

Integrated marketing communications for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants

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13 April 2015



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Degree programme Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants (MUBBA)	
Report/thesis title Integrated marketing communications for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants	Number of pages and appendix pages 78 + 5
<p>The development of globalization, a steady decline in the demographics, specifically in the birth rate, and the marked swift to digital communications channels have affected the way higher education institutions compete to attract and retain prospective students.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis is to identify the most effective modes of marketing communications to increase the visibility of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants, hereafter referred to as MUBBA. The Degree Programme is instructed at HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences.</p> <p>The theoretical framework is divided into two main parts. The first part introduces the integrated marketing communications and the second part presents the consumer decision process. In turn, both topics are applied to the higher education context. The thesis uses qualitative and quantitative research methods. A semi-structured interview with the communication manager of HAAGA-HELIA was conducted to gain insights of the marketing communications developed by HAAGA-HELIA. The interview was conducted in October 2014.</p> <p>A web-based questionnaire was designed to collect empirical data from current MUBBA students, who represented the target group in this study. In total, the survey had 17 questions. There were closed and open-ended questions. Likert scales were also used. The results were presented and analysed using cross-tabulations for the closed questions; descriptive statistics, namely the mean and the standard deviation were calculated for the Likert scale statements. The open-ended questions were analysed manually. The survey was conducted in November 2014.</p> <p>The thesis successfully answers the research questions posed at the beginning of the study. It provides the most effective modes of marketing communications for the MUBBA Degree Programme by presenting and analysing the consumer decision journey of its current students. Notice that the results of the survey cannot be generalized due to the low response rate. In total there were 40 respondents, which account for 17,4% of the total population.</p> <p>The thesis concludes with a set of recommendations. The Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants could benefit from this study by making use of social media platforms to increase its visibility when communicating with potential students. More emphasis should be placed in the studying experience to build and strength loyalty and thus, spur positive word-of-mouth. Nevertheless, continuous research is needed to follow the communication trends among the youth in order to successfully update the marketing communications campaigns on an ongoing basis.</p>	
Keywords Integrated marketing communications, Consumer decision journey, MUBBA students, Multilingual Management Assistants, Social media, Word-of-mouth.	

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1 Introduction

*To my beloved country Venezuela. In the hope that winds of democracy will soon caress the faces
of our children, our beautiful coasts and high mountains.
Gloria al Bravo Pueblo!*

Amidst the positive reputation and visibility that the Finnish educational system has enjoyed for its success in the PISA survey as well as in other international comparisons, changes in the operating environment and the development of globalization have brought about an increasing competition among higher education institutions to target prospective students. According to the Ministry of Education of Finland (2009, 14), the low level of internationalisation is still one of the weaknesses of the Finnish education system in spite of the large amount of degree programmes offered in English.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education of Finland (2009, 36) points out that “Higher education institutions are responsible for student selection and the marketing of the education that they offer”. Altogether, all this poses the big challenge for Finnish higher education institutions to optimise their marketing communications efforts in attracting not only prospective students living in Finland but also applicants from abroad. In parallel, Finland has been facing a demographic decline for the last two decades, a tendency that is expected to continue in the coming years according to recent population projections (Statistics Finland 2012.) The convergence of these conditions is not favourable.

For its part, HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences is a well-known Finnish higher education institution which offers bachelor and master degree programmes in several business fields. The Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants is a bachelor degree programme instructed in English language at HAAGA-HELIA. The specialization areas of this Degree Programme comprise entrepreneurship; HR and leadership; marketing, sales and services; meetings industry and organizational communications. (HAAGA-HELIA 2015.)

Students of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants are expected to gain an extensive set of business and language skills to successfully function in international organizational environments. The language choices students can freely choose from are Chinese, French, German, Russian, Spanish and Swedish. Finnish language is compulsory for Finnish students and foreign students as well. (HAAGA-HELIA 2015.)

1.1 Objectives and delimitations of the thesis

This thesis research reviews the integrated marketing communications theories and the consumer decision process. Both themes are applied to the higher education context from which the following research questions are derived:

- Which modes of marketing communications are most effective when communicating with prospective students for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants?
- How is the consumer decision process of its current students?
- What improvements could be made and what should be taken into consideration for the next marketing communications campaigns?

This research project is delimited only to current students of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. Students of other degree programmes are not of interest for this study.

Some limitations in this small-scale study need to be mentioned. First, due to the date when results were requested, on December 2014, time was a limiting factor for studying a more comprehensive target audience for the marketing communications part. The population under study could have included individuals who applied for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants during the next application period that takes place in spring 2015.

For the purpose of the consumer decision process, however, the assessment of the decision-making is only applicable to current students due to their actual experience of the Degree Programme under study, and as such it was conducted.

1.2 Abbreviations used in the thesis

At HAAGA-HELIA, the acronym used to designate the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistant is MUBBA. Hereinafter, the abbreviation MUBBA is repeatedly used due to its lengthy name.

Further, the following abbreviations are used sparsely in this thesis:

- ASSI, designates the equivalent degree programme but instructed in the Finnish language. Its name is *Johdon Assistenttityön ja Kielten Koulutus*).
- WOM, stands for Word of Mouth.
- UAS, refers to University of Applied Sciences.
- IMC, the abbreviation of Integrated Marketing Communications.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis paper consists of six main chapters. The first one begins with an introduction to the situational background and the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants followed by the research questions, the limitations of the study, the abbreviations used and the structure of the thesis.

The second and third chapters cover the theoretical framework related to the main topics of the thesis, namely the marketing communications and the consumer decision process. Besides the classical marketing literature, each topic is focused from the higher education perspective.

The fourth chapter deals with the empirical part and the research methodology, which in turn is divided in qualitative and quantitative research methods. Each methodology describes the instrument of data collection, sampling, as well as the validity and reliability issues.

The empirical findings and discussion of the research are presented in the fifth chapter. The description of the interview is followed by the survey results. In turn, the survey results are analysed by outlining the marketing communications practices influencing the decision-making journey of MUBBA students. Chapters 4 and 5 are clearly divided in halves which are consistent to the main topics of the thesis.

The sixth chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations followed by the external validity and reliability of the findings and results, and the ethical considerations observed and followed during this thesis process. The chapter ends with a self-evaluation. The appendices can be found at the end of the paper after the references.

2 Marketing communications

In the past, the terms *advertising* and *promotions* were used to address what is currently known as marketing communications. Advertising is only one part of marketing communications, and promotions stands for an abbreviation of sales promotion. Nevertheless, promotions is widely used as an alternative term for marketing communications in the context of the marketing mix. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 4-5.)

For the sake of clarity, in this thesis *promotions* will be referred to as an element of the 4Ps of the marketing mix besides product, price and place. Ultimately, all the marketing mix elements have a marketing communications impact, this being the main reason why the concept of marketing communications is slightly broader than *promotions* and needs to be differentiated.

This being said, marketing communications are defined as all the promotional elements of the marketing mix an organization uses to inform and persuade about its products and brands, influence purchasing behaviour, create brand image and establish a long-term relationship with its customers. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 498.)

2.1 Integrated marketing communications

The notion of integrated marketing communications is not new. For years companies delegated their marketing communications activities to advertising agencies, direct-marketing agencies, package-design firms and public relation agencies. Those activities were managed as separate functions with different budgets, goals, objectives and sometimes with different conceptions of the market. This fragmented management of the marketing communications led some companies to fail in recognizing the imperative of coordinating their marketing communications efforts to communicate a consistent, unified image to their target audiences. (Belch & Belch 2009, 10.)

For long the main promotional function was mass-media advertising. But a swift in direction took place during the decade of the 1980s and first approaches to the integrated marketing communications started to emerge with the development of sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations. Companies asked their ad agencies to coordinate all their promotional tools. Soon after, ad agencies became IMC agencies which managed all clients' promotional needs and programs by offering more value by creating synergy. Synergy implies that the output of managing the whole marketing communications plan is greater than the sum of its parts. (Belch & Belch 2009, 10-11; Pickton & Broderick 2005, 22.)

Some advertising agencies such as Ogilvy & Mather and Young & Rubicam started conceiving new concepts such as orchestration, whole egg, new advertising and seamless communication to describe what it is known today as integrated marketing communications. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 23.)

In its simplest form, integrated marketing communications is the process of integrating all the elements of the promotional mix. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 25.) The following is a more comprehensive definition:

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communications programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, employees, associates and other targeted relevant external and internal audiences. The goal is to generate both short-term financial returns and build long-term brand and shareholder value. (Belch & Belch 2009, 12.)

A more recent version of IMC incorporates online and alternative methods of communication such as database marketing, direct response marketing, sponsorships, online marketing, social media, alternative marketing and public relations programs. These are added to advertising, sales promotion and personal selling activities, which are the traditional promotional tools. In order to deliver a unified and consistent message, all elements of the marketing mix should be blended into the integrated marketing communications plan. (Clow & Baack 2014, 21.)



Figure 1. The components of promotion (Clow & Baack 2014, 21.)

Advertising represents one part of the traditional promotional mix. In most cases, advertising plays the key role and the other elements of the mix - sales promotions, trade promotions and personal selling - support the main advertising program. An imperative con-

sideration is to decide whether to use an in-house group or an external agency. (Clow & Baack 2014, 135.)

Sales promotion includes all the incentives offered directly to customers and end-users to encourage them to make the actual purchase. Sales promotion helps to build brand awareness by improving the image, and enhance loyalty by generating in-store traffic. Some types of consumer promotions are coupons, premiums, contests and sweepstakes, refunds and rebates, sampling, bonus packs, price-offs and overlays and tie-ins. (Clow & Baack 2014, 343.)

Personal selling seeks to acquire new customers to influence them to increase their levels of purchase. Personal selling is a face-to-face opportunity to create a customer for life. (Clow & Baack 2014, 328.)

Database marketing includes the collection and utilization of customer data to build relationships with them. The primary focus is the retention and enhancement of customer loyalty. Database marketing requires the building of a data warehouse for the management of former and current customers. Some examples of data stored in a marketing data warehouse include:

- Customer names and addresses
- E-mail addresses and digital records of visits to the company website
- History of purchases transactions
- History of customer interactions such as inquiries, complaints and returns
- Results of any customers surveys
- Preferences and profiles supplied by the customer
- Marketing promotions and response history to marketing campaigns
- Appended demographic and psychographic data
- Database coding, such as lifetime value and customer segment clusters

(Clow & Baack 2014, 313-314.)

Direct response marketing, widely known as direct marketing, aims to target products to prospects and customers. Direct mail is the most common form of direct response marketing. Other methods are catalogs, direct response mass media (TV, radio, magazines and newspapers), ads placed on a website and search engines, direct sales and telemarketing. (Clow & Baack 2014, 325.)

Sponsorship marketing is mainly used to increase the visibility and enhance the organization's image and brand loyalty. A company can pay money to sponsor individuals, groups or teams to elicit positive feelings which will be directly associated to the company.

Television, sports and cultural events, visual arts exhibits, dance groups and actors in theater performance are popular forms of sponsorship. The most recent form is sponsoring posts on the internet through blogs and social media. Sponsoring events is known as event marketing. (Clow & Baack 2014, 383-385.)

Digital marketing includes anything digital from e-commerce to internet marketing and mobile marketing. Many consumers collect information on the internet and read online reviews before purchasing in retail stores. (Clow & Baack 2014, 254.)

- E-commerce aims to sell products and services on the internet.
- Mobile marketing refers to understanding the shopping nature of any mobile phone device, especially in smartphones, and how individuals use them. Types of mobile marketing include display and search ads, video advertising, text messages, in-app advertising, QR codes, digital watermarks, 2D barcodes and geo-targeting.
- Online advertising reaches consumers in a highly effective way. Some types of online advertising are banners, media and video advertising and search engine optimization.

(Clow & Baack 2014, 256, 261-265.)

Social media is becoming more popular in increasing the consumer activity on social networking and blogging sites. The largest social media platform to date is Facebook, where companies are devoting an approximate of two-thirds of their overall social network advertising budget. Other social media platforms are twitter, blogs, consumer-generated reviews, e-mail, e-newsletters and viral marketing. (Clow & Baack 2014, 268.)

Alternative marketing are innovative ways of creating new intersection points between customers and brands through alternative programs and media venues. Some examples of alternative marketing are buzz or word-of-mouth marketing, guerrilla marketing, lifestyle marketing, experiential marketing and product placement and branded entertainment. (Clow & Baack 2014, 284.)

- Buzz or word-of-mouth marketing refers to conveying information about a product or brand by a friend, family member or acquaintance. It is one of the fastest growing areas in alternative marketing for two main reasons. First, people like to share their opinions and thoughts as part of their social interaction. Second, opinions and recommendations enjoy more credibility than paid advertising. Thus, buzz marketing can be generated by consumers who truly like the brand or by sponsored consumers known as brand ambassadors or consumers evangelists.

- Guerrilla marketing aims to obtain immediate buzz in order to impact consumers by using aggressive and grassroots tactics as well as alternative venues such as where customers eat, shop and hang out. Guerrilla marketing relies on creativity to surprise and reach consumers.
- Lifestyle marketing identifies hobbies and entertainment venues to contact their target audiences in a more relaxed setting.
- Experiential marketing usually involves direct marketing with some interaction to engage customers emotionally and logically. For example, the company brings the brand promise to customers by offering free samples in an event where they can enjoy the benefit of the product through a positive experience.
- Product placements and branded entertainment mainly aim to influence viewers by the planned insertion of a product or brand into a storyline in a television show, movie, or other entertainment medium to create real-world situations. This alternative marketing method has been increasing in popularity with the rise of reality television shows.
- Alternative media venues featuring advertising displays include video game advertising, cinema, subways, street and mall kiosks, stairs, escalators, parking lots, billboards, bus shelters, flight-ticket jackets, shopping bags, restaurant menus and clothes. Alternative media venues seek to reach consumers in their daily routine moments.
- In-store marketing uses color, light, sound, and most recently motion to engage customers in the retail store, where they shop and make their purchase decisions. The most common in-store marketing tactics are point-of-purchase displays (POP), end-aisle displays, merchandise displays, ceiling banners, overhead mobiles, in-store signage and more recently video screen and television monitors. POP displays remain a very effective aid to retail selling.

(Clow & Baack 2014, 285-299.)

Public relations makes use of several tools such as newsletters, internal messages, bulletin board, public relations releases, annual reports and special events to communicate with internal and external stakeholders and portray a positive image. Assessing the firm's reputation, preventing image damage and auditing corporate social responsibility issues are among its main functions. Public relations also aims to create positive image-building

activities by engaging in cause-related marketing, green marketing and pro-environmental activities. (Clow & Baack 2014, 371-372.)

2.2 Integrated marketing communications in higher education

As a result from globalization, higher education institutions providing degree programmes in the English language are established today as a global phenomenon (Durkin, McKenna and Cummins 2011, 154). The market in which these institutions operate is characterized by an increasingly competitive environment among universities to inform, remind and persuade potential applicants to select and apply to their degree programmes. Further, prospective students constituting the target of higher education institutions are characterized by being internet savvies with good communications skills, better informed and prepared to take decisions (Moogan 2011, 570). This context highlights the role of marketing in recruiting and retaining students, and its importance in the higher education sector.

This being said, universities have been applying marketing theories and concepts of the business world to differentiate themselves by integrating traditional with digital media channels to maximize their limited budgets given the high prices of media.

To illustrate this, integrated marketing communications – the equivalent for *promotions* in the classic marketing mix – are embedded in the marketing mix for higher education. Considering higher education as a service provided by universities, and given the intangible nature of this service, Ivy (2008, 289) proposes the 7Ps marketing mix for higher education in the context of service marketing.

2.3 The 7Ps of marketing mix for higher education

Product, is designed to deliver a set of benefits to satisfy the consumer needs. The intangibles provided by higher education institutions which are mental development, skills and graduate outcomes, are only materialized at the end of the process when students receive their degree certificate and start getting interesting job offers. Thus, the design of the degree curriculum and the duration of completing the degree programme are crucial for matching students' needs. (Ivy 2008, 289; Moogan 2011, 574.)

Price, represented by the tuition fees charged to students who enroll in a degree programme. (Ivy 2008, 289.)

Place, includes all forms of distribution that universities develop in order to provide tuition to their students and access to support material. The virtual learning media, e.g. Moodle

and Blackboard, is increasing in popularity as an alternative mode of reaching students. (Ivy 2008, 290.)

People, encompasses the academic, administrative and support staff who interact with prospective students. (Ivy 2008, 290.)

Physical evidence, represented by all the tangible elements evaluated by prospective students such as appearance of the university buildings and facilities, teaching technology and materials, to name but a few. (Ivy 2008, 290.)

Processes, includes all the administrative functions over a relatively lengthy period of time of the studying experience, from handling the applications until the bureaucratic process for graduation. (Ivy 2008, 290.)

Promotion, comprises all marketing communications activities that universities use to promote their offering and encourage prospective students to apply and finally enroll in their degree programmes. (Ivy 2008, 290.) Schüller and Rašticová (2011, 62-63) propose the following marketing communications activities tailored to the higher education context.

Communication support

- Competitions
- Roadshows
- Educational fairs and events

Advertising

- Fliers
- Radio commercials
- Billboards and posters
- Advertising in the press
- Pictures on public transport vehicles
- Web advertising

Relations with the public

- Materials such as magazines and bulletins
- University representatives appearing in the media
- Conferences
- Research papers and other published articles

Personal communications

- Fairs
- Roadshows
- Presenting the university in special events
- Open days

Direct sales

- E-mails and newsletters
- E-shopping by selling promotional material of the university

(Schüller and Rašticová 2011, 62.)

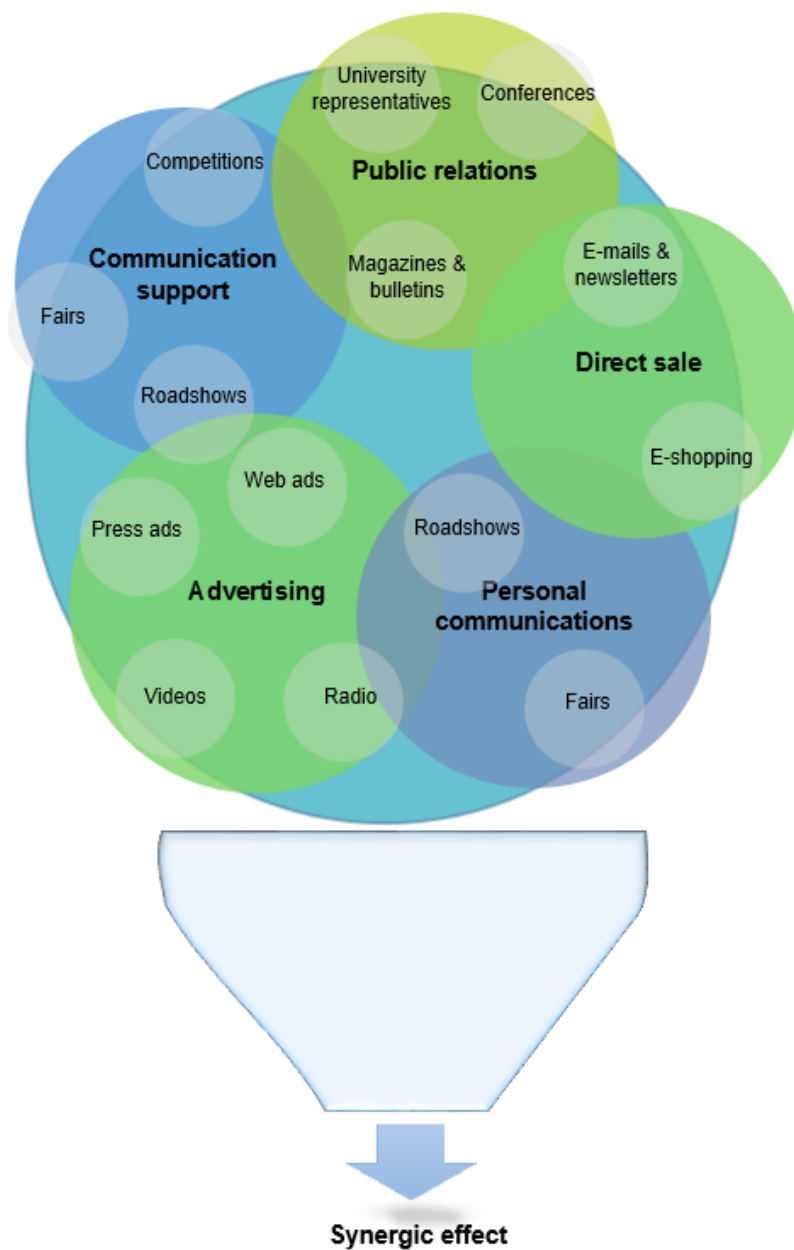


Figure 2. Integrated marketing communications for universities (Schüller & Rašticová 2011, 64-65.)

As Figure 2 shows, each circle represents a particular marketing communication activity and the integration depicts the shape of a funnel. The synergic effect is the principal purpose of integrating marketing communication activities, and it only takes place when the interrelation of these activities is reached.

Several authors (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 27; Pickett & Vinten 2000, in Schüller & Rašticová 2011, 65) define synergy as a phenomenon where $2 + 2$ equals 5, meaning that the result of bringing together several marketing communications activities in a mutually supportive and enhancing way is more than the sum of its parts.

Once integration is achieved, certain synergistic benefits are created. These benefits are named by Pickton and Broderick (2005, 28-29) as the 4Es and 4Cs of the integrated marketing communications:

- Enhancement, the improvement and intensification of the message.
- Economical, a cost-effective communication budget.
- Efficient, which means doing things right, in a competent way.
- Effective, stands for doing the right things, in a not wasteful manner.
- Coherence, achieved by fusing and combining messages together.
- Consistent, not self-contradictory messages.
- Continuity, in harmony over time.
- Complementary, producing a balanced communication message.

Nevertheless, a synergic effect neither takes place by simply combining all the activities of the marketing communications campaign nor by using a single standardized message. Unquestionably, it requires the interrelation of selected marketing activities within the university communication support element. Likewise, it is more suitable to use multiple messages when targeting to different audiences with several objectives. The key in achieving synergy is that marketing communications activities should be managed efficiently while ensuring that the right messages are coherent, consistent and complementary over time. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 29; Schüller & Rašticová 2011, 65.)

2.4 Steps in developing an effective marketing communications plan

Nowadays communications is far more complex than the linear and unidirectional basic process based on Schramm's 1955 model consisting of the three main elements, namely sender, message and receiver. By contrast, the complexity that characterizes today's communications is linked to the mass adoption of online communications into people's everyday life. As stated by Smith and Zook (2011, 24-25) communications is a multi-

faceted and multi-directional process where receivers search for information in a selective and active way. They interact with each other and back to the company, especially in discussion groups and internet communities.

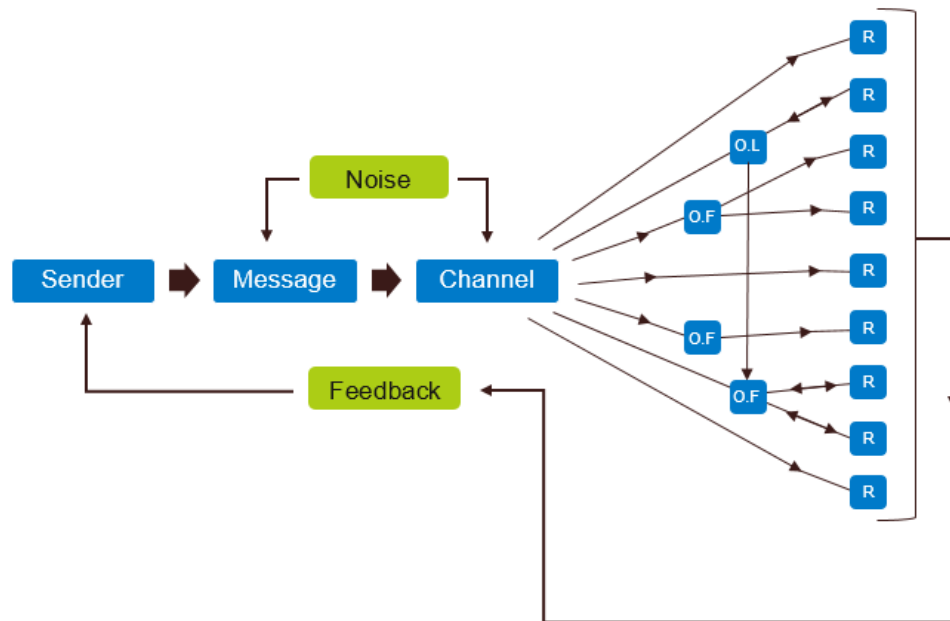


Figure 3. Communication as a multi-directional process (Smith & Zook 2011, 127.)

Similarly, opinion formers and opinion leaders are added as influencers of the communication process. For one part, journalists, critics, analysts and members of official institution are typical examples of experts who provide advice to their audiences. They are known as opinion formers and they are often quoted in promotions and advertisements. Opinion leaders, however, do not provide formal advice but enjoy a higher social status than their peer group. They are characterized for being confident when trying new products and services. Opinion leaders are typically exposed with the brand in public relations activities. (Smith & Zook 2011, 125.)

It is absolutely necessary for marketers to fully understand communications as an interactive, multi-step and multi-directional process before developing a marketing communications plan. In doing so, Kotler and Keller (2012, 504-517) offer the following steps as a guideline for further consideration:

- Identify the target audience. It may be the consumer himself, the customer or person involved in the purchase decision, or particular groups who may influence the purchase. A clear target audience is the result of segmenting the market into homogeneous groups according to demographic, geographic, geodemographic, psychographic or behavioral variables. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 375.)

- Define the communications objectives. To create needs and awareness, and to influence attitude to make the final purchase are the most common objectives.

By creating needs, companies aim to reduce the dissonance between the current and the desired state that exists in individuals of their target audience. Likewise, awareness helps to develop brand knowledge and recognition as well as brand recall. Brand credibility and preference, and the ultimate conviction of buying or taking action are results of influencing their attitudes.

- Formulate the communications, includes designing the message strategy, the creative strategy and selecting the message source.

Message strategy is the content, themes and ideas bound to the experience of product use. Creative strategy refers to the way a message is communicated. Therefore, the creative strategy can be either informative or affective. Informative appeals relate to the rational processing of the benefits and attributes of a product; transformational appeals intend to persuade customers by eliciting emotions. Message source is who delivers the communication message. Usually, the message source is an opinion former or opinion leader.

- Select the communication channels, which can be personal, non-personal or mass media, and integrated communications channels. The communication channels are the components of promotion already explained in Chapter 2.1.
- Decide on the marketing communications budget. One of the most difficult marketing decisions is to decide how much to spend on marketing communications. There are five common methods: the arbitrary method, the affordable method, the percentage-of-sales method, the competitive-parity method and the objective-and-task method.

The arbitrary method, more an approach than a method itself, consists on deciding the budget based on budgets of previous years and the future plans of the business. This approach requires wise judgment given by the experience in the field. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 406.)

The affordable method bases the budget on what the organization can afford without contemplating other considerations such as investment in promotion and sales volume. This method is said to be product rather than marketing oriented. It requires in first instance the calculation of all costs, followed by an estimation of the

profit the company wishes to earn during the period the budget is being set for. The amount left is what can be afforded. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 406.)

The percentage-of-sales method links the marketing communications expenditure according to a fixed percentage of sales or turnover. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 408-409.)

The competitive-parity method tries to allocate proportional budgets according with those of competitors. Further considerations should be taken into account. The competitors themselves, their relative sizes as well as their positions in the market. Another approach for this method is a percentage of sales estimation, in which data of the industry to sales ratios are used to achieve parity. (Pickton & Broderick 2005, 407.)

The objective-and-task method sets the budget according to the costs of the planned marketing communications activities that aim to achieve the established objectives. Therefore, the budget is set after calculating the costs of those activities. Many firms have cut on traditional media marketing budgets to allocate their funds into online communications channels. Digital marketing represents a significant portion of the overall marketing expenses. (Clow & Baack 2014, 255; Pickton & Broderick 2005, 407-408.)

- Decide on the marketing communications mix. Companies must select the most effective media and channels that best deliver their message.
- Measure the communication results. Some typical measures are brand recognition, message recall, and past and current attitudes toward the organization, its products and brands.
- Manage the integrated marketing communications. Marketers need to ensure that each component of the integrated marketing communications plan speaks with one voice and tone, that all contacts with customers and prospects are relevant and consistent over time.

3 The consumer decision process

When target audiences are exposed to integrated marketing communications some needs are triggered and awareness is built. That is in essence the main goal of marketing. Once these needs and wants are created, so are the perfect conditions for influencing consumers toward the beginning of their purchase decision journey.

3.1 The traditional five-stage model

For decades, consumer behavior has been a topic of interest and the epicenter of a vast number of researches in the field of marketing. One approach to understand consumer behavior is by describing the decision-making process individuals go through to satisfy their needs and desires.

Several authors of marketing literature (Belch & Belch 2009, Clow & Baack 2014, Kotler & Keller 2012 to name but a few) coincide with the following five-stage model of the consumer decision-making process. The stages of the model are problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behavior.

Problem recognition. The decision-making process starts when the consumer notices there is a need or want to be satisfied. In order to reduce the dissonance between the current state and the desired state, the consumer starts searching for information about potential products that might satisfy the need.

Information search. The information search can be internal when the consumer tries to recall products on his or her own, or external when the consumer consults sources of information. This is the phase of awareness seconded by familiarity which is characterized by a wide spectrum of potential brands.

When a positive experience has been the outcome of a previous purchase, it is highly probable that the consumer may want to repurchase the same product and the information search ends. Conversely, if the product experience was unsatisfactory, the consumer may discard the brand from the set of alternatives. At this point, the consumer has reduced the set of potential brands discarding the ones associated with negative experiences, and the ones he or she is barely aware of.

The external information search takes place when the uncertainty about which brand to purchase still persists, or if the consumer decides to try a new brand. The main external sources of information can be classified as follows:

- Personal: family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances.
- Commercial: advertising, Web sites, salespersons, dealers, displays.
- Public: mass media, consumer-rating organizations.
- Experiential: handling, examining, using the product.

(Kotler & Keller 2012, 189.)

Evaluation of alternatives. This is the consideration phase where most brands are discarded from the initial set, still remaining a few for further consideration.

According to Clow and Baack (2014, 76-79), there are three methods of evaluating alternatives: the evoked set method, the multi-attribute approach and the affect referral.

The evoked set refers to the array of brands that will be considered as potential options in the purchase stage. Nevertheless, there are two additional sets of brands to refer to the brands discarded at this stage. The inept set holds the brands that elicit negative feelings because of a past experience or negative comments by an acquaintance. And the inert set which includes the brands the consumer has little knowledge about and no connotation, neither positive nor negative.

The multi-attribute approach refers to the set of attributes that a consumer evaluates among the evoked set of brands. The consumer will pay most attention to those attributes that promise to deliver the sought-after benefits, and will make the selection based on the combination of attributes that score higher.

Affect referral may be the result of having used the multi-attribute approach, and it implies that the consumer chooses the brand he or she has the strongest emotional connection with, or the one that elicits positive feelings. Consequently, consumers who hold an affect referral for a brand do not go through the evaluation process again.

Purchase decision. Even when customers have the purchase intention to buy their most preferred brand, there are two interfering factors that may modify, postpone or even avoid the purchase itself. In the first place, a negative attitude held by another person toward the preferred choice may influence the purchase intention. The second factor is represented by the perceived risks the purchase may entail. Those risks vary according to the amount

of money at stake, the amount of uncertainty around a feature, and the level of consumer self-confidence. At this stage, it is suggested there is only one brand.

Post purchase behavior. In the final stage of the buying process, consumers may experience three main feelings. Disappointment, if the product performance falls short of expectations. Common actions are to abandon or return the product, complain to the company, warn friends or spread negative comments. In extreme cases, unsatisfied consumers may even take legal actions. On the other hand, it is likely that consumers experience satisfaction when the product performance meets or exceeds their expectations.

The traditional consumer decision model sees the consumer as a problem solver and information processor who goes through each of the stages of process when making purchasing decisions. However, consumers do not always engage in all five steps of the process or follow the described sequence. Based on their previous experience with the product or service, especially when the purchase implies a low personal, economic or social significance, consumers may skip one or more stages of the decision-making process.

3.2 The consumer decision journey by McKinsey & Co.

The consumer decision journey is an alternative model to the traditional approach. The model was developed by David Edelman, principal and co-leader of digital marketing at McKinsey & Co., and his colleagues, and it was first introduced in 2009. (Ling 2012, 25.)

In an interview with *Marketing News*, Edelman (in Ling 2012, 26-27), points out that the consumer decision journey is a clock-shaped model consisting of five stages as below.

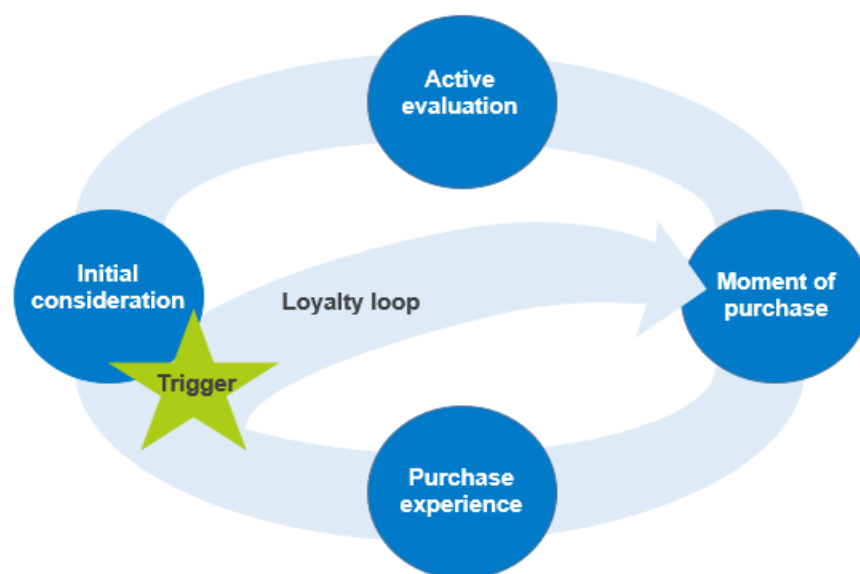


Figure 4. The consumer decision journey (McKinsey & Co. 2009)

Initial consideration. The consumer starts thinking about the need itself and the product or category that may satisfy it. The consumer recalls a small number of brands, the ones that have made it through the proliferation of multiple product choices and media messages. By contrast, in the traditional approach consumers are already aware of a plethora of brands at this early stage.

Active evaluation. The consumer actively searches online for more information about the category itself, different options, relevant attributes and alternative brands. The evaluation has expanded towards more categories and customers do online search, whether the purchase is online or not. They may visit the company's website for more content, check internet reviews, ask recommendations from friends and family members while brands enter and exit constantly changing the initial consideration set toward a wider spectrum of choices. (Court, D., Elzinga, D., Mulder, S. & Jørgen, O. 2009.)

Back to the traditional model, brands reduce in number as the consumer seeks information during this stage and moves through the funnel. Marketing is pushed at each stage to influence the consumer behavior. This push-style communication still remains important. Nevertheless, today consumers are more discerning, well-informed and digitally empowered. They actively take control of the communication process pulling relevant information to them in a two-way conversation with marketers. In fact, that is known as consumer-driven marketing. (Court & al., 2009.)

Those interactions constitute new touch points that are not accounted for in traditional decision-making models. That said, companies should learn how to influence the consumer-driven marketing such as online reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations. (Court & al. 2009; Moran, G., Muzellec, L. & Nolan, E. 2014, 200-201.)

Moment of purchase. At this point the consumer makes the actual purchase and decides what to get, at what price and through which channel. The choice of channel is a relevant feature in the consumer decision journey not present in the traditional model.

Purchase experience. The consumer experience is included in the purchase experience, which has an impact on the overall opinion of the consumer about the brand. This stage is crucial especially for established brands because consumers will talk about their experiences with the brand. In turn, that may influence other people who are considering the brand at the evaluation stage.

Trigger. The consumer experience may trigger advocate decisions. Some examples are reviews and online ratings, the online sharing of experience, spreading the voice about the purchase and positive or negative word-of-mouth. Ultimately, advocacy decisions constitute the bait for other people's evaluations and opinions, thus generating new initial consideration stages and simplifying their purchase journey. Hence, the importance of the consumer experience management and loyalty programs.

Loyalty loop is the last element of the journey and it is triggered only by advocacy. Thus, trigger and loyalty loop are inseparable and both constitute the last stage of the journey. The loop acts as a shortcut taking the customer directly from the experience stage toward the final purchase stage. In other words, loyal consumers skip the consideration and evaluation process due to their strong commitment to the brand.

The consumer decision journey encapsulates the push-and-pull relationship of integrated marketing communications and the moments of maximum influence, or touch points, to reach consumers in the right place, at the right time and with the right message. (Court & al., 2009.)

3.3 Students as consumers in the decision-making process

The student decision-making is a complex process for the two following reasons. First, education is intangible and the process is lengthy. Second, the risks depend to a great extent on the participation and involvement of the student. The latter remains the main reason why students should be considered *consumers* of their higher education experience rather than *costumers* buying a degree. (Conway 1994, in Durkin, McKenna and Cummins 2012, 155).

Thus, at the initial consideration stage universities should endeavor to enter into the original consideration set of prospective students by making effective use of integrated marketing communications. This implies that higher education institutions should be responsive and proactive in finding out the information needs and the variables that affect the decision-making of prospective students. Then, communicate those outcomes in such an effective way that allows the recruitment and retention of the most suitable candidates. (Moogan 2011, 572.)

The active evaluation stage is also complex due to the multiple variables influencing prospective students when they actively gather information about the available choices. At

this stage, they may face confusion derived from information overload, or from differing advices given by their peers and acquaintances. (Moogan 2011, 572.)

At the moment of purchase, prospective students are buying an intangible product which is the promise of the future benefit communicated by the higher education institution. At this stage of the process, the purchase equals to enrolling in the degree programme. (Moogan 2011, 572.)

The purchasing experience in the student decision-making process is characterized by the inseparability of the production and the consumption of the service. In other words, students experience the delivery of the service simultaneously when it is being provided by tutors and lecturers. This varies considerably because of different learning styles and amount of people involved in the process. Nevertheless, the students themselves affect the quality of the outcome based on their own merits. (Moogan 2011, 575.)

The trigger and loyalty loop, the last two stages in the student decision-making journey, are highly driven by word-of-mouth. This implies that students may influence other 'consumers' based on their experience which is the result of subtracting their initial expectations – formed at the active evaluation stage – minus their degree of satisfaction.

Consequently, a priority for higher education institutions is to make use of their alumni's word-of mouth and career progression in their marketing communications strategies as well as to review on an ongoing basis the factors that affect the decision-making of students. (Moogan 2011, 575.)

4 Research methodology

The following chapter describes the research design and methodology used in this study. First, an overview of the design is presented followed by the methodology and research methods employed during the empirical part of the study.

- For its degree of structure and immediate objectives, this research is a *formal study* which aims to answer the research questions.
- For its methods of data collection, this research uses *communication* to collect the responses by personal and impersonal means.
- For its degree of control of variables, this research is an *ex post facto design* where the findings are reported without manipulating the variables.
- For its purpose, this research is *descriptive* because it aims to find out the characteristics of the population (who, what, where, when and how much) through univariate questions, and discover possible associations by using cross-tabulation.
- For its time dimension, this research is *cross-sectional* for being carried out once only, thus referring to a specific moment in time.
- For its topical scope, this research is a *statistical study* that intends to make generalizations based on the validity of its findings.

(Cooper & Schindler 2011, 140-142.)

The research methodology had a two-stage approach to initially gain a better understanding of the research problem and its context. Consequently, a qualitative traditional research was used in the first stage of the study due to the modest insights about the marketing communications carried out at HAAGA-HELIA. The second part of the study used a quantitative approach to collect and measure data from MUBBA students, data that was analysed statistically.

According to Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005, 109), qualitative and quantitative methods are not mutually exclusive and both can be combined in the same study. This being said, the empirical part of this thesis uses both methods to answer the research questions and fulfil the purpose of the study.

4.1 Qualitative research methods

The qualitative technique for data collection was a semi-structured interview to gain a deeper understanding of how the marketing communications are developed by HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences.

4.1.1 Interview

In general, semi-structured interviews start with a few questions contained in an interview guide with a focus on the topics to be covered. This allows the researcher to get control over the interview, explore the topic and gain new perspectives from the interviewee. (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 169; Daymon & Holloway 2002, 171.) The interview guide was based on the *Steps in developing an effective marketing communications plan* described in the theoretical framework (see Appendix 1.)

The appointment for an individual in-depth interview with Mr Ari Nevalainen, Communication Manager of HAAGA-HELIA, was agreed by an email. The interview was conducted on 10 October 2014 in the premises of the university campus in Pasila, Helsinki. Other aspects such as the use of a digital voice recorder and confidentiality issues were previously agreed by email. In addition, the interview guide was sent to his electronic address.

Individual in-depth interviews are characterized by the interaction of two participants, the interviewer and a single participant. Typically, they are prescheduled, conducted face-to-face and on average they last 2 hours. (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 172). In fact, the interview took two hours to complete. Nevalainen was willing in extending the agreed schedule, which was one hour, to provide all the relevant information about marketing communications. The language used during the interview was English. As extensively recommended, the full text of the interview was transcribed and the notes taken during the interview were organized for further analysis.

All in all, the selection of the research methods depends on the type of data needed to answer the research questions (Ghuri & Grønhaug (2005, 109-110). Although the purpose of the interview was not intended to directly uncover the research questions, it was crucial in the first stage of the empirical part. It allowed to gather the background information about marketing communications needed for designing the questionnaire which in turn was the main instrument of data collection to answer the research questions.

Once the research problem was analysed and the information to be asked was clear, the next step was selecting the sample.

4.1.2 Sampling

Qualitative methodology uses nonprobability sampling, which implies that participants are not selected based on how well they represent the target population but on the depth of knowledge they possess about the issue under study. (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 167.)

The type of nonprobability sampling used in this research was purposeful sampling. This type of sampling consists of selecting the person who possesses in-depth information of interest for the study. (Daymon & Holloway 2002, 159.) For the interview, the most appropriate person to provide the sought-after information about marketing communications was Mr Ari Nevalainen, Communication Manager of HAAGA-HELIA.

4.1.3 Internal validity, reliability and relevance

In qualitative research, the concept of validity is more significant than reliability. This is mainly because reliability implies both consistency and replicability. But it is almost impossible to achieve reliability in qualitative studies because they deal with a particular setting and do not seek duplication. (Basit 2010, 70; Daymon & Holloway 2002, 90). Thus, the quality of the interview conducted in this thesis discards the reliability dimension and instead focuses on the aspects of validity.

The conducted interview holds internal validity which refers to the extent to which the actual description is true in the given context. (Daymon & Holloway 2002, 90). The internal validity was achieved by asking Mr Nevalainen to verify and corroborate that the interview findings described the exact reality of the marketing communications at HAAGA-HELIA at the moment when the interview was conducted, this in an attempt of reducing bias. Besides that, the claims made in this research from the interview are merely descriptive.

Similarly, the interview description is meaningful and useful for its commissioner and readers. In other words, it holds relevance, another dimension of validity.

4.2 Quantitative research methods

The second part of the empirical research used quantitative methods to answer the research questions. Thus, a semi-structured survey as the data collection instrument was designed to:

- Find out the most effective modes of marketing communications for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants.

- Describe the touch points of the consumer decision journey from the perspective of the MUBBA students.

Typical descriptive questions are *what* and *how*. The thesis research focuses on *what* marketing communications modes are most effective, *how* students decided to enroll to the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants, and *what* their perceptions are about the Degree Programme. The latter includes describing what triggers off their consumer decision journey, the touch points or stages taking place during the process and how these stages are related to the overall decision-making process.

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire aims to answer the research questions, and as such it covers the two main topics of the research. The questionnaire content was divided into two sections. The first section consists of the background questions such as age, nationality, place of residence when the student applied to the degree programme, year of entrance and previous education.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2011, 325), the type of question that cover sociological and demographic variables are known as classification questions. Target questions, on the other hand, refer to the investigative questions of the study and they can be closed or structured, and open-ended or unstructured. Structured or closed questions offer the respondent a fixed set of choices, while unstructured or open-ended questions present a frame of reference without limiting the respondent's answer.

As stated by Basit (2010, 84), the combination of open-ended questions with closed questions is popular in educational research. This combination is observed in the second section of the questionnaire in this study.

A dichotomous scale was also included in the survey questions. It usually offers two opposing responses, which are mutually exclusive. Dichotomous scale is also known as simple category scale. (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 298.)

Multiple-choice, single-response scale provides the respondent with several category options of which one only can be selected. By contrast, the multiple-choice, multiple-response scale allows to choose one or more alternatives. (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 298-299.) Both scales were used in the survey. Nevertheless, the multiple choice, multiple response scale was used only in question 7.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2011, 299), the summated rating scales present statements with positive or negative connotations toward the matter of interest. The respondent assigns a numerical score to each statement according to his or her degree of agreement or disagreement. Likert scales are the most common type of summated rating scales and they were used in the survey to measure the overall attitude of participants. The category 'Other (Please specify)' was included when appropriate in the questions with Likert scale to avoid that one or more responses could have not been anticipated in the given range of options.

The questionnaire was designed in close collaboration with the Degree Programme Director, Ms Riitta Yli-Tainio. Special attention was given to the sequence in which the questions were asked. The questioning process went from general items such as the background questions in the beginning of the instrument, to more specific questions. The design and sequencing aimed to awake interest and motivation, and avoid that participants could exit the survey without completing it.

As noted above, different question formats were used to retain the respondent's interest throughout the completion of the survey. In addition, a draft version of the questionnaire was proofread by a native English teacher who commented on and improved the grammatical and lexical cohesion of the text.

Once the questionnaire was proofread and ready for launching, a pilot study was conducted to assess question content and sequencing problems, and to pre-test the technicalities of the survey link. The criteria for the pilot study was to select a few critical and willing participants among the administrative and academic staff of HAAGA-HELIA. The respondents made accurate and thoughtful contributions to the preliminary version of the survey. The pilot study revealed, among other things, the time for completion, which did not exceed ten minutes.

The instrument of data collection was created in Webropol, a software suitable for carrying out online surveys. It allowed the survey to be self-administered via email, thus the survey was delivered and collected via internet.

The covering note was created by the Degree Programme Director, Ms Riitta Yli-Tainio. It addressed the purpose of the survey and the importance of participation to improve the status quo. Alike, issues such as anonymity, estimated completion time and a lottery to win movie tickets were mentioned in the covering note (see Appendix 2).

The lottery aimed to motivate participants and increase the response rate. A different link embedded at the end of the survey allowed willing respondents to participate in the lottery by registering their email address.

The Webropol survey link and the covering note were sent by email on 6 November 2014 by the Data Administration Service of HAAGA-HELIA. The survey link was active for 15 consecutive days.

4.2.2 Sampling

The basic notion of sampling is to select some elements of the population to draw conclusions about its entirety with high accuracy, more speed and at a lower cost than if including all the elements of the population. (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 364.)

The students of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants is one strata of the whole student population of HAAGA-HELIA. Nevertheless, the research findings do not intend to make inferences about the student population of HAAGA-HELIA by studying one of its subpopulations or strata. Therefore, and for the sake of clarity, the research is *not* employing a stratified random sampling.

For the purpose of the study, neither are relevant students of other degree programmes nor are the graduates or alumni of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants because the information the latter could provide would only portray a past reality – this is a cross-sectional study, not a longitudinal one – leading to misleading results.

The population, defined as the total amount of elements about which the researcher wishes to make inferences (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 364), was composed of 230 current students of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. They represent the total amount of MUBBA students by the time the research was conducted.

Thanks to the updated electronic database of HAAGA-HELIA, which stores the institutional electronic address of each student, the population was entirely surveyed. In other words, sampling was not used in an attempt to get the highest possible accuracy in the results.

4.2.3 Internal validity, reliability and practicality

An instrument of data collection holds internal validity when it measures what it intends to measure. (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 280.) The survey designed for this study encompasses appropriately the key elements covered in the research questions, namely the marketing communications and the stages of the decision-making journey. Besides that, all the elements of the population of interest, represented by the total amount of current students of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants, were selected to participate in the survey. Consequently, the survey holds content validity.

A second dimension of validity, external validity, allows to make generalizations of the results to wider populations and contexts. (Basit 2010, 65; Cooper & Schindler 2011, 280.) This being said, external validity will be explained after the presentation of the survey findings in Chapter 6.3.

Reliability implies precision and accuracy from the instrument of data collection and the participants. It aims for consistency and replicability of results over time. (Basit 2010, 69.) In this research, special attention was paid to the formulation of the statements in the questionnaire, so that all respondents would understand them in the same way. For example, biographical and factual data such as nationality and the reasons why current students applied to the Degree Programme, would yield the same results over time when the sample and the context are the same. Notice that stability does not apply to attitudinal data, satisfaction and perceptions. Due to the lengthy nature of completing the degree programme, those can be influenced while the studying experience continues.

Moreover, aspects such as economy, convenience and interpretability define the practicality of an instrument of data collection. (Cooper & Schindler 2011, 285.) This research was economical since there were no significant costs derived from the study. Both software tools, Webropol and SPSS, were provided as free of cost by HAAGA-HELIA.

Similarly, the survey was convenient because of its design and layout, and its instructions were clear (see Appendix 3). The interpretability dimension is covered in this research. It comprises the research dimensions to be measured, the procedures employed to meet the purpose of the study and the interpretation of the results.

5 Findings and discussion

This chapter presents the findings and results of the study in two main parts. First, a description of the marketing communications at HAAGA-HELIA is briefly presented. The second part presents in detail the decision journey of MUBBA students.

5.1 Integrated marketing communications at HAAGA-HELIA

For the sake of clarity, it is important to mention that almost the entirety of the marketing campaigns are designed to advertise HAAGA-HELIA as a great place to study while advertising specific degree programmes is limited in quantity mainly for budgetary reasons. Consequently, the following description encompasses the marketing communications to target prospective students for all the degree programmes instructed at HAAGA-HELIA and not exclusively for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants.

Based on the Steps for developing an effective marketing communications plan (see Chapter 2.4.), the following is a description of the marketing communications developed by HAAGA-HELIA.

5.1.1 Target audience

The main target audience is youth with ages between 18 and 24 years, divided into the three following segments:

- Finnish youth living in the Helsinki metropolitan area;
- Finish youth with foreign background living in the Helsinki metropolitan area;
- Youth of other nationalities, mainly from Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia and nearby Eastern European countries.

(Nevalainen 10 October 2014.)

5.1.2 Communication objectives

Brand awareness is the main objective of the Marketing and Communications Services of HAAGA-HELIA. In terms of awareness, HAAGA-HELIA is the best-known University of Applied Sciences in Finland. This is evidenced in several annual surveys that measure awareness and preference among secondary school students and Finnish employers. Hence, raising brand awareness in Finland is slightly different than abroad. In Finland, the goal is to remain number one in the ranking. At international level, the first step is to promote Finland as a study country, then Helsinki for its location, and finally HAAGA-HELIA as a great place to study. (Nevalainen 10 October 2014.)

The good news is that the Finnish education system enjoys a good reputation because the country has been ranked high in international comparisons since 1990s (Ministry of Education of Finland 2009, 12). Besides that, the education in Finland is free, even for students proceeding from countries outside the EU/EEA. In other words, no tuition fees are charged to international students as is done in the majority of countries in Europe that offer international higher education. These reasons make Finland an attractive choice for prospective international students too. Clearly, the first step in promoting HAAGA-HELIA at international level is well supported by these facts.

The ultimate goal is to make talented and motivated youth apply to the degree programmes. In fact, a specific objective for the Marketing and Communications Services of HAAGA-HELIA is to raise by 2% the number of applicants by the year 2020 (Nevalainen 10 October 2014). To achieve this end poses a real challenge for HAAGA-HELIA given the competitive university environment in the context of a decreasing youth population, which is defined by the OECD as those people aged less than 15.

Figure 5 depicts the last population projection of Finland. Population projections, known as demographic trend calculations, describe future population developments assuming that the development which has taken place in recent years continues unchanged. (Statistics Finland 2012.)

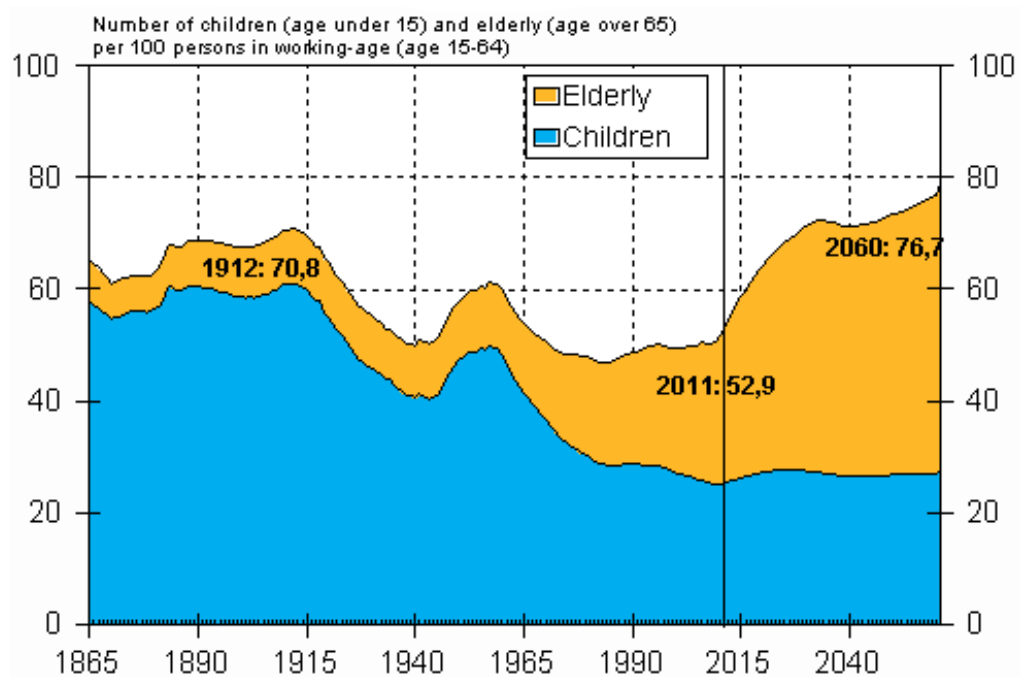


Figure 5. Demographic dependency ratio 1865-2060. (Statistics Finland 2012)

As one can see, Finland has been facing an ongoing decline in its birth rate for the last decades. This indicator is of critical strategic importance for HAAGA-HELIA as it tries to increase by 2% the number of applicants in a five-year period.

Moreover, the trend does not show any signs of significant growth among the youth population, which is the target segment of universities. On the contrary, the trend is expected to continue without major fluctuations, stagnant if not declining, in the next years.

5.1.3 Communications message

To recapitulate, message strategy, creative strategy and message source are the three elements for formulating the communications as mentioned in Chapter 2.4.

HAAGA-HELIA offers a high quality education, an international degree certificate and good job opportunities. That is the core concept for the marketing communications messages. In turn, the message concept is blended with an emotional appeal under the motto 'Join with us and open doors to working life' (in Finnish *Liity joukkoomme ja avaa ovet työelämään*). In fact, the creative strategy combines rational and emotional elements, e.g. in student fairs and events, entertainment through competitions is mixed with information about the degree programmes. (Nevalainen 10 October 2014).

HAAGA-HELIA students are the main source in delivering the communications message to the target audience. They are an important source for face-to-face interaction with prospective students in fairs, events and music festivals. Additionally, current students are a valuable source for their stories and testimonials displayed in the HAAGA-HELIA web page and its digital magazines. (Nevalainen 10 October 2014).

5.1.4 Communications channels

The main marketing communications channels used by HAAGA-HELIA to target prospective students are the internet, print media and radio, personal selling, and alternative venues.

Table 1. Marketing communications at HAAGA-HELIA (Nevalainen 10 October 2014.)

Medium	Channel
Internet	Helsinki Times, Six Degrees, NRJ, Iltalehti, Helsingin Sanomat, White Rabbit

Internet	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Spotify, MSN Windows
	E-magazine for mobile phones
Print media	Metro, Helsinki Times, HBL (Hufvudstadsbladet), Borgobladet, Östra Nyland.
	Helsingin Sanomat (Koulutus section), Uusimaa lehti.
Radio	NRJ
	Radio Nostalgia Radio Helsinki
Personal selling	Oral presentations in high school institutions
Alternative venues	Buses' backseats, back walls and posters inside the metro

5.1.5 Marketing budget

In the past, the allocation of resources used to be proportional between print and digital media. Nevertheless, the tendency has changed toward an increasing proportion in digital media. The current distribution of the total marketing communications budget is 10% in print media, 20% in radio and 70% in digital marketing channels. The budget method employed by HAAGA-HELIA is the objective-and-task method. (Nevalainen 10 October 2014).

5.1.6 Marketing communications mix

In a marketing communications mix, channels are combined to achieve synergy and obtain more effective results. Mr Nevalainen (10 October 2014) explains how HAAGA-HELIA optimizes its marketing communications channels.

Sponsorship marketing with experiential marketing. Radio NRJ organizes private concerts for a maximum of 200 people every month to present popular Finnish artists and bands. The most recent musicians were Elastinen, Cheek, Happporadio and Hallo Helsinki. A particular feature about these concerts is that tickets are not sold. Instead, people have to participate in contests of social media campaigns to win free tickets. The main idea is to provide people with the experience of getting close to their idol, discuss together, take pictures and share them in social media. In addition, NRJ organizes a bigger concert for

500 people once a year. These concerts are targeted to the general public and they are held throughout the academic year, from September to May.

Sales promotions with lifestyle marketing. HAAGA-HELIA's pop-up stands are present in music festivals during the summer season. A group of current students organize competitions and activities for the youth attending the music festivals.

Alternative media venues, social media and fairs. For the third year, HAAGA-HELIA hires a cool-model car which is driven by a group of current students during one month. The vehicle displays the HAAGA-HELIA logo. The main idea is to visit high school institutions and provide prospective students with the experience of taking pictures with the cool car and share them in social media. At the Studia fair, which is held every December in the Messukeskus Centre, some car pictures are shown. If prospective students attend the fair and find themselves in those pictures, they can win prizes, e.g. movie tickets.

Sales promotions in fairs. Fairs are excellent opportunities to raise awareness through competitions. In the travel fair Matkamessu, held every year in Finland, a group of 5-6 students organizes e.g. inbox games and dancing competitions while providing participants with information about the Degree Programme for Tourism and Travel, the admission process and the application time. Furthermore, students are responsible for the exhibition stand displays. These activities are part of specific course assignments. At international level, HAAGA-HELIA also participates in student fairs. During 2014 there were fairs in Germany, Russia as well as in Poland.

Social media and digital marketing, YouTube videos, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. As stated before, most of the marketing communications aim to promote HAAGA-HELIA as a great place to study and its offering of degree programmes. Nevertheless, most degree programmes have a YouTube video made by its own students. Likewise, the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants has created its own video.

The HAAGA-HELIA web page is the main platform where landing pages, online banners and all sort of digital marketing is linked to. Currently, there is a testing live chat panel to help students to find specific information when they are navigating the web page. This platform is planned to be launched in the near future.

HAAGA-HELIA sends a monthly e-newsletter to its alumni, which are approximately 25 000 graduates. They are an important source for spreading the good news of HAAGA-HELIA to their friends, acquaintances and, when applicable, to their children. There are

regular incentives to keep alumni's e-mail addresses updated. For example, there is a competition for the international alumni to win a holiday trip to Helsinki next summer.

5.1.7 Communications results

Brand image and awareness are measured on a yearly basis by Taloustutkimus, an external Finnish research firm. The results allow universities of applied sciences to benchmark their outcomes. For the last 4 years, HAAGA-HELIA has been ranked the best-known University of Applied Sciences in Finland.

Taloustutkimus carries research among high school students and employers in Finland. Internally, HAAGA-HELIA conducts surveys and questionnaires to measure the impact of print and alternative media advertisements. For digital media, the measurement is quick and easy, e.g. clicks on banners, and likes on Facebook. (Nevalainen 10 October 2014.)

The number of applicants is an indicator related to the effectiveness of the marketing communications. Roughly speaking, there are six applicants on average per study place offered by HAAGA-HELIA. Nevertheless, some degree programmes are more in demand than others as the case of the Degree Programme in Sports and Leisure Management with a ratio of 18 to 1. On the contrary, the Degree Programme in Business Information Technology has the lowest ratio (3/1). The Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants has between 4 and 5 applicants for each study place. (Nevalainen 10 October 2014.)

5.1.8 Integrated marketing communications

The marketing communications at HAAGA-HELIA are managed by the Communication Manager and his team together with Dagmar, an external advertising agency, and a group of enthusiast students who provide fresh ideas and their active participation. (Nevalainen 10 October 2014.) In this respect, Moogan (2011, 582) also stresses the importance of using current students to project an informative, positive image and the best possible experience to potential students.

The majority of higher education institutions in Finland implement their communications campaigns twice a year, especially during the application periods. By contrast, HAAGA-HELIA is constantly reminding the Finnish youth about a great place to study with interesting degree programmes that open doors to working life. In other words, HAAGA-HELIA implements marketing communications campaigns throughout the year because most

prospective students evaluate alternatives and make decisions in a different time than during the application periods.

This is also highlighted by Moogan (2011, 582), who states that most potential students start seeking for information a year prior to their applications. In this regard, universities delivering on marketing activities nine months before the application period are missing the big opportunity of reaching 70 per cent of the potential market. Fortunately, HAAGA-HELIA has been wise in recognizing and acting strategically upon this fact.

According to Mr Nevalainen (10 October 2014), the approach for the new communications plan is a stronger integration of the channels to optimise the synergic effect of marketing communications with a special focus on the digital marketing and social media. "YouTube is the new Google and mobile marketing is the future" (Nevalainen 10 October 2014.)

Notice that the interview acted as the foundation for the design of specific questions related to the information sources employed by HAAGA-HELIA to target prospective students.

5.2 The consumer decision journey of MUBBA students

This part presents the survey findings of the decision journey of students of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants.

In total, the questionnaire has 17 questions. There are five classification questions related to the background of the participants placed at the beginning of the questionnaire. The other questions are investigative and they cover the main themes of the research.

Next page shows Figure 6 which depicts the distribution of the questions of the survey along the consumer decision journey. The questionnaire can be found at the end of this thesis report (see Appendix 3.)

In accord with the survey questions, two questions (Q6, Q7) deal with the marketing communications topic by asking respondents to recall and rate the information sources that had most impact upon their decision to enroll in the Degree Programme.

Similarly, question 15 deals with marketing communications, however it is not shown in Figure 6. The question asks respondents to consider the most effective channels to advertise the Degree Programme. This is due to the fact that the answers are not part of the current journey of students and their answers do not describe the current decision journey

of MUBBA students. Instead, their answers collected in question 15 represent an important input for further consideration.

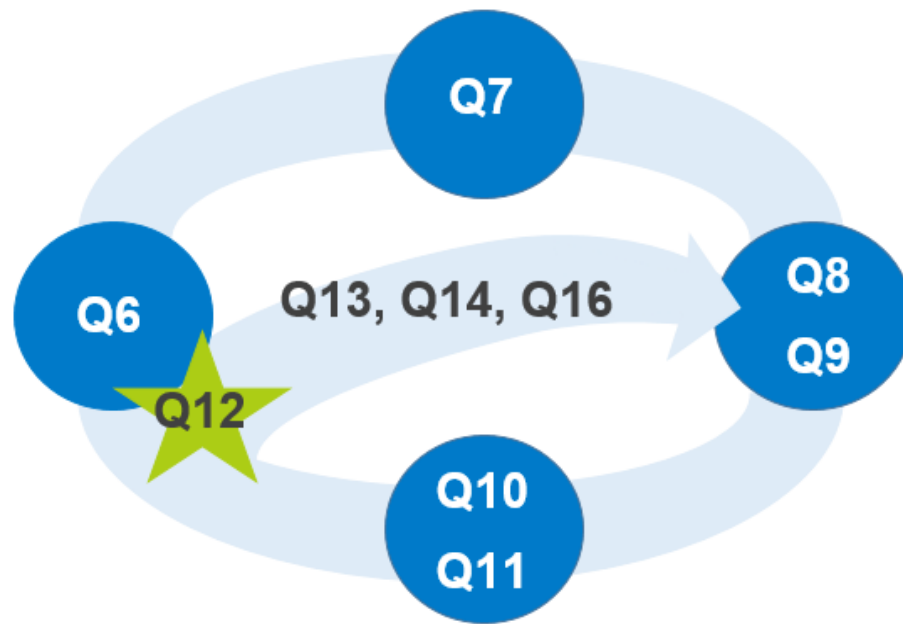


Figure 6. Mapping of questions of the online survey with the stages of the decision journey (Adapted from the Consumer Decision Journey by McKinsey & Co. 2009.)

Other questions (Q8 – Q14, Q16) cover the stages in the consumer decision journey. Respondents were asked to answer a set of questions related to the process they have been through since they considered pursuing higher education studies. In addition, the survey enquired about their ulterior loyalty intentions and brand awareness.

The last question (Q17) was optional. Its purpose was to collect constructive feedback for the Degree Programme. In the same way as in question 15, question 17 is not depicted in Figure 6. The feedback is presented in the recommendations section in Chapter 6.2.

The surveyed data was analysed using SPSS Statistics (Version 22.) The majority of the questions were closed-ended although there were several open-ended questions to encourage independent responses. For closed-ended questions, cross-tabulation was used to compare counts and percentages.

The main variable under analysis was Nationality, which specifically classifies respondents into two main groups: Finnish students and students with a different nationality. Therefore, all the nationalities different than Finnish fit into the last classification.

Further, it was considered to run the Chi-square test to obtain conclusions about the relationships present in the population. Nevertheless, it was not feasible to use the Chi-Square test in this study because the questions analysed with cross-tabulations did not meet the required criteria:

- 20% or less of the cells have expected count less than five.
- The minimum expected count should be at least one.

(Saaranen 2012, 36.)

For the closed-questions with Likert scales, the following descriptive statistics were used. The minimum and maximum values of each statement, the mean as a common measure of central tendency, and the standard deviation as a measure of variability. The open-ended questions were analysed manually.

5.2.1 Background information

The first five questions of the questionnaire are statements. They collected background information about the respondents such as age, nationality, place of residence when applied to the Degree Programme, year of entrance and had they any higher education background.

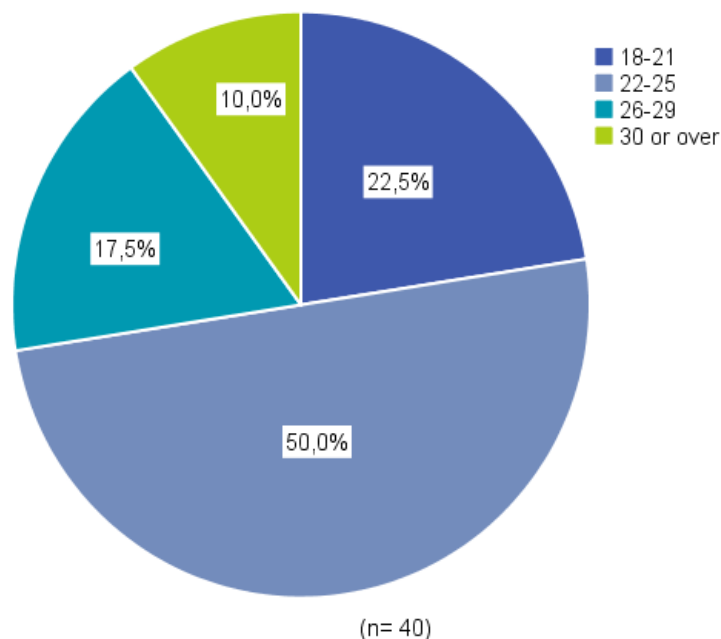


Figure 7. Age distribution

Figure 7 shows the age distribution of the respondents. Half of the respondents (50%) were between 22 and 25 years old. The second largest group (22,50%) were students whose age range was 18-21 years, followed by the ones who were between 26 and 29 years old (17,5%).

The smallest group (10%) of respondents were 30 years of age or older. By assembling the first two categories, the majority of the respondents (72,5%) were between 18 and 25 years old, the target audience of the marketing communications of HAAGA-HELIA.

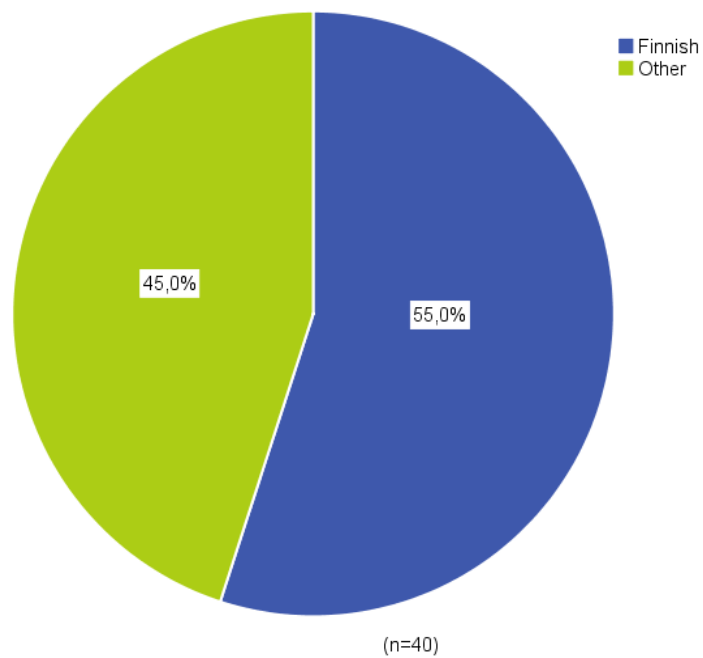


Figure 8. Respondents by nationality

The nationality distribution is depicted in Figure 8. In total, 55% of the respondents were Finnish students, while 45% of the respondents had a different nationality.

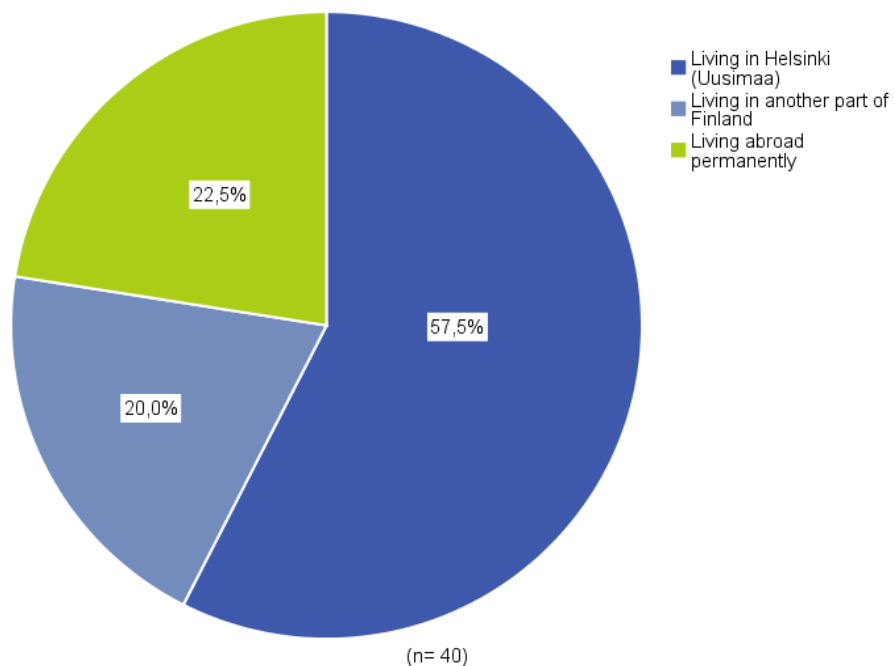


Figure 9. Place of residence when respondents applied to MUBBA

As Figure 9 shows, the majority of the respondents, in total 57,5%, were living in the Uusimaa region when they applied to the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. Almost similarly, 20% of the respondents was living in other region of Finland and 22,5% was living abroad.

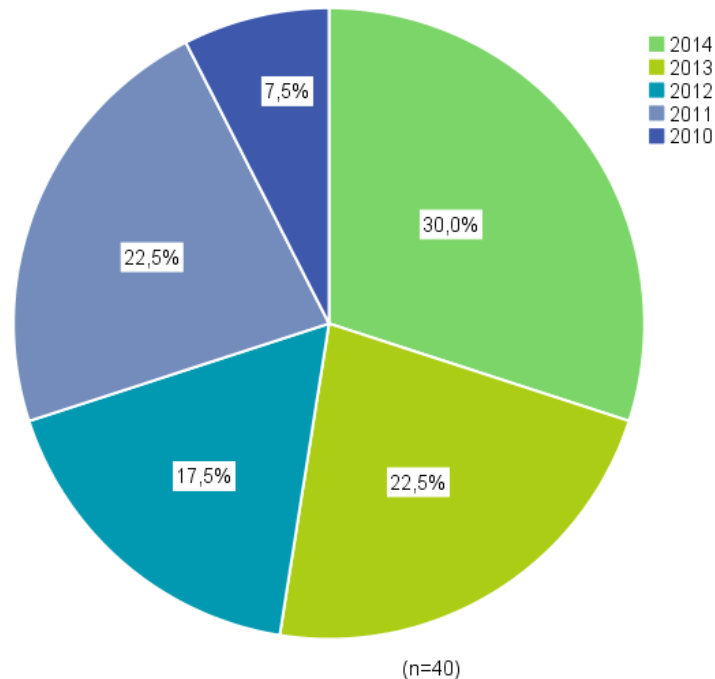


Figure 10. Distribution of respondent according to their entrance year

The entrance year of students is the criteria used to classify the students according to the group MUBBA. For example, a student who commenced his or her studies in 2013 belongs to the group MUBBA 2013. This being said, there were respondents from all groups, except for the ones who started in the year 2009. Although there are still a few students who commenced their studies in 2009, a speculative reason may be the lack of motivation to answer the survey when they have not reached their graduation goal yet.

As shown in Figure 10, a total of 30% of the respondents were from the group MUBBA 2014. The second biggest group of respondents were represented by the groups MUBBA 2011 and MUBBA 2013, each with 22,5% of the respondents. In a similar manner, there were respondents of MUBBA 2012 and MUBBA 2010 with 17,5% and 7,5%, respectively.

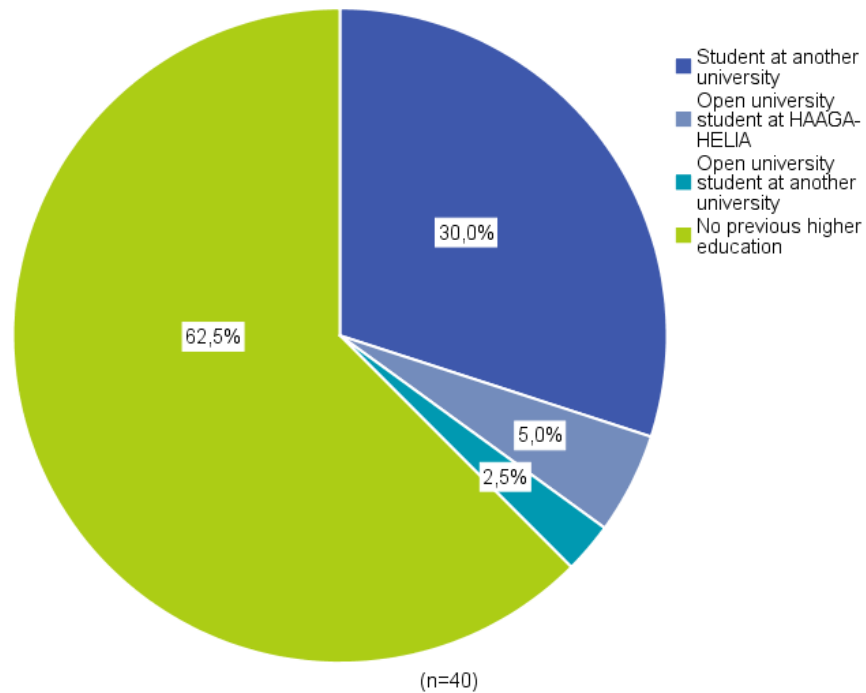


Figure 11. Educational background of respondents

Figure 11 shows that the majority of the respondents, in total 62,5%, did not have any higher education prior to their studies in the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. The second biggest group (30%) is represented by students who were studying at another university by the time they applied to the MUBBA programme. On the other hand, 7,5% of the respondents were in the open university system, of which 5,0% were open university students at HAAGA-HELIA and 2,5% at another university.

The next sections deal with the investigative questions and the interpretation of the survey results.

5.2.2 Initial consideration

The initial consideration phase of the consumer decision journey was covered in question 6. Respondents were asked to recall the information sources through which they knew about the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. Question 6 was dichotomous followed by a text field for respondents who answered positively to specify their answer.

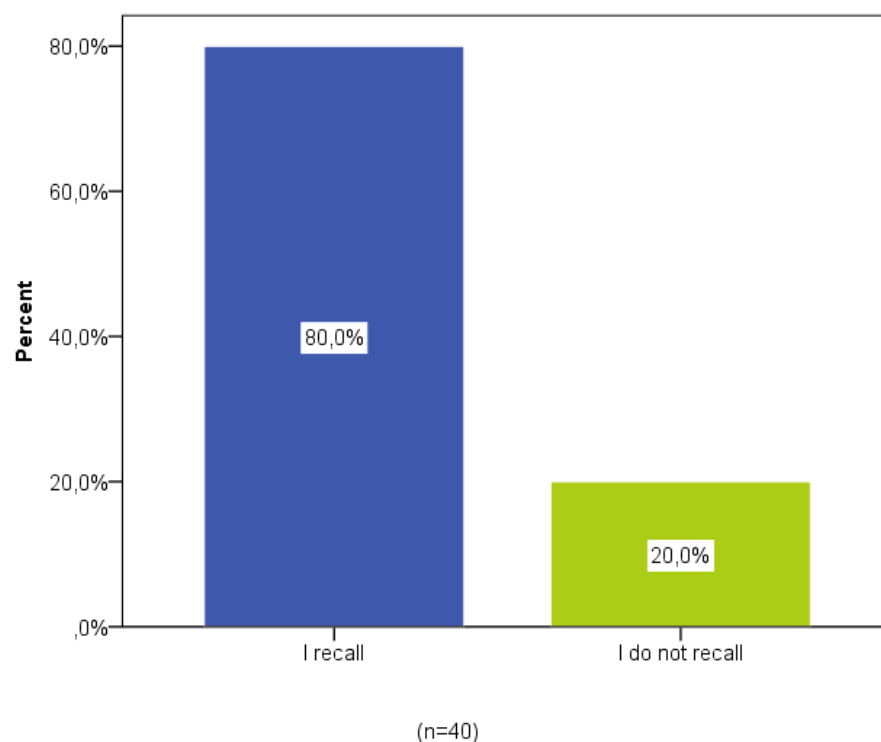


Figure 12. Recall of the MUBBA Degree Programme

Figure 12 shows that 80 % of the respondents recalled how they knew about the Degree Programme while 20% did not.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of recall of MUBBA by nationality

		Nationality		Total
		Finnish	Other	
I recall	Count	16	16	32
	% within Nationality	72,7%	88,9%	80,0%
I do not recall	Count	6	2	8
	% within Nationality	27,3%	11,1%	20,0%
Total	Count	22	18	40
	% within Nationality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Further, Table 2 shows the recall rate by nationality. In a similar way, most Finnish respondents and respondents with other nationality recalled how they heard about MUBBA, 72,7% and 88,9%, respectively. There is no significant difference in the recall rate by nationality.

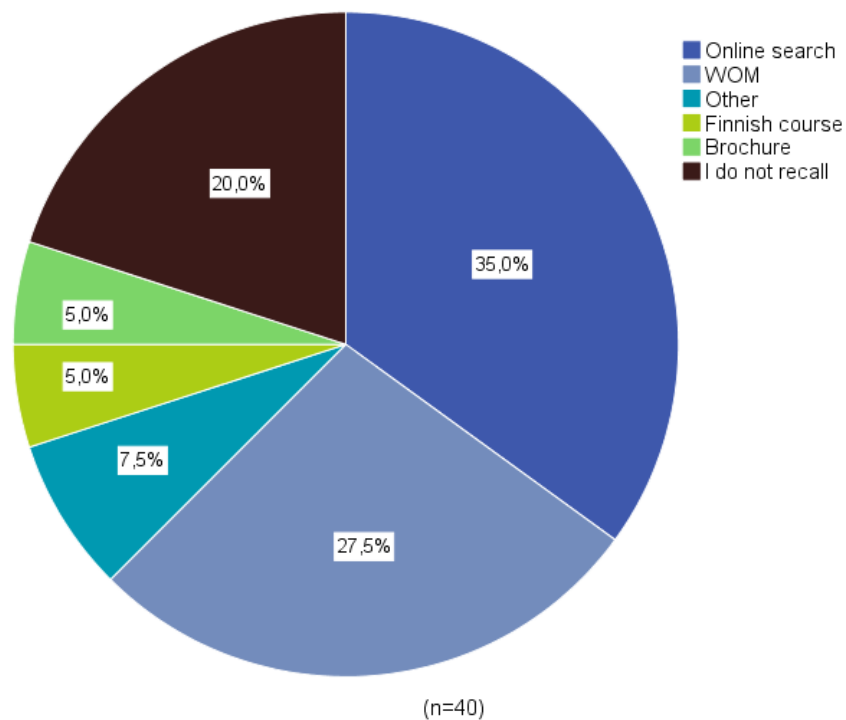


Figure 13. Sources through which respondents heard about MUBBA

The open-ended answers given by respondents were labeled and categorized as shown in Figure 13. In total, 35% of the respondents heard about the Degree Programme on the internet, 27,5% through word-of-mouth, 5% knew about MUBBA by means of brochures and another 5% while taking a Finnish language course. Besides, 7,5% of the respondents knew about MUBBA by other means such as at the open university system, through a MUBBA student who presented the Degree Programme at a secondary school, and in fairs. On the other hand, 20% of the respondents did not recall how they heard about the Degree Programme under consideration.

As stated above, internet was the source through which most of the respondents knew about the Degree Programme. In this category, the following sub-divisions were created to group the open-ended answers: 'Online search' with 15% of the respondents, 'HAAGA-HELIA web page' with 12,5%, and 'Other' which included blogs with 2,5% as well as online sites such as Studentum.fi and Studyinfinland.fi each one with 2,5%. All these online categories sum 35% of the respondents who learnt about MUBBA via internet.

5.2.3 Active evaluation

To portray the active evaluation stage, respondents were required to indicate which source(s) they consulted to find more information about the Degree Programme for Multi-

lingual Management Assistants and, at the same time, rate them according to their degree of usefulness.

Question 7 was a multiple choice, multiple response question embeded in a matrix with a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Poor' and 5 is 'Excellent'. Because this type of question requires to choose as many responses as apply, Table 2 was created to examine the frequency of the most consulted information sources.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of sources consulted by the respondents

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HAAGA-HELIA web page	39	3	5	4,21	,656
Word-of-mouth	35	1	5	3,06	1,327
Social media	31	1	5	2,23	1,383
Printed material	30	1	4	2,00	1,083
Fair - event	28	1	5	1,82	1,090
Other websites	31	1	5	2,23	1,309
Other	7	1	5	3,29	1,380
Valid N (listwise)	6				

As Table 3 indicates, the most consulted sources were the 'HAAGA-HELIA web page' and 'Word-of-mouth' from friends and family members. More specifically, 39 respondents in total visited the web page, and 35 respondents searched for more information among their peers.

Among the given alternatives, 'Other' was added to provide respondents with an open choice in case the information source they consulted to learn more about MUBBA were not included in the original set. Therefore, 'Other' was non-compulsory. Table 3 shows that only seven respondents selected 'Other'. Under this category, respondents reported the online sites Cimo.fi, Admissions.fi and Studentum.fi, which on average were rated as of moderate-good usefulness with a mean of 3,29.

Considering the rating of the information sources, the standard deviation shown in Table 3 indicates that their usefulness varied to great extent, except for the 'HAAGA-HELIA web page' with the lowest standard deviation (0,656). This suggest that the opinions of respondents about the website were consistent. This is also evidenced in the minimum and maximum scores for the 'HAAGA-HELIA web page' which were 3 and 5, respectively.

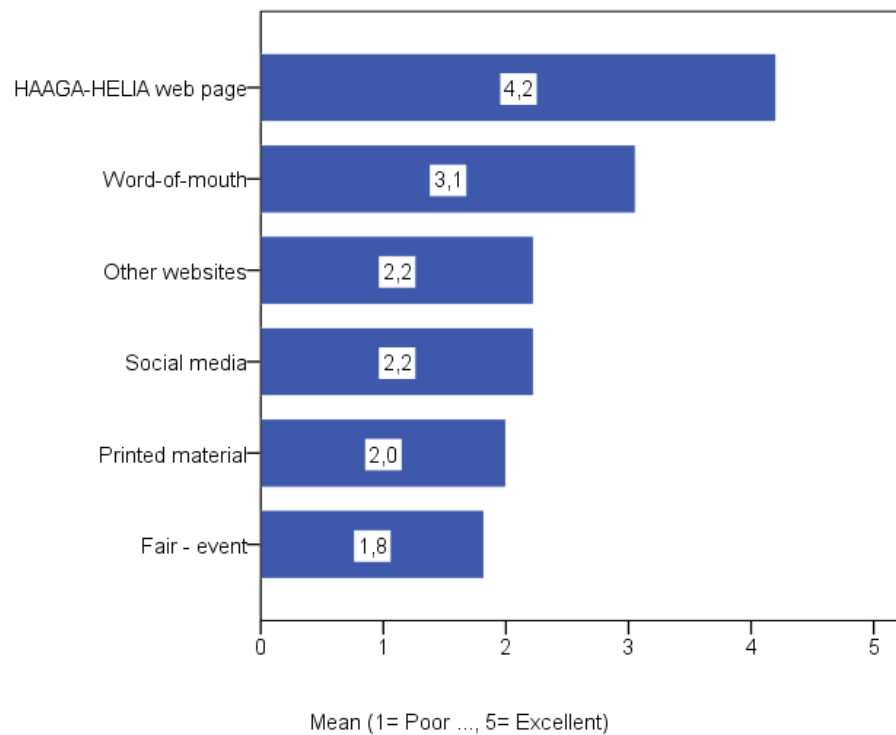


Figure 14. Information sources consulted by the respondents

As depicted in Figure 14, it is possible to see the information sources in descendent order by statistically grouping them into relevant clusters according to their degree of usefulness when students were searching for information during the active evaluation stage.

Respondents considered the 'HAAGA-HELIA web page' as the best information source with a mean of 4,21. Similarly, 'Word-of-mouth' was rated with a mean of 3,06. 'Other websites' (Opintopolku.fi and Studyinfinland.fi) were rated as fair in providing information about the MUBBA Degree Programme, as well as were the 'Social media' and 'Printed material' categories.

In order to avoid misleading comparisons, the option 'Other', with a mean of 3,29, was not included in Figure 14. As stated earlier, seven respondents answered in this category. Still, three of them filled the text field with suspension dots. Thus, 'Other' had only four valid answers.

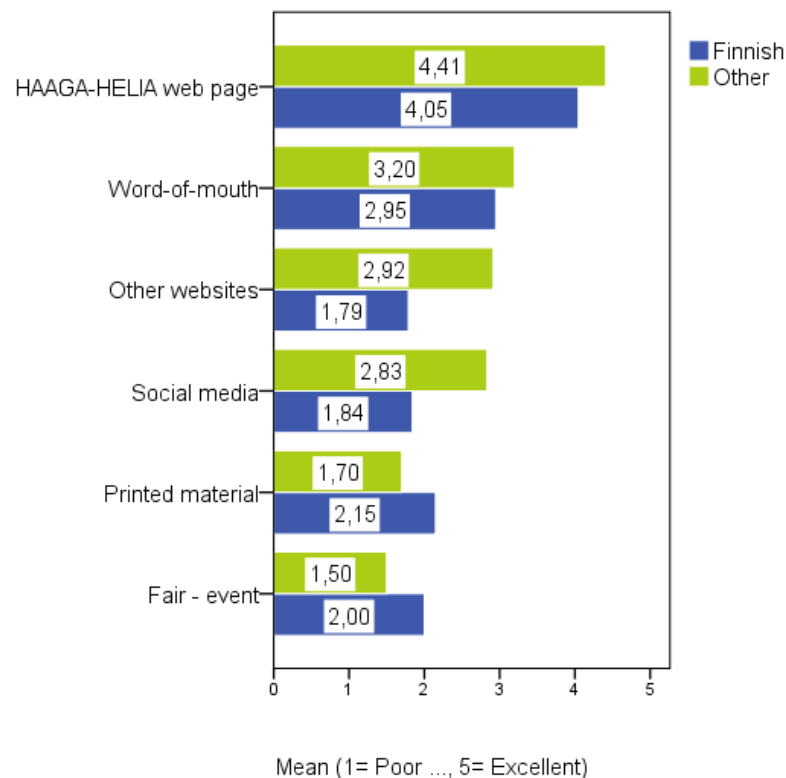


Figure 15. Information sources consulted by nationality

As Figure 15 shows, respondents with other nationality found the majority of the sources more helpful in providing information about the MUBBA Degree Programme than Finnish respondents. The biggest differences are observed in ‘Social media’ and ‘Other websites’ (Opintopolku.fi – Studyinfinland.fi), which were of more help for respondents with other nationality than for their Finnish counterparts.

By contrast, Finnish respondents weighted ‘Fairs – events’, and ‘Printed material’ more useful than respondents with other nationality. An assumption is that Finnish students had more possibilities to attend fairs and get printed material from HAAGA-HELIA than students with other nationality who might have been living abroad by the time they were looking for information about the Degree Programme.

For the sake of clarity, notice that ‘Other’ is a non-compulsory option with an open comment field while ‘Other websites’ refers specifically to Opintopolku.fi and Studyinfinland.fi. and they form a predetermined option.

5.2.4 Moment of purchase

The main reason for respondents to apply for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants was covered in question 8. It was a multiple choice, single response question where participants had to choose a single alternative among the total set.

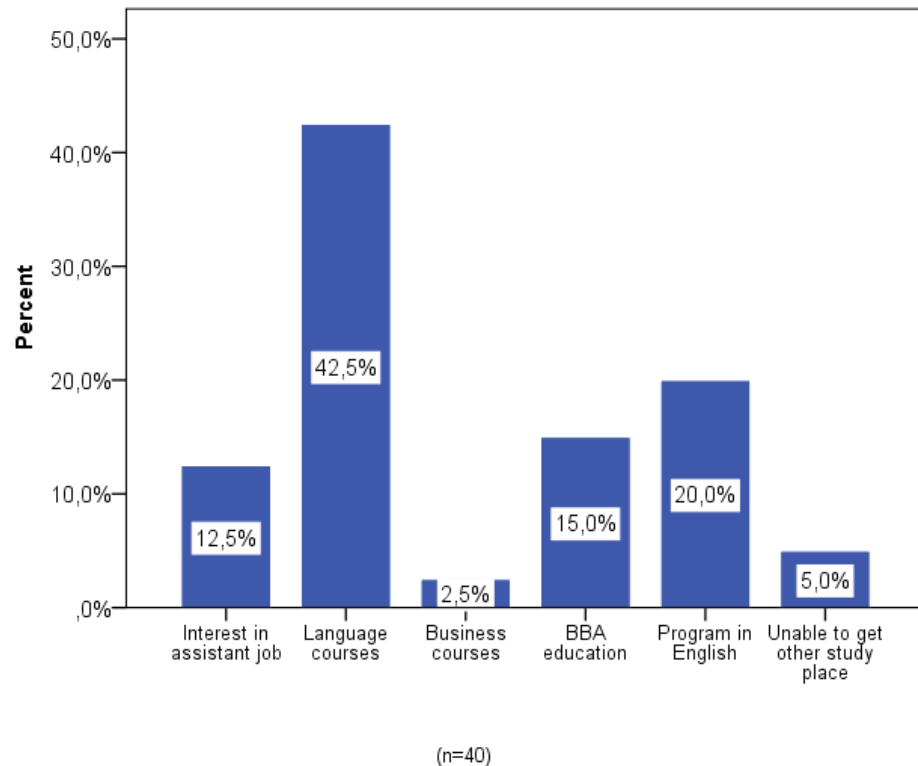


Figure 16. Reasons why respondents applied to MUBBA

At this point in time when potential students had evaluated the information on a range of degree programmes of their preference, question 8 intends to unveil the main reason why they chose to apply to the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants.

As depicted in Figure 16, the most favoured reason was 'Content of language courses' with a total of 42,5% followed by 'Degree Programme offered in English' with 20% of the respondents. This is not a surprise, as the Degree Programme highlights the focus on language studies with the term multilingual, which is part of the degree name and its value proposition. 'BBA education' and 'Own interest in an assistant job as professional career' had 15% and 12,5% of the responses, respectively.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation of the main reason for applying to MUBBA by nationality

		Nationality		Total
		Finnish	Other	
Own interest in assistant job as professional career	Count	1	4	5
	% within Nationality	4,5%	22,2%	12,5%
Content of language courses	Count	10	7	17
	% within Nationality	45,5%	38,9%	42,5%
Content of business courses	Count	1	0	1
	% within Nationality	4,5%	0,0%	2,5%
BBA education (tradenomi)	Count	4	2	6
	% within Nationality	18,2%	11,1%	15,0%
Degree program in English	Count	4	4	8
	% within Nationality	18,2%	22,2%	20,0%
Unable to get other study place	Count	2	1	3
	% within Nationality	9,1%	5,6%	7,5%
Total	Count	22	18	40
	% within Nationality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 4 shows the main reason why respondents applied to the Degree Programme under consideration to identify possible similarities and differences by nationality. For the majority of the respondents, 45,5% of Finnish respondents and 38,9% of respondents with other nationality, the 'Content of language courses' was the main reason for applying to the Degree Programme.

By contrast, 22,2% of the respondents of other nationality than Finnish applied to the Degree Programme because of their 'Own interest in the assistant job as professional career' compared to 4,5% of the Finnish respondents.

Based on the reasons given above, it was important to know whether they had to decide among other study options – in case they applied simultaneously to more than one degree programme - before confirming their study place in the Multilingual Management Assistant Degree Program. This information was gathered with a dichotomous yes/no in question 9. A compulsory open-ended answer was requested from those who responded positively.

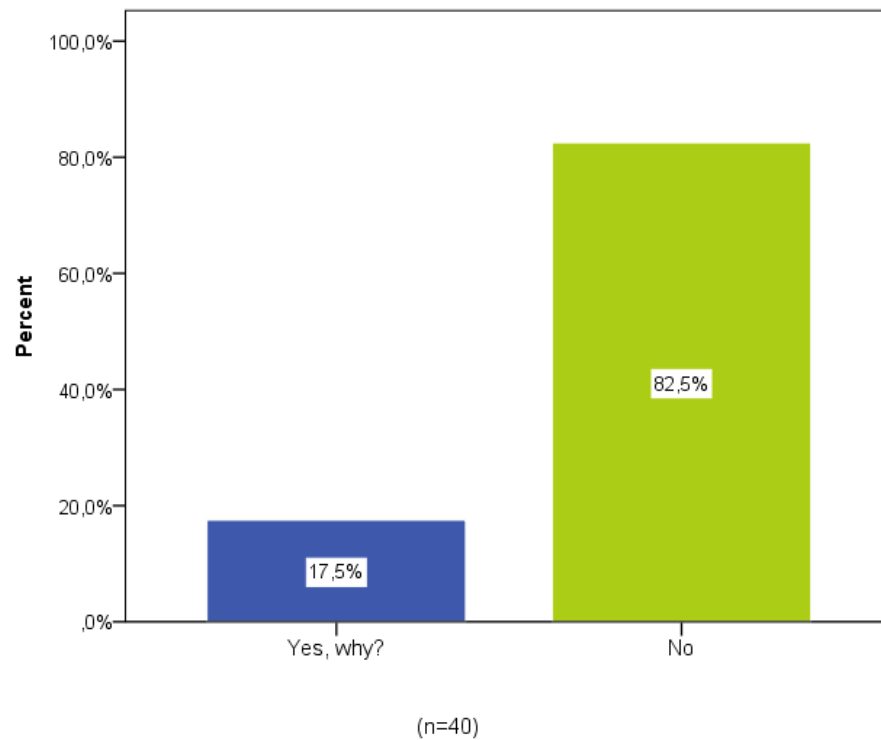


Figure 17. Respondents who were accepted to more than one degree programme

Figure 17 depicts that only 17,5% of the respondents got accepted to more than one degree programme but decided to confirm their study place in the Multilingual Management Assistants Degree Program. As mentioned earlier, respondents who answered 'Yes' were asked to justify their decision. *The degree programme course offering* was the most popular reason given by 6 out of 7 respondents.

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of confirmation of study place by nationality

		Nationality		Total
		Finnish	Other	
Yes, why?	Count	3	4	7
	% within Nationality	13,6%	22,2%	17,5%
No	Count	19	14	33
	% within Nationality	86,4%	77,8%	82,5%
Total	Count	22	18	40
	% within Nationality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

As shown in Table 5, there are no substantial differences in the proportion between Finnish respondents and respondents with other nationality who got accepted into another degree programme but confirmed their study places in MUBBA.

Altogether both questions (Q8 and Q9) uncovered the moment of purchase stage during the consumer decision journey.

5.2.5 Purchase experience

In order to assess the purchase experience stage in the consumer decision journey, participants were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction for a set of statements concerning their study experience in the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. The statements included other dimensions than the Degree Programme itself for being intrinsic to the studying experience. Question 10 presented the statements into a rating matrix using a Likert scale where 1 is 'Very dissatisfied' and 5 is 'Very satisfied'.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of dimensions of satisfaction

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HAAGA-HELIA as a place to study	40	2	5	4,20	,758
MUBBA as a degree program	40	2	5	3,77	,733
Teaching and learning environment	40	1	5	3,50	,961
Business courses	40	1	5	3,28	,960
Language courses	40	1	5	3,87	,883
Opportunities for internship	40	1	5	3,63	1,005
Student exchange opportunities	40	2	5	4,05	,876
Networking	40	2	4	3,20	,608
Other	5	1	5	2,60	1,817
Valid N (listwise)	5				

Table 6 shows the average of satisfaction regarding the student experience. Notice that in option 'Other' there were 5 responses, of which only 3 were valid. One respondent filled the text with suspensive dots and the other one repeated one of the given dimensions, *networking*.

Observing the standard deviations, respondents had very divergent opinions regarding almost every dimension of the student satisfaction. Except for 'Other', the biggest difference is for 'Opportunities for internship', with a standard deviation of 1,005. By contrast, the dimension where students are more consistent in their rating is 'Networking' with a standard deviation of 0,608. It is important to mention that all students are in this stage, 'consuming' the study experience irrespective of their entrance year.

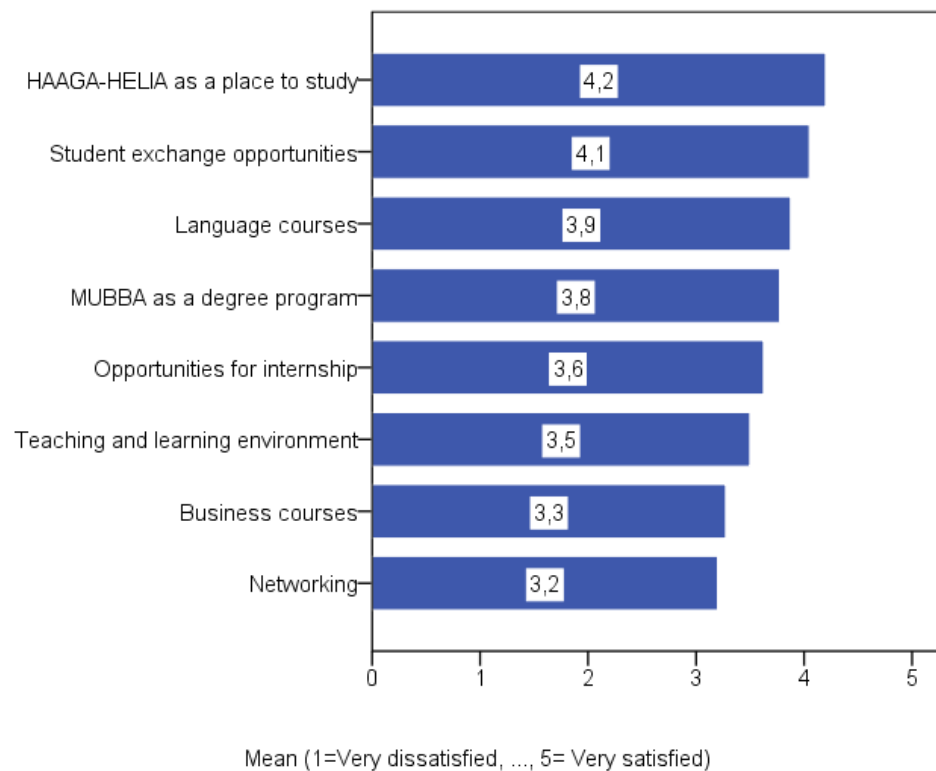


Figure 18. Student satisfaction of respondents

As shown in Figure 18, respondents are satisfied. 'HAAGA-HELIA as a place to study' and 'Student exchange opportunities' are the dimensions enjoying the highest satisfaction with a mean of 4,2 and 4,1, respectively. Similarly, respondents are satisfied with 'Language courses' and with 'MUBBA as a degree programme'.

The category 'Other', which is not presented in Figure 18 because of low response rate, accounted with only 3 valid answers. Respondents were dissatisfied with *Arrangement with some courses and thesis supervisors*, and *Networking*. Although on average 'Networking' was rated neutral, one respondent expressed in the open text field that the student target for the Degree Programme is very women-oriented, for which networking with male counterparts is limited.

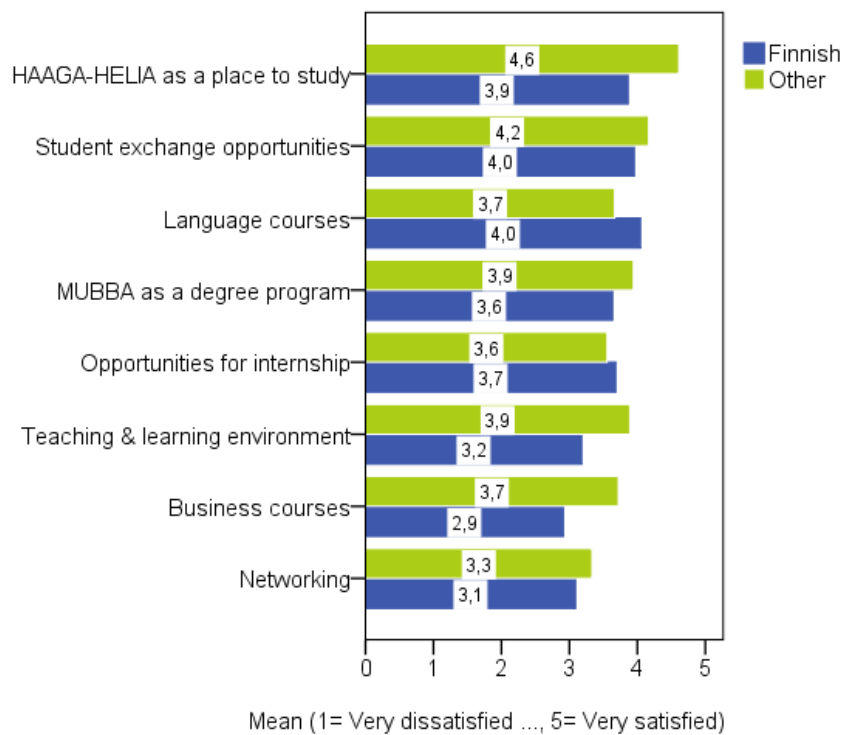


Figure 19. Student satisfaction by nationality

From the nationality perspective, Figure 19 shows that both Finnish respondents and respondents with other nationality are quite satisfied with most of the dimensions regarding their studying experience. However, respondents with other nationality reported to be slightly more satisfied in almost every dimension – the main differences are regarding ‘HAAGA-HELIA as a place to study’, ‘Teaching and learning environment’ and ‘Business courses’ – than Finnish respondents.

In a similar way, question 11 aims to uncover the purchase experience by asking respondents with a dichotomous question: have they ever thought of quitting or applying to another bachelor degree programme either at HAAGA-HELIA or at another institution. In each alternative respondents were required to justify their answer in a text field.

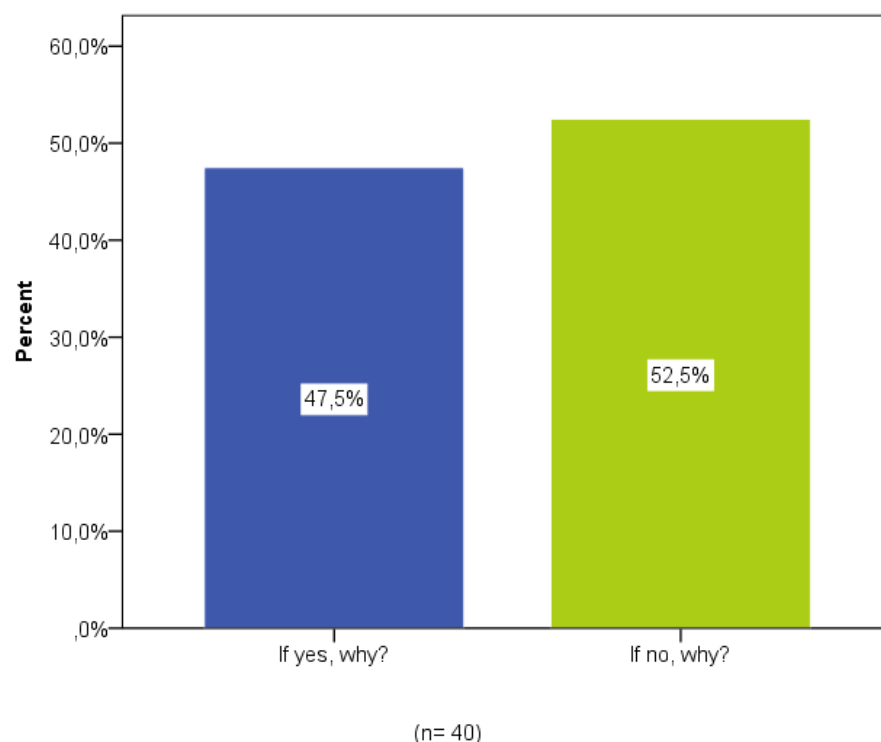


Figure 20. Respondent's intention of quitting or applying to another degree programme

As Figure 20 shows, 47,5% of all respondents have thought of quitting or applying to another degree programme while 52,5% have not considered either option.

Table 7. Cross-tabulation of intention of quitting MUBBA by nationality

		Nationality		Total
		Finnish	Other	
If yes, why?	Count	14	5	19
	% within Nationality	63,6%	27,8%	47,5%
If no, why?	Count	8	13	21
	% within Nationality	36,4%	72,2%	52,5%
Total	Count	22	18	40
	% within Nationality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 7 shows that 63,6 % of Finnish respondents were considering to quit or apply to another bachelor degree programme compared to 27,8% of respondents with other nationality.

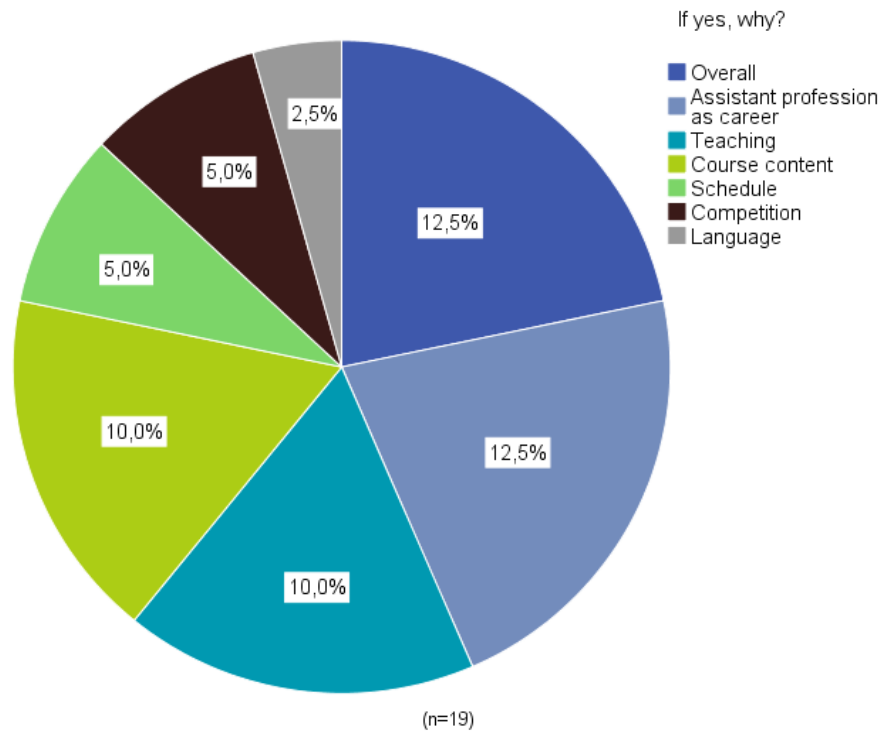


Figure 21. Reasons why respondents thought of quitting MUBBA

The open-ended answers given by respondents who answered 'Yes' were labeled and categorized as shown in Figure 21. As stated earlier, some respondents gave more than one argument when justifying their answers. The categories are explained with the following comments collected from the respondents.

- Overall. The degree programme does not suit me well.
- Assistant as profession career. The assistant job is not appreciated in the business world; I'm unmotivated for my future career; I'm afraid of not finding a job after graduation.
- Teaching. The level of teaching is not very good; usually it is difficult to communicate by e-mail with some lecturers.
- Course content. Lack of scope of business courses; content repetition in many business courses.
- Schedule. Inflexible course schedules; too tight schedules during the first year.
- Competition. Metropolia offers a double degree certificate; I applied to the University of Helsinki to get proper academic education.
- Language. Same degree programme in Finnish language.

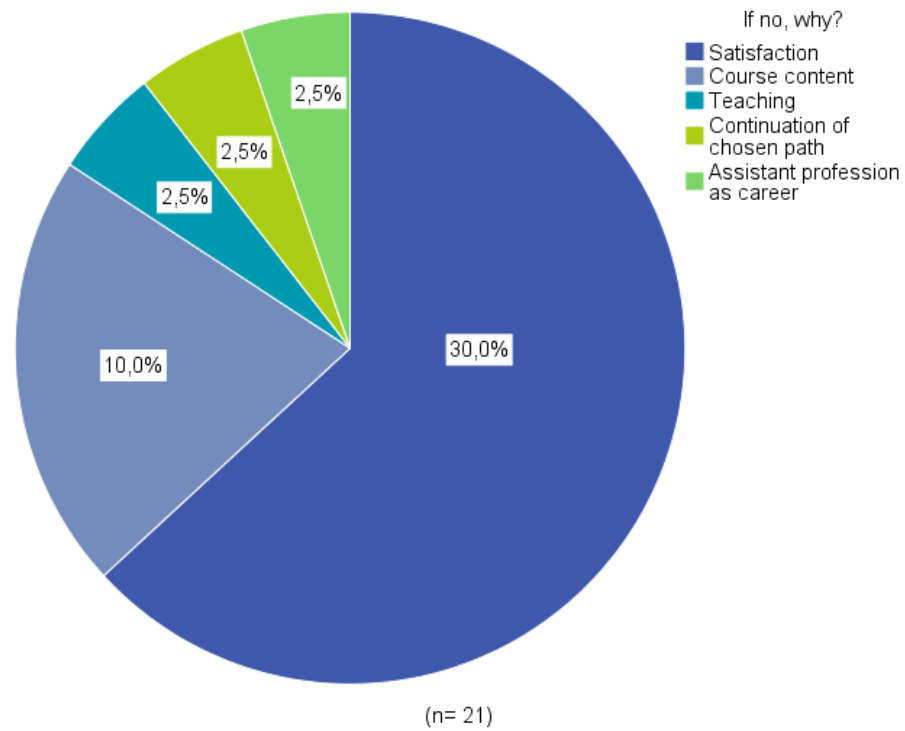


Figure 22. Reasons why respondents had not considered quitting MUBBA

Among the respondents who answered 'No', the main reasons are explained as follows:

- Satisfaction. I feel satisfied with MUBBA.
- Course content. Interesting business courses; great languages courses.
- Teaching. Nice to have native English teachers and teachers from different countries.
- Continuation of the chosen path. I do not like to quit after I have started something.
- Assistant profession as career. I am interested in assistant job; there are good chances to get a job with this Degree Programme.

Altogether both questions (Q10 and Q11) uncovered the purchase experience stage during the consumer decision journey.

5.2.6 Trigger

Based on their experience and ongoing exposure to the Degree Programme, participants were asked whether the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants have met their expectations or not. Thus, question 12 presents a multiple choice, single response question followed by a text field to justify each answer.

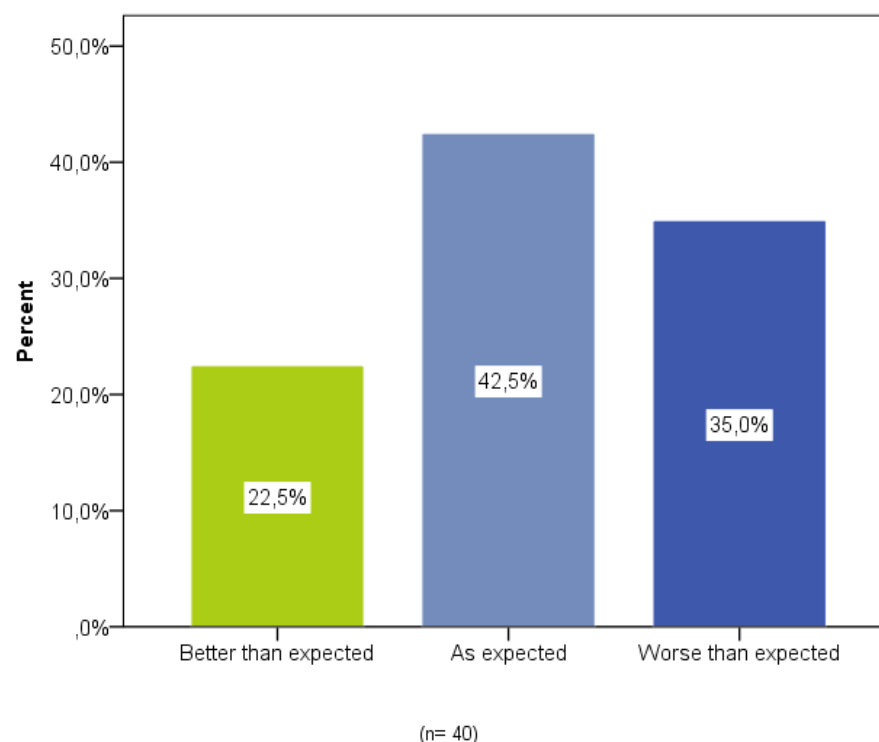


Figure 23. Expectations of repondents

Figure 23 shows that the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants had met the expectations of most respondents, in total 42,5%. In an even more positive light, 22,5% of the repondents considered the Degree Programme better than expected. By contrast, a big proportion of the respondents, in total 35%, considered the Degree Programme worse than expected.

Table 8. Cross-tabulation of expectations by nationality

		Nationality		Total
		Finnish	Other	
If better than expected, how?	Count	4	5	9
	% within Nationality	18,2%	27,8%	22,5%
If as expected, how?	Count	6	11	17
	% within Nationality	27,3%	61,1%	42,5%
If worse than expected, how?	Count	12	2	14
	% within Nationality	54,5%	11,1%	35,0%
Total	Count	22	18	40
	% within Nationality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

As Table 8 shows, 61,1% of respondents with other nationality felt that the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants had met their expectations compared to 27,3% of Finnish respondents. Likewise, 27,8% of respondents with other nationality felt that MUBBA had exceeded their expectations compared to 18,2% of Finnish

respondents. Noticeably, the Degree Programme is worse than expected for 54,5% of Finnish respondents by contrast to 11,1% of respondents with other nationality.

For each alternative, it was required that respondents justify their selected option with an open-ended answer. The answers were varied and some respondents gave more than one reason.

Better than expected

- Better job opportunities than other BBAs.
- Good business courses and interesting language courses.
- Interesting Degree Programme.
- Teaching is excellent. Teachers ask for feedback.
- Internship and exchange opportunities are excellent.

As expected

- Studying is not demanding.
- I got realistic expectations from a friend.
- Teaching level is good.
- Good business and language courses.
- Independent studies combined with lectures.

Worse than expected

- Name of the Degree Program is discouraging.
- The quality of the Degree Programme is overrated.
- The organization of courses is not good; gap between language courses.
- IT courses need to cover more topics.
- Teachers are not very competent, need better guidance from the thesis supervisor.
- There is pressure to graduate fast.
- The MUBBA Degree Programme is treated differently than ASSI.
- Few native English teachers.
- We are required to work in teams a lot.
- Too easy and unchallenging Degree Programme.

5.2.7 Loyalty loop

At the loyalty loop stage, participants were asked to rate the probability among a set of loyalty actions that could be undertaken by their part. In a rating matrix, question 13 com-

bines the loyalty statements using a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Extremely unlikely' and 5 is 'Extremely likely'.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of loyalty actions

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Join HAAGA-HELIA alumni after graduation	40	1	5	3,03	1,025
Recommend MUBBA to a friend or family member	40	2	5	3,78	,862
Share online positive opinions and experiences about MUBBA	40	1	5	3,60	,841
Talk in a positive light about MUBBA	40	2	5	3,97	,768
Valid N (listwise)	40				

Table 9 shows that, on average, respondents are inclined to take loyalty actions toward the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants.

The ratings of the respondents varied regarding the first statement 'Join HAAGA-HELIA alumni after graduation', with a standard deviation of 1,025. For the rest of the statements the standard deviation is lower than 1, which means that the respondents' ratings do not vary significantly around the mean.

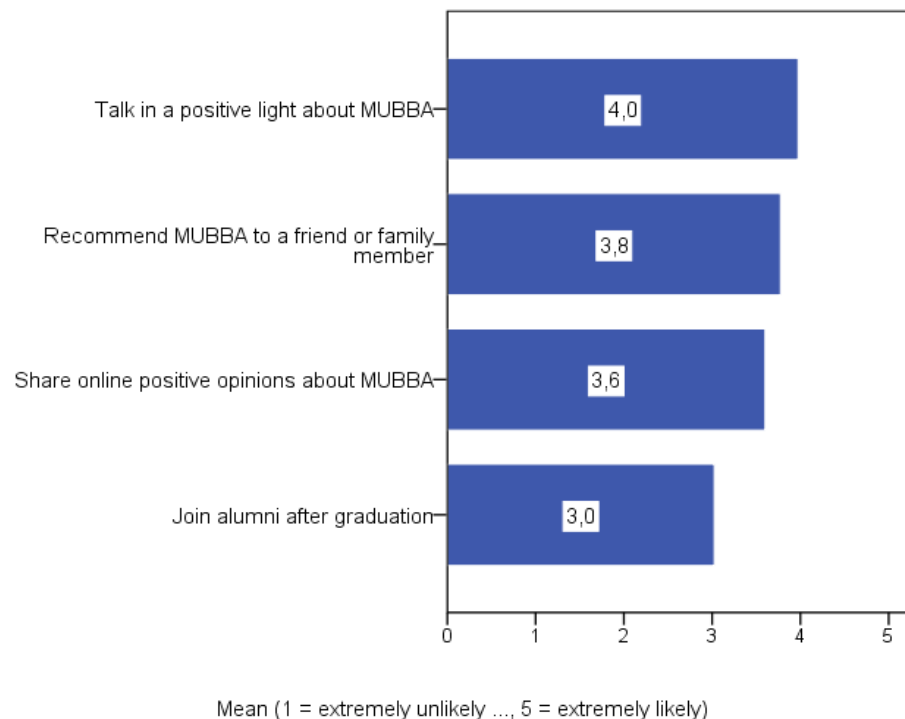


Figure 24. Loyalty actions that could be undertaken

Generally speaking, it is likely that respondents become advocates for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants.

As depicted in Figure 24, 'Talk in a positive light about MUBBA' is clearly expressed with a mean of 4,0. 'Recommend the degree programme to a friend or family member' shows a similar tendency with a mean of 3,8 as well as 'Sharing positive opinions and experiences online' with a mean of 3,6. On the other hand, it is not likely that respondents 'Join the alumni after graduation'. This option was rated as neutral with a mean of 3,0.

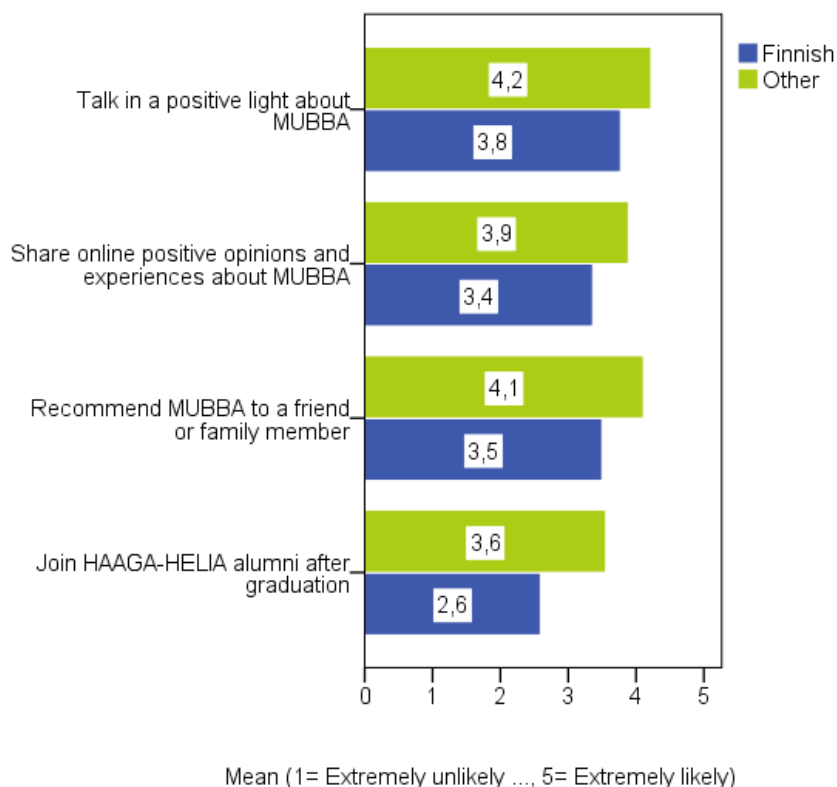


Figure 25. Loyalty actions that could be undertaken by nationality

As depicted in Figure 25, respondents with other nationality are more inclined to undertake loyalty actions than Finnish respondents. The main difference is observed in the statement 'Join HAAGA-HELIA alumni after graduation'.

Although this research is not focusing on measuring awareness, it is considered that students who are aware of certain facts, such as that HAAGA-HELIA has been ranked as the best-known University of Applied Sciences in Finland for the last three years, are more likely to feel pride of belonging to its student community and share positive word-of-mouth among their peers. Consequently, awareness was tackled in question 14 and thus

included in the loyalty loop stage. Question 14 asked respondents with a dichotomous yes/no question whether they knew this fact or not.

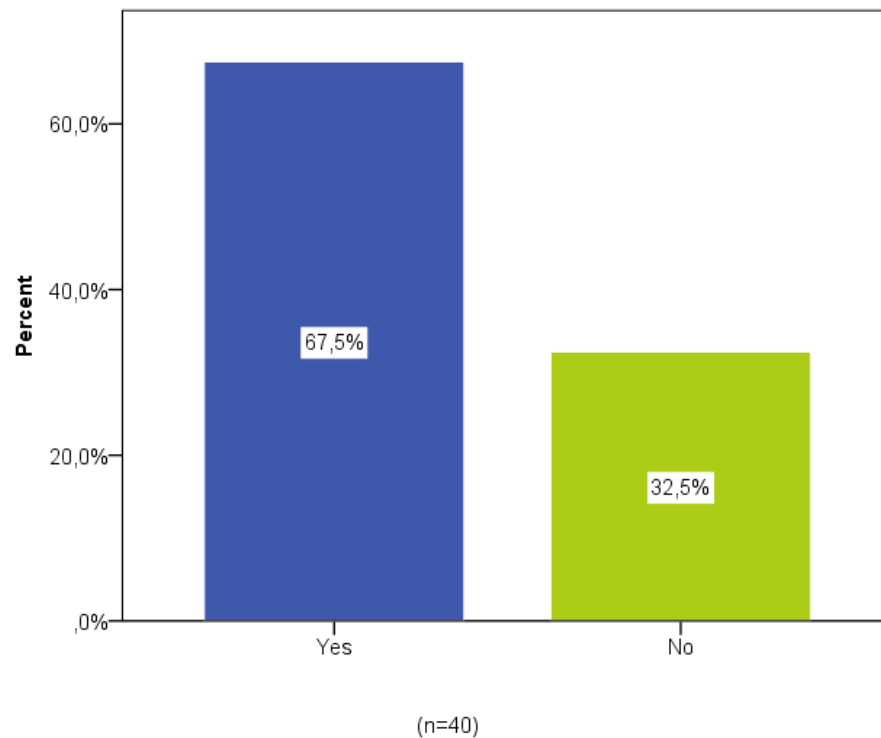


Figure 26. Awareness of HAAGA-HELIA as the best-known UAS

Figure 26 shows that most respondents, in total 67,5%, were aware of HAAGA-HELIA as the best-known University of Applied Sciences in Finland contrary to 32,5% of the respondents who were not aware of this.

Table 10. Cross-tabulation of awareness by nationality

		Nationality		Total
		Finnish	Other	
Yes	Count	14	13	27
	% within Nationality	63,6%	72,2%	67,5%
No	Count	8	5	13
	% within Nationality	36,4%	27,8%	32,5%
Total	Count	22	18	40
	% within Nationality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

As shown in Table 10, there are no marked differences between Finnish respondents and respondents with other nationality regarding this aspect of awareness.

The last dimension included in the loyalty stage was the intention of 're-purchase'. Participants were asked whether they were considering to continue their studies at

master's level. Although there are not specific master degree programmes as a continuation path for the Multilingual Management Assistants graduates, other business programs at master's level could be pursued in HAAGA-HELIA. Thus, question 16 was a multiple choice, single response question that aimed to uncover the degree of loyalty of respondents given their experience in MUBBA.

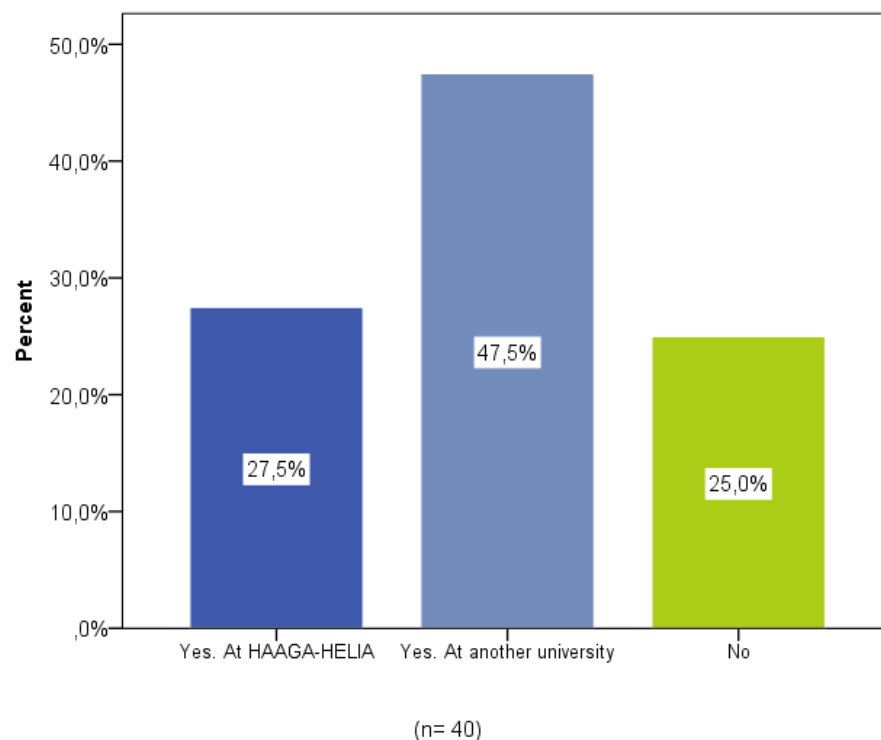


Figure 27. Consideration of studies at master's level by respondents

Figure 27 shows that 75% of the respondents would like to continue their studies at master's level, out of which 47,5% would like to apply to another university and 27,5% would like to apply to HAAGA-HELIA master's degree programmes. By contrast, 25% of the respondents are not considering taking master's studies yet.

Table 11. Cross-tabulation of continuation of studies at master's level by nationality

		Nationality		Total
		Finnish	Other	
Yes. At HAAGA-HELIA	Count	5	6	11
	% within Nationality	22,7%	33,3%	27,5%
Yes. At another university	Count	11	8	19
	% within Nationality	50,0%	44,4%	47,5%
No	Count	6	4	10
	% within Nationality	27,3%	22,2%	25,0%
Total	Count	22	18	40
	% within Nationality	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

As shown in Table 11, most respondents would like to continue their studies at master's level at another university. No marked differences between Finnish respondents and respondents with other nationality are observed.

5.2.8 Effective marketing communications

Participants were finally asked to consider which of the marketing communications channels are the most effective to advertise the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. Question 15 provided respondents with a set of options combined with a Likert scale for rating the sources according to their degree of effectiveness. The scale ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Very ineffective' and 5 is 'Very effective'.

Table 12. Descriptive statistics of effective marketing communications by respondents

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HAAGA-HELIA web page	40	2	5	4,10	,810
Word-of-mouth	40	2	5	4,35	,700
Social media	40	2	5	4,20	,853
Printed material	40	1	5	3,15	,921
Fairs - events	40	1	5	3,80	,966
Other websites	40	1	5	3,75	,954
Other	5	3	5	4,40	,894
Valid N (listwise)	5				

As in previous questions, 'Other' was added to provide respondents with an open choice in case the information source they wanted to rate were not included in the original set. Therefore, 'Other' was non-compulsory and, as shown in Table 12, only 5 respondents had selected this option. High standard deviations observed in Table 11 indicate that the ratings were dispersed from the mean for each source.

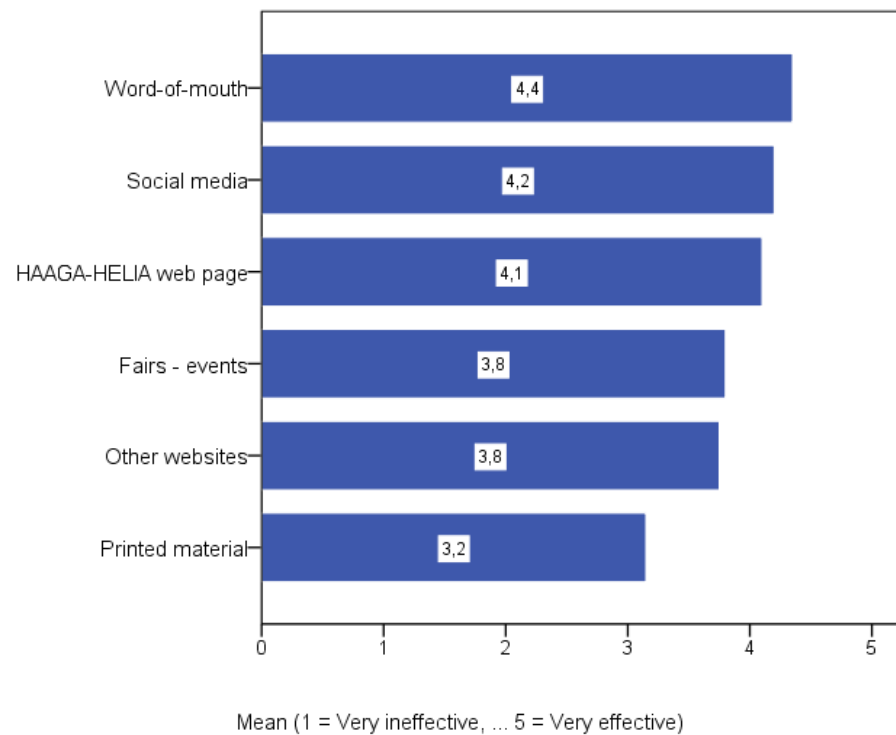


Figure 28. Effectiveness of channels for advertising MUBBA according to the respondents

Figure 28 illustrates the sources considered as most effective by respondents. Interestingly, 'Word-of-mouth' with a mean of 4,4 was considered the most effective information source. Likewise, 'Social media' and 'HAAGA-HELIA web page' were also considered effective with a mean of 4,2 and 4,1, respectively. 'Fairs – events', and 'Other websites' (Opintopolku.fi and Studyinfinland.fi) both had a mean of 3,8, which indicates they have a strong tendency toward effectiveness. As expected, 'Printed material' was rated as neutral.

The option 'Other' is not depicted in Figure 28 because only 3 out of 5 answers were valid. Under this category, respondents rated Studentum.fi and *Networking with international institutions* as very effective and Vk.com as effective.

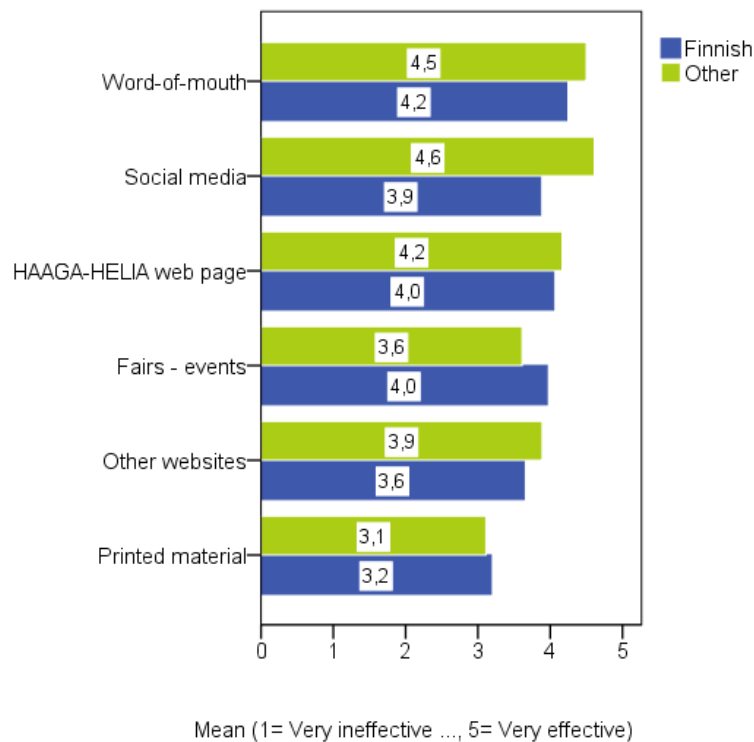


Figure 29. Effectiveness of sources for advertising MUBBA by nationality

According to Figure 29, Finnish respondents rated 'Fairs-events' as more effective than respondents with other nationality. 'Social media', on the other hand, was considered more effective by the latter than by Finnish students.

In an attempt to identify the most influential marketing communications sources, the information sources that have been used by HAAGA-HELIA are contrasted against the information sources respondents perceived as most effective in providing information about the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants.

Table 13. Comparison of means between usefulness versus effectiveness of information sources to advertise MUBBA

Statements	Sources consulted (Q7)	Effectiveness (Q15)	Difference
HAAGA-HELIA web page	4,21	4,1	0,11
Word-of-mouth	3,06	4,4	-1,34
Social media	2,23	4,2	-1,97
Printed material	2,00	3,2	-1,2
Fair – event	1,82	3,8	-1,98
Other websites	2,23	3,8	-1,57
TOTAL - Average	2,59	3,91	-1,32

As one can see, Table 13 showcases the gap between the usefulness of the sources consulted to find more information about the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants, which was asked in question 7, against the estimation of the effectiveness the same sources could offer to advertise the Degree Programme in the future, which was asked in question 15. Notice that the highest mean is highlighted in bold font while the biggest differences are displayed in red font.

Table 13 shows that 'Word-of-mouth', 'Social media', 'Fairs-events', and 'Other websites' were the marketing communications sources respondents considered as most effective for advertising the Degree Programme although they proved to be of less usefulness at the active evaluation stage.

This information can be utilised when it comes to considering the channels of future marketing communications campaigns. In other words, there may be an unexploited potential in those sources or that respondents were expecting to find more relevant information in them than they actually did, except for the 'HAAGA-HELIA web page'.

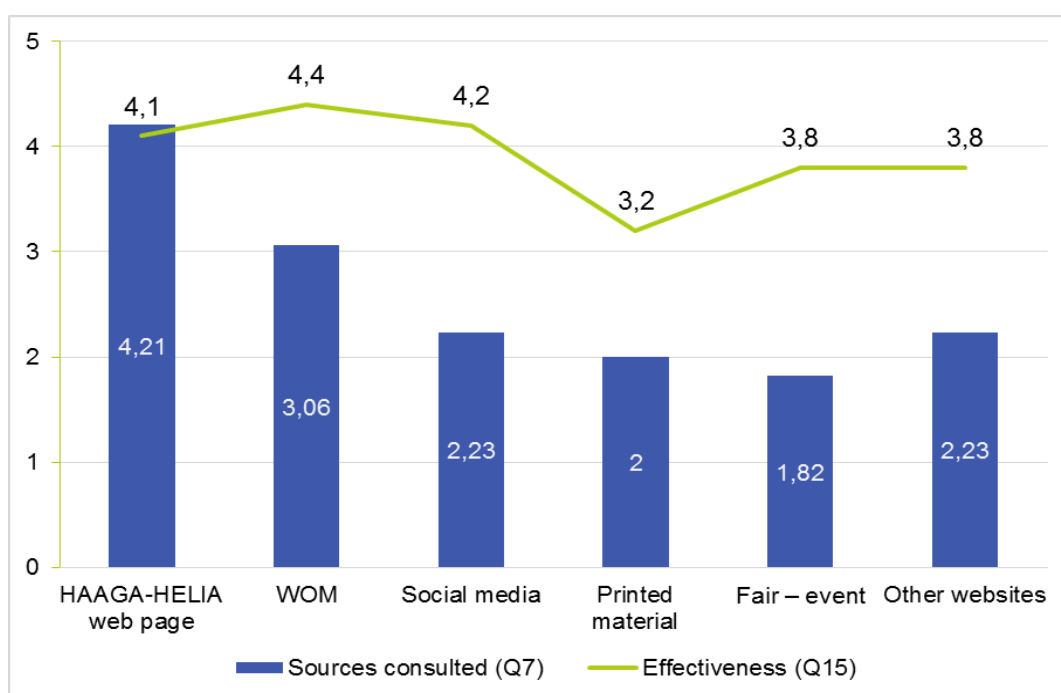


Figure 30. Gap between sources consulted and estimation of effectiveness of sources

As observed in Figure 30, respondents considered the potential of each information source – with the exception of the 'HAAGA-HELIA web page' - higher than the usefulness they provided when respondents had consulted them.

Generally speaking, the 'HAAGA-HELIA web page' is above the expectations of the respondents in terms of its usefulness because it provided them with more useful information at the time they were potential students at the evaluation of alternatives stage, than they actually consider a website could do.

5.2.9 Interpretation of the survey results

Generally speaking, the respondents of the questionnaire match the target audience of HAAGA-HELIA. The majority of respondents were between 18 and 25 years old. The nationality, which was the main variable for the analysis of the survey findings, was proportional between Finnish students and students with a different nationality.

To answer the first research question, which is related to the marketing communications topic, it is clear the role that digital media plays in reaching a well-informed and digital savvy youth. The importance placed by students to the HAAGA-HELIA web page, online search, social media and word-of-mouth in conveying relevant information about the MUBBA Degree Programme is observed with no relevant differences between Finnish students and students with other nationality.

This trend is noted by Moran, Muzellec and Nolan (2014, 200) by examining digitally empowered consumers who typically search online information actively before making purchasing decisions and are simultaneously influenced by word-of-mouth recommendations.

From the survey findings one sees that printed material – which includes fliers, brochures and magazines – shows a low rate in providing useful information during the active evaluation stage of the respondents. This is no surprise because printed material was rated in a subsequent question as the lowest effective channel for advertising the Degree Programme in the future.

To answer the second research question, the next paragraphs will suffice to describe the main findings of the decision journey of current MUBBA students. As one sees, the content of language studies is the main reason why most students - irrespective of the nationality variable - applied to the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants, which is related to the moment of purchase stage.

It is encouraging to note that respondents are satisfied with the MUBBA Degree Programme and with HAAGA-HELIA as a place to study, these two elements being inseparable of the studying experience observed in the purchase experience stage. More specifi-

cally, the offering of language courses and exchange and internship opportunities are highlighted.

In a similar fashion, the survey findings show that students have a positive tendency for undertaking loyalty actions based on their studying experience and awareness of the good reputation of HAAGA-HELIA. By contrast, issues such as becoming an assistant after graduation and the subjective perception that the assistant career is not highly valued in business life represent the major dissatisfying factors that have made students to consider quitting MUBBA or applying to another degree programme. These are enclosed in the trigger element of the decision journey, where students may be conveyed toward the loyalty loop in case they spread the positive voice of MUBBA and enroll to master's programmes at HAAGA-HELIA in the future.

The interview about integrated marketing communications implemented by HAAGA-HELIA presented in Chapter 5.1 is merely descriptive, and as such its purpose was to provide a framework for understanding the survey findings, draw valid conclusions and elaborate useful recommendations. Therefore, the interview findings are not analysed.

To answer the third research question (what improvements could be made and what should be taken into consideration for the next marketing communications plan), the recommendations from the author of the thesis are fused with the open feedback given by respondents in the last question of the survey (Q17), and thus presented in the recommendations section in Chapter 6.2.

6 Evaluation

This is the final chapter of the thesis paper and covers four main parts. First, the conclusions arrived after the analysis of the results and the recommendations are presented. Next, the external validity and reliability of the study is followed by the ethical considerations observed during the thesis process. The chapter ends with a self-learning assessment and a brief reflection of the thesis process.

6.1 Conclusions

One pivotal decision that higher education institutions need to make is to adequately select and combine the most effective communications channels to differentiate themselves from other degree choices in order to reach prospective students with constraints in their budgetary resources. This implies that higher education institutions should explore in detail their target audiences to find out about their information needs, wishes, expectations and how they make decisions that involve extensive periods of time.

As noted earlier, the Ministry of Education of Finland (2009) has weighted the importance of foreign students to tackle the issue of low internationality in its higher education institutions as part of the Internationalization of Higher Education Strategy. Aligned with this end, HAAGA-HELIA aims its marketing communications to attract prospective foreign students beyond its boundaries as well as the ones who are already living in the Uusimaa region in order to sustain and further develop its multicultural environment.

Alluding to the first research question, the most effective marketing communications modes for addressing prospective students for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants are the HAAGA-HELIA web page, social media platforms and word-of-mouth recommendations. This is especially true as electronic media provides a richer and more interactive engaging experience that traditional marketing and paper publications cannot provide.

An important observation is that the same information sources that made students aware of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants at the initial consideration stage were the same they referred to when searching for additional information at the active evaluation stage, except for social media which was not found in the first set. In other words, the survey results indicate that social media offers a huge potential that could be further exploited.

Regarding the second research question – the consumer decision journey – the aim should be to provide a higher quality education and an enjoyable studying experience because students and graduates are going to spread the voice about MUBBA and HAAGA-HELIA among their family members, friends and acquaintances whether it is online or offline, or both.

In turn, these peer endorsements would guide and simplify the decision journey of prospective students during the initial consideration and active evaluation stages. That is how reputation and awareness is built in a society increasingly driven by online communications, which is out of control of marketers.

A positive studying experience should be provided at each stage throughout the consumer decision journey of MUBBA students to help maintain the high awareness and positive brand image among prospective students, sponsors and the general community. David Edelman (2012, 27), principal of the digital marketing strategy group at McKinsey & Co., resumes the importance of word-of-mouth by stating that “all marketing in the world can’t cover up the quality of the experience with the product”. Hence, the sharing of a highly engaging brand experience through WOM is considered of paramount importance.

6.2 Recommendations

To date, the current practices in marketing communications developed by HAAGA-HELIA to advertise all degree programmes under a unique umbrella have proved to be highly effective. In other words, there are no tailored communications campaigns for individual degree programmes.

For this reason, an imperative for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants is to distinguish itself from other study options offered by HAAGA-HELIA and by other universities, and sense and closely follow the communication trends among the youth. This being said, there is much room for improvement.

Hence, it is highly recommended to design a unique communications message for the Degree Programme. According to Moogan (2011, 570), tailor-made communications strategies allow positioning within the competitive environment. To meet this purpose, the following set of actions and activities are suggested:

- A short survey should be conducted at the final phase of the application process asking applicants where they heard about the Degree Programme for Multilingual

Management Assistants and the reason for their choice. At this stage, it is assumed that applicants have a better recall than at a later stage. The input would allow to measure past marketing communications efforts and would provide up-to-date information about the trends in marketing communications channels followed by the youth.

A pertinent observation about the survey results is that it might have been difficult for current students to recall the information sources from which they heard about the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. Remember there were respondents whose year of entrance dated since 2010.

- Although this research does not reflect the gender of students, the marketing communications message for the MUBBA Degree Programme should address explicitly women and men as part of their target audience to level up applicants of both sexes. The unbalanced proportion between genders was addressed by students in the open feedback (Q17). Thus, it is suggested to use student male champions who have excelled in their fields to encourage the application of male students.
- Similarly, and as currently done, real stories from students champions are recommended to provide an insight for prospective students during their active evaluation stage. Nevertheless, alternative channels in cooperation with students of other degree programmes are suggested.

Blogs, based on testimonials and interesting stories of students of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants about their internships, student exchanges, special events or other remarkable experiences. In turn, these blogs could be integrated to the HAAGA-HELIA web page in the same way that the YouTube video of MUBBA is embedded. The blogs could also convey potential applicants toward the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants web site and vice versa.

E-newsletters constitute another way of disseminating information to prospective students (Moogan 2011, 581.) E-newsletters could be written by current students specializing in journalism or communications as part of their assignments.

- Based on its language of instruction, the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants has a great potential to attract international students. It can

differentiate itself from the ASSI Degree Programme, which is conducted in Finnish language, on the grounds that studying in English as a global language truly weights in an international degree certificate. Likewise, native English teachers are seen by current students as of excellent quality for the added benefit of their language skills. For this reason, native English teachers could address a quota to the issue of internationality when advertising the MUBBA Degree Programme.

- Once prospective students become 'consumers of the studying experience' it is considered critical to reinforce the positive image of the MUBBA Degree Programme. This suggestion is based on the grounds that some respondents have a skewed image of the assistant career, and many have expressed their doubts in finding a suitable job after graduation. These were observed in the feedback given in question 17.

Therefore, story-telling from graduates at interesting job positions and viewpoints of highly reputed employers could emphasize the importance and value of the assistant career in business life. In a similar manner this is supported by Moogan (2011, 581), who points out that "alumni are useful sources of promotion whereby publication of past students' careers and progression since leaving university can be advertised". At this stage, the purchase experience, face-to-face interactions during seminars, lectures and events are favoured.

- An exclusive social networking site such as a Facebook page for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants is highly recommended. By doing this, there is a two-fold benefit.

For one part, online ratings could be used to quickly measure and track student satisfaction and gather continuous feedback during the purchase experience stage. Careful attention should be paid to the metrics of social networks. Simply counting 'Likes' in Facebook, for example, does not imply engagement with the Degree Programme. That said, the focus should be placed on driving e-WOM engagement activities. (Moran, Muzellec & Nolan 2014, 204).

At the same time, positive e-WOM collected, for example in the suggested Facebook page, could be indexed to appear in search-engine results to provide a positive initial 'moment of truth' for online-seekers. Online ratings and e-WOM are never confidential and as such feedback could be acted upon when considered appropriate.

- The Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants could be enhanced by integrating some mandatory courses in cooperation with other degree programmes, and at the same time, adding a multidimensional approach to the MUBBA Degree Programme. This is on the grounds that some respondents expressed in question 17 their dissatisfaction about some business and IT courses. These students could enhance their skills while meeting their academic expectations.
- The Career Planning assessment takes place three times during the completion of the studies. They could represent an excellent opportunity to track and enhance the purchase experience stage of MUBBA students, which is the lengthiest stage during the decision-making process. For instance, at the end of the semester students could be asked whether their expectations were met or not, whether they faced major challenges in their learning experience, and practical solutions should be offered in a one-to-one environment.
- In a similar fashion, individual needs should also be emphasized to support students to achieve their academic goals toward a smoother transition to their career paths. This is of paramount importance for students at the end of their studies and a driver of positive word-of-mouth.
- It is important to measure student satisfaction by conducting online surveys about teaching quality, as expressed to be of major discontent in some respondents. Likewise, it is important to find out other drivers of their loyalty that could be spurred. At later stages of the student journey, it is recommended to promote the master degree programme offering and alumni benefits.

To summarize, the long-term demographic decline in Finland, a fierce competition of higher education institutions and a governmental policy to embrace internationalization as strategy are three major converging challenges.

The Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants should set up a plan of marketing events that distinguish itself and at the same time is mutually integrated with the overall marketing communications strategy of HAAGA-HELIA. This integration would form a logical pattern in attracting domestic and international prospective students.

In fact, there are three elements, namely the management assistant career, content of language studies – observed as the main reason why students applied to the Degree Pro-

gramme – and English as the language of instruction, that encapsulate the essence from which to build a crystal-clear value proposition in the future.

The City of Helsinki plan to unite East and West Pasila into a modern and vibrant Central Pasila by 2020s. Several degree programmes, among them the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants, are instructed in Pasila campus. That said, it is believed that Central Pasila will enhance the attractiveness of the location of HAAGA-HELIA for prospective students, and that could be used to support future marketing communications messages.

This paper outlines that following the trend in marketing communications channels among the youth is critical for assuring effectiveness of future campaigns and for raising brand awareness. This study suggests that social networking and generating word-of-mouth recommendations, both online and offline, should be used more extensively thanks to their price-benefit relation to advertise and built awareness about the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants.

6.3 External validity and reliability

In essence, external validity is mainly about making generalizations. Nevertheless, there is a different criteria used in qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In qualitative methods, the claim is not to generalize the findings to a wider population. By contrast, in quantitative methods, external validity is highly dependent on sampling, development of instruments and statistical analyses. (Basit 2010, 64; Cooper & Schindler 2011, 219).

Although all the elements of the population of interest were selected, only 40 responses, which accounts for a low response rate of 17, 4% of the population, answered the survey. However, some prior considerations were taken into account in an attempt to maximize the participation in the survey:

- The database containing the email addresses of current students was updated and reliable. The possibilities of non-delivery or non-return emails were discarded.
- Oral notifications were made in advance by the Degree Programme Director to encourage participation.
- The covering note assured anonymity, emphasized the importance of participation to improve the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants and highlighted the completion time of 10 minutes on average.
- An incentive to participate in a lottery to win movie tickets was employed.
- For the same purpose, a reminder was sent to encourage participation.

Complying with ethical considerations in business research, the participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and therefore subordinated to the student's cooperation. This is known as the right of free and informed choice presented in Chapter 6.4. Consequently, it is not appropriate to claim that the conclusions arrived at the end of this research can be generalized to the whole population of interest, which includes those who did not answer the survey.

As stated before, qualitative methods do not claim generalizability, although fuzzy generalizations can be made stating that what was found in a singular study is possible, likely, or unlikely to be found in similar situations (Basit 2010, 66). This being said, the interview findings are not representative of other cases and populations. It cannot be claimed that marketing communications plans are developed and managed at other universities of applied sciences in the same way as it is done at HAAGA-HELIA. Nevertheless, the interview findings cannot be considered invalid on this ground. Hence, external validity is irrelevant for the qualitative methodology of this research.

6.4 Ethical considerations

According to Daymon and Holloway (2002, 78-87), there is a number of ethical principles that should be followed during the stages of planning, implementing and managing the results of the research. The following ethical principles and conventions were observed and complied with during this thesis research process.

The right of free and informed choice. Based on the right of participants to decide whether to answer a survey or not, data collection is always subordinated to people's cooperation. (Daymon & Holloway 2002, 78). Therefore, the participation in the survey of this study was entirely voluntary based on the right of free and informed choice.

Privacy and protection from harm. The online survey was anonymous to avoid biased answers. Anonymity was ensured and the right of privacy protected. The lottery survey link, which contained the email addresses of respondents who registered for the lottery, was embedded in the main survey. Hence, anonymity was guaranteed because the two links were independent and could not track the respondents' identification. There was no risk of participants getting harmed or inconvenienced.

A second dimension of privacy is confidentiality. It suggests that issues and opinions that participants wish to keep in secret should not be revealed. In this research confidentiality issues were limited. All the information gathered during the interview was allowed to be

published in this paper - this oral consent was granted by the Communicator Manager of the institution in the course of the interview – except for the budget estimation and expenses (amount in euros) allocated to the marketing communications at HAAGA-HELIA.

Additionally, the formal permission for the publication of the thesis report was given in the thesis commissioning agreement, which was duly signed by the Degree Programme Director. Therefore, there is no risk of exposing private issues for the commissioner party.

Autonomy and informed consent. The principle of autonomy refers to the explicit agreement between the researcher and the participants by which the latter ones allow the data collection to fulfil the research objectives. (Daymon & Holloway 2002, 82).

In the case of the online survey, participants who decided to answer the questionnaire gave their permission to use their input data for the research purposes because these conditions were previously stated in the covering note. Actually, the covering note is the informed consent itself. It communicates the identification of the researcher, contact information and the name of the university so that respondents know they are dealing with a bona fide researcher. This consent is confirmed by the action of submitting their answers online.

Autonomy and debriefing. Debriefing implies that the research outcomes and the gained knowledge are shared with the participants or the ones interested about the findings and implications of the research. (Daymon & Holloway 2002, 84).

The thesis commissioner complied with this principle of autonomy by presenting the most significant survey findings to the academic staff of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants and other interested staff members of the university. Similarly, a brief summary with the most significant findings from the survey was uploaded in MyNet, the intranet site of HAAGA-HELIA, on 12 December 2014. The report was accessible to the current students of the Degree Programme under study.

Other ethical dimensions are honesty in data collection and interpretation of the results. It includes a final report free of plagiarism. These ethical standards have been met to avoid misleading others and keeping away unethical practices.

6.5 Evaluation of the thesis process

The overall self-assessment of the thesis process is very positive. Among the strengths of the process, being a student of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants was of valuable help to gain insights and understand the context of the research. In addition, the support and flexibility offered by the Director of the Degree Programme and the Thesis Advisor made the thesis process smooth and encouraging.

The main challenge was posed by time management. For this, a weekly timeline was designed and reduction of working hours was planned in order to accomplish each activity and objective in due time. An additional challenge was represented by the shortcomings faced during the writing process considering that the author of the thesis is not a native English speaker.

In turn, these challenges became positive outcomes thanks to the abilities gained through efficient time management and formal academic writing. As a matter of fact, conducting the thesis research while taking additional courses and working part-time was challenging but rewarding.

Strengths over weakness show that although the author of the thesis was not initially specializing in the field of marketing, the skills gained during her studies allowed to conduct and complete the research project without major difficulties. In the same way, attempts were made to reduce bias, the skills for the analysis of the results were required and tested.

The thesis results were reported to be beneficial for the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants. I wish this thesis will be an inspiration and perhaps a point of reference from which to further develop research in the field of marketing communications at HAAGA-HELIA.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire for the interview

The questions are based on the Steps for Developing Effective Communications by Kotler & Keller (2012, 504.)

1. What is the target audience for the MUBBA degree programme? What is the student profile?
2. What have been the main communication objectives: brand awareness, brand attitude or brand purchase intention?
3. How is the communication in terms of message, strategy and source?
4. Which marketing communication channels have been used to advertise and promote the MUBBA programme since 2010?
5. How the budget is allocated to different communication activities?
Anything else you want to share about the budget?
6. How has been the marketing communication mix for MUBBA since 2010?
Have you considered other modes, tools and channels?
7. How do you measure the results of the marketing communications activities?
8. How the marketing communications are being managed?
How do you plan to manage the marketing communications in the future?

Appendix 2. Covering note for the online survey

Dear students,

Are we doing the right things? We would like to ask you MUBBA students, if we are providing the students with the information they need when they are applying for this degree programme. Therefore we kindly ask you to give us the information requested, so that we are able to reach the candidates and to develop our activities for this degree programme.

This will take only 5 - 10 minutes. The information that you give us will of course remain confidential.

If you wish to participate in a lottery for some movie tickets please write your name in the space provided. Three winners will receive two movie tickets each.

We warmly thank you for your input and wish you all the best for the rest of this academic year.

On behalf of the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants

Ms Riitta Yli-Tainio

Appendix 3. Example pages of the online survey



Marketing communications for the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants

I. Please provide us with the following information:

1. My age is *

- ☐ 18 - 21
- ☐ 22 - 25
- ☐ 26 - 29
- ☐ 30 or over

2. My nationality is *

- ☐ Finnish
- ☐ Other

3. When I applied for the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants *

- ☐ I was living in or near Helsinki (in the Uusimaa region).
- ☐ I was living in another part of Finland.
- ☐ I was living abroad permanently and moved to Finland for study purposes.

4. According to the year when my studies started, I belong to the group *

- ☐ MUBBA 2009
- ☐ MUBBA 2010
- ☐ MUBBA 2011
- ☐ MUBBA 2012
- ☐ MUBBA 2013
- ☐ MUBBA 2014

5. Prior to my studies in the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants *

- ☐ I was a student of another degree program at HAAGA-HELIA.
- ☐ I was a student at another university.
- ☐ I was an open university student at HAAGA-HELIA.
- ☐ I was an open university student at another university.
- ☐ I did not have any previous higher education.

II. Please answer the following questions by choosing the most relevant option to describe your experience as a student of the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants.

6. Where did you hear about the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants for the first time? *

- ☐ I recall. (Please specify).
- ☐ I do not recall.

7. Which source(s) did you consult to find more information about the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants?

Additionally evaluate the consulted source(s) in terms of its usefulness.

HAAGA-HELIA web page

Word-of-mouth (friend - family member - student - graduate)

Social media (Facebook - Twitter - LinkedIn - Instagram - YouTube)

Printed material (fliers - brochures - magazines)

Fair - event

Other websites (opintopolku.fi - studyinfinland.fi)

Other

Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. The main reason you applied to the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants was because *

- ☐ Reputation and image of MUBBA.
- ☐ My own interest in an assistant job as professional career.
- ☐ Content of language courses.
- ☐ Content of business courses.
- ☐ BBA education (tradenomi).
- ☐ Degree Program offered in English.
- ☐ Unable to get other study place.
- ☐ Other

9. Did you get accepted to more than one degree program (either at HAAGA-HELIA or at another institution of higher education) but you decided to confirm your study place in the Multilingual Management Assistants program? *

** If the reason is different from the one stated in the previous question, please specify.

☐ If yes, why?

**

☐ No

10. How satisfied are you at the moment with

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
HAAGA-HELIA as a place to study. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MUBBA as a degree program. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching and learning environment. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Business courses. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language courses. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for internship. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student exchange opportunities. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Networking. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. During your studies, have you ever thought of quitting / applying for another bachelor degree program, either at HAAGA-HELIA or at another institution? *

☐ If yes, why?

☐ If no, why?

12. How would you rate the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants in terms of your expectations? *

☐ If better than expected, how?

☐ If as expected, how?

☐ If worse than expected, how?

13. At the moment, how likely is it that you would *

	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Extremely likely
Join HAAGA-HELIA alumni after graduation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recommend MUBBA to a friend or family member.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share online positive opinions and experiences about MUBBA.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talk in a positive light about MUBBA.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Did you know that HAAGA-HELIA has been ranked number one as the best-known University of Applied Sciences in Finland during the last few years? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. Which of the following channels do you consider the most effective for advertising the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants in the future?

	Very ineffective	Ineffective	Neutral	Effective	Very effective
HAAGA-HELIA web page *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Word-of-mouth (friend - family member - student - graduate) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media (Facebook - Twitter - LinkedIn - Instagram - YouTube) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Printed material (fliers - brochures - magazines) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fairs - events *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other websites (opintopolku.fi - studvinfinland.fi) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Are you considering continuing your studies at the master's level? *

- ☐ Yes, I would like to continue my studies at the master's level at HAAGA-HELIA.
- ☐ Yes, I would like to continue my studies at the master's level at another university.
- ☐ No, I am not considering continuing my studies at the master's level.

17. We would like to hear anything else that you might have to say.

Any feedback you may have is very important for us.

100% completed



Lottery

Please provide us with your HAAGA-HELIA e-mail address:

E-mail

Submit