REACHING POTENTIAL RUSSIAN STUDENTS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Case: Lahti University of Applied Sciences Ltd

LAHTI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
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Abstract

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Abstract

Nowadays, digital marketing plays an important role in higher education. Lots of educational institutions contest each other through social media for attracting more students, increasing income and ranks. The fact of the tuition fees in higher education for non-EU/EEA students forced Finnish universities to build a new digital marketing strategy to attract potential international students. Russian students are one of the largest groups of international students in Finland. Therefore, the objective of the thesis is to support the case company, Lahti UAS Ltd, to obtain a better understanding of the customer journey of potential Russian students and how they can be reached through social media.

The theoretical framework of the whole thesis consists of two chapters that create a basis for the study. The following paragraph introduces the two chapters forming the theoretical part of the thesis. The first chapter of the theoretical part, chapter two, discusses customers, how to get to know potential customers, build brand awareness and describes decision making process as well as the location of potential customers in the marketing funnel. Chapter three moves on gives the meaning of digital marketing, discusses inbound marketing and content marketing as well as social media in connection to marketing.

This thesis is written using a deductive reasoning approach. Quantitative methods are used for measuring results received from the online survey. In addition to that, data collected by primary and secondary sources. The survey was held online with Russian potential students to collect primary data. Secondary sources were collected from literature such as books, journals and electronic sources as web articles.

The empirical research results showed that potential Russian students start their decision journey mostly in high school or bachelor's degree and gather information on Yandex, Google or web page. They are interested in international students' content and feedback of students. Tuition fees highly affect their decision making. And relatives are considered one of the main influencing factors. Based on the results, recommendations to the case company on digital marketing strategy are provided.

Keywords

Russian students, digital marketing, potential customer, inbound marketing, international student, social media, channel, decision making, marketing

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

According to the Russian governmental news and experts in the field of education, due to the increasing cost of studying at Russian universities, more and more students prefer to study at European universities. The number of Russian citizens studying abroad has quadrupled during the past 20 years. Those who are willing to study abroad are more and more interested in doing this despite the fact of the financial crisis in Russia (Wiki, 2017). Russian citizens study in the EU and the US, but recently there is a growing interest in studying in Asian countries (Nikolskaya 2015).

According to the data for 2015, approximately 56,000 Russians study abroad, which is about 1% of the total number of Russian students (about 5.5 million people). This figure is constantly growing: in the mid-1990s, 13,000 Russian students were studying abroad, and by 2007 the figure had grown to 37,000, and in 2013 it reached 50,600. Most Russian citizens study in Germany. According to UNESCO, in 2015 there were almost ten thousand Russian students in Germany. The 2016 - 2017 academic year, the number of Russians studying in the United States amounted to 5,400. (UNESCO 2015.)

Finnish education is recognized as the best in the world, but not many people know that this is not its only advantage. Finland offers various Degree Programs in both Finnish and English language and is a neighbour of Russia. Therefore, it is a favoured country for Russians to study in higher education. The number of Russian students in Finland has been growing, and in 2017, there were 2,560 Russian students, which is the largest group of International students in Finland. (CIMO 2017.) From past times till nowadays, education is a bridge – builder between Finland and Russia, with cooperation businesses in both countries, without an influence of economic trends and political changes (CIMO 2016a).

Russian students enrol especially in bachelor's degree programs in Business Administration, Nursing and IT. Therefore, Russian students are one of the target audiences for the case company – Lahti University of Applied Sciences Ltd. (Heikkinen 2018.) In order to provide accurate study, the frame was applied. Therefore, this thesis will concentrate on English bachelor's degree. Thus, we will understand which factors in digital marketing of Lahti University of Applied Sciences Ltd influence their choice of an International bachelor program.

Social, technical, financial environments have been changed in companies, because of social media. The strategies of the organisation have been changed to up-to-date, because of the appearance of the new communication culture. Digital marketing and social media are currently changing business models. The new communication culture field with new online environments offer a huge amount of opportunities for companies with much attraction to people. (Clay 2017, 41-42.)

Lahti University of Applied Sciences Ltd is very active on social media and provides various information for students and applicants. Moreover, it has an active and up-to-date channel, which is targeted on the Russian audience, with posts both in Russian and English. (Maksheeva 2018.)

Therefore, this study helps Lahti UAS Ltd to understand the digital journey of Russian students before and during the application process, with awareness of their needs. Additionally, the study gives Lahti UAS Ltd ideas on how to better approach its target audience through digital marketing and stand out among its competitors.

1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions, and Limitations

The objective of the thesis is to support the case company, Lahti UAS Ltd, to obtain a better understanding of the customer digital journey of potential Russian students and how they can be reached through social media. Like hypotheses and research questions, objectives are found at the end of the "statement of the problem" section, after the literature review, or in a separate section of the study (Creswell 2012, 110). The focus will be on how Lahti UAS Ltd could reach potential Russian students through social media. English is a mandatory subject for all Russian students, therefore all the information on social media can be accessed in English. Nevertheless, for Lahti UAS Ltd Russian students are not a new target group, the fact of tuition fees, will influence the characteristics of this group. Thus, the outcomes will help an organisation with new customer approach through digital marketing.

The main research question is the following:

What are the most effective ways to reach potential Russian students through Social Media and Digital Marketing?

The sub-questions of the research are the following and presented below:

Which channels are considered and influence potential Russian students, while choosing a bachelor's degree program?

What kind of content on Social Media is attractive to potential Russian students, while choosing a bachelor's degree program?

Who is influencing a student's decision making, in choosing a bachelor's degree program?

The leading role of sub-questions is to point out where the case company should invest their limited recourses. Taking into consideration, the tuition fee for studies, the new digital marketing strategy should be invented for showing the potential Russian student that case company can bring benefit to the student and fulfil their demands.

The thesis has certain limitations. It applies a quantitative research method by collecting data through a structured questionnaire with close-ended questions. The respondents therefore have limited options, and this limits research findings (Chetty 2016). Firstly, as the thesis is focused on potential Russian students, the results might not directly apply to other nationalities. Secondly, as the thesis is focused on the case company, Lahti UAS Ltd and a particular target group, the outcomes cannot be suitable for other organisations. Nevertheless, the results can essentially help the case company to create better social media content for attracting Russian students. Finally, because the field of education changes rapidly, the results of the thesis might not apply anymore in the near future.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the whole thesis consists of two chapters that create a basis for the study. The following paragraph introduces the two chapters forming the theoretical part of the thesis.

The first chapter of the theoretical part, chapter two, discusses customers, how to get to know potential customers, build brand awareness and describes decision-making process as well as the location of potential customers in marketing funnel. Chapter three moves on gives the meaning of digital marketing, discusses inbound marketing and content marketing as well as social media in connection to marketing.

1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

The first step that should be done to proceed the research is to settle which research approach should be utilized to study the topic. In the time of the scientific process, deductive reasoning is used to reach a valid logical ending. It is essential to acknowledge the meaning of each type of reasoning so that proper logic can be identified. Deductive

reasoning, or deduction, begins with a general statement, and investigate the possibilities to reach particular, logical conclusion. Inductive reasoning is opposed to deductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning generate extensive generalizations from distincts observations. Basically, there is information, and the conclusions are made from the data. (Bradford 2017.) As the below figure, Figure 1, shows, the thesis applies the deductive approach.
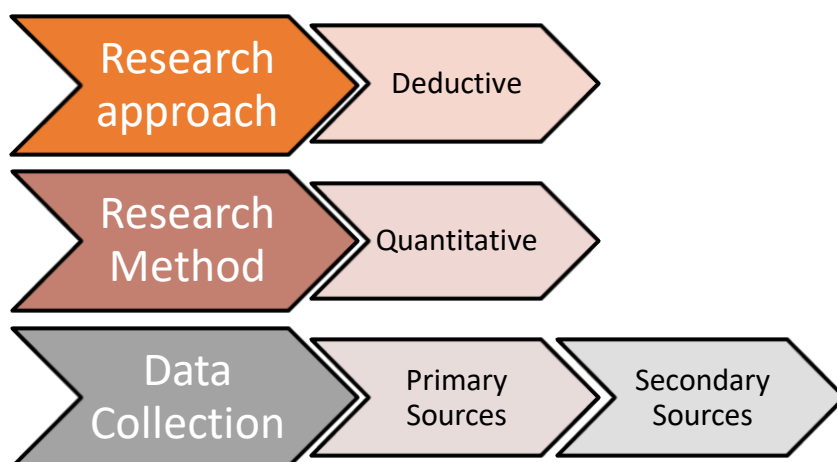
Figure 1 Thesis Methodology and Data Collection

The next step is to decide how data should be collected and analysed. Data is commonly collected and analysed by applying qualitative or quantitative methods.

Qualitative research involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting data by observing what people do and say. Observations and conclusions are qualitative and carried out in a non-standardized manner. Qualitative data can be translated into quantitative form, but special procedures precede this. The purpose of qualitative research is to obtain data explaining the observed phenomenon. Such data are not expressed in specific figures and therefore cannot be statistically processed. Qualitative research can determine the motives of consumer behaviour. (Creswell 2012, 16.)

Quantitative research is usually identified with the conduct of various surveys, to which a large number of interviewed people respond. The characteristic features of such studies are the following: the format of the collected data and their sources are well defined; the processing of the collected data is carried out by using orderly procedures. To obtain and analyse reliable data subject to comprehensive statistical processing is the objective of the quantitative research. Quantitative research allows us to check the reliability of consumer opinions revealed in the course of qualitative research. Both are conducted

through surveys using statistical sampling methods. (Creswell 2012, 13.) This thesis uses a quantitative method as shown in Figure 1.

After choosing a research approach and data collection method, the next step is to collect research data. The thesis uses both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through an online survey. Secondary data was gathered from online sources, articles and literature related to the topic.

1.5 Thesis Structure

Figure 2 below illustrates the structure of the thesis. Below the figure is a detailed introduction of each chapter.
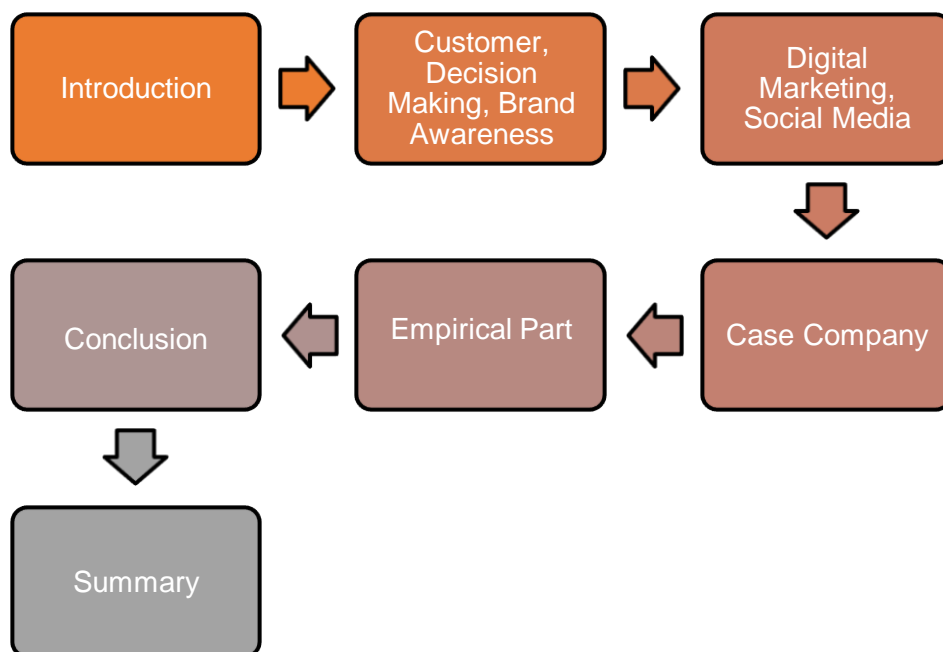
Figure 2 Thesis Structure

The thesis begins with an introduction. It gives background on the topic. Furthermore, it introduces the research objective, limitations, and the research question and sub questions. Finally, the introductory chapter summarizes the used research methods.

The thesis can be divided into two main parts: the theoretical part discusses key concepts, and the empirical part presents empirical data, results, and recommendations for the case company.

The theoretical part includes two chapters, chapters two and three. Chapter two discusses customers and importance of knowing potential customers, marketing funnel, brand awareness and consumer decision journey. Chapter three introduces digital marketing, inbound marketing, content marketing and social media.

The empirical part includes two chapters, chapter four and chapter five. Chapter four provides background information about the case company, Lahti UAS Ltd. The chapter introduces the case company's vision and value and discusses its current social media marketing strategy. Chapter five explains how the research data was collected, analyses the data, and provides recommendations for the case company.

Finally, chapter six concludes the thesis and gives answers to the research questions. Chapter seven summarises the thesis.

2 CUSTOMER AND DECISION MAKING

Understanding of customer is an essential step in the overall process of digital marketing. Its importance increases in highly competitive markets, where the choice of goods is vast and varies a lot. In order to influence the behaviour of the consumer, it is necessary to understand the process of how the customer makes a decision about the purchase and what methods can push him to the right decision making at different stages. In the following chapter, we will consider the meaning of the customer, their attitude and motivation with the decision-making process and arrival to the final decision. (Hooker 2015, 32.)

2.1 Customers

Nowadays, competition in the education market is increasing from day to day; therefore, universities put many efforts to attract customers in various ways (Peppers & Rogers 2017, 20-21). However, to have more efficiency, it is necessary, firstly, to understand:

Who is a customer?

A customer is a person or company who can purchase services, where he can be an end user or upstream businesses, who purchases for producers and resell it whether to the end user or invest in manufacturing their product (Peppers & Rogers 2017, 20-21).

2.2 Know Your Potential Customers

Huge number of companies are focused on a particular customer, and the better the organization have an idea of targeted audience, the better it will be able to adapt offer to its needs, and therefore get a serious competitive advantage. This applies to both offline business and the online one. However, in the e-commerce segment, there are much more opportunities to measure the behaviour of visitors. (Atkinson 2011 ,19.)

Why targeting work with potential customers plays an important role? Mainly because they are representatives of this group and potential buyers of offered products and services. So, their interest in the company's offer and loyalty to the brand, in fact, depends on the success of the business. (Robles 2014, 28.)

There is no need to be a brilliant marketer or economist to understand that the same product cannot be equally preferred by men and women, pensioners and students, as well as an office clerk and IT developer will have different requirements to a laptop stuffing. By taking into consideration the following fact, it is essential to have different approaches to

the process and way of bringing information for different categories of people. (Zerres & Baran 2008, 12.)

Personalized offer or advertising appeal allows a company to create a personal nature of the relationship between the organization and customer, to convince the targeted customer is offered the best option, and not just the one to whom the company is trying to sell the goods (Webb 2017, 27-28). Knowledge of the potential customers of the offered product gives the entrepreneur the following advantages:

- savings on advertising budget
- reduction of the development time
- increase customer loyalty
- improving business reputation
- a possibility of content personalization and advertising appeals, etc.

The priority of quality over quantity allows the company to get the best results. It does not matter how many visitors have moved from the search to the main website of the company. It is important how many of them are potential customers. The better company knows their potential customers, the more effective will be their actions on marketing communication. Therefore, it is vital for the company to get to know their potential customer before they start work on the promotion or social media advertisement. (Robles 2014, 32-36.)

2.3   Marketing Funnel

Marketing Funnel is a visualized model for getting a better understanding of how leads are turning into customers, perceived from marketing and sales perspective. The concept is that, like a funnel, organisations throw the wide net to acquire as many leads as they can, with further influencing future customers through acquiring decision, and narrowing down following potential customers in each level of the funnel. (White 2016.)

The funnel presented in Figure 3 is not the only version of it. Some of the funnels have more "steps", while others have more, with dissimilar terms and actions carried by the business and consumer for each. By using presented below funnel on Figure 3, the author presented mostly used and appropriate funnel levels, terms, and actions, so that this information is advantageous to as many readers as possible. (Singh 2017.)
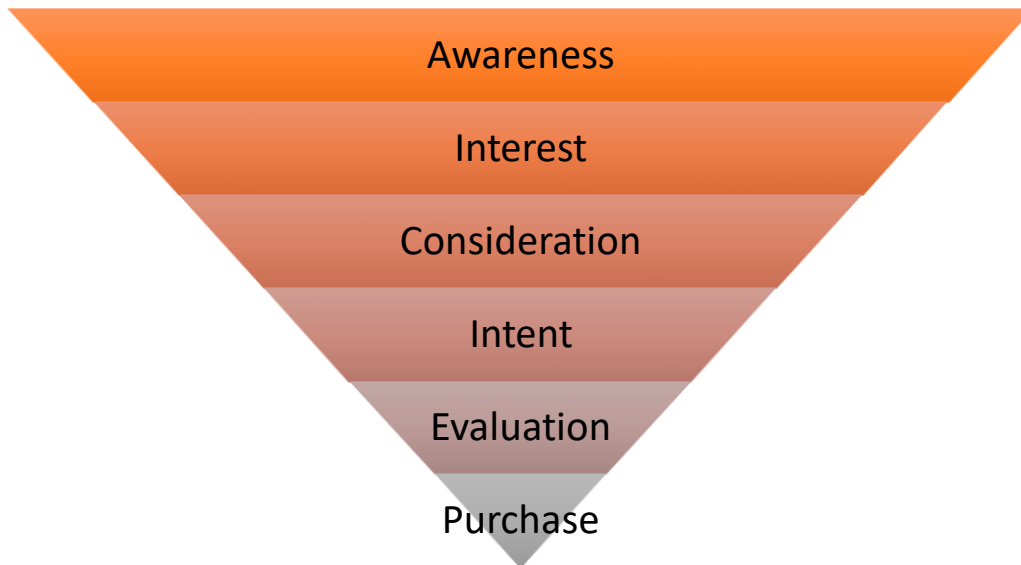
Figure 3 Marketing Funnel (White 2016)

Awareness

Awareness is the foremost step in the marketing funnel, where potential customers are getting to know about the company through advertising, marketing, and other communication strategies. On the following step, marketer tries to have an impact on the entire group of potential customers. After obtaining customer information, then it is placed in the lead management system for raising further down the funnel. (Singh 2017.)

Interest

Since leads are created, they go further to the interest level, where they get to know about the services of the company and other information. It is an excellent chance for companies to build a relationship with people and introduce its positioning. The marketer can throw leads through targeted content, concentrated more on brands, industries, etc. (White 2106.)

Consideration

On the upcoming level, leads are changed into marketing qualified once where customers are considered to be prospective. There is an ability to send email campaigns or other necessary information about the brand, paralleled with targeted content, open trials and so on. (Singh 2017.)

Intent

As soon as customers demonstrate that they have a willing to buy the offered service, it automatically comes to the intent stage. These demonstrations can be: putting product in a cart, buying related queries, etc., therefore the following step is a trigger for the company and sign for remarketing and using different marketing strategies. (White 2016.)

Evaluation

The following level is a pre-step before buying a product, where the customer is evaluating offered service, compares prices and conducting his decision. Therefore, on the particular level the most crucial role plays sales team, rather than marketing one, however, in better case cooperation of both teams are considering, in order to influence customer decision-making, that offered product is the best option. (Hinson 2016.)

Purchase

Considered as a final level of the marketing funnel where lead becomes a customer and purchase the service. The sales team is moving in charge of the process. In the case of customer satisfaction and a pleasant experience, the company has a high possibility to be chosen next time, where the funnel starts from the beginning. (Singh 2017.)

It is important to stress that this survey relates only on first and second levels of the marketing funnel which are awareness and interest, as potential students represent the group of leads included in these two stages.

The alternative to the marketing funnel is consumer decision journey, as it is represented in the circular model instead of linear, with showing the whole process, pivots and touch points. The author will consider it more firmly in upcoming chapter 2.3.

2.4 Consumer Decision Journey

Nowadays, in the so-called digital era the model of Consumer Decision Journey is widely in use for analysing the consumer purchase path. The following model takes into account how consumers are looking for products and buying it in today's life. (Hopfauf 2017.)

One of the main goals of marketing is to communicate with the consumers in the moments when it is possible to influence their decisions (McKinsey & Co 2015). These moments, or touch points were previously described by the previous decision-making journey by McKinsey in the 2009 year, presented on (Figure 4).
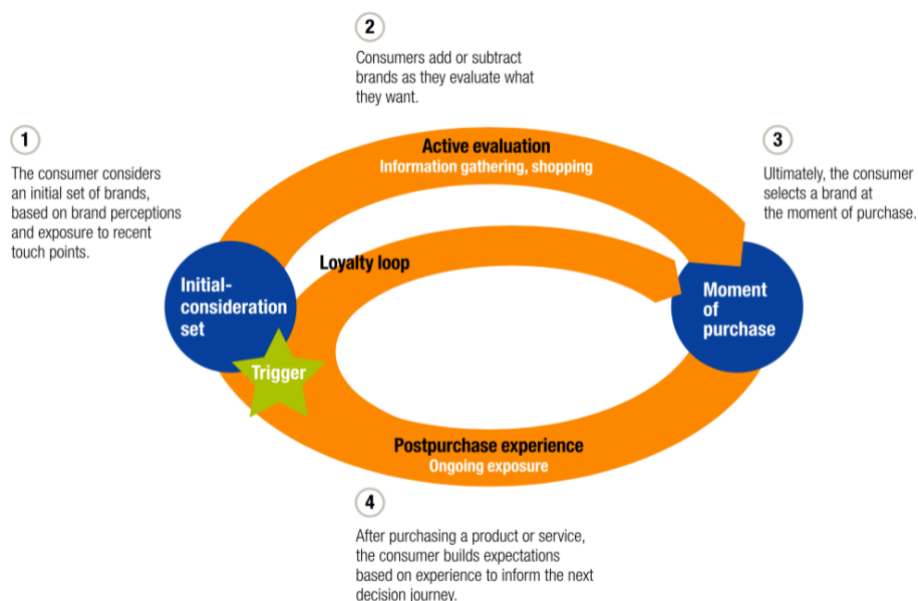
Figure 4 Circular Consumer Decision Journey (McKinsey & Co 2009)

Trigger - are situations in which consumers start thinking about buying a company's product.

The initial consideration set can be presented on example. Let's imagine that a student decided to apply to University. As with most products, he recalls several well – known brands, in this case Universities, in this category-which he will begin to consider in the first place. Getting into this set of brands for the organization is crucial. It is necessary for the consumer call to mind the company when he needs their product, therefore the company has to increase brand awareness among potential consumers. Brands that hit the initial pool are three times more likely to be bought – than those that were found at the stage of the active study. (Hopfauf 2017.)

At the stage of active evaluation, the consumer studies the information about the product as well as other brands. Learning more about the offers, he adds and removes brands from the list of consideration, with looking for the most appropriate to his needs and objectives. At the stage of ongoing evaluation, ⅔ touch points with advertising are marketing which are created by consumers (consumer-driven touch points) – reviews, recommendations, etc. and only ⅓ touches are traditional advertising. (McKinsey & Co 2015.)

Moment of purchase is when the consumer decides on a particular brand in the moment of purchase. The post-purchase experience forms the opinion of consumers, which will influence their subsequent purchasing decisions in this category. If all goes well, the company will be chosen again and vice versa, if something is wrong the consumer will start to consider the new proposals of other brands. (Lechelle 2014.)

The consumer decision journey included customers taking all pros of technology for rating goods and services more strongly with changing choices over the time, with an involved feedback loop, where customers shared their experience and motivated companies to bring superior experience. (Satell 2015.)

2.5 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is responsible for the ability of the target audience to know or remember the company's trademark at the time of making a choice or just before buying a product. Product awareness is measured in % and means the share of the audience that is familiar with the company's product and can identify the brand within the product category. Brand awareness affects product competitiveness and long-term growth opportunities. (Clay 2017, 20.) There are different stages of brand awareness that are presented below in Figure 5.

Figure 5 The Brand Awareness Pyramid (Standberry 2017)

Unaware of Brand
The buyer has never heard about a particular brand, usually in the first stages of the buying process (Shorr 2012).

Brand Recognition
The ability of the consumer to identify and recognize the brand in contact with it by individual characteristics and attributes. In other words, this term is responsible for how

quickly and easily the consumer can recognize the product in content, images, and design elements. (Bhasin 2018.)

Brand Recall

The consumer can remember the brand of the company at the time of a specific need (Bhasin 2018).

Top of mind

The ideal result of brand recognition in the market. It means that the consumer remembered this trademark. On the top of mind stage, brands are firmly established in the minds of consumers and are linked with the product category or market where it is offered. The consumer is inclined to purchase these brands in the first place. Top of mind products are usually market leaders and included in the mandatory set of brands (consideration set), from which the consumer is ready to make a choice. (Standberry 2017.)

Assessment of brand awareness in the market is an integral part of the company's brand promotion. Knowing the current level of awareness, the company can build the right promotion strategy, define communication goals and advertising budget as well as build relevant content that will increase the interest of the target audience. (Clay 2017, 21.)

3 DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital marketing - is a tool of communication with the consumer which are carried out through digital channels such as smartphones, computers, tablets, digital screens. Besides, digital marketing has its embodiment in offline channels in the form of links to electronic resources and QR-codes. (Alexander 2016.) Digital marketing is gaining popularity and in active use both in the business to customer and in business to business segments. It allows companies to work closely with consumers and cover most of the target audience, with making it highly effective. (Patel 2018.)

Companies use digital channels for attracting potential customers and maintain relations with their existing ones. Digital marketing supports the company's goal by including various holdings, such as website, blog, etc. and strategies which are the following: content marketing, inbound marketing, pay – per – click (PPC), search engine (SEO) and others. (Alexander 2016.)

Digital marketing has several significant advantages over traditional marketing:
- Allows companies to interact with a broader audience and find customers even in unexpected places.
- Provides an opportunity to convey information about the product and the company to a large number of consumers in a short period, while other strategies require significant time.
- Allows companies to establish a dialogue with customers.
- Digital technologies help to have a much impact on customers which increases the likelihood of product interest.
- Digital promotion is cheaper than other strategies.
- Transparent tracking of impact effectiveness. (Singh 2017.)

Companies improve quality of communication, with digital marketing and cost-effectively connect to the customer. Clay states that digital marketing is actively influencing relations of the company and targeted group, with helping to reach as wide audience as possible. Therefore, digital marketing gives an ability to track in a real – time. (Clay 2017,16.)

3.1 Inbound Marketing

Inbound marketing - is a way of promotion through useful or just exciting content. Content can be presented as blog articles, illustrations, videos, answers to questions on forums, podcasts, presentations. Inbound marketing is fundamentally different from outbound

marketing, which uses traditional methods to attract customers such as calls, advertising on radio and television, mailing lists. (Kunkel 2017.)

The leading carrier of information in inbound marketing is the content that should be noteworthy and unique: author's texts, videos, infographics, instructions, etc. Inbound marketing replicates this content with the help of modern means of promotion on the Internet such as the company's website, contextual advertising, social networks, and others. (Hubspot 2018.)

As far as advantages of inbound marketing are concerned, the following can be taken into consideration:

- Cheap - many tools for inbound marketing are free and available to everyone.
- Not under pressure - when people subscribe, they voluntarily consent to receive news from the company and do not perceive these messages as spam. They are interested in receiving information relevant to the brand.
- Viral effect - as soon as the company is interested in one person to become a subscriber in social networks, upcoming likes will cause interest of other audience in the brand. (Kunkel 2017.)

Inbound Marketing model consists of 4 stages: attract, convert, close and delight, which are represented below in Figure 6. However, it is essential to stress that thesis aimed to reach potential Russian students, therefore the literature review regards the first stage and partially second stage of the model, with changing strangers to visitors and the beginning of becoming leads.

Figure 6 The Four Phases of Inbound Marketing (Shannon 2017)

Attract

No one needs just some traffic to the site. Business wants to see people who can be useful. How to get such visitors? Inbound marketing attracts the target audience, showing

them useful content at the same time when they are looking for it. The most common channel for the first stage is social media, blogging and relevant content. (Shannon 2017.)

Convert

The audience company gathers in the blog, and social networks should be converted to leads in the next step. Inbound marketing offers to do it through those channels of communication that are convenient to customers, through messages, forms, letters, phone calls or meetings. The task of business is to stay in touch and answer questions. Content-different types and themes for different segments of the audience are also working on this stage, and a company continues to communicate using the content until the customer is ready for purchase. (Shannon 2017.)

Nowadays, both purchasing processes B2B and B2C starts with gathering information on the Internet. Thus, customers can be easily reached at the beginning of the buying process. Potential customers decision making can be influenced by valuable and relevant content. (Tervo, 2018.) In inbound marketing, the content plays a vital role, where it should be located where the potential customer is looking for it, often in the beginning stage of the buying online process. Therefore, inbound marketing plays an important role as an influencer of the company for attracting their potential customer. (Hubspot 2018.)

3.2 Content Marketing

Content marketing is a marketing technique for creating and distributing popular content to attract the target audience. The task of the content marketing is to encourage the visitor to target actions, to involve him in the company's conversion scenario. Content marketing is the information received by the potential customer at the right time and in the right place. (Steimle 2014.)

According to Wilson, content marketing is considered to be successful, only if the potential customer found the relevant content, got to know with presented content and final step, took action which can be considered as the purchase (Wilson 2016, 59). International organisations which have businesses in several countries, sometimes find problems with providing content for the local foreign audience in another country as it can be considered in the case of Lahti UAS Ltd. The majority of the potential customers would be more interested content written in their native language. (Bedor 2015.)

The central figure in content marketing is that content should make potential customers think, that they are making the right purchase, where customers should be supported with content in the purchasing process (Lucidchart Content Team 2017). Content marketing funnel is rpresented in Figure 7, which can help in the understanding of the customer

buying process. Nevertheless, for this thesis only top part of content marketing funnel is relevant, each stage will be considered for better understanding.
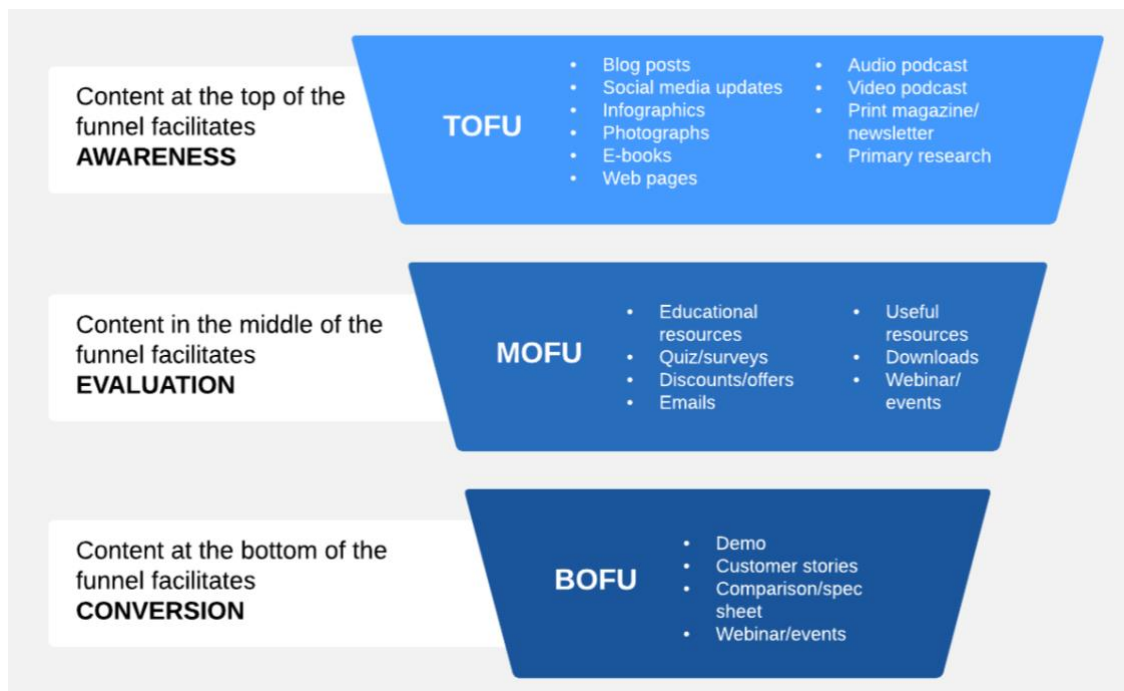
Figure 7 Content Marketing Funnel (Lucidchart Content Team 2017)

At the top of the funnel, content marketing is needed to create an information background and generate interest in the company. The top of the funnel is inbound marketing: useful and interesting content, which creates awareness as visitors considered to be unaware of the company's service or product. Companies need to understand what the audience wants to know, and then — to be able to convey it. Thus, helping potential customers to reduce the number of other market choices with photos, videos or social media. (Shuey 2018.)

The middle stage of the funnel is the level of converting a visitor into a potential customer. People got already to know the company and received some valuable material from them. Therefore, it is the step for changing the status of customer and companies can already ask visitors for contact information. For example, newsletter subscription, emails, downloads work well, and from now on, the company can develop relationships with its subscribers. (Shuey 2018.)

The bottom stage is a time of persuasion, where potential customers becomes real buyers as they already know about the brand, they received open information. This is the most difficult stage of the funnel. The content on the following stage should influence the

customer to purchase from company and instance of the content can be customer stories or product comparison. (Lucidchart Content Team 2017.)

3.2.1 Target Audience

The target audience is a group of people who are most likely to be interested in the offer or a specific service of the company. The main value of the target audience in marketing is that the representatives of the selected group are likely to purchase a certain service. Therefore, the marketer forms an advertisement with taking into account the taste, preferences or characteristics of this particular group which significantly increases the effectiveness of the advertising campaign. (Wilson 2016, 45-48.)

The target audience definition is a foundation of all marketing efforts and essential (Roque 2018). Thus, the following steps will be achieved:

- Building the most successful advertising campaign (SMM, banner, contextual, mailings).
- Creation of the optimal content for a particular target audience.
- Communication with customers, creating promotions, and other campaigns aimed at attracting new customers.
- Time-saving for development and promotion of the store.
- Creation of new services, products that will be of interest to a particular target audience.

Creating a portrait of the target audience will help the company to find a common language and ground with the target audience. The purpose of the target audience image – is to give received data the face and character. (Law 2018.) In order to make an image of the target audience, the following characteristics should be considered:

- demographics (age, gender, income, etc.)
- location
- psychographics (interests, opinions, activities).

In this thesis, author-defined target audience as potential Russian students, of the different age and gender, who has a willing or is interested in studying abroad. In addition to that, the financial side of the target audience is also playing a vital role in the following survey, as education in Finland is no longer for free (LAMK 2018a).

3.2.2 Owned, Earned and Paid Media

Paid, owned and earned media - these are the names of the media channels that are used in the planning of advertising campaigns, with allowing the company to separate the central budget from the experiments. The following trifecta is presented in Figure 8. Companies gain brand awareness as well as trying to involve visitors, increasing number of customers and gaining credibility from them. (Newman 2014.)
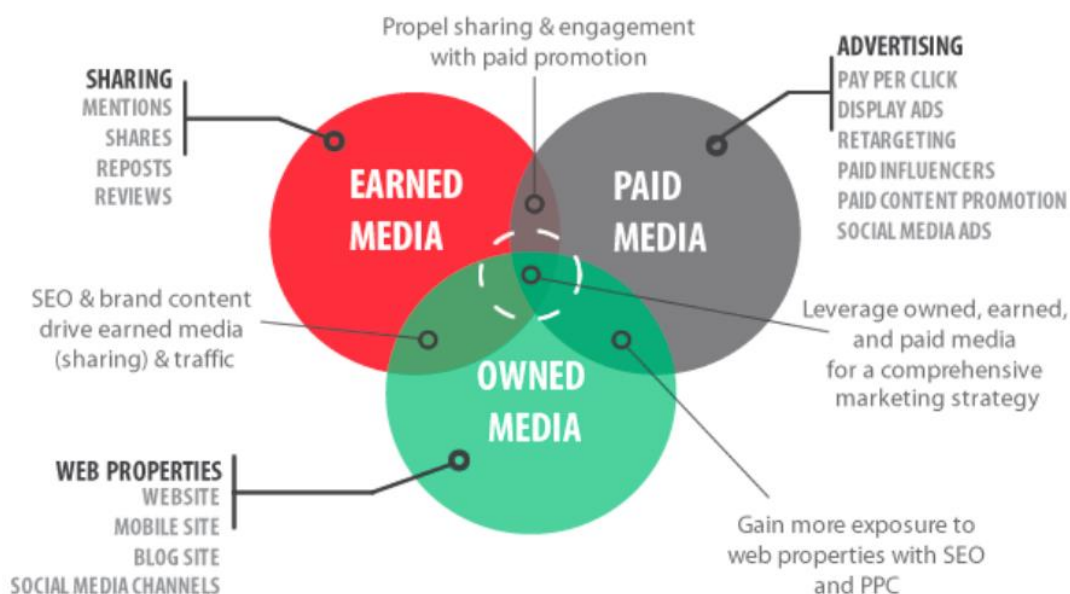
Figure 8 Digital Marketing Trifecta (Grimes 2015)

Owned Media – is any communication channel or platform owned by the brand itself. Companies create it themselves, with further full control. The audience of own media is potential, existing and former customers of the brand. The change status from visitors who were attracted with the help of paid tools and platforms to customers mainly depends on the credibility and relevance of the content. For example, mobile applications, company's website, newsletters. (Springer 2015.) Owned Media are the touch points of the brand, which are maintained with three elements:

- Content – information goes straight from the company to the targeted group with examples as blog posts, newsletters and so on.
- Context – first-hand experience with engaging visitors.
- Community – considered as an effective way to build relationship among users and company, for instance, virtual forums, media groups and so on.

Paid Media - is the whole list of paid tools and platforms to attract traffic to the website, blog, application and other resources of the company. This channel allows the company to expand the coverage of digital campaigns and increase brand awareness. Accordingly, the audience of paid media is users of the world wide web who have not heard about the company before but are potentially interested in its products or services. For instance, it can be: TV, radio, paid promotions by influencers, newspaper advertisement, etc. (Newman 2014.) Paid Media has upcoming characteristics:

- Reach – has the highest reach among types of communication media with a range from television advertisement to social media advertisement and bringing more extensive brand exposure.
- Information – wide range of relevant information can be used for influencing purchase decision of the customer.
- Differentiation – with the huge competition, it is essential for the company to differentiate itself in order to be noticed among other companies.

Earned Media - is the whole set of users' actions concerning the brand: discussions of its image, content, and products on different sites of the Internet as well as likes, shares, and comments on the company's website and its pages on social networks. It is powerful public advertising of the brand generated by its audience. (Ratcliff 2014.) Moreover, this audience consists mainly of those users who are currently targeted by the company's advertising as well as fans of the brand and those people who were previously attracted by paid and owned online marketing channels. In addition, this includes friends and subscribers of all the above categories of users with whom they decide to share brand content or discuss its products and services. (Pahwa 2018.) Earned media is:

- Uncontrolled – cannot be controlled by the company, therefore information can be interpreted differently.
- Trustable – shared information by other person is considered more trustable, than by the company itself.
- Economical – do not need huge investments as the company pays a negligible amount. (Pahwa 2018.)

3.2.3 Common Types of Content Marketing

One of the most popular types of promoting companies and brands on social media is content marketing. It provides an increase in the number of initial links to the site due to the appearance of various materials, that in turn, cause sincere interest of users. Thus, content marketing differs significantly from most artificial methods of promotion. The

disadvantage of content marketing is that the number of initial links cannot be controlled and predicted, so there are difficulties in planning and determining the timing of achieving the desired result. (Gotter 2018.)

There are various types of content marketing, which many organisations use in order to achieve and interest potential customers (Chale 2018). And it is important to stress that in the following chapter will consider related to the survey types, and they are presented below:

Blogs

A company's blog is a great place to share educational materials with insights into the subject area, announcements of coming events and other relevant content. However, blogging is different from other types of content marketing - with an emphasis on newness. For example, an organization can update their blog 4-5 times a week, but it is also important to engage the team of marketing professionals, partners, customers, and opinion leaders to help marketers continuously create new content. (Ryan 2014,163-164.)

Videos

Videos can achieve many goals - it can improve branding, show instructions, answer questions, provide customer feedback, and entertain the audience. Videos are based on production quality and time-consuming so that it can require serious investment. (Gotter 2018.)

Reviews

The review is a type of content, which role is to assure the customer in his right decision for purchasing service. With the help of reviews, customer understands why this product is better than other and how it performs. (Ryan 2014, 160.)

Landing Pages

Landing page - is a web page focused on the sale of one service and aimed at visitor target action. It is not considered as the main page of the site, but a separate tool for digital marketing. The main task of any landing page is to lead a potential buyer along with the conversion path. The end point of which is the performance of a certain action: registration; application; purchase. (Chale 2018.)

Infographics

Visual materials are always of interest to users and the desire to share information with friends. If the infographic is made on an actual and demand topic, then it has a great chance to go online and ensure the popularity of the promoted resource. Infographics attract external links and add visual interest to informative materials. Marketers can use

infographics to attract customers' attention and make complex information such as warnings and instructions. Because these are larger visual forms, companies can use infographics to represent facts and data that are too complex. (Harris 2018.)

3.2.4 Consumer Generated Content

The author decided to cover the following topic, because in the case of Lahti UAS Ltd. customers, who can be existing or former students can be included in social media marketing for potential Russian students, with bringing value and trust.

Let's start with definitions of two main terms: consumer and content, with the relevance of social media marketing. Consumer – other people, then writers, journalists or publisher, who concerned as consumers, themselves. Content – represents appropriate and valuable information, that can be introduced to the public, overall, speaking, it is a message that the company want to bring to the customer. (Moens 2014, 20-21.)

Therefore, according to the above written definitions, we could say that consumer generated content - a marketing technology for creating and distributing popular content to attract the targeted audience. The function is to encourage the consumer to targeted actions, to involve him in conversion scenario and receive information by potential customer at the right time and in the right place. (Moriuchi 2016, 1-3.)

Consumer generated content has both challenges and opportunities for companies. The main advantages of consumer - generated content are presented below:

- wider exposure on the market
- ease in information finding, about the presence of the company
- positive reviews and comments will bring trust to upcoming customers.

As it can be seen, consumer generated content brings common ground, credibility, which, in turn, destroys the "resistance" of the customer. As far as challenges are concerned, the constant introduction of new social media is potentially harmful to companies. Therefore, some companies create departments to have someone in - charge of the online activities. In addition to that, social media allows spreading the word fast and wide, which is a double - edged sword with following damage to the company, in the case of not on time appropriate recovery. (Moore 2017.)

The future of Social media marketing will be reliant on consumer generated content which is collaborated by customers and companies. In accordance with Emi Moriuchi, involving customers is already in the past, and, nowadays, the majority of marketers convert

marketing activities form "involvement" to "engagement" which means to engage into co-created value process. (Moriuchi 2016, 69.)

3.3   Social Media

Social media - is a set of online technologies that allow users to communicate with each other. Communication can take a variety of forms - users can share their opinions, experiences, and knowledge, interact with each other, establish contacts, and share news, information, videos, photos, music and links. (Bowden 2016, 4.)

According to the Statista in the 4th quarter, in Russia, as it is shown in Figure 9, the most active in Russia is used YouTube (63% of respondents), the second place goes to Vkontakte — 61%. The global leader of Facebook is only on the fourth line with an indicator of 35%. Among messengers, Skype and WhatsApp dominate (38%).
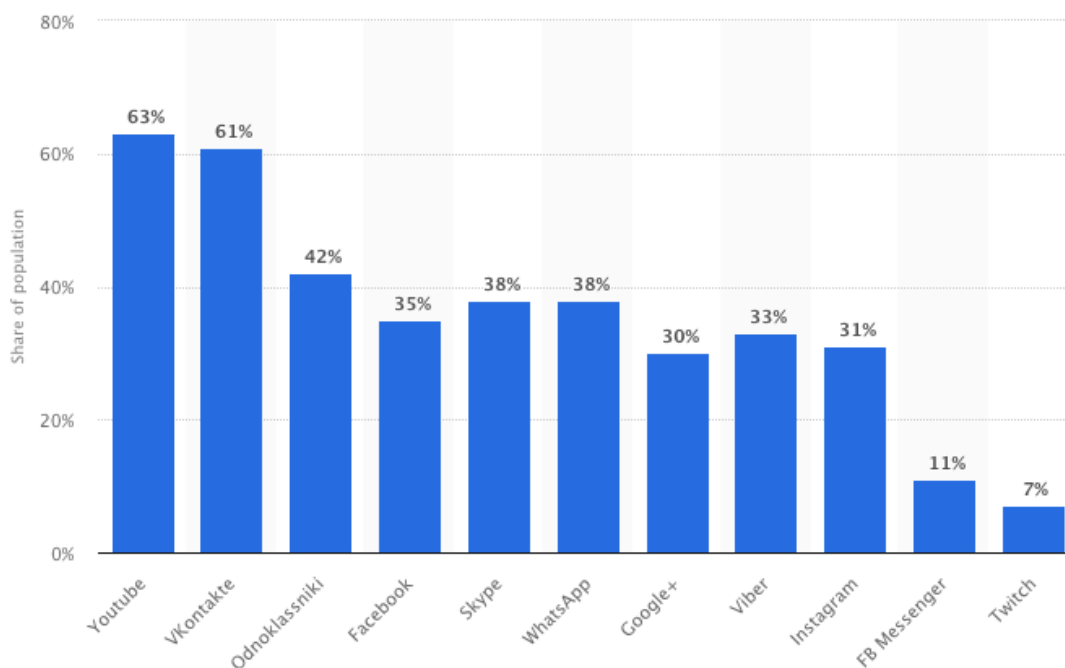
Figure 9 Penetration of leading social networks in Russia as of 4th quarter 2017 (Statista 2017)

3.3.1   Interactive Social Media

Today social media is represented as an interactive platform where each visitor or member has an opportunity to change the content or comment on it. Social media includes societies that build valuable content to its members. Each member can influence the community by creating relevant content. (Henton 2013.)

Based on it, companies have a chance to build customer awareness, attract potential customers and control activity on their social media platforms. In order to improve activity, companies use the following methods such as commenting, voting, questioning, etc. However, companies should develop and use activation methods with accordance to their audience and organisational way of acting. (Abe 2018.)

Companies can make sustainable value with commenting and creating the content that supports their philosophy and view, thus creating credibility. Discussions can show whether the comment or other action brought any value or grab the attention of potential customers. Therefore, for Lahti UAS Ltd it is essential to create an interactive environment, especially on Vkontakte platform as the targeted group is Russian potential students. (Moore 2017.)

Let us consider the interactive social media platforms that this study focuses on.

Facebook

Facebook is one of the largest social networks in the world. It was founded on February 4, 2004, and its Creator was Mark Zuckerberg. In January 2018 the highest number of users in Russia was 5.7 million, where the gender is female, and age varies from 25-34. (Statista 2018.)

The mission of Facebook was presented by founder, and it states the following:

> **We want to give people the opportunity to share, to make the world more open and connected. Today, the best idea will be how Facebook can develop a social structure, build a global society that will work for everyone.** (Mark Zuckerberg 2017.)

YouTube

Not many people know, but initially, in 2005, the social media platform Youtube.com was conceived and implemented as a dating site. Only it had one unusual for that time "feature" - the ability to upload personal videos. According to the idea of developers and creators Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, such platform would help users easily and conveniently post videos with their participation and dating would be much easier. (Wright, 2017.)

Nowadays, YouTube is owned by Google and allows a huge number of people to watch, share and find out videos, in order to encourage people all around the world. It acts as delivering a platform for both original content and advertisements. (Sharma 2016.)

YouTube takes a leading role in the percentage of users in Russia and amounts to 63%, which brings it on the first position, compare to other social media platforms (Statista 2017).

Instagram

Instagram is free social media platform was created in 2010 for sharing photos: after taking a photo, the user can process it with colour filters in one click, and then share the picture with the whole world through any network including the Instagram network itself. A distinctive feature of the program is that the same aspect ratio characterises the photo obtained after processing, that is, it has the shape of a square, which distinguishes it from photos taken by modern cameras with an aspect ratio of 4:3. (Instagram 2018.) In April 2012, Facebook bought Instagram, by providing a version for Android (Facebook 2018).

In the 3rd quarter of 2017, the percentage of Instagram users was equal to 31% in Russia and took eighth place in the chart of actively used social media platforms in Russia (Statista 2017).

Twitter

Twitter is a social media platform for public messaging via the web interface, instant messaging or third-party programs for Internet users of any age. The publication of short notes in the blog format is called "microblogging". It allows users to write not more than 140 characters called tweets which can be both: public and private. It was created on 21th of March 2006, by Jack Dorsey. (Twitter 2018.)

According to the statistics of using social media platform in Russia, Twitter takes only 10th place, with 18% of users (Statista 2017).

Vkontakte

The official birthday of Vkontakte is considered to be October 10, 2006. Created by Pavel Durov social media platform was positioned as a social network for Russian Universities students. However, in 2007 it became an open social media platform where each user was required to provide real data and post a real photo. For many Internet users at that time, it was unusual because the primary platform for communication were forums where anonymity was preferred. (Vkontakte 2018.)

Vkontake is considered the most popular social media platform in Russia and takes second place with 61% of users, after YouTube (Statista 2017).

3.3.2 Social Media Marketing

With the growing popularity of social networks such as Instagram, Facebook, Instagram, and others. The interest of marketers to these sites as a new source for targeting audience for the promotion of brands and companies has increased. Incredibly quickly social media marketing has become one of the elements of the Internet marketing complex. (Bindley 2018.)

Social media marketing - is a useful tool with which visitors are attracted to the site from social networks, communities, blogs, diaries, and forums. The attention of consumers can be obtained, bought through advertising. The trust of the target audience cannot be bought, it can only be deserved, therefore social media platforms as a modern tool help in interaction with the target audience. Today, the audience of social networks is comparable to the audience of television channels, but it is more attentive and active. (Donson 2016,187.)

With social media marketing companies can promote their brand and increase customer awareness and loyalty as well as raise the main webpage attendance, etc. Therefore, social media marketing has no immediate effect, but gives long-term results, in the case of its intended and proper use. (Kajaria 2018.)

3.4 Social Media for Acquiring Potential Customers

In today's world, there are many opportunities to build and promote a company's business through Social Media. Even though the "social boom" has already ended and formed the group of leaders in this field of business, the opportunities for promotion in social networks remain virtually limitless. (Spinos 2017.)

Acquiring potential customers through social media is relevant to the following survey as it is considered to be the primary objective for Lahti UAS Ltd. which is reaching potential Russian students through social media.

Companies put a lot of efforts and investments in social media in order to maintain customers' approval of its services and products. Customers, in turn, communicate with each other for discussing the service or products they purchased before where the following interaction can build positive brand awareness. For instance, when customers share their opinions or leaving reviews. However, there is a presence of negative opinions and experiences, which can also significantly influence brand credibility and trust. (Chaffey and Smith 2017, 227.) There are four ways of acquiring potential customers through social media:

Listening to the target audience

It is vital for companies to learn more about the target audience trough tracking discussions, checking reviews and feedbacks, thus understanding initial customer feelings about brand and services (Spinos 2017).

Engaging the target audience with content

Learning from customers and listening to them will give a better idea of which content is unusual for them and can bring company more value, and trust. Therefore, under factors as mentioned above, companies create content that is valuable for customers. (Rampton 2017.)

Creating immediate opportunities for purchase

After raising customer interest and bringing him to the purchasing process, it is vital to make an immediate reaction with bringing a customer to the product or service page (Rampton 2017).

Evaluating the effectiveness of campaigns in real time

Fast and immediate monitoring and evaluating campaigns bring an impact on further content which with the right understanding and using will raise customer interest and bring success to the company (Spinos 2017).

Chaffey and Smith claim, that social media is more useful for interacting with existing customers, however, potential once can also be reached through advertisement, or sharing posts with encouraging them to be active. Because, the more active users are on social media, the more leads it will bring further. (Chaffey and Smith 2017, 223.)

4   CASE COMPANY

The following chapter, introduce the organisational background in order to get the reader to know the company, its vision and values, for guiding the reader through objectives and understanding its strong brand differentiation. In addition to that, the Social Media Marketing of Lahti UAS Ltd considered, to have a better approach to Russian Students.

4.1   Background of Lahti UAS Ltd

Lahti University of Applied Sciences is located in the city of Lahti, which is about 100 kilometres away from Helsinki, which is the capital city of Finland. Lahti UAS Ltd is an international multidisciplinary higher education which was established in 1992. It offers different high standard bachelor's and master's degree programs in technology, social and health care business administration and hospitality management, and design, with giving to students a chance to have an international, worldwide experience, to raise student's intercultural competence. (LAMK 2018a.)

About 5,000 students are studying for a bachelor's or a master's degree, with approximately 300 international students and around 200 exchange students. The experts of Lahti UAS are used to work in a multicultural environment, with creating a truly international study atmosphere, as they play actively in global education services and develop their education. (LAMK 2018a.) As far as Russian students are concerned, there are currently around 83 students from Russia, whose nationality is Russian and approximately 132 students, whose first language is Russian (Heikkinen 2018).

To summarize the following chapter, we would like to stress that Lahti UAS support students with well-being, intercultural community, and quality education, with offering various bachelor and master programs. However, in the following thesis international programs will be discussed, according to international studying program choice of Russian students.

4.2   Vision and Values of Organisation

Lahti UAS Ltd vision is very future-oriented, with finding LAMK in 2020 as being exploratory, insightful and influential. The primary strategy of the organization is to develop considerably attractive and diverse higher education cluster of international standing and high quality. The values of Lahti UAS Ltd are insightful learning experiences, the joy of exploring together and meaningful work, expertise, and success. (LAMK 2018b.)

From the 1st of January 2018, LAMK is becoming a part of the LUT group, which is the collaboration of 3 following Universities as its subsidiaries: the Lappeenranta University of Technology, Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and Lahti University of Applied Sciences. Therefore, the LUT objectives will be connected with the purposes of Lahti UAS Ltd with the contribution of University to the group's aim through its activities. The LUT group strategy is to enhance educational paths and economic impact. (LAMK 2018b.)

4.3   Internationalization for Students

Lahti UAS Ltd offers various ways to get to know international life and study in a cross-cultural environment. Thus, students can get to know how to deal and work in the future with people from other countries and gain as much experience as they can. Lahti UAS Ltd has currently approximately 300 foreign degree students and 200 exchange students. (LAMK 2018c.) Figure 10 represents four ways that Lahti UAS Ltd increases student's intercultural competence.
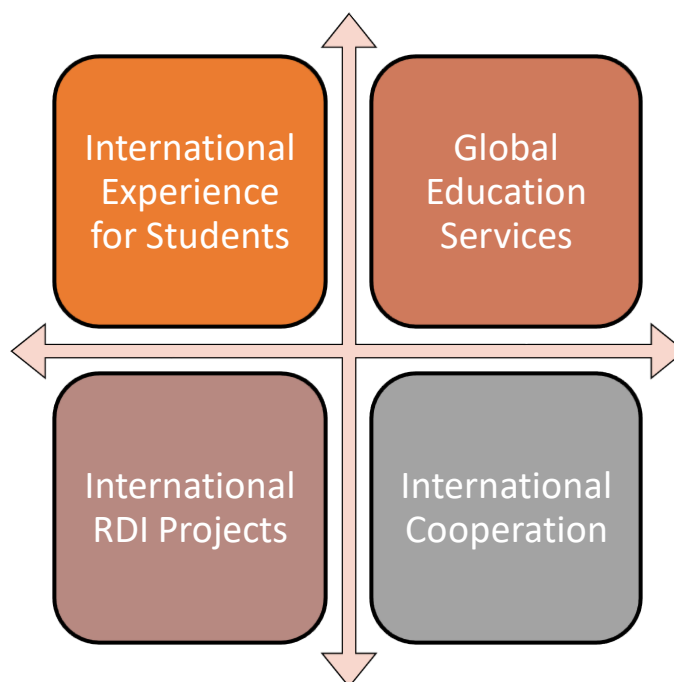
Figure 10 Possible Ways of Internationalisation for Students in Lahti UAS Ltd

According to the International Experience for Students, Lahti UAS Ltd offers a double degree program for students, with partner institutions in France, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland. (LAMK 2018c.) It gives the chance to study in two universities at the same time and have a double degree at the end of studies. The following possibility gives the student an opportunity to have a deeper understanding of the studied subject. In addition to that, students are offered a chance to have an internship abroad, which is

highly appreciated by employees and gives to the student real-life working experience. Additionally, international intensive programs, that brings teachers, students, and staff from Lahti UAS Ltd together for 1-2 week intensive studies with allowing them to work together in international groups and obtain experience from working with each other. Tutoring international students, is a great fortune for students as it allows them to make new friends all over the world, help exchange and international students and get to know about another culture.

As for Global Education Services, Lahti UAS Ltd is a lively participant of global education services that include degree program advancement, masterclasses, specialized studies, consulting and educational reforming and educational and technical visits (LAMK 2018c). Therefore, students will get into international life and have a chance to experience the multicultural atmosphere and educational events.

International Cooperation, provides students with opportunities to participate in study exchange abroad where a student can choose the country and University for three to six months studies in there, mostly organized with Erasmus+. Thus, a student can get more international experience, get to know the life of another country and fuller their knowledge with chosen subjects.

International RDI projects, propose student to participate in various projects in different field, in order to develop, innovate or do research. Thus, students can participate in improvement, research the field, they are interested in or participate in the future-oriented invention.

4.4   Current Social Media Marketing Situation

Since autumn 2017, a citizen of a country in the European Union, the European Economic Area countries, or Switzerland, can study in Finland for free. Refer to the point, that education in Finland is no longer free for non EU and EEA countries, it was the valuable reason for Russian students to study in Finland, Lahti UAS Ltd need a new digital marketing strategy for potential International students.

Currently, Lahti UAS Ltd plays a very active role on social media with having its main webpage where potential students can find all the necessary information, and using various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and the most popular among Russian students Vkontakte platform. Therefore, through the following channels Lahti UAS Ltd has its strong brand promotion and information delivery. Let's consider the following channels. The following channels are compared regarding followers, popularity, the language of posts, subscription, content, and likes.

According to the number of followers, LinkedIn is considered to be the biggest social media channel with 7,172 followers, and 4,839+ graduated students, who mentioned LAMK on their page (November 2018). The description of the company is written in English, with following links to the main website and essential information which is vital for international students. Nevertheless, the fact that the following group has both international and Finnish audience in the approximately close amount, the majority of the posts with approximately every second, are written in the Finnish language which cannot be a problem for students as everyone can use an automatic translation of the text. However, we can assume that the page with posts only in Finnish will not attract International student attention or interest. Second, in terms of followers, the media channel is Facebook, with its 4,784 followers and 4,865 likes (November 2018). Nevertheless, the fact of being the most popular social media channel, Facebook has the same situation as LinkedIn concerning the placed post's language, however the content on Facebook content is wider, than in LinkedIn.

As far as Instagram is concerned, the following social media channel is considered the most useful channel around the world. The Lahti UAS Ltd has 2,544 followers, 1.130 publications and 1,118 subscriptions with the majority of the posts written in both languages: Finnish and English. The next biggest, in terms of followers, social media channel is Twitter with its 2,245 followers, 3,909 tweets, 3,759 likes, 954 subscriptions and one moment (November 2018). In addition to that, the audience is represented with significant Finnish audience which influences the number of Finnish language posts as it mostly communicates in Finnish. The next and the last international social media channel is YouTube with 192 followers and 829, 841 views in all which is an incredibly high number and represents this social media channel as one of the most popular ones (November 2018).

Overall, we can stress that most of the posts are written in Finnish, however, when it is concerned international life, it is also written in English which can be not right as international students may want to learn about genuinely Finnish student life. However, the amount of international and Finnish audience should be considered, because the Finnish audience would prefer their own language posts. All social media channels represent content on last news, interesting facts, and upcoming events and overall represents the atmosphere while studying and working in Lahti UAS Ltd.

The last, but not the least social media channel, that can be considered in the following thesis as its oriented on Russian students is Vkontakte. It has 562 followers, and the majority of the audience are Russians, therefore all the information, description and posts

are written in the Russian language with following links to English page on the website. The following group includes photos of previous international as well as exchange students, during the study process. In addition to that, the contacts of Russian students can be found there for writing and asking for additional information as well as the contact of student counsellor Alexandra Maksheeva. Moreover, potential students can find a list of discussions in the group, made by previous students or applicants where they discuss living, application process, tuition fees, etc. The content is concentrated on various news, deadlines, different facts and how to apply, thus making this social media channel one of the most informative ones.

4.5 Competitors' Social Media Marketing for Potential Russian Students

Nowadays, the sphere of education is developing extremely dynamically, acquiring new features, transforming its functional, structural, organizational, ideological and value characteristics. Fundamental changes are taking place in higher education: the requirements of society to the quality of education are increasing, technologies development is continuously updated, the economic conditions of universities are rapidly changing. Additionally, universities are granted the right to carry out entrepreneurial freely and other income-generating activities with all these factors leading to the high increase in competition in the market of educational services. All mentioned above raises the problem of finding new sources to improve the competitiveness of the University. Concerning market development, the competitiveness of the University is not just an economic term, it is the philosophy of the educational institution, behind which is built all the variety of strategic and tactical methods of functioning and development.

The main group of competitors is local ones, which spread around Finland and include Finnish Universities. Some of the most prominent competitor institutions to Lahti UAS Ltd on Finnish educational market include Tampere UAS Ltd, South-Eastern Finland UAS Ltd, and Haaga – Helia UAS Ltd.

The Tampere UAS Ltd allows the student to gain an education at both bachelor's and master's level for currently 10,000 students in seven fields of education. As well as Lahti UAS Ltd education in the following institution is targeted on well-being, culture, business, and technology. (TAMK 2018.) As for the social media marketing, Tampere UAS Ltd provides the same channels as Lahti UAS Ltd with including: main webpage; Facebook with 12,360 followers and 12,816 likes; Instagram, with 1,956 followers, 396 posts and 105 subscriptions; Twitter with 66 followers, 54 tweets and 48 likes; YouTube with 779 followers; and Vkontakte with 89 followers (November 2018).

The primary institution page can be read in two languages: English and Finnish and contain all necessary information. As for other sources, the main factor that will probably affect potential Russian student decision making is that majority of the posts are written in English as well as a short translation to all Finnish language written posts, except for Twitter. Additionally, Tampere UAS Ltd highly stresses Tampere as the city for student life, with positioning as the most attractive student city which can attract and increase the interest of potential Russian Students more. Nevertheless, the content of the posts is mostly similar to the content of Lahti UAS Ltd showing student life, events, and exciting project, the Tampere UAS Ltd attracts students with an attempt to make them interested in Robot Pepper, which is currently started the journey in the following autumn. This can be seen not in every university. Therefore, it can influence students and Russian students amount of interest. As for Vkontakte channel, the group is less active, and content is uploaded not very often, which apparently is influencing group's frequency of visits.

South – Eastern Finland UAS Ltd is already a collaboration of Institutions from Kouvola, Savonlinna, Mikkeli, and Kotka. The following University provides high-level education as bachelor and master for 9,300 students. (XAMK 2018.) As far as social media channels are concerned, XAMK UAS Ltd provides the main webpage with a description of every campus and contact information; Facebook with 15,247 followers and 15,063 likes; Instagram with 3,599 followers, 1,162 posts and 581 subscriptions; Twitter with 1.014 followers, 650 likes, 1.304 tweets and 711 subscriptions; YouTube with 263 followers; Vkontakte with 178 followers (November 2018).

The home page of South-Eastern Finland UAS Ltd is represented into two languages: English and Finnish, the page provides a detailed description of every campus in all different cities as well as information about the application process. Facebook page posts are mostly written in English, however, on Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, the majority of the posts are written in Finnish, which can influence International student interest. The content of all channels is mostly the same and Institution position itself as environmentally-friendly with stress on Energy conservation, which can increase Russian student's curiosity, as care about nature is an upcoming trend in Russia. As for Vkontakte page, it contains no information about application process, no photos from University life and with the last made post in April 2018, which make this channel non-informational.

The Haaga-Helia UAS Ltd is the first merger of institutions, which is already operating for ten years (Haaga-Helia 2018). Nevertheless, Haaga-Helia UAS Ltd campuses located in the capital of Finland, students still compare it with other institutions with an attempt to find out all pros and cons. Haaga-Helia UAS Ltd represents following social media channels:

Facebook with 14,887 followers and 15,134 likes; Instagram with 4,668 followers, 852 posts and 1112 subscriptions; Twitter with 4,699 followers, 7,235 tweets, 6,223 likes, and 880 subscriptions; YouTube with 552 followers; Vkontakte with 1008 followers (November 2018).

According to the content of Social Media Channels, Twitter is concentrated mainly on studies, Facebook targeted on University events, Instagram collects posts of all points together, and YouTube includes student videos about the reasons of the study in Haaga-Helia choice. All the channels are using Finnish and English as a communicative language. Vkontakte group contains much up-to-date information, which is partially provided by students.

Overall, we can see, that some competitors use mostly the same social media channels, however, everyone is trying to stand out, by providing some specific feature, that makes them unique. As for social media marketing targeted on Russian students, we could see, that not all institutions keep Vkontakte group life, however, advice and posts from current Russian students in the following university is a great marketing approach for potential Russian students, as well as videos describing the reasons for choosing a particular institution.

5   EMPIRICAL PART

This chapter gives understanding of the empirical research carried out for the thesis and analyses collected results acquired from the research. Firstly, used researched methods and survey design are explained and after collected results are demonstrated and analysed. The survey was hold among the potential Russian students who can be interested in Finnish education and particularly Lahti UAS.

5.1   Design and Creation of the Empirical Research

As it is stated in chapter 1.4, there are two possible research methods: quantitative and qualitative. In this research quantitative method was applied, because author carried out an online survey among Russian potential students.

The empirical research was done via online survey and collected information was base source of primary data. The questions of the online survey are presented in appendix 1. The purpose of the survey was to find out who is influencing potential Russian student's decision making, which channels they use for finding information about studies and which content is mainly interested for them. Therefore, the main goal is to get to know the targeted group and create a digital marketing strategy for the case company.

According to the fact, that this survey concentrates on the Russian students as potential students of Lahti UAS Ltd, the online survey was carried out only among Russian students. The online survey was placed on several groups in Vkontakte, which are used mostly by potential Russian students and where they usually try to find information. The survey was held in English language, as it is assumed that targeted potential Russian students know English for studying abroad. The survey includes 18 questions where: 11 multiple-choice questions, 3 open questions and 4 questions with possible several answers. The questionnaire can be found in appendix 1.

5.2   Data Collection

Data Collection chapter details the process of data assembly. Figure 11 displays various stages, which were taken in the data collection process.
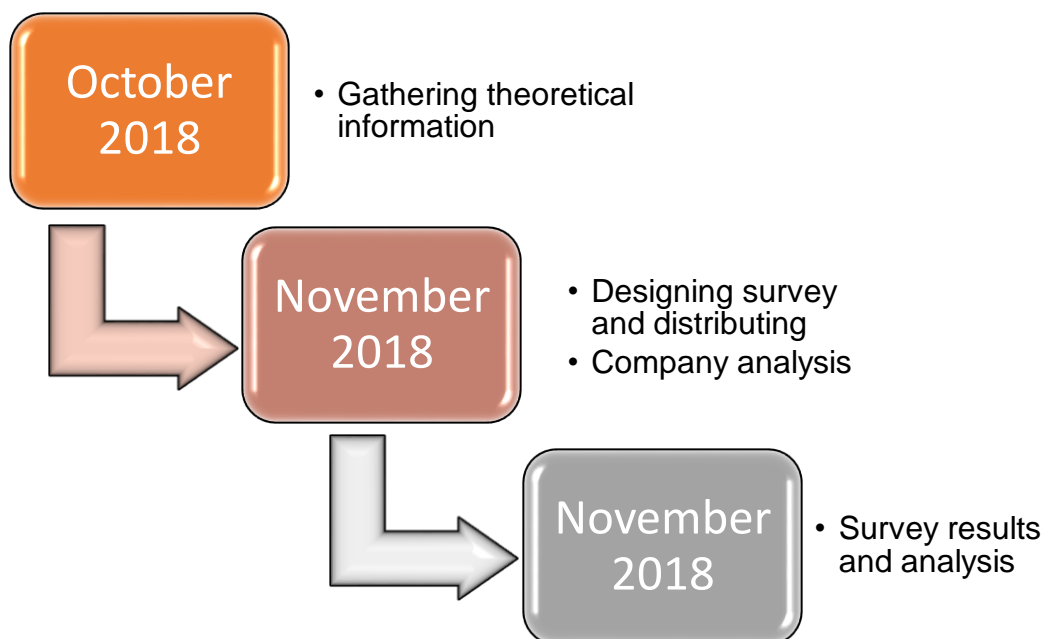
Figure 11 Data collection process

The author started to write the thesis in October 2018. Firstly, author got to know with theory and knowledge about potential customers, customer decision journey, digital marketing and social media. Secondly, after theoretical frame was made, the survey was created with reliance on sub-questions and theoretical frame. The survey questionnaire was created with Google forms. It was placed on 19th November 2018 and was opened for four days. The link to the survey was located in Vkontakte several groups: the group page of LAMK, Nordic School and in school groups, where second language is English. The author considered, that following groups can have more potential applicants.

In the end of the survey there were 47 responses, which was considered enough for analysing collected data. The next chapter gives detailed analysis and explanation of the data assembled via survey.

5.3   Data Analysis

The following survey aims to answer main question and several sub-questions that were presented in chapter 1.2 in particular: **What are the most effective ways to reach potential Russian students through Social Media and Digital Marketing?**

The sub-questions of the research are the following and presented below:

Which channels are considered and influence potential Russian students, while choosing a bachelor's degree program?

What kind of content on Social Media is attractive to potential Russian students, while choosing a bachelor's degree program?

Who is influencing a student's decision making, in choosing a bachelor's degree program?

The survey was targeted at Russian students who is currently studying or have intention to study abroad in the future. In order to understand which social media and criteria they were using or are using, when they choose university for application and make decision to study abroad.

The first two questions in the survey were aimed on getting to know the demographics of the respondents. The first question was asking the gender of the answerer. Altogether, there were 47 respondents, where 26 of them are female, 16 male and 5 respondents decided not to share this information. The Figure 12 shows correlation between genders in percentage. Taking into account, that both genders took part in survey, the results are rational for the case company and both genders' opinions are considered.
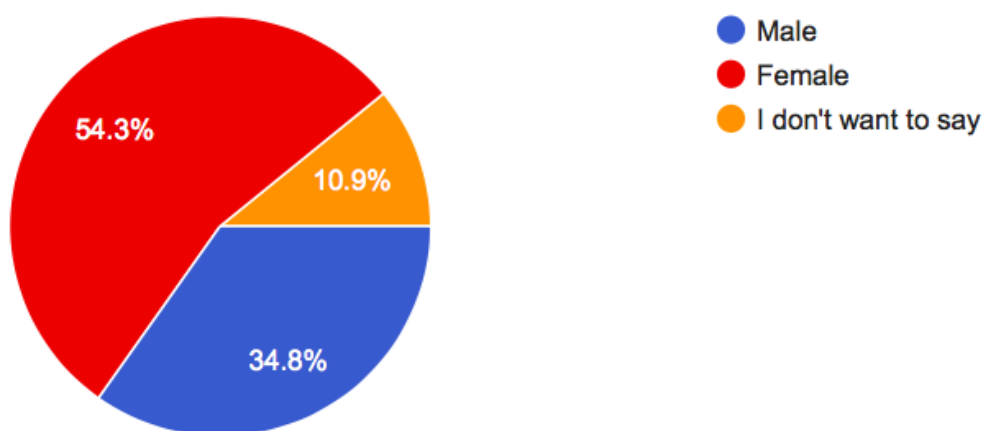

Figure 12 Gender correlation of participated respondents

The second question was aimed to know the age of the participants. The oldest is considered to be above 25 years and youngest 17 years old. The majority of respondents were from the group 17-19 years old. There is no age limit for people who want to get a degree in Lahti UAS Ltd. Therefore, the limit for age is not applicable for the survey and Figure 13 displays target group segmentation, as it covers high school pupils (17-19),

student who is currently studying in the university (20-22, 23-24) and people, who already obtained degree or employed (23-24, above 25).
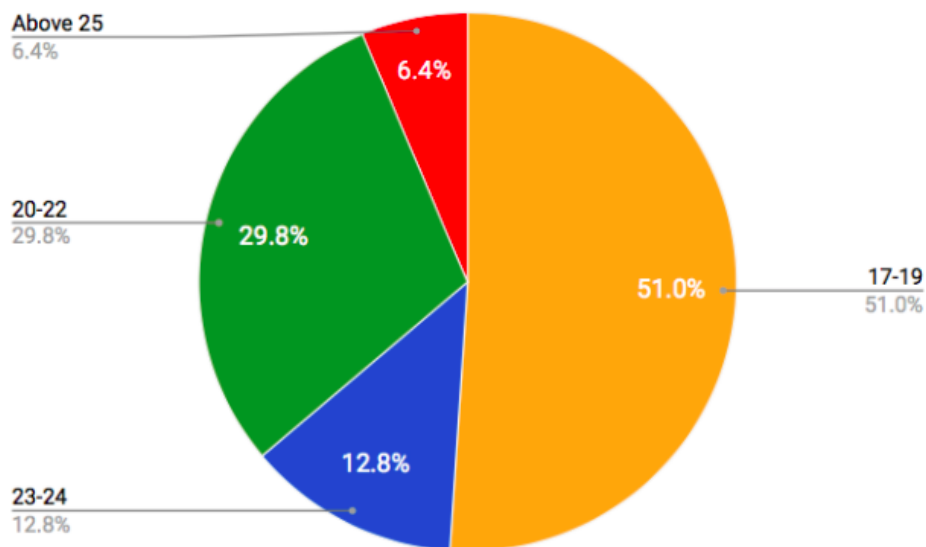

Figure 13 Age distribution of participated respondents

However, in order to get detailed information about participants, the author included the question about degree that respondents have gained or currently obtaining. Figure 14 demonstrates that the main group of respondents is equal to 18 respondents, who is currently getting High School degree. The second biggest group amounts 14 participants, who is obtaining bachelor's degree. The college is in great request in Russia, therefore the next group with 7 people is getting a college degree. The next two groups represent the smallest number of people as for secondary degree equals to 5 and master's degree to 3 respondents. Thus, reader can get better understanding of the respondents group.
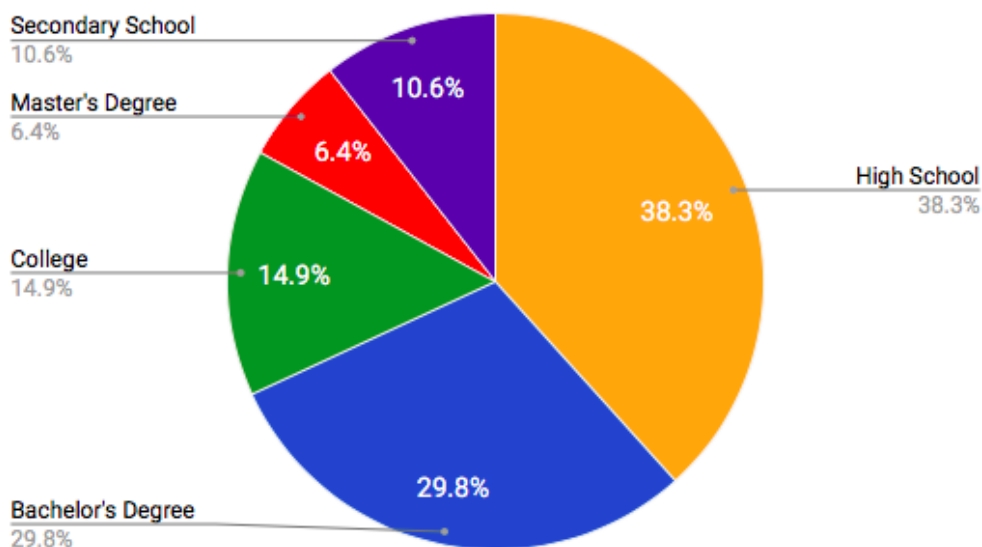
Figure 14 Acquired education status of respondents

After understanding the demographics of the respondents, the author decided to ask whether the respondent has a willing to study abroad. The question includes 3 variants which Yes/No or Maybe in Future. Therefore, the company has a better knowledge about willing of respondents to study abroad and whether they are interested in it or not. Figure 15 demonstrates willingness of respondents to study abroad. The largest group 25 respondents out of 47 showed their interest in education abroad, while 15 are still thinking about it and consider it as a future perspective and the rest equals to 7 respondents who doesn't want to study abroad.
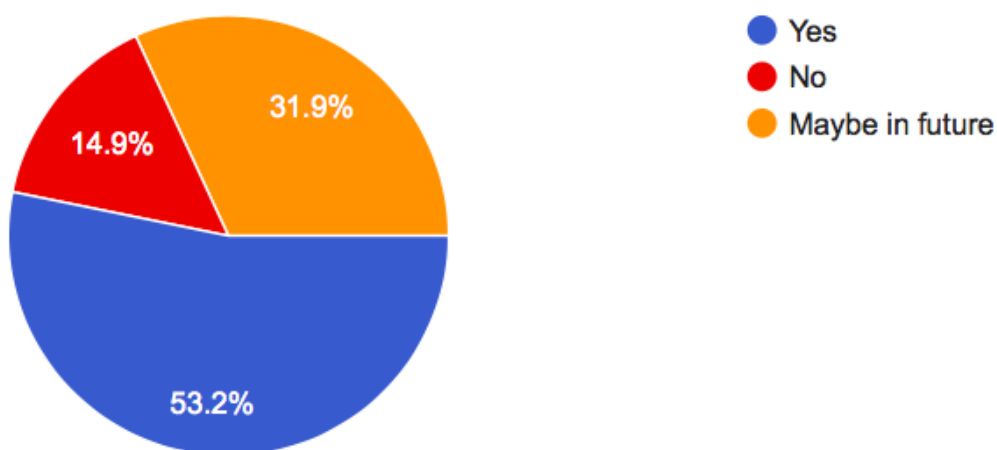

Figure 15 Respondents willingness to study abroad

Upcoming question is aimed to get to know when respondents got a wish to study abroad. This question is not applicable for respondents, who answered No in the previous question, therefore 7 respondents got the not applicable answer. With the help of this question the case company understands the education diapason of the potential Russian students group for future targeting. Question has 6 options to choose which is more suitable for them as well as chance to write their own answer. Figure 16 demonstrated gained results. According to which, the major group equals 16 out of 47 realised in high school while second biggest group 10 out of 47 during bachelor's degree and 9 respondents during secondary school. And only 5 participants realised it in primary school. Therefore, for the case company Lahti UAS Ltd the main group for targeting is respondents in a high school with following after group of bachelor's degree students.
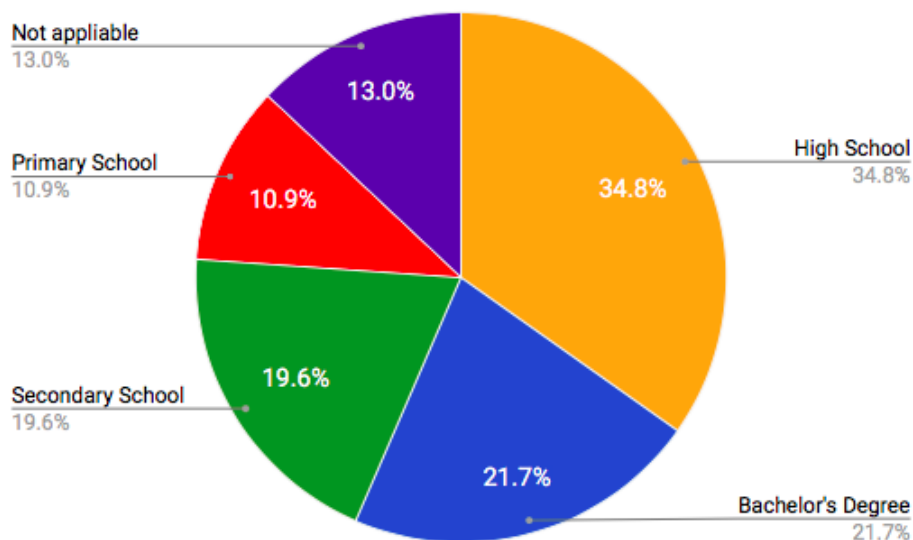
Figure 16 Education status when Russian students decided to study abroad

The sixth question was related to the tuition fee and how does it affect their choice of choosing educational institution. The question was presented as an open one, where respondents could write their own opinion. Considering the overall performance, the majority of the respondents said that it plays the most important role and they can afford education abroad only in the case of scholarships. Some of the answers presented below.

"It plays the most important role. If the tuition fee is not affordable, then I probably won't study at that particular university."

"The main factor for me is tuition fee. If the University asks much, I just remove it from list."

"Current fees for foreign students made it impossible for me to study in Finland."
However, the small group of respondents approximately 5 out of 47 stayed, that it doesn't affect their choice and some of them ready to pay. This information helps case company to acknowledge that tuition fees plays essential role for Russian potential students.

The next question determines the willingness of Russian potential students to study in Finland. Thus, case company will get to know the overall consideration of Finland for further education. The respondent has 3 options to choose Yes/No or Maybe in Future. According to the results 20 respondents out of 47 chose option Yes, while 12 were against and 15 respondents consider that option in future perspective. Figure 17 represents chosen options in percentage.
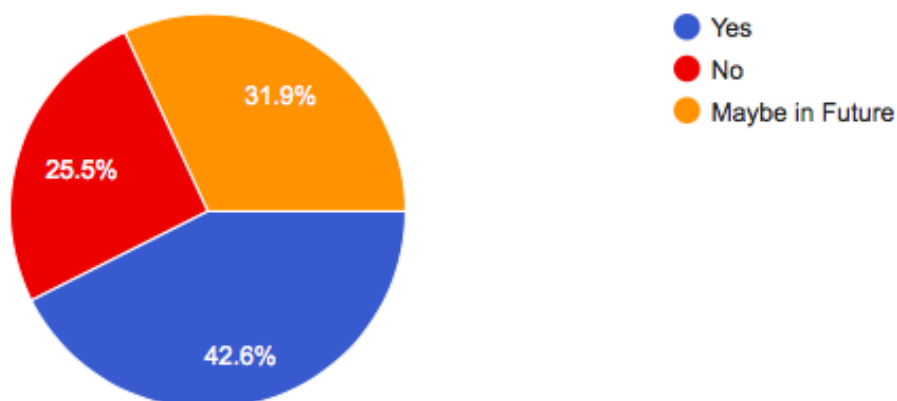
Figure 17 The willingness of Russian potential students to study in Finland

After the previous question, the author decided to ask the respondents with positive answer, what makes Finnish education special for them. The huge amount of answers is related to the famous quality of education, which is famous all over the world. Second group of respondents put location as the most important factor for them, because Russia is located close to Finland. And the last group of respondents mentioned relaxed and friendly atmosphere in international environment. This question helps case company to give better understanding on the reason which Russian potential students relying during their decision process.

The next part of the survey was devoted to the digital side of the thesis. And the first question, acknowledge us with social media platforms that respondents use day-to-day. There are offered 5 options with Instagram, Facebook, Vkontakte, Twitter, YouTube and space for open answer. As it can be seen from Figure 18 respondents use Instagram mainly with 45 people out of 47. The second place takes Vkontakte with 38 respondents and the Facebook with 18 respondents. Moreover, 2 out of 47 considered Snapchat as everyday social media platform. The case company can recognise the most used social media platform among Russian potential student and consider further develop.
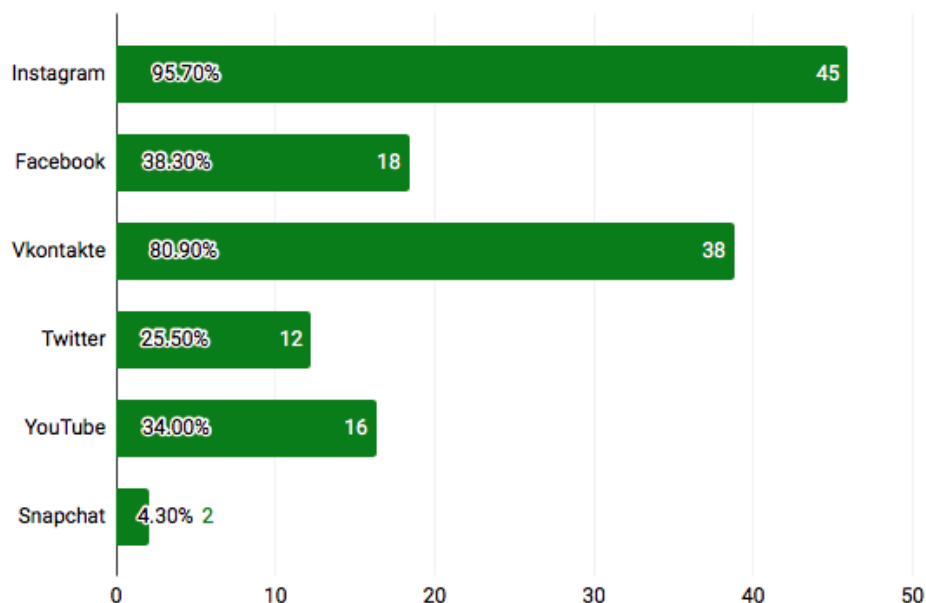
Figure 18 Russian potential students' penetration of social media platforms in everyday life

After understanding the popularity of social media platforms in everyday life, it's time to ask about preferred social media channels and search engine for finding information about studying in the University. Respondents could choose several options, to have wider understanding. As it can be seen from Figure 19, the majority of respondents use search engine with 42 out of 47 for finding information. Secondly, they use website of the University and only after they consider Vkontakte as a source with information about studying in University. The case company Lahti UAS Ltd can have appearance of the channels, where the main work should be targeted.

Figure 19 Social media channels and search engine Russian potential students use for gathering information about studying in University

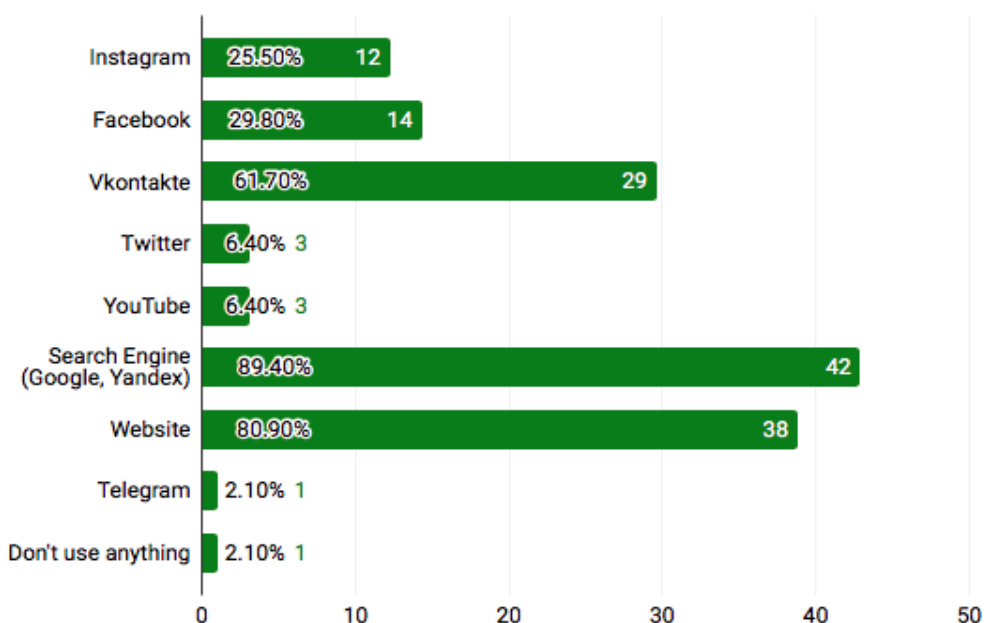Nevertheless, the next question looks similar to the previous one, it is aimed on having information about collecting information. While the previous question was about information gathering. It is useful for the case company, as they will know where the most relevant and valid information should be located. Figure 20 represents answers of respondents. There we can see, that mainly web page is used for collecting data and equals to 43 respondents out of 47. And search engine as Google and Yandex with 39 respondents out of 47. However, it is important to notice that 36 respondents chose experience of other as a channel, where they can get an information.
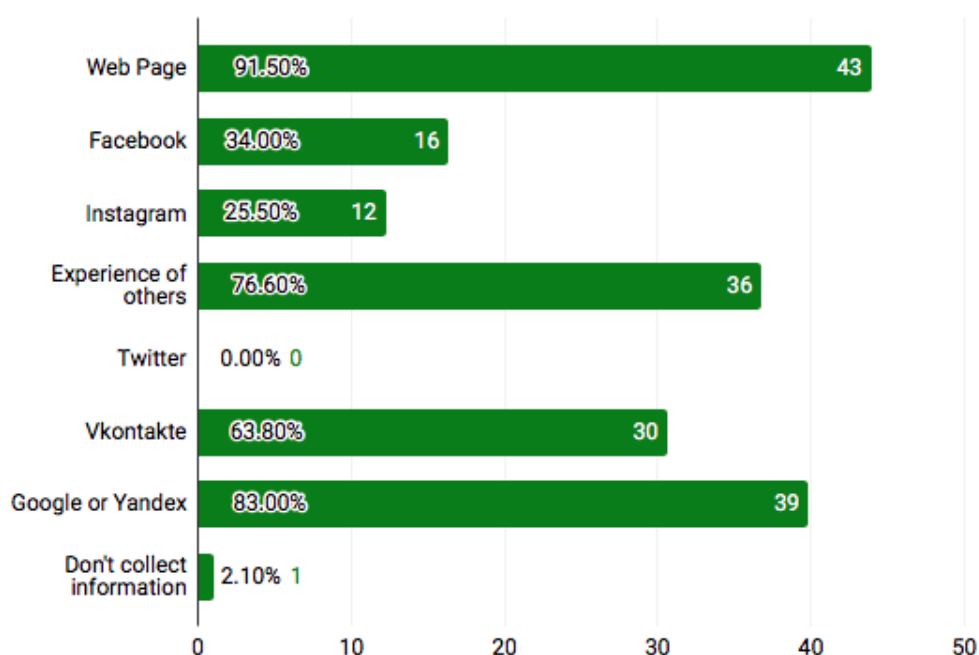
Figure 20 Channels and search engine that Russian potential students use for collecting data

The next question has an answer for one of my sub questions: *What kind of content on Social Media is attractive to potential Russian students, while choosing a bachelor's degree program?* Respondents has 7 options to choose with position for open answer. Figure 21 demonstrates that Russian potential students are interested in International students' content with 35 out of 47 respondents. Secondly, the students feedback and stories relatively play vital role with 31 respondents. Finally, news and events of University and how to apply information cause Russian potential students interest relatively with 30 respondents.
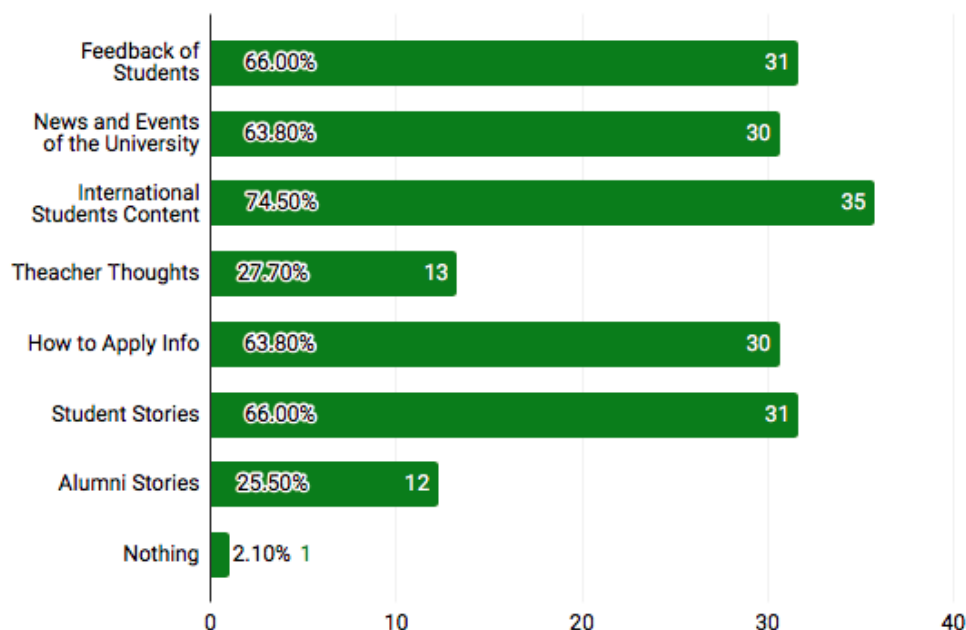
Figure 21 Content that is interesting for Russian potential students

Further question is devoted whether respondents know LAMK. The respondents have two options Yes or No. And 29 respondents gave the positive answer, while 26 of them answered No. It will help company to understand the Russian potential student's awareness of the University.

Then, after asking the awareness, the author decided to understand from where 29 respondents got to know LAMK. Figure 22 represents their answers. The question has 6 positions and one open answer. 21 out of 47 never heard before, while 8 respondents chose friends and relatives. Social media took only 6 respondents. LAMK Website and Vkontakte have 4 respondents relatively and Study Exhibition only 2 respondents. 2 out of 47 notices in the open answer Study in Finland webpage as the source where they got to know about Lahti UAS.
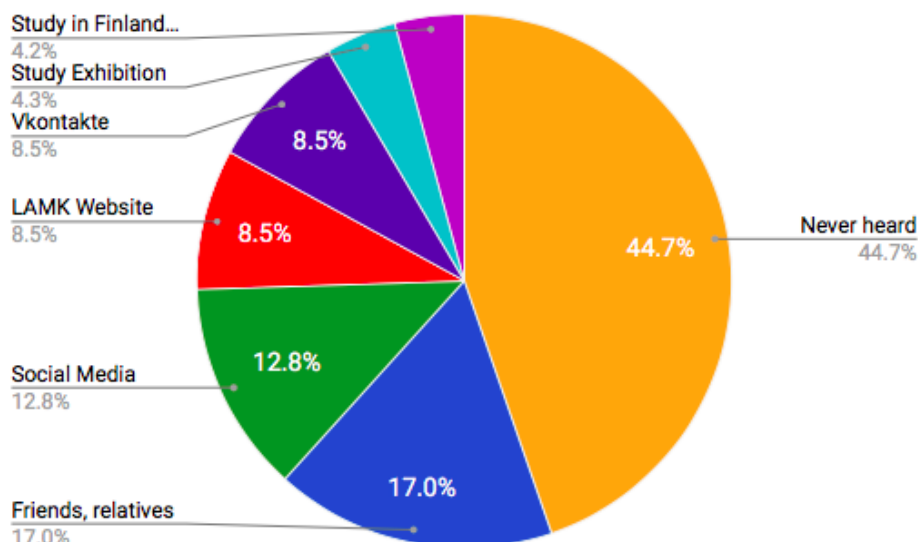
Figure 22 Russian potential students' awareness about Lahti UAS Ltd and used channel

The 15th question regards current study location of potential Russian students. The question asks respondents whether they study currently abroad or not. It contains two options Yes/No. 31 out of 47 gave negative answer, while 16 agreed on their studying abroad. Therefore, case company gets an overview of the current location of potential Russian students.

The 16th question answers the sub question of this thesis: *Who is influencing a student's decision making, in choosing a bachelor's degree program?* There are given 5 options: Relatives, teachers, no one, experience of former students, experience of existing students and one open answer. Figure 23 represents chosen variants.

Figure 23 Influence on study abroad choice of potential Russian students

As it can be seen in the figure, relatives play an important role in choosing bachelor's program. 21 respondents chose following option. 13 out 47 has no influence on their decision making to study abroad. Existing students play also essential role, as they have influence on 7 respondents. While former students and teachers have 3 respondents relatively. The case company Lahti UAS can get it into account and consider relatives and existing students as two main factors influencing Russian potential student decision.

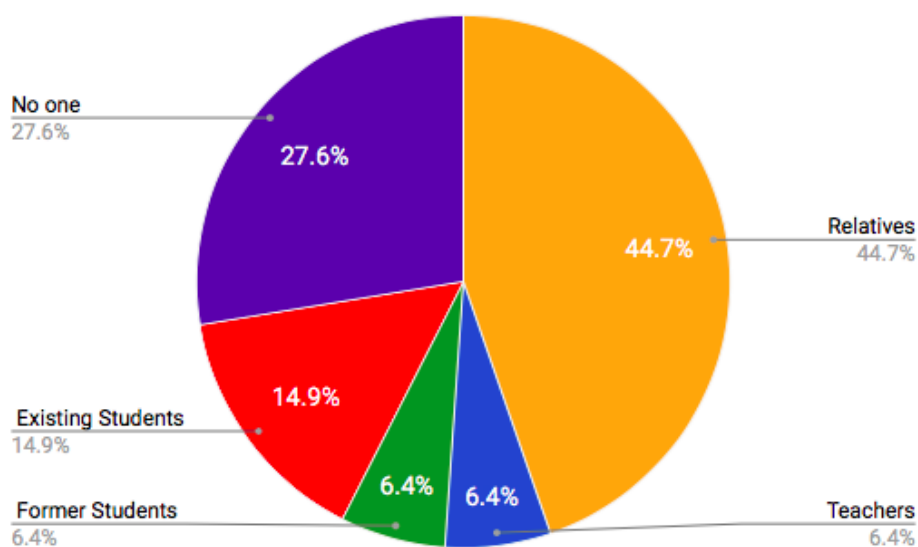The author decided to finish with questions about LAMK webpage and what it is missing. These questions are aimed for students, who would like to study or currently studied at Lahti UAS. Questions are aimed to find out if respondent cannot find any information or would like to know more. And it is considered to support Lahti UAS in providing information for potential and existing Russian students. 38 out of 47 said the they found all needed information, while 9 respondents agreed on having lack of the information. Thus, the next question gives an ability for respondents to write about missing information. And the following comments are left:

"For instance, when I was accepted I was confused by the staff of LAMK that the university to cooperate with universities that offer a double degree, in fact, we do not have it, only exchange studies. Maybe more information about abroad opportunities would help potential students with the choice."

"Any examples of students, who find a work after in Finland."

"Exchange possibilities and which countries are included?"

5.4   Recommendations

The literature review is done, and empirical research is conducted, therefore it is time to provide some recommendations for the case company Lahti UAS Ltd The base for the recommendations are current situation of the case company, The Russian potential student's answers collected from survey and author's point of view. As author considered potential Russian students, the recommendations are targeted on building university awareness and providing targeted information with help of digital marketing.

According to the Content Marketing Funnel presented in chapter 3.2, the initial stage is building customer awareness with relevant content. Potential Russian students starts their decision journey by finding relevant content on social media. Therefore, according to the survey, it is essential for Lahti UAS Ltd brings students feedbacks on Vkontakte page, more international content and student stories. Currently, there is only information about applying in the Vkontakte LAMK group, which will not attract potential students. The

experience of existing students or former plays essential role as Russian potential students value the experience of others. Therefore, more students should be involved in Vkontakte page. There, they can provide feedbacks and experience from their own life.

Moreover, social media channels of the case company are full of posts in Finnish language which can be a barrier for students who are new to this. Thus, the author would recommend to the case company translate more posts to English language so that Russian potential students on initial phase can get more to know about activities and events of the University.

Since relatives has a great impact on decision making process of the potential Russian students, it will be a huge advantage for the case company to translate the main webpage into Russian language. Thus, more parents will have an ability to acknowledge the case company and increase brand awareness among parents.

After raising the brand awareness and attracting potential Russian students, it is stage where case company, should increase interest and show pros, that other Universities do not have. Therefore, it would be a great impact to involve existing Russian student for creating some content to social media, which is relevant to Russian students. For instance, it can be as a part of digital marketing course or another relevant subject, where students are creating videos about their life in University, writing posts on social media platforms and giving some advices through video on YouTube. Thus, case company will save budget, involve Russian existing students and will provide content, which will really interest Russian potential students. There is additionally, huge possibility to stand out of the competitor's crowd, especially if the content will be entertaining and funny.

Additionally, as we can see from the survey, tuition fee plays and important role for potential Russian students. Translating and providing content about scholarships for Russian students will have a huge influence on the amount of attracted potential Russian students. The article in Vkontakte, Blog or infographics about possible ways of gaining scholarship, would have great impact on both social media performance and potential student's attraction.

6 CONCLUSIONS

All the results obtained with an empirical research are combined together in this chapter. Chapter 6.1 gives answers to research question and sub questions. The chapter 6.2 related to the validity and reliability of this study. And chapter 6.3 gives suggestions for the next research.

6.1 Answers to Research Questions

The research in the following thesis was held to find out the information about possible ways that case company can reach potential Russian students thorough social media. As sub-questions have a role of the base, that supports the main one, they will be answered first.

Sub-questions:

Which channels are considered and influence potential Russian students, while choosing a bachelor's degree program?

Potential Russian students start their Decision Journey from Google or Yandex. There, they try to find more channels with valid information. Moreover, there are several social media channels that are used by potential Russian students. They are used for both gathering and collecting information while choosing a degree program. The website and Vkontakte group plays vital role in decision making. Therefore, targeted audience of the case company is located on these two social media platforms. And development of these channels will raise potential student awareness of the Lahti UAS and bring more Russian students. In addition to that, social media channels as: Instagram or Facebook have influence on Russian potential students, as they use it from day-to-day live.

What kind of content on Social Media is attractive to potential Russian students, while choosing a bachelor's degree program?

The majority of the Russian potential students considered attractive the following: content about International students is in demand, student stories and student feedbacks. Therefore, with knowing target audience and content which is in demand will benefit to the case company Lahti UAS. Additionally, news and events of the university as well as the information about application was considered attractive for potential Russian student. However, currently this information is already provided on the social media channels of the case company.

Who is influencing a student's decision making, in choosing a bachelor's degree program?

The main group of people who are influencing Russian potential students is Relatives. It is well-known that relatives, has much more experience in life, therefore very often they influence the decision-making process of Russian potential students. Moreover, as it was mentioned in the previous sub-question, experience of exiting students influences degree program choice. And Russian potential students rely on the information provided by the existing students.

What are the most effective ways to reach potential Russian students through Social Media and Digital Marketing?

Most of the potential Russian students use social media channels actively. According to the analysis there are two most effective ways of providing information for potential Russian student through social media. It is presented below:

It is crucial for the case company to make a relevant and valid content on both Vkontakte and Webpage. The valid content in this case is not just information about application process or events description, but also feedbacks and reviews of existing students. Because they bring trust and stands the company out of the competitor's crowd.

Secondly, as a huge influence have parents of the potential Russian students, it is important to provide information in their native language. As usually, parents are the ones who providing the last decision, thus influencing potential Russian students.

To summarise, valid content and reliable information on the social media channels is playing valuable role in the process of choosing bachelor's degree. Therefore, it is vital for case company put efforts in developing popular among Russia potential student's channels.

6.2   Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important concepts in research. Validity is used to understand on the one hand, whether the research is suitable for measuring what it was created for, and on the other hand, measures its approximate effectiveness and correctness. (Shuttleworth 2018.) The reliability of the method is a criterion that indicates the accuracy of psychological measurements that allows to judge how reliable the results are (IWH 2016).

The basic goal of research is to find out answers for all questions stated in the beginning. The objectives of this research were accomplished as the answers to the main question and sub - questions were discovered. In this thesis both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data was collected with the help of the online survey. The survey was held among Russian potential students, who is currently finishing high school and considering apply for studies abroad or those who is currently studying. At the end of the survey were 47 answers, which is enough to make the analysis. The analysis of collected data presented in the chapter 5.3. Gained results definitely give answers to the sub-questions of the research and then main question. Secondary data was taken with review of literature, such as books, journals or periodicals which gave better understanding of the topic referred to the research questions. All mentioned above ensure validity of the research.

Methodology research was revealed. The outcomes of the research are relevant, because the research is conducted with the case company and potential targeted Russian students. The online survey was done to answer the research question. The online survey included multiple choice questions and open questions. Therefore, the results generate better acknowledgement of the target group. Moreover, the survey was held online, which brings openness of the respondents. Taking into account all factors mentioned above, the author believes in reliability of this research.

6.3   Suggestion on Further Research

The thesis' objective was to find out valid digital content, channels and influencing factors for potential Russian students' decision making in degrees programmes. To expand results the further research should be conducted on the evaluation and conversion stage. Deeper examination and correlation of digital marketing and Russian students, will bring value to the case company and better understanding of overall appearance of the targeted group.

In addition to that, the research is made only for Potential Russian students. To support case company Lahti UAS Ltd. to obtain a digital marketing strategy. Wider research would be beneficial for case company. As it is also targeted on students from other countries as India and China.

7 SUMMARY

The objective of the thesis is to support the case company, Lahti UAS Ltd, to obtain a better understanding of the customer journey of potential Russian students and how they can be reached through social media. Thesis and results are useful for case company because Russian students are one of the targeted groups of the case company. This thesis concentrated on the initial phases, as all potential customers can be found there. Thus, giving better understanding of the targeted group. Moreover, in this thesis digital marketing and social media was discussed as it is necessary for the company to cause an interest of potential Russian students to study in Lahti UAS Ltd and have better approach.

Thesis was written based on deductive reasoning. Firstly, the definition of customers and potential customers was given. After that, marketing funnel and consumer decision journey discussed with explanation on initial phases location of potential customers. Finally, brand awareness was covered in the first theoretical part of the thesis. The second theoretical part discussed digital marketing, inbound marketing and content marketing. Chapter 3.3 covered social media with relevance to social media marketing. Finally, the possible ways of acquiring potential customers through social media are described in chapter 3.4.

Chapter four gave the background of the organisation as vision, values, current social media marketing situation, international service in case company Lahti UAS Ltd. The competitors' social media marketing for potential Russian students was also analysed in this chapter. Empirical research was discussed in chapter five. Data collection process formulation and design of the research as well as data analysis are also presented in this chapter. Online survey was conducted to collect data for the research. Thus, the better understanding of targeted group was given to the case company. In addition to that, results of the survey gave a significant point on channels, content that interest potential Russian students and factors that influence their decision.

In chapter six, the interpretation of the empirical research findings and recommendations were given. To finalise the thesis, the answers to the main research question and all sub-questions were given. Validity and reliability were covered as well as suggestions on further wider research given. This thesis reaches all the purposes that were made and is considered to be valid and reliable.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey

Survey Questionnaire

The following survey is conducted for the thesis of the graduating student of Lahti University of Applied Sciences. All the results are anonymous.

Please write Your name *

Short-answer text

1. Gender *

○ Male

○ Female

○ I don't want to say

2. Age *

○ 17-19

○ 20-22

○ 23-24

○ Above 25

3. Education Status *

○ Bachelor's Degree

○ Master's Degree

○ High School

○ College

○ Other...

4. Would You like to study abroad? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Maybe in future

⋮⋮⋮

5. If previous answer was Yes/Maybe in Future, when did You realise that You want to study abroad?

◯ From the childhood

◯ Primary School

◯ Secondary school

◯ High School

◯ During my bachelor's Degree

◯ Not applicable

◯ Other...

6. How does tuition fee affect Your choosing University? *

Long-answer text

7. Would You like to study in Finland? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Maybe in Future

8. If previous answer was Yes/Maybe in Future, then what makes You interested in Finnish Education?

Long-answer text

9. Which social media platforms are You using day-to-day? *

☐ Instagram

☐ Facebook

☐ Vkontakte

☐ Twitter

☐ YouTube

☐ Other...

10. What are You using in finding information about studying in University? *

☐ Instagram

☐ Facebook

☐ Vkontakte

☐ Twitter

☐ YouTube

☐ Search engine (Google, Yandex)

☐ Website

☐ Other...

11. When it comes to choosing the University and studying program, from where do You collect Information? *

☐ Web Page

☐ Facebook

☐ Instagram

☐ Experience of others

☐ Twitter

☐ VKontakte

☐ Google or Yandex

☐ Other...

12. Which content is interesting for You, to read about on SM Channels of University? *

- [ ] Feedback of students
- [ ] News and events of University
- [ ] International students content
- [ ] Teachers thoughts
- [ ] How to apply Info
- [ ] Student stories
- [ ] Alumni stories
- [ ] Other…

13. Do You know Lahti University of Applied Sciences? *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No
- ( ) Other…

14. How did You get to know about Lahti University of Applied Sciences? *

- ( ) Social Media
- ( ) Study Exhibition
- ( ) Friends, relatives
- ( ) Never heard before
- ( ) LAMK Website
- ( ) VKontakte
- ( ) Other…

15. Do You study abroad? *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No
- ( ) Other…

16.Is there anyone who influenced You to study abroad now or in future? *

- ◯ Relatives

- ◯ Teachers

- ◯ Experience of former students

- ◯ Experience of existing students

- ◯ No one

- ◯ Other…

17. Is there any information about LAMK, that You want to know but cannot find? *

- ◯ Yes

- ◯ No

18. If Yes, then what information it was?

Short-answer text