? Are any internal or external factors capable of alternating the final outcome and what are they? In this chapter, the authors would like to uncover these issues by looking into contemporary theories of consumer behaviors and consumer decision-making process. Moreover, a specific group of consumers and their unique purchasing behaviors, which are international students in this case, will be also put under a careful investigation in this session.

3.1 Consumer Decision-Making Process

Considering consumer buying, the action of purchasing a product or service is only the visible part of a much more sophisticated decision making process. From marketing perspective, a comprehensive knowledge of consumer decision making process is vital as businesses all want to nudge the consumers to choose their own products or services. Theoretically, the widely accepted model of consumer decision making process consists of five key stages and is presented below:

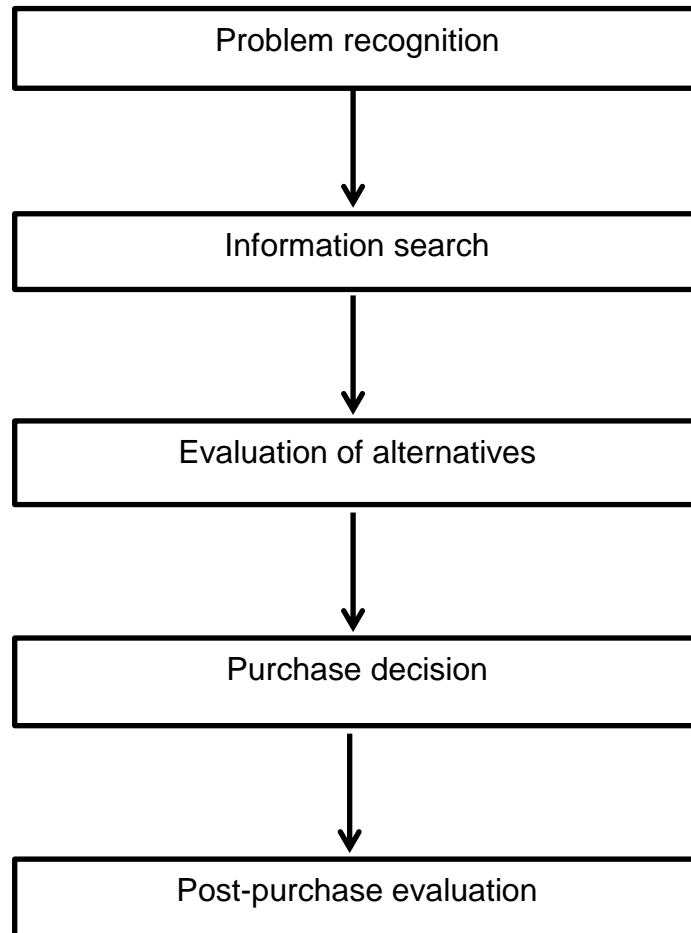


Figure 4. Stages in consumer decision making (Solomon 2007, 305)

In reality, buyers do not always follow this sequence of decision making process all the time. Depending on time constraint, level of perceived risks and type of products and degree of involvement, the decision making process may vary. For example, with the convenience products such as soap or toothbrush, a consumer needs very little or no information searched, and the decision is made in the matter of minutes. However, with big and important purchases like buying a new house or a new car, consumers usually spend a great deal of efforts and time in searching information, evaluating available alternatives and identifying the optimal options. (Fill 2011, 69.)

Communication, when used properly, can exert certain influences in every stage of decision making process. For instance, communication can be used to point out undesirable state and subtly urge the consumers to

rectify the problem. In information searching stage, communication is adopted to ensure that details of product or service offers should be within consumer's reach. From the evaluation stage of available alternatives and to the point of making purchase decision, the superior performance of the product or service as well as positive attitudes associated with the brand should be reminded constantly. Even after the purchase, communication is still needed to reinforce the belief that the consumer has made a right decision. This can be done by emphasizing repeatedly on remarkable features of the product or service and providing information aiding their usage. (Fill 2011, 150-151.)

In myriads of factors affecting purchasing decision, perceived risk is considered to be deciding factor leading to certain brand choice. Perceived risk refers to "consumer's perceived level of uncertainty regarding the outcome of a purchasing decision" (Perceived Risk, accessed on April 19, 2015). This notion is usually associated with high-priced or complex products because consumers have little or no experience concerning the performance of the products (Solomon 2007, 316; Fill 2011, 70). Service is usually considered to be embedded with high risk due to its intangible nature (Mitchel 1999, according to Fill 2005, 155).

In order to ease their anxiety, the consumers respond by carrying on intensive research of the product or service and asking for advices from previous users or trusted experts (Perceived Risk, accessed on April 19, 2015). Marketers can reduce the consumer's perceived risk toward their own products or services intentionally by releasing relevant and persuasive information for the decision making process through sales representatives, word-of-mouth, mass media or the internet (Fill 2011, 70).

Perceived risk is related to another important concept in understanding the academic work related to decision-making process – involvement. Until now, there is no generally accepted definition for involvement. However, the main idea behind this concept is about the degree of personal importance concerning the product or service and the perceived risk of

that particular purchasing decision (Fill 2011, 71). From the understanding of perceived risk, involvement concept and decision-making process, scholars have identified two main approaches employed by consumer when facing two main types of purchasing decision: high-involvement decision-making and low-involvement decision-making (Fill 2005, 161).

Low involvement purchase associates with a purchase with low perceived risk. Low-priced items such as washing powder, cereals and repeated purchases are typical examples for low involvement purchases (Fill 2011, 72). Due to little perceived risk or already having first-hand experience with a certain product or service, consumers usually relies on brand-related information stored in their memory to make purchasing decision (Fill 2011, 69). Therefore, low-involvement decision-making process is characterized by short internal information search (Fill 2011, 72). Communication messages for low-involvement decision-making type need to be short and easy to remember. Repetition of the messages is necessary to ensure the retention of information in consumer's mind. Moreover, the most suitable communication channel is broadcast media (e.g. TV and radio) as it compliments passive information reception (Fill 2011, 73).

On the other hand, high-involvement purchases are usually linked to high personal importance and high perceived risk. Highly priced products or services such as cars, houses, insurance often require a great deal of involvement. Hence, in high-involvement decision-making, information search stage is extremely important and extensive. Buyers take an active role in seeking information and opinions of experts from various media sources. In this case, providing right information in the right time at the right place is a suitable communication strategy. (Fill 2011, 73.)

3.2 Decision-Making Process of International Students

There are many noticeable changes in cultural demographics at today's workplace. Graduates find themselves working with various ethnicities. In addition, recruiters nowadays consider and select their potential candidates based on not only their expertise but also their cultural skills

(McPherson et al. 2008, 39). These demands of labor market have led to increasing number of international students studying or searching for suitable higher education institutions around the world (Enders 2004; Teichler 2004, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 101). However, studying abroad is considered as one of the most complex and risky decisions that international students may ever make (Mazzarol 1988, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 102). The authors have identified the most common reasons constituting the high perceived risk of the decision to study abroad and they will be discussed below.

The first and foremost reason is that studying overseas is associated with high financial risk (Cubillo et al. 2006, 102). As the literature research has revealed that consumers usually link big price tag with higher level of uncertainty (Solomon 2007, 316; Fill 2011, 70). Before deciding to study in another country, especially for a higher education degree, international students have to consider and prepare their personal financial support. They will go to great lengths to ensure that the chosen institution is the best option for them in consideration of their available resources and personal preferences.

The second reason is the nature of education. Education is characterized as a service; as a result, it cannot be displayed for consumers to see, feel or touch before deciding to buy it or not (Service Marketing: 5 Major Characteristics of Services, accessed on April 20, 2015). This brings difficulties for international students as they have to rely mostly on indirect instruments such as institution image and reputation, graduated and current students' evaluations and available information when evaluating potential study programs. Literature research has also confirmed that the association between intangible nature of service and the higher perceived risk. (Mitchel 1999, according to Fill 2005, 155.)

Last but not least, the complexity of the selection process also leads to the high perceived risk of the decision to study abroad. There are many inter-related decisions revolving around the main decision of studying abroad. For instance, international students do not only have to make arrangement

about the study program and the institution, but they also have to consider the host country of the institution and all related aspects of living in the host country such as safety, quality of life, international background, learning environment, visa and entry requirements etc. (Cubillo et al. 2006, 103.)

Due to the high perceived risk and high level of personally attributed importance, international education requires considerable amount of involvement from the students (Nicholls et al. 1995, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 104). The decision-making model of international students needs to be added another stage before information search stage. Potential students have to identify indispensable factors expected from their desire studying place and map out the extent of trade-off among these attributes they are willing to do (Soutar and Turner 2002, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 104).

Through studying disparate existing literature, Cubillo et al. (2006) identified four main groups of factors influencing the purchase intention of international students: personal reasons, country image effect, city effect, institution image and program evaluation (Cubillo et al. 2006, 104). The factors and their dynamic interaction will be presented below.

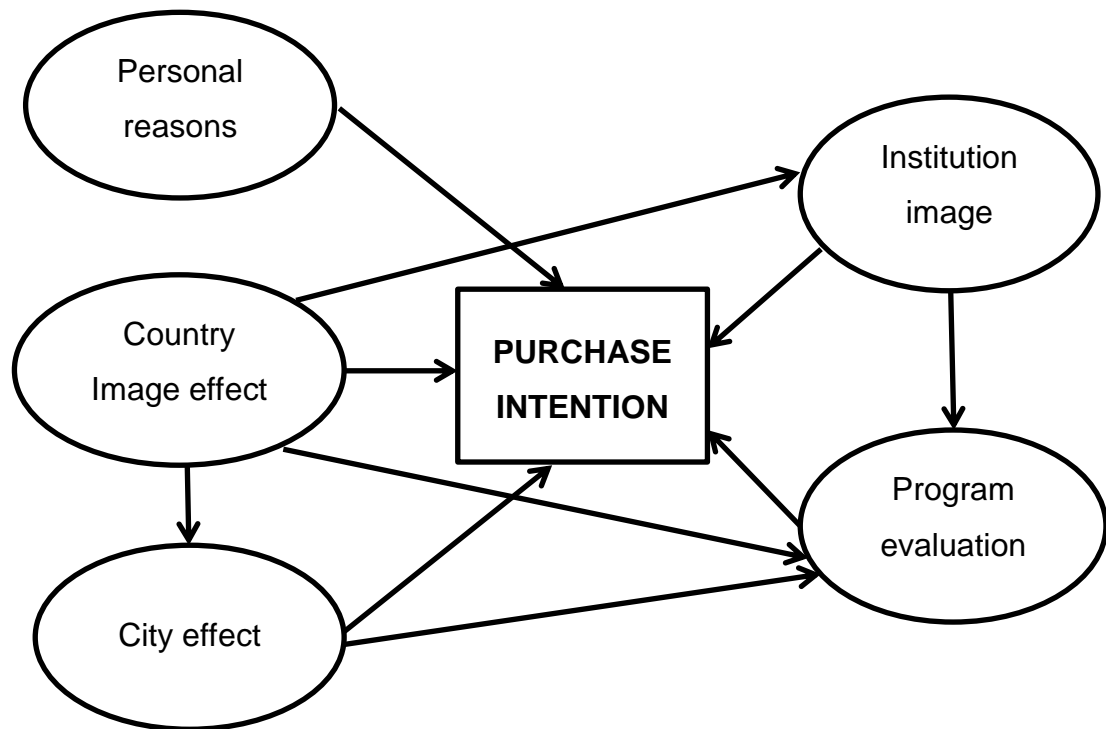


Figure 5. Model of international students' preference (adapted from "A model of international students' preference", Cubillo et al. 2006, 107)

Personal reasons

There are many reasons attributed to internal motivations to study in a foreign country. However, scholars realized that these reasons can be categorized into two big groups: personal achievement and advice. Personal achievements can consist of desired future job, high earning prospects, language skill improvement etc (Cubillo et al. 2006, 108). Among those reasons, employment prospect is believed to be the biggest motivator. International students do not buy the degree; they invest on themselves to be more competitive in the labor market as they link promising career path and high status with studying abroad (Qureshi 1995; Lin 1997; Bourke 2000, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 104). Moreover, some studies shown that recommendations from friends or relatives, who already used international education services also have a greater chance to influence the students' decision (Krampf and Heinlein 1981; Turner 1998; Bourke 2000, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 107). Therefore, as a piece of advice to higher education institutions, graduated and current

students are considered a good and trusted channel to communicate positive institutional and program image (Cubillo et al. 2006, 107).

Country image effect

Country image effect refers to “the picture, the reputation, and the stereotype that consumers attach to product or services of a specific country” (Nagashima 1970; according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 109), and “it is directly linked to the brand image” (Nebenzahl and Lambert 1997, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 109). In education service, country image is crucial to international students’ preference as the country choice precede institution choice (Bourke 2000; Srikatanyoo and Gnoth 2002, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 109). Furthermore, students tend to trust that institutions in the countries with good reputation in education will have higher quality services (Bourke 2000, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 109).

City image effect

The city of the institution is similar to the environment in which the service will be delivered and consumed. In the international students’ perception, destination city image have the same weight and influence as host country image in the decision process. The aspects of the city concerned by the students can be cost of living, safety and security, social facilities etc. (Cubillo et al. 2006, 109.)

Institution image

Institution image is defined as “the sum of opinions, ideas and impressions that prospective students have of the institution”. These opinions, ideas and impressions are usually built up by word-of-mouth, past experience and marketing activities of the institution (Ivy 2001, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 110). Nowadays, international students become more and more critical and analytical with the institution choice. They assess the institution in many aspects; for examples, academic reputation, quality of teaching, campus atmosphere (Krampf and Heinline 1981; Lin 1997, Mazzarol

1998, Soutar and Turner 2002, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 110). Understanding the important of institution image, higher education institutions should consider quality perception and branding as their strategy to attract more international students (Peters 1992, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 110). In addition, many studies also reveal that facility is another decisive component in decision-making process (Price 2003, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 110).

Program evaluation

Scholars observed that students consider the suitability of of the study program is the most important factor and they usually are not willing to compromise it with any other factors. The assessment of the program is based on diverse categories such as program curriculum, program quality, international recognition of the degree, entry requirement, tuition fee and available financial aids (Qureshi 1995, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 111). In order to check the sustainability of the program, students tend to compare similar programs offer by different institutions (Krampf and Heilein 1981, according to Cubillo et al. 2006, 111).

In a nutshell, all the groups of preference factors and their corresponding variables affecting decision-making process will be consolidated in the following table.

Factor	Items	Variables
Personal reasons	Personal improvement	Enhance career prospects Future job prospects Future earnings prospects Higher status Live in a different culture Make international contacts Improve language skills

	Advice	Family recommendation Friend's recommendation Professor's recommendation
Country image effect	Country image	Cultural distance Social reputation Academic reputation Development level Cost of living Immigration procedures Opportunity of working during course Time to get the degree
City image effect	City image	City dimension Cost of living Linguistic proximity or distance Safety and security Social facilities International environment University environment
Institution image	Corporate image	Institution prestige Ranking position Brand reputation Academic reputation Researcher reputation Quality reputation
	Faculty	Expertise of teaching staff Professional experience of teaching staff
	Facilities	Campus atmosphere Social life at university Safety and security

		Library facilities Availability of computers Availability of quiet areas Availability of areas for self-study Sport facilities
Program evaluation		International recognition Program suitability Program specialization Quality programs Recognition by future employers Total cost and finance

Table 2. Main factors and variables identified in the decision-making process (Cubillo et al. 2006, 111)

The authors find the understanding of international student's decision-making process as well as their preference in selecting international education service is essential knowledge base for this dissertation as the target audience is future international students. From the international students' perspective, information is an indispensable input for their decision making. By comprehending the driving forces behind choosing one institution over others, the authors can select the useful and interesting communicative contents for prospective international students; thereby, the authors are able to design the suitable communication guidelines for Lahti UAS, especially through social media.

4 BRAND

As discussed in the chapter 3 about the decision-making process of international students, the authors have identified several factors and groups of factors that have the power to influence the final university choice. The five big groups of factors are personal reasons, country image, city image, institution image and program evaluation. In the authors' opinions, universities do not possess equal influence and control of the group of factors. For instance, with country and city image, the universities cannot enhance them deliberately on their own as it needs a lot of efforts from the whole education system to create favorable image in such a large scale. As to individual students, the universities are only able to urge them to choose their school subtly through integrated usages of marketing and techniques. Moreover, a study conducted by Sevier (1994) indicated that "image" is the most influential factor affecting a student's decision to enter a university. (Casidy 2013, 804.) However, with institution image, the universities are more active in deciding and taking necessary actions to shape the way they want to be seen by their students. Institution image can be achieved through appropriate strategic branding. In the next sessions, the authors wish to explore the nature of brand and university brand as well as how to communicate it effectively through social media.

4.1 Brand and University Brand

Defined by American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition (Keller 2008, 2). Technically, in the context of this definition, the process of creating a brand revolves mainly around putting visible unique marks on the product. However, in the contemporary marketing, this definition is considered insufficient as it cannot capture fully the manifestation of a brand towards consumer perception and decision-making process. Therefore, considering the scope of this dissertation, the authors find themselves in an agreement with a more suitable and

practical definition of brand from a consultant named Booz Allan Hamilton: “Brands are a shorthand way of communicating critical data to the market to influence decisions” (Sinha 2007, 139). Interestingly, Hamilton also emphasized the important of brand in the decision making process of consumers. He remarked that the role of brand is even more significant in the purchasing decisions which are considered as high personal importance (Sinha 2007, 139).

In today’s business world, the interests in brand and practices surrounding brand building are staggering. For more than half of the 20th century, brand and brand-building activities were mainly for consumer products and services, now they are featured at the corporate or even national level (Blackett 2009, 14). Brand at corporate level, or corporate brand is “a structure where all products and services, buildings, official communication and employee behavior are labeled or branded with the same company name” (Cornelissen 2013, 72) and aims at establishing differentiation and preference for the whole company rather than for every single product or service (Curtis et al. 2009, 405).

Facing harsh competition in education sector, many higher education institutions have recognized brand as a valuable asset to their organization. In the higher education context, university brand carries with them similar nature of a corporate brand and is characterized by “a manifestation of the institution’s features that distinguishes it from others, reflect its capacity to satisfy students’ needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of higher education and help potential recruits to make wise enrolment decisions” (Ali-Choudhury and Bennett 2008, according to Ali-Choudhury et al. 2009, 14).

To prospective students, brand broadcasts critical information for decision making process such as service offering, service quality and institution reputation (Curtis et al. 2009, 406). Furthermore, a strong university brand can create the belief that the chosen university is excellent and the prospect of studying in this school will bring added values and pleasant

experience; thereby, the brand can boost the confidence of the potential students to proceed to the purchase stage (Ali-Choudhury et al. 2009, 14).

4.2 Corporate Identity and Corporate Image in Higher Education Institutions

As discussed in the last session, brand, either of a product or of a whole corporation, is the results of collective perceptions from the product's consumers or the corporation's stakeholders. However, the consumers or the stakeholders of the brand do not form their perceptions from thin air. They are based on various cues and signals the organization transmits as well as any interaction that may occur between the organization and the stakeholders. These cues and signals may be sent deliberately or accidentally; nonetheless, they are all taken into consideration and interpreted by the stakeholders and contribute in shaping how the organization is seen. For the sake of the organization, it should be closely monitored and have strategic plan to ensure that the images formed in its stakeholders' mind are positive and will work their magic for the benefit of the organization. (Fill 2005, 424.)

Accordingly, the starting point for building a successful brand is identifying "the set of meanings by which an organization allow itself to be known and through which it enables people to describe, remember and relate to it" or in business term, identifying corporate identity. Then, an organization can use various communication tools to deliver the corporate identity to its stakeholders and build its corporate image subsequently (Fill 2005, 424).

Corporate identity and corporate image are very important concepts in literature of corporate branding as well as in practices of companies and organizations adopting business model. Furthermore, when embracing selective implementations from business, high education institutions also employ corporate branding theories and practical implementations to help them be different and assume unique position in their customers' mind. Theories and practices revolving corporate identity and corporate image will be explained carefully in the next sessions.

4.2.1 Corporate Identity

According to Van Riel et al. (2007, 67), corporate identity is simple a “collection of attributes that members use to describe an organization”. However, for these ascribed attributes to be acted by both internal and external stakeholders, every company must have a suitable “identity mix” for each group of target audiences. Interestingly, also according to Van Riel et al. (2007, 68), corporate identity includes the three following components: communication, behavior and symbolism and will be discussed next.

- **Communication:** This attribute refers to all the verbal messages that are employed by an organization to deliver its identity (Van Riel et al. 2007, 68) Communication tools can include corporate advertising, events, sponsorship, publicity, and promotion (Cornelissen 2013, 65).
- **Behavior:** An organization can also express its identity through their behaviors. For example, an organization can just only say it is innovative but it has to demonstrate the innovativeness in, for examples, its operational model, its products or services, or its management. Behaviors is believed to be the most effective medium to communicate corporate identity and stakeholders are usually based on these to aspects to establish their judgments of a certain organization (Van Riel et al. 2007, 68). Not only marketing and communication department but also all the behaviors of the employees (ranging from managers to front-line staff) are able to create positive impressions and images (Cornelissen 2013, 65).
- **Symbolism** is referred to a strategic tool by which an organization is able to to build its identity using visual and audible symbols such as logos, slogans, signs, sounds and taglines. These symbols can be used integratedly with other tools to create identifiers for the organization or to engrave the

organization's outstanding characteristics in their customers' mind. (Van Riel et al. 2007, 68.)

Regarding the scope of this dissertation, the authors are greatly interested in how to construct corporate image from desired corporate identity. More specifically, they wish to explore how to deliver Lahti UAS identity using explicit and subtle cues and signals transmitted through various social media platforms.

Corporate identity and corporate image are two closely linked concepts like two sides of the same coin. The model describing the relationship between corporate identity and corporate image from Birkigt's and Stadler's perspective is presented below:

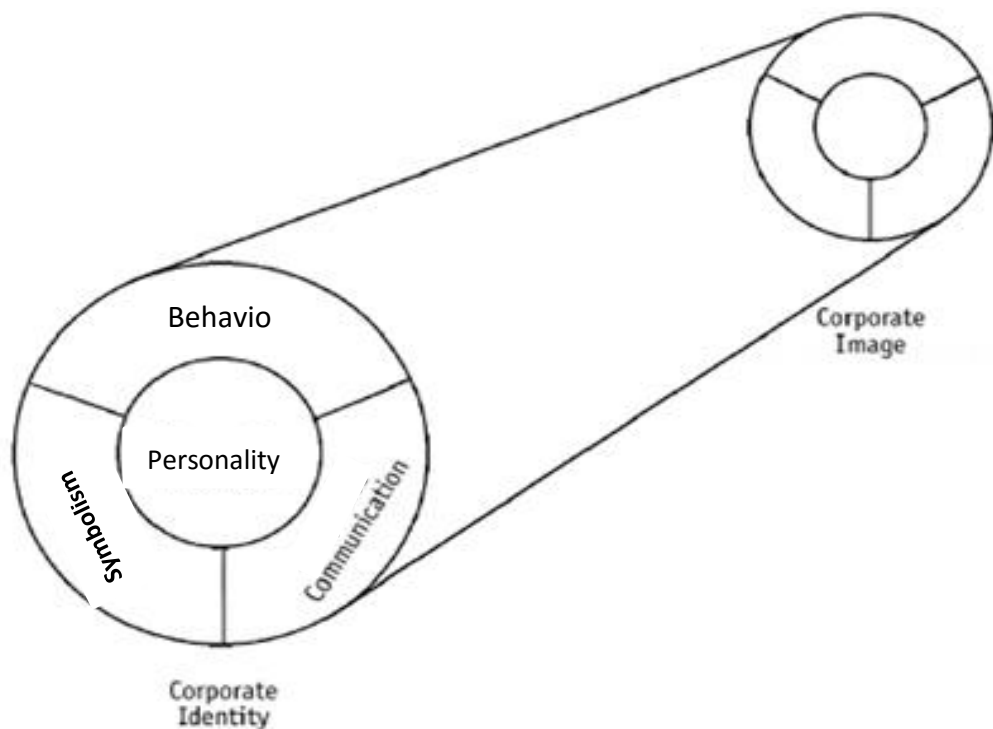


Figure 6. Relationship between corporate identity and corporate image (Birkigt and Stadler 1968, according to Van Riel et al. 2007, 68)

As seen in the diagram, corporate image is the reflection of corporate identity in the consumers' mind. As a reflection, corporate image may be identical or may be diverse from the desirable corporate identity,

depending on how successful an organization delivers its desired associations with its brand. To be able to manage well images of an organization as a whole, an understanding of true nature of corporate image is required and it will be discussed in details in the next session.

4.2.2 Corporate Image

Corporate image, on the other hand, comprises of all the interpretations the stakeholders make about an organization (Van Riel et al. 2007, 68). According to Birkigt's and Stadler's model (1986), corporate image is the projection of corporate identity through symbolism, communication and behavior (Cornelissen 2013, 65). Some specific nature of corporate image, devised from Birkigt's and Stadler's model will be discussed next.

- As corporate image is the reflection of corporate identity, an organization cannot change its stakeholders' perception directly but through the management of its identity (Fill 2005, 435).
- Moreover, while corporate identity is intentionally created by the organization, the formation of corporate image is totally dependent on the stakeholders, and they usually base on their own experience when interacting with the organization to shape their perceptions. Therefore, in reality, corporate image may vary from individual to individual, from group to group. (Fill 2005, 435.)
- Similar to product or service brand, corporate image is formed by what the stakeholders think about an organization in prior to any interactions and the image is confirmed by their experience with the organization. To construct a sustainable corporate image, the stakeholders should have similar perceptions before and after they interact with the organization. (Blakeman 2015, 40.)
- Images created before any interaction with the organization are often built on limited amount of information. Therefore, when delivering identity cues, an organization should be aware of the

available touch points with the stakeholders; thereby, it can prevent the limited amount of information to distort its corporate image. (Fill 2005, 435.)

In practices, to keep up the same corporate image across a vast population, the most important goal should be coherence. At the corporate brand level, coherence is in the environment, communication, experience or behaviors with which will direct the customers to think of only one specific brand immediately. Within the symbolism aspect of corporate identity, coherence should be how an organization presents itself across all the touch points with its customers. All the visual cues should be consistent and in conformity to avoid sending confusing signals to the customers. (Keohane 2014, 35.)

Understanding the relationship of corporate identity and corporate image as well as the creation mechanism of corporate image is crucial to any business aiming for success and sustainability in the business world. This knowledge will help organizations to avoid pitfalls when broadcasting their image as well as turning corporate identity and corporate image into valuable tool to attract and retain the stakeholders.

5 SOCIAL MEDIA

In this chapter, the authors will present the definition of social media and some examples of it. Also, its relation to communication and brands will be discussed.

5.1 What is Social Media?

Levine et al. (2000) remarked “markets are conversation” (Levine et al., 2000, according to Hinton et al. 2013, 7). Social media offers a revolutionary way for businesses to connect to their customers and stakeholders (Nyangau et al. 2012, 38). In the past, the communication in marketing was mainly one-way communication, as marketers were active generators of messages and customers were passive receivers of those. Marketers had direct and total control over the brand communication process, for examples, what was the contents of the messages, how the messages were distributed, when the messages were distributed, how frequent the messages were repeated etc. (Keohane 2014, 45).

However, the birth of social media put an end to the dictatorship of marketers in communication process. According to Safako and Brake (2009), social media indicates “activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media”. Social media operates on the foundation of Web 2.0 facilitate the interactions and the creations of user-generated contents in the forms of texts, images, videos and audios (Mohammadian et al. 2012, 58).

In order to grasp social media landscape, many scholars have tried to classify it based on certain criteria. For example, based on the degree of user-engagement, Vernuccio (2014) divided social media into six categories: social networks, blogs, content-on-demand, content communities, virtual worlds and internet forums (Vernuccio 2014, 214-215)

- **Social networks** facilitate multi-node communication as they allow users to create their own profile, form their online network

and circles of friends and exchange instant messages with each other. The communicative medium on social networks is rich, consisting of videos, pictures, web links, audio files and blogs. (Cornelissen 2014, 263.) Examples of social networks can be Facebook and Twitter.

- **Blogs** are web-based applications that enable users (bloggers) to publish information about their interests in a journal style (Cornelissen 2014, 261). Blogs can be created on behalf of a company as a medium for corporate branding and connections with stakeholders. Some popular blogging platforms are WordPress, Tumblr, Blogger etc. (Vernuccio 2014, 214).
- **Content-on-demand** encompasses multimedia contents such as podcasts, audio-video files that are available upon user's requirement (Vernuccio 2012, 215).
- **Content community** is a platform where users can create, share, organize and use media content. Examples of such platforms can be Youtube for video sharing, Instagram for photo sharing and Wikipedia for information sharing. (Vernuccio 2012, 215.)
- **Virtual worlds** are online environments that enable users to create a virtual persona (avatar and virtual identity) and live a virtual life parallel with their own real life. An example of virtual world can be Second Life which incorporates human natural interactions into three-dimensional environment. Second Life even allows companies to set up their virtual stores or advertise their products. (Cornelissen 2014, 264.)
- **Internet forums** are online message boards where users can discuss about topics of common interests or ideas (Vernuccio 2014, 215).

Because Lahti UAS is at the very beginning of social media marketing, this dissertation will only focus on the most popular social networks (i.e. Facebook and Twitter) and content communities (i.e. Youtube and Instagram) as the main channels for communicating Lahti UAS brand on social media.

Now, the authors would like to provide more information concerning the four chosen social networks for Lahti UAS case. These platforms will also be the main subjects of the subsequent social media audit plan for Lahti UAS. The general information and also particular terms for each channel will be elaborated in the following sections.

5.1.1 Facebook

This media platform at this moment has the highest momentum and is used by most international customers and has been the market leader since April 2008 (Treadaway et al. 2010, 30). Like MySpace, it is a social network platform. It was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 during his sophomore year at Harvard and its original purpose was to provide the students at Harvard a means to make acquaintances. It provides a platform for users to comfortably connect with friends, family members, co-workers and so on. It hosts a range of social applications and promotes communication. It allows users to customize their online profile and personalize the user experience. Users can create a Facebook page basing on their preferences, and they can add fellow users to their circle, share pictures, videos or experiences through statuses. (Safko 2010, 449-451.)

Business-wise, Facebook can be used for networking, communicating internally, organizing and tracking of events, promoting products and so forth. In an academic environment, it can be used to promote course information, to organize school functions, and to announce and arrange events etc. (Safko 2010, 449-451). As of April 2015, Facebook has approximately 1.44 billion monthly active users, which makes it the biggest social network in the world (Smith 2015).

Facebook glossary:

- **Profile:** A web page that others users will see. It gives them a general idea about a person's identity
- **Page:** A business profile where customers can find posts and information about a company
- **Post:** A term used for sharing content on Facebook page. A post can either be a text-only post, a multimedia post (with videos and photos) or a link (posts with URLs).
- **Friends/Followers:** A user who joins the page because he or she is a supporter
- **Like:** An engagement function allowing followers to leave a quick positive feedback on a post in form of a thumb-up
- **Comment:** An engagement function in form of a direct reply users can make to a post on a page, in addition to "likes"
- **Share:** An engagement function allowing users to repost the shared content from another page on their own page. (Curtiss 2013.)

5.1.2 Twitter

Twitter is a social medium and was originally designed to be of internal usage by Obvious, LLC as a research and development project. Its success made way to its official launch in 2006 (Safko 2010, 449-451). Twitter is an information network made up of 140-character messages called Tweets (Getting Started with Twitter, accessed on June 28, 2015). On Twitter, users can stay connected and communicate with each other, and they can share their current activity or state of mind with friends and strangers. Businesses have started to use Twitter as a free-of-charge marketing research service and a means to receive feedbacks on products and services. Many big companies are also having their presence on

Twitter such as Cisco Systems, Dell etc. As of April 2015, on Twitter there are 302 million active monthly users (Smith 2015).

Twitter glossary:

- **Tweet:** The content users share with others, similar to a Facebook post
- **Reply:** Answers made by users in response to a tweet, similar to a Facebook comment
- **Favorite:** Similar to Facebook likes. Moreover, “48as48isti” tweets can be saved to go back to afterwards.
- **Retweet:** A share or repost of another user’s tweet, similar to Facebook share
- **Followers:** Users who follow a Twitter page, similar to Facebook friends or followers (Curtiss 2013.)

5.1.3 YouTube

YouTube was established in 2005 by three co-founders Chad Meredith Hurley, Jawed Karim and Steve Chen. They designed the platform so as to get rid of the burden of sharing videos via emails. Video clip sizes were too huge for an email to deliver. It is now a content community – an online video sharing site that enables users to upload and share videos on the Internet. Users can also give comments on videos, be part of groups, tag themselves, and use the code to post the video on a different website. There is also the possibility to create personal or professional profile pages, from which users can search for videos and channels that they like. From entertaining purpose, YouTube now is an essential marketing tool in a business environment as its user numbers keep increasing. (Safko 2010, 449-451.) Untill March 2013, YouTube’s active users are over one billion, and it generates more than four billion views per day (Smith 2015).

YouTube Glossary:

- **Channel:** A profile of a YouTube user, similar to Facebook page
- **Subscribers:** Users who register to be a subscriber of a channel on YouTube, similar to Twitter's "Followers" or Facebook's "Friends/Followers"
- **Views:** A counter for total times a video has been watched. It is shown under every video.
- **Comment:** A user can comment to a video, similar to Facebook comment
- **Likes/Dislikes:** Indicators displayed under every video when enabled. They express the sentiment of viewers towards the video. They are represented by two figures, a thumb-up for like and thumb-down for dislike. (Miller 2011.)

5.1.4 Instagram

Instagram was launched on October 2010 and since then it has been gaining popularity among Internet users. It is a social network that allows people to connect to each other, and it is predominantly meant for sharing photos and also short videos in its network. Similar to Facebook or Twitter, users will sign up for an account and they will have their profile connected with their acquaintances (What is Instagram?, accessed on June 25, 2015). Users can post their photos, follow others, like or comment on photos, or search for their friends. One significant feature of Instagram is the ability to add filters on photos taken in prior to posting. Similar to YouTube, Instagram is now more and more becoming a platform used by businesses to promote their brands via visuals. Instagram has a user pool of 300 million active users as of October 2014 (Smith 2015).

Instagram Glossary:

- **Profile:** Similar to Facebook profile. It shows the owner's personalized identity.
- **Post:** A photo or video uploaded onto a profile
- **Like:** An engagement function similar to Facebook like. Users can click a heart-shaped button under photos to like it.

- **Follower:** A user who follows an account, similar to Facebook fans
- **Comments:** Similar to Facebook comments. Users can leave a comment underneath every photo. (Instagram: The Simple Glossary, The 19 Terms You Have to Know, accessed on June 28, 2015.)

The authors now will summarize the terminologies for the four channels in a table to enable smooth understanding from this point onward. It is also to reduce confusion that might take place when the same terms are mentioned across multiple platforms. The comparison of terms will be presented as follows.

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube
Connections	Friends/Followers	Follower	Follower	Subscriber
Like	Like	Favorite	Like	Like
Share	Share	Retweet	-	-
Comment	Comment	Reply	Comment	Comment
Post	Status	Tweet/Post	Photo	Video

Table 3. Comparison of Terms for each Social Networks (Liebowitz 2014, 219).

5.2 Social Media and Communication

Communication is defined as “the process of exchanging verbal and non-verbal messages” from one person or a group of people to another person or group of people (Components of Communication Process, accessed on 24 April, 2015). In the traditional model proposed by Willbur Schamm (1955), the communication process includes two main actors (the sender and the receiver), three principal types of actions (encoding, decoding and feedback) and a medium facilitating the transmission of the messages (Fill 2005, 36).

The communication sequence occurs as following. It starts when the sender generates an idea and wants to share it with the receiver. He or she transforms his or her own abstract idea into to a message that is likely understandable to the receiver. This process is called encoding. Moreover, the sender also has to choose a suitable communication channel to transmit his or her message. Then, the message passes the communication channel and reaches the receiver. The receiver has to interpret the symbolic style of the message; in other words, decode the message in order to understand the sender's idea. Feedback is also embedded in the response sent back to the sender, signaling that the receiver has received and decoded the messages correctly. (Components of Communication Process, accessed on 24 April, 2015.)

Related to communication in business, the old style of marketing is practiced based on the premised that if marketers can create a right message and find a way to inform as many consumers as possible, their business will be profitable (Sinha 2007, 12). Consequently, the outdated communication process usually consists of only the part of transmitting the message from the marketers to the consumers. In fact, it is a common phemonenon that the consumers get bombarded by loads of messages from the marketers. Moreover, the consumers are also forced to take the passive role in the communication process as they are only allowed to choose whether to see or not to see the message or to act or not to act on the content. (Fill 2005, 44.)

However, the birth and flourish of social media has taken the business world like a storm and redefined the communication landscape as well as communication etiquettes. These effects of social media to communication, especially communication in maketing are listed below.

- **Conversation:** Consumers nowadays no longer tolerate monologues from the marketers. They want to have their voice in conversations and they want it to be heard. They also want to be involved in meaningful conversations (Maggiani 2014). Social media provides platform where marketers and consumers can

exchange information and work for shared benefits (Solis 2011, 6). Furthermore, marketers today not only have to learn how to talk to but also have to learn how to listen to their consumers, become a good conversationalist and entice their consumers to talk about their brand (Solis 2011, 159).

- **Contribution:** Social media has changed the rule of traditional marketing communication as it overthrows the reign of marketers in communication and encourages contributions from anyone who are interested in the topic (Maggiani 2014). To marketers, social media is a double-edged knife to a brand as it consolidates both positive and negative contributions into one place which is easily accessed by others. Consequently, crisis management plan for handling negative effects of contents on social network sites are extremely critical and are advised by successful businesses on social media to defend and save the organization's image (10 tips for Reputation and Crisis Management in the Digital World, accessed on 26 April, 2015).
- **Collaboration:** Social media stimulates people to interact and share information not only between business and its consumers but also among consumers or between consumers and non-consumers (Maggiani 2014). Companies should put more efforts in collaborative activities as they are very first stones to build consumer engagement in which consumers take personal interests in the company's product or service and spread these interests to their connections in physical or virtual world (Evan et al. 2014, 12).
- **Connection:** Social media offers businesses an excellent chance to connect and build directly with their customers. It is not an exaggeration to say that there have been no marketing tools which are able to surpass social media in reaching out a large amount of customers and in developing intimate connections between a brand and its consumers. Many

marketers and entrepreneurs believe that connecting and nurturing relationships with consumers via social media will be indispensable to successful companies in the new age. (Brand Building: Connecting with Consumers through Social Media, accessed on 26 April, 2015.)

- **Community:** According to Solis (2011, 229), marketing on social media should be managed at community level. Social media is owned by everyone and anyone can publish their own contents on their own social network sites. If consumers are given free rein, they will steer your brand reputation on social media aimlessly or even to unwanted directions. Though marketers' power is partially restricted on social media, they still can guide the consumers' perceptions through building strong online communities of fans and followers. Through these communities, organizations can communicate effectively with their consumers as well as address promptly any issues revolving their organization if needed.

5.3 Social Media and Brands

Social media is not only another change in tactics from companies' brand marketing departments. It is now truly a paradigm shift gaining more and more weight in any company's strategy. Before the advent of social media, brand managers, in order to pass on their brand stories on to consumers, used one-to-many marketing communication, like advertising (Hoffman et al. 1996, 50-69). Consumers then had the ability to reevaluate and personalize their own version of the brand stories they were receiving, but their power was limited due to technological incapability. Brand managers since could choose to opt out their consumers' reviews and opinions if they were negative and unbeneficial to the company.

However, the arrival of social media capsized the pivotal role of brand managers as the authors of their brand's stories (Kuksov et al. 2012, 294-309). Consumers now are equipped and empowered with the tool to

actively engage, express their point of views about the brands and share it with the universe of other fellow consumers. Companies have already lost their grasp of control over what should and should not be discussed about them. The brand stories are generated and narrated by the new force – consumers. Consumers are brands' storytellers and the new brands' ambassadors (Booth et al. 2011, 184-191). Consumer-generated brand stories conveyed via social media are much more influential than spread through traditional channels as they are digital, visible, ubiquitous, available in real-time, and dynamic (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, 38-52).

5.3.1 Social Media's Significance

Social media's significance is now on par with conventional media like newspapers, television advertisements and so on. 79% of the companies participated in a survey in 2014 employed social media as a content marketing tactic, while only 31% of them used traditional media to promote their marketing contents (Hausman 2014). Also, according to HubSpot, 92% of marketers in 2014 stated that social media marketing was crucial to their business, with 80% implying their efforts on social media boosted traffic to their sites. Even more, 97% of marketers surveyed were currently active on their social media presence (DeMers 2014). Some statistics mentioned above indicate the importance of social media to its users, regardless of the size of the organization. As stated by Richard Branson – Virgin Group founder: "Social media channels are an amazing tool for reaching our customers and the public...Whether you are launching a start-up or leading an established company, you should start establishing your social media presence if you haven't already" (The Importance of Social Media, accessed on June 18, 2015).

5.3.2 Benefits of Social Media to Brands

The benefits which social media contribute to a brand are multiple and can no longer be ignored. The authors, however, decided to pick out four most noticeable points which are grouped into following topics: building an

online community for a company, leveraging brand recognition, cost effectiveness, and fast sharing of contents.

- **Building a supportive online community around the brand:**

There are two motives for a customer to become part of a brand's community which are self-motivation and social-related motivation (Sukoco et al. 2010, 614-622). Self-related motivation refers to members' interest to experience enjoyment, gain knowledge regarding a brand, and maintain their self-esteem. Social-related motivation refers to members' interest to join brand communities to have some affiliations with other members and acquire social status to maintain their collective self-esteem (Sukoco et al. 2010). In short, people who advocate the brand will attract those who are yet customers but potential to form a community – a buzz – around the brand because community strength is a potent branding power (Angelova 2013). This is getting more comfortable and easier for firms due to the fact that social media leads to massive exposure for its worldwide access, sharing capabilities, and huge amount of daily users (Angelova 2013). When an organization's followers are part of its online community, it can gain instant access to them to find out more valuable information about its customers (Chandler 2013).

- **Leveraging brand recognition:**

A strong online presence leads to the image of a good organization's reputation (Angelova 2013). With the support from a loyal online community, a brand can expand its audience and hence increase its awareness to prospective customers. According to 2014 Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 92% of all marketers surveyed indicated that social media generated more exposure for their businesses (Stelzner 2014). This means more people know about the brand when it is active with its social media presence. With social media, companies can decide on how to position itself and what it wants people to know about its business. Good reputation for the brand can be constructed around the

company's values, benefits, and advantages with materials such as great contents and consistent efforts (Chandler 2013).

- **Cost effectiveness:**

Social media at the moment is one affordable means to promote a business. In the past years it has solidly taken over traditional print marketing and advertising. Promoting products on social media platforms will increase the rate of return on investment (ROI) (Angelova 2013). Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest and many more allow the promoting and sharing contents with nearly no cost beside the expenditure of the marketer's owned time (Carbone, 2015).

- **Fast sharing content:**

In the past, marketers faced the challenges of reaching their audience with their contents in the shortest possible time. Today, with the help of social media, businesses can spread the word with a click of a button (Carbone 2015). When businesses use social media, specifically for sharing contents about them or for content curation, they just need to share it on their brand's social network accounts (Cisnero 2014). Also, as it takes roughly six to eight exposures to a product before a customer decides to purchase, an additional benefit of social media appears from the ability of sharing things quickly. In other words, it creates repeated exposure of certain contents to the followers within the networks. This allows constant reminding to customers of what an organization can offer, which in turn may shorten the sales funnel dramatically (Cisnero 2014).

In this chapter, the authors have discussed the definition of social media and how it is in relation to communication and brands. The next chapter will elaborate on the concept of social media audit.

6 SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIT

The authors will introduce the concept of social media audit with its definition and benefits in this chapter.

6.1 What is an Audit?

Fundamental information about an audit regarding its definition, classification and benefits will be presented by the authors in this section.

6.1.1 Definition

There is a variety of definitions for an audit. The majority of them, however, imply an audit's usage as a finance-related term. An audit is an accounting procedure under which the financial records of a company or an individual are closely inspected to make sure that they are accurate (What is an Audit?, accessed on June 18, 2015). It is true that audits are frequently associated with financial reports; however, its usage is not limited to financial field only. Therefore, the authors see the need to expand its meaning to a broader sense in order to fit the context being currently discussed in this dissertation. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, an audit also means a careful check or review of an issue (Audit, accessed on June 18, 2015). In "Quality Audit in the European Higher Education Area" publication, the authors found its definition of an audit to be most suitable to the scope and background involved. An audit is generally comprehended as an evaluation of a project, a system, a process, a product, an institution or organization etc. in any context, including industry, public administration, health care etc. (Kastelliz et al. 2014, 13). This definition implies that it is possible to employ auditing as an evaluating tool for non-financial issues to gauge the progress or performance of any subject in question. That means auditing can as well be applied to Lahti UAS' social media assets to measure its performance.

6.1.2 Classification of Audit

Generally there are two types of audits depending on the nature of the execution – internal and external audit. Internal audits are conducted by employees working within an organization and are reported to its audit committee and/or directors. They help improve the company's operational systems and help develop specific risk management policies. The work of the internal auditor tends to be continuous and based on the internal control systems of a business in any size. On the other hand, external auditors' works are independent from the organization they are auditing. They report to the company's shareholders. They provide their opinions on the truthfulness of the company's financial statements and perform work on a test basis to monitor systems in place (Internal vs. External Auditors, What's the difference?, accessed on June 18, 2015).

6.1.3 Benefits of Auditing

Owing to the extension in meaning of the term "audit", it is occasionally used interchangeably with some other terms, such as measurement or measuring. In other words, auditing is measuring facts and reporting a conclusion (Audit, accessed on June 24, 2015). Why is a company in need of measuring its operation? In reality, there are many advantages when conducting an audit/measurement of a business' operation/performance, for examples, aiding decision making process, assessing own strengths and weaknesses, better understanding of competition, allocating sensibly available budget and staff and supporting strategic planning (Paine 2011, 7-8).

6.2 What is Social Media Audit?

The authors, in this part, will introduce more details about social media audit. The term will be elaborated with information concerning its definition and advantages.

6.2.1 Definition of Social Media Audit

Social media audit, as derived from its name, is a form of auditing. The subject of the audit, however, is the social media assets of an organization. Social media audit is one of the most valuable tools under a social marketer's belt, and they can take many shapes and forms (Shively 2014). A social media audit is an evaluation of a person or organization's social media presence that will help make certain it is achieving maximum Returns on Investment (ROI) (George 2014). As social media is now essentially integrated into communication strategy, social media audits become an equally vital part of any marketing and branding efforts. Without in-depth analysis of the activity on social media platforms, the desire to know ROI rate on social media is almost impossible (Social Media Audit, accessed on June 24, 2015). A social media audit is the chance to improve social outreach, to guide efforts to a right direction and help prevent companies from repeating possible past mistakes concerning their online presence (Breakenridge 2011). It provides an analysis of the company's existing social media efforts, including their strategy for using social media, identifying their current and potential customers, and targeting them effectively (Kruse 2014).

6.2.2 Benefits of Social Media Audit

A social media audit grants benefits to companies operating their social media assets and also even to those who are not connected to the social media. It is the starting point for any social media marketing initiative, from which companies get to see the risks, benefits and opportunities involving in the interaction with social media. Since compiling a holistic and complete picture of the current state of affairs is of the essence, the ability to carry out a thorough and meaningful social media audit is an invaluable tool in a good marketing toolbox (Bolsinger 2010). Some of its most noticeable merits will be listed next.

- **Position in social media landscape**

Conducting a social media audit will provide a comprehensive view of the organization's position on social media, and conversations around it (Social Media Audit, accessed on June 24, 2015). Normally, without any assessment, it is difficult for social media marketers to realize the gaps between their organization's status quo and the place they need to be for success. A social media audit provides a detailed analysis of how to measure activities on social media, including which metrics companies should be tracking, and an explanation of why they should be tracking them (Kruse 2014). It is as well an opportunity to fix what went wrong with social outreach, and to guide new efforts moving forward plus preventing companies from falling victims to their same old past mistakes (Breakenridge 2011). The results of a social media marketing audit will bridge the differences between the current situation and the desirable stage of social media performance (What Do You Get with a Social Media Audit?, accessed on June 24, 2015).

- **Development of a social media strategy**

Social media handled in the right way will accomplish many things for a brand. It has the power to reduce overall marketing costs and provides the strategic direction for future social media campaigns. Also, it equips a brand with the ability to humanize itself with a content marketing strategy, hence enabling consumers to connect with the brand on a deeper level which will facilitate brand loyalty and brand evangelism (Does Your Company Need a Social Media Audit?, accessed June 24, 2015). A social media audit will guide the way to how businesses can provide value through all the channels of social media. Additionally, it identifies the best channels for firms to capitalize on (Kruse 2014).

- **Competitive juxtaposition**

A social media audit can reveal areas where firms can improve and where openings in competitors' customer service and content marketing are that brands can fill. Simply put, it provides insight into competitors' strategies (Comcowich 2015). Moreover, social media audits will unveil how the benchmarks and competitors are handling their own media assets, what they are doing successfully and at where they are facing trouble. This information will reveal areas of opportunity for companies. Hence, social media auditors are advised to visit all the profiles of their company's rivals to observe the overall strategy behind their social contents (Kruse 2014).

- **Knowing audience's opinions**

The social data acquired from social media audits will enable the creation of social media audience segments (or 'technographics') that define the company's target audience's needs, wants and behavior in social spaces (Social Media Audit, accessed on June 24, 2015). Since the firm's advocates – customers, employees and other stakeholders and so on – are the new media, they are in the position to control and narrate the stories around the brand. Through a social media audit, the information revealed will show what they think about a brand with the expression of their opinions and the change of their behavior on the social platforms (Paine 2011, 69).

Beside the mentioned benefits, there are underlying merits that a social media audit brings to a company which exercises it, such as:

- **Better usage of resources on social media:** A social media audit is a smart step as a lot of time and resources can be wasted improving things that do not need and neglecting things that really need your attention (Kruse 2014).

- **Audience engagements:** A review of current social media efforts indicates whether the community is engaging and conversing and also reveals working engagement. Showing up and broadcasting content across the social webs without facilitating and joining the conversation is not an effective strategy. Proper engagement with the audience should be accomplished in order to boost progress towards business goals (Rich 2014).

The authors have introduced the concept of social media audit together with its benefits in this section. In the upcoming part, the authors will present the layout of a social media audit with its specifics.

7 LAYOUT OF A SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIT PLAN

According to Paine (2011, 84), the social media online world is divided into two types of properties: sites that companies can manage and control and sites over which they exert no authority. Although companies own their social media assets like websites, blogs, social media channels and so on, the vast majority of the conversations are taking place online on other people/companies' sites (Paine 2011, 84). In this dissertation, the authors will discuss the usage of non-controllable social media assets solely. The reason aligns with the fact that the authors do not have ownership over Lahti UAS' social media platforms. Hence, it is impossible for the authors to apply the tools specifically meant for owners of those social media assets only.

For sites that organizations own and manage, it is a good idea that they select a web analytics system, such as Google Analytics, WebTrends or Omniture and then implement it in a consistent manner throughout their properties. The properties include websites, e-commerce sites, blogs and more. The organization will embed the web metrics code into possible platforms to gauge their performance. For certain sites which do not support the insert of metrics code, e.g. Facebook, the auditor needs to depend on the data the platform itself provides.

The based theory the authors choose to be the guideline for their social media audit layout in this paper is the 6-step outline by Paine from her book "*Measure what matters*" (2011, 84-96). There is indeed a wide selection of different steps and models to consider when thinking of social media audits. However, given the clarity and coherence of Paine's (2011, 84-96) layout, the authors decide to adopt that model with selection and supplementation from other professional sources to create their own audit plan without losing or compromising the essential meanings or procedures that should be included.

The theoretical structure of a social media audit is described as follow.

7.1 Defining the Goal/Success in Prior to the Audit

Needless to say, in order to reach a goal, it must be established. If no clear objective is defined for a social media strategy, the organization will face difficulties in determining what they want to achieve with their online presence (George 2014). And that leads to the waste of time and resources both to operate it and to measure it. There are generally three big categories into which a goal can be classified.

- **Sales or marketing gains:** When an organization desires to gain market share, have an increase in donations or other quantifiable revenue goals, it needs a set of measurement tools that emphasize on web analytics. Using unique URLs and other forms of statistical analysis of traffic and response data is necessary (Paine 2011, 85).
- **Increase in engagement:** Certainly, this concept is explained in many different notions. Experts look at it with their own reasoning for why it is important and what it really is in scope. Depending on the usage, there is quite a wide array of definitions for “engagement”. Brand engagement, customer engagement, content engagement etc. are some among the many examples the term possesses. They correlate at certain extents, but they are all important to any organization. It is the first step to the construction of relationship between customers and a brand. Moreover, customer engagement promotes and protects the brand at the same time. Suggestions from customers who are active with a brand can indicate where room for improvement should be. In social media, engagement is a metric frequently utilized because it is easy to be measured through numbers of likes, comments and shares. Also, it is easy to be compared to that of other companies. Engagement rate is a vital metric to keep track on since a higher consumer rate means a sign of great

contents. Additionally, it is useful to assess social media marketing efforts, and can be applied to major social media platforms (Engagement Rate, accessed on June 25, 2015).

- **Improvement of relationships or reputation:** Organizations need a precise measuring apparatus to assess the health of their relationship with stakeholders and to leverage it. In such a scenario that organizations are focusing on improving its reputation and brand loyalty, the required measurement tools include surveys, content analysis and relationship metrics (Paine 2011, 85).

7.2 Identifying, Prioritizing Audiences and Seeing the Influence of Own Social Media Efforts on Them

As each audience segment has different needs, wants and expectations, an organization is advised to identify and separate them according to their characteristics and psychographics. The reason is to manage the current relationships with them in a better way, since each constituency benefits an institution differently and mishandling of a relationship will lead to unwanted consequences. There are fifteen typical audiences in an academic environment.

Faculty	Deans
Staff	Alumnae
State government	Students
Local elected officials	Parents
Local community	Prospective students
Local media	Parents of prospective students
National media	Donors
Trade media	Federal government

Table 4. Typical audiences within the academic environment (Paine 2011, 211)

Priority should be made to better focus the social media efforts. Along with arranging the constituencies in order, institutions also need to draw out the influence of their social media program on different segments. This helps indicating whether the efforts are sufficient towards a specific important audience segment.

7.3 Defining Benchmarks

There is one key note that brands should keep in mind about any evaluation program: measurement is a comparative tool. In order to estimate own success, it needs to be compared to other results (Paine 2011, 37).

7.3.1 Definition of Benchmarking

The meaning of the term “benchmark” is diverse. Benchmark, according to Business Dictionary, is a measurement of the quality of an organization’s policies, products, programs, strategies, etc. and their comparison with standard measurements, or similar measurements of its benchmarks (Benchmarking, accessed on June 25, 2015). From another perspective, benchmarking is a way of exploring what is the best performance being attained – whether in a particular company, by a competitor or in an entirely different industry. This information can then be used to identify gaps in an organization’s processes in order to achieve a competitive advantage (Understanding the Purpose and Use of Benchmarking, accessed on June 25, 2015). Paine (2011) put it more simply by stating that there are two possible ways to understand benchmarking. A benchmark study is preliminary research done to learn about audiences or an environment or to set targets for the future. A benchmark to compare against, on the other hand, is the standard against which an organization measures its progress toward its goal. Most effectively, benchmark should be done against an organization’s competition and benchmarks over time, and additionally against its own past performance (Paine 2011, 37).

7.3.2 Purpose of Benchmarking

The purpose of benchmarking is linked to the goals the user wants to achieve. The objective of it is to comprehend and estimate the current position of a business or organization in relation to best practices and to identify areas and means of performance improvement (Riley 2012). From AMC (Argi Management Consultants Sdn. Bhd.), the overwhelming purpose of a benchmark is to improve the competitive position of a company. Also according to AMC, there are three reasons for an organization to start a benchmark:

- It produces an objective evaluation of a company's business processes against similar processes in other organizations
- It acts as a vehicle to scan for improvement ideas from other organizations
- It widens an organization's experience pool by gaining insights into operations and methods that work and that do not (What is Benchmarking?, accessed on June 25, 2015).

7.3.3 Types of Benchmarking

There are multiple types of benchmarking. Without a clear understanding, a benchmark project will consume more resources and improvement outcomes will not be as high as planned (Wireman 2004). Generally, three categories of benchmarking are adopted in common business environment. They are as follow:

- **Internal Benchmarking:** It is the process by which a company or corporation looks within the realm of its own business to determine the best methods for conducting business. It typically involves different departments in an organization. The process is closely associated with the concept of finding best practices, which means that the company is conducting its operations in a way which optimizes the results of its workers' efforts (What is Internal

Benchmarking?, 2015). Now, it is easier to have access to sensitive and/or standardized data internally and it takes less time and resources to implement better practices (Types of Benchmarking, accessed June 25, 2015).

- **Competitive/Industry Benchmarking:** It uses external partners in similar industries or fields. Competitors are also a subject of this type of benchmark (Wireman 2004). It can be defined as the continuous process of comparing a firm's practices and performance with the results from a set of specific benchmarks or competitors. Also, a standard can be used as a milestone (Beard 2013). When selecting competing or benchmark organizations, the ideal number is three. The highest acceptable number of entities in a study is five, or it will become unwieldy (Paine 2011, 86).
- **Best Practices Benchmarking:** It concentrates on spotting the unarguable leaders in the process under benchmark. The organization studies business processes outside its industry, adopts better performing methods to make a leap in efficiency when comparing to its rivals. This kind of benchmark is not limited to geographical locations or characteristics of the industry involved (Wireman 2004). To put it in another word, this is a benchmark report where companies choose to look at a company or companies that they aspire to be like. By choosing companies that are on the leading edge of the industry, they can identify best practices that help improve their own company (What Is Benchmarking? – Definition, Types, Process & Examples, accessed on June 26, 2015).

7.4 Define Specific Key Performance Indicators for Audit

It is impossible to execute a social media audit without bringing up the concept of Key Performing Indicators (KPIs). It is essential that

organizations choose the correct KPIs or areas and tools to track progress on their social media goals. They illustrate the effectiveness of a campaign or program as it relates to reaching a specific target. The characteristic of a KPI depends on the nature of the measurement taking place (Blanchard 2011). Certainly, the main subjects of the social media audit will be major social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and so on. They will be the primary resource to apply KPIs throughout the whole auditing process.

Regarding the KPIs to perform the audit and measurement, there are three potential fields considered by the authors valuable and important. They will be listed next.

7.4.1 Branding

Branding elements should be consistent across the multiple media channels that an organization utilizes. They are the images supported by corporate identity which represent the organization throughout its social media properties (Breakenridge 2011). While each channel does not have to be a mimic of the other, there should be some branding details that flow through all of the outposts, so that each social media page is very clearly recognized as belonging to one's business (Gaenzle 2014). In this sub-category, there are bullet points to consider, such as:

- **Profiles:** All social media networks where an organization has its presence must be gathered for assessment. It is necessary to check the level of completion, meaning whether the existing media profiles have been filled with fundamental information about the brand or not. It is also important that all information is consistent and relevant across the channels (Bolsinger 2010).
- **Logo and brand images:** The organization needs to check if the correct and up-to-date logo is uploaded onto all of their social media platforms. The same logo and images will show consistency and as a result a recognition of identity throughout

different channels. Consistency is crucial in branding which means it is imperative that the one responsible for the social media efforts should stay in line with the rest of the organization (Bolsinger 2010).

- **Backgrounds:** Background colors/patterns of the social platforms should align with the company/organization's image. To add to that, as a rule of thumb, they need to be the same for all channels (Boame 2010).

7.4.2 Content

In order to be a useful source to customers, social media must have meaningful content to accompany it. During audit, organizations should pay attention to the type of information presented to their constituents and to see whether they consider it valuable enough to share with their networks. Alternatively, it is also a good sign if they would take the time to inform that they appreciate the information by any sort of engagement (Breakenridge 2011).

- **Topics of sharing content:** Auditors need to check if the content is relevant to the followers or not. Content should be associated with brand profiles, and they will affect the position of companies in the market (Bolsinger 2010). Furthermore, organizations should see if they have been adding or using anything else besides plain text, like links, photos, videos etc., and if they is visually appealing and also aligning with the general branding picture (Gaenzle 2014).
- **Frequency of sharing content:** It is not necessary to overload the audience with superficial information on a daily basis, meaning there are no obligations to post something every day. Valuable and meaningful content will leave an impression of genuineness on the readers, which will be appreciated much more than superfluous sources of information (Boame 2010).

- **Style guide:** An effective audit when checking the content either of the organization doing it or that of its competitors should try to indicate if there is a content style in place. The spotting of any emerging patterns for a content style will give hints for better and more engaging postings (Bolsinger 2010).

7.4.3 Tracking with Metrics

A metric is defined as a measurement system that quantifies data or dynamic characteristics. In research as well as business, metrics are employed to define goals, measure the degree of completion or the deviation, and subsequently implement measures to improve these metrics (Farris et al. 2006).

Organizations should utilize the analytic metrics available within major social media channels to gain insight into demographics, performance, follower behavior, and other indicators of user engagement (Gaenzle, 2014). With the existence of large volumes of social media data, there are simple metrics to gauge the public interest and opinions. They are generally categorized into two types: volume metrics or quantitative metrics and valence metrics or qualitative metrics (Moe et al. 2014, 11-14).

7.4.3.1 Volume/Quantitative Metrics

Volume/quantitative metrics are the signal of popularity and visibility of a social media presence. They can help businesses to go a long way when used appropriately (Moe et al. 2014, 11-14). This metric involves data which is generally numeric in nature and yielding sample sizes of statistical significance with repeatable results (Social Media Metrics and ROI, accessed on June 26, 2015). Nevertheless, one shortcoming of this kind of metric is that it fails to consider the nature of the activities/interactions that generate the social media volume (Moe et al. 2014, 11-14). Belonging to this field of measurement is some sub-categories and their corresponding metrics which hold different levels of meanings. The authors have selected

the key metrics that they consider most suitable to the social media audit for Lahti UAS and will introduce them in the coming section.

- **Reach:** a measurement of the size of audience you are communicating with. This data will benefit organizations by revealing the picture of their social media momentum. There are two supporting metrics, which are audience growth rate and total followers (Chitwood 2013).
 - **Total followers:** It is one of the most common metrics that brands track. However, it does not bear much influence as it is merely an expressing number of how big the size of a platform's audience is. The calculation is performed by counting the total number of followers/subscribers of a specific platform (Social Media Metrics and ROI, accessed on June 26, 2015).
 - **Audience growth rate:** Audience growth rate reflects the increase of followers and is one of the most used metrics. Organizations will be able to see if their social media efforts are making a splash when they have a significant increase in audience growth (Nowak 2014).

The calculation is as follow (in a certain observing period):

Audience growth rate

$$= \frac{\text{New number of followers} - \text{Old number of followers}}{\text{Old number of followers}} \times 100\%$$

- **Engagement:** the total number of likes, shares, and comments on a post. It is appreciated as an essential and meaningful metric. Engagement metric is the holy grail of measuring a firm's social media success and efforts. It also can actually measure a host of different items depending on the channel (Social Media Metrics and ROI, accessed on June 26, 2015). Engagement

rate, as defined by Simply Measured, is a consistent calculation meant to measure the level of engagement across all pieces of content shared on a particular platform, most notably Facebook (Osegi 2014). It is a measure of quality or efficiency and is calculated as engagement volume divided by the number of users or events that could have triggered the action (Yamaguchi 2014). Engagement rate is always relative to page size, which means that brands with one million followers will still be eligible to be compared to brands with only 100,000 followers, with unbiased results (Engagement Rate: A Metric You Can Count On, accessed on June 26, 2015). The authors will select two most significant metrics belonging to this sub-category to apply into the social media audit plan. They are average page engagement rate and average post engagement rate.

- **Average page engagement rate:** page activity engagement compared to overall followers. It allows you to check the pulse of your existing network and see how your social media efforts are resonating with this established base (Chitwood 2013).

The calculation is as follow (in a certain observing period):

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Average page engagement rate (\%)} \\ &= \frac{\text{Total interactions}}{\text{Total followers}} \times 100\% \end{aligned}$$

(Engagement Rate: A Metric You Can Count On, accessed on June 26, 2015)

- **Average post engagement rate:** post engagement compared to overall followers. The average engagement rate compares the posts' engagement with the channel's overall follower base (Chitwood 2013). Engagement rate on posts is also a valuable metric for measuring the quality of contents that are posted to the page. By

knowing what share of the audience actually engages with content, it can indicate the quality of the audience as well as that of content pieces over time (Smitha 2013).

The calculation is as follow (in a certain observing period):

Average post engagement rate

$$= \frac{\text{Total interactions} / \text{Number of posts made}}{\text{Total followers}} \times 100\%$$

(Engagement Rate: A Metric You Can Count On, accessed on June 26, 2015)

7.4.3.2 Valence/Qualitative metrics

Valence/qualitative metrics are capable of filling the void of sentimental expressions left by volume metrics. It captures the nature of the contents being expressed by the audiences (Moe et al. 2014, 13). Valence/qualitative data are founded on observations, and can then be tested using quantitative data (Social Media Metrics and ROI, accessed on June 26, 2015). There are three common valence metrics, which are average sentiment, the proportion of positive comments, and the ratio of positive to negative comments. These metrics are all purposed to indicate if the opinions expressed on social media channels are good or bad (Moe et al. 2014, 13). There is one valence metric; however, has the nature of a quantitative measurement, which is online rating systems. The opinions given to this rating system are quantitative in nature, hence there is no text input required. It still, nevertheless, belongs to the valence category (Moe et al. 2014, 13). The authors, after some considerations, decide to choose three valence metrics which will support them in analyzing the contents of online opinions on social media platforms. They are proportion of positive comments, ratio of positive to negative comments and online rating.

The method to evaluate valence metrics requires time investment, depending on the volume of the conversations taking place. To record the

emotional nature of interactions, auditors need to review the contents, evaluate the tone existing and designate a score. Scores generally are positive, negative and neutral (Dunham 2014).

- **Proportion of positive comments:** This is to see the scale of total positive opinions towards the organization on a specific social channel versus the whole volume.

The calculation is as follow (in a certain observing period):

Proportion of positive comments (%)

$$= \frac{\text{Total number of positive comments}}{\text{Total number of comments}} \times 100\%$$

(Moe et al. 2014, 13)

- **Ratio of positive to negative comments:** This is to see how positive opinions of the brand scale against its negative opinions. This could reveal how the current image of an organization is perceived on social media.

The calculation is as follow (in a certain observing period):

Ratio of positive comments to negative comments

$$= \frac{\text{Total number of positive comments}}{\text{Total number of negative comments}}$$

(Moe et al. 2014, 13)

- **Online ratings:** This metric is mostly available on Facebook. Organizations can have a quick glimpse at this indicator to understand how the current general opinion about them is.

7.5 Select measurement tools to collect data

Organizations need measurement tools to carry out the evaluation of their social media efforts. In reality, there is an abundance of tools at the disposal of organizations. However, the availability of each varies

according to many criteria, such as affordability, relevancy, usefulness, timeliness and so on. The selection of the correct tool relies on the objectives set out at the beginning of any social media audit plan (Paine 2011, 40).

There are three major tools that brands are suggested to look into. Each of them is distinct in nature and usage, and when utilized collaboratively they will unveil the big picture of the organization's social media landscape. They are web and statistical analysis, surveys, text mining and content analysis (Paine 2011, 88-89; Moe et al. 2014, 7-9).

7.5.1 Web and statistical analysis

These tools are more commonly used as the measuring ruler of financial outcomes. Nevertheless, it is also possible that they are used for none or indirect commercial objectives. With websites and other social media platforms, there are tools which are useful such as Google Analytics, Omniture or WebTrends. However, these tools have specific requirements to implement. Organizations need ownership of the sites to track, they need to purchase the tools or they are advised to have a certain level of technical expertise to run the software. Having access to software like SPSS or SAS can help organizations computing and analyzing the volume data collected. For small volume of data, it is understandable to use human input when analyzing. However, with bigger amount of data, in order to relieve the analyst from labor burden and chances of errors, the usage of these tools might help the evaluation arrive at a higher rate of accuracy (Paine 2011, 88-89).

7.5.2 Surveys

The history of surveys is far beyond the concept social media. In the past, it is used to measure awareness, preference, or perception that would not in any other way be possible without approaching people to ask for their opinions (Paine 2011, 88-89). Generally, it is the tool to gauge reputation and relationships. To handle the surveys, some free tools are available

online, such as SurveyMonkey or Zoomerang. There are also a number of established research agencies operating to meet the need (Paine 2011, 89).

7.5.3 Text mining

Text mining is the tool available to organizations to tackle a large volume of comments. It is the analysis of data contained in natural language text. Text mining works by transposing words and phrases in unstructured data into numerical values which can then be linked with structured data in a database and analyzed with traditional data mining techniques (Rouse 2013). Text mining can provide an organization a means to derive potentially beneficial business insights from text-based contents such as word documents, emails and postings on social media streams like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. With an iterative approach, an organization can successfully use text analytics to elaborate into content-specific values such as sentiment, emotion, intensity and relevance (Rouse 2013).

Depending on the level of complexity, there is a collection of different text mining tools available for usage. The two most commonly used are:

- **Word Count:** Word Count is simply the tool designed to count the number of times different words appear in a given set of comments. With the emergence of words heading towards a particular topic, organizations are given the power to indicate the popularity of such topic. It is necessary to process the raw data input in prior to a quantitative analysis. The input might need to be “stemmed”, meaning it needs to be traced back to the root word to reduce the number of words but still keeping the original and central meaning. An example could be “learn”, “learner” and “learners” all retracted to “learn” as the root word and only root words are counted (Moe et al. 2014, 8).

- **Word Cloud:** Word Cloud is the follow-up approach fed by the data from Word Count. It is the visual representation of the popularly used words detected in the volume of comments by Word Count (Moe et al. 2014, 8). The conversation circulating a specific topic can be anatomized and illustrated with root words standing for common opinions. In Word Cloud, the font size of the words is symbolic for the frequency they are mentioned. This approach is useful to brands since it is straightforward, constructed on Word Count Data and it shows how the brand's image is perceived in the eyes of audience (Moe et al. 2014, 8). One simple tool to create a word cloud is Jason Davies's Word Cloud Generator which takes in either URLs, feeds or plain texts to craft a visual representation of the desired purpose (Bennett 2011).

7.5.4 Content analysis

Content analysis is the means to measure the conversations taking place on social media universe. It adds the quality aspect to the quantity of the social media data in inspection. Since counting comments is not sufficient, organizations need content analysis to determine the quality of the discussions about their brands (Paine 2011, 90). In this case, the sole measurement of volume metrics will be misleading. Hence the importance of content analysis is grand as it helps organizations understand the overall sentiment surrounding a particular subject, or in other words, to listen in on conversations. This enables brands to create a broader and more complete picture of the social media data which matters to them (Dunham 2014). A well-executed content analysis will reveal recurring themes, complaints and messages that determine how a brand is perceived by its audience and constituencies. It is essential that brands also code their competitors' items in the same criteria when they perform for their own audit (Paine 2011, 90).

Media content analysis can either be performed by human readers or automated with computers. Computers are effective at handling huge volume of data, but they are inapt at determining key messages. Humans, on the other hand, can analyze complex messages with tonality and differences but they are slow paced and can be subject to bias. The following table will illustrate the pros and cons of the two.

Tool	Strengths	Limitations
Automated content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ High speed ❖ High efficiency ❖ Ability to assess large volume of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Inability to detect tonality ❖ Inability to determine complex messages
Manual content analysis	Efficient at determining tones, differences and complex messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Cumbersomeness ❖ Slow pace ❖ Subject to bias and inconsistency

Table 5. Comparison of Manual and Automated Media Content Analysis (Paine 2011, 49)

There are 4 steps to perform a content analysis.

Step 1. Finding the contents

Collection of contents is arduous for most measurement programs. Even monitoring services, using their search engines, cannot guarantee what kind of contents they will gather. There are some free-of-charge services that would be useful like Google Alert and Social Mention for brands. For Twitter specifically, there are Twazzup and TweetDeck (Paine 2011, 91).

However, most of the social media contents or conversations will be found on major channels. According to Paine (2011), the list includes the fourteen following main categories:

Blogs and comments	Comments	Social networks (Facebook)
Micromedia (Twitter)	Video sharing (YouTube)	Photo sharing (Flickr)
Forums	Social Bookmarking (Pinterest)	Broadcast media
Podcasts	Message boards	Online news media
Print media	Communities	

Table 6. Types of media channels (Paine 2011, 50)

Each of the channels holds a different level of influence and engagement. The authors will select most suitable platforms with the foundation based on Lahti UAS' current situation and the scope of this dissertation.

Step 2. Determining the type of conversations occurring

Brands can better concentrate on specific conversations and attach less importance to others if they categorize the buzz by topics. The nature of the conversations will be revealed by referencing them to the predetermined types, and the quantification of the categories in percentage will show which topics the audiences most engage with. This helps brands prioritize their responses and media efforts (Paine 2011, 91). The research at KDPaine & Partners arrives at a list of twenty seven different basic types of conversations that may take place. They are presented in the following table.

Acknowledging receipt of information	Advertising something	Answering a question
Asking a question	Augmenting a previous post	Calling for action
Disclosing personal information	Distributing media	Expressing agreement
Expressing criticism	Expressing support	Expressing surprise
Giving a heads-up	Responding to criticism	Giving a shout-out
Making a joke	Making a suggestion	Making an observation
Offering a greeting	Offering an opinion	Putting out a "Wanting for Free" ad
Rallying support	Recruiting people	Showing dismay
Soliciting comments	Soliciting help	Starting a poll

Table 7. Conversation types

By grouping the audience's interactions into these types, brands will understand the status quo of their social media traffic, meaning what the viewers are talking mostly about. During the implementation on Lahti UAS' social media data, the authors will try to determine how Lahti UAS' audiences and that of its benchmarks are responding to the organization in general and on a more specific levels to the content posted.

Step 3. Determine visibility of the brand

A vital component in indicating whether the circulating conversations about brands will be remembered or passed on is the visibility. Hence, it is suggested that brands should pay attention to where they are mentioned in the posts, videos or comments. The brands need to know if they are a focal point or just a fleeting mention. There are two attributes when discussing a brand's visibility. They are prominence and dominance (Paine 2011, 92).

- **Prominence:** Prominence is termed as the location of the first mention of the brand within an item. A more prominent a name is

in a comment/blog/post will result in the likelihood that the audience will remember it more. Therefore, by classifying the social media discussions in terms of prominence, organizations can know at what extent they will be remembered by the audience (Paine 2011, 92). Prominence can be assessed differently for text-based data and videos. With text data, prominence is determined as follows:

- *Photo*: The brand name is first found in a photo or in a photo caption.
 - *Headline*: The brand is firstly mentioned in the headline.
 - *Top 20 percent*: The brand is first mentioned in the top 20 percent of the item body.
 - *Bottom 80 percent*: The brand is first mentioned in the bottom 80 percent of the item body.
- (Paine 2011, 92)

With video items, the metric is assessed by:

- *Video start*: The brand is first mentioned or shown at the start of the video (first 25 percent).
 - *Video middle*: The brand is first mentioned in the middle of the video (26 to 75 percent).
 - *Video end*: The brand is first mentioned at the end of the video (76 to 100 percent).
- (Paine 2011, 92)

- **Dominance**: Besides prominence, there is another attribute to look at for brands, which is dominance. It is to gauge the extent to which a brand stands as the focus or the spotlight of an item. The metric is attributed by four levels of dominance.
 - *Exclusive*: Whether the studied brand is the only one to be included or mentioned in the item.
 - *Dominant*: The brand is the main focus of the item but it is not the only one mentioned.
 - *Average*: The mention of the brand is one of many integral parts of the story, with no significant prevalence.

- *Minimal*: The missing in mentioning of the brand causes no concern to the audience.

(Paine 2011, 92)

Step 4. Determine sentiment/ tonality or presence or absence of recommendations

The measurement of sentiment will determine whether the audience is supporting and recommending a brand (Paine 2011, 93). Sentiment analysis embarks on measuring the tones and tenors of a conversation revolving around a certain topic or item. In a social media context, it is most commonly used to tell whether people advocate, detest or are balanced about respective brands or campaigns (Social Media Metrics and ROI, accessed on June 26, 2015).

According to HootSuite (Dunham 2014), a sentiment analysis has some usages like:

- Evaluating a brand's health
- Heading off a crisis
- Aiding competitive research
- Evaluating campaigns and other initiatives

The appropriate path to perform a sentiment analysis is a subject of debate. There is an on-going discussion whether computers or humans are more fit to the job. However, regarding the benefits mentioned previously on how humans more accurately carry out the process, it is recommended that human coding is utilized for sentiment analysis (Paine, 2011).

The categories of sentiment values are suggested as follows:

- **Favorable or positive:** Comments making the audiences likely to join or support the organization
- **Negative:** Comments making the audiences less inclined to work with, to join or refer the brand to another

- **Neutral:** No sentiment detected from the comments, hence showing neither positive nor negative expression (Paine 2011, 94)

Basing on the proportion of sentiment value, brands can have an overview of their social media efforts and how their brand's online presence is affecting the audiences. Also, a hint that reflects good publicity lies in the presence or absence of brands' recommendations from the audiences. If the brand is having a good standing in public's opinions, people may praise and advocate it via recommendations on social media. When performing social media audits, organizations may as well consider this piece of information to know better of their audience's thinking towards them.

7.6 Collecting Data, Analyzing Results, Making Recommendations and Reiterating

The most crucial part of a social media audit or any other measurement program is reaching insight from data collected. It is essential that analysts arrive at valid and actionable conclusions. By using the tools, brands can determine the areas yielding good results and those that are not. Brands are also expected to spot the trends that are reflected through the analyses of data (Paine 2011, 95-96). It shows the relationships, performances and related issues over a period of time which helps preparing brands to confront past problems. Furthermore, competitive results are of the essence because it grants organizations the ability to locate their position with indicators of where their benchmarks are, so that they know where to navigate their social media effort to achieve success. Another point for brands to stay focus on is that at its core, measurement is also an iterative process. It is meant for continuous improvement, and the cycle of measuring – reaching results – implementing new solutions must be repeated so as to arrive at any meaningful outcomes (Paine 2011, 95-96).

Paine (2011) in her book introduced five ways to assess the success of the social media measurement. They are:

- **Sales or revenue:** It is the simplest definition of success. Brands can link actual sales to their social media activity.
- **Cost savings:** Using social media can help mitigate the costs needed for various departments and procedures, such as recruitment, customer service or marketing and so on.
- **Paid versus earned search rankings:** Brands will spend less money on social media advertising given they can boost the efficiency of their current media effort.
- **Cost avoidance:** When companies are immersed in crises, social media is able to decrease the extent and duration of the crises. If the companies have good relationships with its stakeholders, and they have their presence on social media, the brand's advocates will express their support via social media.
- **Social capital:** This is an important notion and was studied by Professor Robert Putnam. It pointed out that good social capital for a brand means better flow of information, increase in innovation and efficiency, and decrease in legal costs. When put in a social media context, it means if a post is generating positive comments, engaging audience, disseminating information faster and more accurately, the post itself is creating more social capital for the brand.

With regards to these output goals, the authors can assess how much success Lahti UAS' social media efforts are generating. The comparison with benchmarks and competitors will also pinpoint areas in which improvements can be made. Recommendations and plans, either short or long term, can be suggested to reallocate resources to where there are needs for revamping.

8 CASE STUDY – LAHTI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES (LAHTI UAS)

In this chapter, the authors would like to provide background information as well as current social media assets of our case – Lahti UAS.

8.1 Background Information of Lahti University of Applied Sciences

Lahti University of Applied Sciences (Lahti UAS) is a part of a bigger Lahti Region Educational Consortium (LREC), an organization which devotes itself to providing regional educational expertise and know-how via vocational education and training (Lahti Region Educational Consortium, accessed on February 16, 2015). LREC is a joint project of several municipalities in Lahti region (e.g. Asikkala, Hartola, Heinola, Hollola, Hämeenkoski, Kuhmoinen, Kärkölä, Lahti, Nastola, Orimattila, Padasjoki, Pertunmaa and Sysmä), aiming at “training competent workforce and promoting regional competitiveness” (Our Organization, accessed on February 16, 2015). Lahti UAS strategic position within LREC is displayed in the diagram below.

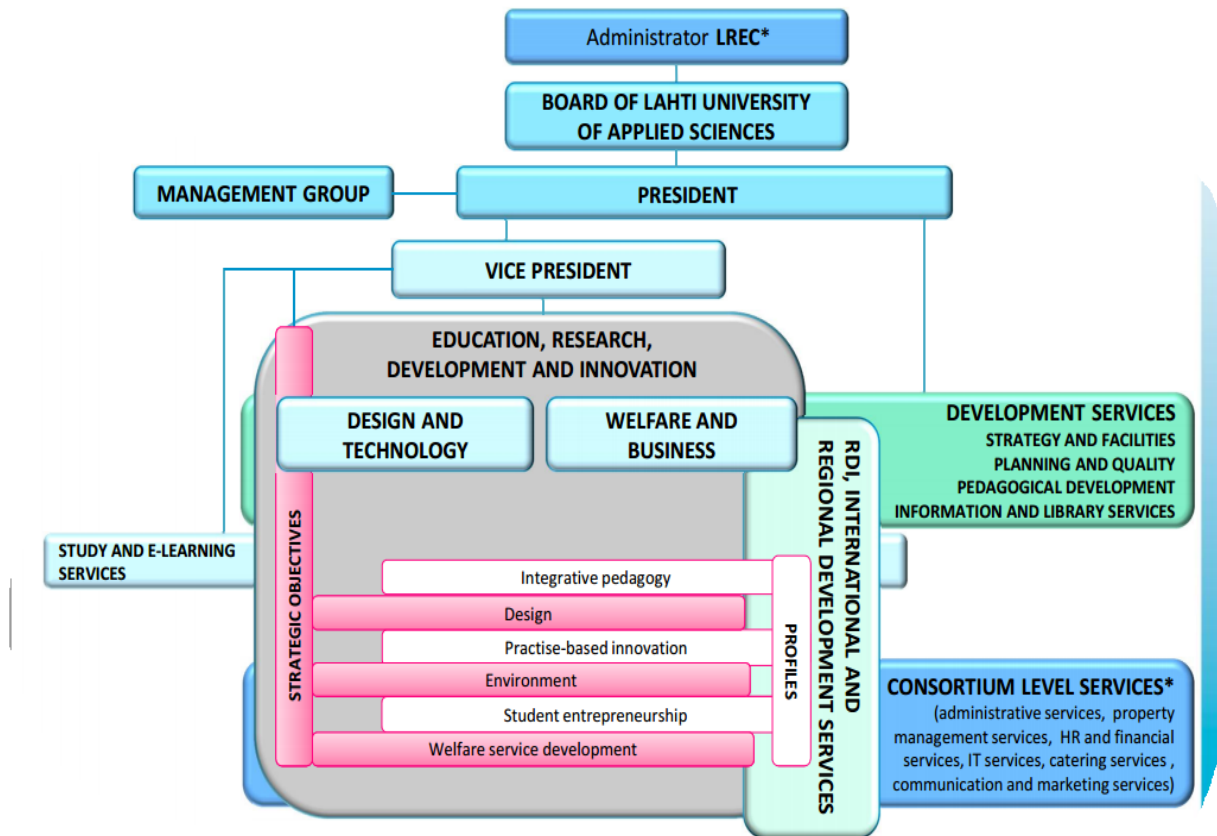


Figure 7. Lahti UAS organization chart (Our Organization – Organization Chart, accessed on 16 February, 2015)

As depicted in the picture, in strategic management, LREC is responsible for developing Lahti region and determining regional objectives. Lahti UAS' task is supporting LREC to fulfill these objectives. From the functionality perspective, between LREC and Lahti UAS, there is also division of responsibilities. While LREC provides business- and managerial-related services such as administrative services, human resources and financial services, IT services, catering services, and communication and marketing services etc, Lahti UAS focuses on “pedagogical development, planning and quality assurance, RDI (research, development and innovation), international and regional development, strategy and facilities, and studying and eLearning” (Our Organization, accessed on February 16, 2015).

Lahti UAS is also a member of the Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences (FUAS), an alliance of three independent universities of applied sciences (UASs) in the Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area: Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK) and Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area consists of Uusimaa, Päijät-Häme, Kanta-Häme, and Southern Pirkanmaa. It is the most populous region in Finland and also plays an important role in economic, cultural and innovation aspects of the whole Finland (FUAS Federation Universities of Applied Sciences: FUAS in English, accessed on February 23, 2015).

At this time, FUAS is the biggest association of UASs in Finland with approximately 19 500 students (which accounts for 14 percent of total number of students in UASs in Finland) (FUAS Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences, accessed on February 23, 2015). FUAS is in charge of the greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area development by providing professional, competitive and competence workforce. FUAS intends to achieve its goal through

- Taking advantage of each member institution's expertise, focus areas and network
- Nurturing strong cooperation among member institutions
- Planning mutual higher education policy (FUAS Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences, accessed on 23 February, 2015)

Particularly, in FUAS-vision 2020, FUAS encourages its member institutions to offer their students "high quality education and the broadest range of study opportunities throughout the academic year" and offer businesses in the greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area the most comprehensive RDI service products (FUAS Federation Universities of Applied Sciences: FUAS in English, accessed on February 23, 2015).

At the present, Lahti UAS is a regional- and international-respected educational provider with more than 5000 students and 350 staff members

(FUAS Federation Universities of Applied Sciences: FUAS-strategy 2015 – 2020). Lahti UAS offers both bachelor and master degree programs in different disciplines and in both Finnish and English languages. The bachelor's and master's degree programs available in English at Lahti UAS, which have attracted considerable amount of attention from international students, are listed below.

Bachelor's degree programs in English	Business Information Technology
	International Business
	Nursing
Master's degree programs in English	Environmental Technology
	International Business Management
	Social and Health Care Development and Management
	Information and Communications Management

Table 8. Degree programs in English at Lahti UAS (Bachelor's Degree Programs and Master's Degree Programs, accessed on February 23, 2015)

The number of international degree students in Lahti UAS, according to statistics of 2013, is 300 students and the number of international exchange students in the same year is 375. Although the proportion of international students is not high in comparison with the total students in Lahti UAS, they are the main object in the internationalization process and majority of international activities are targeting this small niche of Lahti UAS population (Strategy – Lahti University of Applied Sciences, International Strategy 2013 – 2016, accessed on February 24, 2015).

As discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, globalization has taken the world like a storm and imposed significant changes in education sector. Parallel with the increasing number of international students, academic institutions worldwide have decided to employ marketing practices to gain attention of their customers. As a result, many higher

education institution as well as governments at all levels (e.g. local, regional and national) have taken a great interest in international students' preference (Cubillo et al. 2006, 102)

In order to satisfy the demand of educational market and strengthen regional competitiveness as an education destination, both LREC's and FUAS' strategies emphasize the crucial role of internationalization. LREC has a vision of "an international center of expertise in learning and sustainable reform" (Strategy – Lahti University of Applied Sciences, accessed on February 23, 2015), while FUAS goal for 2020 is becoming "an internationally respected federation of independent higher education institutions" (Strategy – FUAS Strategy 2011 – 2015, accessed on February 23, 2015). As a member of both LREC and FUAS, Lahti UAS supports and incorporates the strategic intents of these two organizations into its own vision and strategy. In 2020, Lahti UAS hopes to become "an insightful, experiential and exploratory Lahti UAS 2020 – promoter of regional growth and international reformer of future learning" (Strategy – Facts and Figures of Lahti University of Applied Sciences, accessed on February 23, 2015).

Based on this vision, Lahti UAS has also put forward its own declaration of core purposes, its mission, as a foundation for future action plans. Lahti UAS' mission is stated as follows:

- "Lahti Universities of Applied Sciences is an influential higher education institution in the Lahti region with an international reputation and a global network of partners. Lahti UAS prepares students for successful careers as experts in their chosen fields.
- Lahti UAS strengthens the region's knowledge and skills base and enhances its competitiveness and well-being through proactive activities in education, research, development and innovation.
- Lahti UAS is a brave, flexible and inspiring partner. Students and learning are at the centre of its activities, as well as the well-being of staff."

(Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Strategy 2020, accessed on September 5, 2015)

Through the 2020 vision and mission, Lahti UAS has expressed its strong commitment in transforming itself as a sensible option of international students as well as aiming at building an international profile and reputation. In order to achieve this vision and mission, Lahti UAS has to think about branding not only at regional and national level but also at international level. Social media has been proven a powerful tool for this task in many circumstances and this dissertation is aiming at examining how Lahti UAS can use social media for its benefits. However, before reaching that part, the authors would like to provide some background knowledge of Lahti UAS' current profiles in various social network sites.

8.2 Overview of Lahti UAS' Social Media Assets

At this moment, Lahti UAS has its brand presented on a wide range of different social media platforms. Besides the main official website, it promotes seven other social networking sites, which are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, Flickr and Instagram. Lahti UAS' image is broadcast through these channels to its various audiences—students, teachers and the like. The authors will compile a brief introduction to Lahti UAS' current presence on these platforms in order to inform the readers of its virtual dimensions' status before going to the subsequent research on Lahti UAS' media profiles.

On Facebook, Lahti UAS has approximately 2,400 followers who are students, teachers, staff and more. Many of whom are international students who are studying full time at Lahti UAS. This is also the biggest channel in possession of Lahti UAS and Lahti UAS' Facebook page was created in 2010. LinkedIn comes in as the second largest social platform of Lahti UAS in terms of size. Lahti UAS has over 1,000 followers on its LinkedIn account with a small proportion of its audience being international degree students. In regards to Twitter, Lahti UAS has a follower base of 972 followers and it is the third biggest social channel of Lahti UAS. There

are more than 1,500 tweets updated on it so far and the majority of its audience is from Finland.

Pinterest is a relatively new platform and Lahti UAS has twelve followers on this page with thirty pinned posts. Next, on YouTube, Lahti UAS has around 47 subscribers with the total number of videos uploaded at more than thirty. It joined the site in 2009 and this is the main channel to promote about Lahti UAS' brand in forms of cinematic graphics and motions. Lahti UAS joined Flickr network in 2012 and up until this dissertation it has 17 followers with a substantial number of more than 2,000 photos uploaded onto the site. Most of Lahti UAS' activities are captured and kept there as a photograph storage. The final platform is Lahti UAS' Instagram with more than 600 followers. It has over 400 posts and this is a vibrant channel which is gaining more popularity over time.

By analyzing the performance of Lahti UAS' efforts on certain platforms, the authors hope to find out insights that will lead to recommendations for the improvement of Lahti UAS' image to international students.

9 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter will be dedicated to explaining step-by-step the construction of empirical research for this dissertation, especially the emphasis on data collection and data analysis procedures.

9.1 Data Collection and Data Analysis for Survey

Procedures concerning how the primary data for this dissertation is gathered and processed using quantitative methods will be described in details in the next sections.

9.1.1 Data Collection Choice

Survey is referred to “all methods of data collection in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order” (deVaus, 2002, according to Saunders, et al., 2009 p. 360). Survey is the most frequently used method for collecting primary data in descriptive studies as it allows the researchers to analyze the phenomena from different angles (Saunders et al. 2009, 419).

In this dissertation, the survey is chosen as a tool to put together a clear picture of the decision-making process as well as the preferences of international students when choosing a higher education institution in a foreign country. The survey aims at finding the answers to the following research question:

What were preferences of current international students when deciding to choose Lahti UAS?

The population that interests the authors in this survey is potential and current international students of Lahti UAS. At Lahti UAS, international students are from two different categories: degree students (who are pursuing a Bachelor or Master Degree) and exchange students (whose stay and study at the university last only for one or two semesters). Potential international students of Lahti UAS are related to individuals who

show interests in studying at Lahti UAS, indicated through signified actions such as asking for information of Lahti UAS, or actively participating in the social network sites of the university. Current international students are defined as foreign students who are studying at Lahti UAS at present, regardless of the length of study or study program.

In this survey, the authors wish to implement sampling techniques due to the following reasons:

- It is impractical and infeasible to study the whole population as many potential international students of Lahti UAS cannot be identified and reached even with the aid of modern technology (e.g. internet and telecommunication).
- Time constraint imposed in this dissertation prevents the authors from conducting the survey on the entire population of interest.
- Other resources restraints such as lack of budget or personnel make sampling a logical decision in this case.

As mentioned previously in this dissertation, primary data is acquired through survey and observation. Both of these two data collection methods are able to provide sufficient and diverse data for the research; however, the methods do not intertwine. Thereby, they can be conducted simultaneously. This section will be dedicated only to the data collection process for the survey. A separate section will be devoted to describing the implemented approach to gather primary data by observation in this research.

The timeline for conducting the survey is illustrated below.

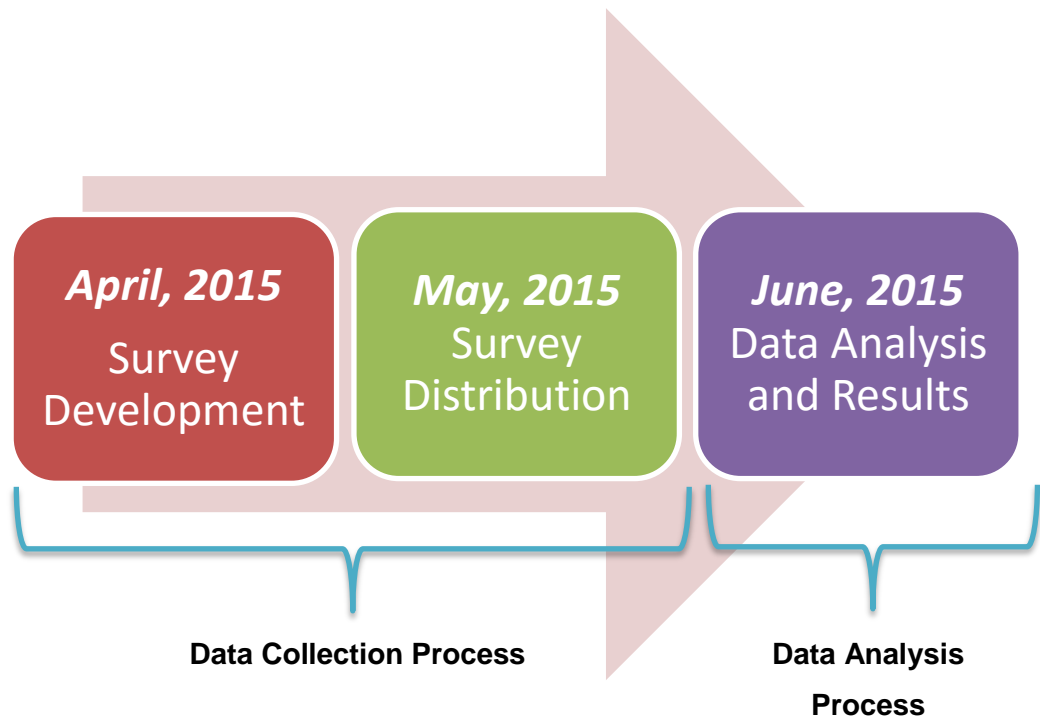


Figure 8. Timeline for the survey

The month of April 2015 was mainly dedicated for literature research. The authors studied theories concerning consumer behaviors and knowledge concerning conducting a study using survey as data collection tool. The survey was distributed in both paper version and electronic version during May, 2015. Then, from the beginning of June 2015, the responses collected were subject to various quantitative data analysis techniques in order to seek valuable insights for the research problem.

9.1.2 Data Collection Process

Step-by-step explanation of data collection process for the survey will be illustrated in the section below.

9.1.2.1 Survey Development

To conduct a valid and reliable research for this dissertation, the authors implemented the following survey development process.

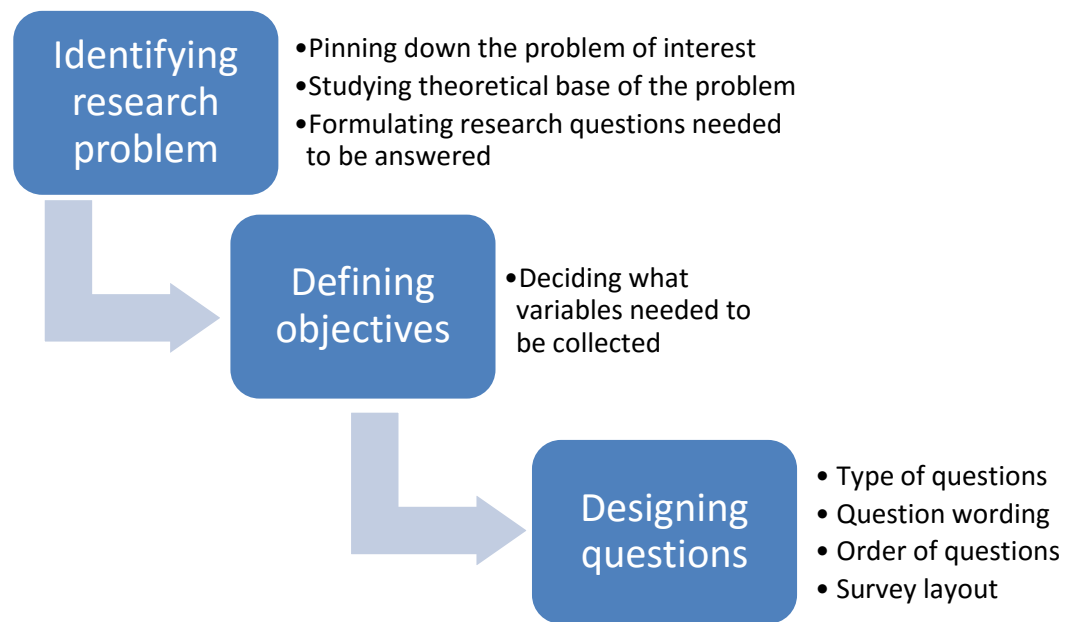


Figure 9. Survey development process for Lahti UAS case, adapted from Kananen (2013, 137-150) and Fowler (2009, 116-118)

Identifying Research Problem

Remarkd as one of the most commonly used data collection methods in deductive approach of a problem, survey is associated with using corresponding theories and models to make sense of a certain phenomenon in real life. The phenomenon which the researchers would like to explain is posed as a research problem. The research problem is then converted into research questions and the ultimate goal of the research is to seek the answers to these research questions by using relevant data sources and materials. Moreover, while drafting research design, researchers are often enticed into including questions that do not really contribute to the research goal. Therefore, aligning survey design with the research questions is extremely critical to avoid such circumstances. (Kananen 2013, 134.)

A questionnaire or survey includes a collection of questions, which represent variables of the phenomenon the researcher wishes to examine. It is necessary to emphasize once again that, for the success of the study,

the questionnaire question should be derived from the understanding of research problem, research questions and the relevant theories and models on the phenomenon (Kananen 2013, 136). In the figure below, the authors wish to illustrate how they can produce the appropriate questions for the survey to solve the research problem of Lahti UAS case.

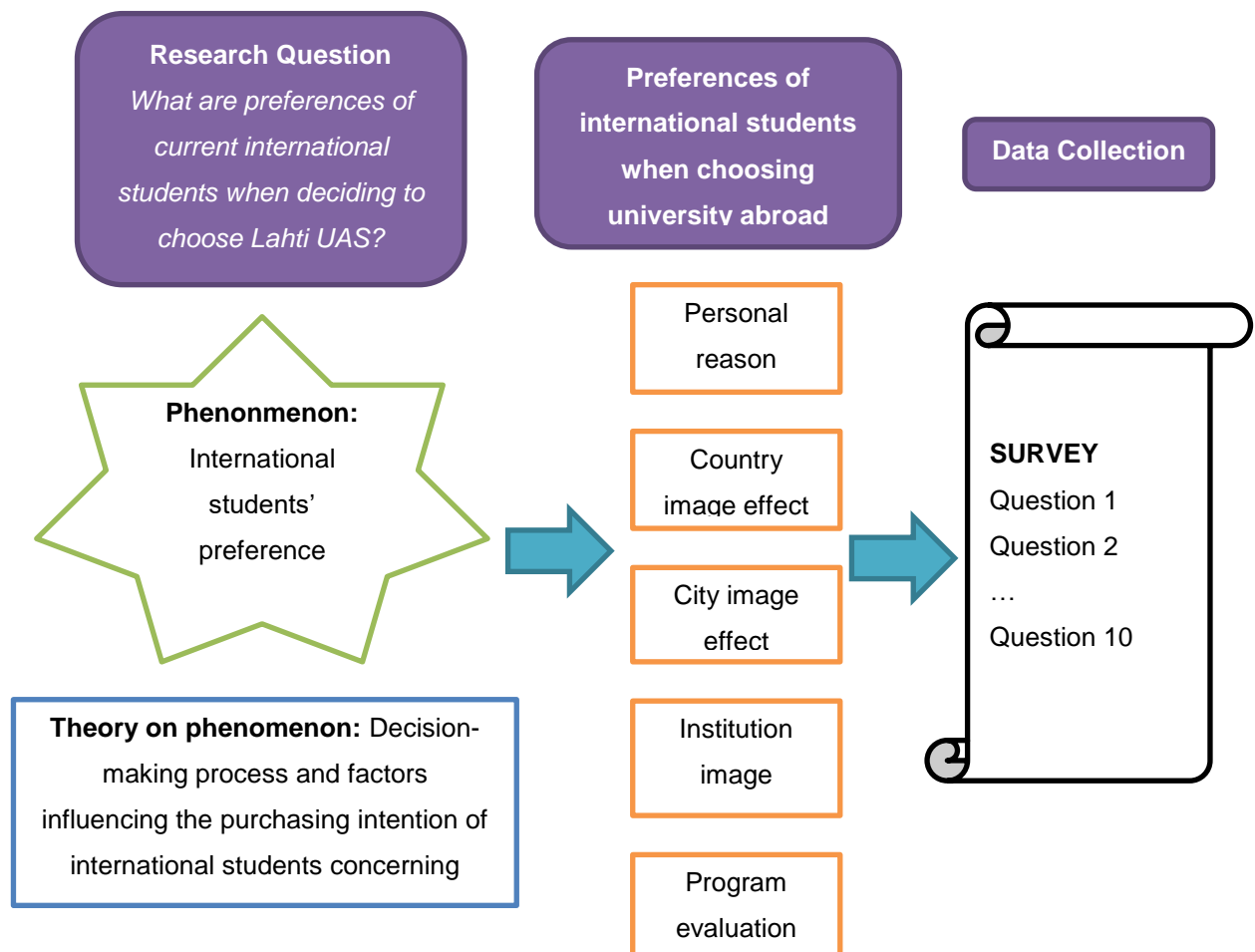


Figure 10. Derivation of survey from research problem, applied to the Case of Lahti UAS, updated from Kananen (2013, 136)

The authors took interest in the phenomenon that, concerning choosing educational services abroad, international students developed a list of preferences to help screening the options and choosing the most suitable institution. The motivating forces may vary and the weighted factors may be different from individuals to individuals. International students applying for Lahti UAS are not an exception. They have chosen this university

based on their desirability regarding the specific outstanding characteristics of educational service package from Lahti UAS.

Notably, the most influential variables can still be detected as studying overseas is considered a high-risk purchase and it calls for a great deal of research and rational decision-making processes from the buyer. The influential factors in this process were identified throughout numerous academic studies. By using these variables in the survey for international students at Lahti UAS, the authors wish to single out the most powerful forces that have motivated its students to choose Lahti UAS as the final destination. The five main groups of factors tested are personal reason, country image effect, city image effect, institution image, and program evaluation.

Defining Objectives

After identifying research problem, the next step for designing a good survey is to develop a set of objectives concerning how to achieve the predetermined goal. More specifically, the researchers should develop refined ideas about the following two domains: the target population and the variables to be measured. The target population in survey is referred to a particular group of people the research wishes to describe (Ornstein 2013, 61). While defining the objectives for the research, researchers should form a list of unique characteristics of the target population and categorize them into subgroups to apply special estimates if needed (Fowler 2009, 116).

Another list of variables to be measured should be developed at this stage also. The list of variables should include (a) dependent variables for measuring central tendency (e.g. mean or medians) (b) independent variables for understanding distribution and potentials patterns or relationship and (c) control variables if needed for explaining detected patterns or relationship and examining contradicting hypotheses (Fowler 2009, 116)

Relating to this dissertation, the authors have applied the mentioned requirements for defining objectives stage to ensure the reliability and validity for the research. The characteristics for target population in this research will be explained in details in the next section of survey distribution and the list of variables to be measured will be described carefully in the data analysis part.

Designing Questions

In this stage, several decisions are needed to be made concerning how to design individual questions and how to put them strategically together. The purpose is to avoid potential biases and errors and to gather essential information for the research. These decisions made by the authors in the matter of research design for this dissertation will be explained carefully in the next section.

Type of Questions

Questions in a survey can be set in various ways depending on the intentions of the researchers. The majority of surveys employs a combination of open questions and closed questions to balance the advantages and disadvantages when using only one type of questions. Open questions encourage the respondents to give answers in their own way. The biggest advantage of this type of question is the ability to gather the most accurate and detailed information from the respondent related to the studied problem. However, as the survey requires a large sample size, the coding and processing information gathered with open questions will be extremely time consuming. (Saunders et al. 2009, 433.) On the other hand, closed questions supply the respondents with a number of alternatives and they can choose the closest alternative to their opinion about the asked problems. This type of questions is quicker and easier to answer, as they demand minimum amount of writing. It is also less time-consuming for the research to group and code responses. (Saunders et al. 2009, 432.) Nevertheless, by classification the responses in advanced, the

research may encounter the risk of losing information accuracy and omission of possibly critical answers (Kananen 2013, 138).

In the survey for this dissertation, the authors have used both closed questions and open questions, with closed questions occupying a bigger proportion than the open questions. The rational judgement for this decision is listed below.

- Firstly, it requires little time (approximately 5 to 10 minutes) to answer the whole survey. Minimal writing does not require respondents to spend a lot of time over how to put their opinions together in form of text. Moreover, less time-consuming survey and minimal writing also have positive effects on the response rate.
- Secondly, for this research, the authors' main interest is to study how international students of Lahti UAS establish their own list of preferences from specific variables selected from various preceded studies. Although there are "other" options to explore unforeseen responses, the primary concern is still analyzing the relationship among predetermined variables.
- Last but not least, by mainly using closed questions, it is easier for the authors to classify the answers and process a large amount of returned surveys, in this case 97 submissions altogether.

Question Wording

In survey, questions are a principal instrument for gathering raw material for the research; thereby the quality of the whole research depends heavily upon how the questions are asked. The researchers need to take into great consideration in paraphrasing every single question to guarantee the clarity of the answers (Kananen 2013, 150). The respondents should have a clear idea what problem is posed in the question and the research should also prevent the situations in which the

respondents have to interpret the question in their own way. These interpretations usually result in misunderstanding the intended meaning of the question (Fowler 2009, 124). Complex sentence structure adds potential misconception and diverts a lot of energy from the respondents into comprehending the question rather than considering their opinion (Kananen 2013, 149).

In addition, with the self-administered survey (e.g. internet survey) as in this dissertation, a clear instruction is also needed to give the respondents the general purposes of the survey and the required actions from them. Another issue to consider is that the survey for this research is in English, and it is not the primary language of majority of Lahti UAS' international students, the question should be paraphrased in even clearer and simpler way to ensure that all the respondents understand the questions in the same way and are able to provide the required information. In this research, the question wording is discussed and reviewed thoroughly between the authors to avoid unclear and confusing questions and instructions.

Order of Questions

Apart from the questions, the order of questions is another inseparable and critical aspect in designing survey. The order and flow of the question should be deemed to be logical to the respondents instead of following rigidly the predetermined variable list (Saunders et al. 2009, 444). The structure of a typical survey usually consists of two parts: the questions helping the researchers answer the research problem and the questions providing the background information of the respondent (e.g. age, gender, and income level). These background information are useful when comparing the sample with the target population and when categorizing the research results. (Kananen 2013, 148.)

The survey for this research also adopts this common structure. The survey begins with questions that are able to provide information of the most important factors for international students when choosing Lahti UAS

and ends with asking for personal information of the students such as major, study group and length of time staying in Finland.

The authors also implemented another advised arrangement of questions, in which the structure of the survey should progress from general questions to more detailed questions. The questions providing the big picture of the discussed issue is put forward, followed by questions asking for more details on various aspects of that issue. By using this arrangement, the research can first equip the respondents with general understanding about the nature of the studied issues, and then guide them gently through the survey with increasingly detailed and difficult questions. From the respondents' viewpoint, they also find it easy to follow general-to-detailed flow of questions (Kananen 2013, 148).

In this dissertation, questions related to main groups of preference factors (e.g. personal reason, country image effect, city image effect, institution image and study program) will be presented first. After that, the respondents will be asked about more specific variables in each main group of factors. By this way, the authors can signal the respondents which groups of preference factors they are interested in, and how each group can be defined by variables.

Survey Layout

Layout is another important decision relating to designing survey, and even more important to designing a self-administered survey. The overall appearance of the survey should be considered attractive to encourage the respondents to accomplish and return it (Saunders et al. 2009, 446). According to experts, self-administered survey should appear to be clear and uncluttered in the respondents' eyes. Many studies have proved that cramming many questions in a page has a negative effect on the response rate in comparison with distributing the same amount of questions in more pages (Fowler 2009, 121).

Findings also indicate that the length of the survey has notable impacts on the response rate; however, these impacts are mixed. There is belief

among researchers that the longer surveys have relatively lower response rate in comparison with the shorter ones. In contrary, a short survey may convey a notion to the respondents that the research is insignificant and is not worth to be considered. Saunders, et al. (2009, 446) suggests that four to eight A4 pages is ideal length for self-administered surveys.

Adhering to the advice from the experts, the authors have tried their best to create a survey that can be, at the same time, appealing to the respondents and fulfilling its task of gathering the necessary information for the research. In order to be appealing to the respondents, the layout was designed to be clear and neat as the questions were distributed evenly over four A4 pages, and there were no more than three questions per page. The authors also used online survey tool – Webropol – to produce a professional-looking survey. The survey consisted of ten questions, which did not take too much time for the respondents to complete (approximately ten minutes at most) and was not too short to appear insignificant. The questions were designed to be sufficient to meet the research questions and objectives; any redundant questions were trimmed. The layout was thoroughly checked to ensure that it was logical, simple and understandable to the respondents.

9.1.2.2 Survey Distribution

This stage is sub-divided into three smaller steps depicted in the diagram below.

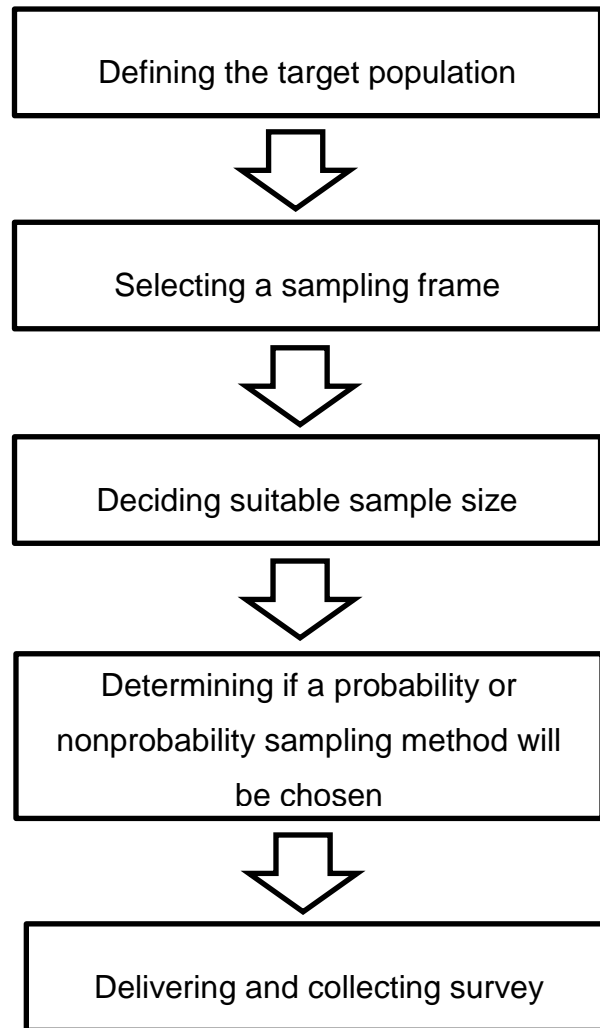


Figure 11. Procedure of survey distribution (Saunders et al. 2009; Zikmund et al. 2010)

Defining the target population

In research methodology, target population is referred to the entire group of individuals that the survey aims at describing. Each individual in the target population is referred as an element (Ornstein 2013, 61). In sampling procedure, target population must be carefully defined so that the sources of primary data for the research can be identified. Target population is usually defined by establishing a list of essential characteristics that each individual included in the population should possess. Within the scope of this dissertation, the target population for the survey must satisfy the following two conditions.

1. They must be international students coming from other countries to study at Finland.
2. They must be studying at Lahti UAS at the present.

Currently, at Lahti UAS, international students are mainly present in some bachelor degree programs (International Business, Business Information Technology and Nursing) and in several master degree programs (Environmental Technology, International Business Management, Social and Healthcare Development and Management, Information and Communication Technology). These programs are all taught in English. Every semester, Lahti UAS welcome exchange students from different countries in Europe and around the world. In the spring semester from January to May of 2015, Lahti UAS has 84 exchange students and 324 non-Finnish degree students (both in bachelor and master degree programs). These total 408 international students are identified as the population of the survey for this dissertation.

Selecting sampling frame

Sampling frame is defined as a list of population elements from which the sample may be drawn (Zikmund et al. 2010, 391). In the case of Lahti UAS, there is an official list of currently registered international students from which the authors can use as sampling frame. A sample is selected from a list consisting of individual elements in the entire population is called a list sample (Ornstein 2013, 62).

Determining suitable sample size

Sampling techniques are usually used in the circumstances in which time and money constraints and the impossibility to collect data from every element in the population are present. Sampling also allows the possibility of generalizing the findings from the sample to the entire population. However, such generalization still has to obey some rules. Statistically speaking, the larger the sample size is, the more accurate the findings is. Economically speaking, the larger the sample size is, the more resources such as time and money are required. Therefore, researchers have to

compromise between the accuracy of the data collected and the resources available (Saunders et al. 2009, 265). The compromise is made based on decision relating to the following issues.

- The confidence of the collected data – the level of certainty that the characteristics of the acquired data are the exemplar of the characteristic of the population
- The tolerable margin of error – the level of accuracy demanded from any generalization made from the sample. Researchers usually are satisfied with the margin of error of 5 percent.
- The types of analyses the data will be subjected to, for example, subdivision data, and Chi-square test
- The size of the total population (Saunders et al. 2009, 265.)

Fortunately, in Lahti UAS case, the authors did not need to compromise much accuracy of the collected data. As the target population is also the population and the sampling frame, the authors are confident that the data gathered will bear the characteristics of the whole population. Moreover, the advanced communication technology such as emails and internet allows the author to reach the entire population of 408 international students at Lahti UAS. Such sample size will reduce the margin of error to the minimum (approximately 1 percent or less).

Determining if a probability or nonprobability sampling method will be chosen

The authors decided to choose probability sampling method for the survey of this dissertation. Probability sampling method is usually used in parallel with collecting data by survey, and generalization of the results is needed to answer the research questions. In probability sampling, all the elements in the population have a known and nonzero probability to be selected. As the survey is sent to 408 international students of Lahti UAS by emails, each student has 100 percent of probability to become a section in the sample.

Delivering and collecting surveys

In order to ensure a satisfactory response rate, the distribution of the survey was divided into two stages. The first stage was that paper surveys would be distributed in two classes of International Marketing course, one was for the first year students and another was for the second year students. This course was a part of the curriculum for International Business degree program; therefore, the participants of this course were mostly international students. The Finnish students were identified and were asked not to participate in the survey. The paper surveys were distributed on April 28, 2015.

The second stage was distributing the survey via emails. An email with a link to the pre-designed online survey was sent to the international office of Lahti UAS – the department handling all affairs concerning international students. This department kindly helped the authors to forward the emails to all the international students registered in the school system. The online survey was public on May 4, 2015. The publication of the online survey was intentionally scheduled after the distribution of the paper survey. Therefore, the students who had completed already the paper survey would know the online survey was the same one and would avoid doing it again. On May 18, 2015, a reminder was sent to the international students in the same manner to remind them to complete the survey in case they had not done it. The online survey was closed on the May 24, 2015.

With the paper survey, the collection of the responses occurred immediately after the respondents completed the survey. With the online survey, the Webropol platform combined the data automatically. After the survey was closed, the authors could export the collected data to an Excel file. The data from the paper surveys were entered manually into the same Excel file. The authors collected 97 responses in total.

9.1.3 Data Analysis

In this section, the authors wish to illustrate how the data gathered from the survey is manipulated and analyzed. As the utmost goal of processing the acquired data is to be able to find the relevant answer to the research questions, the authors were critical when choosing appropriate data analysis techniques. The data will be subject to the following data analysis process. Each stage of data analysis process will be explained in details in this section.

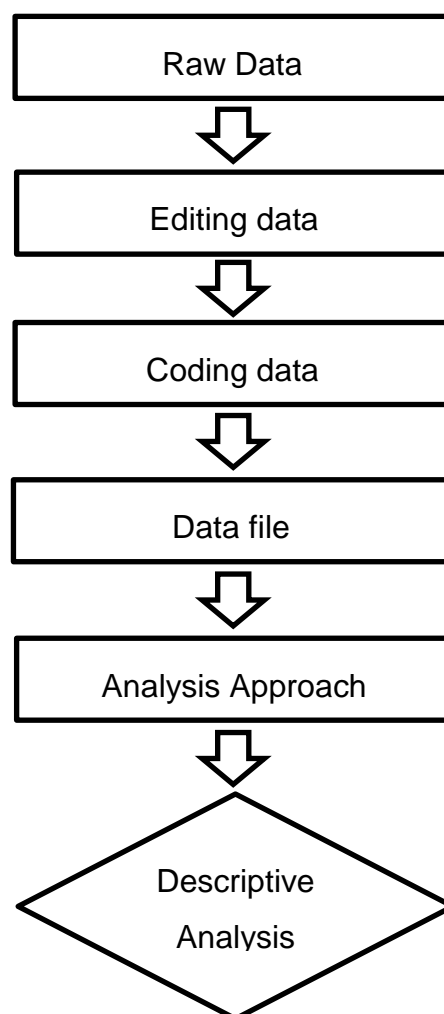


Figure 12. Quantitative Data Analysis Process, adapted from Zikmund et al. (2010, 462)

9.1.3.1 Editing Data

After the data collection stage, the authors gathered 98 responses but only 97 responses were usable. One response was eliminated because of the missing information related to the respondents' background (e.g. nationality, discipline and study group and length of staying in Finland). The data combined automatically by Webropol platform was exported to Excel file. On the same Excel file, the data collected in distributed paper surveys was keyed in to create a consolidated data file.

After the inputting of data, the editing and coding stage followed. Editing is referred to "the process of checking and adjusting data for omission, consistency and legibility" (Zikmund et al. 2010, 463). In this step, any survey with missing answers was removed. As mentioned above, one survey was unusable due to this reason. Answers regarding the length of staying in Finland were edited to be clearer in units (months or years). Answers to other questions were also checked thoroughly for any nonconformity with the authors' specific requests in each question (e.g. compulsory three alternatives from question 1 to question 5, only one allowed answer in question 6 and 7).

9.1.3.2 Coding Data

Coding is designated as a "process of assigning numerical score or other character symbol to previously edited data" (Zikmund et al. 2010, 468). In coding, codes are created as general standards to interpret, classify and record data. Codes also help researchers to transfer and transform quantitative and qualitative responses into an understandable format by analytical software such as Excel and SPSS. However, when constructing code system, researchers must bear in mind the two fundamental rules.

- Firstly, the coding categories for the responses must be exhaustive. In other words, all responses should fall into one category or another even if the "other" category must be

employed to ensure that all responses have their own class. (Zikmund et al. 2010, 472.)

- Secondly, the coding categories must be mutually exclusive, meaning there are no overlapping categories and one response can be placed in only one coding categories. (Zikmund et al. 2010, 472.)

Following these basic rules, the authors constructed two different coding systems for fixed-alternative questions and another system for opened-ended questions. To illustrate these coding systems, the authors wish to present examples from the actual survey for this dissertation.

Coding fixed-alternative questions

In the figure below demonstrate an example of a fixed-alternative question.

1. What are your personal motivations to study abroad? Please choose ***three most*** important reasons.

- To secure your desired job in the future
- To be able to find a good job with attractive salary
- To experience a new culture
- To build your international network
- To improve your language skills
- Because my family/friends/professor recommend me to study abroad
- Other reasons, please specify _____

Figure 13. Example of a fixed-alternative question

In the survey for this research, the similar fixed-alternative questions are present from Question 1 to Question 5. In these questions, the respondents were asked to choose three options from the listed available answers. To record these chosen answers into Excel, the authors developed a system that the chosen answers would be assigned a numeric code of number 1 and the not-chosen answers would be assigned number 0. An example of the coding system for Question 1 will be presented in the following diagram. It can also be seen from the diagram

that the “other reasons” option still carried number 1 as a chosen option and was followed by the specific reason in text.

What were your personal motivations to study abroad? Please choose three most important reasons.						
To secure your desired job in the future	To be able to find a good job with attractive salary	To experience a new culture	To build your international network	To improve your language skills	Because my family/friends/profess or recommended me to study abroad	Other reasons, please specify
1	0	1	0	1	0	
1	0	1	0	1	0	
1	0	1	0	1	0	
0	0	1	1	0	0	1, I have moved to Finland before planning to study here
1	1	0	1	0	0	
0	1	1	0	1	0	
0	0	0	0	0	0	1, Love interest
0	0	1	1	1	0	
1	1	1	0	0	0	
0	0	1	1	1	0	
0	0	1	0	1	0	1, because of the better education then my country's
0	1	1	1	0	0	
0	0	1	1	1	0	

Figure 14. Example of coding system for fixed-alternative questions in the survey

Questions 6 and 7 of the survey require a different coding system. In these two questions, the answer was restricted into only one option and the respondents were asked to choose the most applicable one to their case. Question 6 will be taken as an example for this coding system.

6. What is the most influential set of factors to you when choosing a particular university? Please choose only one option.

- Personal reasons
- Country image
- City image
- Institution image
- Study program

Figure 15. Question 6 of the survey

To record the data, each alternative in Question 6 is assigned a number. In this case, “personal reasons” is represented by number 1, “country

image” is number 2, “city image” is number 3, “institution image” is number 4, and “study program” is assigned number 5. A similar recording manner is also implemented to Question 7 of the survey. Figure 13 will give the readers a general idea how Question 6 appears in the Excel file.

What was the most influential set of factors to you when choosing a particular university? Please choose only one option.	
	4
	4
	1
	1
	5
	2
	5
	4
	5
	1
	5
	4
	5

Figure 16. Coding system for Question 6

Coding open-ended questions

It is a common phenomenon that even in structured surveys, open-ended questions are included. In the survey for this research, an open-ended question, which is Question 8, was used to require the respondents to write down a list of information they could not find from the official website and social network sites of Lahti UAS when researching a suitable university to study. This open-ended question needed to have a different coding scheme than the fixed-alternative questions do. An extract of Question 8 will be displayed below.

<p>8. What kind of information was important to your consideration for Lahti UAS, but you could <i>not</i> find it on official website or other social network sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) of Lahti UAS?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Figure 17. Question 8 of the survey

In coding open-ended questions, the main objective is to classify all individual responses into a few general categories. Then, each of these categories can be assigned a numerical code (Zikmund et al. 2010, 474). For example, when coding Question 8 of the survey, the answers such as “extracurricular activities”, “supporting activities”, “forum for students”, “clubs” and “LAMKO events and activities” were put into one category named “Activities and events”. After the coding stage, all the collected answers in Question 8 were grouped and these groups and their assigned code are demonstrated in the following table.

Not-found information	Code	Number of answers
Scholarship	1	1
Partner universities	2	1
Application process	3	2
Activities and events	4	7
University prestige	5	3
Degree recognition	6	2
Employment opportunities	7	2
Course-related information	8	8
Student experience at LAMK	9	2
Acceptance score of the entrance exam	10	1
Accommodation information	11	2
Necessary contacts of the university	12	1
I am not sure	13	1
I found everything I need	14	3
Total		36

Figure 18. Categories and codes for gathered responses in Question 8

The result of the editing and coding step is a data file. A data file resembles a regular spreadsheet with a matrix-like format. Each row in the data file represents an individual respondent and each column displays the studied variables. The matrix is filled by the respondents’ answers regarding to each variable. Obviously, all the data is displayed in this file in their coded forms. An extract of the data file for this survey is demonstrated in the upcoming figure.

What were your personal motivations to study abroad? Please choose three most important reasons.								In what aspects did the host country image influence to your decision to study abroad? Please choose three most important reasons.						
To secure your desired job in the future	To be able to find a good job with attractive salary	To experience a new culture	To build your international network	To improve your language skills	Because my family/friends/profess or recommend me to study abroad	Other reasons, please specify		Similarities between the culture of the host country and your own	Overall reputation of education system	Cost of living	Complexity of immigration procedure (e.g. visa application)	It allows students to work part-time	A worthwhile living country (e.g. peaceful, happy, welcoming, safe, nice local people)	
1	0	1	0	1	0		0	0	0	1	1	0	1	
1	0	1	0	1	0		0	0	1	1	1	0	0	
1	0	1	0	1	0		0	0	1	0	0	0	1	
0	0	1	1	0	0	0 1, I have moved to Finland before planning to study here	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	
1	1	0	1	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
0	1	1	0	1	0		0	0	1	1	0	0	1	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0 1, Love interest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
0	0	1	1	1	0		0	0	1	1	0	0	1	
1	1	1	0	0	0		0	0	0	1	0	1	1	
0	0	1	1	1	0		0	0	0	1	0	1	1	
0	0	1	0	1	0	0 1, because of the better education then my country's	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	
0	1	1	1	0	0		0	0	1	1	0	0	1	
0	0	1	1	1	0		0	0	1	0	1	0	1	
1	1	1	0	0	0		0	0	1	1	0	0	1	
1	0	0	0	1	1		0	0	1	0	0	1	1	
1	0	1	1	0	0		0	0	1	0	0	1	1	
0	1	1	1	0	0		0	0	1	1	0	0	1	

Figure 19. A data file stored in Excel

9.1.3.3 Analysis Approach and Data Analysis

As the purpose of the survey is to produce a clear picture of the international students' preference in the matter of choosing a desirable university overseas, the authors decide to implement descriptive analysis as the primary statistical analysis for the survey. The most prominent attribute of descriptive analysis is the ability to portray the basic characteristics of the collected data such as central tendency, distribution and variability; thereby, researchers can pick up certain patterns of behaviors relating to the studied problem. The techniques employed will be mainly calculating frequency distribution of each variable in the survey, observing the highest and lowest distributions and using various types of charts to illustrate acquired results. The general picture of the preferences of Lahti UAS students, described carefully by applying statistical analysis, will be presented in detailed in Chapter 9 of this dissertation.

9.2 Data Collection and Data Analysis for Social Media Audit Plan

In this part, the authors will present the data collection technique to obtain primary data, the design of Lahti UAS' social media audit to facilitate it and the method to analyze such data.

9.2.1 Data collection and design process for Lahti UAS' social media audit

The social media audit for Lahti UAS is aimed at answering the second sub-question mentioned previously in this dissertation, which is:

What are the good practices from benchmark universities regarding using social media to attract potential international students?

By examining the social media assets of other internationally renowned institutions, the authors intend to reveal the good practices that would lead to any possible hints. These hints could be considered in Lahti UAS' own strategy to improve its social media performance with an aim of catching the attention of potential international students. After the findings have been integrated with the result from sub-question one, it will enable the authors to reach a holistic conclusion for the research problem discussed in this paper. The result will be used as recommendations for Lahti UAS' direction in the future regarding its social media efforts. Additionally, not only will the audit show the better aspects available from other schools' social media but also it will pinpoint the areas that are underperforming and are in need of reassessment which Lahti UAS may need to avert.

9.2.1.1 Data Collection

Because there is no preliminary research on this issue, the authors will need to find the means to gather their own primary data. For this, the authors will employ observation as the key method to perform the collection of information. By using observation, the authors will gather the necessary information to conduct the audit process. Both qualitative and

quantitative data for this part will be collected by this method. Due to the fact that the kind of data in search cannot be obtained by other methods such as surveys or interviews and so on, observation fits in as the suitable selection in order to acquire the information for this social media audit.

According to Zikmund (2010), observation is a systematic process of recording behavioral patterns of people, objects, and occurrences as they happen. It does not require communicating with people or questioning them. Researchers adopting this method will witness and record the data while observing events and activities taking place. They can also make use of certain tracking systems or internet activity records to serve the purpose of their research (Zikmund 2010).

When applied in the context of this dissertation, the subject of research is the activities occurring on the universities' social media platforms. It includes the interaction between the audience and the platforms plus the current status of their utilization. The data acquired by the authors represents the characteristics of this interaction and its recording and documentation will yield essential information that will help the authors reach the answers proposed at the start of the thesis.

To be more specific, the authors chose online observation – a sub-category under observation – as their means of finding the needed information because the subjects in investigation are the social media platforms of different universities. Online observation can be used to observe the phenomena of either the physical world or those on the Internet. And since the social media platforms exist entirely on the Internet, online observation proves to be the correct method to assess them. According to Kananen (2015), it remains the same for the method of observing and analyzing the phenomena, either taking place in the real or the virtual world, as in conventional qualitative research. The evaluation of the events taking place online will act as a reflection of the real world (Kananen 2015, 78).

As the students or followers of the universities are real people with authentic identities, their remarks, opinions and wishes on the social media channels are peculiar and are parts of them which can be approached, assessed and analyzed in the same manner as in real life. By getting to know their thoughts, preferences and opinions expressed via their communication on the social networks, conclusions can be drawn and considered for application for the practical situation at Lahti UAS. In the next section, the authors will explain how they will decide on the length of their data collection.

Observation period

The authors decided to implement the audit in an observation duration lasting for one month, starting from July 1st to July 31st. The authors collected the data on a daily basis. The duration was divided into four smaller periods and they acted as the checkpoints for the data collection progress. Specifically, Period I was from July 1st – July 7th, Period II was from July 8th – July 14th, Period III 117as from July 15th – July 21st and lastly Period IV covered from July 22nd – July 31st. Period IV was slightly longer than the rest, but it had no significant influence on the tracking progress.



Figure 20. Breakdown of Observation Period

At the end of each period, the authors gathered all the data from that period and put it into record. The aim was to make the subsequent analysis easier for the authors since they only had to use the data collected from the weekly checkpoints rather than scanning content from

single days. There was another benefit accounting for this method. They could serve as extra benchmarks, in which Lahti UAS' performance would be compared week after week with its past progress and also against that of its benchmarks. On the last observation day, all data was put through a holistic assessment which would provide the answers the authors were attempting to find out in this paper.

9.2.1.2 Social Media Audit Design Process

The authors' media audit design was divided into phases which are of chronological order. The following graph will demonstrate the timeline of the audit plan from its starting point to its concluding phase.

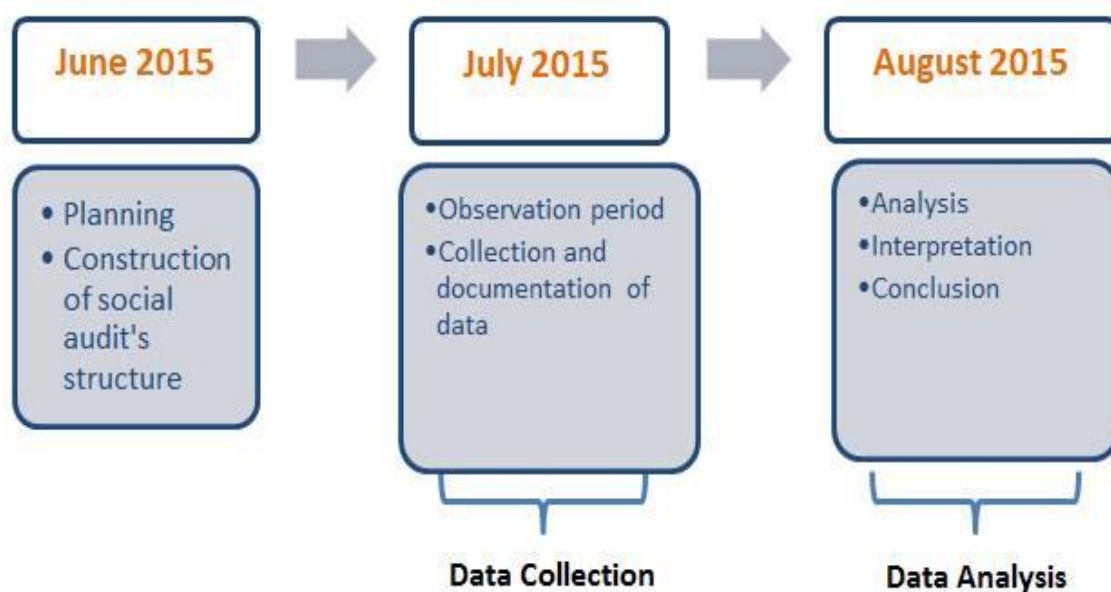


Figure 21. Timeline for Social Media Audit

During the month of June 2015, the authors studied the literature background to support their construction of the social media audit. They used the secondary sources from e-articles and journals on the Internet in addition to the academic sources from books and references. The structure of the audit will be explained in details in the next section. In the month of July 2015, the authors performed observation on the social

channels had discussed previously to gain insights into the problem. They collected, recorded and documented the information during the observation period into their own system which kept everything ready for the final analysis. The month of August 2015 was used to synchronize, analyze and withdraw conclusions from the data received throughout the audit period. The authors, afterwards, combined the results to reach the answers needed for the main questions in this thesis. The construction of the social media audit will be discussed in the following section.

The author will adopt the 6-step theoretical guidelines from Paine (2011) regarding social media effort measurement as the foundation for Lahti UAS' social media audit. The stages were implemented with suitable adjustments to fit Lahti UAS' context. It was also to gain necessary and relevant information to help support the authors in reaching meaningful conclusions. The outline of Lahti UAS' social media audit will have six steps and it will be illustrated in the following graphics.

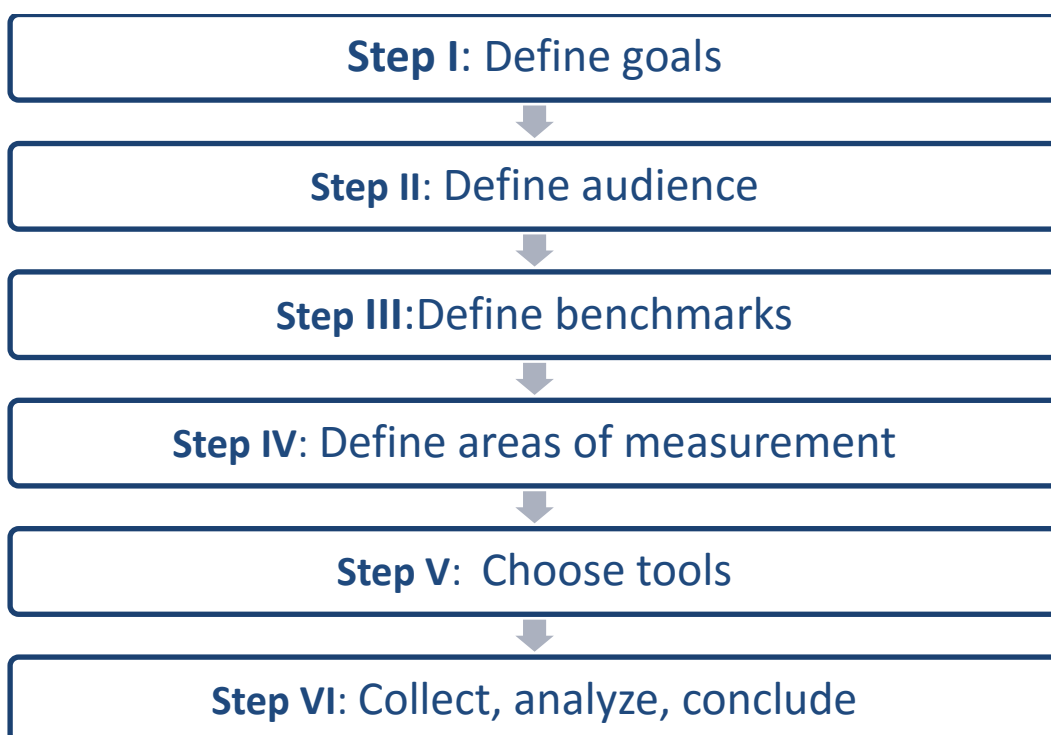


Figure 22. Steps of Lahti UAS Social Media Audit

Step I: Defining Goals

The main goal of Lahti UAS' social media audit is to identify indicators that would help build better Lahti UAS brand to attract international students. There are two smaller underlying objectives linked to this goal. Firstly, it is posting engaging content to international students on social media. Secondly, it is to enhance visibility of Lahti UAS on social media in Finland and beyond. These goals and objectives will be the main focus throughout the audit. The authors will perform the audit on Lahti UAS' social media and on that of other chosen universities. Subsequently, they will compare the findings to arrive at a competitive analysis result. The findings revealed from this part will contribute to the overall outcome of this dissertation.

Step II: Defining the Audience

Having a defined audience is primary to the measurement plan of Lahti UAS' social media assets. The groups of audience have already been introduced in the previous section with more than ten different types within academic environments. However, with respect to the purpose this dissertation as to find out in what ways Lahti UAS can enhance its visibility to prospective students in Finland and further, the authors decide to select only the segments of audience that would be most suitable in terms of importance and relevance. Hence, there are two types of audience that would be the focus of the research:

- International Students
- Prospective international students

It is undeniable that other audience segments also play an important role to some extent. Nevertheless, due to the limitation of this paper, a need arises to prioritize where the efforts should be invested.

Step III: Defining Benchmarks

The authors decide to choose competitive benchmarking method as the primary type of benchmarking to employ in Lahti UAS' social media audit. The reason is based on the characteristics of the benchmarking types.

Internal benchmarking will be inappropriate because Lahti UAS' social media assets represent Lahti UAS as a single entity with a whole image. They do not stand for any singular department within Lahti UAS. Hence, it is unsuitable to select internal benchmarking for its purpose is to measure performances amongst departments inside an organization. In this case, the example will be to measure social media activity of different departments or faculties within Lahti UAS, which is as explained unreasonable.

Best practices benchmarking will also be unfit, because the authors find it difficult to arrive at any guideline that dictates how a practice on social media is best. Therefore, competitive benchmarking/analysis will be chosen as it is most approachable and relevant. By comparing Lahti UAS to its benchmarks in academia world, insights about how they are performing will be revealed. These areas that are either operating efficiently or underperforming for each benchmark will be justified through concrete numeric data and results can be drawn to respectively improve Lahti UAS' own social media campaign. Competitive benchmarking consists of two smaller segments, and the authors, in this paper, will employ both of them, which are competitive analysis and past performance benchmark.

Regarding the benchmarking subjects, the authors have chosen a list of four benchmark education institutions besides Lahti UAS. These institutions' locations are decentralized, stretching across the world. They are:

- Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) – Finland
- National University of Singapore (NUS) – Singapore
- Harvard University (Harvard) – The United States of America
- Ecole Polytechnic Federale de Lausanne (EPFL) – Switzerland

The reasons for having selected such a list are as follows:

- The authors see the need to choose the candidates on the basis of internationality. The fact that Lahti UAS is transforming into a

more international teaching institution itself has provided the needed justification. In order to gauge the performance of schools in broadcasting their own images internationally, there is no other better way but to look at those who are doing it well on an international level. Through observation, Lahti UAS can draw valuable insights from how its benchmarks are performing. Choices if taken inside Finland will be strictly refined. It will lead to subjectivity and reduce the value of the research. That is why three out of five universities are outside of Finland.

- The international universities selected have good rankings in the world's record for being representative of international image. According to Times Higher Education, both EPFL and NUS have achieved high rankings in terms of internationality. EPFL ranks at number one and NUS ranks at number four out of 100 schools announced in the list of 2015 (Parr, 2015). Three components account for their respective standing. They are the proportion of international students, the proportion of international staff and the proportion of research published with an international co-author. With the supporting data present, it is with high reliability EPFL and NUS are suitable benchmarks for Lahti UAS' social media audit. Harvard University is the oldest academic institute in the U.S. and it is also popular worldwide with lots of overseas students. Hence, it is on par with other benchmarks chosen for Lahti UAS' audit regarding international images. Therefore, Harvard is selected as the third outbound benchmark.
- As it can be seen, VAMK in Finland is in the list. By the same token with outbound benchmarks, the authors would like to balance the possible bias that might take place reversely. If all the benchmarks are overseas, due to cultural, economic and distinctive differences attached to each university, it is likely that biases will affect the final result in some manner. Because they are not in the same context with Lahti UAS in terms of socio-

culture in this research, which is the country of Finland, there will be chances errors influencing the analysis process. VAMK, being a benchmark of Lahti UAS in Finland, is under a relative same condition which will lessen the degree of bias of the data collected. This university has around 3,600 students enrolled, and according to Bachelors Portal EU, it takes special interests in integrating international awareness and regional entrepreneurial spirit (Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, accessed on July 26, 2015). Internationalization has been its emphasis along with high educational standard. Hence, VAMK acts as a good example for benchmarking against Lahti UAS regarding the criteria in discussion.

- The suggestion for the number of benchmarks is that three is optimal and over five is unwieldy (Paine 2011, 86). Therefore, the authors consider taking the mean value at four benchmarks – four benchmark institutions. The decision will increase the validity of the data and at the same time will not place too much pressure on the analyzing process.

Step IV: Defining areas of measurement

Although the media offers a plethora of different channels, it is essential for researchers focus on significant options. Since students and prospective students are the prime segments, it is advised that institutions pay attention to forums and social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and so forth. The explanation is that students consume very little of mainstream media and they get most of their information from online sources (Paine 2011, 214). It can be assumed that when the prospective students are researching Lahti UAS as a potential future destination, it is highly likely social networks will account for most of their findings. Hence, the gravity placed on social media efforts is even more profound.

Because of that, the authors will concentrate on the social network channels where Lahti UAS is present. Additionally, they are the most

popular and most used on a global scale. The chosen sites are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Each of these holds a distinct element to marketing and promoting a brand, and altogether they will form the big social media picture that would integrate at a later point into Lahti UAS' branding strategy. Moreover, these four social networking sites are as well utilized by the benchmark institutions which will make data observation and analysis more available and valid. Another important reason is the result from the survey on international students at Lahti UAS. The survey result suggests that the preponderance of Lahti UAS international students is aware of and using merely popular sites such as Facebook and Instagram. Thus, it is logical the authors concentrate on well-known social network sites that may attract potential international students to its audience pool.

Facebook and Twitter serve as the main portals of information which will report on Lahti UAS' activities to its audience and they also contain the largest pool of Lahti UAS' audiences. YouTube is peculiar as it is the sole platform specialized in promoting Lahti UAS' brand with videos. Instagram is new but gaining more and more buzzes from the young and energetic audiences. It delivers Lahti UAS' image to its audience and supporters in forms of well-crafted photos. Although standing as the second largest platform in terms of size for Lahti UAS, LinkedIn is not chosen to be a subject to analyze. The reason is that LinkedIn, by its nature, is a social platform predominantly for professionals and academics. The site promotes more about personal branding and career enhancing attributes than it does to promote an international image and livelihood of a university. As quoted by Safko (2010, 459), it is used to maintain professional relationships, to serve recruitment process, to elaborate on employment opportunities and so on (Safko 2010, 459). Therefore, the authors consider LinkedIn as not sufficiently relevant to the case study in progress. For Flickr and Pinterest, the authors believe it would not yield much needed information for the research because Lahti UAS' follower base on these two platforms is miniature. Hence, the data which is vital for the analysis will not be available from those two sites. To add to that, no

other benchmark institution has either Flickr or Pinterest in their social media portfolio. It will be impossible to benchmark as there is no data at hand.

As explained in the previous section, prospective students, especially international students, are influenced by various factors that would contribute to their decision of choosing an overseas university for study. These factors are critical to institutions in a way that they have to consider these attributes in their marketing campaigns so as to increase the effectiveness of such efforts. In a social media context, the content shared and broadcast must be in line with the institution and also align with the factors that have impact on its audience and, more importantly, international students. Therefore, in addition to the nature of the content posted, either plain text, a link, a photo or a video, a need arises for further grouping of the content into topics that are according to the aforementioned factors. The result from this grouping's observation and analysis will be beneficial to the research because the authors can correlate its outcome with the collected opinions from Lahti UAS' international students through the surveys. Afterwards, conclusions could be drawn to assess at what level Lahti UAS is aligning its social media content with the expectation from its international students.

The groups of topics of content will be summarized in the next table.

Personal motivation		
Enhance career prospect	Future earning prospect	Future job prospect
Higher status	Live in a different culture	Make international contacts
Improve language skills	Family recommendation	Friends' recommendation
Professor's recommendation		

Country image		
Cultural distance	Social reputation	Academic reputation
Development level	Cost of living	Immigration procedures
Opportunity of working during course	Time to get degrees	
City image		
City dimension	Cost of living	Linguistic distance
Safety and security	Social facilities	International environment
University environment		
Institution image		
Institution prestige	Ranking position	Brand reputation
Academic reputation	Researcher reputation	Quality reputation
Expertise of teaching staff	Professional experience of teaching staff	Campus atmosphere
Social life at university	Safety and security	Library facilities
Availability of computers	Availability of quiet areas	Availability of areas for self-study
Sport facility		
Program evaluation		
International recognition	Program specialization	Program suitability
Quality programs	Recognition by future employers	Total cost and finance

Table 9. Topics of content for the social media audit (Cubillo et al. 2006)

All the content will be compared and coded according to the corresponding criteria. Then, it will be listed as parts of the bigger groups, which appears in the final results. There will also be outcomes from benchmarks of Lahti UAS which will be compared against. Diagrams will

be utilized to visualize the big picture in order to better present the meaning of the data analyzed.

Step V: Choosing Tools Usage

The authors will adopt both computer tools and manual approach to analyze the data and arrive at conclusions. Authors will use the available software introduced in previous sections such as Microsoft Excel 2010, Social Mention, Jason's Word Cloud and the metrics that require human input particularly for content analysis. The reason lies in the nature of the data collected. Computer software will ease the authors from the burden of assessing massive volume of quantitative information manually and will help them spot the patterns and trends if there are any. This is a feat nearly impossible when performed with mere human effort. However, as it has already been mentioned above, there are areas that bear more advantages from manual analysis over computation. It is the analysis about qualitative aspect of all the information gathered which needs a human conscience and logic to accurately evaluate the data package. Computer software is unreliable in processing languages in specific contextual phrases like sarcasm, irony, humor, slangs and so on. Human effort then comes into play as a more precise means to scan through pieces of information containing sentiments. The balance gained from using both kinds of tools will help add more ground to the results of the audit plan.

Social Mention is a social media search platform that aggregates user generated content from across the web into a single stream of information (About Social Mention, accessed on August 10, 2015). By monitoring over one hundred social platforms, the site tracks and measures the conversations about organizations and related topics in the social media landscape in real-time. The authors will attempt to use Social Mention to gauge the ambience of Lahti UAS' social media profile and those of others. This will provide a brief hint on how visible Lahti UAS' social media assets are compared to other benchmarks.

Jason's Word Cloud is a computer tool which uses algorithm to present words from a text in an animated manner. Like other Word Cloud programs, it visually represents common words extracted from a collection of comments or texts. The font size of a word is corresponding to the frequency of usage of it. That means when a word is repeatedly mentioned, it will appear bigger in a word cloud. In Jason's Word Cloud, the maximum length of a text is 318 words. Word Cloud is enabled by Word Count, which is its data feeding process. The authors will pick out the repeated words or phrases in the comments from the audience and then use Jason's Word Cloud to find out what the most common words the audience uses for their remarks on the schools' social media are. This tool will reveal the attitude of the audience towards the general image of the institution and also towards the content updated on their social media.

For the subjects of analysis in discussion, the authors believe they should have their own agenda as each is distinctive from another. The variation in key metrics is not substantial. Only minor differences will be noticeable but it will not change or affect the result of the audit plan. Another reason is that some metrics and measurement criteria are unavailable and inapplicable to a certain social media platform. The areas to be assessed for each social media channel will be introduced in the following tables.

Branding		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Logo ▪ Completion of profile information ▪ Interlink with other media platform
Content		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forms of posted content ▪ Topics of posted content ▪ Frequency of posts
Metrics	Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of fans ▪ Growth rate of fans ▪ Average Page engagement ▪ Average Post engagement
	Valence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Online rating ▪ Proportion of positive comments to total

		comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ratio of positive comments over negative
Supporting tools		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Word Count and Word Cloud ▪ Content analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Types of conversations most used

Table 10. Facebook assessment plan

Branding		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Logo ▪ Completion of profile information ▪ Interlink with other platforms
Content		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Topics of posted content ▪ Frequency of posts
Metrics	Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of subscribers ▪ Growth rate of subscribers ▪ Average Page engagement rate ▪ Average Post engagement rate
	Valence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proportion of positive comments ▪ Ratio of positive comments over negative
Supporting tool		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Word Count and Word Cloud ▪ Content analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Type of conversations most used

Table 11. YouTube assessment plan

Branding		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Logo ▪ Completion of profile information ▪ Interlink with other platforms
Content		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forms of posted content ▪ Topics of posted content ▪ Frequency of posts
Metrics	Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of followers ▪ Growth rate of followers

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Average Page engagement rate ▪ Average Post engagement rate
	Valence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proportion of positive comments ▪ Ratio of positive comments over negative
Supporting tools		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Word Count and Word Cloud ▪ Content analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Type of conversations most used

Table 12. Twitter assessment plan

Branding		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Logo ▪ Completion of profile information ▪ Interlink with other platforms
Content		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Topics of posted content ▪ Frequency of post
Metrics	Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of fans ▪ Growth rate of fans ▪ Average Page engagement rate ▪ Average Post engagement rate
	Valence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proportion of positive comments ▪ Ratio of positive comments over negative
Supporting tools		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Word Count and Word Cloud ▪ Content analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Type of conversations most used

Table 13. Instagram assessment plan

Regarding the media content analysis, the authors see the need to adjust and customize a specific outline for Lahti UAS' audit program from the 8-step theory introduced previously. First of all, not all the steps listed there are relevant and impactful to the goal of the audit of Lahti UAS' social media efforts. In the future, they might become useful in researches when

Lahti UAS has firmly transformed into a corporate model. For the moment, they are not the priorities to be invested in. Secondly, due to the limitation of this dissertation in terms of time and resources, for some steps it will be difficult for the authors to collect data. Accessibility also attributes to this when it is impossible to approach certain social media profiles that have been set to private or not open to public. Therefore, the authors decide to focus on the key steps that meet the criteria of the content analysis plan being approachable, useful and relevant without compromising the essential function of the outline.

The new and customized media content analysis for Lahti UAS consists of three components.

- **Finding the content:** In order to know how the audience is reacting to the topics posted and what their opinions towards the schools are, the hints lie in the conversations taking place online. The authors will locate the comments or replies the audience leaves on the four social platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube for each benchmarked school. Once identified, they will go through a series of analysis which will be mentioned afterwards.
- **Determining the type of conversation:** At this stage, the conversations – comments and replies – will be subject to classification. The authors will match the responses to their corresponding category. With the provided list of twenty seven different kinds of responses that might take place online, the authors will attempt to find out what the audience is talking about Lahti UAS and to other benchmark institutions.
- **Determining the sentiment or tonality of the conversation:** This step involves finding out the sentiment towards the school which is expressed via the comments left by the audiences. It will also reveal how the audiences are receiving the content generated by the social media effort of each school. The authors

will record the sentiment towards Lahti UAS and other schools in two different levels: positive or negative. The proportion of each level will provide insights into how positive and healthy Lahti UAS' image online and in the real world is. By the same token, it could be deducted from the result of other institutions.

Step VI: Collecting, Analyzing and Concluding Results

When all preparations are ready, the authors will enter the observation period in order to collect the raw data. Afterwards, the data will be inputted and recorded in a structured format which is designed by the authors. At the end of the observation, all data will go through analysis and results will be drawn. The method which the authors use to assess the raw information will be carefully explained in the next section.

9.2.2 Data analysis

This part will elaborate on how the authors will analyze the obtained data after the observation period. The data collection phase provides the authors with both qualitative and quantitative information, and due to the differences between the two, there is a need for different interpretation methods.

Regarding the qualitative data, the authors follow a sequence of steps to reorganize and analyze it. It will be illustrated in the next diagram.

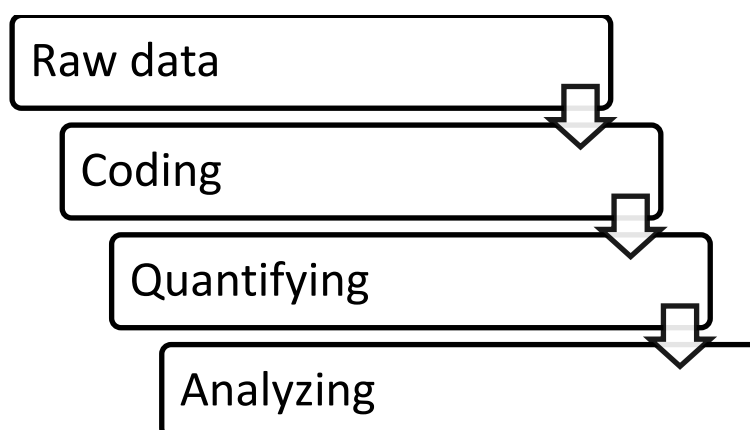


Figure 23. Qualitative Data Analysis Process

9.2.2.1 Coding

There is a plethora of ways to analyze qualitative data and coding is one among them (Saldana 2013, 2). In prior to the analysis, raw data collected through observation will be subject to coding. Coding is the process of assigning a numerical score or other character symbols to the data (Zikmund 2010, 468). In other words, it is the critical link between data collection and their interpretation of meaning (Chazmar 2001, 335). According to Saldana (2013), a code in qualitative inquiry is occasionally a word or a short phrase which attaches a summative, essence-capturing and evocative attribute to a portion of language-based or graphical data (Saldana 2013, 3).

The authors will use coding method to assign each variable a corresponding code that reflects its nature. More specifically, it is provisional coding that will be used to assess the qualitative information acquired. Provisional coding creates an advance starting list which has sets of codes that are prior to fieldwork (Miles et al. 1994, 58). The codes developed in this list are generated from various preparatory sources such as literature reviews related to the issue, previous research findings, researchers' own past knowledge, researcher-formulated hypotheses or the study's framework (Saldana 2013, 114). They can be from anticipated categories or types of responses that might take place in the uncollected data. As the progress advances, these provisional codes can be revised or modified to fit the new condition (Saldana 2013, 144).

The reason for the authors' choice of provisional coding lies in their research approach. For this dissertation, deductive approach has been selected to navigate the direction of research. Deductive approach concerns using existing theories to explain specific cases. Researchers can base their research strategy on these theories to predict and explain the observed phenomenon. Provisional coding utilizes the theories introduced in the literature review part to form its set of codes that would afterwards be applied to the variables. This benefits the authors in two ways. Firstly, they do not have to create the codes from their own

perspective which makes the analysis process easier. Because the theories are valid, the list of codes extracted from them is then eligible to be used without having to be tested. Secondly, due to the nature of this social media audit as being iterative, Lahti UAS can continue to reuse these same sets of codes to conduct future audits without the need of modifying or creating new codes occasionally.

There are four measurement metrics which the authors apply provisional coding to. They are the form of posted content, the topic of posted content, the type of conversations used by the audience on the social channels and the sentiment of those conversations.

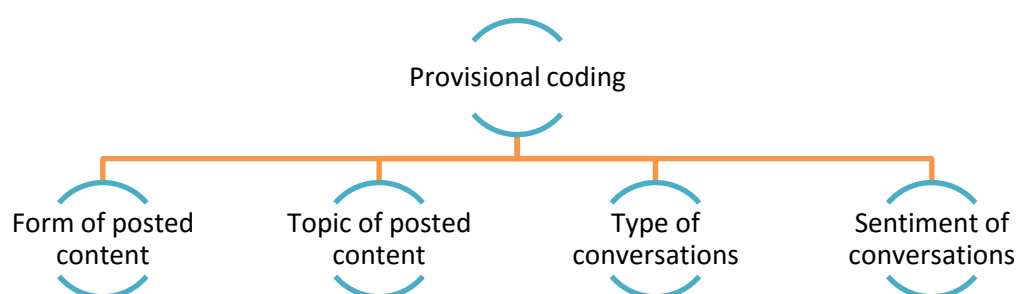


Figure 24. Metrics to-be-applied provisional coding

Regarding the form of posted content, there are generally four different kinds of content that an update on Facebook and Twitter falls into. They are plain text, photo, video and link. The next diagram will illustrate this notion.

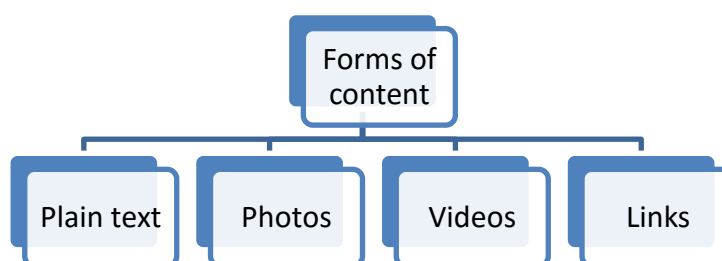


Figure 25. Codes for different forms of content

A post has plain texts without any links or visual displays embedded. It can have photos accompanied by texts. A post can also contain a video with or

without text captions. Finally, an update can include a link to lead viewers to further information. On Instagram, there are only two forms of content available for upload, which is either a photo or short videos. YouTube can host only videos. Depending on the form of each update on corresponding channels, the authors will group these posts into their category to see if there is any pattern in the resulting proportion of the criterion in question.

Next, the authors will utilize the theory from the decision-making process of International student mentioned previously to build their list of codes for the topic of posted content. As international students have their own incentive driving them to choose to study abroad, having the information that resonates with the students' needs on social media will be crucial in order to attract them as potential students. In a social media context, this alignment will increase the effectiveness of efforts invested in Lahti UAS' social media marketing. Therefore, in addition to the form of the content posted (text, photo, video, link), a need arises for further grouping of the posted content into codes withdrawn from the theory. The result from this coding will help the authors to compare Lahti UAS' content with the collected opinions from its international students through the surveys. Afterwards, conclusions could be drawn to assess at what level Lahti UAS is aligning its social media content with the expectation from its international students. The authors will use the categories in Table 9 Topics of content for social media audit as the codes to assign to the data collected from this metric.

All the content will be compared and matched with its corresponding sub-category. Subsequently, it will be assigned to the main codes that the sub-category belongs to. The next diagram will summarize how this metric will be coded.

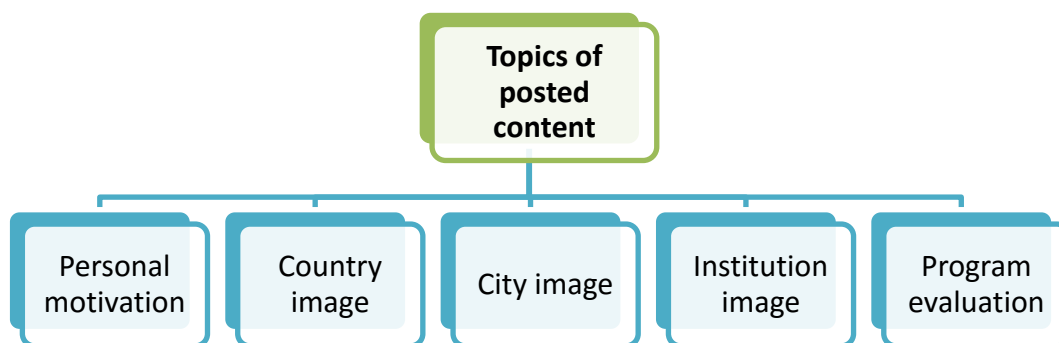


Figure 26. Codes for different topics of content

By attaching these codes to the content on the institutions' social media, the authors will attempt to find out the proportion of the topics used in promoting content. The result from this metric will reveal what Lahti UAS and other schools are updating on their social media assets, and whether there is an existing pattern. Notably, the authors will only assess the content promoted in the English language. The reason for this is that international students are the subject of concern in this research, and English is most commonly used among them. Content posted in any other languages will not draw their attention since they neither understand the post nor believe it is meant for them. Hence, any content using a different language than English will be grouped as extra codes with the name of such language. They will not be entitled to analysis.

The final metric which is applied provisional coding is the type of conversations taking place on social media channels. The type of conversation in this context is the purpose of the audience's remarks on the media platforms. The conversation takes form of either a comment on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube or a reply on Twitter. According to Paine (2011, 52-53), there are commonly twenty-seven different types of conversations that take place on social media. The following table will reintroduce this metric which has already been mentioned previously.

Acknowledging receipt of information	Advertising something	Answering a question
Asking a question	Augmenting a previous post	Calling for action
Disclosing personal information	Distributing media	Expressing agreement
Expressing criticism	Expressing support	Expressing surprise
Giving a heads-up	Responding to criticism	Giving a shout-out
Making a joke	Making a suggestion	Making an observation
Offering a greeting	Offering an opinion	Putting out a "Wanting for Free" ad
Rallying support	Recruiting people	Showing dismay
Soliciting comments	Soliciting help	Starting a poll

Table 14. Codes for different types of conversations

By assessing each comment and reply across the social media platforms, the authors will match it to the suitable code that best reflects the purpose of the conversation. The result produced by this metric will show what type of conversations the followers on the social media are using most in response to the institution and its content. Depending on the proportion, it will reveal many things such as the level of attractiveness of the school's content, the audience's attitude towards the institutions and so on. With regards to the traffic on the media channels, solely English and comprehensible conversations will be taken into account. The authors are only capable of understanding English language, thus they cannot determine the meaning from conversations in other foreign languages. Furthermore, conversations that include incomprehensible texts will be discarded because the authors are not able to decipher their meaning and purposes.

Lastly, the sentiment of the conversations will be coded with two options: either positive or negative. The authors will decide if a comment has a positive or negative tonality by interpreting the meaning with their own

capability of understanding English linguistics. Any piece of data which does not offer the authors sufficient hints to determine its tone will not be collected and analyzed.

9.2.2.2 Quantifying

After the assessed data has been coded with the procedure presented above, they will be taken to quantifying phase. Quantifying data is an essential step to draw conclusions from qualitative data. The quantitative analysis of qualitative information involves transforming the data from words or images into numbers to look for emerging patterns (How to Quantify Qualitative Research, accessed on August 9, 2015). The usage of numbers and diagrams to demonstrate the significance of collected qualitative data comes from the desire that data should be presented within a scientific construct.

The coded data alone cannot present a holistic meaning. Therefore, it is necessary the authors quantify it in prior to final analysis. By turning coded materials to numbers-meaning adding the pieces of information belonging to the same group, the authors will be able to prepare the data for the sequential analysis. The next graph will illustrate this point.

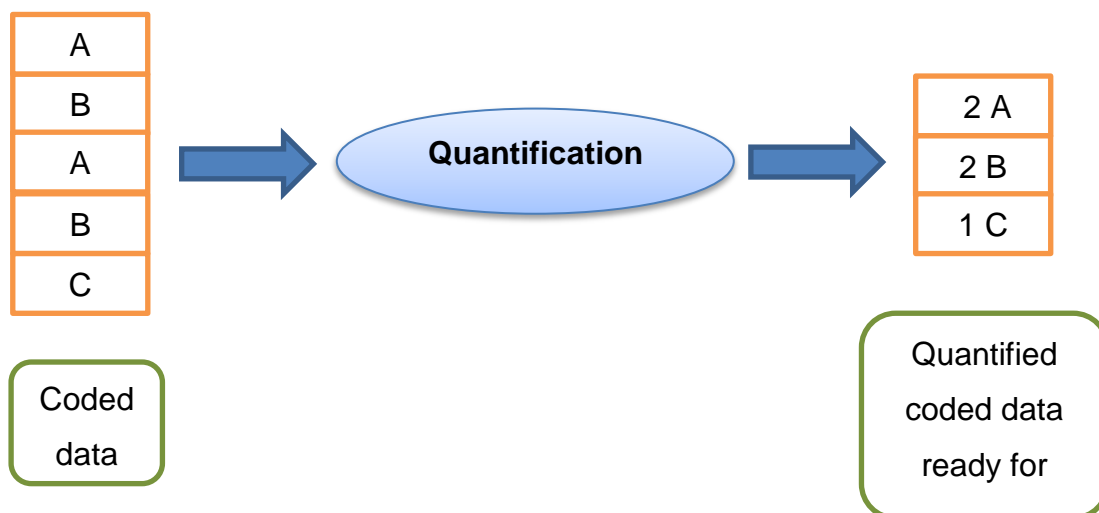


Figure 25. Example of quantifying data

The idea illustrated in the example is that after coding process, the authors have five coded pieces of information – A, B, A, B and C. Then, the authors can quantify them by adding the two A pieces and the two B pieces together because they belong to the same group. After this phase, the authors now have two A pieces and two B pieces and one C piece. This process is reiterated until all the coded data has been combined into majorities. After this phase, the qualitative data collected is subject to final analysis.

9.2.2.3 Analyzing

When all the qualitative data involved has been quantified, it will enter the analyzing phase. The authors once again will adopt descriptive analysis to assess the qualitative data for this part of social media audit. With this method, they will find out the fundamental aspects such as central tendency, distribution of variables and variability about the values in study. Graphs, charts and tables will be utilized to illustrate the results. The outcome of how descriptive analysis is applied to this section will be discussed in the findings.

Quantitative data analysis

Through observation, the authors will be provided with quantitative data necessary and relevant to the metrics they wish to explore. The information packages come in form of numerical data that can be measured numerically as quantities. The authors will use their own formulas which have been presented earlier to analyze the acquired data. Afterwards, they will utilize demographics and charts to illustrate the found results. All the output will be organized and presented in the next section.

This chapter is dedicated to the empirical research and data analysis of this dissertation. In the following section, results and findings from the analysis process will be demonstrated. Also, the authors will draw recommendations from the findings and present them with clear explanations.

10 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results and their implications from the survey and social media audit will be presented and discussed thoroughly in the mean time. The chapter will be divided into two parts: findings and discussions for the survey and for the social media audit.

10.1 Findings and Discussions from Survey

This first part of this chapter is dedicated to illustrating interesting insights from the results of the survey.

10.1.1 Demographics of Respondents

There are respondents from many different countries participating in this survey; however, the sample was dominated by Vietnamese students, who occupied around 46% of the sample. The second biggest group of participants was from Russia, taking up nearly 14% of total respondents. The domination of Vietnamese and Russian students in the sample can be justified as they also occupy the biggest proportion of total international students pursuing English degree programs at Lahti UAS at the present. When asked about the studying programs they are studying, the international students' answers fell mainly into the following three disciplines: International Business (59.8%), Business Information Technology (15.5%) and Nursing (10.3%). It can be inferred from the studying disciplines that majority of students participating in this survey are undergraduate students and they are also main target customers of Lahti UAS. The two pie charts below summarize what have been discussed so far relating to the demographics of the respondents in the survey. By sketching the general profile of the participants, the authors also hope to find potential relations between their background and their decision-making process.

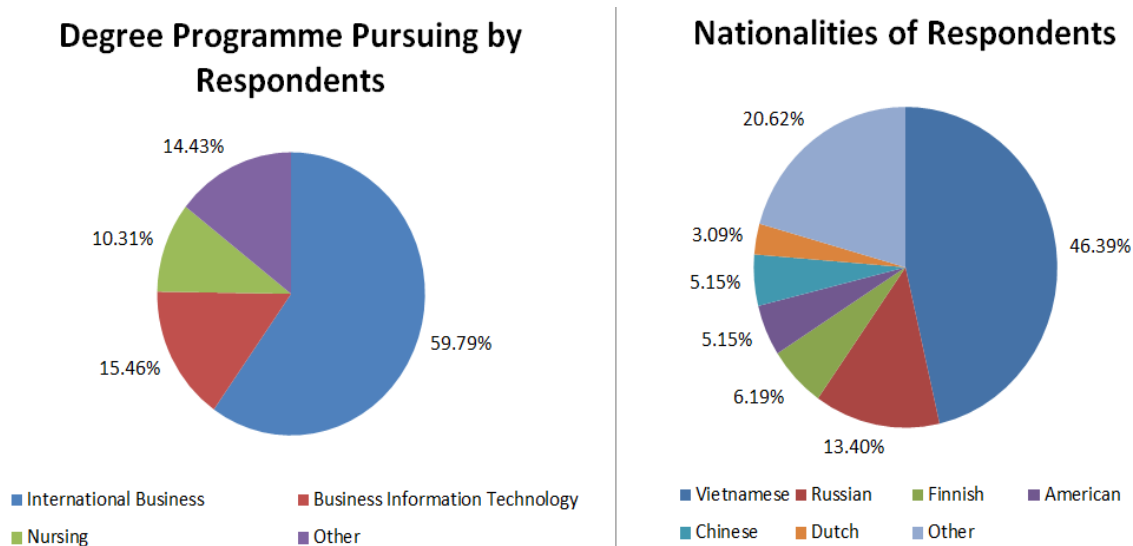


Figure 26. Demographics of the respondents regarding their degree program and nationality

The length of stay in Finland is also another aspect that the authors take a lot of interests in. Although the respondents were asked to answer by a specific number of months or years they have been staying in Finland, all the answers to this question was classified into two categories: “less than or equal 1 year” and “more than 1 year”. International students with the length of stay of less than or equal 1 year consists of degree students with the starting academic year in 2014 and exchange students of Autumn semester 2014 and Spring semester 2015. On the other hand, international students who have already studied in Finland more than 1 year are from degree program starting in 2013 and before.

One of the main reasons for the authors to choose 2014 as the separation point between the two categories is that 2014 is an eventful year for Lahti UAS as it marks the beginning of the transformation of Lahti UAS from a state-owned entity to a corporate-like entity. From that point of time, there have been many changes occurred and business practices have been implemented to the management of the university, evidently through the changing of the school logo, the launching of a totally new official website and the interests in building image through social media network. Another

reason for this classification is that the authors would like to examine whether there is any shift in preferences of new students (belonging to “less than or equal 1 year” group) and older students (belonging to “more than 1 year” group).

Concerning the participants of the survey, there is a quite balanced proportion between the old and new students, 48.5% and 51.5% respectively. The even distribution between the two categories of “less than or equal 1 year” and “more than one year” will ensure that any relationship drawn between this variable and others is credible and unbiased.

10.1.2 General Overview of International Students’ Preference Concerning Choosing University Abroad

As mentioned above, the content of the survey included five main groups of preference factors (i.e. personal reasons, country image effect, city image effect, institution image and study program) and their relevant variables. The distribution of variables within each main group of preference factors was summarized in frequency distribution table – the table representing the total appearance of a certain variable in the database of the survey. However, as the goal of the survey is to analyze the preference of international students at Lahti UAS, the authors take a great interest in variables that have the highest frequencies in each group of preference factors. The table below displays such variables.

Groups of Factors	Most chosen variables	Second most chosen variable
Personal reasons	To experience a new culture (27.4%)	To build international network (16.7%)
Country image effect	Overall reputation of education system (30.4%)	A worth living country (27.1%)
City image effect	Safety and security (24.6%)	International environment (22.9%)
Institution image	Good university reputation (18.4%)	Modern and well-equipped campus (17.7%)
Study program	Internationally recognized degree (26.0%)	Quality of the program (20.6%)

Table 15. Frequency distribution of variables within groups of preference factors

As seen from the table, in personal reasons, the variable “to experience a new culture” was the dominant answer, which occupied nearly one third of the total responses. Notably, the difference in frequency distribution between the most and second most chosen answers in “Personal reasons” group was around 10%. This high discrepancy indicates the considerable importance of culture in the preference list.

Considering country image effect, the frequencies of the two most preferred responses – “overall reputation of education system” and “a worth living country” – were close in value. Each of them took up nearly 30% of the total answers and created significant gaps with other variables within “country image effect” group. The third preferred answer only covered 16.5% total response and was around 11% less than second favored reasons.

A similar pattern can be detected in city image effect, institution image and study program groups as the most and second most chosen alternatives dominate totally other options. The two most favored answers were “safety and security” and “international environment” in city image effect. Regarding institution aspect, the most desirable factors were the

reputation and facilities of the university, indicated through the favor of “good university reputation” and “modern and well-equipped campus” options. Relating to study program, the international students at Lahti UAS were most concerned about the international recognition of the degree and the quality of study program (26 percent and 20.6 percent of the total answers, respectively).

The next bar chart displays the answers of the participants in the survey when they were asked to evaluate the priority of the five main groups of preference factors. From this chart, the authors have discovered a several interesting results.

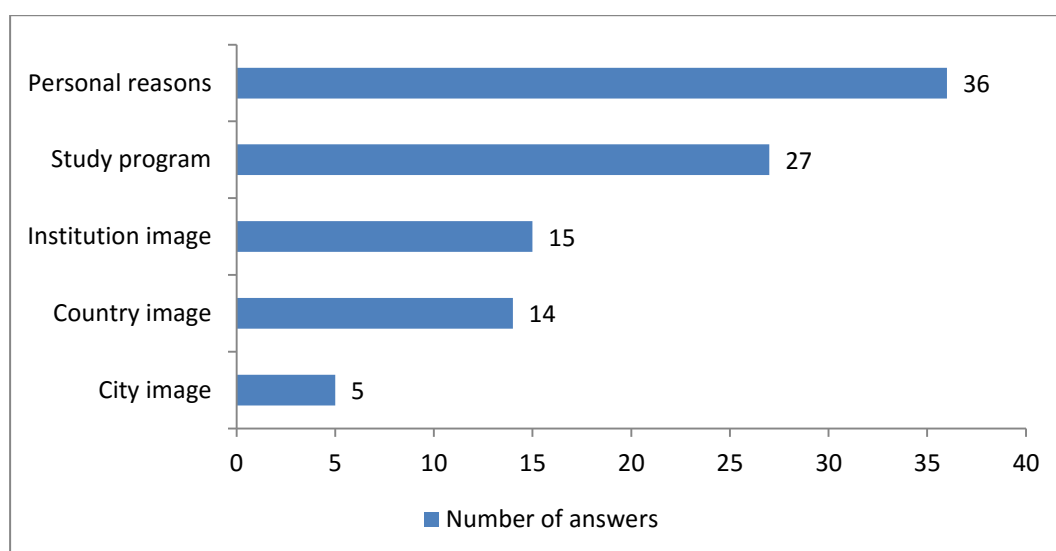


Figure 27. Most influential set of factors when choosing a particular university

As it can be seen in the diagram, “personal reasons” played an impressive role in persuading international students to choose a particular university. In addition, as mentioned above, the desire to experience a new culture and to build their own international network were the most powerful personal incentives for international students to choose a university in a faraway land instead of a school within the comfort zone of their hometown. The second most significant force in the decision-making process of international students was a congregation of all variables revolving around study program, especially the international recognition

of the degree and the quality of the program as indicated in the previous section.

Notably, the institution image and country image were competing for the respondents' favor as they possessed nearly the same number of answers (15 and 14 responses respectively). When taking a look back the table 15, it can be seen that the most favored variables in each group of factors were also similar but at different scales. At the institution level, the students concerned about the prestige of the university and facility of the campus. Similarly, at the country level, the students were interested in the overall reputation of education system and living standard. In addition, as a remark of Culbio et al. (2006), institution image and country image can be used as trade-offs for each other. For example, the students can tolerate a slightly poorer reputation of the educational system of a country in exchange for entering the most prestige school in that country. On the contrary, the students can choose a not-so-good university in a country with a good reputation system with a belief that the school would be still better than the most prestigious institution in countries that are ranked lower in educational hierarchy. This logic may explain for the same position of institution image and country image from the results of the survey.

The next issue the authors wish to explore is the considered trusted sources of information when the international students need sufficient amount of data input to make a rational decision relating a suitable university. The diagram below represents the results gathered in the survey for this dissertation.

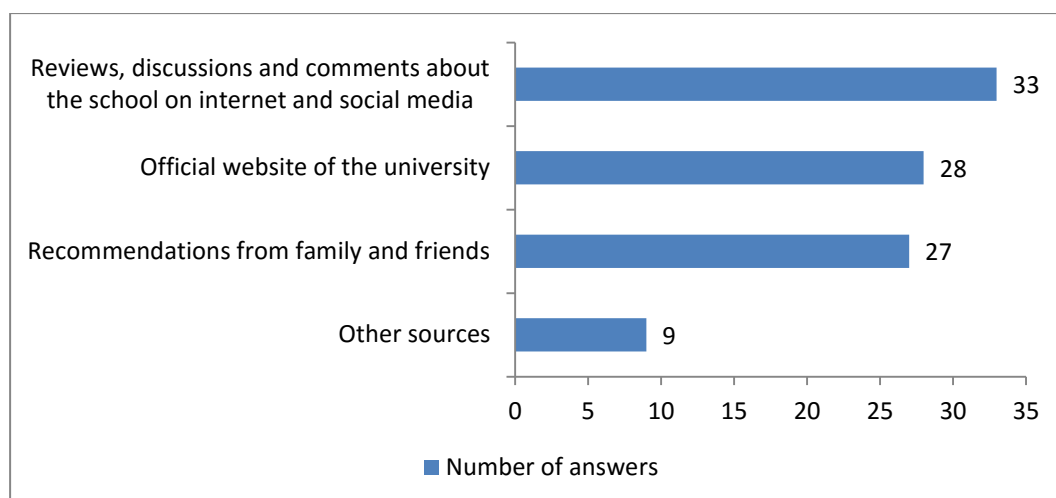


Figure 28. The trusted source of information by international students of Lahti UAS

Surprisingly, from the results of the survey, the most trusted source of information is “reviews, discussions and comments about the school from the social media and internet”. The authors believe the reason behind the trust of the customers for social media and internet as a reliable information source is that the customers consider social media and the internet is a free zone where everybody can voice their own opinions. Internet and social media users, when concerning products and brands, are also customers who narrate their experiences of a product or service. Therefore, these stories are usually considered as more honest and trustable than what comes from professional marketers. Because the information provided by the internet and social media is subjective and abundant, particularly in customer experience with products or services, it is understandable that international students think of them as the primary sources when searching for an appropriate university.

It is also worth noting that the official website of the university on the list as another trustworthy source of information. Official website is believed to supply more accurate information about core and augmented service package of a university (e.g. study program, curriculum and campus facility) than social media and the internet.

To explore further this issue, the authors inserted a follow-up question, asking the respondents to provide a list of information they could not find on the social media or official website of Lahti UAS. The collected answers were then interpreted carefully and classified into certain types of information. The results are shown in the following table.

Not-found information	Code	Number of answers
Scholarship	1	1
Partner universities	2	1
Application process	3	2
Activities and events	4	7
University prestige	5	3
Degree recognition	6	2
Employment opportunities	7	2
Course-related information	8	8
Student experience at LAMK	9	2
Acceptance score of the entrance exam	10	1
Accommodation information	11	2
Necessary contacts of the university	12	1
I am not sure	13	1
I found everything I need	14	3
Total		36

Table 16. Missing information from official website and social network sites of Lahti UAS

The highlighted rows demonstrate the most frequently missing/cannot-be-found information from the official website and social network sites of Lahti UAS. As it can be seen in the table, the most concerned information of international students was course-related matters such as course materials, courses contents, available courses etc. It seems that the students, especially exchange students, can not find this information on the official website or any social network sites of Lahti UAS. The authors know that Lahti UAS has a different website (www.reppu.lamk.fi) dedicated to course-related information. However, the layout of this website is quite confusing. It requires time to get used to the website and it sometimes needs a student account to view particular content of the page. In other

words, www.reppu.lamk.fi is targeting current students not the potential students.

Activities and events for students and university prestige were also the two aspects that international students took a great interest in when choosing a university abroad. Beside study program, activities and events (both educational and festive ones) can be used to evaluate how accomplished and unique a service package offered by one university is in comparison with other institutions and how attractive the university is to individual student. University prestige refers to the respect and admiration other students and even employers and recruiters attribute to the school, usually due to its high quality services, success and social influences etc. In education field, the more prestigious a university is, the higher its position is in university hierarchy and the more advantageous it is in recruiting best students and competing for financial fundings for the future developments. Universities can accumulate their prestige in many ways, for example, expertise in education, achievements in scientific researches, wide network of partnership and international relationship.

Notably, in the new official website of Lahti UAS (www.lamk.fi), course-related information for degree and exchange students and curriculum for various study programs are added. The contents of the official website are more student-oriented and are designed especially with international students' needs in mind. These are positive changes, indicating Lahti UAS efforts in becoming more competitive in educational market. However, the official website, despite of being beautifully designed and informative, is laden with many links and it takes time to navigate around and find a specific information. Important information such as curriculum for degree programs, content of courses is piled under myriads of links. To resolve this problem, the authors suggest having a separate tab, for example, FAQ (or Frequent Asked Questions) tab addressing directly to the most frequently asked matters of new students in general and potential international students in specific. Such a supplement will make the personal research of new students easier and more effective. In addition, student activities and events and university prestige should also be

included and highlighted in Lahti UAS official website and its social network sites. The contents of Lahti UAS social network sites and how to improve them will be discussed separately in the section of findings from the social media audit.

Question 9 of the survey was created to gather information about the frequently used social network sites among international students and whether Lahti UAS social network sites are attractive enough for them to subscribe. Moreover, this question is intended to complement the social media audit as it suggests which social media channels the university should spend more efforts to develop. The results for Question 9 are displayed in the column chart below.

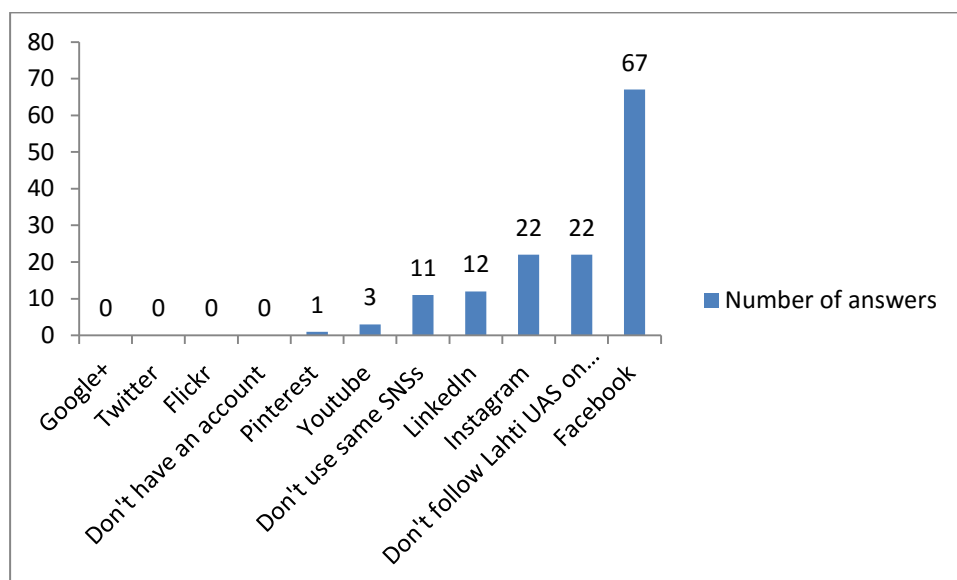


Figure 29. The amounts of followers, who are international students, on various social networks sites of Lahti UAS

As seen in the graph, the most popular social network site of Lahti UAS is Facebook. It is easy to understand as Facebook is also the biggest social network site in the world at present. The runner-up is Instagram, followed by LinkedIn. Despite its popularity, Youtube channel receives little attention from international students due to the poor contents. Other social network sites of Lahti UAS such as Google+, Twitter, Flickr and Pinterest do not have any followers in this survey. The social media audit may be able to shed a light on how this situation occurs.

Unfortunately, among the alternatives, the option of “don’t follow Lahti UAS on social media” is the second most chosen answer. It may indicate the failed attempts or insufficient attention in managing and promoting these social network sites of Lahti UAS. Where the main problems with social media of Lahti UAS are will be discussed thoroughly in social media audit part of this dissertation.

10.1.3 Relationship among variables

As mentioned above, the authors are also interested in the existence of potential relationship among variables. Specifically, the authors would like to explore the following issues:

1. *Is there any differences in the most influential preference factor between the two groups of students with different length of staying in Finland (i.e. “less than or equal 1 year” and “more than 1 year”)?*
2. *Is the most influential preference factor different among different disciplines (i.e. International Business, Business Information Technology, Nursing and Other)?*

The relationship is examined using chi-square test with the significant level of $p=0.05$. A chi-square test is usually implemented to analyze statistical significance. In other words, from the result of chi-square test, the authors can infer whether the two specific variables are associated or not (Saunders et al., 2009). Chi-square test is particularly appropriate in testing hypotheses concerning frequencies. Chi-square test provides researchers significant level, or “the probability indicating the inference of a difference between an observed variable and some statistical expectations is true” (Zikmund, et al., 2010). This significant level is then compared with a predetermined p-value, which is an acceptable probability for a statistical expectation or a null hypothesis is true. In the two chi-square tests used in this dissertation, the p-value is decided to be 0.05. If the significant level of the chi-square test is lower than the $p=0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected and the authors can infer that there is a very small

chance that the null hypothesis is true. And vice versa, if the significant level is greater than $p=0.05$, the authors can be confident in concluding that the null hypothesis is true. The following session will be dedicated for how to apply chi-square tests to examine the interested issues.

10.1.3.1 Relationship between the Most Influential Set of Factors and the Length of Staying in Finland

In order to examine the association between the two variables “the most influential factor” and “the length of staying in Finland”, the authors developed the following hypotheses:

- H_0 (*null hypothesis*): “The most influential set of factors” and “the length of staying in Finland” are independent.
- H_1 (*alternative hypothesis*): “The most influential set of factors” and “the length of staying in Finland” are dependent on each other.

The chi-square test is employed and the results are displayed in the table below.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.574 ^a	4	.006
Likelihood Ratio	16.925	4	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.758	1	.053
N of Valid Cases	97		

Table 17. The results of chi-square test between “the most influential set of factors” and “the length of staying in Finland”

As it can be seen in the table the significant level of the chi-square test was 0.006, which is much lower than the p-value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis in this case was rejected and the authors can conclude that “the most influential set of factors” and “the length of staying in Finland” are associated with each other. The following bar chart will reveal more about the relationship between these two variables.

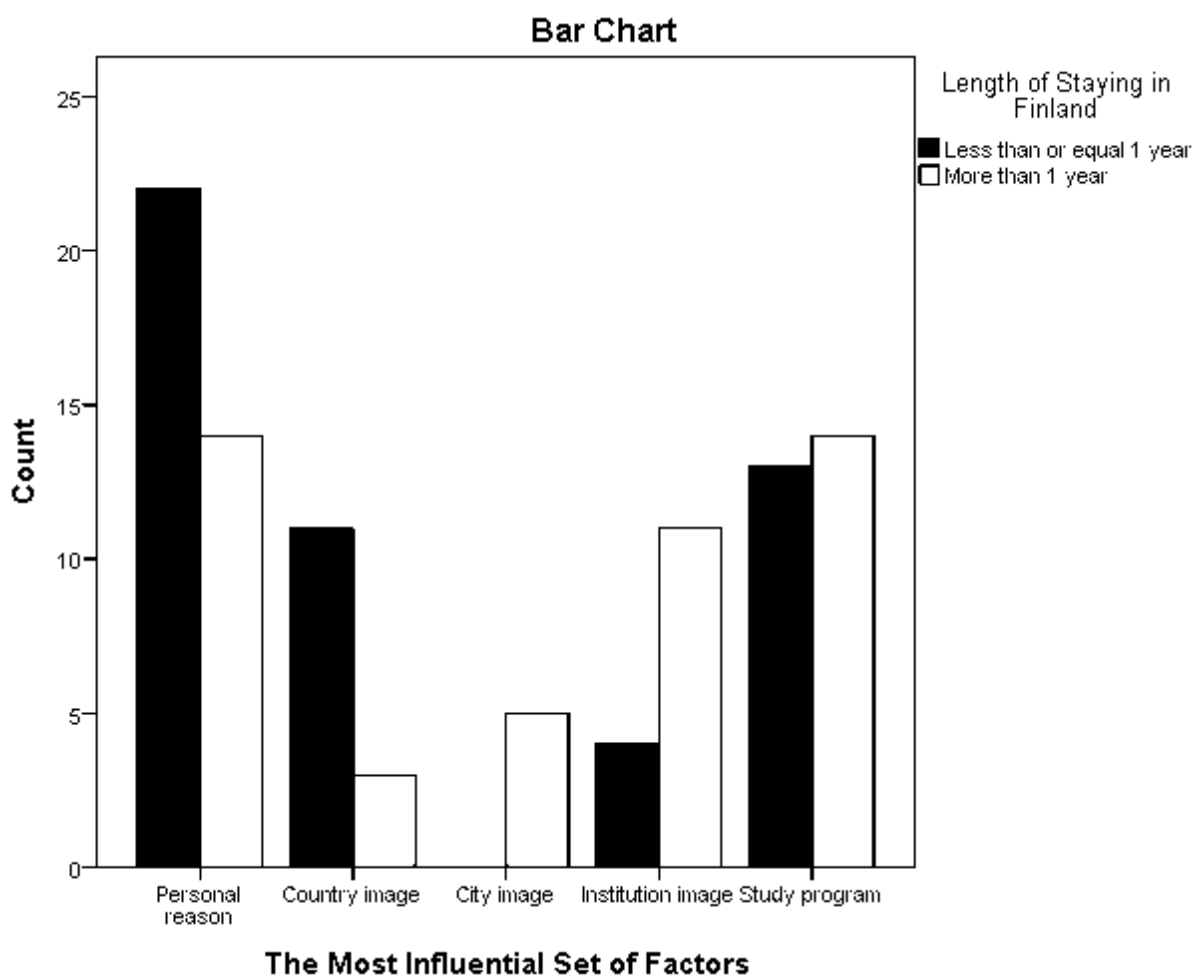


Figure 30. Bar chart displaying the distribution of “the most influential set of factors” and “the length of staying in Finland”

As indicated in the diagram, there were slight differences in the preferences between the students who have studied at Lahti UAS for more than one year (old students) and the ones who have studied less than or equal one year (new students). With the old students, all five set of factors were assigned a prioritized position in the preference list. Study program

and personal reason were the most influential set of factors and had the same weight in the decision-making process. On the contrary, with the new students, the most influential set of factors was skewed toward personal reason. Study program still held an important position in the preference list but it was after personal reason. Surprisingly, city image seemed to have no influence in the decision-making process of the new students. The authors can infer further that within the interval of three years, there is a shift in the preference of international students, especially in the most priority factor. When linked with the knowledge in which “to experience the new culture” and “to build an international network” are the most common answers in the personal reason, the authors believe that the potential international students will aim more for personal achievement and future career development through networking when choosing a university abroad. Therefore, to attract new students, emphasizing on the quality of the study program is not enough. Universities should also point out how studying at their university will aid the personal and career development of individual students.

10.1.3.2 Relationship between “the most influential set of factors” and “the respondent’s discipline”

In a similar manner, the chi-square test is applied to examine the following hypotheses:

- H_0 (*null hypothesis*): “The most influential set of factors” and “the respondent’s discipline” are independent.
- H_1 (*alternative hypothesis*): “The most influential set of factors” and “the respondent’s discipline” are dependent on each other.

The result of the chi-square test will be presented in the following table.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.506 ^a	12	.043
Likelihood Ratio	22.716	12	.030
Linear-by-Linear Association	.035	1	.851
N of Valid Cases	97		

Table 18. The results of chi-square test between “the most influential set of factors” and “the respondent’s discipline”

The significant level of the chi-square test was 0.043 and was lower than the accepted $p=0.05$. Therefore, only the alternative hypothesis was accepted, which states that “the most influential set of factors” and “the respondent’s discipline” have statistically significant relationship. How these two variables relate to each other will be displayed in the bar chart below.

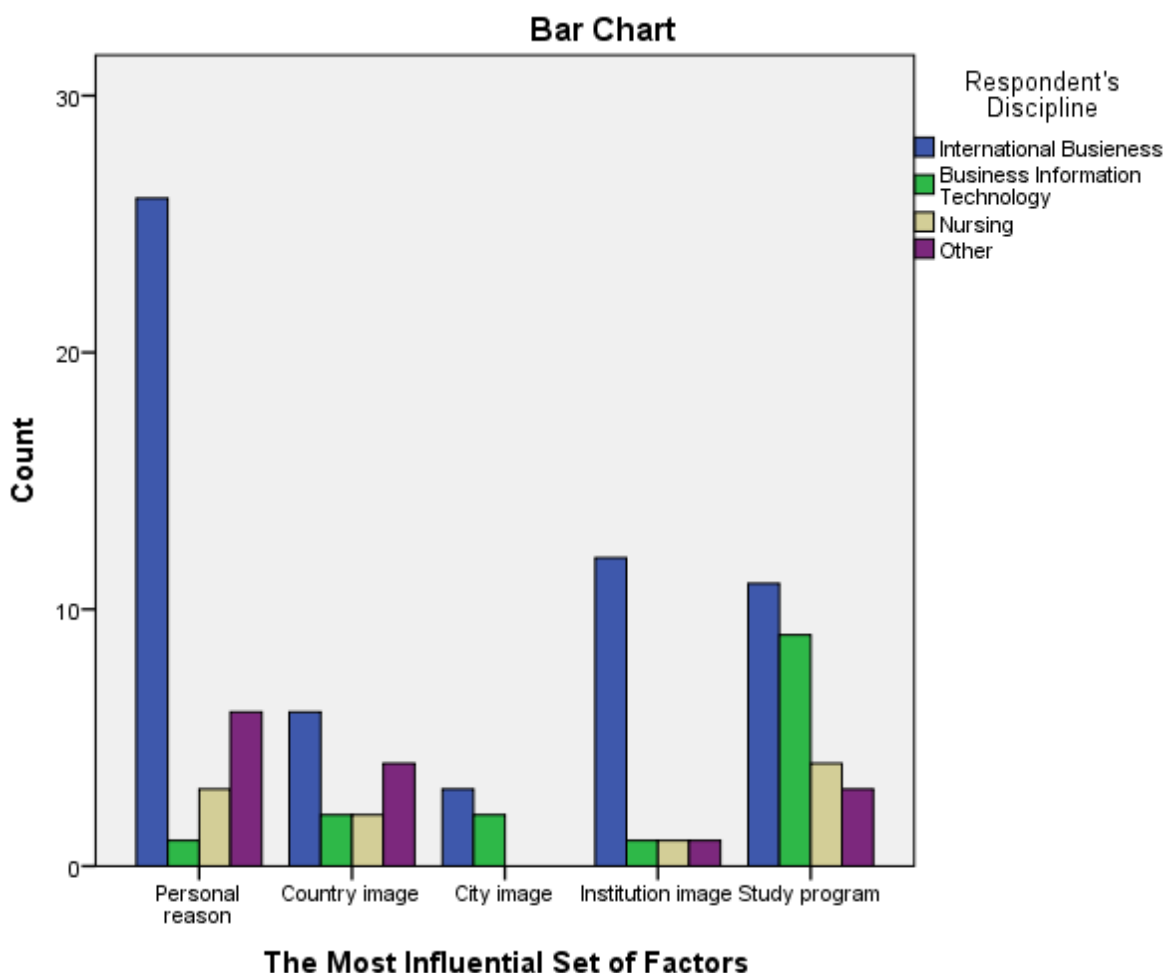


Figure 31. Bar chart displaying the distribution of “the most influential set of factors” and “the respondent’s discipline”

As seen in the figure, each discipline had a small divergence in the preference list. For example, International Business students preferred the following priority list: personal reason – institution image – study program – country image – city image; whereas, Business Information Technology students arranged their priorities in the order of study program – country image and city image (same level of priority) – personal reason and institution image (also same level of favor). With the nursing students, the most to least important set of factors were study program – personal reason – country image – institution image. In general, personal reason and study program are always among the most powerful factors in the decision-making process of international students. Targeting these factors

will help Lahti UAS and other institutions in recruiting new students successfully.

10.2 Findings and Discussions from Social Media Audit

The authors have divided the results found from the analytical phase into three categories and will report them accordingly. Each category has its own set of metrics that together will reflect the picture about a certain aspect of Lahti UAS and other institutions' social media assets. The categories are popularity, performance and perception and will be demonstrated in the next graph.

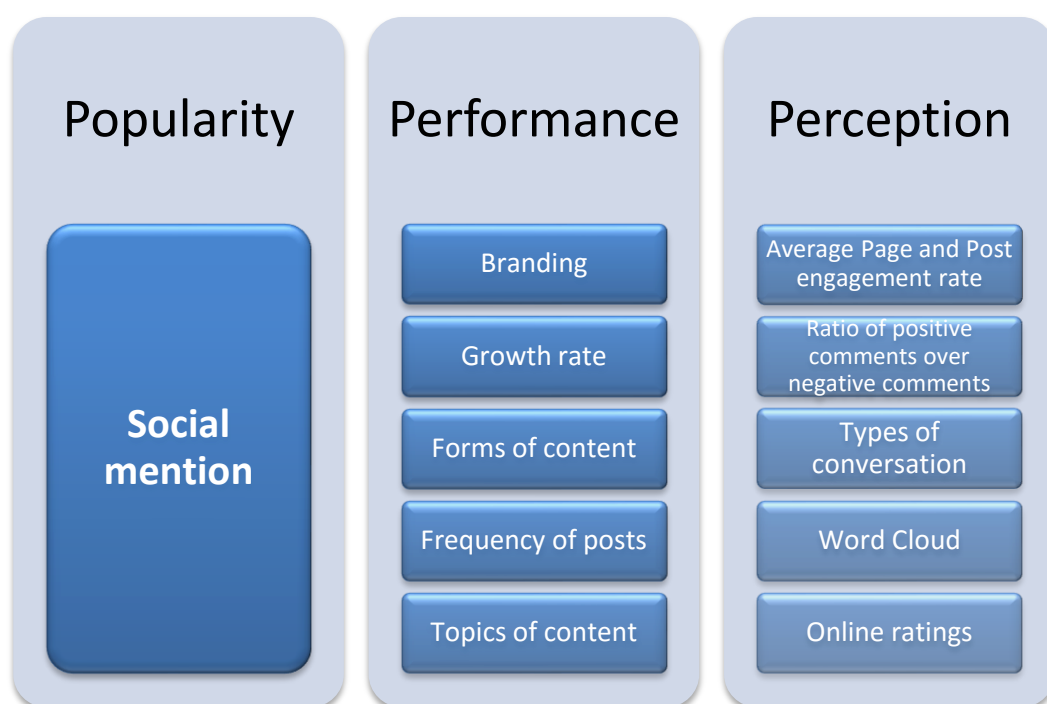


Figure 32. Categories to report social media audit results

The studied metrics are arranged into the three categories on the basis of their purpose. Popularity means how much the traffic in the social media landscape is talking about a specific institution. The authors decide to use Social Mention tool to explore this category. Performance is the category that holds metrics which reveal the current status quo of social media efforts of all institutions in discussion. Perception is the last category and its metrics report on how the audience of each school perceives its

existence on social media. The results will be presented in the next section.

10.2.1 Popularity – Social Mention

As discussed previously, Social Mention is a virtual tool which monitors a multitude of social platforms to track and report any conversation around an organization. The authors will utilize this tool to have a brief look at how much the audience is talking about Lahti UAS and other schools. To initiate the tool, the authors will provide the search keywords. They will be the full name of the institutions without any abbreviations. This is to ascertain that the incoming result will be correct and relevant. Using short names or abbreviations will lead to a chance that irrelevant results may occur due to the use of the same abbreviation but with a different meaning. The output is demonstrated as following:

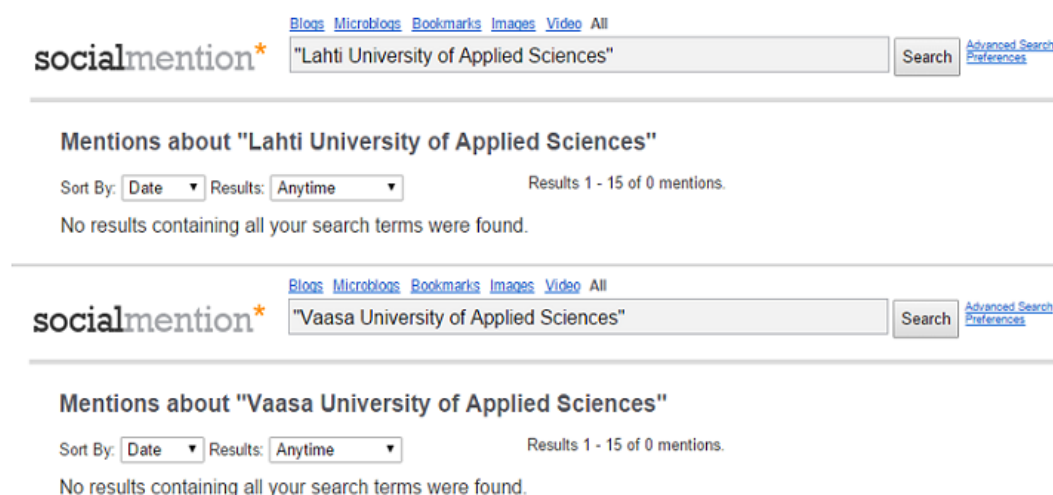


Figure 33. Social mention results for Lahti UAS and VAMK on August 15, 2015

The above picture is the screenshot from Social Mention with two search keywords “Lahti University of Applied Sciences” and “Vaasa University of Applied Sciences”. As seen, Social Mention could not report on any current conversations or mentions that are directed to the two schools.

This means the popularity of both Lahti UAS and VAMK are still limited in the social media landscape. The result for Harvard University, NUS and EPFL is as follows:

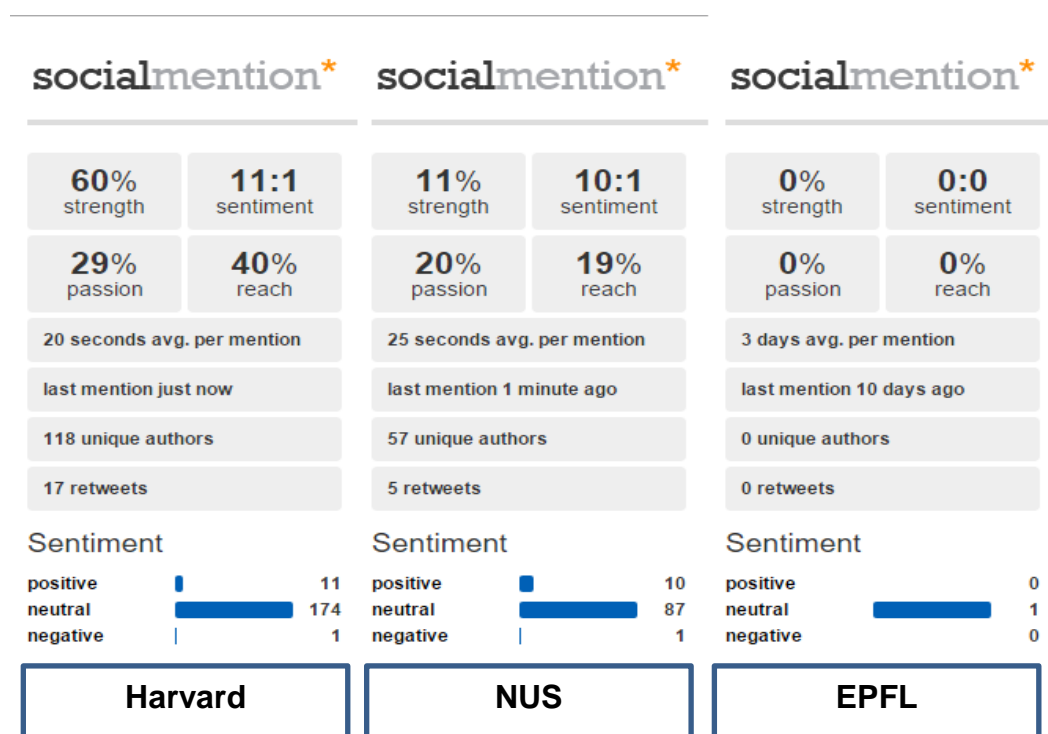


Figure 34. Social mention results for Harvard, NUS and EPFL on August 15, 2015

As it can be observed from the graph, there were conversations that were circulating around the institutions. All the three schools yield results but at different extents. For Harvard University, its average time per mention was 20 seconds, comparing that with NUS' 25 seconds and EPFL's average three days. Also, there were more discussions about the schools shown in the Sentiment calculation. Harvard led the three schools with around 186 mentions, and 11 of them are positive. NUS had roughly 100 mentions, which is less than Harvard but it holds more positive mentions in the overall ratio. EPFL has only one neutral mention of its name. From this comparison, the result shows that regarding popularity in the social media landscape, Harvard University leads the five institutions with most conversations occurring around its brand.

10.2.2 Performance – Branding

There are three areas in the branding assessment the authors want to report about: existing profiles, their completion and the logo display. The results will be presented next.

For the media profiles, the authors have conducted a research with an aim to locate all the channels on which the schools have their social media presence. The following table will illustrate the current status of Lahti UAS' social media participation and that of others.

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube	Google+	Pinterest	Flickr	LinkedIn
Lahti UAS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
VAMK	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Harvard University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes(No activity)	Yes	Yes
NUS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes(No activity)	No	Yes	Yes
EPFL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Table 19. Social media portfolio of all institutions

As observed from the table, there are eight different channels listed. However, not all of these channels are promoted on the official websites of the schools. Nevertheless, the pages are still present and some institutions still have their content updated there regularly. Regarding Lahti UAS, it is present on all eight channels studied. All its platforms are updated with content regularly apart from Google+. The last entry on Lahti UAS' Google+ account is from November 2014, and since then it has been dormant. VAMK employs five major platforms for its social media, which are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest and LinkedIn. Harvard University also has its presence on all eight channels, but there is no activity on its Pinterest. For NUS, it does not have a Pinterest account and

on Google+ there is no activity either. EPFL has an active presence on seven out of eight platforms, making Pinterest the odd one out.

As it can be seen, only Lahti UAS and VAMK use Pinterest actively. Some entries of content for Lahti UAS are updated there regularly. Nonetheless, the impact is still limited because on Pinterest Lahti UAS has only 13 followers, which is a very insignificant number. There is one issue the authors noticed about Flickr channel during the research. Although Lahti UAS and three other institutions have an account on that platform, the usage is different. On Flickr, Lahti UAS has 17 followers which is merely the same to its audience on Pinterest and is a very small number. Contrary to a tiny audience, the channel hosts over 2,300 photos taken by Lahti UAS. All the photos uploaded there are under Lahti UAS' ownership.

Harvard, NUS and EPFL use their Flickr platforms in a different manner. The three institutions leave Flickr as an open forum which can be provided with photos from the audience – the students. The students can contribute photographic materials related to the schools and the institutions' administrators will select the suitable ones to be uploaded. In other words, the schools only monitor the user-generated content supplied by their students. They do not have to invest any considerable amount of efforts into promoting the channel and the image of the school. This saves them considerable amounts of time and human resources from managing this channel.

The big picture shows that Lahti UAS is using more social media platforms than any other institutions. However, the audience for some channels like Pinterest and Flickr is small, making the possible impact Lahti UAS could provide through these channels also smaller in proportion. VAMK uses fewest media platforms, which can be considered as a good point since they have to manage fewer channels and those channels are the major ones. Harvard University, NUS and EPFL generally employ the same platforms that are most popular in order to promote their institution image. The completion of the information on these profiles will be discussed next.

For Facebook, the result is that all five institutions have adequate information introducing them. This includes contact details that students can follow to inquire more information. All schools have links to the official website and other platforms embedded. However, as for Lahti UAS and VAMK, they only have the information in Finnish while the other three institutions have the details written in English. This may restrict international students from understanding the provided information because they cannot understand Finnish language. Lahti UAS may consider supplementing a short English translation for the introductory information to make it more welcoming towards potential international students. On Twitter, Lahti UAS' level of completion is on par with others. It has a brief English introduction and links to the official website like the others. The same situation is observed on Instagram. All institutions, including Lahti UAS, provide a short description about them and the link to return to the main website. Nevertheless, there is a slight difference on YouTube. While all other institutions provide the links to their other media platforms, Lahti UAS is missing most of them.


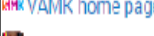


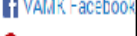


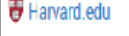



















Lahti UAS	VAMK	Harvard University	NUS	EPFL
Links  Google+	Links  VAMK home page  VAMK Instagram  VAMK LinkedIn  VAMK Facebook  VAMK Pinterest  Google+	Links  Harvard.edu  SoundCloud  Harvard on Google+  Twitter  Facebook  Google+	Links  NUScast  NUS iTunesU  NUS Google Maps  Facebook  NUS iTunesU  Google+	Links  EPFL  EPFL on LinkedIn  Google+  Facebook  EPFL on LinkedIn  Google+  Twitter  EPFL on Coursera

Figure 35. Links to other social media platforms on YouTube for the institutions in order: Lahti UAS, VAMK, Harvard, NUS and EPFL

By adding the missing links, Lahti UAS can engage the viewers more by inviting them to visit its other social media platforms. Also, the supplement of these links shows that YouTube is not a stand-alone platform but part of Lahti UAS' media assets and it works together with other channels to

promote Lahti UAS' image. The logo display will be presented in the next section.

As assessed on August 17th, the logos for Lahti UAS on the official website and on four studied social media platforms were as follows.



Figure 36. Logos of Lahti UAS on the official website and on social media platforms in the following order: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube

It can be seen from this image that the logo used on the official website of Lahti UAS is not the same with the others on its social media. To add to that, for different channels, different logos exist but they all are affiliated to the same name – Lahti UAS. There is no conceivable coherence in this display which may cause confusion among the viewers. The audience may be wondering whether the channel they are visiting actually belongs to Lahti UAS. Next, results for VAMK, Harvard University, NUS and EPFL will be presented.



Figure 37. Logos of VAMK on the official website and on social media platforms in the following order: Facebook, Instagram and YouTube

VAMK displays its logo in a coherent manner across the official website and the social media channels. The same logo is used for all of its media assets, which keeps them in uniform and it acts as a reminder that they all

are representative of VAMK. By this, confusion for the viewers will be limited to its smallest possibility.

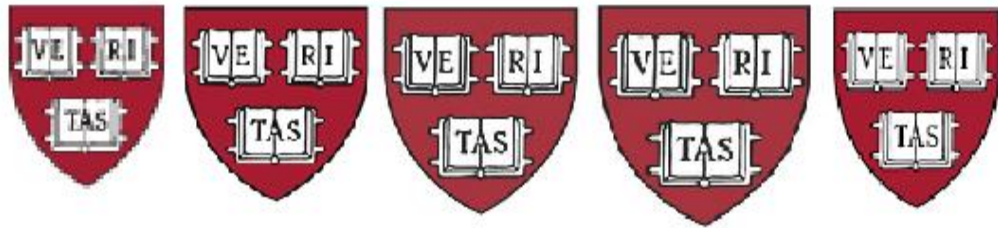


Figure 38. Logos of Harvard University on the official website and on social media platforms in the following order: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube

By the same token, Harvard University shows uniformity in its logo display across its social media. The same logo is used to represent Harvard University to its audience worldwide.



Figure 39. Logos of NUS on the official website and on social media platforms in the following order: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube

NUS also demonstrates consistency in its logo display. The school's image is represented by the same logo-the crest and the abbreviation of the school's name across its social media assets.



Figure 40. Logos of EPFL on the official website and on social media platforms in the following order: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube

EPFL as well consistently displays its logo on the media channels in discussion. The fact that the EPFL logo is uploaded onto all its media platforms diminishes the chance to be mistaken with others. Viewers will know immediately they are following the correct EPFL official channel.

A uniform logo will show consistency when the audience looks at the institutions' social media channels. Lahti UAS' current usage of multiple logos will make room for confusion to the visitors, and this should be mitigated. With the display of a single logo, it will create a positive impression that all channels are managed and developed with a coherent guiding strategy from Lahti UAS, which will enhance Lahti UAS' image even further. In the next part, the authors will elaborate the results found about the growth rate of all the institutions' social media platforms throughout the observation period.

10.2.3 Performance – Growth Rate

Before the authors go into explaining the growth rate of followers across all institutions' social media assets, they will briefly present the current number of audience each school possesses. The authors will utilize graphical illustrations to present the result for this part.

	Lahti UAS	VAMK	Harvard University	NUS	EPFL
Facebook	2,500	3,300	4,100,000	185,000	48,000
Twitter	1,000	N/A	519,000	13,200	11,500
Instagram	650	730	78,500	2,100	3,300
YouTube	50	50	239,000	6,000	9,000

Table 20. Approximate number of followers of the five institutions' social media channels, accessed on August 17th, 2015

As seen from the table, Lahti UAS and VAMK have relatively the same size of audience on their social media platforms. Harvard University has the biggest number of followers, succeeded by NUS and EPFL. The numbers here are for reference primarily and they do not pose any significant meaning to the concluding process. The huge discrepancy in the number of followers does not affect the analyzing process due to the fact that the formulas are calculated on the basis of proportion, which makes the output unbiased and valid. Next, the authors will present the result about the channels' growth rates.

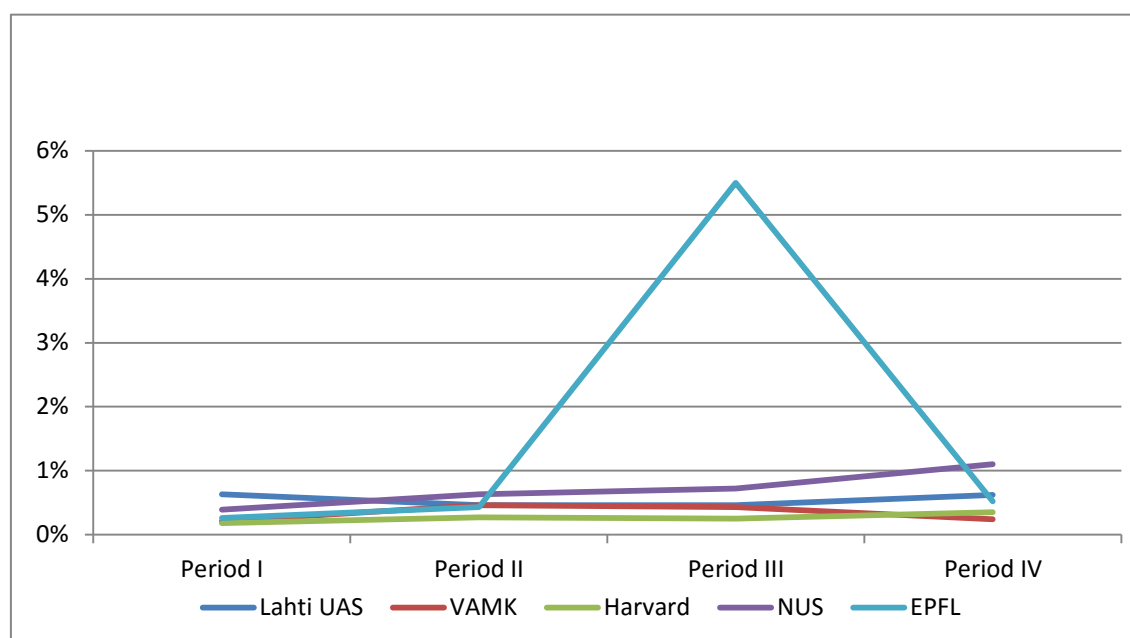


Figure 41. Facebook follower growth rates throughout observation period

On Facebook, the growth of number of followers for all schools did not differ much from each other. They ranged from 0.2% to 1.1% during the

observation period and did not fluctuate dramatically. In fact, the growth rate was stable for Lahti UAS specifically. As seen, no figure dropped to zero which means all schools had a positive growth rate throughout the observation period. This is a good sign showing that new visitors are paying attention to the channel. There was a spike for EPFL's growth between Period II and III. During this time, the number of new followers of EPFL jumped to 5.5%. The explanation for this surge could be credited to the events which took place during Period II and III. From July 15th to July 21st, there was a competition about mechanical engineering called Hydro Contest in which teams from EPFL participated. They won first and second prizes in some categories and hence created a buzz across social media. EPFL promoted these achievements on their Facebook profile and received a great number of supportive remarks. This positively enhanced the institution's image and thus accounted for the abrupt rise in EPFL's growth rate.

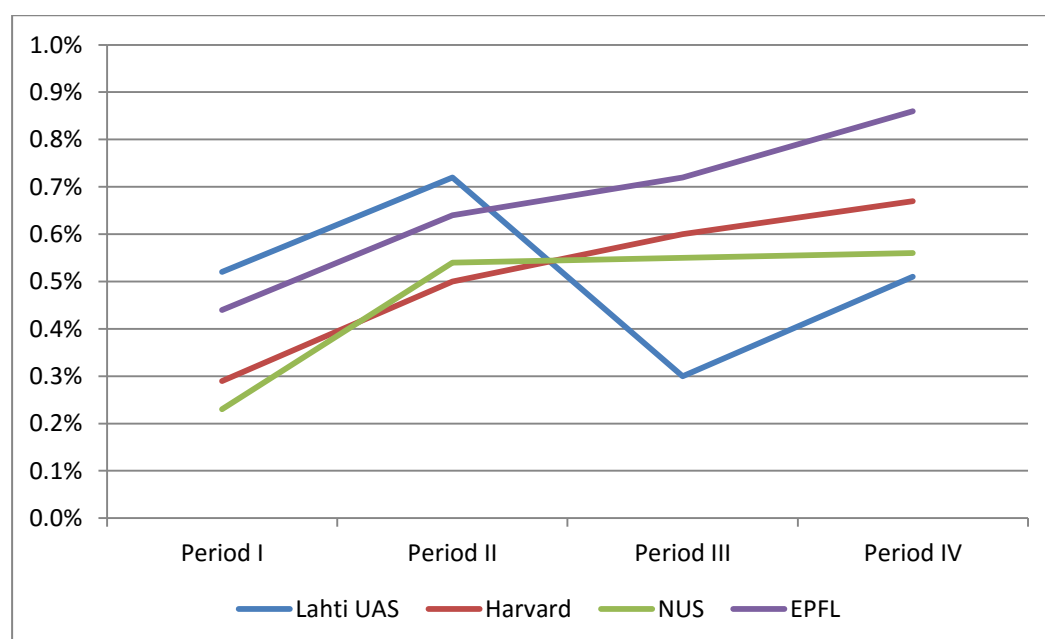


Figure 42. Twitter follower growth rates throughout observation period

VAMK does not use Twitter; therefore they do not appear in this chart. As it can be easily observed, Lahti UAS' growth on Twitter was not stable in comparison with others. There was a drop during Period III of nearly 0.4%. Meanwhile, other institutions maintained a positive and upward trend and

eventually they ended up higher than Lahti UAS at the end of Period IV although they all started at a lower position. This means Lahti UAS should make improvements on Twitter to keep its growth more stable than it was during the observation period.

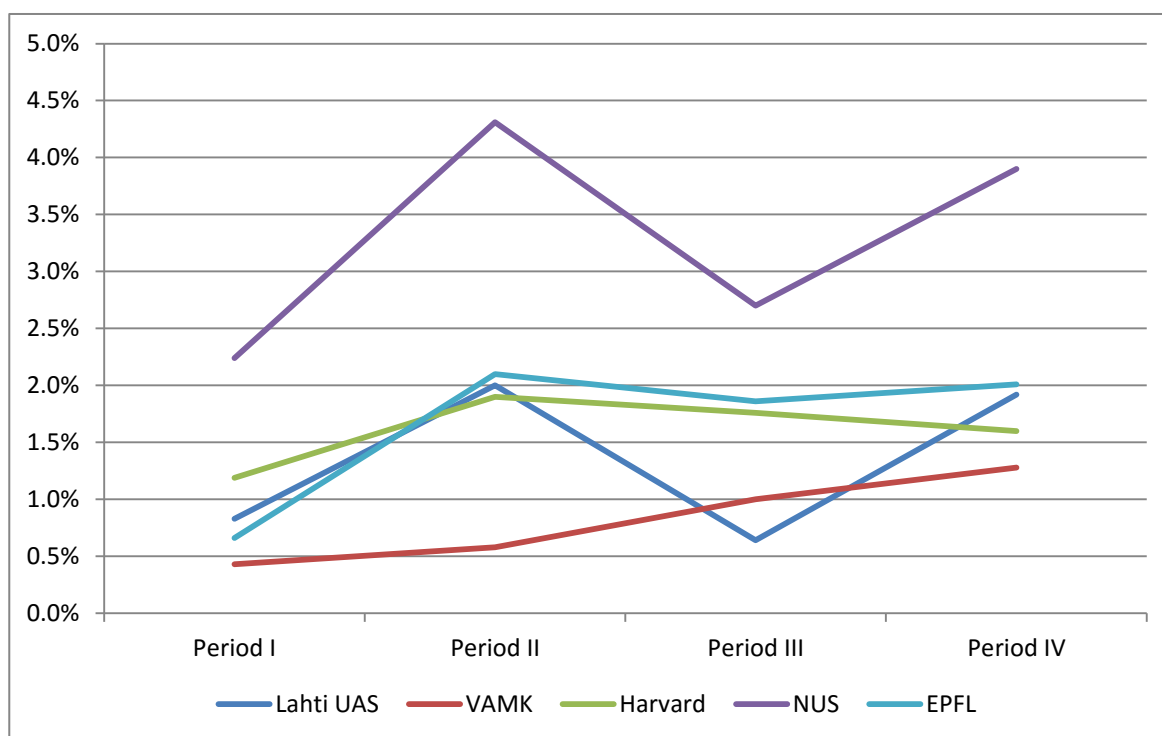


Figure 43. Instagram follower growth rates throughout observation period

It can be seen from the chart that the growth rate on Instagram for all institutions involved was significantly higher compared to other channels so far. A noticeable point is that all schools had a positive and upward trend. At the end of the observation period, the growth rate for all institutions was higher than the starting rate. Although Lahti UAS' growth rate was not stable as it fluctuates during the periods, it rose to nearly 2% at the end of Period IV. The difference of the rates between the starting and the ending period for Lahti UAS was 1.1%. Instagram is currently the platform that has the highest growth for Lahti UAS in terms of new audience. NUS led the chart with a positive rate between 2.2% - 4.3%.

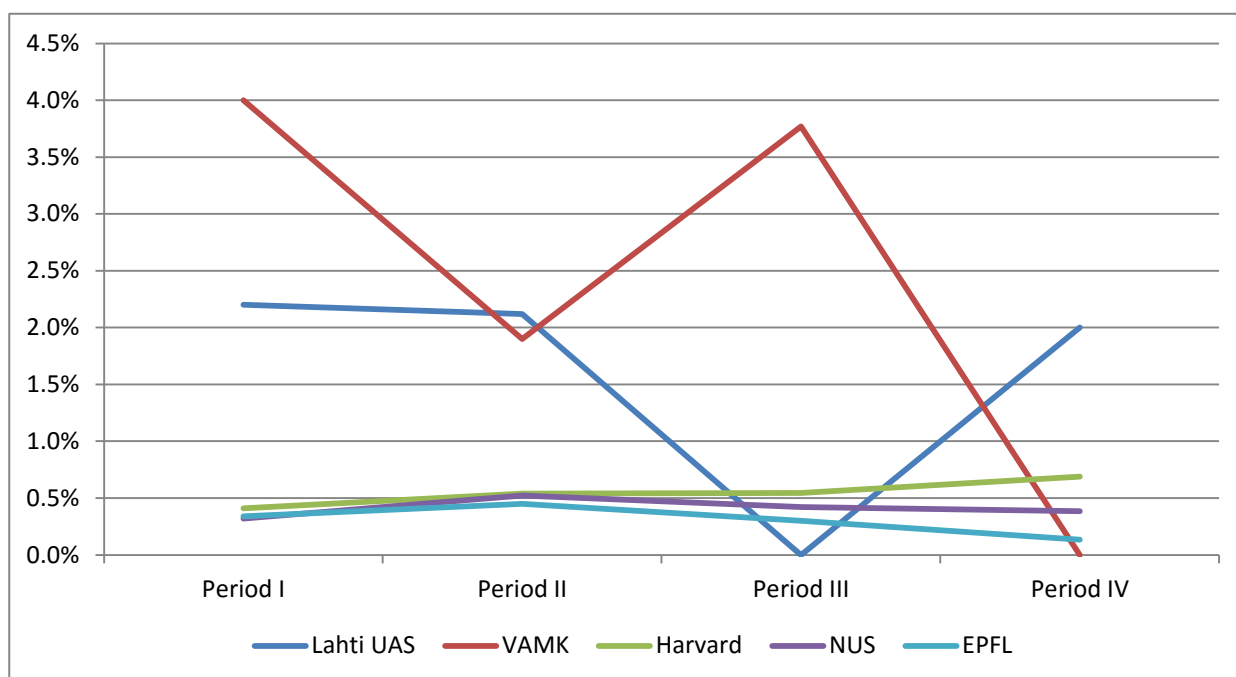


Figure 44. Youtube follower growth rates throughout observation period

On YouTube, the trend between institutions varies greatly. For Lahti UAS, YouTube yielded the highest growth rate among all channels – at 2.2% during Period I. However, once again the rate was not level but fluctuates dramatically. During Period III, it dropped to 0% which meant there was no growth for Lahti UAS' YouTube during this time. It then increased to 2% in Period IV. Harvard, NUS and EPFL held a relatively stable rate and none of them drops to 0%. VAMK also had a rapidly changing growth when it went from 4% at the starting period to 0% at the end. Although the rate is highest for Lahti UAS on YouTube, there is a fact in need of consideration. The base for Lahti UAS' YouTube followers is much smaller than its number of followers on Instagram. On YouTube it has only 50 and on Instagram it has around 650. This means Instagram still brings more new followers to Lahti UAS than YouTube does.

10.2.4 Performance – Forms of Content

This metric will be applied only to Facebook and Twitter, since the remaining two Instagram and YouTube can only be updated with either photos or videos. By looking at this metric, the authors wish to find out

which form of update the institutions are using for their content. The result will be provided in forms of column charts.

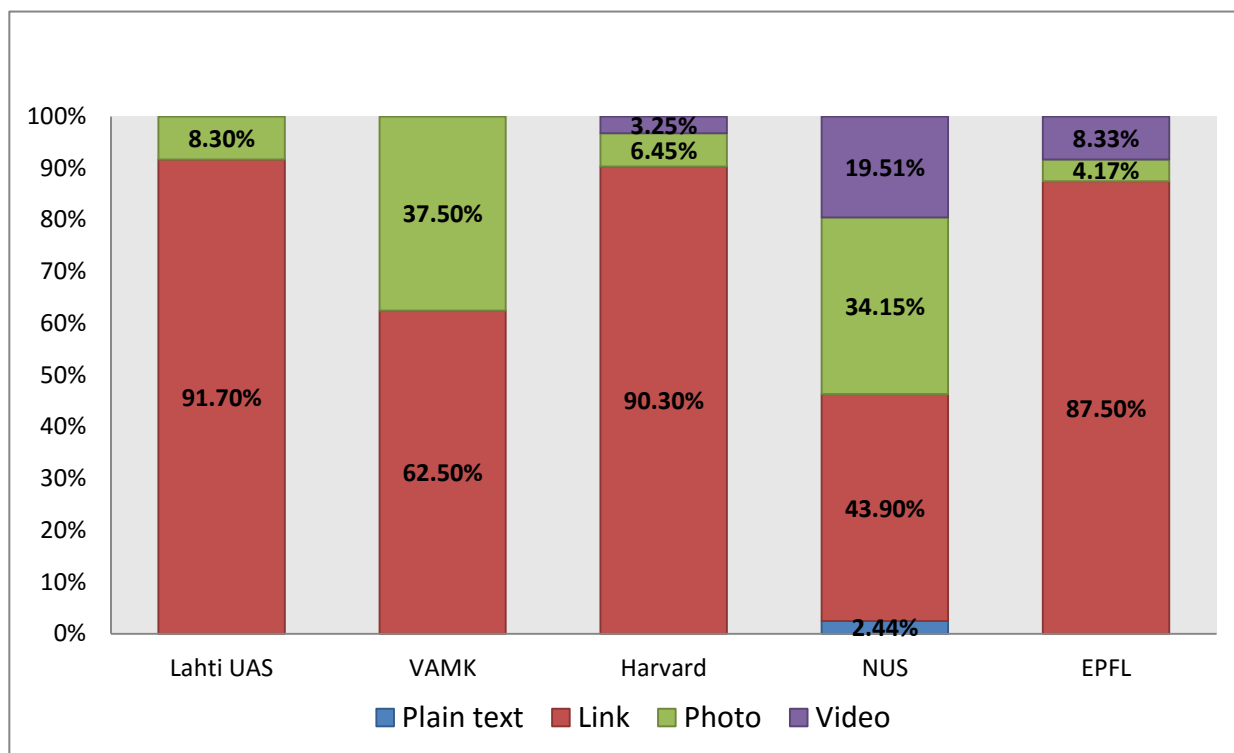


Figure 45. Proportion of forms of content on Facebook

Regarding Facebook, it can be observed that there are distinct differences between how the institutions update their content onto this channel. In 91.7% of all the updates, Lahti UAS embedded at least one link into them. For the remaining 8.3% of all updates, it used at least one photo to accompany and elaborate them. This proportion is diverse among the schools. VAMK also used only two forms of content but at a different ratio. Harvard, NUS and EPFL all updated their content in, at minimum, three ways. From the chart, NUS seems to be having the most balanced proportion with four different forms of content. For Lahti UAS, it may consider expanding the range of content forms to provide more engaging materials that would appeal to its audience on Facebook.

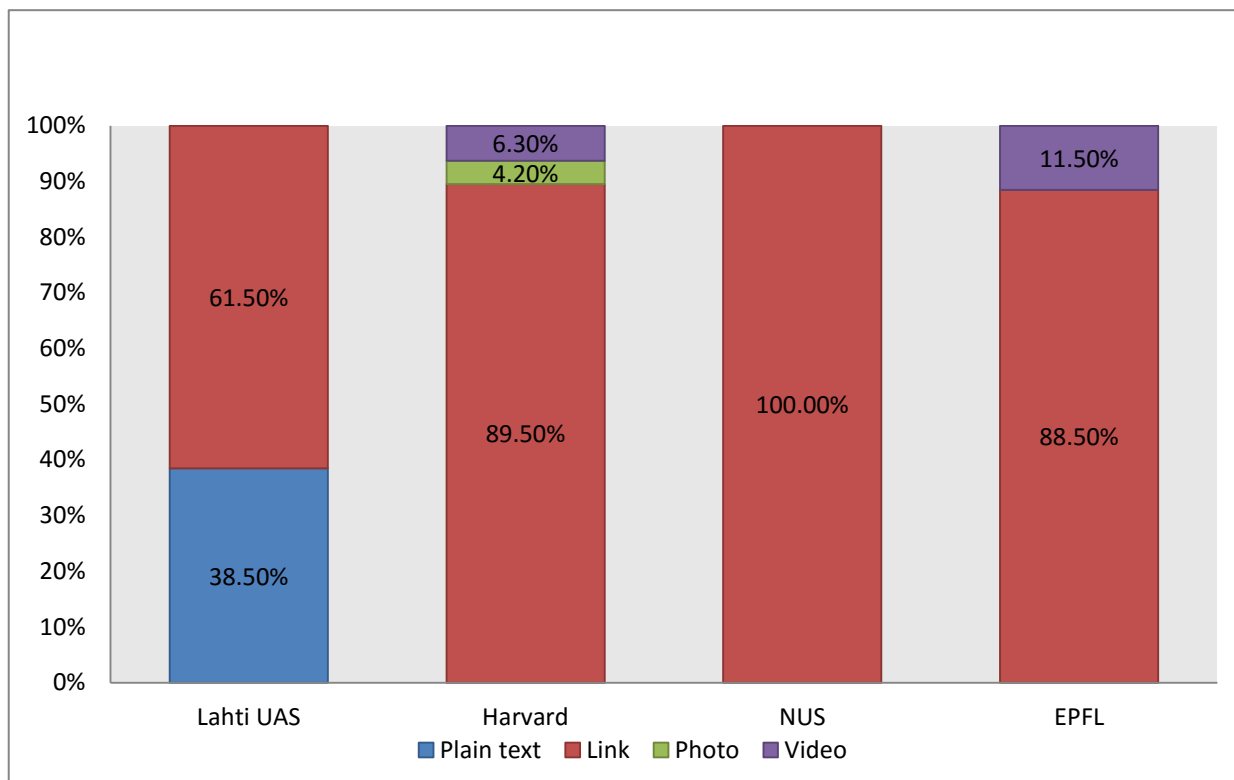


Figure 46. Proportion of forms of content on Twitter

Twitter is utilized by four out of five institutions, excluding VAMK, which is the reason for VAMK not being listed in this chart. As seen, Lahti UAS was the only institution using plain text for some of its content updates – meaning there was no link or visuals to lead viewers to another source of information. This accounted for 38.5% of all Lahti UAS' updates on Twitter and the rest was posted with embedded links. Without any links or photos or videos, an update will be merely informing and the audience's call for action will be limited. This means there is no material to elaborate the update and hence cannot contribute to retaining the viewers' attention and engagement. Lahti UAS can consider increasing the proportion of non-text-only updates to boost the engagement level on this channel.

10.2.5 Performance – Frequency of Posts

The frequency of posts metric will assess the number of updates the institutions post onto their social media during the observing period. The collection of this data will show the authors how frequent the schools have used their social media assets to convey new stories to their audience. It

will provide insights into knowing whether a channel is dormant or actively utilized. A higher frequency means the institution has more content to present to its audience and that there are more new stories circulating the school. This leads to the image of the school being active and vibrant in the perception of the students. Lahti UAS can consider this matter in the future to develop its branding strategy for its social media assets.

The result will be demonstrated through the use of line charts next.

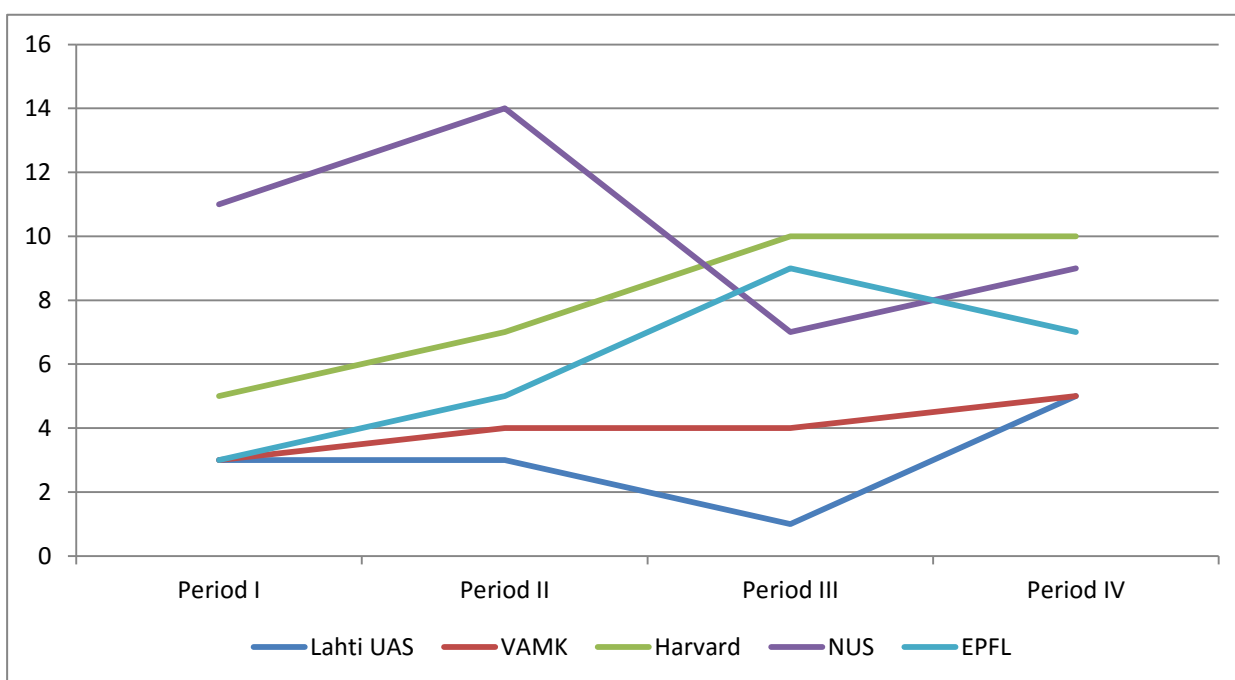


Figure 47. Frequency of updates on Facebook

The chart reveals that all institutions update at least once a week on Facebook and the number of posts vary for each school. This means all five institutions utilize Facebook platform continuously. This is a positive point since it will not appear to the audience that the school's Facebook is idle. Lahti UAS had fewest updates in comparison with other benchmarks, standing at 12 updates throughout the observation duration. Its average number of posts per period was 3. NUS topped the chart with a total of 41 updates during the observation. The average post per period for VAMK, Harvard and EPFL was 4, 8 and 5 respectively.

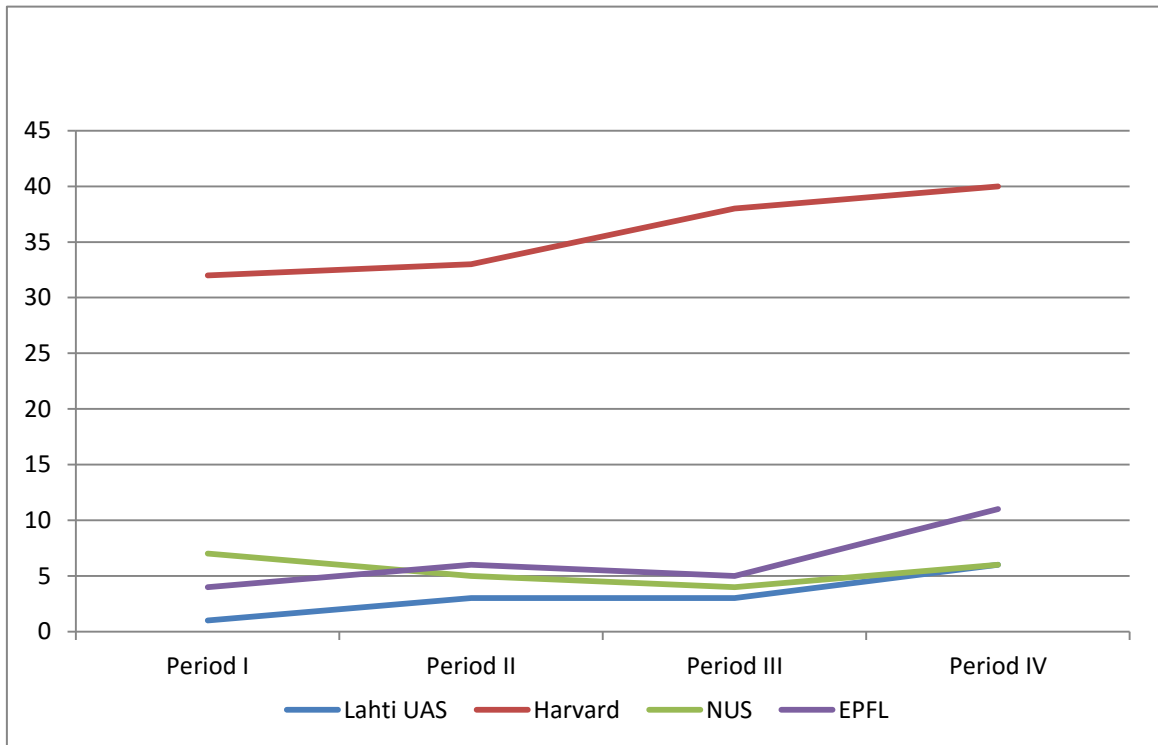


Figure 48. Frequency of updates on Twitter

For Twitter, Lahti UAS' frequency stays more or less the same as on Facebook. It updated 13 posts during the observation period, and once again it had the lowest number of updates on this channel compared to others. VAMK does not have a Twitter account which leaves it out of the chart. It can be easily noticed about Harvard's number of updates on this channel. Its number skyrocketed to 143 updates during the one-month data collection. Seemingly, Harvard put much more efforts into this channel than it did on Facebook. NUS and EPFL updated at 5 and 6 times per period respectively.

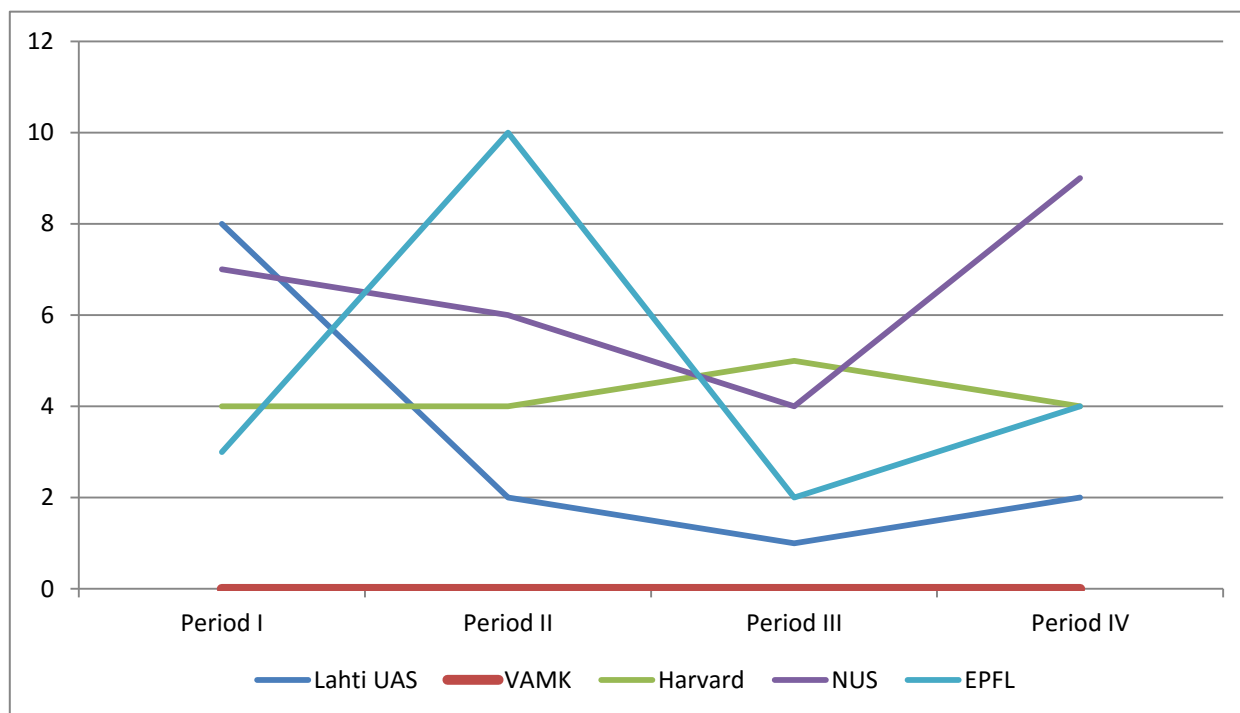


Figure 49. Frequency of updates on Instagram

During the observation period, Lahti UAS updated 13 posts onto its Instagram account. Its average frequency was 3 posts per period and it was stable and consistent when compared to the previous result for Facebook and Twitter. There was no activity on VAMK's Instagram account during the tracking period. All the other schools had a greater number of updates than Lahti UAS and NUS also led with 26 posts throughout the duration. Harvard, NUS and EPFL's numbers of average post per period in order were 4, 6 and 5.

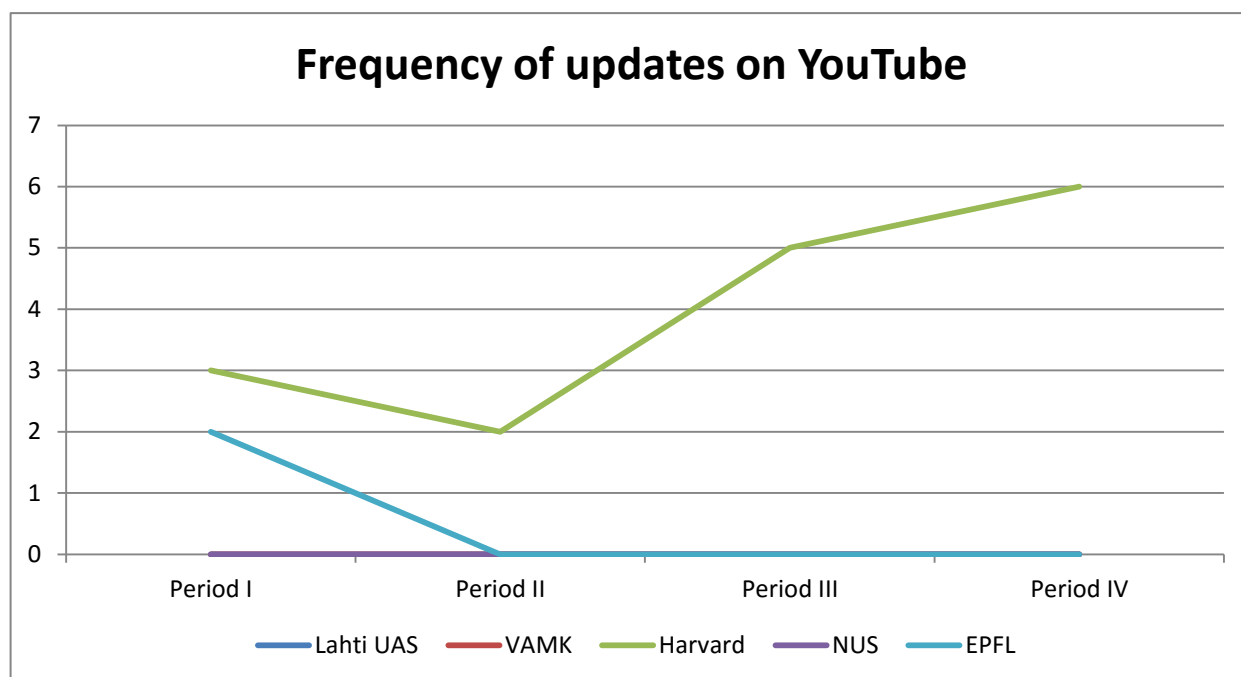


Figure 50. Frequency of updates on Youtube

Concerning YouTube, there were only two institutions which were active during the observation. They were Harvard University and EPFL. Lahti UAS, VAMK and NUS stayed idle on their YouTube during this tracking time. Harvard posted a total of 16 videos onto its channel and EPFL uploaded 2 videos. On average, Harvard posted 4 videos per period to its YouTube account.

The finding shows that only two institutions stayed active across all of their social media channels in discussion, which are Harvard and EPFL. NUS had the highest number of posts on Facebook and Instagram, while Harvard led the table on Twitter and YouTube. Lahti UAS posted its content onto its channels at a consistent frequency, which were 3 posts per period. This shows that Lahti UAS is maintaining a stable amount of effort on its social media. However, Lahti UAS is still behind other institutions, and this could be improved with future strategies to find more quality content to introduce to its audience.

10.2.6 Performance – Topics of Content

By assessing the content with the set of codes presented previously, the authors wish to find out what sort of stories the institutions have been messaging to the audience via their social media. The data was collected and analyzed for each benchmark across all of its social media platforms. This means the authors will not divide and report the result in single channels. Instead, they will combine all the information to create a holistic picture of what kind of stories the institutions conveyed to their student audience throughout their social media. The result will be presented in the following pie charts.

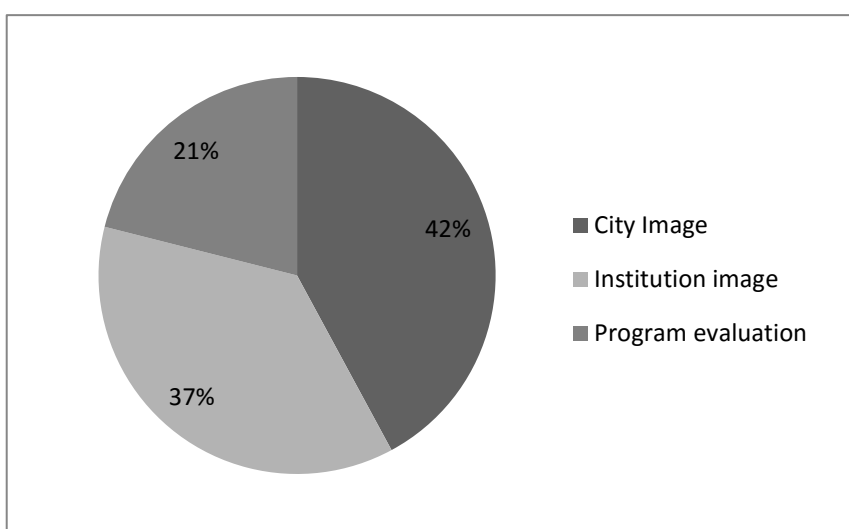


Figure 51. Proportion of content topics in English from Lahti UAS' social media

This chart assessed the updates from Lahti UAS which were in English only. As it can be seen, there were three main topics that these updates promoted. The biggest percentage was from posts that promoted the city image – meaning the city of Lahti at 42%. Next, at 37%, Lahti UAS uploaded the content which introduced or enhanced the image of the university itself. Lastly, the proportion of content about program evaluation, or issues related to the study program and similar matters, was at 21%. It can be conceived that Lahti UAS' proportion is fairly balanced, and the scale between its updates in English and in Finnish will be introduced next.

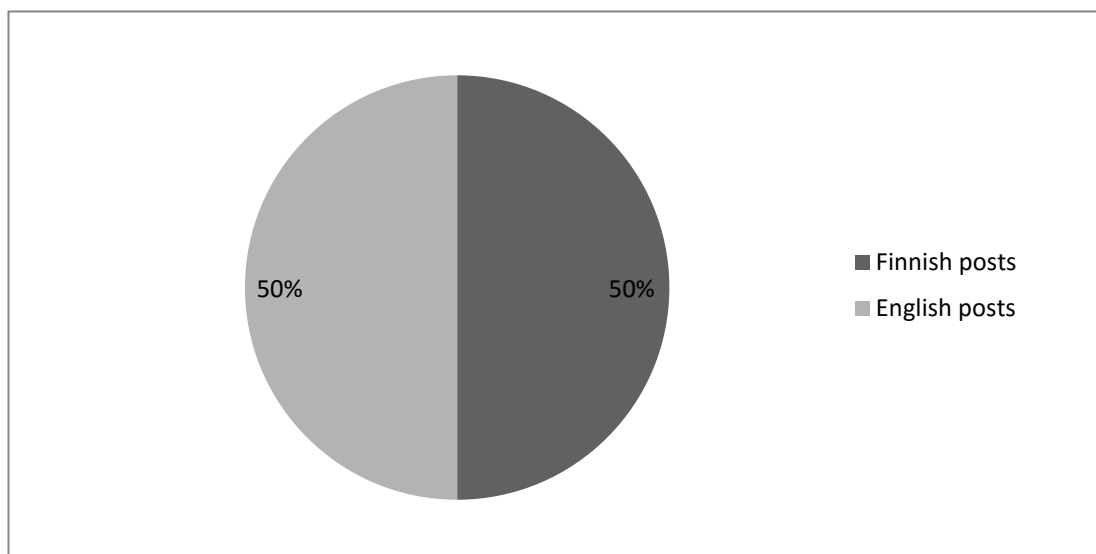


Figure 52. Proportion of Lahti UAS' content in terms of language

The proportion of all updates from Lahti UAS in Finnish and English was divided equally as seen from the pie chart. The authors could not decipher the full meaning of the posts in Finnish, and due to that fact they decided to subtract them from the overall assessment and presented this piece of information in a new chart. After observation, the preliminary analysis was that there is likelihood that half of these updates will not attract the attention of international students at Lahti UAS. International students may not be able to understand the message of the content and they may probably wonder whether those posts are meant for them. Hence, the chance that they may pay attention to such content will be diminished. This is an issue Lahti UAS needs to consider in an attempt to develop a social media marketing strategy aimed at potential international students.

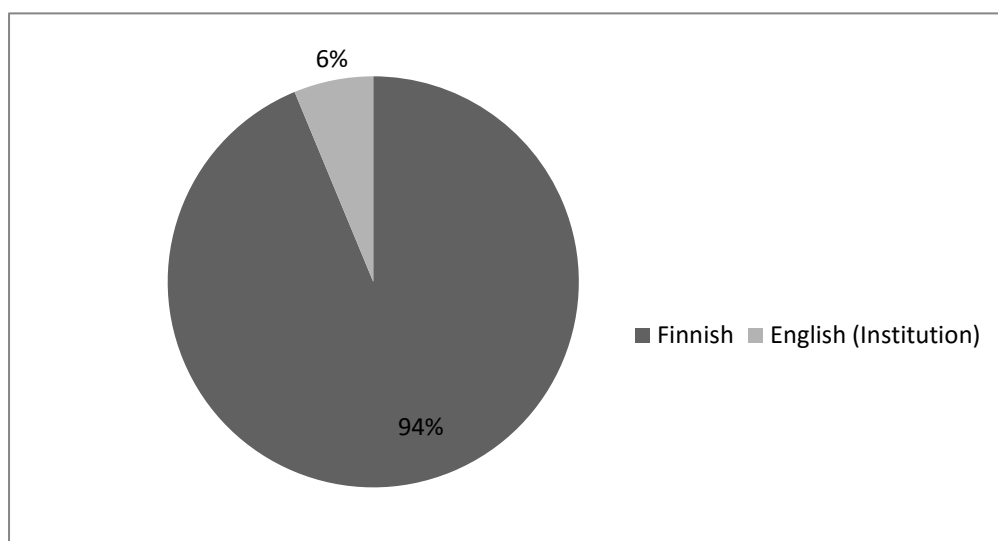


Figure 53. Proportion of content topics from VAMK's social media

For VAMK, the authors decided to combine both Finnish and English updates into one pie chart. The reason was that the majority of its posts are in Finnish, and only one update across its studied social media channels was in English which is a post promoting VAMK image. The ratio is shown as above – 94% Finnish updates and the remaining 6% represents Institution image. This proportion suggests that only the students who are familiar with the Finnish language can understand the updated content. These students are unlikely international students or the potential ones. Compared to Lahti UAS, this scale is more polarized and unbalanced.

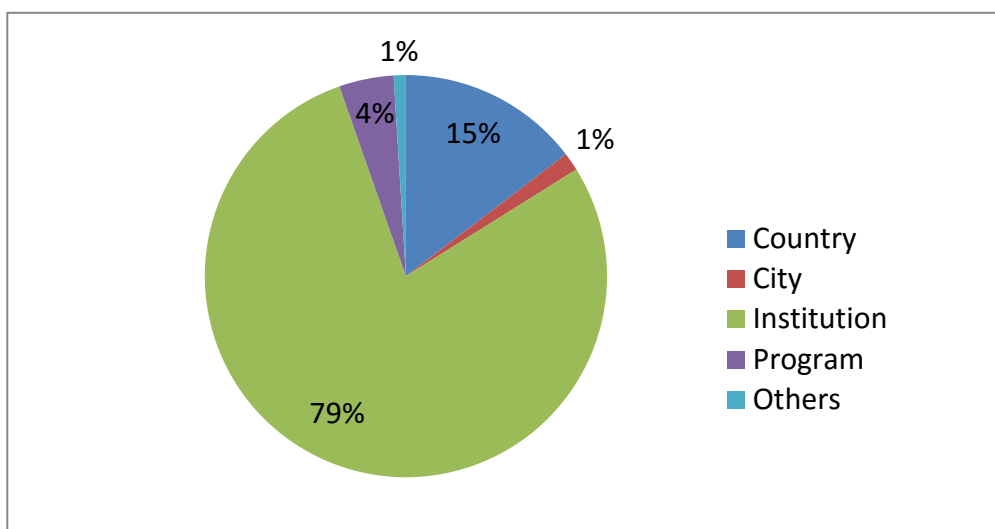


Figure 54. Proportion of content topics from Harvard University's social media

It can be deduced from the pie chart that there are two biggest majorities regarding what kind of story Harvard University has been telling its audience. Firstly, it updated about the country image – the United States of America – accounted for 15% of all posts. Secondly, posts about the topic of institution image, which was the most dominant topic across all of its social media platforms, take up 79% of all stories updated. There were other smaller topics that contributed to the big picture, which are city image (1%), program evaluation (4%) and other (1%). To illustrate these figures, it could be said that four out of every five posts via Harvard's social media were about the university, its students or similar matters. From what is shown through the data, Harvard University decisively invested much effort to promote its university name.

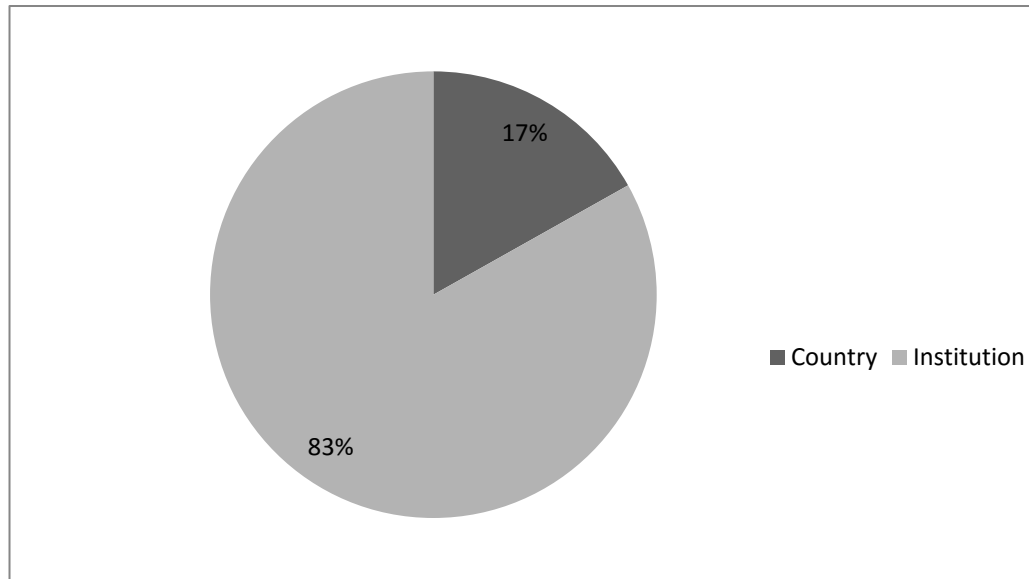


Figure 55. Proportion of content topics from NUS' social media

There were only two kinds of topics which were promoted by NUS' social media. The data indicated that the majority of its updates on social media platforms (83%) were about institution image. The remaining 17% was used to promote the image of the host country – Singapore. This proportion shared a similar pattern to that of Harvard's, in which institution image accounts for a very large percentage in the total number. To add to that, country image was also the second largest topic observed in both NUS and Harvard's structure.

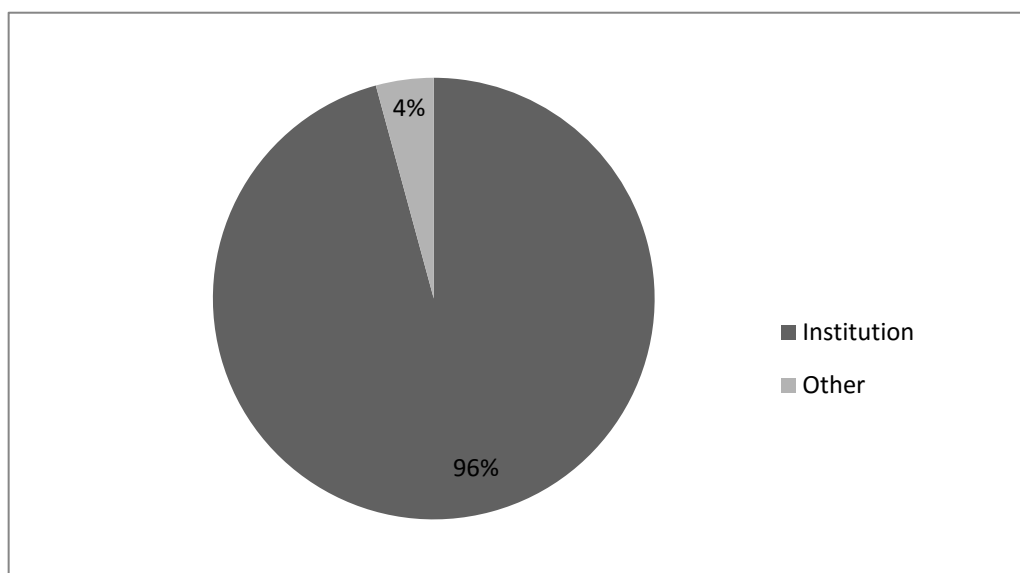


Figure 56. Proportion of content topics from EPFL's social media

As for EPFL, the information shows that EPFL used two kinds of topics for its content across all platforms. They were topics about institution image and others which did not belong to any predetermined categories. Additionally, the percentage of institution-image-related stories was at an overwhelming 96%. Other stories represented only a tiny fraction of 4%. EPFL's proportion was even less diverse and more polarized than that of any other benchmark. It can be deduced that this institution is investing most of its efforts on social media to promote the stories that enhance EPFL's name, in particular. However, this proportion might appear with a shortcoming because it missed out on some other topics concerning the city of Lausanne or the country of Switzerland where it is situated which the audience may also pay their attention to.

10.2.7 Perception – Average Page and Post Engagement

The authors have collected and analyzed the data for this metric by using the specific formulas provided through the theoretical background of this dissertation. Average page and post engagement will determine the level of engagement for each channel of each school, and also for the content updated there during the observation period. The assessment of this aspect will give the authors insights into how the audience is responding to the efforts all institutions have been investing into their social media. With

that, it will present a hint on how well the communication of the university images is currently being perceived by social media followers. The result will be illustrated by the following column charts.

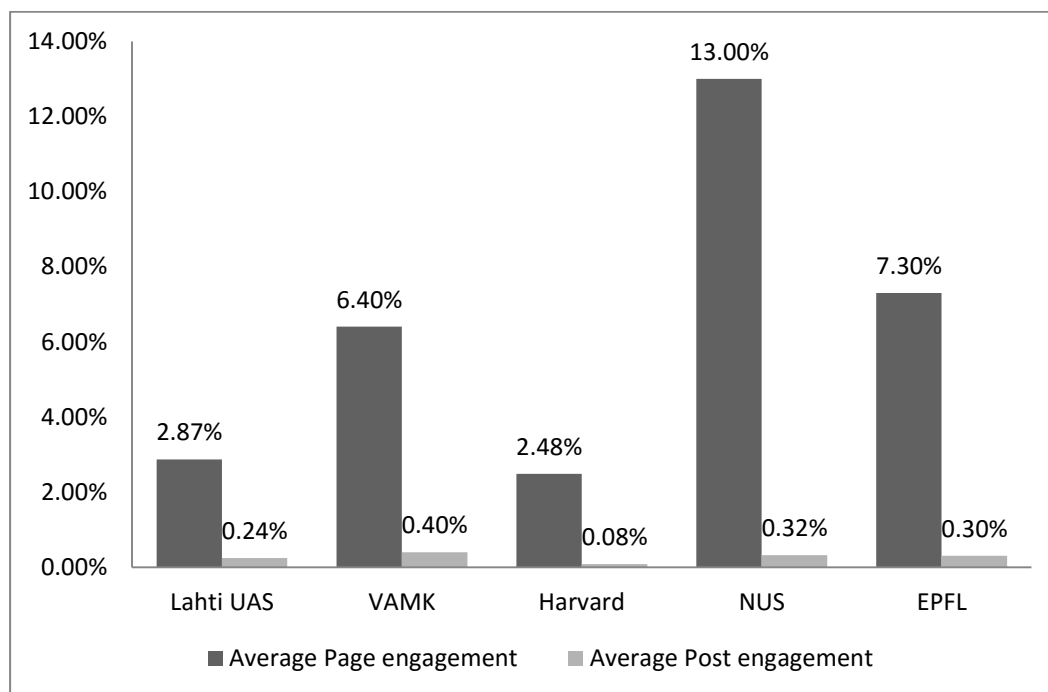


Figure 57. Average page and post engagement of all benchmarks on Facebook

On Facebook, it can be observed that Lahti UAS had a lower page engagement rate than most of its benchmarks. At 2.87%, it was behind VAMK (6.4%), NUS (13%), and EPFL (7.3%). There was a gap of more than 150% between Lahti UAS and its Finnish counterpart VAMK. However, Lahti UAS did not have the lowest figure since Harvard University came last at 2.48%. NUS led this chart with a towering figure of 13%, which was 4.5 times more than Lahti UAS'. Generally, there was a relatively far distance between Lahti UAS' page engagement rate on Facebook compared to those of other schools. Regarding the post engagement on Facebook, the data shows that Lahti UAS did not lag too far behind other institutions although it was still the second to last to this metric. At 0.24%, Lahti UAS' rate was on par with other schools, such as VAMK (0.4%), NUS (0.32%) and EPFL (0.3%). Harvard University, although having the largest pool of followers, was the last to come with a

small percentage of 0.08%. This figure indicates that Lahti UAS' followers – current students – were responding fairly well to the content updated on its Facebook. However, there is room for improvement to boost both of these figures for Lahti UAS' Facebook platform since Lahti UAS was behind most of the other benchmarks.

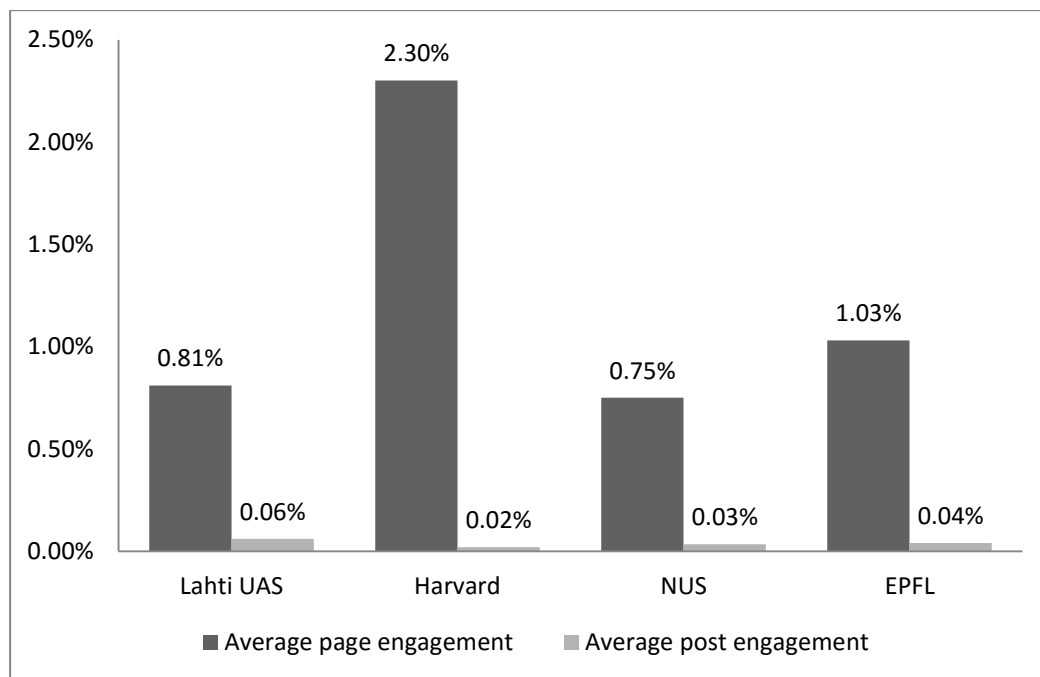


Figure 58. Average page and post engagement on Twitter

On Twitter, VAMK does not have an account and it will not be listed in this chart. As seen, for Twitter Page engagement rate, Lahti UAS' figure was on the same level with other schools. At 0.81%, it was not led by a great distance. Harvard University scored best with 2.3%, followed by EPFL at 1.03% and finally NUS at 0.75%. For post engagement, Lahti UAS surprisingly led the chart at 0.06%. Harvard, NUS and EPFL were at 0.02%, 0.03% and 0.04% respectively. This implies that the audience engages with Lahti UAS' content on Twitter at a better rate than all of its benchmarks.

The percentage for all schools, however, was significantly lower in comparison with Facebook. This means the audience engages at a much lesser degree with the schools on Twitter. It is to say that Facebook is the more popular channel than Twitter for Lahti UAS and other institutions in

discussion. Lahti UAS may take advantage of this point to reassess its social media marketing in the future.

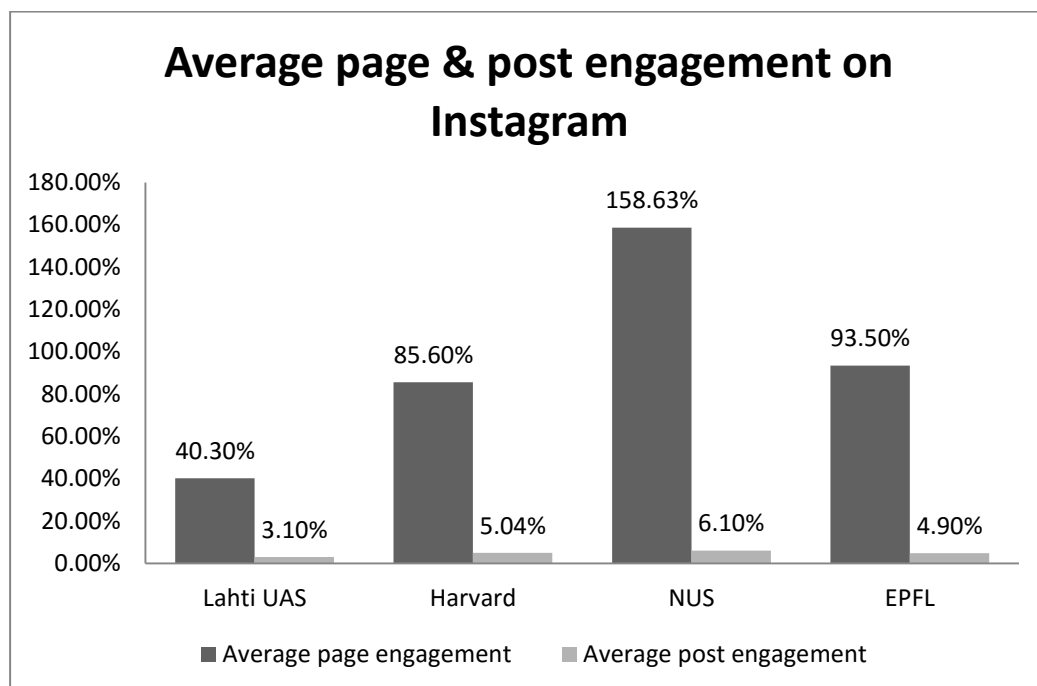


Figure 59. Average page and post engagement on Instagram

Throughout the observation period, VAMK did not have any updates on its Instagram account, hence could not be presented in the final result. The chart indicates a substantial distance between Lahti UAS and other institutions regarding Instagram page engagement rate. The order of standing for the schools was NUS (158.63%), EPFL (93.5%), Harvard (85.6%) and lastly Lahti UAS (40.3%). The gap between Lahti UAS and the next benchmark – Harvard University was more than 100% and this number when compared to the leading candidate NUS went up to 300%. It shows that the audience of other schools is paying attention to their schools' Instagram accounts at a greater extent than Lahti UAS' followers. Concerning Instagram post engagement, it can be noted that Lahti UAS' posts on Instagram have a lower engagement rate than that of other institutions. At 3.1%, it was behind, in order, EPFL (4.9%), Harvard (5.0%) and NUS (6.1%). Nevertheless, the distance was not as dramatic as in Instagram Page engagement rate. NUS, which also led in this metric, had its rate nearly two times more than Lahti UAS'.

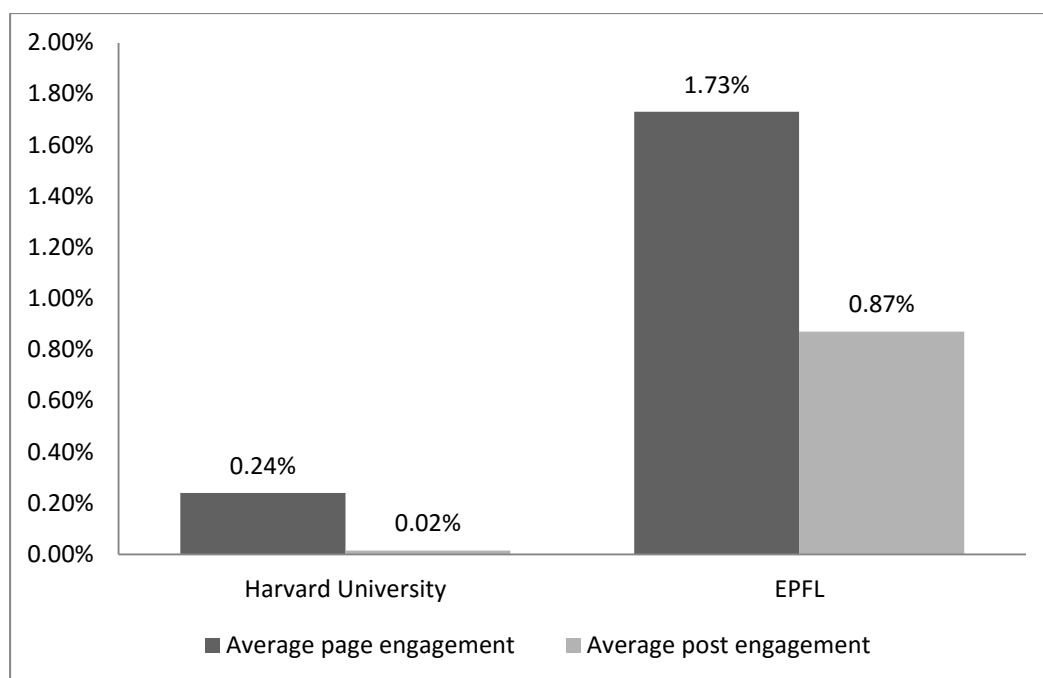


Figure 60. Average page and post engagement on Youtube

On YouTube, Harvard had seemingly the lowest rate for both of its page and post engagement. Its page engagement was only 0.24% in comparison with 1.73% of EPFL. The post engagement rate was 0.02% for Harvard and 0.87% for EPFL. One possible explanation for Harvard's low engagement rate on YouTube is because the institution has disabled the comment function for its videos. Therefore, no viewer can leave his comments for Harvard's videos and hence reducing the number of interactions. Engagement on YouTube for EPFL was still higher than that on Twitter, making this channel more effective in reaching its students than Twitter.

It can be easily recognized that among the channels, all schools receive very high rates of engagement on Instagram. In fact, both engagement rates for all the benchmarks on Instagram are highest so far. As regards to Lahti UAS, Instagram evidently is the channel that captures most engagement for its owner. The discrepancy between Facebook and Instagram Page engagement of Lahti UAS is almost 20 times. This pattern of discrepancy is true to all other institutions. It can be deduced that across all social media platforms in study, Instagram is the one that

receives most attention from the audience and hence yields the biggest amount of returns on the efforts invested into social media marketing for all schools in this research. Lahti UAS can consider integrating this result into its social media marketing strategy to enhance the attractiveness of Lahti UAS' image towards current and potential international students.

10.2.8 Perception – Ratio of Positive Comments over Negative Comments

For this metric, the authors will capture and extract the tonality from the information sources which are the comments and replies of the audience on the social media channels in study. This is to gauge the positivity of the audience's perception of the schools' channels and of the content updated there. The authors will combine the data from all social media platforms of each benchmark to craft a holistic depiction of the current landscape. Results will be elaborated as follows.

	Ratio of positive over negative comments
Lahti UAS	3:0
VAMK	0:0
Harvard	709:30 (23:1)
NUS	170:2 (85:1)
EPFL	24:3 (8:1)

Table 21. Ratio of positive over negative comments

The table above displays the full and also the summarized proportion of all schools for this ratio. From the total number of positive and negative comments/replies collected, the authors divided the two variables for each other to arrive at a simplified result. According to the table, Harvard University had the highest number of comments that contained tonality. It was followed by NUS, EPFL and Lahti UAS. Lahti UAS' ratio was 3:0, meaning that there were three positive comments on Lahti UAS' social media channels and no comment had a negative tonality. For VAMK, this ratio was 0:0. It can be interpreted that during the observation period,

there was no comment and reply that contained a sufficiently strong indication of a tonality. Harvard led this metric with a scale of 709:30 or the simplified version of 23:1. Across Harvard's studied social media channels, there were 709 positive comments and thirty negative ones. The abridged ratio meant that the number of positive comments was twenty-three times more than the negatives. NUS had a ratio of 170:2 or 85:1, which implied that after the tracking period the authors observed in total 170 positive comments and two for negative tone. Although NUS was not the institution that received the most positive comments, it had, however, the best ratio of positive over negative. The number of positive remarks for NUS was eighty-five times more than the negative ones it got. EPFL obtained a more humble figure of 24:3 or 8:1. It got twenty-four positive comments and three negative comments in total, which also resulted in the fact that the number of its positive comments was eight times more than its negative ones.

There are two things to be commented about Lahti UAS' ratio. Firstly, while three other benchmarks – Harvard, NUS and EPFL – received negative comments, it is a positive sign that Lahti UAS has not received any. This means the content updated onto Lahti UAS' social media channels did not offend or trigger any unfavorable sentiment among the audience. However, the number of positive comments it received was very limited, which could be improved with future changes in social media strategies. A high number of supportive comments indicate a positive perception in the audience's minds and this will be the valuable assets or social capital that will leverage Lahti UAS' efficiency in its social media efforts. The next table will present the proportion of the number of positive comments compared to all comments and replies received on the institutions' social media platforms.

	Proportions of positive comments in all comments
Lahti UAS	25%
VAMK	0%
Harvard	27.2%
NUS	54.3%
EPFL	19.8%

Table 22. Proportion of positive comments in all comments

It can be observed that Lahti UAS' percentage was on par with others. At 25%, it ranked third place out of five institutions. NUS led the metric with 54.3%, followed by Harvard at 27.2% and EPFL at 19.8%. VAMK had 0% which could be explained with the aforementioned ratio. This was a fairly good signal that during the observation process, one out of every four comments on Lahti UAS' social media was a supportive one. Half of the remarks NUS received from its audience were positive, and this proves that the school was successful in communicating its image to its international students. Harvard had a relatively same percentage with Lahti UAS, and EPFL was a little behind in this metric.

10.2.9 Perception – Type of conversations

In this kind of metric, the authors wish to explore the nature of the audience's remarks on the institutions' social media. From the information source being all the recorded comments and replies, the authors will apply the codes presented earlier to identify the reason the followers have when engaging. By looking at this data, insights will be revealed about the purpose of the audience when they are commenting to a specific post. Data from all media platforms of each school will be integrated to present a complete picture of how engaging the content is perceived by the audience. Pie charts will be utilized to illustrate this metric.

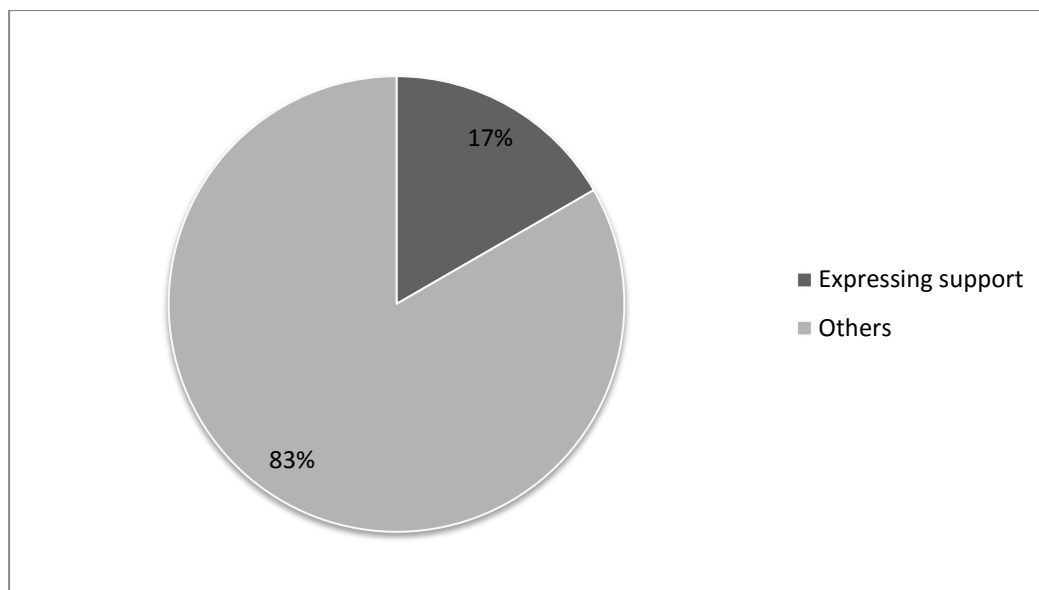


Figure 61. Proportion of conversation types on Lahti UAS' social media

As seen, on Lahti UAS' social media, there were two types of conversations that were used by the audience. They were the expression of support and others. The minority of 17% out of all codeable comments was to express support towards Lahti UAS or its content. The rest 83% belonged to "others" category. This "others" category was the collection of all undecipherable Finnish remarks which the authors did not have the capability to analyze.

For VAMK's social media, there was not sufficient data to report for this metric, since all of the comments were in Finnish and thus the authors were not capable of understanding them. Therefore, the authors will not present VAMK in this metric.

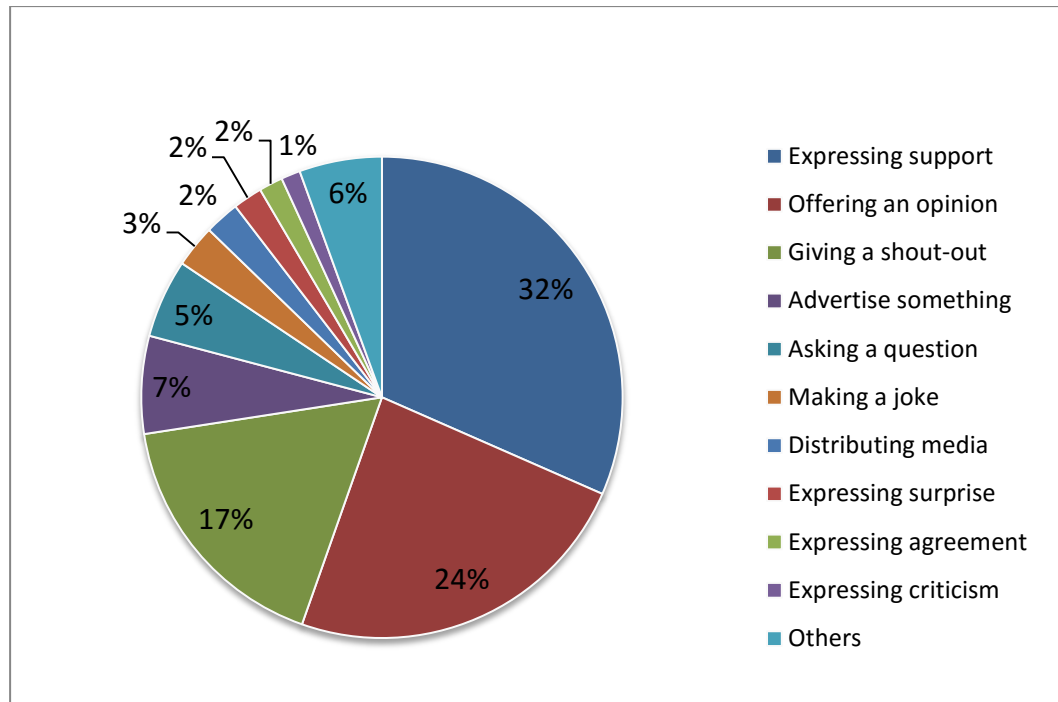


Figure 62. Proportion of conversation types on Harvard's social media

For Harvard, there was a difference in the diversity of audience's conversation types. There were ten different purposes from the audience when commenting onto Harvard's social media. The proportion was divided unequally between variables with three major types. At 32%, expressing support was the biggest factor. It was followed by offering an opinion at 24%, and giving a shout-out at 17%. This figure can be understood that one third of all coded comments showed support from the audience towards Harvard's image in general and also to its content. A quarter of these comments were opinions provided by the readers. Giving a shout-out means when a follower tags or actively invites a fellow friend to view a specific post and it has stood at 17% of all comments. A multitude of other categories consisted of the rest of the shares on Harvard's social media.

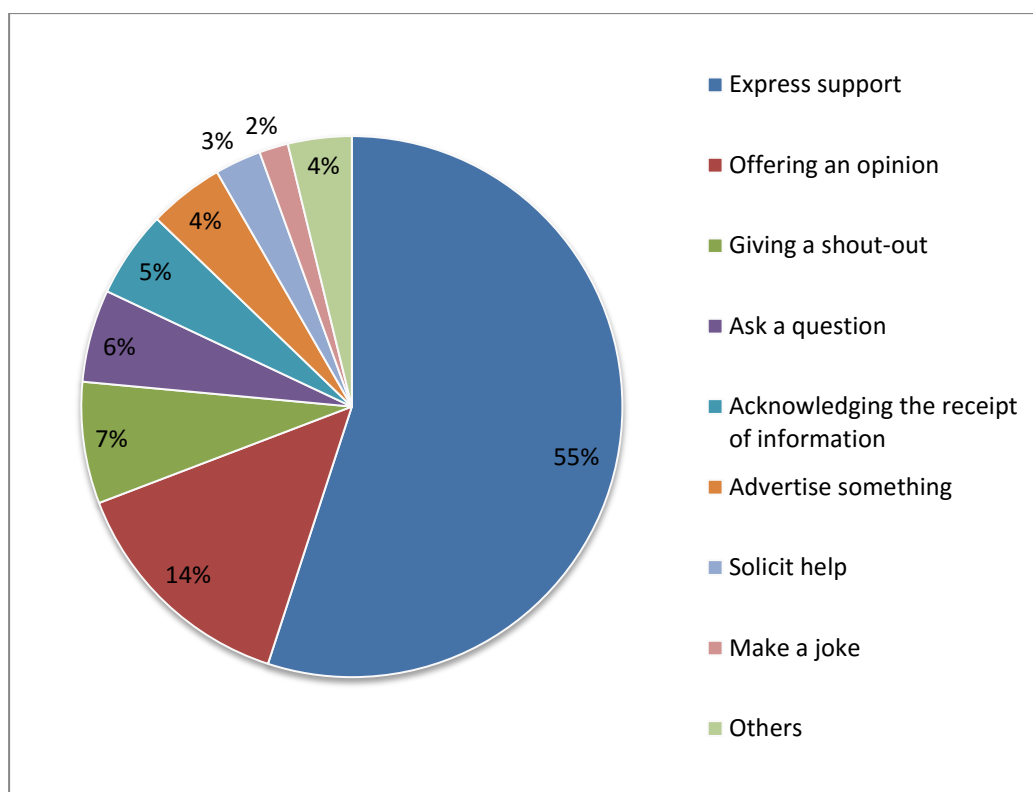


Figure 63. Proportion of conversation types on NUS' social media

There were three major conversation types for NUS' social media: the expression of support, giving an opinion and giving a shout-out. These were the same categories in comparison with Harvard but they had a different ratio. Expressing support was the highest segment as it dominated more than half of all NUS audience's comments (55%). Next were opinions from the audience towards the content updated and it accounted for 14% of all comments. Lastly, giving a shout-out segment occupied 7% of the pie chart. There were a number of different types that justified the remaining proportion. However, they were small in relation to the three major categories and hence did not yield big significance.

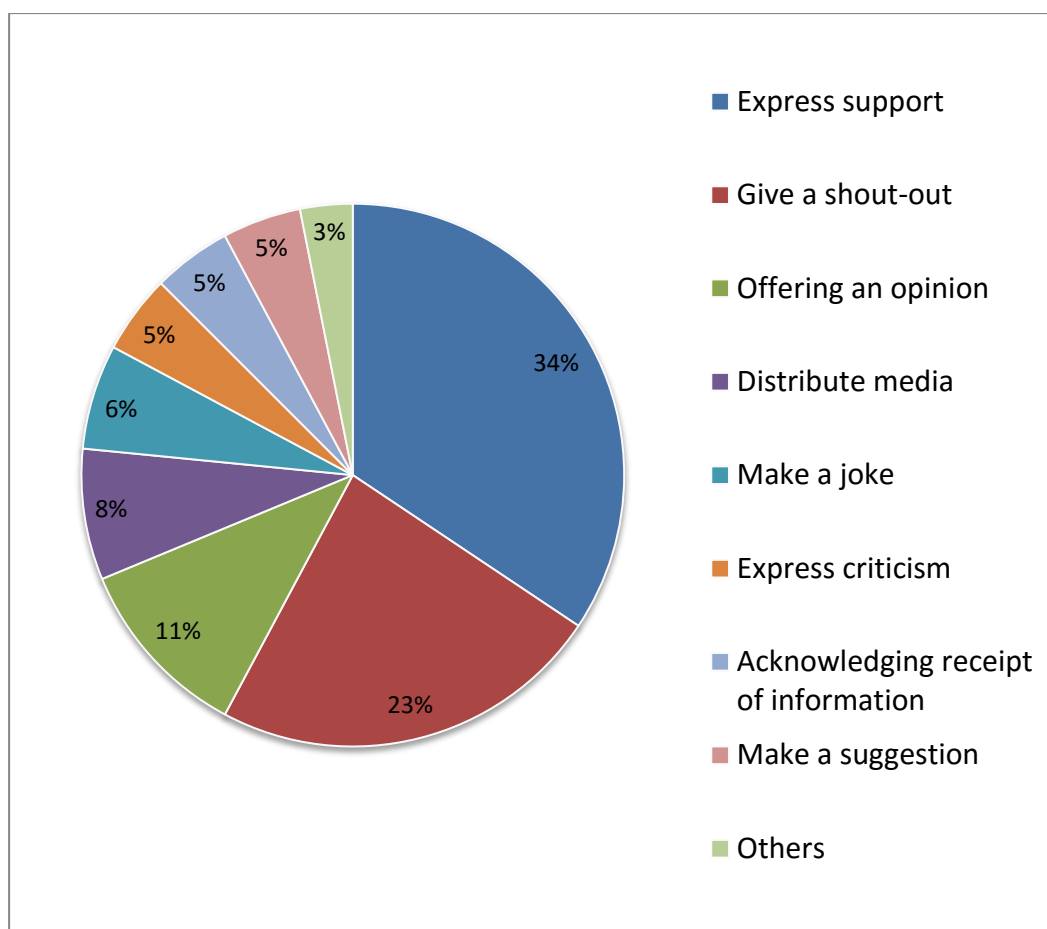


Figure 64. Proportion of conversation types on EPFL's social media

The proportion of conversation types on EPFL's social media comprised of three majorities: the expression of support, giving a shout-out and giving an opinion. At 34%, expressing support was as well the category that had the biggest share for EPFL. Coming second was the segment giving a shout-out at 23% and the third one was giving an opinion at 11%. The remaining data was distributed quite evenly for other conversation types.

From the data, it can be observed that three institutions Harvard, NUS and EPFL all had the same major categories which were expressing support, giving a shout-out and giving an opinion. The proportion for each school was different, however. This suggests that the audience has been responding positively towards the content provided from these schools. The evidence lies in the fact that the biggest majority for these institutions has been always the expression of support. To add to that, giving a shout-out has been also in the top three. This indicates appealing content that

made the audience invite friends in their circle to view the posts. Opinions given by the followers being in the top three categories shows that the content updated was engaging and thought-provoking which triggered the audience's giving their own opinions.

Lahti UAS' data also had the expression of support as a major conversation category. It means the audience did react in a positive manner to what Lahti UAS presented on social media. Nevertheless, its proportion was not diverse. The segment "support" accounted for only a relatively small percentage of 17% and Lahti UAS did not have the other segments in its portfolio like Harvard, NUS and EPFL do. Therefore, it is to say that there is a need to improve the content of Lahti UAS on social media to enhance the engagement from international students.

10.2.10 Perception – Word Cloud

Word Cloud is a computer tool to illustrate the frequency of repeated words in a context. By using this tool, the authors wish to find out the most popular words and phrases that are used by the audience on the institutions' social media. Before the use of Word Cloud, the authors will utilize Word Count – meaning recording the occasionally repeated words from the remarks of the audience on social media. Then, these words will be processed with Jason's Word Cloud to produce an animation of the frequency of such words. This will provide a picture of the current health of the schools' images in the social media landscape. The result will be introduced next.

Because there was not sufficient data available for Lahti UAS and VAMK, the authors will not present the result for these benchmarks. Output for Harvard, NUS and EPFL will be presented as following.

institution is on the right track of promoting its brand name to its potential international students. EPFL's result will be last to come.



Figure 67. Word cloud of EPFL

EPFL, like the other two, received numerous supportive praises from its audience. In total, there were sixteen reiterated words used to respond to EPFL at over fifty times during the tracking period. Compared to the other schools, EPFL had a lesser density with fewer numbers of words. The most popular ones were “magnificent”, “amazing” and “bravo”. It can be suggested that EPFL's image in the audience was perceived positively and that the content provided was engaging and interesting.

Lahti UAS did not receive any supportive words to be calculated in Jason's Word Cloud. This does not mean that Lahti UAS has been performing poorly on its social media. Instead, it is an indication that there could be improvements to its social media strategy to trigger the positive expressions from the students. A well-received content will be able to engage its audience and these supportive remarks from them will not only show that they are interested in it but it also acts as a foundation to communicate and promote Lahti UAS to the future international applicants.

10.2.11 Perception – Online rating

Online rating is a feature available only on Facebook. A viewer can depend on this metric to make his own judgement on a school's popularity and quality. The higher the vote is, the better it is for institutions' images. Fellow students can provide opinions about their school and those opinions will turn into a considerable factor influencing future applicants. The authors wish to introduce this metric to find out how the benchmarks are gaining their popularity with this rating system compared to Lahti UAS. However, Lahti UAS does not have this rating available on its Facebook. Therefore it will not be listed here in this part. All other schools having their own rating score will be presented next.

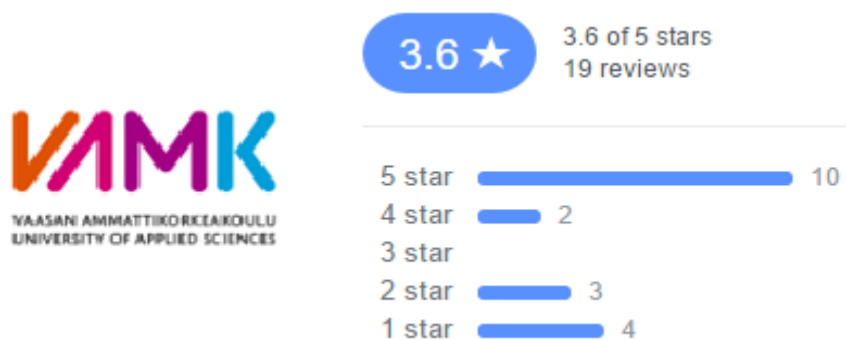


Figure 68. VAMK's Facebook rating

The score for VAMK on its Facebook was 3.6 out of 5 stars. There were nineteen reviews about this institution and the highest numbers of reviews gave 5 stars. Although 5-star rating was the highest number, the proportion of low and negative rating of 1 star was also very considerable, which is at 21%.

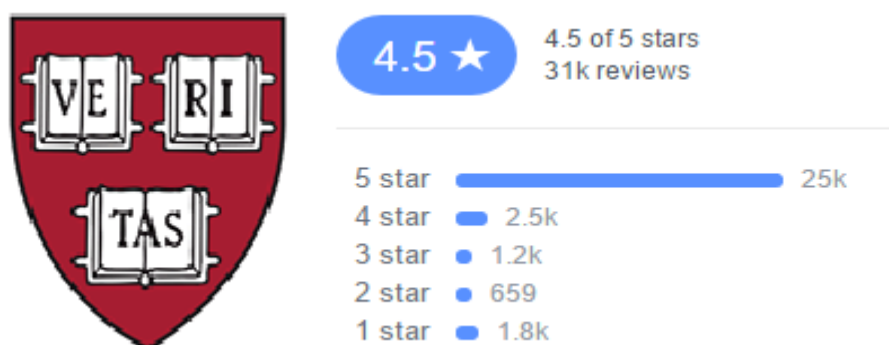


Figure 69. Harvard's Facebook rating

Harvard University had a score of 4.5 out of 5 stars. Its number of reviews, nonetheless, was much more substantial than VAMK's figure. More than thirty-one thousand people gave their rating to Harvard on its Facebook and the majority decided on a 5, which accounts for 80%. Only 5% was the stake of negative reviews of 1 star.



Figure 70. NUS' Facebook rating

NUS was behind Harvard with just a tiny fraction. At 4.4 stars, it received nearly two thousand reviews and also the reviews with 5 star rating were dominant at 74%. 8% of all reviews had a negative sentiment which resulted in a rating of only 1 star for NUS.

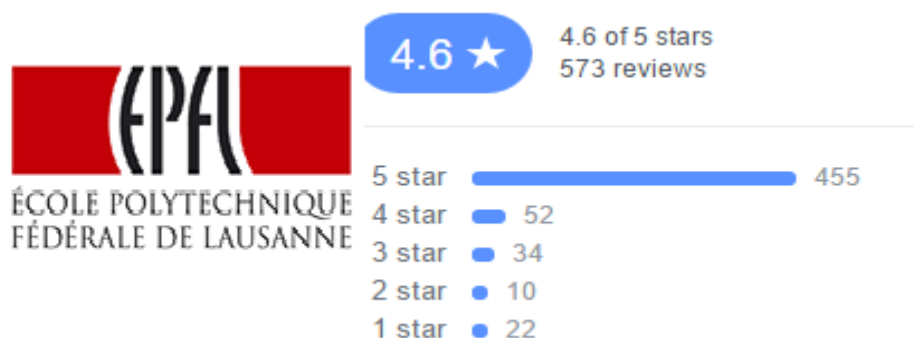


Figure 71. EPFL's Facebook rating

EPFL has had the highest rating among all benchmarks with 4.6 out of 5. It got more than five hundreds reviews and 80% of them gave a 5 star rating. To add to that, only nearly 4% of the reviews gave EPFL a one-star rating.

By looking at these ratings, potential international students, during their research of the places to study, will acquire a view, although superficial, of the image of each school. This may affect their decision to choose a particular institution to pursue their study abroad. A high ranking will definitely contribute to a good perception from the audience and vice versa. Lahti UAS at this moment does not offer such feature. It can then consider adding this into its future social media development plan to better promote its brand name to new international students when they are browsing its social media.

10.3 Recommendations

Basing on the result produced by Question 8 of the survey - "What is your most trusted information source when choosing a foreign university?", the authors have come to the conclusion that the conversations and discussions on social media are the most trusted source of information for the international students at Lahti UAS. Therefore, this acts as a motivation for Lahti UAS to consider investing more efforts into its social media marketing.

Generally, Lahti UAS' image on social media is being perceived by its international students in a relatively positive way. This has been proven

through the ratio of positive remarks from the followers in which Lahti UAS received no negative comment about itself. The types of conversations also attributed to this fact when there have been a proportion of supportive remarks in all of the comments Lahti UAS obtained.

However, there is still room for Lahti UAS to improve its performance on social media. The audit shows that the current situation for Lahti UAS' social media landscape is that it is receiving a low chance of being mentioned by its international students. This has been pointed out by the result from Social Mention searches which showed no result of Lahti UAS being discussed across any social media networks. Hence, increasing its popularity and conveying a better image of Lahti UAS to international students via its social media should be integrated into future objectives for Lahti UAS' media campaign. In order to improve the general picture, the authors suggest that Lahti UAS focuses on improving the areas that have been underperforming in comparison with other benchmarks in this dissertation according to its capacity.

The findings have also indicated that there is a multitude of Lahti UAS' existing social media profiles. In fact, Lahti UAS is the only institution among five benchmarks to have active accounts on all eight different social media channels. However, some of them have low activity and do not have good popularity among the audience. Students may associate continuing absence of activity on social network sites with incompetence or negligence. Meanwhile, an unpopular platform will render the efforts dedicated by Lahti UAS futile because there is no audience to interact and evangelize it. The authors put forward a suggestion that Lahti UAS should either consider terminating the idle platforms or renovating the use of such channels. Specifically, Lahti UAS' account on Google+ has been dormant since December 2014 until now. In the event that Lahti UAS no longer requires the use of this channel, the school may close the account to avoid possible negative effects.

The second platform to be mentioned is Pinterest. As observed, this channel of Lahti UAS has only a mere number of seventeen followers.

This observation is also supported by the results of the survey. Only one participant has reported following Lahti UAS on Pinterest. Thus this is not, at the moment, a popular channel among Lahti UAS' international student users. The authors have anticipated two practical recommendations for Lahti UAS regarding this matter. Firstly, Lahti UAS can increase its efforts on this channel by boosting growth and engagement. Secondly, Lahti UAS can, in the same case as Google+, temporarily close the account to avoid unforeseen negative effects from the lack of activity and to save resources. Then, the school may allocate them to other well-performing channels. Nevertheless, concerning the current situation at Lahti UAS through the discussion with Ms. Hanna Mikkonen – Manager of International Relations, Lahti UAS is in a shortage of human resource to efficiently manage a variety of different social media networks. Consequently, the option of a short-term closure seems more beneficial to Lahti UAS. It can adapt to the trend and reactivate this account in due course.

Flickr is the third channel to be mentioned on which Lahti UAS has a very limited number of followers. However, the authors have noticed an interesting trend through the observation of other universities and have decided to put forward a recommendation concerning this platform for Lahti UAS. Flickr is used by three out of four benchmarks, and their use is different in nature compared to Lahti UAS. Lahti UAS uses Flickr as a channel to store most photographic materials which account for over 2,000 pictures taken at different events and workshops. Nevertheless, such valuable content that could help promoting Lahti UAS' image is shared in a limited manner and the impact it has on the institution is decreased due to a low follower base. Meanwhile, Harvard, NUS and EPFL use Flickr as an open forum for all of their students. The students are encouraged to upload to this channel any good pictures of theirs that are related to the institutions. The submitted content then is filtered and promoted on Flickr. This new approach requires less efforts directing to social media management from the school. Moreover, student-generated content will be more aligned with the interests of the mass. Lahti UAS may consider

converting the use of its Flickr into this practice to lighten its burden of managing several social network sites at the same time. This will also be a cost-effective method to broadcast Lahti UAS' brand to the social media world with better efficiency.

The logo of Lahti UAS across its social media is one noticeable feature during the observation. As presented earlier, Lahti UAS does not use a consistent logo for all of its channels. Instead, there is a variety of differently designed logos for different profiles. Logo is an important element of an organization's image and one of the primary visual symbols recognized by the customers. In addition, according to Keohane's idea (2014) about broadcasting corporate image mentioned previously, coherence should be the utmost goal in branding. Hence, all visual cues of Lahti UAS should be consistent and are kept in conformity to avoid transmitting confusing messages to the students. When the international audiences on Lahti UAS' social media look at the different logos on its various profiles, uncertainty may arise among them since they may wonder whether the channel they are visiting indeed belongs to Lahti UAS. The authors, regarding this matter, have considered the following suggestion for Lahti UAS. The school may select one logo only, preferably the official logo used on Lahti UAS' main website, as its profile picture for all of its social media platforms. By doing this, Lahti UAS can keep a uniform image when it is delivered to the international and potential students.

The findings have also shown that on Facebook and Twitter, the content on social media of Lahti UAS is less diverse compared to other benchmarks. On Facebook, it uses excessively web links to accompany the statuses while other institutions additionally have more videos and more photos. For Twitter, Lahti UAS is the only one that uses plain texts in its tweets when all others attach web links to elaborate the tweets they share. This is one aspect Lahti UAS may want to adjust to improve its image and engagement level on these two platforms. With a more varied number of forms for the content, the stories that Lahti UAS wants to convey to its audience may receive a more positive interaction frequency.

This can be explained with the preference of the audience when some viewers enjoy videos and others are appealed by good photos. Limited use of different forms when updating the content on these two channels will restrict the potential engagement for Lahti UAS' stories and thus decrease the reach of its image to new international students. Therefore, the authors' recommendation for Lahti UAS is that it should rescale the proportion on Facebook to have more photos and videos in its statuses and posts. By the same token, Lahti UAS can adjust and use more photographic materials and web links for Twitter updates to provide room for more engagement from its followers.

Regarding the frequency of updates, Lahti UAS seems to lag behind other benchmarks with fewer but relatively stable numbers of posts. For all three platforms it had activity during the observation, Lahti UAS updated about twelve to thirteen posts which can be calculated to approximately three posts per week. A higher frequency of updates will display a more vibrant image of the institution to the audience and Lahti UAS can take this point into consideration to improve its social media marketing. The authors recommend Lahti UAS to research more content and to increase the frequency of its status and post updates to a figure of four or five posts per week across its social media assets. The aim of this suggestion is to energize the livelihood on Lahti UAS' social media to attract more attention and engagement from the current and also the potential international students.

The topics of content will be the next issue mentioned by the authors. However, before discussing deeper into that issue, the authors would like to emphasize again the importance role of information for the decision-making process of international students, including Lahti UAS' students. Choosing a university abroad is categorized as a high involvement purchase and characterized by intensive information search prior buying. Therefore, in this education sector, detailed information about service packages of a particular institution is demanded by their potential students. However, not all information is the object of interests in the

students' eyes, and the school should be strategic in choosing which information should be released.

Coming back with the issue relating to the topic of content, there are two points the authors would like to discuss about this result. First of all, according to the result from the survey question 6 "What is the most influential set of factors to you when choosing a particular university?", the international students at Lahti UAS chose the answers with a descending order of Personal Reasons – Study Program – Institution Image – Country Image – City Image in which Personal Reason was most important and City Image was least. Institution Image was relatively important but considered less than the top two answers. When the authors correlated the result from the social media audit with the survey result, the proportion of Lahti UAS' content on its social media has not entirely matched what its audience desired. On its social media, the recorded data showed that Lahti UAS promoted the City Image factor with the most percentage at 42% and next Institution Image at 37% and finally Program Evaluation at 21%. However, this was the least concerned criterion of Lahti UAS' international students according to the survey and the higher proportion of such factor would result in a loss of engagement. The authors then suggest that Lahti UAS should adjust the proportion of its content topics to satisfy the demand from the international students. The guideline at this moment lies in the need of the students to have access to information that interests them most. That means Lahti UAS may research and update more posts about motivation for individuals to study at Lahti UAS, how the study program can be of interest to them and how to promote Lahti UAS' image in their perception.

Before the authors go to the second point, they would like to highlight one fact relating to two institutions: NUS and EPFL. In Singapore, there are four official languages: English, Malay, Tamil and Standard Mandarin (Language, accessed on August 26, 2015). However, to maintain a friendly environment for its international students, NUS has been using only English for all of its social media updates. Concerning EPFL, it is located in the city of Lausanne, Switzerland and in Switzerland there are

two official languages which are English and French. More specifically, Lausanne is an area situated in the French-speaking region of that country. EPFL then has two distinctive accounts on Facebook in French and English. The rest of its social media platforms use English as the main language.

Regarding Lahti UAS, half of its updates on social media are in Finnish. This is a big hindrance to international students because they may not possess a sufficient command of Finnish language. Hence, they may overlook the updates that are written in Finnish as they may not understand the content. Additionally, they may be under an assumption that such content is meant for local students only. This will result in a substantial loss of engagement. To counter this conundrum and to better deliver Lahti UAS' image to international students, Lahti UAS may consider using the universal language of English for all of its posts on social media and also for the content on the official website. The authors believe that this change may result in an increase in engagement from the international audience.

Relating to the average engagement rate on social media, the authors have noticed that for Lahti UAS, it is Instagram which yields the highest engagement and also the highest growth rate. Facebook is the channel that holds most Lahti UAS' followers. Together, these two channels attract the majority of new audience for the school. The authors, when correlating this result with the data from survey Question 9 "Do you follow Lahti UAS on social media?", have discovered a matching pattern between the two outputs. Seemingly, Lahti UAS' social media channels that most of its international students follow are Facebook and Instagram as well. Thus, the authors suggest that Lahti UAS may need to invest more efforts into developing these two channels. Lahti UAS can conduct researches to find more content and to utilize these channels at a higher frequency. There is also a specific suggestion nominated by the authors. The authors believe Lahti UAS can combine the use of both Instagram and Flickr to promote the school's image in forms of photographic materials. This suggestion involves Lahti UAS' Instagram posting one best introductory photo from an

album and then uploads the rest onto Flickr. On Instagram and other major channels, Lahti UAS will promote the address on Flickr to international students so that they can explore more photographic content stored there. Because there are more international students on Facebook and Instagram, Lahti UAS may be able to capture more of their attention on Flickr while still concentrating on improving Facebook and Instagram. Using different social network sites to promote each other will enhance the effectiveness of the broadcasting of Lahti UAS' image to its international students on the internet.

Additionally, for Lahti UAS' Facebook specifically, the authors suggest that the school may enable the rating feature. All other benchmarks have this feature available for the students to show support to their schools. Since most international students at Lahti UAS attach much importance to online reviews and discussions on the institution's social media, Lahti UAS having a good rating voted by its followers on Facebook may play a role in motivating them. It may boost the international students' engagement on this channel and increase their positive attitude towards Lahti UAS' image generally.

Through the study of social media activities, the authors have discovered some interesting practices. One of them is social media schedule. The schedule mainly concerns with the time frame when the content should be updated. It is to match the time of the day when most users are active on Lahti UAS' social media. This practice increases the efficiency of Lahti UAS' communication on social media because its content can be delivered straight to the audience when they are using social networking sites and not to be piled up by other content from the users' newsfeeds. In order to know when Lahti UAS' followers are active on social media, there are certain tools that offer the insights into this issue. For Facebook, there is Facebook Insights which is an integrated feature of a Facebook page. The administrators of Lahti UAS' Facebook account can access the information supplied by this feature to see when the page is visited most in a day by the followers, and this is one among the many other useful data that Lahti UAS can utilize to improve its performance on Facebook. On Instagram

platform, Iconosquare is a web-based management tool which will provide much information about an Instagram account's performance. It includes the tracking of traffic on this channel which shows the busiest hour in a day and additionally the most vibrant day of the week when most followers of Lahti UAS' Instagram are visiting the site.

Furthermore, Lahti UAS can employ certain web analytics service to track activities on its social media platforms. Google Analytics is an example that can be utilized to acquire the information regarding Lahti UAS' social media assets. By using a technology called page tag, it collects data about the site visitors and sends it to Google for analysis. These raw data will afterwards be processed into reports and exported which Lahti UAS can review in real time to understand the current picture of its performance. The results are shown in demographics that in details present many aspects of the school's social media. Some of them are visitor overview, page view, and time on site and so on. A proportion of the data provided by Google Analytics cannot be found by any other means which makes this tool valuable in evaluating Lahti UAS' social media communication. The school can use these hints to improve the communication of its image to the international audience across its social media landscape.

Last but not least, the authors would like to suggest the repetition of the survey and the social media audit. More specifically, the interval of the repetition for the survey is advised to be three years by the authors. This suggestion is based on the results of the survey, which indicated that the preferences of international students may change after that period of time. Concerning the social media audit, the authors as well as the marketing experts recommend the reiteration but at a shorter intermission (e.g. in every three months). Depending on the objectives of the audit, the repetition interval may vary. The purpose is to have a more accurate assessment of current social media efforts and social media performance as well as to gather substantial information for short-term communication strategies and marketing campaigns.

11 CONCLUSION

As mentioned above, the most important goal for any research is to be able to find out the solution for the predetermined research problem. Therefore, the authors believe that there is no better way to conclude a research than presenting our new knowledge of the interested matters discovered through the proper and careful implementations of various research methods. These discoveries will be demonstrated in this section under the form of answering research questions. Furthermore, the assessment of credibility, i.e. validity and reliability, will also be elaborated in this chapter.

11.1 Answering Research Questions

Research Sub-question 1: *What are preferences of current international students when deciding to choose Lahti UAS?*

As the authors remarked in the literature review of consumer's decision-making process, purchases perceived as high personal importance and high risk are subject to rigorous research and immensely rational evaluation of available alternatives before buying. Choosing an education service is categorized as such a purchase. To aid them in the decision-making process, each international student him or herself develops a personal list of desired characteristics of an ideal university. Fortunately, favoured factors as well as their positions in the priority list assigned to a specific academic institution can be detected by surveying the current students of that school. Understanding the international students' desires, universities can incorporate them into their strategies to be more attractive to their potential students.

Through a thorough analysis of the data collected in the survey, the preference list of Lahti UAS international students which was used when choosing Lahti UAS as their final destination is revealed and summarized in the table below. Notably, all the main groups of factors as well as the variables within each group are displayed in the order of decreasing

degrees of importance (i.e. from most important factor to least important factor).

Priority Rank	Set of Factors	Variables
#1	Personal Reasons	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To experience a new culture 2. To build an international network 3. To improve language skills 4. To be able to find a good job with attractive salary 5. To secure desired job in the future 6. Because of family's/friends'/professor's recommendations
#2	Study Program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Internationally recognized degree 2. Quality of the program 3. Tuition fee and available financial aids 4. Personal suitability of the program and curriculum design 5. Recognition of the degree by future employers
#3	Institution Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University reputation 2. Modern and well-equipped campus 3. High teaching quality 4. Social life and campus atmosphere 5. Knowledgeable and professionally experienced teaching staff 6. High ranking position 7. Organization culture, values, vision and mission of the university 8. Activeness in scientific research 9. Logos and other sympolic representations
#4	Country Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overall reputation of education system 2. A worth living country

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Cost of living 4. Opportunity for part-time job 5. Similarities between culture of the host country and original country 6. Immigration procedure
#5	City Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Security and safety 2. International environment 3. Cost of living 4. City supports to its local universities and students 5. City dimensions and city characteristics

Table 23. List of preferences of Lahti UAS international students when choosing Lahti UAS as their final destination

Research Sub-question 2: *What are the good practices from benchmark universities regarding using social media to attract potential international students?*

The social media audit conducted for the five institutions have provided the authors key findings to reach the answer to sub-question number two. The details will be described in the following table.

	Good practices
Profiles	Regarding the social media profiles, not all of the benchmark universities are active across all the mainstream media channels. Some platforms such as Pinterest which does not have high enough efficiency is omitted in order to decrease the cost of resources and to optimize the existing ones. The channels that are performing well in promoting the image of the benchmark universities to international students are Facebook and Instagram. Interestingly, three out of four benchmarks have a different usage for their Flickr accounts from Lahti UAS'. The accounts are used as

	an open forum for international students to contribute content to promote their own schools.
Logo	The logos for all benchmark universities' studied social media accounts are used in uniformity. This coherence helps the international students to associate the media platform to the corresponding institution instantly. In addition, this practice decreases the probability of confusion that might take place when accounts from the same school are represented with different displays.
Forms of content	The benchmark universities have a more diverse proportion of content forms on their Facebook and Twitter. They utilize more photographic materials and video recordings in their news updates, and almost all the updates have an embedded web link to elaborate it. This helps increase the engagement rate from international students since they are able to find out more about the institutions they are researching in prior to application.
Frequency of posts	Generally the benchmark universities keep a busier frequency of posting new updates on their social media. This figure varies from school to school and channel to channel. Nonetheless, it starts at around four updates per week, which is a little more than Lahti UAS' frequency at three posts weekly. More content updates mean a livelier image in the outlook of international students.
Topics of content	Besides VAMK, all other three benchmarks use English as the main language on their social media platforms. Although certain countries have their peculiar set of official languages, English is selected as it is the only language that can reach a universe of international students. Content that is written in this

	language will have higher chances in attracting overseas students' attention.
Rating feature on Facebook	On Facebook, all the benchmark institutions have enabled the rating feature. This allows students studying at named universities to show support for their schools. From there, such support will serve as foundations influencing international applicants in considering pursuing study at a specific abroad university.

Table 24. Good practices on social media from benchmark universities

Research Main Question: *How can Lahti UAS use social media to attract potential international students?*

From the findings collected for sub-question one and two, the authors have arrived at the final answer to the main research question of this dissertation, which is “How can Lahti UAS use social media to attract potential international students?”. The answer is that Lahti UAS may refer to the results provided by sub-question one and adopt the good practices from benchmark universities presented in sub-question two to leverage its attractiveness to its current and potential international students via social media. The practices from benchmark universities may be considered for implementation because they are applicable to Lahti UAS. The school can integrate these suggestions into its social media marketing strategy and use them as parts of the guideline for content.

To be more specific, Lahti UAS may consider using the content topics for its social media strategy that match the list of influential factors of current international students at Lahti UAS. To readdress the point, the first idea is that Lahti UAS can explore and research its social media content that is directed towards motivating personal experience for an international student at Lahti UAS. Secondly, it may find the content that promotes the benefits of the study program currently being offered at Lahti UAS and how it would help the students to advance in the working environment.

Moreover, it might consider enhancing the attractive aspects of the school more on social media. That is to say Lahti UAS can present its vibrant academic atmosphere along with its well-equipped campus to potential international students via social media channels.

In addition to that, Lahti UAS may utilize the power of computer software such as Google Analytics to track the progress of its social media activities which will provide a more accurate result concerning many aspects including the engagement of international audience and the perception of Lahti UAS' image in their minds via social media channels. Furthermore, Lahti UAS may design a social media schedule, or when Lahti UAS should publish their contents on social media. The time frame for posting should match the time when most of Lahti UAS followers are using social media to avoid their post being missed out in the users' newsfeed. For example, if 7pm is the active time of the followers on Facebook, Lahti UAS can consider updating their statuses around this hour. To know when most of the followers are on social media, Lahti UAS can employ available social media management tools such as Facebook Insights, Iconosquare etc.

11.2 Further Research

The authors hope that this dissertation can be a good foundation and a good source of inspiration for future studies in similar topics. The authors would like to suggest some aspects that this research could be developed further.

- The results concerning sketching international students' preferences could be improved with similar survey but in a larger scale (e.g.: all international students in Finland) to have more accurate predictions of decisive factors, better manipulation of potential students's decision making process and timely detections of any changes in preferences.
- Future work may be conducted to analyze the possible interrelationship between the five major sets of factors. The

authors anticipate that certain relations among groups of factors exist and these factors interact in a dynamic system. Moreover, the authors also believe when a university tries to affect one group of factors may cause a chain reaction in other groups and changes in students' perceptions of that school. However, more researches are needed to confirm this hypothesis of the authors.

- The authors would like to encourage further exploration of more application of social media audit in achieving other branding objectives (for example, engaging current followers and attracting new ones, building circle of advocates for the university brand on social media etc.).

11.3 Evaluation

The ultimate goal of every study is not only about finding results and conclusions to the research problem but also ensuring the results and conclusions found are correct, reliable and credible. Therefore, the matters concerning the reliability and validity of the research should be taken into account even in the planning stage of the study. Heeding these advices, the authors applied different techniques in every stage of the research progress to ensure the validity and reliability of the empirical part for this dissertation. These implemented cautions will be explained in detail in this chapter. As the research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods and the credibility assessments for these methods are not the same, the chapter will be divided into two separate parts: reliability and validity of quantitative research and of qualitative research.

11.3.1 Reliability and Validity of Quantitative Research

In quantitative research, reliability is referred to as “the consistency of the results” or in other words, in case that the research is duplicated, it is still able to generate the similar results (Kananen 2013, 183). Reliability in quantitative research is measured through the two following facets: consistency and stability. Consistency should be present in both

measuring procedures and measuring results. In this survey, consistency is guaranteed through the rigorous documentation of all the choices and the justifications of choosing each and every variable. For example, the preferences of Lahti UAS international students regarding choosing a university abroad are constantly put under investigation. The guidelines for coding data, for the classification of variables and grouping of variable, the chosen statistical techniques for data analysis and their application procedures etc. are documented carefully and are administered systematically in individual variables. With these cautions, the authors are confident that the research will yield the same results in any other repeated trials.

As of the stability of the results, the authors expect that the obtained preference list for Lahti UAS will hold true at least in the near future (i.e less than three years). Moreover, the authors also anticipate that the three most influential factors (personal reasons, study program and institution image) will not be replaced for a considerable time ahead. However, the order of these three sets of factors in the priority list may be altered over time as proven in the findings part. This will make the research results unstable to some extent; however, it is understandable as consumer preferences are expected to change over time. In general, the authors can say that the research reliability is satisfied in this dissertation.

Validity is another measure to assess the credibility of a study. Validity is evaluated by two criteria: internal validity and external validity. Internal validity is the assessment of how correctly the research has been conducted (Kananen 2015, 272). In this research, the internal validity is satisfied by a series of rational decisions concerning the object of measuring. For example, the international students of Lahti UAS were chosen as the main object of investigation for studying international students' preferences as they all went through the process of choosing the most suitable university abroad themselves and chose Lahti UAS as their final destination and they all have clear ideas of their own ideal school. Moreover, the authors believe that it is reasonable to survey current students as the preferences of students are expected to be unchanged in

short-term. The statistical approach implemented to analyze the data collected in the survey is suitable as it allows the authors to handle a large amount of data in a scientific manner. In addition, all the variables measured in the survey were based on a careful review of academic work and the results were consistent with the past studies. Therefore, the authors believe that the internal validity of this research is fulfilled.

On the other hand, the external validity is related to “the generability of the obtained results” (Kananen 2015, 276). In this research, although there may be some questions about whether the participants of the survey are true representatives for the entire international students of Lahti UAS, the survey is still able to deliver properly the general preference list as expected. In fact, the structure of the sample (e.g. nationality, discipline, study group) is similar to the structure of the population. Moreover, the sample size is reasonable (97 in comparison with the population of 408 international students). Hence, the authors anticipate that these results can be generalized with some reservations; for example, in equivalent situation/conditions/community. Other academic institutions can find some applicable practices for themselves in this survey.

11.3.2 Reliability and Validity for Qualitative Research

As it has been said at the beginning of this chapter, the criteria of reliability and validity assessment in qualitative research is different from quantitative research. However, the fundamental idea is still the same, which is to ensure the research is conducted according to scientific rules. In qualitative research, reliability is evaluated by the following two criteria, confirmability and evaluability (Kananen 2013, 281). Confirmability is to have the interviewees review all the interpretation and research results to ensure the correctness of the analysis in the interviewee’s point of view. However, in this research, raw materials for qualitative analysis are posts and comments on social network sites. Therefore, it is not feasible to ask for confirmation. In this study, the data is cross-examined between co-writers to ensure correct interpretation and reliability of data.

On the other hand, the evaluability is met by substantial documentation. Substantial documentation allows researchers to check whether the research is following the right path. Understanding the importance of documentation, the authors kept track of all activities related to this dissertation. Any reasons and justifications concerning data collection, analyses and interpretation were written down. By this way, all the decisions could be revised and the most suitable options for this research could be selected. In the authors' opinion, the reliability of the qualitative research is fully met.

Internal validity refers to "whether the conclusions drawn by a researcher are correct". Nevertheless, raw data in qualitative research is gathered from different sources and requires a great deal of interpretation from the researchers. Mistakes may occur when interpreting isolated materials. Therefore, to prevent this pitfall, the authors developed a system for the interpretation of multiple sources of data. For example, the classification of a comment into one of five sets of preference factors is based on certain prerequisites. Moreover, all the classifications as well as other analysis of data are cross-examined between co-authors to guarantee the consistent interpretation. In conclusion, the authors are confident to say the internal validity of the qualitative research is satisfied.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Paper version of the survey

PREFERENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WHEN CHOOSING UNIVERSITY ABROAD

This survey is aimed to discover the preference of international students when choosing university abroad. The information gathered will be used for branding as well as enhancing the attractiveness of Lahti UAS in international students' perceptions. The survey includes only eight questions and takes at most five minutes to complete, but each answer is invaluable to us. Therefore, we would really appreciate your time and support when participating in this survey.

Moreover, as a token of our gratitude, we would like to give three Moomin mugs to three lucky participants of this survey. If you want to participate in the lucky draw, please provide us your email at the end of the survey.

Thank you very much!

1. What are your personal motivations to study abroad? Please choose **three most** important reasons.

- To secure your desired job in the future
- To be able to find a good job with attractive salary
- To experience a new culture
- To build your international network
- To improve your language skills
- Because my family/friends/professor recommend me to study abroad
- Other reasons, please specify _____

2. In what aspects will the host country image influence to your decision to study

at a particular university abroad? Please choose ***three most*** important reasons.

- Similarities between the culture of the host country and your own
- Overall reputation of education system
- Cost of living
- Complexity of immigration procedures (*e.g. visa application*)
- It allows students to work part-time.
- A worth living country (*e.g. peaceful, happy, welcoming, safe, nice local people*)
- Other reasons, please specify_____

3. In what aspects will the host city image influence to your decision to study at a particular university abroad? Please choose ***three most*** important reasons.

- Safety and security
- Cost of living
- International environment.
- The city supports to its local universities and students
- The city dimensions and city characteristics (*city dimensions = population, ethnic groups, employment rate etc.; city characteristics = fun, dynamic, festive etc.*)
- Other reasons, please specify_____

4. In what ways the university image will affect your decision to study at a particular university abroad? Please choose ***three most*** important reasons.

- Logos and other symbolic representations (*e.g. photographs, booklets, leaflets*)
- High ranking position
- Good university reputation (*e.g. successful alumni, awards, praises from graduated, positive feedbacks from current students*)
- Activeness in scientific research
- Knowledgeable and professionally experienced teaching staff
- High teaching quality
- Modern and well-equipped campus
- Social life (*e.g. student clubs, festivals, competitions*) and campus atmosphere
- Organization culture, values, vision and mission of the university

Other reasons, please specify_____

5. What are the most important factors of the study program that will affect your final decision? Please choose **three most** important reasons.

Internationally recognized degree

Personal suitability of the program and curriculum design

Recognition of the degree by future employers

Tuition fee and available financial aids

Quality of the program

Other reasons, please specify_____

6. What is the most influential set of factors to you when choosing a particular university? Please choose **only one** option.

Personal reasons

Country image

City image

Institution image

Study program

7. What is your most trusted information source when choosing a foreign university? Please choose **only one** option.

Official website of the university

Recommendations from family and friends

Reviews, discussions and comments about the school on internet and social media

Other sources, please specify_____

8. What kind of information was important to your consideration for Lahti UAS, but you could **not** find it on official website or other social network sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) of Lahti UAS?

9. Do you follow Lahti UAS on social media? You can choose more than one option for this answer.

- Facebook
- Google+
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Flickr
- Instagram
- Youtube
- Lahti UAS does not present on the social network I use.
- I have an account on one of the platforms mentioned above, but I don't follow Lahti UAS there.
- I don't have an account on any social network.

10. We want to know more about you!

Your nationality *

Your discipline and your study group
(e.g. IBU12, BIT13) *

How long have you been in Finland? *

Your email (*enter only if you want to participate in the lucky draw*)

Appendix 2. Daily Facebook data record format

Number of posts	
Type of posted content (link, video, photo, text)	
Topics of posted content (personal motivation, country image, city image, institution image, program evaluation)	
Number of likes, shares and comments	
Number of positive comments	
Number of negative comments	
Word Count (Frequency of a specific word)	
Type of conversations used	

Appendix 3. Daily Twitter data record format

Number of tweets	
Types of content posted (link, video, photo, text)	
Topics of posted content (personal motivation, country image, city image, institution image, program evaluation)	
Number of replies, retweets and favorites	
Number of positive replies	
Number of negative replies	

Word Count	
Type of conversations used	

Appendix 4. Daily Instagram data record format

Number of posts	
Topics of photos posted (personal motivation, country image, city image, institution image, program evaluation)	
Number of likes and comments	
Number of positive comments	
Number of negative comments	
Word Count	
Type of conversations used	

Appendix 5. Daily YouTube data record format

Number of videos posted	
Topics of videos posted (personal motivation, country image, city image, institution image, program evaluation)	
Number of comments and total likes/dislikes	
Number of positive comments	
Number of negative comments	
Word Count	
Type of conversations used	

Appendix 6. Periodical collection of data across social media channels

	Facebook	Twitter	Youtube	Instagram
Old followers				
New followers				
Growth rate				
Number of posts				
Total interaction				
Number of comments/replies				
Number of positive comments				
Number of negative comments				
Type of conversations				
Content of posts				