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Customer experience analysis for Sqore.com

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This study has been conducted for a Swedish commissioning company, Student Competitions AB. Sqore.com is a product owned by the company that was launched in 2015. It serves as a platform for companies and universities to organise challenges for prospective students and employees. These challenges give an opportunity to be granted some form of financial aid from a university or a job position, depending on the nature of the challenge.

The aim of the research was to conduct an analysis of the Sqore users who participate in education-related challenges. The main topics of interest were the users' demographics, their customer experience during the challenge and the impact this challenge had on them. Additionally, communication flow between the user and the Sqore was analysed.

The research utilizes a literature overview and quantitative method in the form of a survey. The theoretical part focuses on customer experience and customer relationship management, with some attention paid to the topic of marketing communication.

The empirical study was performed via SurveyMonkey which was used to design the survey layout, as well as to collect and analyse the responses. The survey link was distributed via two channels: a Sqore newsletter and separate emails to the Sqore users who participated in several selected challenges in the past. The responses were collected during the first two weeks of October 2017, from 29 September till 15 October 2017. A total of 192 fully completed responds were received, additional 42 partially completed answers were analysed. The findings are presented in a clear and detailed manner.

The outcomes indicate that overall, customers show a high satisfaction rate regarding their experience on the Sqore platform. This assertion is also supported by the very favourable responses to an open-ended question. The results of the research indicate that participating in the Sqore challenge has a significant impact on the behaviour of users regarding their education. To illustrate this point, it can be pointed out that 70% of respondents hadn't heard of the challenge's host university before they participated in the challenge. The findings also illustrate that a positive customer experience promotes customer retention and increases the value of the customer base.

The information gathered from the survey will help to further develop Sqore services, focusing on the types of challenges and rewards needed the most by users.

Keywords
Customer experience, Customer journey, Customer relationship, Marketing communication, Customer survey

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1 Introduction

In today's world one of the main world trends is globalization. Easiness of travel, long-distance communication and international nature of business motivate more and more young people to go abroad for study or work. This process is usually obstructed with various hurdles that must be overcome; among them are lack of necessary financial means, difficulty in finding comprehensive information about available opportunities abroad, simply huge numbers of student applications to the universities among which it is difficult to stand out.

At the same time universities are trying to solve the problem of attracting the right students, marketing themselves in an appealing way, making their application process more interesting to young people uncomfortable with the old ways of application letters and entrance exams, and giving opportunities to prospective students to show themselves and test their skills.

Sqore.com, the commissioner of this thesis, is working on solving this problem of connecting right students with right universities in a fun, engaging way, motivating young people to challenge themselves. Sqore provides recruitment services for both companies and universities, and their prospective students and employees, often serving as the first point of contact between them, and introducing new opportunities for young people all over the world.

1.1 Definition of the thesis topic and research objectives

In order to provide superior customer experience Sqore needs to understand its users, their needs, preferences and perceptions of the experiences they already had. This is how the need for the research came to be – to analyse customer experience, their perceptions of Sqore and find out areas for improvement.

The thesis concentrates on the topic of customer research, performing analysis of the Sqore users who have completed an education-related challenge. Throughout the thesis education-related challenge is defined as the challenge arranged by Sqore and published on their website where the prize might be some of the following:

- full or partial scholarship for Master's or Bachelor's Degree programme, summer school or just a separate set of courses;
- an application fee waiver;
- any other form of financial aid targeted at the prospective full-time or exchange students;
- possibility to visit a specific university and communicate in person with the admissions department;

- other similar prize that will be of interest and will attract prospective international students.

Some examples of the education-related challenges offered by Sqore can be found in the section of the thesis that introduces the commissioning company to the reader. The examples aim to give the reader a better understanding of an education-related challenge.

The main aim of the research is to find out what was the Sqore users' customer experience and how it impacted their lives and decisions, especially regarding the choice of their education option. In short, the objectives of the research can be described as:

- understand the background of the users (their basic demographic profile);
- understand what is users' customer experience (are they satisfied, what are the areas for improvement);
- find out how the Sqore challenge experience impacts the customers in their lives and opinions;
- analyse the communication between Sqore and its customers.

The findings of the research will be useful for the overall development of the customer experience and Sqore challenge process. It will also be beneficial for the company's marketing as it will show the characteristics of universities and study programmes that are most important for users, and which should be emphasized in the marketing campaigns.

1.2 Limitations

The limitations of this research can be presented in three parts – limitations of the context, limitations of the topic and limitations in the research method.

The research context is limited by the exclusive focus on the education-related challenges organised by Sqore, excluding from analysis the challenges for cash prizes and challenges for work and internship opportunities. Such limitation on the research context was set by the commissioning company because of their particular interest in their customers who use this service, and their development goal to focus more on providing opportunities to study abroad for young people and grow into a digital service similar to the student council advisor in the future. (Mirzoeva 28 August 2017) Additional purpose of limiting the research to analysis of exclusively education-related challenges was to make the research process and data collection more manageable. As the consequence of the mentioned limitation in the research context the segment of the Sqore customers who were contacted for the purpose of data collection was restricted only to those who have completed at least one education-related challenge. Thus, the segment of Sqore users analysed in the research excluded those who participated in other types of challenges offered by Sqore,

those who have not yet participate in any Sqore challenge and those Sqore users who participated in an education-related challenge but failed to complete all the steps.

In its topic the research was mainly limited to the analysis of the Sqore customers' experience during the challenge process. The research topic was chosen on the basis of the proposition made to the commissioning company, who narrowed the suggested topic of Customer Research to its more focused variant of Customer Experience Research. (Mirzoeva 29 August 2017)

The research method applied in this thesis was limited to the exclusive usage of the quantitative method in the form of an online survey. The reason for such restriction was because this method allowed to engage with large numbers of respondents in the relatively short time. Moreover, the online survey was seen as the most effective way to reach respondents in the circumstances when they are spread over many different countries, and arranging long qualitative interviews would cause unnecessary difficulties. The final reason for exclusive usage of the quantitative research method was the possibility to arrange it relatively easy, using the commissioning company's account in in the SurveyMonkey tool used for creating, distributing and analysis of online surveys.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The first chapter of this thesis provides the basic overview of the research. It introduces the topic, the commissioner and lists the objectives of the research and the limitations it may face.

The second chapter is dedicated to a detailed introduction of the commissioner. As the company is relatively young and might not be that well-known, it was decided to give a thorough overview of its history, service scope and marketing communication.

The next chapter of the thesis focuses on the literature review and provides the theoretical framework for the thesis. The chapter attempts to give an overview of such concepts as customer experience, customer journey, customer relationship management. Some attention is paid to marketing communication and digital marketing.

The empirical study in the fourth chapter of this thesis describes the research method that was chosen. The reasons for such method are mentioned in the beginning followed by the description of the survey development process and its structure. The data collection part covers how the primary data was collected and what channel and incentives were used.

The following part gives a thorough overview of the data collected. The research findings are grouped according to the structure of the thesis, and are linked to the research objectives.

The final sixth chapter covers the conclusions derived from analysis of the research findings. It also introduces practical recommendations that were developed during the research process.

2 Introduction of the commissioning company

The thesis is written for a Swedish commissioning company Student Competitions AB. It provides fully digitalised service in recruiting prospective employees and students to universities and commercial companies.

The company has been founded in 2010 by four founders: Niklas Junegagard, Chu Zhu, Robert Lyngman, Gustav Borgefalk. (Sqore. About) Their vision and idea was built on their past experience as four former students and their passion for competitions. During their studies, they all actively took part in various competitions, which provided opportunities to win prizes, travel and just have fun. Enjoying the experience, they wanted to share it and make sure that students all over the world can find a competition that would be interesting and beneficial for then. Thus, the website www.studentcompetitions.com, was created. It lists numerous international opportunities organised for students all over the world. (Mirzoeva 20 September 2017)

In the beginning the project was not-for-profit and aimed at gathering in one place all available international opportunities for students. The project was presented in the form of the website that provided information, deadlines and links to various international student opportunities (competitions, conferences, etc). The goal was to make sure that no great opportunity would be missed by any student because of lack of information.

With time noticing the great traffic to the website, the founders saw how they can develop the idea further and make it commercial and profitable. The idea was not only to list opportunities created by other organisations, but also to arrange competitions themselves. From this notion, the Sqore.com platform for competition was created. Unlike StudentCompetitions.com which stays as a not-for-profit project, Sqore gains earnings by providing recruitment services to companies and universities.

Nowadays the company operates in three directions: StudentCompetitions.com and Sqore.com, and organising of highly customized challenges for the clients. The difference lies in the fact that Sqore website has only the competitions arranged by Sqore on behalf of their customers using the Sqore platform. On the other hand, StudentsCompetitions.com lists all the student opportunities including those created by other organisers, those from the Sqore platform and highly customised challenges organised for the clients. The highly customised challenges are operated as separate projects in close cooperation with the clients, with their own websites and unique design.

This thesis is focusing on performing an analysis of the customers who use Sqore.com.

2.1 Sqore

According to the “Terms and Conditions of Use” published on the organisation’s website, Sqore is “a product owned by Student Competitions AB”. (Sqore. Terms and conditions of use) The Sqore platform was first launched in 2015. Its goal is to connect companies and universities with the best suited, prospective students and employees.

The mission of Sqore is to give an opportunity to its users to demonstrate their skills and stand out in the recruitment process. The Sqore solutions utilizes gamification elements into its skills-assessment in the competition, and provides multichannel marketing for its challenges and commercial clients, who buy the service.

The Sqore earns its profit from arranging the challenges on behalf of its clients, companies and universities. The customer pays a certain license fee for utilising the Sqore platform. In cooperation with its customer Sqore arranges a challenge, decides how it will be presented on the page, what information will be included, sometimes gives advice on what should be offered as a prize. Sqore also is fully responsible for marketing the challenge, reaching the prospective students or employees, encouraging them to participate and guiding them through the competition process.

As it can be understood, customers of Sqore can be divided into two basic segments: companies and universities who bring profit for the company, and prospective students and employees searching for opportunities through Sqore. While the first segment pays for the Sqore’s service, the second segment consisting of prospective students and employees register on Sqore for free. They form the Sqore’s user database and its existent group of loyal users, and serve as the first target audience for marketing of the new challenges.

This thesis is focused on the Sqore customers who enjoy the service for free – its registered users. For the purpose of this thesis, further in the text the term Sqore customers denotes the registered free users of Sqore platform.

2.2 Overview of Sqore challenges

The Sqore platform offers challenges in several categories depending on the type of host-organisation and the prizes offered.

The first category, which can be considered as the most important for the company and contains the highest number of challenges organised, is devoted to education-related challenges. This type of challenges provides opportunities for prospective students to win scholarships, travel allowances and other similar prizes.

One example of an education-related challenge is “Online/Blended Learning MBA & DBA Programs” arranged by Sqore, where the participants have the chance to win scholarship which will cover up to 50% of tuition fees for obtaining a DBA or MBA degree at UNICAF University in Africa. (Sqore.com 2018d) Similarly the challenge “Full-Time International MBA” also offers a chance to win a scholarship to cover up to 50% of tuition fees for obtaining an MBA Diploma in Lisbon, Portugal, from two European universities simultaneously with an immersion program at MIT in Cambridge. (Sqore.com 2018b) While the aforementioned challenges provide scholarships, the challenge “Master of Science in Urban Studies” arranged by Sqore and hosted by Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Brussel, Belgium, gives the chance to win an administrative fee waiver worth of 600 euro for applicants to Master Programme in Urban Studies. (Sqore.com 2018c) Those challenges are aimed at the young people who wish to study for a full degree. The challenge “Summer Course in Creativity & Innovation” hosted by the Berghs School of Communication in Sweden, on the other hand, offers the possibility to win some discounts and additional benefits for attendees to the Summer Course in Creativity and Innovation taught at the same Berghs School of Communication; and is targeted at students who will spend quite short time at the host-university. (Sqore.com 2018e)

These are just a few of the vast number of different opportunities arranged and offered by Sqore on its website.

At the moment, the company plans to focus on arranging more challenges that will offer application and administrative fee waivers to the top winners. Overall these challenges give the chance to stand out in the crowd of student applications with additional benefit of some form of financial aid. All the challenges in this category are hosted by universities.

The next category focuses on Sqore users who are searching for employment and internship opportunities. These challenges are commissioned by commercial companies. The prizes for the competitions in this category can vary from a personal interview with the company HR manager to an internship or full-time job position.

The third category differs from the first two by the type of prizes offered. Challenges in this category give a chance to win cash prizes, accelerator programs and business mentorship. (Sqore, Competitions) Another difference is that some of these challenges are designed for teams, unlike the competitions in the first two categories which are only for individual participation. One example of such challenge would be “Design for Social Impact” currently arranged by Sqore and hosted by Autodesk, where the participants are designing cooking device that does not burn wood and/or a sustainable housing shelter. This challenge offers cash prizes for up to 1000 USD for adult participants and some IT equipment for underage participants. (Sqore.com 2018a)

Besides the challenges, Sqore also offers to its users an opportunity to test their skills in various subjects or spend some time doing fun quizzes. These skill-tests and fun quizzes do not offer any prize for participants, but provide a channel to engage with the platform, entertainment and an opportunity to learn some fun facts or test the knowledge in certain subjects.

2.3 Sqore marketing communication

As Sqore provides fully digital service, its marketing is also organised mainly through digital channels.

The first channel is email marketing performed through newsletters sent to the registered users. The content of the newsletter depends on the type of the challenge a user expressed interest in before. It means that a user who searched for and participated in challenges hosted by universities for Bachelor programs, will likely receive email focusing on new challenges of similar type – education-related, Bachelor programme, the same university, etc. The same logic applies if the person was looking for challenges in certain field, like architecture, business or design. Besides information on new opportunities, the newsletter will also contain links to organisation’s social media profiles, an article or a blog post related to the overall theme, and links to several fun quizzes.

The Sqore also provides support communication to the users who are participating in a challenge at the moment. The users receive direct messages and notifications in their Sqore profiles regarding deadline reminders, next steps in the competition, the results and winners, etc. The email notifications and reminders containing the same information are also sent to the users’ emails.

Sqore website also has a blog whose main contributors are participants and winners of Sqore challenges and Sqore employees. (Sqore Blog 2017a) The blog covers several topics with most attention paid to the stories of Sqore challenge winners. Some stories cover the time just after the challenge describing the winners' challenge experience and feelings, while others focus on the life of the winners after some period and tell about the impact Sqore challenge had on their lives. The other important topic covers the information that can be useful to those searching for new opportunities to study or work abroad. This category tells about such important practical issues as IELTS, TOEFL, GMAT, preparation to study abroad, etc. (Sqore Blog 2017c) The main purpose of this category is to provide guidance to prospective students in the confusing process of applying to a university and moving abroad for studies. The contributors to this category are often Sqore employees and sometimes participants of the challenges. The next topic covered in the blog is mostly written by Sqore winners. It describes the experience of the winner studying in the country or programme they have got in due to the challenge. (Sqore Blog 2017e) Besides giving information on the topic "What happened next?" usually thought after by the broad audience, this category also provides useful insights about adapting to new environment, country or programme to future students. The blog also introduces Sqore employees in the form of very short interviews. (Sqore Blog 2017b) Finally, the blog also describes in detail some of the challenges and actively serves as a marketing channel for them. (Sqore Blog 2017d) The blog can be easily accessed from the Sqore website.

Another marketing channel actively utilised by Sqore is social media. The company has two social media channels actively in use for marketing to Sqore customers – Instagram and Facebook. The main purpose is marketing of the new challenges and attracting of new Sqore users to the website. In order to promote interaction with customers and establish loyal group of followers, the company varies the content published on the social media sites. The main types of content published are (Mirzoeva 20 September 2017):

- Marketing campaigns promoting new and already existent challenges;
- Quotes of the Day – quotes by famous people, mostly on the topic of challenging yourself, motivation and self-development;
- Sharing of the blog posts from Sqore blog;
- Posts promoting participation in Sqore's skill tests and fun quizzes;
- Interaction posts – posts with question to followers and promoting the discussions (mainly used in Instagram).

Another social media channels, where Sqore is represented are Google+, Twitter and LinkedIn. Google+ is the least active and has only 53 followers; very few posts were published during the current year. Twitter is used more actively but the date of the last post, 2 October 2017, hints that company is currently focusing more on Facebook and Instagram as main marketing channels to reach customers. LinkedIn is used for promoting company

and the brand, describing its future plans, achievements and business insights by its founders.

Sqore challenges are also marketed by its partner brand StudentCompetitions.com and its social media channels – Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. (Mirzoeva 29 August 2017) As both trademarks are owned by Student Competitions AB, it makes the use of Student-Competitions.com as additional marketing channel easy and effective.

The marketing channels mentioned above form the core of the Sqore social media campaign and contain 32-40% of the company marketing reach. The current goal of the integrated marketing campaign is to use company's own marketing channel even more effectively, so that 50% of customers would be reached through the internal marketing. (Mirzoeva 20 September 2017) Basically, the goal is to promote more active participation from the already registered Sqore users.

Another marketing option used by the company is establishing marketing partnerships. (Mirzoeva 20 September 2017) The company contacts various universities, student organisations and institutions with extensive databases of customers in the target segment. In such cases Sqore either forms an agreement with an organisation to mutually promote each other through their own marketing channels; or Sqore pays the organisation for its marketing services. The marketing partnerships are most effective and used in cases, when a challenge is targeted to a specific country or segment poorly presented in the internal database of Sqore customers or which cannot be reached through established channels (for example, students from Asian countries).

Finally, it should be mentioned that universities hosting the challenges also arrange some marketing of their own, mentioning the challenge on their website, social media or at the education fairs to the prospective students as an opportunity to win some form of financial aid.

As it can be understood from the overview of Sqore marketing communication, positive experience and loyal customers are extremely important for Sqore, as they are the focus of company's marketing campaign.

3 Customer experience

This thesis focuses on finding out who are the Sqore customers, what are their needs and wishes, what motivates them, what is their experience of Sqore and how it influences them in decision making and changing perceptions of educational opportunities. The research also aims find out if the current communication efforts satisfy the needs of the Sqore users. These questions are mostly related to the customer experience, customer relationship management and marketing communication areas. That is why theoretical framework is built around these subject areas.

3.1 Definition of customer experience concept

Customers are the most important asset of the business. The company cannot survive if it does not have a user who would consume its service or product. Customers and their needs is that force that drives all business activity. The most basic definition explains customer as the person who buy a service or product for personal use. (Ebert & Griffin 2017, 411). Yet it cannot reflect the broad nature of the term in the current intertwined environment. The more accurate explanation of the customer in the modern connected business world would be that of a constituent of an organisation, or in other words everyone in the ecosystem of a business, a stakeholder. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 21; I-Scoop1, 2016) Therefore customer cannot be viewed as an entity separate from the business. What interests us in customers is their interaction with the company, their customer experience, as it is the force that makes them either come back for another purchase or flee to a competitor.

The notion of customer experience is to some extent recent phenomenon. In order to better understand the term, it is necessary to discuss reasons for its emerging. During the twentieth century, the main competitive advantage for companies was their ability to develop new technology and create a product that hasn't been on the market before. Improvements in machinery and manufacturing processes allowed businesses to produce goods in massive quantities for prices that were accessible to broad audiences. At this period innovation was the most important factor in a company's success. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 4) The next step was mass marketing. With emergence of new communication methods and channels, standardized messages targeted at the broad audiences became the new tool in winning customer share. Mass marketing and advertising allowed to reach the biggest pool of potential clients than ever before. Improving of reliability and speed of transportation together with the world trend towards globalization lead to companies targeting foreign market after their domestic market share reached its full potential. At this point few businesses paid attention to the customer relationship. The main goal was to

produce new product or service that will be better than the competitor's. The customer relationship was limited to solving complaints and issues with faulty products.

As the result of such company strategies most products and services became highly commoditized, and from the point of the customer were interchangeable with ones produced by competitors. Thus, new technology could no longer be a strong enough competitive advantage. To overcome this issue a new trend emerged – customer orientation with focus on customer experience as the principal competitive factor.

In the beginning the notion of customer experience focused on the instance of buying a product or service, and described its characteristics and quality of the purchasing process. As Meyer and Schwager define customer experience in 2007, it is combination of all aspects of the offering: "quality of customer care, but also advertising, packaging, product and service features, ease of use and reliability". (Kandampully 2011, 44) With time a more complex approach to the term appeared and became widespread among professionals. Peppers & Rogers define customer experience as the aggregate of individual perceptions of all the interactions of the customer with a product or company over time and through different channels. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 22)

From the definition it follows that perception and interaction are the essential elements in understanding customer experience. Interaction here is understood as an encounter between a customer and a company that is happening through the channel that allows mutual reciprocation. For example, seeing a TV-advertisement cannot be viewed as an element of customer experience concept, while customer engagement through the social media can, because it is direct interaction and allows mutual reciprocation. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 22) Perception here brings the emotional aspect to the concept. It is created by emotional and behavioural reactions to the stimuli presented during the encounter between a customer and a business. (Dodds 1 August 2016) Perceptions are highly individual as they are shaped by personal characteristics of each customer. Individuality of perceptions is the driving force behind the current need for companies to offer superior, differentiated and personalized experience to their clients if they want to retain them. (Soudagar, Lyer & Hildebrand 2011, 9)

3.1.1 Customer experience management

In the modern world where customer experience is becoming more and more crucial for the success of a business, the concept of customer experience management (CEM) has become one of main points of focus for companies.

Nowadays customers have enormous influence and power over the business. The spread of social media, review websites, real-time communication and development of technologies give customers ample opportunities to voice their opinions to broad audiences. The purpose of these opinions is not only share the experience with customers, but also dictate the companies how the clients want to be served. Businesses see customer experience management as a tool to influence the word-of-mouth, and the way to react to the opinions. That is simple logic: the better managed and more superior customer experience you offer, the more positive reviews you get, thus bringing more loyal customers.

To better understand what customer experience management is and how to implement it an important issue must be taken into account – a business cannot control its customer. Customer experience is built upon individual emotions and is shaped by the customer; a business cannot control the mind of a person – its client.

Therefore, customer experience management is, in fact, designing customer interactions (touchpoints on a customer journey) in such a way as to meet customer expectations and ideally exceed them. (I-Scoop 1, 2016) As an integral element of customer experience, customer has to be involved in the design process, as the source of feedback.

There are five main steps in implementing the customer experience management (I-Scoop 2, 2016):

- Understand your customer's journey and act upon this with a help of customer journey mapping.
- Monitor, measure and analyse customer experience at various touchpoints, interactions and overall brand perception from the customer perspective.
- Continuously act upon the received feedback by designing and optimizing for better experiences.
- Build a customer-centric culture across the whole organisation, including the subcontractors.
- Set up necessary processes and infrastructure that will enable all of the above.

From this we can see that customer experience is not just an independent tool but a combined reflection of the company's culture and its operating processes. (I-Scoop 1, 2016)

As a summary four core competencies of customer experience management can be highlighted (TemkinGroup, 2 June 2011):

- Purposeful leadership – executives acting consistently with the message they are communicating. It's about being true and consistent.
- Compelling brand values – living up to the brand promises made to the customers all the time.
- Employee engagement – the law of customer experience: unengaged employees cannot create engaging customer experience. Employees must truly be a part of what an organisation wants to achieve.

- Customer connectedness – ensuring that organisation has a deep understanding of what customers think, say and feel about it; and making sure that all the decisions are based upon this understanding.

3.1.2 Customer journey

Intertwined with customer experience is the concept of customer journey. Customer journey is a set of consecutive touchpoints that together form the experience that customers get from the interaction with a company. (McKinsey & Company 2016)

The customer journey begins with the customer identifying a need or problem that he intends to solve by consuming a certain product or service offered by a company. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 480) It continues when the potential customer begins to research his options in satisfying the existent need. Depending on the need the decision-making process can be complex, time consuming and involve many steps (for example, when buying a house), or it can be almost instant and happen on the background without the customer even realising it (for example, buying a soft drink at a store). Once the decision has been made and the best available option for satisfying the need is chosen, the customer will engage with the company for additional inquiry and completing of the purchase. After the purchase is completed and the customer is "converted", the next stage begins – the relationship, in other words actual use of the product of service. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 481) If the customer relationship is good enough and cumulative customer experience is consistently positive, the customer may become the brand advocate promoting the product or company through the word-of-mouth. Achieving this final stage of the customer journey cycle should be the end-target when a company is mapping their customer's journey. The following graphic illustrates the common journey flow (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 481):

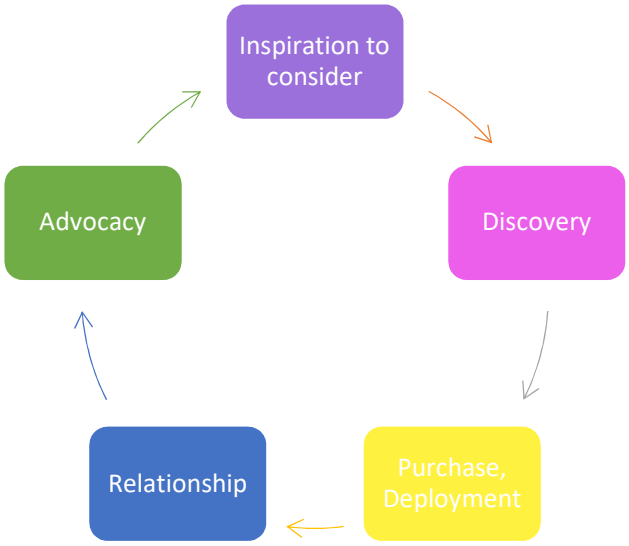

Figure 1. Typical customer journey flow (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 481)

Understanding how your customer perceives your company is the first step in customer relationship. Before a company can improve or develop their relationship with the clients, it needs to understand what part of the customer journey needs the most attention. The organisation must put itself in the client's shoes and see how the decision is made. It is not enough to research the client's behaviour on a company website or in the store. The customer journey starts way before they initiate the first contact with a business. It is necessary to understand how the first need arrives and what attributes of the potential solution bear the strongest significance for the client. The company should research how the customer makes the decision between the competitors and makes the initial contact, what characteristics are important during the consuming of the service or product and how the process concludes.

Companies can use different tools and approaches to study the customer perceptions. First, the managers can imagine themselves as the client and try to understand what would be important for them. To achieve better results with this approach it is beneficial to "go into the field". For example, a company employee can go to their store without revealing themselves as having connection to the business, and see how their experience progresses; the results can be used to introduce improvements to the customer service. Another tool for conducting the study is developing a customer survey that would focus on the topic of customer experience and customer journey. The results of the survey carry the reliability and validity because the clients answer them without any company bias and preference, unlike as in the case of company employees "going into the field". Besides the survey introduces the communication channel between the company and a customer starting the customer relationship.

3.1.3 Customer journey mapping

After researching the customer experience with the company, it is necessary to establish a consecutive order of the touchpoints where the client interacts with the business, understanding the emotions and what happens at each touchpoint. In other words, the business needs to create a customer journey map. It is often taught at business programmes and used by the marketing professionals.

In the book "The Customer Experience Book: How to design, measure and improve customer experience in your business" customer journey mapping (CJM) is defined as "a structured way to understand and capture your customer's wants, needs and expectations at each stage of their experience with your company." (Pennington 2016)

The CJM visualizes how the customer moves from one interaction to another, what emotions he or she experiences and what communication channels are used. The customer journey mapping has the potential to find the weak links and the most important moments in the process of supplying the service or the product. It also illustrates which department "owns" the customer at different stages of the customer journey and when the transition from one division to another happens. (Pennington 2016) This insight is especially significant as the transition point often is the time when customer satisfaction may drop without the company noticing. It is fairly easy to measure satisfaction level at each separate interaction, and that is how companies usually do it. This approach leads to a situation when overall satisfaction is high, yet there is an outflow of the customers. Until the company maps the customer journey, they do not understand that the flaw lies in the structure of the process and the ways the customer is handled from one department to another. Therefore, customer journey mapping is a valuable tool in designing customer service.

Customer journey maps can be of different design and structure, and have different focus, but can usually be attributed to one of the most common categories (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 485):

- Customer story – focuses on emotions and behaviour of a potential customer; usually is presented in a visual format (video or a drawing).
- Campaign marketing / touch map – focuses on outgoing interactions planned within the communication strategy; tends to be presented in the form of process flows and flow-charts.
- 360-degree experience map – is designed using a comprehensive set of emotional and rational data collected by various means (observations from customer transactions, campaign performance data, surveys, focus groups, etc.); can take any visual form or a combination of several of them.

A company can choose one of the categories or combine them in the journey map design to get a more comprehensive insight. It usually depends on the needs of the company, its area of operations and current needs, as well as on the time and resources devoted to this type of research. The main point is to understand that designing a customer journey map should become a continuous effort because customers and their perceptions change, and a journey map created two years ago may not reflect current state of things. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 492)

3.2 Customer relationships

Customers are, first of all, people – for whom it is natural to establish various relationship bonds throughout their lives. The most obvious relationships are the personal bonds that connect friends, families, neighbours, etc. The other type of relationships, that people can be engaged in, are ties with inanimate objects, like a favourite kid's toy, a park where a

woman was proposed to, etc. Yet another relationship that a person becomes involved at is the relationships with organisations and businesses, for example, a school or university a person attended, a local store, a hairdresser who has been providing services for years, etc. This last category of relationships is what companies aim to establish with their clients – customer relationships. It is not that easy though to understand at what point a simple purchase of a product or service becomes a relationship. There are seven characteristics that qualify a relationship between a customer and a business.

First of all, the relationships must be mutual. It means that the relationship must be recognised by both active participants. Basically, a relationship must go both ways. This quality puts a distinction on what can be considered as relationship-building activities from the business perspective. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 45)

Secondly, the relationship cannot be created without interaction and exchange of information. The interaction here is not just a contact face-to-face or digitally, it also is the very purchase made by a customer. Each of these interactions adds to the total information that can be used in relationship building. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 45)

The customer relationship is also iterative in its nature, meaning that it builds on over a period of time and consists of repeated interactions. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 46) This quality of customer relationship is what brings additional value. Through repeated interactions the company comprises a personal profile of a customer containing his or her preferences. This ensures that during the next interaction the customer experience would be tailored for this individual client.

The other quality of a customer relationship is an ongoing benefit for both parties as the main reason for existence. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 46) When the customer stops receiving the expected value as the result of the relationship, it will likely be terminated unless changes are made to correct the situation.

This brings up the next integral characteristic of a customer relationship – need for change of behaviour on both sides. Both the company and the customer must react accordingly taking into account the customer's feedback, change of the environment and technology advances in order to ensure continuous mutual benefit. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 46-47)

As it has been already mentioned in context of customer experience, each experience is individual and unique because there are no two absolutely identical persons. The same notion applies to customer relationships.

Finally, the ultimate quality of customer relationship, as well as any other, is trust. With time, a customer tends to put more and more trust into the company expecting it to act in his/her interest. Together with affection and satisfaction, trust forms the emotional side of a customer relationship. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 47)

When the stream of continuous interactions between a company and a customer acquires the qualities listed above a customer relationship is established.

3.2.1 Five E's of customer relationship

A professor at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Jim Barnes, has developed a framework for deeper understanding of the concept of customer relationship and factors that facilitate a closer connection between companies and their customers. The framework is called 5 E's of Customer Relationship. (Barnes 2016, 54)

Figure 2. The 5 E's of customer relationship

In order to establish strong customer relationships, the company needs to understand the customer environment, in other words it has to know what is happening in customers lives, what they aiming to achieve. Such need comes from the fact that customers do not buy a service or product just for itself, they buy it because it offers a solution to a problem they are currently facing or it enables them to enjoy certain feelings and emotions. (Barnes 2016, 55) For example, a woman buys a Prada bag not only because she needs

a new purse, but mostly to hear praise and admiration from her friends. Companies that understand the context in which the customer operates and can see the underlying issues he/she is trying to solve, will have more success in establishing true customer relationship. (Barnes 2016, 55)

Understanding and meeting customer expectations is an integral part of customer relationship building. In most cases, though, it is not enough just to achieve customer satisfaction. Even satisfied customers will consider the competitors' offers and easily change the service provider if the offer is just slightly better, especially in highly-commoditized industries like airlines. In order to build a genuine relationship a business should also understand what the customer is not expecting and surprise him/her by delivering value above the established expectations. Surprising the customer will bring up emotional element, and prompt storytelling and sharing of the experience. (Barnes 2016, 56) To make it clear, customer surprise should be of a positive nature.

By definition, relationships are emotional connections that a person has with other people, companies or brands. Therefore, when building customer relationships business must operate in such a way as to reduce negative customer feelings and strengthen positive ones. Usually, emotions start from small things. For a negative example, it can be a mild irritation at the slow load speed of a company website. It probably will not result at breaking of the customer relationship. If the problem is left unattended, the negative feeling will accumulate until it reaches the point when it becomes the main reason to go to a competitor. The similar thing happens with positive feelings: a relatively weak emotion of friendliness if strengthened through each interaction will lead to a strong affectionate relationship with a brand. (Barnes 2016, 57) The core of this concept of customer emotions lies in the quality of emotions to build up and accumulate over a period of time.

Customer experience is also an integral part in building customer relationships. In order to establish a long-lasting customer relationship, there should be a consistency in delivering series of positive customer experiences. On the other hand, a series of negative experiences or the constant change from positive to negative experience will make the chance of establishing strong customer relationship considerably smaller. (Barnes 2016, 57)

Nowadays the focus of customer relationship building is on creating customer engagement. Customer engagement is achieved by involving customers in production and delivery of products and services, thus creating high levels of commitment. In other words, a customer becomes partners with the business in creating the value proposition. The value of the engaged customer is in spreading positive word of mouth, creating communities of

devoted customers leading to co-dependency and establishing of a strong relationship. (Barnes 2016, 58)

Acknowledging and acting upon 5 E's of customer relationship provide a framework for developing the strategy for customer relationship building.

3.2.2 Learning relationships

In customer relationship company finds out new information about the customer with each subsequent interaction. With time company accumulates data about the customer's background, environment, preferences in services and products. Basically, the customer educates the business about himself while in return receiving personalised service. This characteristic of customer relationship forms a framework for Learning Relationship.

The strategy of a company involved in a learning relationship will be to learn more about the customer and become able to give him/her something they cannot get from anywhere else, thus creating a competitive advantage. At the same time business creates significant switching costs for its customer. If a client decides to switch to a competitor, it will take time and efforts to teach a new company what the current service provider already knows. As a result, the customer becomes more loyal to the company because it is more convenient and easier than looking for a new partner. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 23) So as it can be seen, learning relationship affects both, the company and the customer.

In addition to creating customer loyalty learning relationship has two more benefits for the parties involved in it (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 24):

- Customer gets a chance to learn more about himself from the history of interactions with the company and its feedback. This knowledge enables him to handle some aspects of life more effectively and efficiently.
- The business, on the other hand, receives feedback from customers and can better find out its general strengths and weaknesses. Acting upon the received feedback, the company becomes able to improve its marketing and communication strategy.

Though beneficial and simple to understand, learning relationship will work only if the company has created adequate processes for collecting, storing and using the customer data.

3.2.3 Customer relationship management

Customer relationship management, or in short CRM, is nowadays the main topic among the marketing and strategic professional circles. New graduates are expected to be knowledgeable of the concept, be able to apply it and know how to work with CRM software

systems. Yet usually there is no clear definition of the term. Possibility of alternative names makes the understanding of what CRM means even more difficult to achieve. As Smith and Zook (2011, 62) state, there are several names that are used in literature and internet sources to define the same concept: customer relationship management (CRM), customer experience management (CEM) and customer managed relationships (CMR). The names are used interchangeably sometimes putting a reader at a loss.

Moreover, the definition of customer relationship management varies depending on who you are talking to. The IT specialist will likely describe it as a software platform that collects, stores and analyses data about the customer database. Even some marketing-related sources would put the stress on data collection and management, and information systems in their explanation of the CRM concept. Ebert and Griffin (2017, 378) define CRM as a combination of methods used by a business for building better information connections with the customers. Smith and Zook (2011, 62) make the definition of CRM even narrower, limiting it to “a set of processes, usually linked to a database, that help an organisation keep in contact with customers and deal with their requests, complaints, suggestions and purchases”. In other words, CRM can be understood as database management, focusing on data collection, its storing, proper maintaining and using in communication with customers. Of course, these explanations do not reflect the true nature and purpose of the concept.

Armstrong, Kotler & Opresnik give a better and broader definition, though a bit vague. According to them, CRM focuses on creating and retaining profitable relationships with customers by increasing the customer value and satisfaction they receive. (Armstrong, Kotler & Opresnik 2017, 41) To have a clearer understanding, CRM can be described as a total combination of business practices of a company, aimed at optimizing the value of each customer and directed by understanding of customer’s perspective. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 6) The purpose of CRM is to bring company closer with its customers, to give the opportunity to intimately know each one and provide greater value to them, thus making each customer more valuable to a company in regard of the profits they can deliver. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 7)

The point of customer relationship management is to treat every client differently depending on what you know about him or her. Modern customer wants highly individual and personalised approach in customer service, both in face-to-face interactions and online. CRM systems give the information about a customer, but how business uses its information makes up its customer relationship management.

The principal benefit of proper customer relationship management is building customer loyalty and increasing customer retention. The economic benefit lies in the fact that a loyal customer brings higher profits because of the repetitive string of purchases. A business might have effective system for attracting new customers, but unless the CRM is equally good, the only benefit would be a one-time purchase. A loyal customer, on the other hand, stays longer holding the value of a lifelong string of purchases. Loyal customer has a high potential of becoming a brand advocate in own family and among friends. Finally, it is cheaper to keep a current customer than to bring a new one. (Armstrong & al. 2017, 41)

The importance of customer relationship management rises to especially high levels within businesses that rely mainly on their existent pull of customers and users. If the company decides to put emphasis on its existent customers, it should automatically adopt customer-centred strategy and focus on making customer relationship management its competitive advantage.

3.3 Marketing communications

When discussing customer experience, engagement, relationships and customer relationship management, there is an underlying concept of marketing communication without which any of the above cannot exist. A business cannot learn about a customer unless it is communicating with him, and vice versa. Marketing communication has been practised in one form or the other for centuries, starting from the primitive advertising in Ancient Greece to the modern variety of marketing channels and available technology, simultaneously changing its objective from simple advertising to promoting customer engagement and conversation between the client and the business. The most significant change in defining marketing communication has happened during the past two decades.

The initial concept and understanding of marketing communication was that of promotion and advertising with the emphasis put on the product and its features. This focus can be explained first by overall trend in business during the 20th century, when the main competitive advantage was the ability to create new products. The main objective of marketing communication at that time was provide rational, product-based information and promotion, persuading people to purchase the product. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 19) The other reason, why the simple one-way advertising was in the core of marketing communication, was the limitation of existing communication channels. It was relatively easy to reach the target audiences, but there was almost no opportunity for businesses to receive customers' feedback and engage with them.

With arriving of new communication channels, television and advances in graphic design the era of mass advertising arrived, and the emphasis of marketing communication transferred to creating compelling product imagery and emotional messages. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 19) Still the main objective of marketing communication was promotion and advertising. The predominant communication model used was a simple single-step model with three basic elements: the sender (the active element), the message and the receiver (the passive decoder of the message). (Smith & Zook 2011, 123)

Further technological advances, Internet, spread of social media and commoditising of the goods caused the significant change in understanding the purpose of marketing communication. This change brought up a more modern definition of marketing communication as the means by which a supplier of goods or services presents itself to the target customers aiming to stimulate the conversation and lead to better relationship. (Egan 2014) As it can be seen here, the purpose of the marketing communication is not advertising and promotion so much anymore, but motivating interaction and customer engagement.

Fill and Turnbull (2016, 20) give a more precise but shorter definition: “Marketing communications is as audience-centred activity, designed to engage audiences and promote conversations”.

The extended definition focuses on three main topics; the first one being engagement of customers with the company through a communication model currently comfortable for them (i.e. one-way, two-way or interactive dialogue). (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 20) The next feature of audience-centricity is the focus on the shift from traditional target customer to the wider audience of stakeholders, including customers but not restricting to solely this group. This means that marketing communications nowadays must base their messages on understanding the needs and environment of the audience, and broaden its range of subjects to include information on corporate issues, product features, policies, procedures and values of the organisation. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 20-21) Finally the definition states the purpose of marketing communication which is to induce audience’s response either attitudinal, emotional or most important behavioural. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 21)

Summarising, the modern purpose of marketing communication is to guide the customer to a desired behavioural response, which can be purchase of a product, visiting the website, register as a user, etc. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 10) Though the definition stated above mentions emotions and attitudes, behaviour is the most important and thought after. For example, a campaign aiming to strengthen negative attitudes to fast food, in its essence wants to change the behaviours and encourage to eat healthy. This is the reason why the

majority of messages incorporates the “call-to-action” – guiding the audience in a certain way; it is especially true for the marketing communication performed through social media.

4 Conducting the study

As the main research method during this study it was decided to use quantitative method presented in the form of an online survey. In order to understand why this research is based on the quantitative analysis, the quantitative research method should be explained and its main characteristics must be described.

First of all, it should be understood that when the research is mentioning a research method, what is actually meant is the method with which the data for the research is collected and how it is interpreted. Probably the main characteristic feature of the quantitative research method is its emphasis on objective measurements and its focus on statistical, mathematical or numerical analysis of information collected through surveys, questionnaires or by manipulating existing statistical data in order to explain a particular phenomenon or describe groups of people or things. (American Public University System) Therefore, quantitative research can be described "as business research that addresses research objectives through empirical assessments that involve numerical measurement and analysis approaches". (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2013) Yet the simpler and more straightforward definition of a quantitative research would be a research that is conducted through distribution of sets of structured questions with limited answer options to large numbers of respondents. (Burns, Veeck & Bush, 2017)

The main characteristics of quantitative research stemming from its definition are (American Public University System; Burns & al., 2017):

- the purpose of research is specific and well-defined;
- the commissioner of the research and the researcher agree on the precise information needed;
- the data is gathered in a formalised and highly structured way;
- the respondents' samples are usually large in size;
- the collected data is presented in the form of numbers and statistics and often arranged in tables, charts or other visual forms;
- tools, such as questionnaires or computer software, are used for collecting and/or analysing the numerical data;
- all aspects of the study are usually carefully designed before the start of the data collection.

Based on the aforementioned, the reasons for choosing the quantitative research method for the current research can be defined. Firstly, the research objective is specific and achievable, and the commissioner has defined what information they would like to receive in the process of research. Secondly, the intended outcome was to get a comprehensive understanding of the customer segment by collecting insights from the highest possible number of customers resulting in a large sample of respondents. The other reason for

choosing quantitative method was the nature of the commissioner's service. The Sqore's service in its entirety is provided in digital format with almost no face-to-face interaction. The main channel to reach the potential respondents is through their email addresses stored in the company database. Additionally, Sqore's users come from all over the world, thus an option of conducting qualitative interviews would face a number of difficulties, such as time differences between countries, potential technical and distance problems, language barrier, etc. Moreover, a user is more likely and willing to spend five to ten minutes on completing a survey than to agree for a half an hour interview, especially if contacted after a considerable time since the services has been received. The quantitative survey was seen as the most appropriate method considering all the circumstances.

4.1 Focus of the research

The aim of the study was to receive answers from the target audience (Sqore users who participate in education-related challenges) to the following research questions:

- Who is a Sqore user? (its basic demographic profile)
- What kind of experience a user gets from participating in a Sqore challenge?
- How the Sqore challenge influences user's behaviour and perceptions?
- How the user sees Sqore's communication support during the challenge?

As it has been mentioned earlier, Sqore organises several types of challenges:

- education-related challenges;
- challenges for a job or internship position;
- challenges to win cash prizes.

For the purpose of this research and to make it more manageable, it was decided to limit the target audience for the survey and focus only on the users who has shown interest in education-related challenges. The purpose was to make the research process more manageable and straightforward, thus increasing the reliability of the results.

Furthermore, the target audience was divided into three subgroups depending on their behaviour during the challenge. First subgroup contained the winners of the challenge, the second was comprised of the users who completed the challenge and applied to the university hosting the challenge, and the last group was formed by the users who completed the challenge but did not apply to the host-university. The division was necessary because each group has different customer journey, and the company wanted to understand how it influence the behaviour of each user segment.

The results of the research are going to be used by the company for improving the challenge process through better understanding of customer experience and developing new challenges that would better correspond to the target audience's needs.

4.2 Development of the survey

The development of the survey was conducted during September 2017. It was performed in several stages.

First of all, several online meetings were held with the representative of the commissioning company. The aim of the meetings was to set the target audience for the survey, decided upon research objectives and the topics that would be covered in the questionnaire.

The next stage was devoted to developing the questions for survey. This part brought some unexpected difficulties as I have never done this type of work before. The main problem was in understanding how to design questions that would be easily understood by respondents and in deciding on the answer options. Another difficulty lied in structuring the questionnaire in a way that would guide the respondent through his past user experience and provide smooth transition from one topic to another. The structure of the survey was also complicated by the existence of three subgroups within the target audience. As the questionnaire contained group specific questions, there was a need to decide how to structure and distribute the survey, so that it would reach the correct audience. Solving of this problem was postponed to the later stage of survey development. The final structure of the questionnaire is discussed in detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

The outcome of this stage was a Word file containing the preliminary set of questions for the survey and each subgroup, presented in the order they would follow in the questionnaire.

Testing of the survey questions was the next step in the development process. The objective was to find and correct possible flows in the design of the questions and answer options, find out if there is something that should be added to the survey. At first the questionnaire was tested among the friends and acquaintances. After some minor changes, the questionnaire was sent to the representative of the commissioning company. After several days, the questionnaire was returned with comments for consideration and improvement. This stage resulted in final set of questions for the survey.

The next step was dedicated to choosing the way to distribute the survey and collect responses. Initially it was decided that the survey link would be sent to the group of registered Sqore users who had completed the education-related challenges in the past. To assure that correct target audience segment would receive the right set of questions, the option to send a separate survey variant to each subgroup was discussed. This option was

discarded after some thought process and communicating with the IT department of the commissioner. It was too difficult to isolate the subgroups within the user database. To solve the issue, minor changes to the survey structure were introduced.

On the next stage, the survey was implemented in the online survey tool of choice – SurveyMonkey.com. This tool was used predominantly because the commissioning company has used it before, and has an account with it, which provided wider functionality for designing the survey, collecting and analysing the responses. After the survey was created in the SurveyMonkey, it was tested by the representatives of the commissioning company. A technical issue was discovered as a result, but was easily solved utilising the proper function of the survey tool. Additionally, two survey questions were eliminated on this stage. One question concerned the gender of the respondents. It was discarded because of little benefit to the company as neither of the challenges is targeted to a specific gender group. Another deleted question concerned the ways users prefer to receive information about new challenges on Sqore. The commissioner was not particularly interested in this kind of information at the time of the research.

After the necessary changes were introduced, the survey link was distributed among the target audience.

4.3 Structure of the questionnaire

In its final form, the questionnaire consisted in total of 31, 32 and 33 questions for the three subgroups – winners, those who completed the challenge and applied to a host-university, and those who completed the challenge but did not apply to the university, respectively.

To facilitate redirection of the respondents to questions designed for their proper target subgroup contingency questions were introduced into the survey structure. The purpose of contingency questions is to determine whether the respondent should answer the next question or can skip it. (Sue and Ritter 2012, 67) SurveyMonkey tool allowed to use the skip-logic which gave the solution to the problem of guiding the respondents to the proper group-specific questions. Though when designing surveys, it should be taken into account that contingency question can only be used in online surveys. If used in questionnaires administered on paper, they tend to confuse the respondents and often lead to discarding of questionnaires as they are not filled in correctly. (Sue and Ritter 2012, 67)

The first contingency question was Question 4, and separated the first group of the respondents – the challenge winners. The next contingency question was in the fifth position

in the survey, and further separated the respondents into 2 subgroups – those who applied to a host-university and those who did not.

The survey started with the introductory message and followed with first three interest-getting questions. Their purpose was to capture the interests of the respondent, make him feel connected to the purpose of the questionnaire, and reduce coverage and nonresponse error. (Dillman, Smyth and Christian 2015, 230-231) These questions also covered the beginning of the customer journey of a Sqore user – realising by the customer his/her need for education and motivation behind choosing the university. The information gathered from these questions can help Sqore to understand what interests the prospective students and what should be emphasized in marketing of the challenges.

To make sure that each research question would be covered in the survey, it was roughly divided into several sections each focusing on answering one of research questions. The section following the interest-getting questions was aimed at understanding the customer experience of the Sqore user. It covered the customer journey from initial interaction with Sqore and motivation behind it, and progressed into the influence the challenge had on customer's behaviour. The customer-experience section is also devoted to several topics, analysing the actual challenge experience, relationship between the challenge and applying to a specific university and the specific experience of each subgroup. The next section in questionnaire focused on communication between Sqore and customers during the challenge process. The aim of the next several questions was to find out what type of content and challenges the customers would like to see in the future on Sqore website. The final section focused on retrieving information about the basic demographic profile of a Sqore user. The survey rounded up with a field for comments and request to leave an email address, if the respondent wished to qualify for receiving a gift voucher. By design all questions except the 2 last ones required an answer.

The full questionnaire can be found in the appendices to this thesis.

4.4 Data collection

As has been previously mentioned, the survey tool SurveyMonkey was used for designing the survey, collection and analysis of the data. The main reasons were its ease of use, clear functionality and a fact that the commissioning company had used it previously, and had an account open there.

The contact information to the target audience was provided by the commissioning company in the form of emails retrieved from the company database. The list of emails was

comprised of the participants of the top ten Sqore challenges, which had a proven record of representatives of all three subgroups of the target audience.

The survey was distributed through two channels. Firstly, it was sent through email containing an online link to the questionnaire. Secondly, the online survey link was also included in the newsletter that is regularly sent to the registered Sqore users. The answering time for questionnaire was two weeks in total, from 29 September till 15 October 2017. The questionnaire was distributed only once, and no reminder email were sent.

To motivate Sqore users to participate in the survey, it was decided to offer 3 Amazon gift-vouchers for 20 dollars each. One representative from each target subgroup was selected for receiving the voucher. The selection was based on the comprehensiveness of the answers and efforts put into completion of the survey.

5 Results of the survey

This chapter presents the findings received during the survey collection period from 29 September till 15 October 2017. The results were first collected and analysed in the SurveyMonkey tool and then exported to the Excel format, in order to present them in this thesis.

In order to give more freedom, majority of questions allowed an option to include a respondent's own variant of answer. These answers as well as the answers from the comment field can be found in the appendices.

After the two-weeks collection period the total number of the responses reached 234 individual respondents, though only 192 respondents completed the questionnaire in full – 42 respondents dropped the survey after completing the first three questions. It is of course far from the total number of the registered Sqore users participating in education-related challenges, still the results can be viewed as fairly reliable considering the short collection period. Good understanding of the Sqore user profile, their customers' experience and perceptions of the company was gained as the outcome of the survey.

5.1 Results for interest questions

Following the structure of the questionnaire, the first section containing interest-getting questions will be analysed. One of the two purposes for these questions was to understand the beginning of the customer journey of a Sqore user. The findings from this section will be used for better tailoring of the Sqore marketing messages, emphasizing the characteristics of a challenge, programme of host-university which cause the strongest interest.

This section was answered by 234 respondents. The results are presented in three subchapters according to the questions, including the most interesting personal answers of the respondents.

5.1.1 Most attractive university features

The aim of the first two questions was to find out what university features are most important for prospective students. One question focuses on the university resources used for providing education, while the next puts emphasis on a student's well-being. Both questions allowed to choose multiple options.

When asked what makes the university attractive, five main characteristics emerged that were important for the majority of respondents (more than 50%). The most important turned out to be the international ranking of the university which got 60,68% of replies. It was quite a surprising result as this information is very rarely mentioned on the university websites, as well as on Sqore. The other four most important features were multicultural faculty, international student body, opportunities for exchange and career services. They were quite obvious and expected. The least important characteristic also brought up a certain level of surprise – location. The surprise is caused by the fact that in most marketing messages universities often emphasize their location in a big city or a countryside attempting to attract students. But the results show that it is far from being a decisive factor, reaching in average 18,17% of responses (average of results for options "Its location in a big city" and "Its location in a picturesque place, away from major cities"). The detailed overall results can be seen in Figure 3.

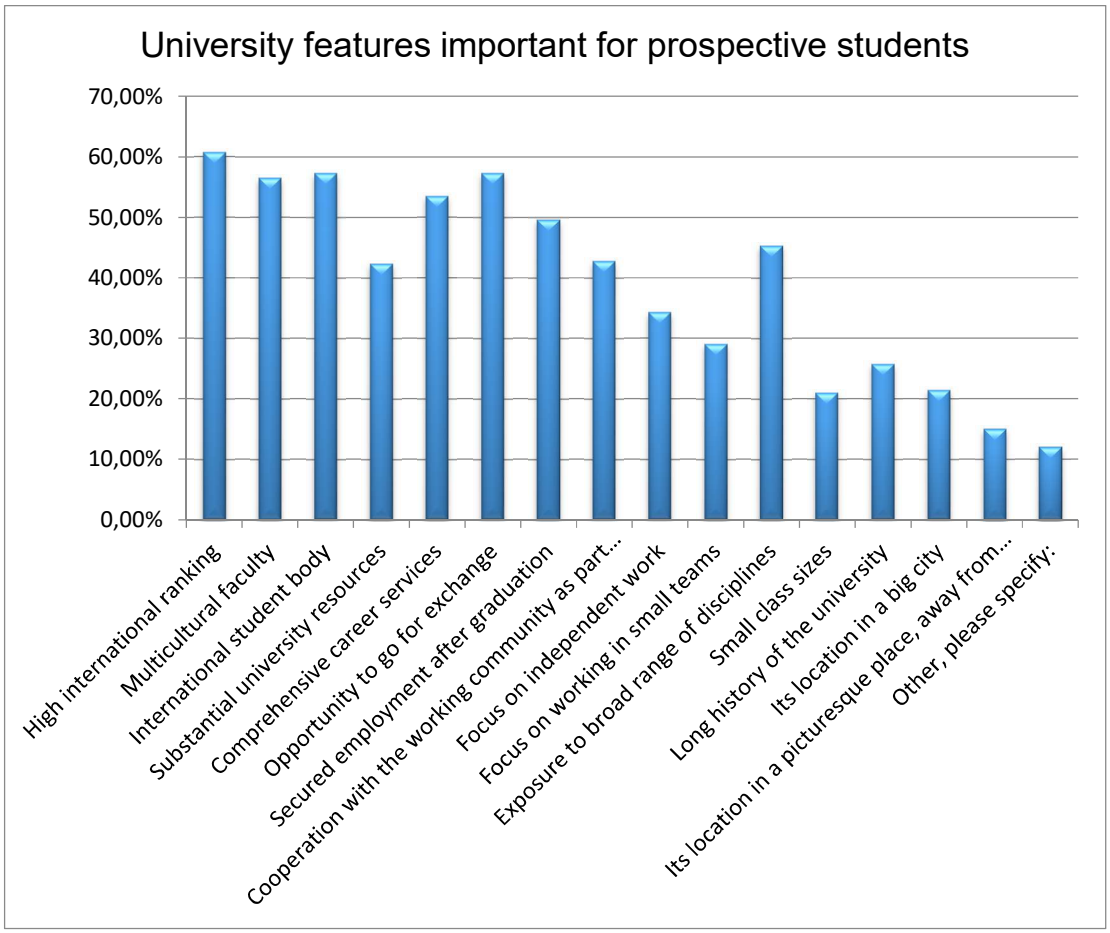

Figure 3. University features important for prospective students

When analysing the answers inserted by respondents themselves it was interesting to see that opportunities to do research were mentioned twice, which is not something you expect a prospective student to be thinking about. Another response that caught attention was “gender equality”. It was mentioned only once but was unexpected. In overall the focus is given to costs of studying and living, environment and relationships between the faculty and student body, additional opportunities students can enjoy (for example, attending big conferences).

When asked about their well-being the most important was the provision of financial aid by the university – 85,9% of responses. Related to this was the opportunity to study and work at the same time – 76,07% of respondents state this as important for their well-being. The third most important characteristic was career counselling provided by the university – important for more than half of the respondents (55,13%). For more details see Figure 4.

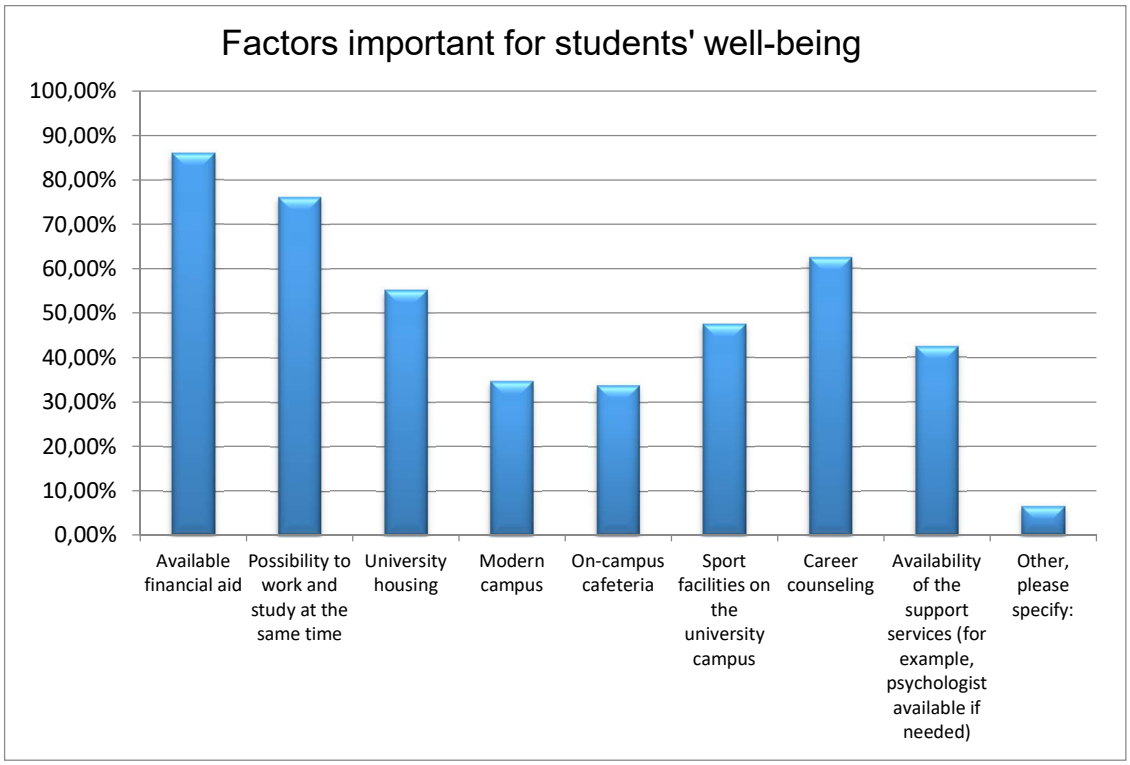

Figure 4. Factors important for students' well-being

In the free options, a stress was put on availability of medical facilities for students. Another respondent suggested to allow students work for university during their studies, which is similar to the policies existing in US universities where students can work in a university library or cafeteria to support their studies. Strongly emphasized was the free access to modern literature (mentioned by 3 respondents), availability of online courses and extra-curricular activities.

5.1.2 Reasons for studying abroad

Sqore challenges are mostly targeted to those who wish to study abroad, therefore it was important to understand what prompts prospective students to go to another country for studies.

The results showed an interesting trend – 75,64% of respondents stated that they wish to challenge themselves. This trend supports the vision and mission of Sqore, showing that the company managed to reach their intended target audience. The other two most common reasons among the respondents turned out to be improving the foreign language and studying a subject that the home country had poorly developed. The least important reason was family or friendly ties – 2,99% of respondents found it important enough to be mentioned.

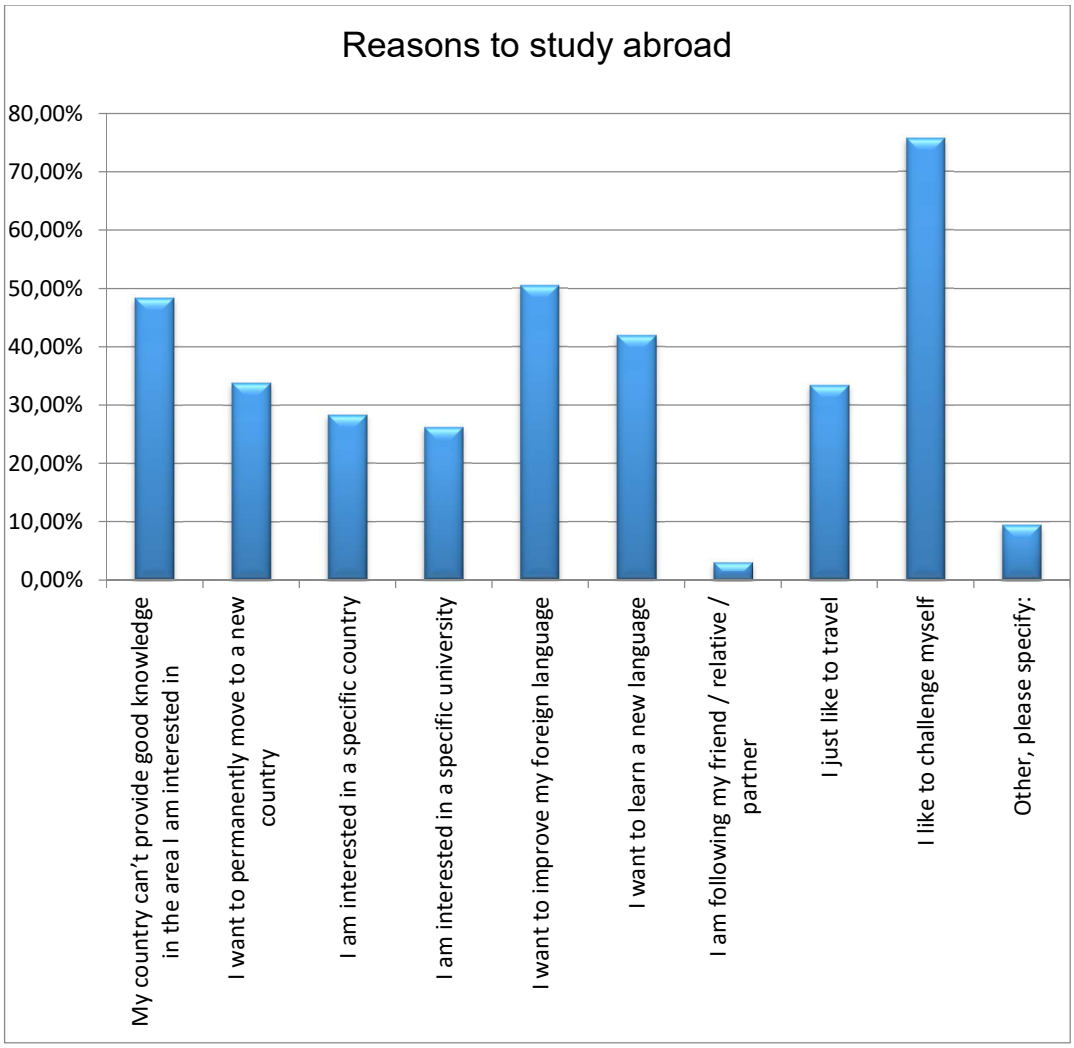

Figure 5. Reasons to study abroad

In the individual responses, several trends emerged. One common reason to study abroad mentioned by several respondents was the wish to explore new things, cultures and countries, and meet new people. The other trend showed that many respondents move abroad for studying because their home country does not provide enough opportunities for studying and work, or because of unstable situation (war). One respondent stated that nothing can make him go study in a foreign country.

5.2 Background profile of the users

In the structure of the questionnaire the questions regarding demographic profile of the respondents were moved to the end of the survey because of the general rules of survey construction. In the analysis though, this information will be examined in the beginning before moving to other sections of the questionnaire.

The first category analysed is the age of the respondents. In the interview with the Sqore representative it was mentioned that the company focuses on young generation, specifically millennials and Generation Z. From the Figure 6 it can be seen that the survey findings support the company strategy, showing that the target audience is successfully reached by the marketing communication. The most significant group is comprised by the respondents aged 23-27 years, and the second largest is Sqore users between 18 and 22 years of age. It is also quite surprising to see that the Sqore is also used by an unlikely group aged over 43 years. This group is even bigger than user segment comprised by users under 18 years old, 6 and 5 respondents respectively.

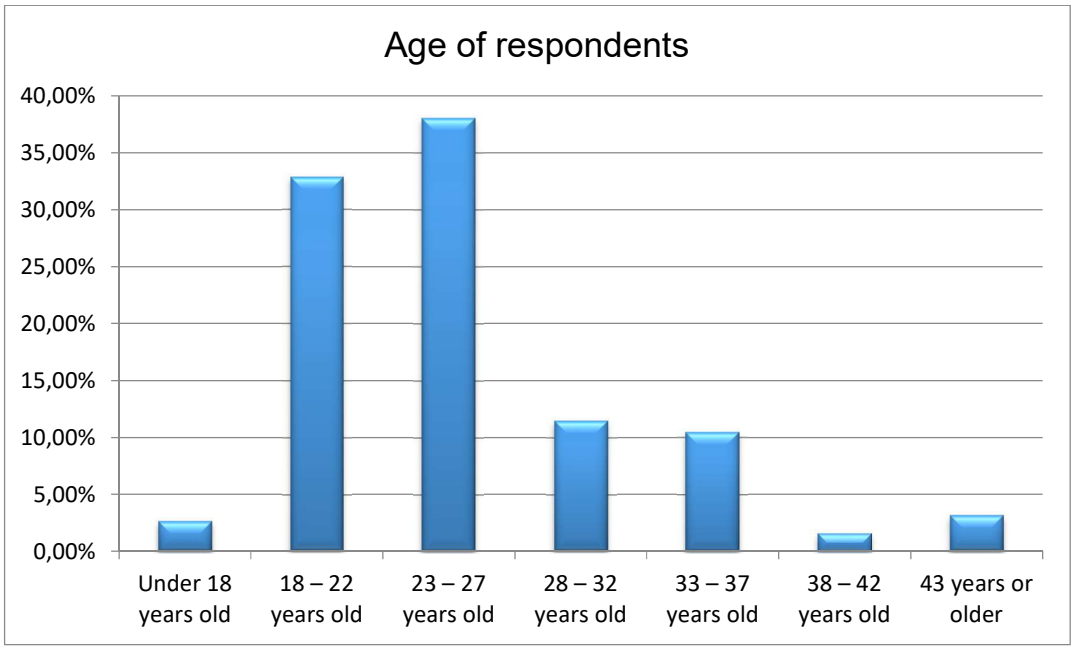

Figure 6. Age of respondents

The next category analysed was the country of origin and residence. It was decided to have two separate questions. The reason is that the survey was sent to Sqore customers who have completed the challenge already, and there is a possibility that the person has already moved abroad. This way the results will not really show what countries the Sqore has originally targeted and reached. Therefore, to rectify it separate questions about the country of origin and residence were introduced.

The results have shown that among total number of 192 respondents there were people residing in 56 different countries. The countries best represented in the sample were India, Nigeria, Indonesia, Brazil, Ghana, Pakistan and Egypt (mentioned in descending order of respondents). Most of other countries were represented by one, maximum 4 respondents.

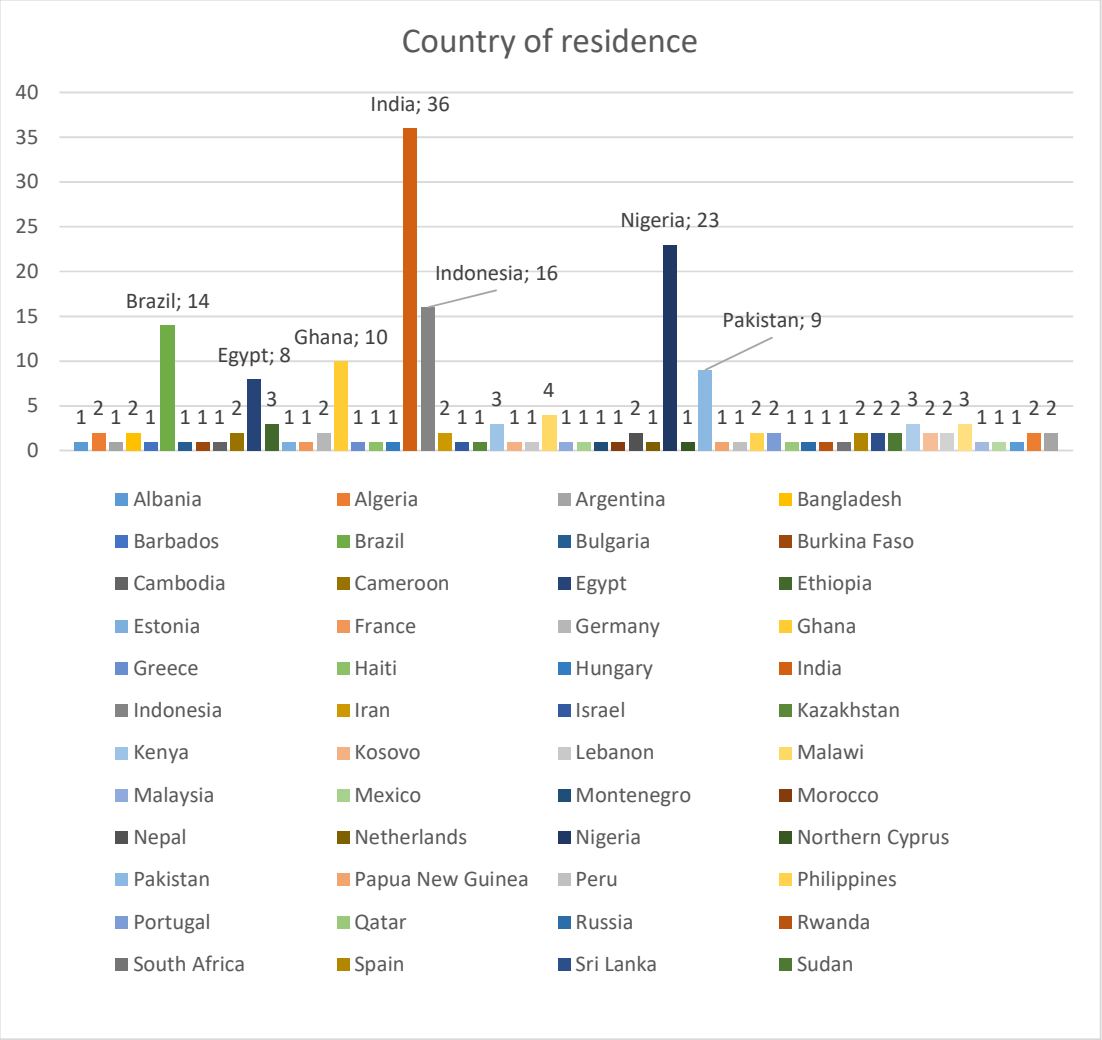

Figure 7. Country of residence of the respondents

Question about the countries of origin apparently caused some confusion among the respondents, as there were several answers that could not be qualified as countries (i.e. Asia, Africa, Tata Industries). Therefore, some of the answers had to be disqualified. As the result the total number of the respondents to this question reached 181. In general, the results showed that there were representatives of 51 countries among the respondents. It is slightly less than the number of countries of residence. The countries represented in the sample stayed the same.

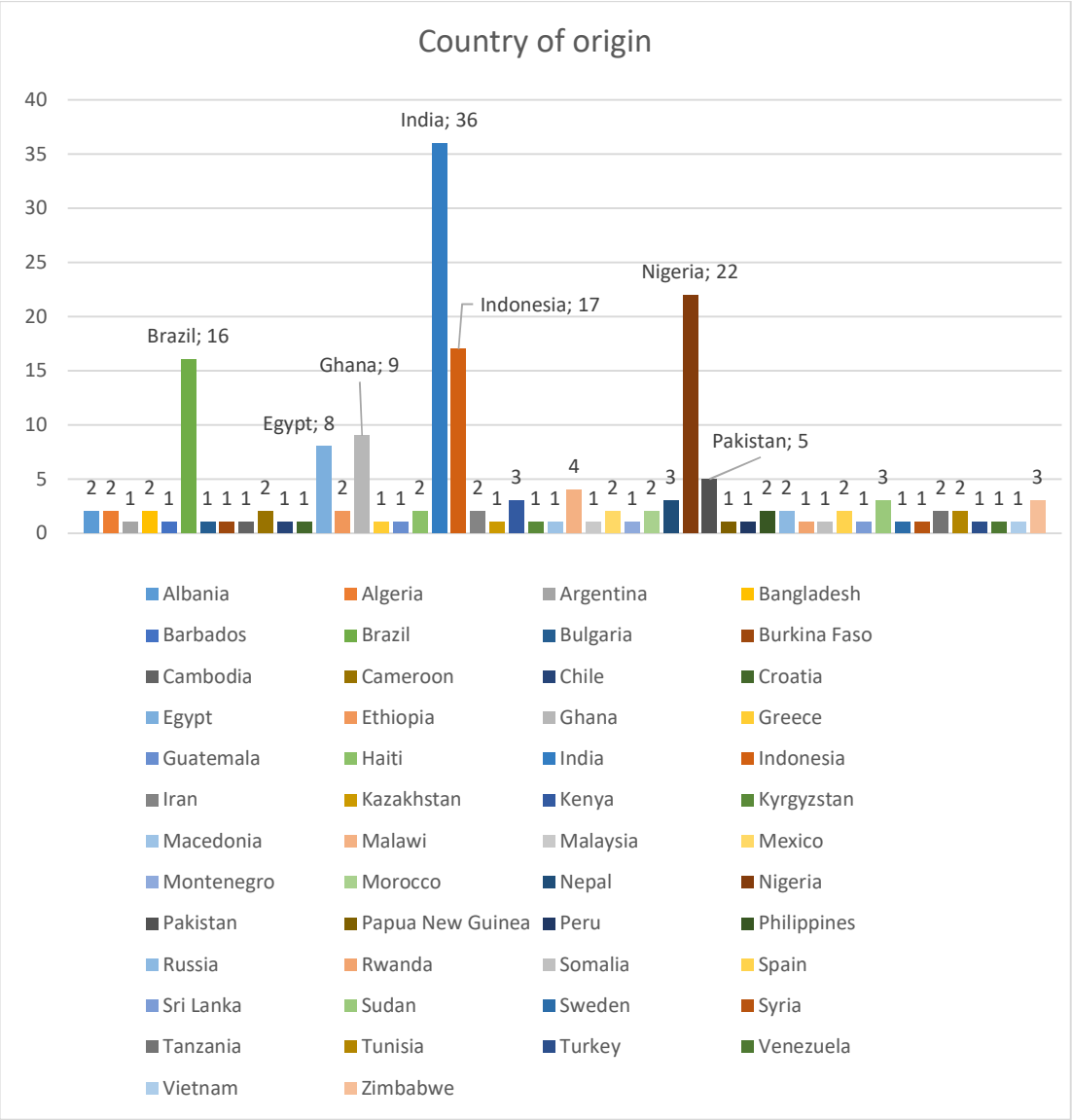

Figure 8. Country of origin of the respondents

This specific country spread was likely caused by the fact that the contact information for survey respondents was taken from the list of Sqore users who have participated in sev-

eral Sqore challenges. It looks like those challenges were mostly targeting Asian and African countries. Fortunately, the survey was also sent as part of Sqore newsletter, thus increasing validity and variety of the sample.

As the analysis was performed over the group of Sqore customers who completed education-related challenges it was important to understand what was their level of education, and which challenges they might be potentially interested in. The findings showed that that the biggest segment consists of users who have already obtained a Bachelor's degree – 48,44%.

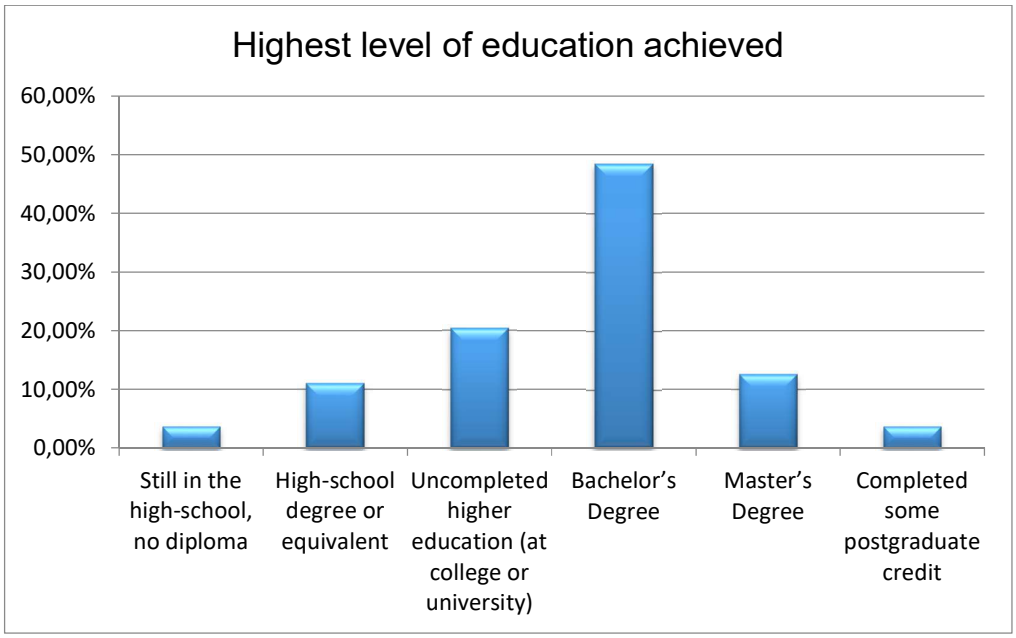

Figure 9. Level of education achieved by the respondents

Since Sqore services provide opportunities to participate in competitions for young people for better understanding the customer profile it is necessary to know what is their current student status. The results of the survey show an interesting insight: there are two major, almost equal target segments – current students and young people looking for higher education.

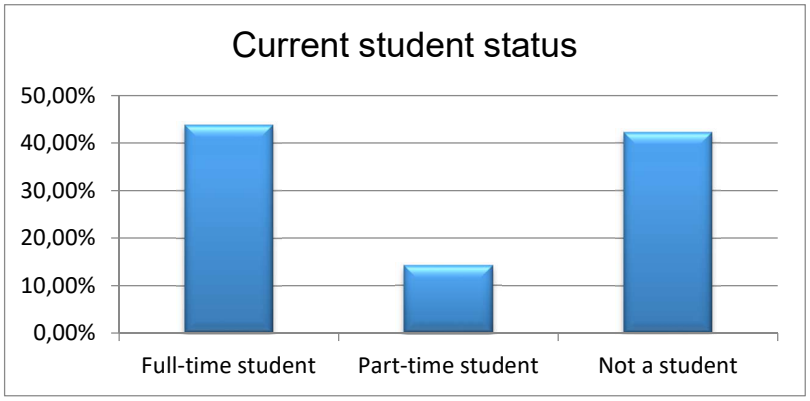

Figure 10. Current student status of the respondents

Knowing the employment status of a Sqore customer is to the same degree important as acknowledging the student status. The reason is that unemployed or partially employed person will be more motivated to search for new opportunities, is more active in his/her search and will bear less costs when moving abroad for studying. Though the majority of respondents expectedly turned out to be unemployed, still almost one third of the sample (29,17%) were employed full-time. It is likely that this segment would be looking for additional benefits included in the challenge prize, in order to justify the costs of losing the salary in case they win the challenge and have to temporarily relocate abroad.

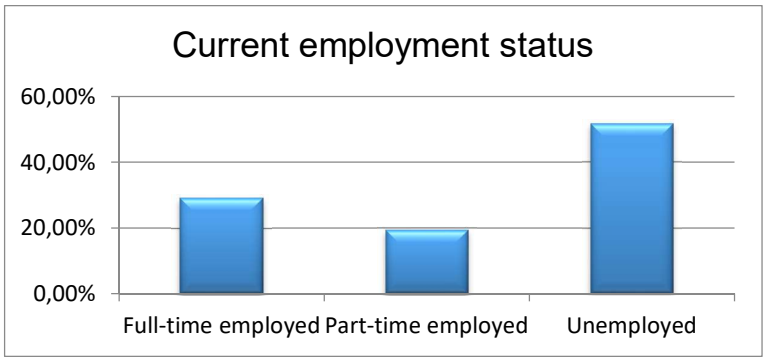

Figure 11. Current employment status of the respondents

From the above stated results, it is possible to define two customer segments. The first segment would be presented by a young person in mid-twenties or slightly older, fully or partially employed and most likely with completed higher education in the form of Bachelor's degree. A typical representative of the second segment is a current student in his early twenties and likely unemployed. These two segments will have different needs and interest in challenges. The first segment is more likely be interested in challenges for Masters' programs or internship positions, strong universities and programmes with ample resources for studying; they might need extra benefits included in the prize of the challenge.

The second segment would be ideal customers of the challenges for short (for couple of weeks) and long term (semester or a year) exchange courses and travel grants.

5.3 Findings from the questions researching Sqore challenge experience

The following set of survey questions attempts to describe and understand Sqore customer's experience during participating in a challenge.

5.3.1 Analysis of the actual challenge experience

The first question in the section is attempting to find out how the initial interaction with Sqore challenge happens. It also gives information on effectiveness of the company's marketing efforts. Figure 12 illustrates the results on this question. As we can see the total of 72,92% of the respondents were directed to the challenge via the company's owned marketing channels – StudentCompetitions.com, Sqore newsletter, company website and social media. Out of these the website, newsletter and Facebook were the most efficient. It is necessary to mention that Twitter did not bring any visitors to the Sqore challenges, even though it was still in use on the time of the first interaction of the respondent and the company (as it has been already mentioned in Section 2.3 of this study, the commissioner stopped using their Twitter account in the beginning of October 2017). Apparently, it is not the right channel to reach the target audience; the findings explain why the company decided to stop marketing through this channel. The findings also reveal that information about Sqore challenges is also shared through the word-of-mouth – 5,21% of the respondents heard about the challenge from a friend or relative.

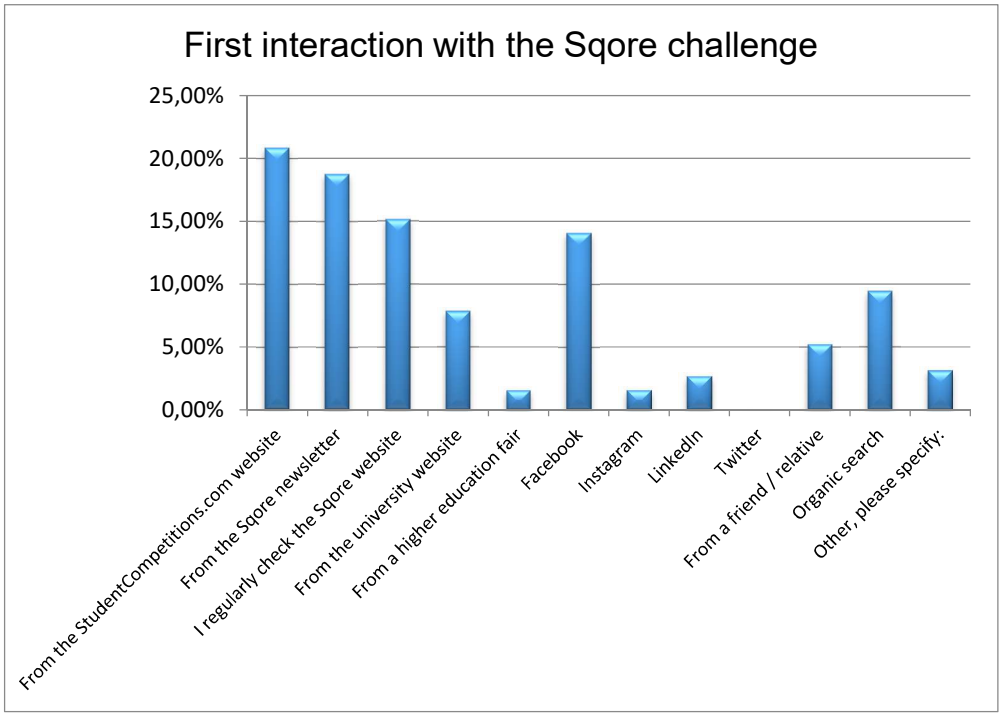

Figure 12. Channels of the first interaction with the Sqore challenge

The next question attempts to understand the motivation behind the participation in Sqore challenge. Obviously, the main reason was desire to study abroad, as it is the objective of the Sqore service to provide world-wide opportunities for young people. The second most important motivation for the respondents coincided with their answer for reasons to study abroad. According to the results 59,90% of the respondents want more challenges. The overall trend shows that respondents wish for exciting experiences and opportunities to test themselves in different environments. An interesting insight shows that almost 25% of respondents see the Sqore challenge as a way to simplify their university admission process. This supports the ambition of Sqore to provide services similar to those of a study counsel advisor. Still there is opportunity to grow this number even higher through closer cooperation with educational institutions.

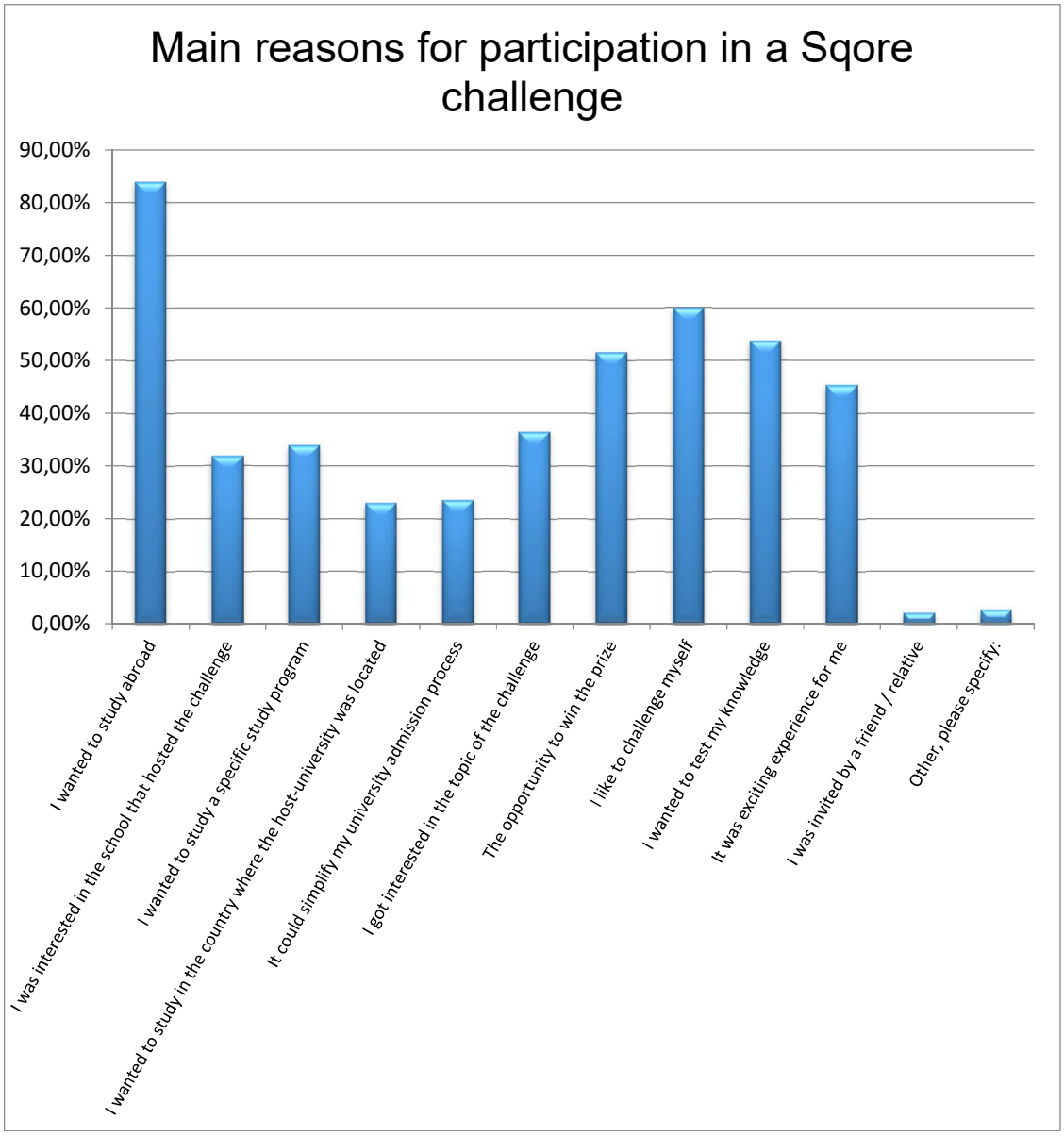

Figure 13. Main reason for participation in a Sqore challenge

To analyse the customer experience, it is necessary to understand how the users perceive the difficulty level of a challenge – a too hard challenge will demotivate participation, while too easy will not be perceived as a serious opportunity worth effort. The answer options for the question were presented in a form of a Likert scale. The results showed that overall the difficulty of the challenge is adequate to the prizes and opportunities offered.

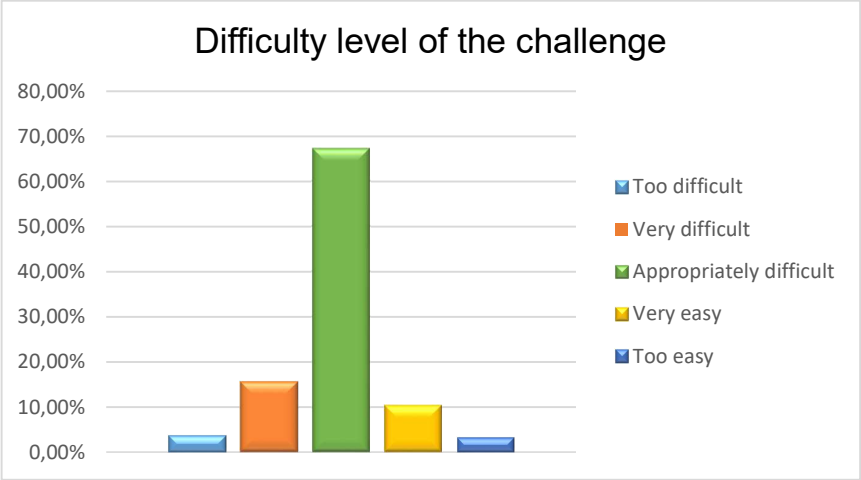

Figure 14. Difficulty level of the challenges

For the customer participating in any kind of activity it is necessary to see that it is relevant to the intended outcome. In the case of a Sqore challenge, customers will feel more motivated to complete the challenge process till the end if they see that it is closely related to the program they wish to apply to through the challenge. In general, 60,42% of the respondents can clearly see the ties between the challenge tasks and the program. Though 31,25% replied “Maybe”, showing that it was difficult for them to see the point in completing the challenge tasks. It is likely they did not see how the tasks tested the skills, which in their opinion, were necessary for the program they were applying to. The level of unclearness is quite high, and it is necessary to attempt to lower it down.

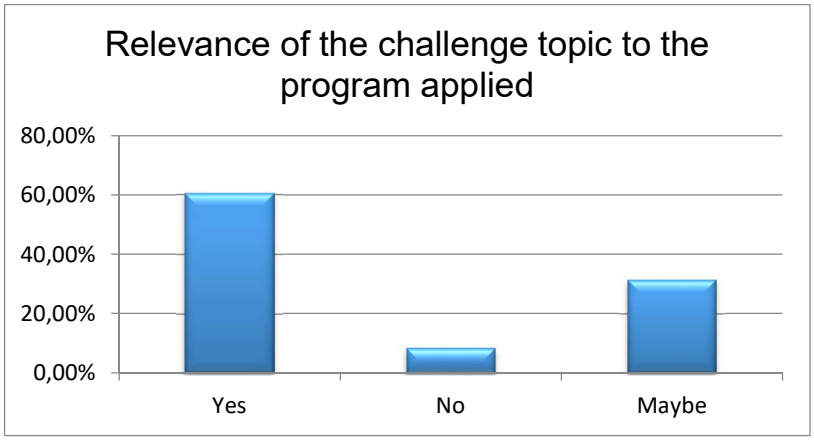

Figure 15. Relevance of the challenge topic to the study program

The next question is related to the previous one. The purpose is to understand the customers’ perceptions of the skills and knowledge necessary for studying. This feedback also reflects the customers’ experience. Answering to the question what should be in-

cluded in the challenge tasks, Sqore users inform about what they lacked in their challenge experience. According to the results, respondents see the language test and questions about the program as equally important and two most necessary categories – 51,56% respondents chose both. While questions about the program and the university usually are an integral part of a Sqore challenge, the language skills are tested quite rarely in the challenge process. The reason is likely because universities require IELTS or TOEFL exam results in their application process, therefore they see unnecessary to check language skills separately. The second place on the importance scale is occupied by a business case scenario amounting to 42,71% of responses. Here the business case scenario means a task where a challenge participant will attempt to solve a problem for a real or imaginary company. At the moment very few of the challenges on Sqore have this type of tasks included in them. The third most important skill that needs testing is math, though often disliked it is still seen as necessary. Figure 16 illustrates the results in more details.

Valuable feedback was received from the answers supplied by respondents themselves. One suggestion was to set a task to design a product or service, unlike the simple aptitude tests. The suggestion captures attention, but at the same time contradicts an answer given by another person. In his opinion, the tasks should be easy enough to be able to complete during breaks in studies or work. Such requirement will demand that the tasks are separate from each other and can be completed over a long period of time, with significant breaks between them. Design of a product or service will take a lot of time and preparation, though it can be assigned as a task for a challenge with ample time assigned to it, and with a valuable prize. Among others a lot of attention is paid to necessity of test on logic and reasoning. Unexpected was the request to include test on knowledge of social responsibility in the country where the university-host of the challenge is located. It shows that people need more preparation before entering the foreign culture, in order to make their experience more comfortable.

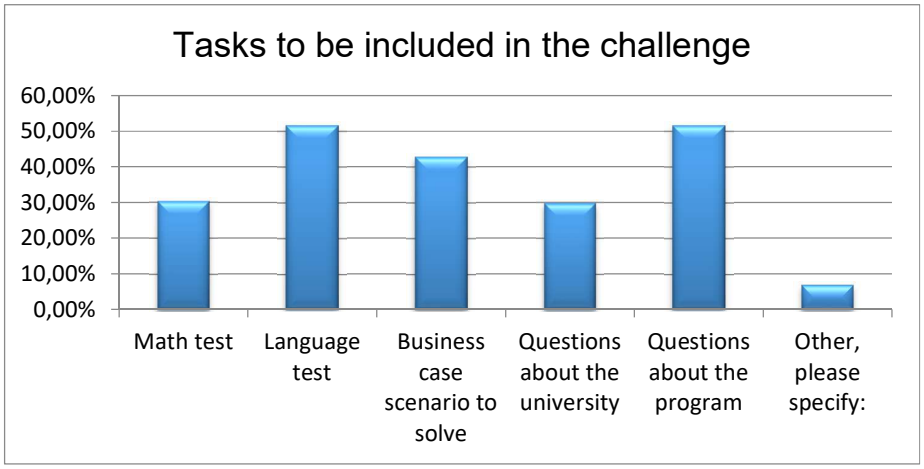

Figure 16. Tasks to be included in the challenge

The next question focused on finding out how each of the Sqore customers perceived the challenge they participated in personally. The purpose is to find out what kind of image the customers have of Sqore and its main service. Overall the perceptions of the Sqore challenge are very positive, emphasizing the usefulness of the challenges for the application process, innovative approach, and describing them as an interesting and engaging experience. Commonly the Sqore challenge is perceived as interesting (76,04% of respondents checked this answer option), new experience (65,1%) and an innovative way to recruit new students (53,65%). Figure 17 gives the full picture of the image that the customers have of their Sqore-challenge experience.

Though not as extensive as in other question, the answers provided by the respondents gave some interesting insights. A surprising answer was “a bit undisclosed”, which signifies that Sqore customers would like to have more information about the challenge in free access before taking part in it. Two other answers show that the challenge was perceived as a rather difficult one. Finally, two respondents wanted to attract attention to the competitiveness of the challenge, high numbers of participants and low chances of winning as a result. The final comments show that the challenge manage to serve its purpose of attracting a lot of potential students and spread the information about the various opportunities available.

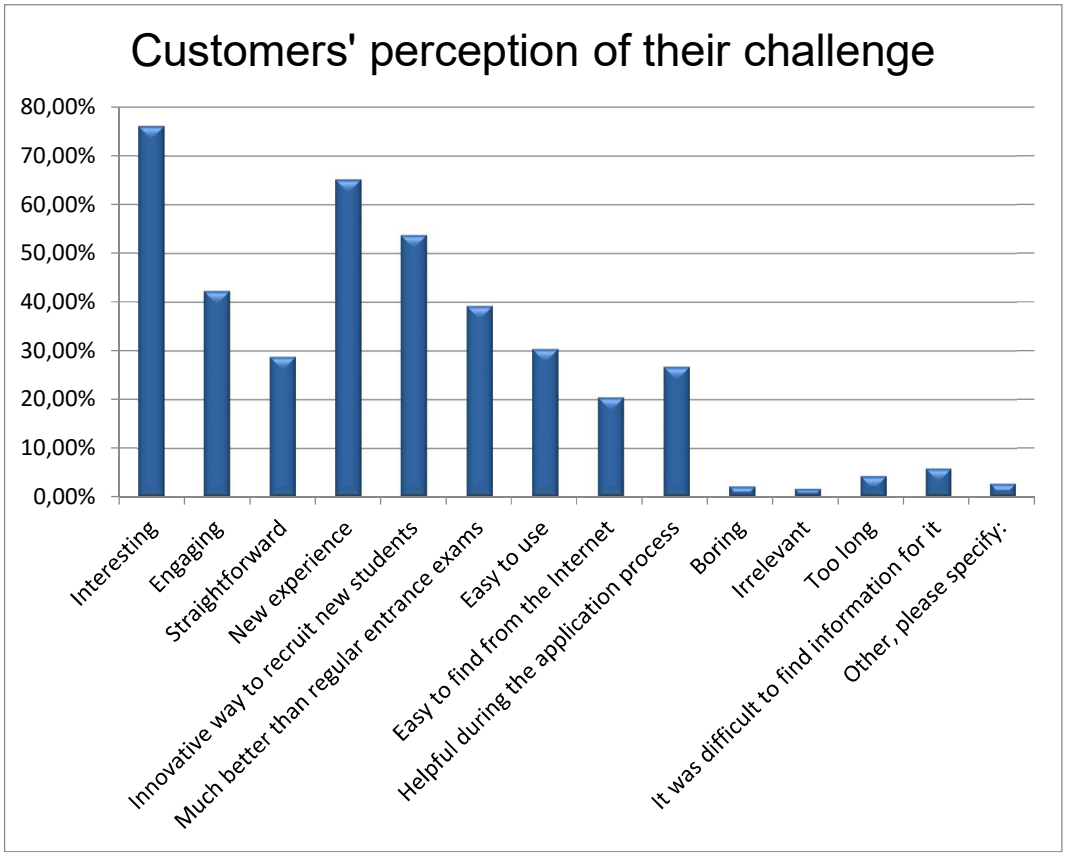

Figure 17. Customers' perception of the challenge

5.3.2 How participating in the challenge affects university applications

This questionnaire section aims to find out whether and how the Sqore challenge affects the decisions during university application process.

The first question is directed to finding out how effective the Sqore challenge could be for marketing the universities and spreading the information about them. The question asked whether the respondent knew about the university hosting the challenge before participating in it. As the Figure 18 illustrates almost 75% of the respondents had the first interaction with the university through the Sqore challenge. This high percentage clearly illustrates that the Sqore can serve as a marketing channel for universities. At the same time, it is a good source of knowledge for prospective students, as the organisation cooperates with various universities in different countries. Thus, a prospective student can find out about options available in different countries without researching each country separately, which is quite rare and valuable opportunity. The result numbers also show that Sqore can potentially mould behaviours of its customers through providing more information about available opportunities.

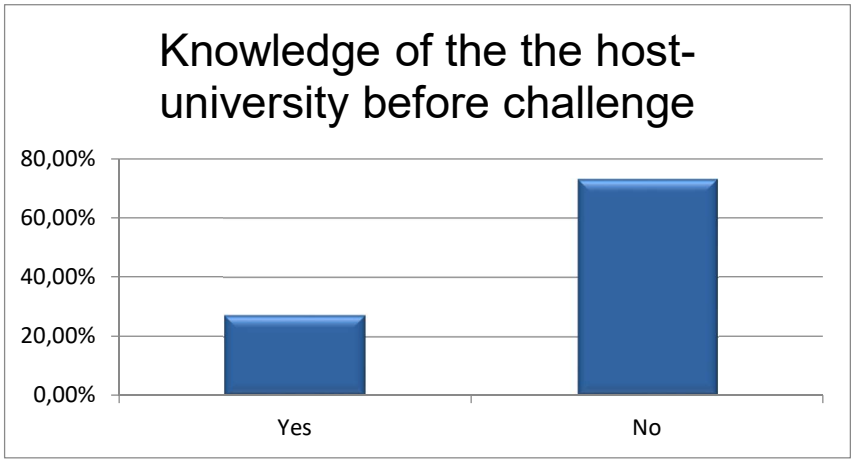

Figure 18. Knowledge of the host-university before the challenge

While the first question on the topic of this thesis chapter was asked from all the respondents, the other two questions were asked only from the first two subgroups of the respondents. This can be explained by the fact that the last subgroup never applied to university hosting the challenge, and their questions where aimed to find out why not.

The following question was aimed to find out the role the challenge participation played in decision to apply to the host-university. In total this question and the next one were answered by 103 respondents – 35 in the group of challenge-winners and 68 in the group of non-winners. As the Figure 19 shows a little more than the third of the respondents would have never applied to that specific university if they had not participated in the challenge. One third of the respondents replied with a definite positive answer to the question, and one third was indecisive. The answers show the strong marketing potential of the Sqore service, as well as its strong impact on the behaviour of its users.

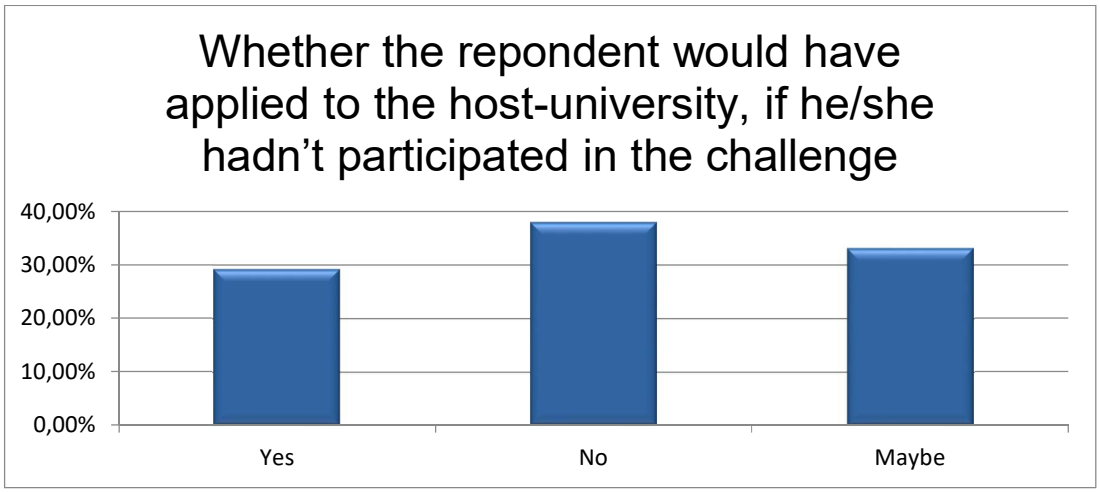

Figure 19. The relationship between challenge participation and university applications

The next question was directed to finding out how the challenge influenced respondents in their decision to apply to the university. It helped to find out what features of the challenge were the most important during the decision-making process. As the Figure 20 shows the most significant and useful feature of the Sqore challenges and its service as a whole was its ability to provide information. Therefore, this aspect should be emphasized in the future development of the service. The respondents also value the chance to get the financial aid offered by the challenges, as well as the opportunity to assess their knowledge. A bit more than 20% of the respondents mentioned the opportunity to communicate with a university representative. Finally, there were two respondents who provided their own answers. One respondent emphasized how the challenge encouraged to do a deeper research of information. The other one valued how the challenge familiarizes a participant with a particular information.

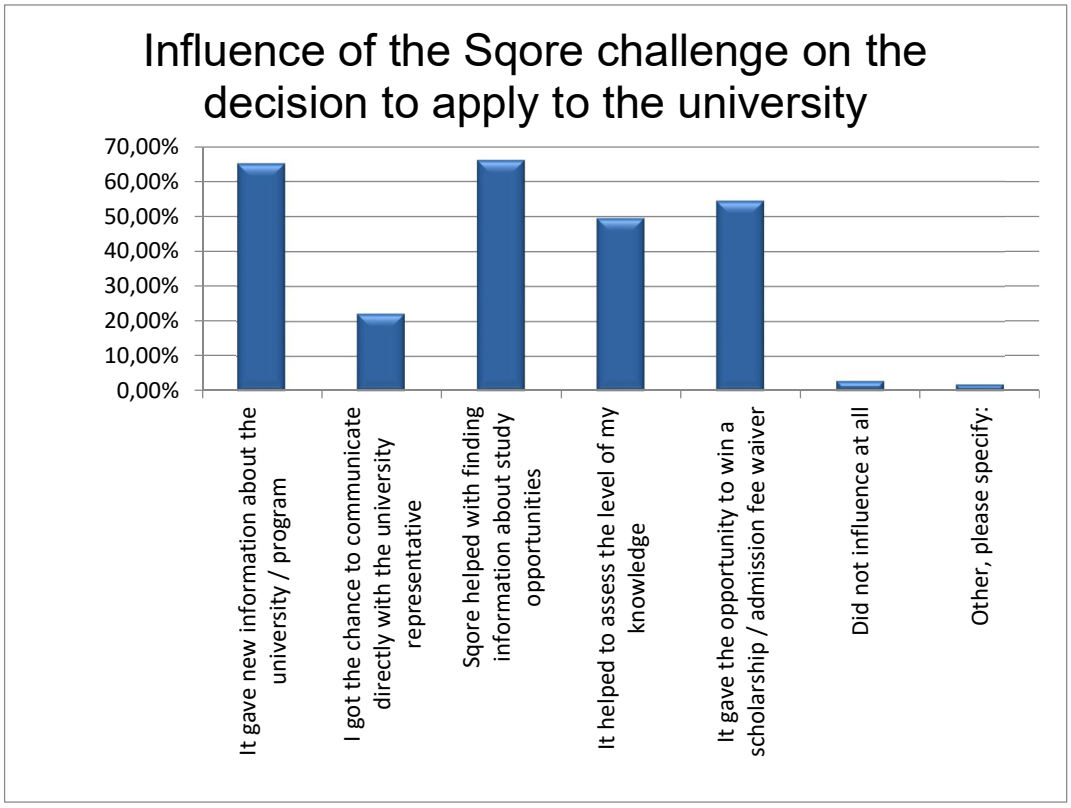

Figure 20. Influence of the challenge on the decision to apply to the university

Overall it can be seen that Sqore has a significant impact on the behaviour of its customers mainly be providing the information not known and available before, thus giving more opportunities to act differently.

5.3.3 Findings from the subgroup sections

This section contains and analyses the answers received from the respondents in each specific subgroup.

Subgroup of the challenge winners

The subgroup of the challenge winners consisted of 35 respondents in total, who answered the questionnaire in full. The section is designed so as to find out how strongly the winning influences the decisions and actions of the challenge participants.

Figure 21 shows how strongly the winning of the challenge impacted respondents in their decision to attend the university hosting the challenge. For 40% of the respondents the winning was a powerful decisive factor. Surprisingly for just 17,14% of respondents winning the challenge was the only reason to attend the university. The higher percentage rate for this answer was expected. Similarly, the percentage of respondents not at all affected by the winning – 11,43% - was expected to be lower or even approaching to zero.

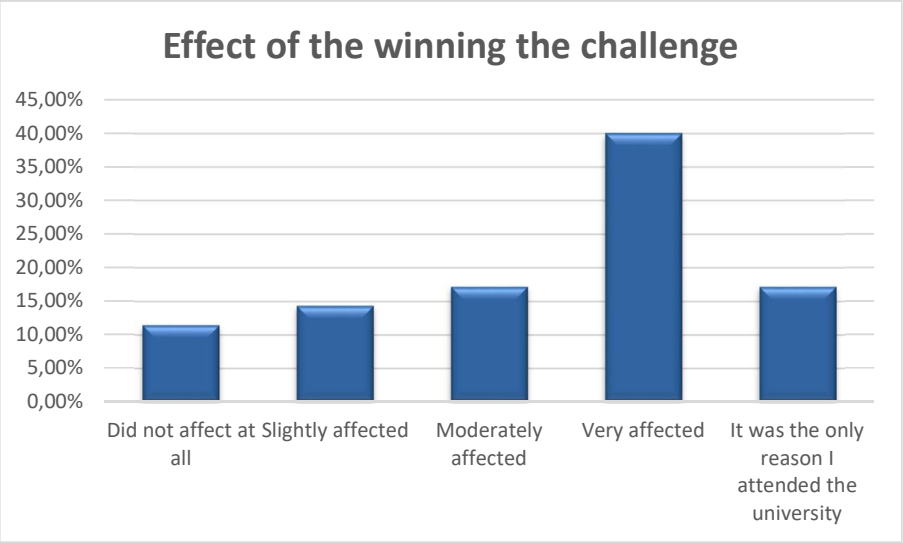

Figure 21. Impact of winning the challenge

In order to better understand the motives of the respondents in the winners' subgroup, they were asked what would they have done if they did not win the challenge. The results showed that the main motive to participate in the challenge was a chance to get the opportunity to study in a specific university hosting the challenge. As the Figure 22 show 40% of the respondents within the group were willing to wait till the next challenge organ-

ised by the same university in case of losing in the challenge. This motive is further supported by 34,29% of respondents who were going to apply to the host-university regardless of the challenge results.

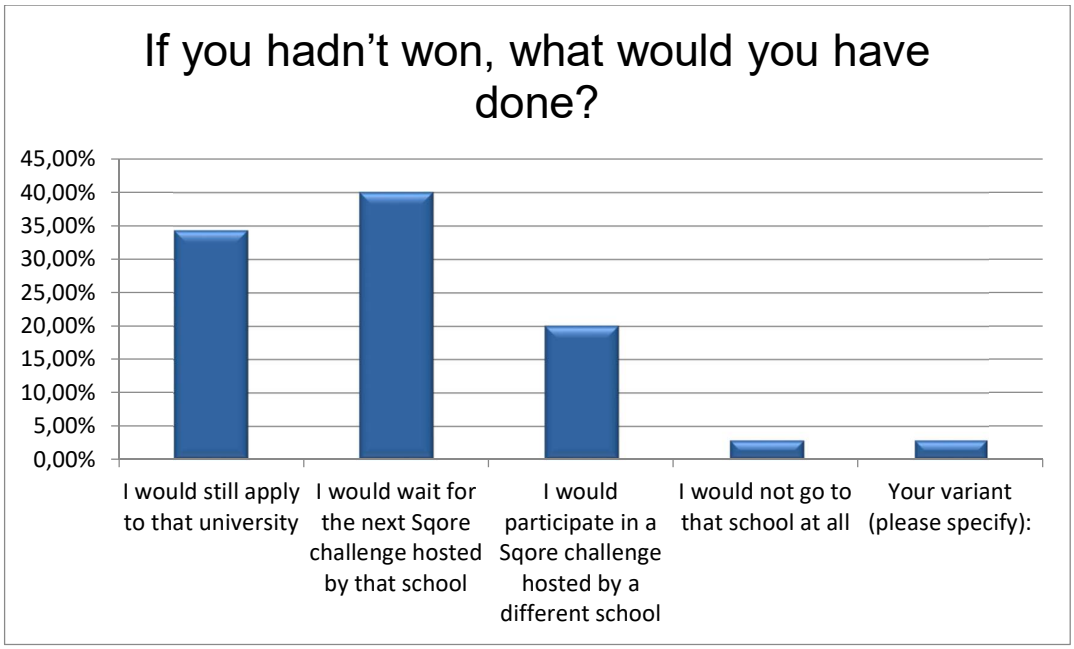

Figure 22. Analysis of possible behaviour in case of losing the challenge

In general, we can see that though winning greatly affects the behaviour of the respondents, it is never an absolute decisive factor.

Subgroup of the challenge participants who applied to the university

The next subgroup analysed is the segment consisting of the Sqore users who have participated in the challenge, did not win but still applied to the host-university. In numbers this group is almost twice as big as the group of challenge winners consisting of 68 respondents.

Similarly, as with the group of winners the first question asked is about the effect the participation in the challenge had on the decision to apply to the university. Unlike in the previously analysed subgroup, the answers in the current segment where more evenly spread. For the majority of respondents – 35,39% – participating in the challenge had the moderate effect on the subsequent actions of the respondents; the picture very much different from that of the group of winners. For 30,88% participation was a very decisive factor, compared to 40% in the group of winners. And for only 7,35% participation was the only reason to apply and attend the host-university. The full picture can be seen from the Figure 23.

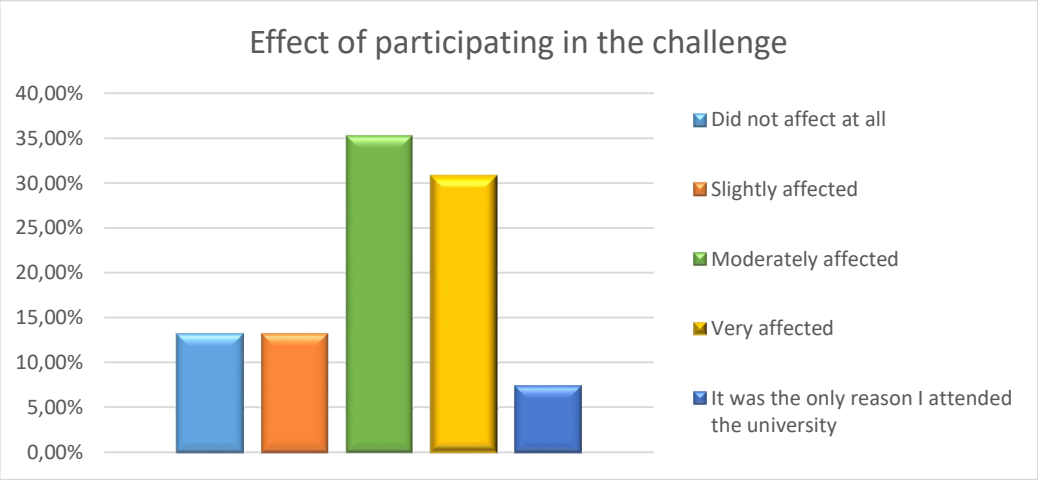

Figure 23. Effect of participating in the challenge

It was expected that winning the challenge should be almost the factor in the decision to apply to the university hosting the challenge. The next question aims to find out what makes respondents to apply to the university even when they do not win the challenge. As it can be seen from the chart in the Figure 24 two main reasons for proceeding with a university application were the prospective students being impressed with the information about the school and the study program (26,47% and 30,88% respectively). It was interesting to find out that for 13,24% (9 respondents out of 68) the university offered another form of financial aid. This number was further supported by the response in the open-ended answer option: the respondent replied that Sqore challenge provided additional information about admission requirements and gave the opportunity to get another source of financing the studies directly from the university. So as we can see, Sqore challenge possesses some hidden benefits, not visible from the beginning. This way Sqore manages not only to meet the customer expectations but to exceed them at the same time.

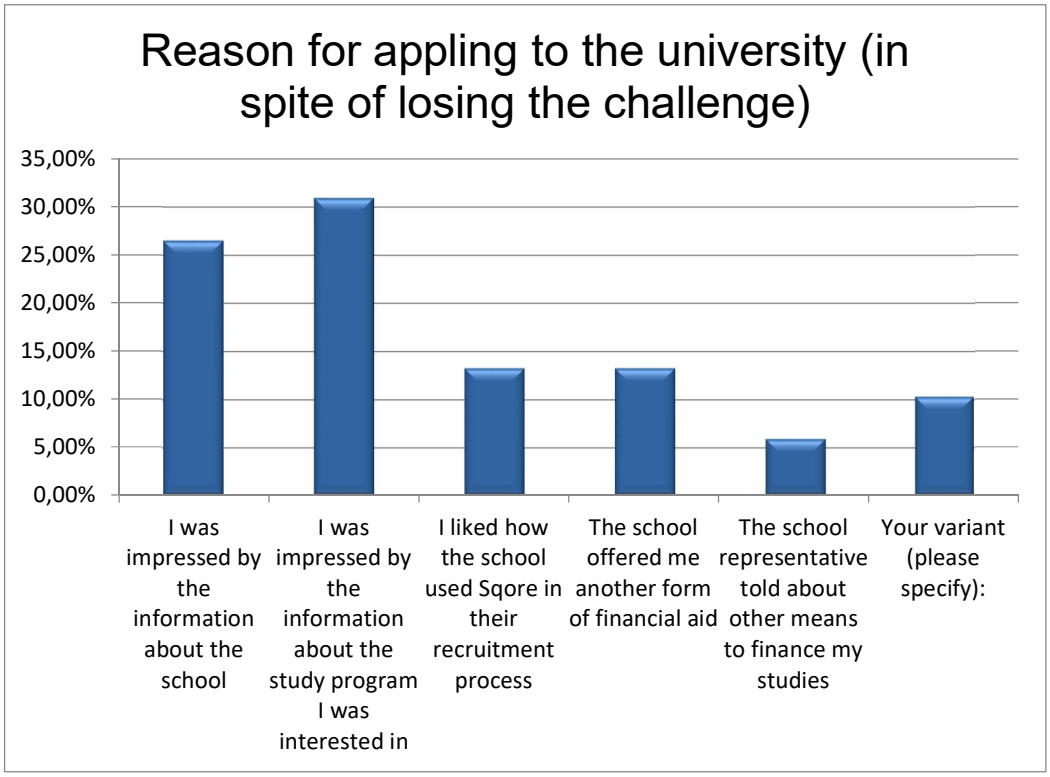

Figure 24. Reasons for applying to the university

Subgroup of the respondents who did not apply to the university

The most extensive subgroup among the respondents consisted of those who completed the challenge but did not apply to the university.

In the first question the reasons for not completing the challenge are analysed. The most important reason turned out to be the unwillingness to pay the university application fees – 41,75% of respondents checked this option. It can be explained by the fact that most of the Sqore challenges require also the completion of separate university application. Apparently, when asked for a fee during the application the respondents were discouraged from the further finishing of the Sqore challenge. It supports the recent decision of the Sqore company to increase the number and promote the challenges for application fee waivers. At the same time 25,84% of the respondents replied that they did not understand that they needed to apply to the university separately, and additional 21,35% missed the university application deadline. These numbers show that the supporting communication from the Sqore during the challenge process should be more active and clear. It is further supported by the 16,85% of respondents who answered that the Sqore website didn't provide enough information on the application process. It was surprising to find out that 12,36% of respondents never planned to apply to the host-university; supposedly they

used the Sqore challenge for testing their knowledge. More detailed information can be seen from the chart in Figure 25.

In the open-ended option the respondents mostly stressed the lack of financial means; one person answered that the host -university didn't have the desired Master Programme.

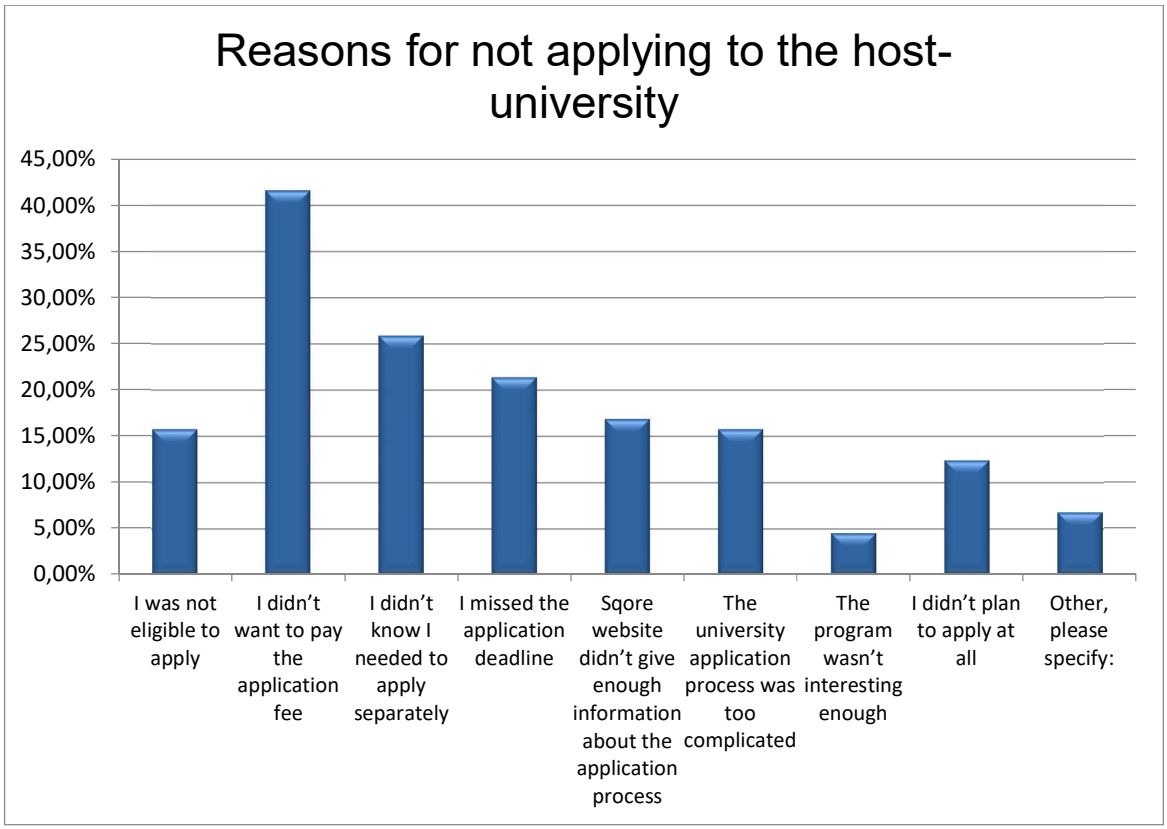

Figure 25. Reasons for not applying to the host-university

The next question aims to find out what could have prompted the Sqore users to complete the application process. After the analysis of the previous questions it is understandable that 57,30% of the respondents have checked the option "Application fee waiver". The equal number of the respondents – 16,85% (15 respondents) – stressed the necessity of the fuller information presented on the Sqore website and email reminders. The detailed picture can be seen from the Figure 26.

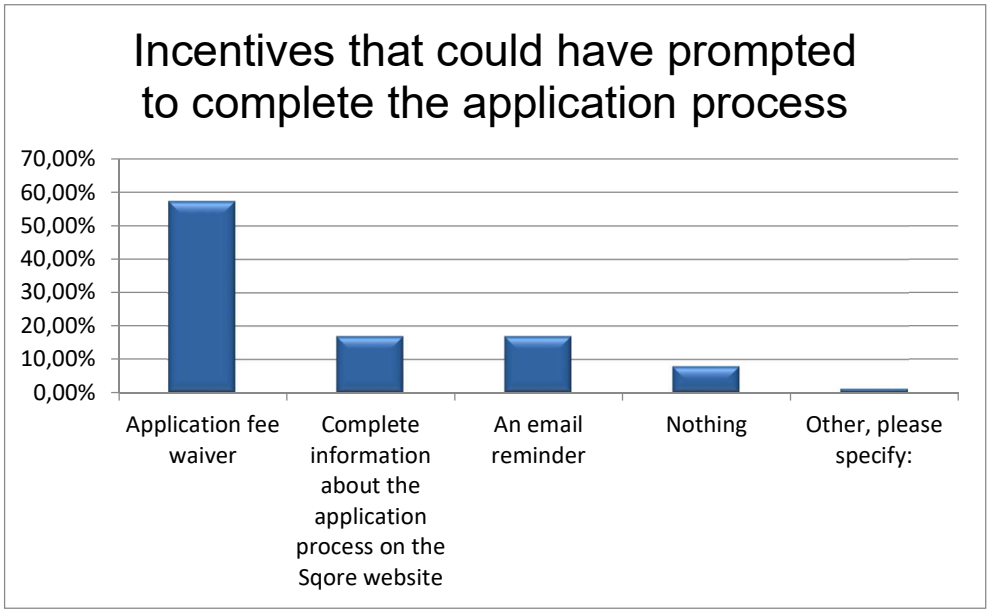

Figure 26. Incentives prompting the completion of the application process

Though the respondents never applied to the university hosting the Sqore challenge, there still should have been some benefits they acquired from the participation. First of all, it is necessary to see for how many respondents the challenge was still useful. The survey showed that 87,64% of respondents in the subgroup answered the question positively. More can be seen from the Figure 27.

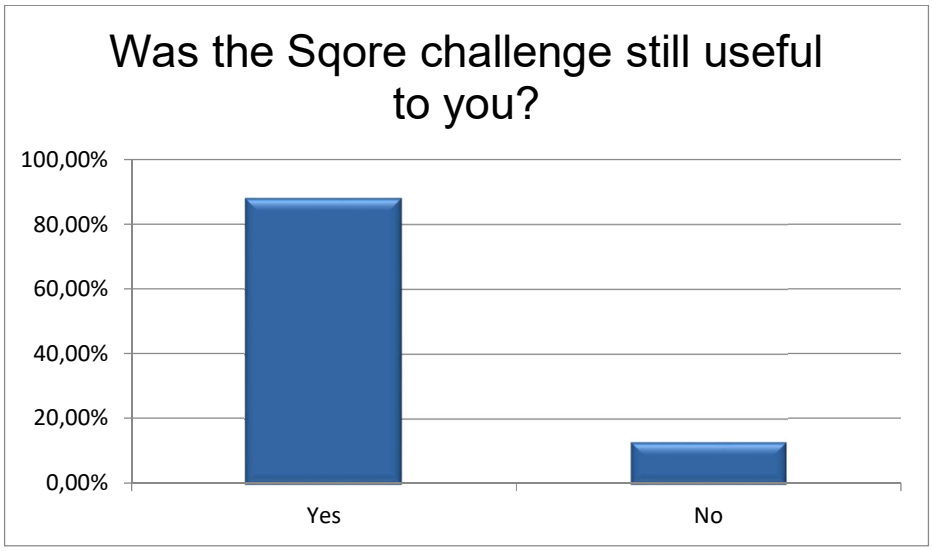

Figure 27. Whether Sqore challenge was still useful to the respondents

To extend the previous question it is necessary to see how the respondents in the current subgroup manage to benefit from the challenge. The main benefit turned out to be the opportunity to assess the knowledge – 69,66% of respondents checked this option. The next

4 main benefits were learning about Sqore and a university not-known before, as well as additional opportunities for financial aid, and finally the exciting experience of competing in the challenge (57,30% for the first two, 49,44% and 47,19% respectively). Only three respondents out of 68 in total did not see any benefits for them at all. More details are shown in Figure 28.

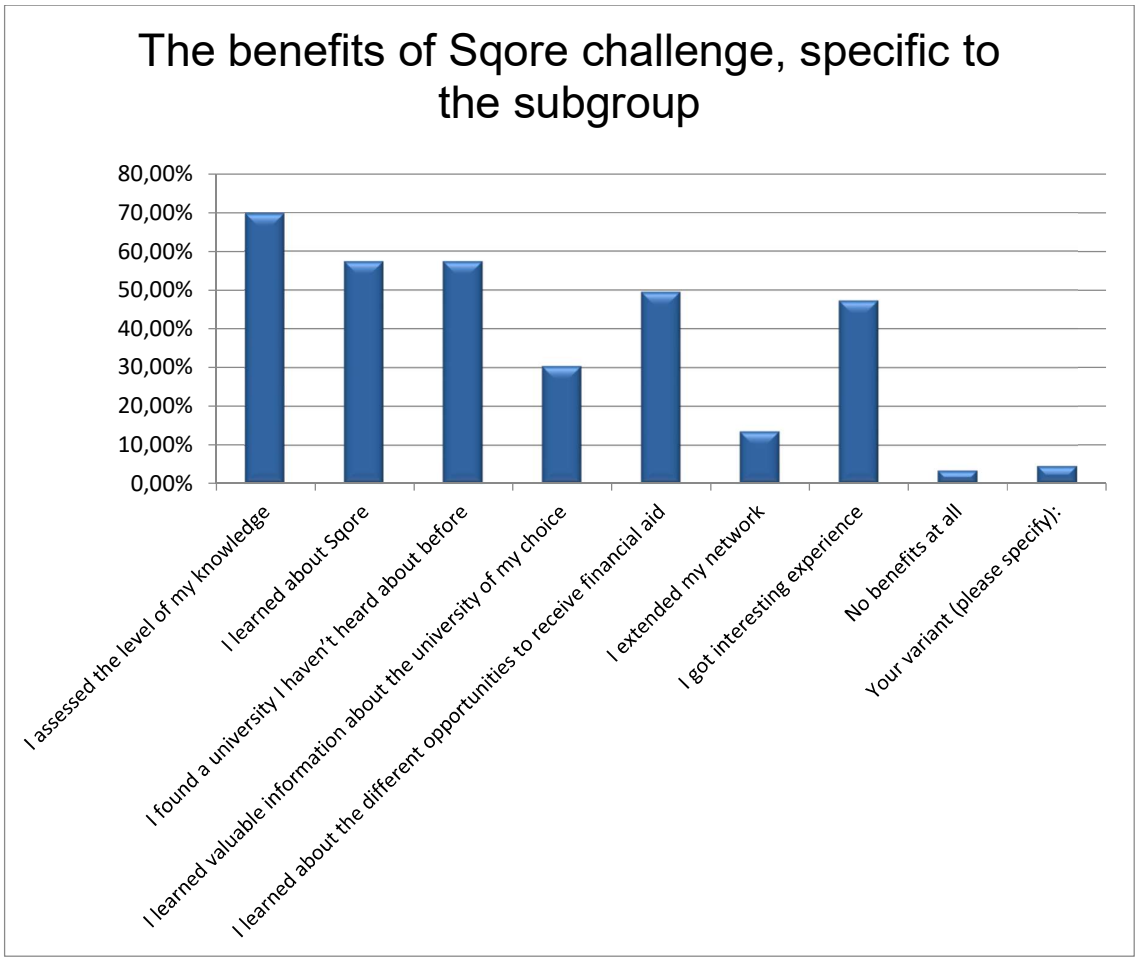

Figure 28. The benefits of Sqore challenge, specific to the subgroup

Some interesting insights came from the open-ended answer option. Three respondents stressed the learning opportunity: experience in logic thinking, studying while not feeling like doing it and a chance to recollect thing learnt a long time ago. One person stressed the benefit of understanding where he/she stands as a prospective student, and what are the chances of getting in with a scholarship.

While it is important to analyse the past actions, it is also necessary to try to predict the future behaviour of the customer. The next question attempts to find out how likely it is that the respondent will participate in the future Sqore challenges. It also must be stated that this question had a mistake in its design, which allowed checking of multiple answer

options for this question. The mistake was noticed only during the analysis of the completed study; therefore, it couldn't be corrected during the data collection process. This resulted in a small deviation, as 3,37% (three respondents out of 89 in the group) have checked several answer options to this question, which was supposed to have only one allowed. The Figure 29 shows that 77,53% of respondents answered the definite "Yes", 1,12% of respondents were interested only in the challenges hosted by a specific university and 22,47% stated that they maybe will participate in a challenge again. Only 2,25% of respondents expressed a definite negative decision to participate in any other Sqore challenges.

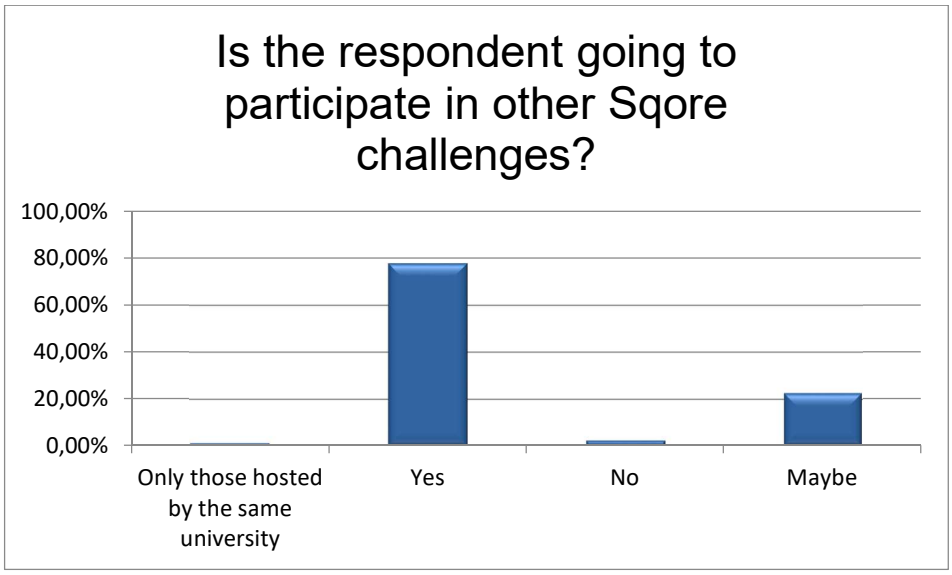

Figure 29. Readiness to participate in the future Sqore challenges

Summarising, the analysis of the current subgroup was more detailed, first of all, because it is the biggest, secondly because they present the group of potential defectors (those who may transfer to competitor services) – these respondents never achieved what they initially planned, specifically getting into a university. The analysis showed that the main reason for not applying to a university is the student application fee, and nullifying it will prompt the higher rate for challenge completion. The analysis also showed that the important benefits for this respondent subgroup is the opportunity for learning in general. Finally, the respondents are likely to continue their relationship with Sqore, though 24,72% of the respondents already presented themselves as potential defectors (sum of those who answered "Maybe" and "No" to the last question in the set).

5.4 Findings about the communication between Sqore and its customers

Communication between a company and its clients is the important tool that facilitates and develops customer experience, engagement, relationships and customer relationship management. When analysing customers, it is also necessary to research the communication between them and the business, its clearness, comprehensiveness, effectiveness and the client's satisfaction with it. The next section of the survey attempts to find out whether there are enough communication efforts made form the Sqore's side.

The first question in the survey section aims to see how clear are the instructions accompanying each Sqore challenge. The results show that in general the instructions are very understandable for the Sqore customers. Only 16 respondents out of 192 fully completed surveys (8,33%) answered that the directions were somewhat unclear; and for 4 respondents (2,08%) the guidance provided was not clear at all. The full picture of the received answers can be seen from the Figure 30.

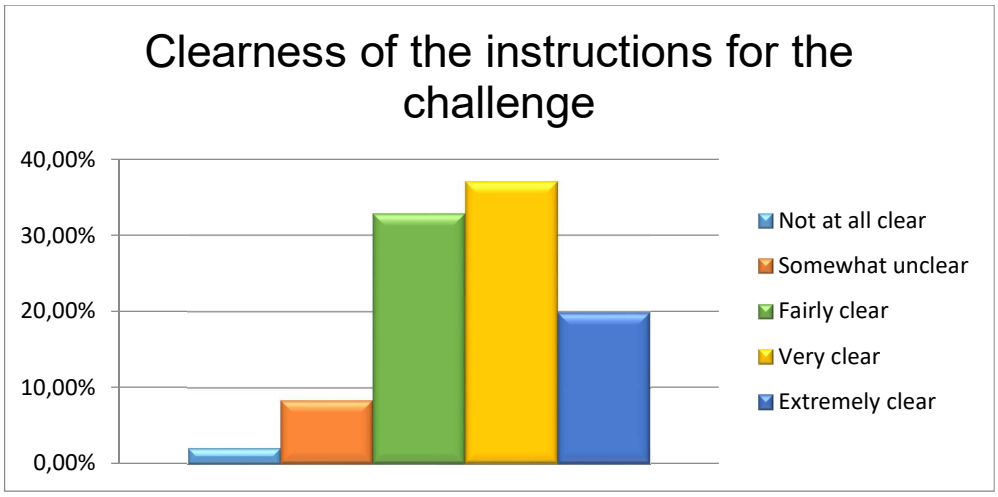

Figure 30. Clearness of the instructions for the challenge

When a customer searches for information about product or service, it is important for him to find as much details as possible. The next question analyses the comprehensiveness of the data provided to the Sqore customers. For 20,83% of the respondents the information provided by the company was not complete enough (see the Figure 31).

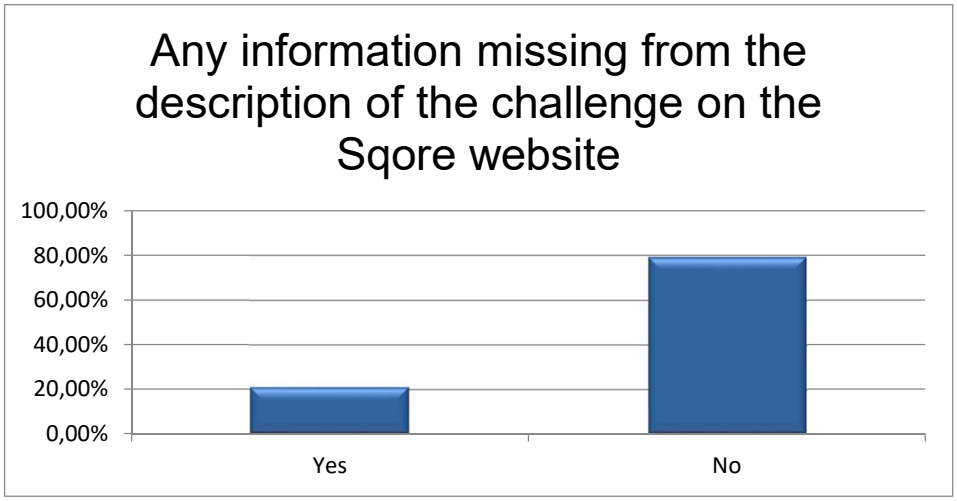

Figure 31. Comprehensiveness of the information provided to customers

The following question extends the answers for the previous one, explaining what kind of information the Sqore users wish to have more on the website. It turned out that the most desired information was about the study and living costs at the host-university – 66,15% of the respondents checked this option. Such information has not been provided by Sqore before, but it needs to be changed, especially if the Sqore plans to fulfil its ambition of providing services similar to those of a study counsel advisor. Another information which is often unclear and covered poorly are the eligibility criteria for the challenge and the university application – 53,64% of the respondents wish to see more of it. The rest of the answers can be seen in Figure 32.

Useful insight was provided to this question by the answers in the open-ended option. For three respondents it was important to see the information on the results of the challenge in open access: who won, the prize and similar. It is true that at the moment this information is not openly available – only the winners are informed. The winners might be covered later in the Sqore blog, but the other challenge participants are not informed about it; they can only see the post if the routinely check the website. One respondent was interested in information about the scholarships offered to asylum residents. It will depend on whether there are any support programmes offered by the universities themselves. Other answers included information on master degrees online, about university programs and other scholarship opportunities beside Sqore.

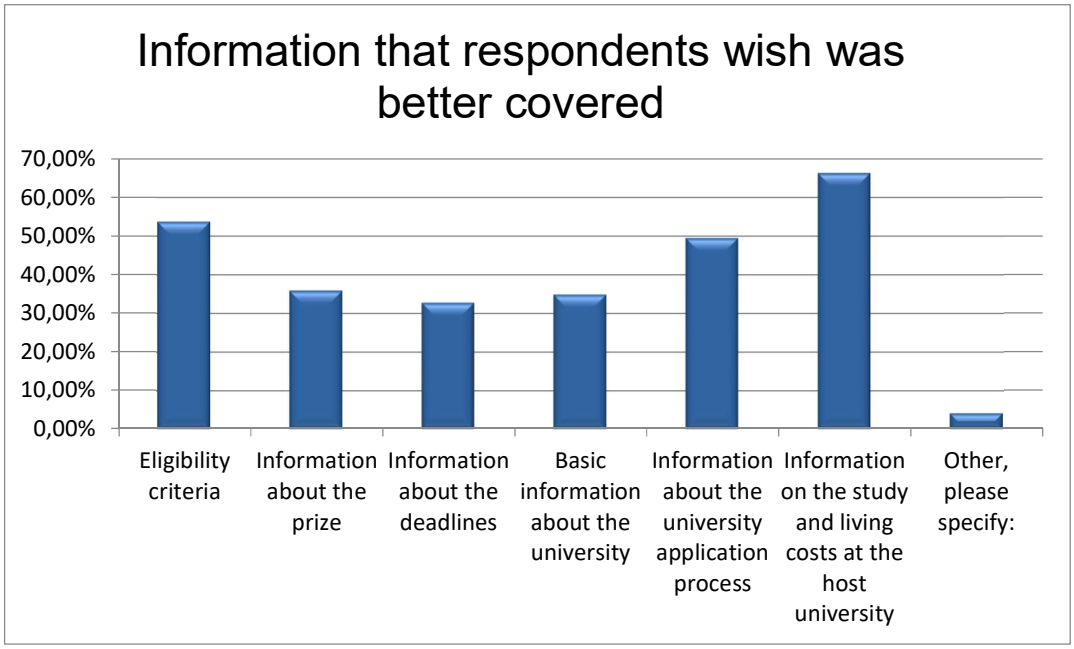

Figure 32. Information that respondents wish was covered better

Deciding on the higher education, searching for a suitable programme and educational institution is a difficult and stressful period for a young person when he or she needs support not only from their family and friends but also from the educational institution. In the Sqore challenge process support function is taken by their communication department that makes sure that the participants know about the necessary steps and don't miss any deadlines. The next question aims to find out whether the participants of the Sqore challenge receive enough supporting communication. According to the answers the absolute majority of the respondents find the existing communication between the Sqore and its customers – the respondents – extensive enough to be satisfied with the service. The positive answer to the question was received from 77,08% of the respondents. The Figure 33 shows the spread between the positive and negative answers.

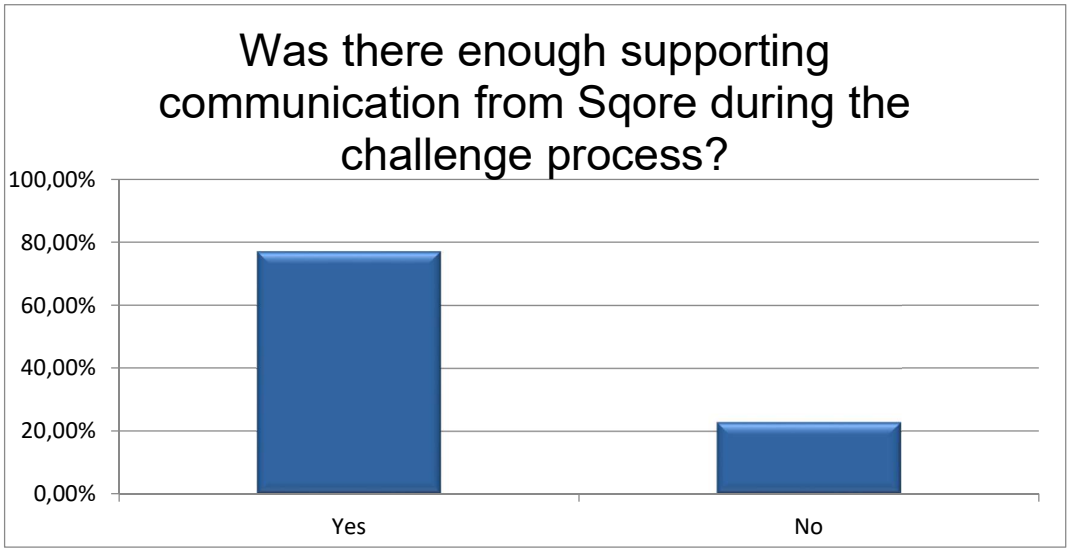

Figure 33. Sufficiency of the supporting communication during the challenge process

The most significant part in the communication between the Sqore and its clients during the challenge process are the reminder emails aimed to ensure following the important deadlines for the participants. Therefore, it was important to find out how the customers perceive such emails, how important they are for them and whether they fulfil their purpose. The results showed that for most of the respondents the remainder emails were most definitely useful tool in the challenge process. Surprising answer was that for 20,31% of the respondents the reminder emails were extremely useful – the result for this option was expected to be much smaller. Similarly, 37,50% of the respondents found the reminder very useful in their challenge experience. For only 2% the emails were not useful at all. These answers prove that the reminder emails most definitely fulfil their purpose and justify their significant share in the communication process between the Sqore and its clients. The detailed spread between the answer options can be found in the Figure 34.

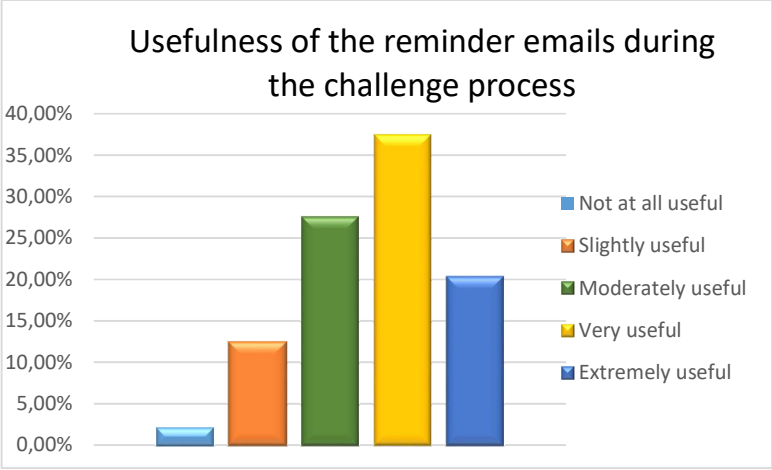

Figure 34. Usefulness of the reminder emails during the challenge process

In the communication process the form and the medium through which the message is received is as important as the content. It was decided to ask how the customers of Sqore would prefer to receive the reminder emails during participating in the challenge. The main idea was to find out whether Sqore should extend their use of social media in the communication process. As the possible answer option, the respondents could choose email, message through social media, text message, a phone call and give their own answer. Practically all the respondents clearly showed their preference for email as the main communication method – 85,94% of the answers. The text message option was given mainly for wider variety, yet it received the percentage of responses in the survey after email – 8,85%. Option to give their own answer has not been chosen by anyone among the respondents – quite unexpectedly considering the trend observed through the rest of the survey. The Figure 35 gives the full picture of the received answers.

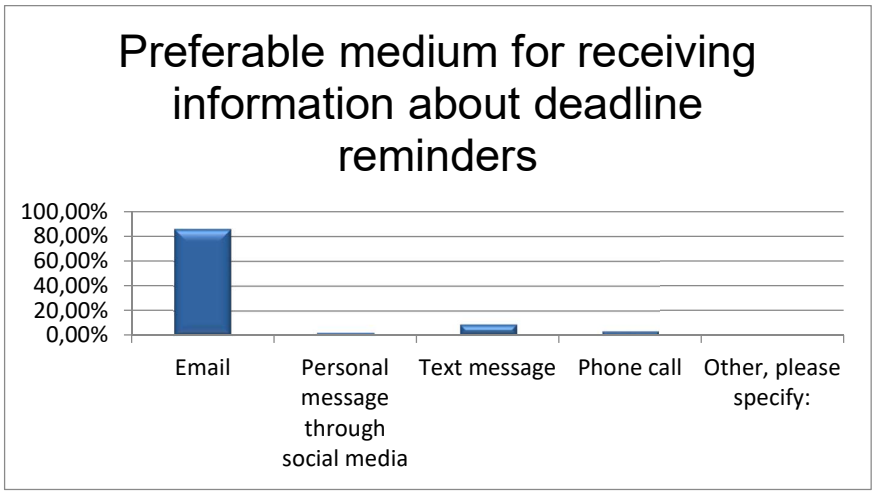

Figure 35. Preferable method for receiving information about deadlines

As a whole the answers to this section of the survey showed that Sqore customers are satisfied with the way the communication process is organised. At the same time the valuable information was given about the desired content on the website.

5.5 Finding about future development of the Sqore website

The customer feedback and survey is not only a useful method for determining the perceptions the customers have about the current service; it can also be a method for finding out what customers are expecting in the future and planning the development of the service. The current section of the survey is aimed at finding out what kind of content and challenges the clients wish to see more on the website.

The first question in the current section of the survey focuses on the content question. The results showed that the most desired content is the one that is currently not presented at all on the website. The top three choices of the respondents are “full list of universities and programs the Sqore is cooperating with”, “information about the upcoming challenges” and “winning essays/case studies from the past challenges” – 71,88%, 68,75% and 53,65% respectively. The detailed picture can be seen on the Figure 36.

Four respondents chose the option to give their own answers. Unfortunately, it did not give any special insight: two answers concerned the winner stories and their successes. One respondent mentioned the desire to see all the results of the challenge participants. The last respondent emphasized the interest in English scholarships.

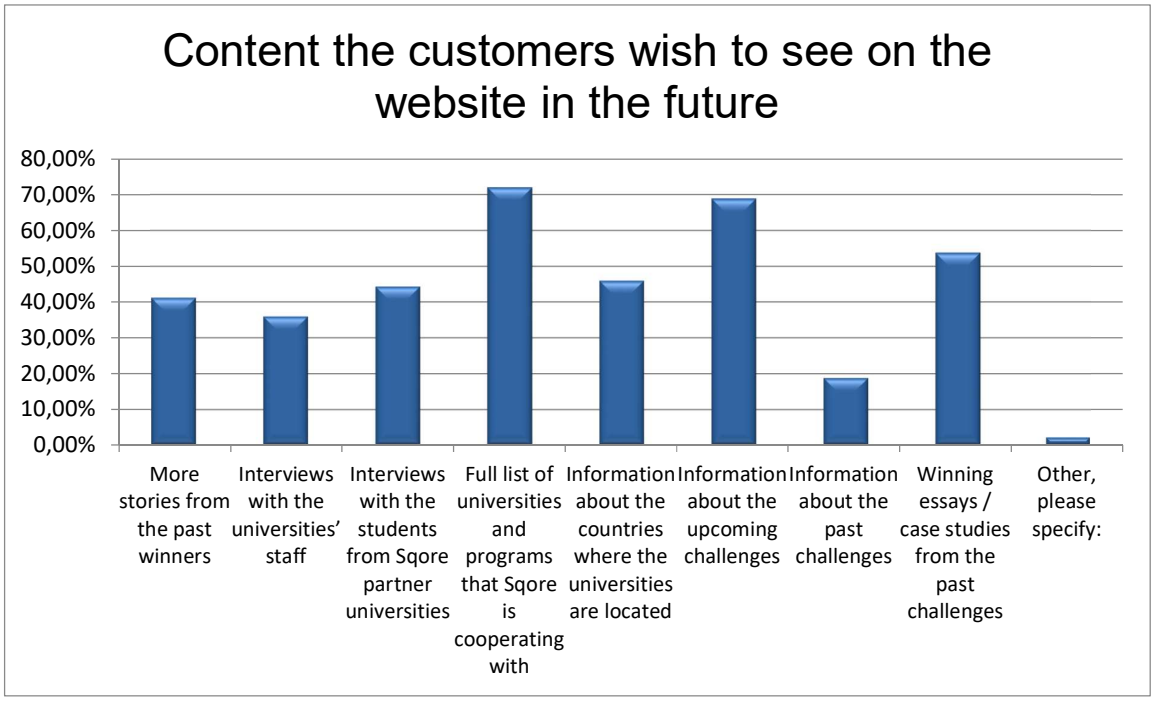

Figure 36. Content the customers wish to see on the website in the future

Besides the content question the commissioner was also interested in finding out what types of challenges their customers are most interested in. The top two choices of the respondents were challenges for university scholarships and challenges for financial aid to cover the living costs – 83,85% and 71,35% respectively. The third most popular answer option was challenges for the job opportunity – 65,10%. It shows that the customers of Sqore are gradually shifting from the prospective university students to the university graduates who are now looking for their first jobs. If Sqore aims to focus on their internal

existent customer base, they need to plan how to better utilize and retain this segment. The Figure 37 shows the detailed results for the question.

In the option to write their own variant one respondent revealed interest for challenges for online master degree programmes. Another respondent emphasized the need for a higher number of challenges on the website.

Figure 37. Challenges that customers wish were present on Sqore

This section of the survey likely is the most informative as this information cannot be figured out from the customers' behaviour on the website. This type of insights can only be received by asking and receiving feedback from the clients.

5.6 Findings from the open-ended question

As the last question of the survey it was decided to leave an open-ended question that will give the respondents a chance to leave their comments and thoughts. This question was the only one that wasn't compulsory for answering.

Analysis of the answers to the open-ended question showed that it was mostly used as the opportunity to thank the Sqore team for their hard work, help and the opportunities they provide. Respondents readily expressed their interest in staying with Sqore and intentions to participate in the future challenges organised by the commissioner. It was quite unexpectedly to see such a positive response and so many great reviews and words of support for Sqore.

At the same time the answers produced many valuable insights. The most valuable easily seen trend was the request to increase the number of the challenges available, as well as to increase the number of winners of the challenge – meaning allowing for a group of participants to win the challenge. This fix is supposed to combat the problem of the growing number of Sqore users which automatically lowers the chance of the individual participant to win.

A few respondents commented on the types of prizes that should be offered. The respondents most often mentioned that they wish to have a possibility to win travel grants, financial aids that would finance not only the tuition but would also help with the living costs.

Another set of answers received concerned the types of programs offered through the Sqore challenges. Some valuable answers mentioned challenges for fully funded scholarships and grants for postgraduate studies, challenges for programmes in architecture field. Finally, one respondent mentioned the wish to see opportunities for master programmes in economics. Among the replies another trend presented itself in the interest expressed for online degree programmes, both Master and Bachelor.

Some answers received can be grouped under one title – winning strategies. One respondent was interested in finding out about the winner-selection process. The aim was to understand what fields of knowledge should be improved in order to be able to win. Another respondent asked for study materials to be supplied by the Sqore website before and after the challenge. Such a request may seem strange but can probably be explained by another respondent's answer. The aforementioned respondent suggested that the year of completion of studies must be factored in the assessments. So, it can be assumed that for participants who completed their studies long time ago, it might be difficult to find the studying materials for preparing for challenge. The final answer in this group concerned the idea that has been repeated in the previous questions of the survey – providing the sample of the winning essays for future participants to view as examples for style and format.

Two respondents commented on the part of the challenge process that the university is responsible for. These two comments were of clearly the negative nature. One respondent mentioned that some universities tend to extend the deadlines for applications. As a result of the flawed process participants have to fill in new application each time the deadline

was extended. Obviously, it does not promote challenge participation. The other respondent's comment showed clear annoyance with the university marketing efforts – universities often contact participants even if they don't win hoping to attract the students with some other offers or benefits. The mentioned respondent is clearly irritated with such policy, wishing not to be contacted unless he/she is the winner. But since such response was a single event, it cannot be assumed that it is an overall trend.

Two respondents mentioned the drawbacks that the actual Sqore service has. One respondent complained about a clear technical issue of slow speed of loading the website and logging in. This is issue is quite important and should definitely be addressed by Sqore. Usually such issues can be the reason for losing even the most devoted customers. Another comment supported the results received throughout the rest of the survey – respondents wish to receive more information about the results of the challenges and the actual prizes for winning the competitions. One more respondent complained about the irrelevance of the questions in the challenge questionnaires and tasks. Such question has already been addressed in the previous parts of the survey where the issue was more extensively covered.

One last comment in this section that deserved attention suggests that the respondent actually uses Sqore challenges as educational, training and assessment tool. This same respondent also mentions one case of a technical issue that was experienced during participating in Sqore challenge. But the commentator mentions that it was a one-time case, and does not focus attention on it.

Overall the open-ended question proved that the Sqore customers have high level of satisfaction with the service. At the same time, it provided valuable insight to be used in the future development of Sqore. The full list of the answers can be found in Appendix 2.

5.7 Practical implications of the survey results

In practice the findings obtained through conducting the survey have little immediate impact on the Sqore and the services they provide. It is not possible to implement the suggestions obtained through the survey for the Sqore challenges that are currently running or have already been planned, as all the changes have to be previously agreed with the host-university.

However, in the long-run the questionnaire has provided valuable feedback about the perceptions the Sqore users have of the company, service and how it can develop to satisfy

their needs better. The results and information gathered are intended to be used as a reference point in planning the further development of the services provided by Sqore. The insights given are also to be used during the stage of arranging new competitions.

Finally, the survey showed the current level of customer satisfaction, interest and their clear intention to continue using the Sqore service. All three turned out to be exceptionally strong.

6 Discussion and conclusions

In this part main suggestions stemming up from the survey are going to be presented. They were proved by multiple repetitions throughout the questionnaire answers.

6.1 Conclusions and recommendations

The overall study was attempting to analyse the customer experience of a Sqore user by finding out how the users perceive Sqore and its service throughout their customer journey. Additionally, the survey designed and conducted during the research served as a tool to build on and strengthen the customer relationship between Sqore and its users. It can be seen from the fact that the survey follows the three and touches the fourth of the characteristics of customer relationship set out by Peppers & Roggers. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 45-46) First of all, the survey provides an interaction point and exchange of information between Sqore and its customers. Secondly, it is iterative in nature – it is a habitual practice at Sqore to arrange surveys among its customers in order to understand their experience of specific challenges and determine ways for improvement. Thirdly, the survey provides mutual benefit for Sqore and its user: Sqore gets valuable feedback, and the users – possibility to express their feelings of the service and ability to infuence on the development of the company. Finally, the results of the survey will be used to develop the Sqore service. Thus we have a connection of the survey with the fourth characteristic of customer relationship – need for change of behaviour. (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 46-47)

During the study it was not possible to cover the entire customer experience of the Sqore user. Therefore, only the touchpoints surrounding the main interaction of customers with the service – Sqore challenge – were analysed.

The customer journey concept is an essential part of customer experience. The survey followed almost all the stages of the customer journey as presented by Peppers & Rogers (Peppers & Rogers 2016, 481):

- discovery – in the survey presented by the question about the first knowledge of the Sqore challenge;
- purchase – this step was covered with questions about the reasons and motivation to participate in a Sqore challenge;
- relationship – the survey covered this step with the questions about the perceptions of Sqore users and their future plans towards continuing their user experience with Sqore.

The only two steps of the customer journey flow that were not covered in the study were the initial identifying of the customer's need that must be solved, and the final stage of customer's becoming the brand/advocate.

As it has already been mentioned the survey conducted in the course of the study was also used as a tool to develop the customer relationship between Sqore and its users. Therefore, the survey attempted to describe the following elements of customer relationship as described by Barnes in his framework 5 E's of Customer Relationship (Barnes 2016, 54):

- customer environment – it was analysed very briefly by the questions aimed to find out the demographic profile of the customers, as well as questions focused on users' motivations and reasons for participation in the challenge;
- customer experience – most of the survey question focusing on the experience of participating in the Sqore challenge;
- both customer expectations and customer engagement were covered with the questions aimed to find out what Sqore users wish to see in the service in the future.

There was on element defined by Barnes, but not covered in the survey at all – customer emotions. It was not covered in the survey questions, yet some information about customer emotional response was received through the last open-ended question of the survey.

The survey results provided valuable basis for recommendations for the Sqore about how their service could be developed further in order to better satisfy the customers, meet and exceed their expectations.

Overall the most clear and consistent message carried throughout the results of the survey, is the high satisfaction with the Sqore from its users, as well as high demand for increasing the number of challenges and number of possible winners in each individual challenge. So, this would be the first suggestion to the commissioner company – to arrange more challenges and negotiate with universities the increase of a winner group.

The next suggestion concerns the content provided on the Sqore website. The survey showed that Sqore users would be most interested to see results of challenges published on the website. At the moment very few challenges have their results openly published on the website. Usually only the winners and runners-up are contacted during the challenge, leaving the rest of the participants without any information. The customers also wish to be able to read the winning essays and case-studies in order to compare their work and see what level they should aim at. Finally, the survey showed strong interest in the life of the winners after the challenge – Sqore users expressed desire to read more success stories of past participants. Summarising, the Sqore in the future should arrange publishing the challenge results, possibly names of the winners if the they agree and the best works submitted in the course of the challenge.

To continue with the topic of the content of the Sqore website, the survey showed that there should be more information published about the universities hosting the challenges and the study programmes which they have. The Sqore users would also like to obtain more practical information about living and studying in the foreign countries where the host-universities are located.

Another suggestion concerns organising work the information in the customer database. In particular at the moment customer relationship management is built on the interests and preferences set by the user during the sign-up process. The newsletter usually contains the information about the new challenges either for a job/internship position, or education-related depending on the previously expressed interest of the user. This approach does not consider the different stages of person's life. If a user completed an education-related challenge, it means that he/she is studying now or will commence his education in the nearest future. The average higher education degree lasts from 3 to 4 years; after this period, the user transfers to another target group – users who are seeking a job/internship position or a study opportunity for a post-graduate degree (depending on the type of the challenge the user first participated in). Unless the person shows interest in other types of challenges by participation or checks the website regularly, the user will not receive information on the new challenges that have become more relevant in the new life stage.

The suggestion is to establish a timeline for the user, meaning that after a certain period users, who have participated in education-related challenges, will start receiving information about competitions for job and internship opportunities or post-graduate degrees, even though they haven't expressed new interest in such challenges within the Sqore platform. The need for introducing such process is actually proved by the answers obtained through the last open-ended question of the survey.

These are the major ides that could be implemented. The less significant points, mostly mentioned by individual survey answers, are not discussed in the final thesis summary, but can be found throughout the thesis.

6.2 Self-evaluation

First of all, the thesis process took much more time for completion than it was expected and planned initially. It should be taken into account for planning and conducting other studies in the future. The main point is to allocate time for force-majeure, delays in receiving the survey answers and possible difficulties that may be encountered during the later stages of the research.

The hardest task in the research process was to plan, invent and conduct the actual survey. It was important to structure the thesis so that all three subgroups of the respondents were covered and were directed to their correct questions. It was also important to avoid ambiguity in the survey questions. It is hard to tell to what degree the it has been achieved, but overall the answers showed that the respondents mostly have understood the questions and didn't have difficulties answering them. It has to be mentioned though that because of the contingency questions and breaking the survey into subgroup, some percentage of the respondents have been lost after the first three questions. As for the wording of the questions during the stage of analysing the survey results it was noticed that some questions should have been worded differently. Additionally, though the survey managed to direct the respondents to the correct questions for their respective subgroups, the structure and order of the questions posed more difficulties for the analysis of the survey. It resulted in the necessity to utilize Excel during the analysis stage, which therefore took longer time than initially planned. The reason for it was that during the survey development stage the survey was considered only from the point of view of the respondent, but failed to plan how the results will be analysed. In the end the analysis was successfully completed, but, for the future reference, the survey must be viewed and planned so that both the respondent and the person conducting the research will not have difficulties with it.

In conclusion the main learning points taken from completing the thesis are: better understanding of the research planning process and its hidden difficulties, and developing, planning, conducting and analysing surveys.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Sqore Challenge Experience survey

The questions follow the order and interface as they were presented in the actual survey. The survey started with the introductory greeting message.

Hi!
We would be happy if you could spend some of your time to answer this survey. We are aiming to better understand your experience at Sqore and your needs, and become even better in what we do. For this we need your help!

As an incentive we will offer an Amazon voucher for 20$ to **3 selected respondents**.

Thank you in advance for your support!

OK

* 1. What makes a university interesting for you? Choose all that apply.

- [ ] High international ranking
- [ ] Multicultural faculty
- [ ] International student body
- [ ] Substantial university resources
- [ ] Comprehensive career services
- [ ] Opportunity to go for exchange
- [ ] Secured employment after graduation
- [ ] Cooperation with the working community as part of the university courses
- [ ] Focus on independent work
- [ ] Focus on working in small teams
- [ ] Exposure to broad range of disciplines
- [ ] Small class sizes
- [ ] Long history of the university
- [ ] Its location in a big city
- [ ] Its location in a picturesque place, away from major cities
- [ ] Other, please specify:

* 2. What is important for your well-being as a student? Choose all that apply.

- [ ] Available financial aid
- [ ] Possibility to work and study at the same time
- [ ] University housing
- [ ] Modern campus
- [ ] On-campus cafeteria
- [ ] Sport facilities on the university campus
- [ ] Career counseling
- [ ] Availability of the support services (for example, psychologist available if needed)
- [ ] Other, please specify:

* 3. Why would you choose to study abroad? Choose all that apply.

- [ ] My country can't provide good knowledge in the area I am interested in
- [ ] I want to permanently move to a new country
- [ ] I am interested in a specific country
- [ ] I am interested in a specific university
- [ ] I want to improve my foreign language
- [ ] I want to learn a new language
- [ ] I am following my friend / relative / partner
- [ ] I just like to travel
- [ ] I like to challenge myself
- [ ] Other, please specify:

The first contingency question.

* 4. Did you win a Sqore challenge?

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

The second contingency question.

* 5. Did you apply to the university that hosted the Sqore challenge you participated in?

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

* 5. How did you first find out about the Sqore Challenge?

- ◯ From the StudentCompetitions.com website
- ◯ From the Sqore newsletter
- ◯ I regularly check the Sqore website
- ◯ From the university website
- ◯ From a higher education fair
- ◯ Facebook
- ◯ Other, please specify:
- ◯ Instagram
- ◯ LinkedIn
- ◯ Twitter
- ◯ From a friend / relative
- ◯ Organic search

* 6. What were the main reasons why you participated in the Sqore Challenge? Please, check all that apply.

- ☐ I wanted to study abroad
- ☐ I was interested in the school that hosted the challenge
- ☐ I wanted to study a specific study program
- ☐ I wanted to study in the country where the host-university was located
- ☐ It could simplify my university admission process
- ☐ I got interested in the topic of the challenge
- ☐ The opportunity to win the prize
- ☐ I like to challenge myself
- ☐ I wanted to test my knowledge
- ☐ It was exciting experience for me
- ☐ I was invited by a friend / relative
- ☐ Other, please specify:

* 7. In your opinion, how difficult was the challenge?

Too difficult	Very difficult	Appropriately difficult	Very easy	Too easy
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

* 8. In your opinion, was the topic of the challenge relevant for the program you were applying to?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe

* 9. In your opinion, what should be included in the challenge tasks? Please, choose all that apply.

- [ ] Math test
- [ ] Language test
- [ ] Business case scenario to solve
- [ ] Questions about the university
- [ ] Questions about the program
- [ ] Other, please specify:

* 10. How could you describe the Sqore challenge you participated in? Please, choose all that apply.

- [ ] Interesting
- [ ] Engaging
- [ ] Straightforward
- [ ] New experience
- [ ] Innovative way to recruit new students
- [ ] Much better than regular entrance exams
- [ ] Easy to use
- [ ] Easy to find from the Internet
- [ ] Helpful during the application process
- [ ] Boring
- [ ] Irrelevant
- [ ] Too long
- [ ] It was difficult to find information for it
- [ ] Other, please specify:

* 11. Did you know about the host-university, before you started the challenge?

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

* 12. Would you have applied to the host-university, if you hadn't participated in the challenge?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe

* 13. How did the Sqore challenge influence your decision to apply to the university? Please, choose those which apply.

- ☐ It gave new information about the university / program
- ☐ It helped to assess the level of my knowledge
- ☐ I got the chance to communicate directly with the university representative
- ☐ It gave the opportunity to win a scholarship / admission fee waiver
- ☐ Sqore helped with finding information about study opportunities
- ☐ Did not influence at all
- ☐ Other, please specify:

After this question the survey singled out the subgroup questions.

I. Subgroup of the challenge winners

* 14. To what extent did winning the challenge affect your decision to attend the university?

Did not affect at all	Slightly affected	Moderately affected	Very affected	It was the only reason I attended the university
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

* 15. If you hadn't won, what would you have done?

- ◯ I would still apply to that university
- ◯ I would wait for the next Sqore challenge hosted by that school
- ◯ I would participate in a Sqore challenge hosted by a different school
- ◯ I would not go to that school at all
- ◯ Your variant (please specify):

II. Subgroup of the challenge participants who applied to the university

* 15. To what extent did participating in the competition affect your decision to apply to the university?

Did not affect at all	Slightly affected	Moderately affected	Very affected	It was the only reason I attended the university
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

* 16. Why did you still decide to attend the university, even though you didn't win the prize?

- ◯ I was impressed by the information about the school
- ◯ I was impressed by the information about the study program I was interested in
- ◯ I liked how the school used Sqore in their recruitment process
- ◯ Your variant (please specify):
- ◯ The school offered me another form of financial aid
- ◯ The school representative told about other means to finance my studies

III. Subgroup of the respondents who did not apply to the university

* 13. Why did you not apply to the host university? Please, choose all, which are true.

- ☐ I was not eligible to apply
- ☐ I didn't want to pay the application fee
- ☐ I didn't know I needed to apply separately
- ☐ I missed the application deadline
- ☐ Other, please specify:
- ☐ Sqore website didn't give enough information about the application process
- ☐ The university application process was too complicated
- ☐ The program wasn't interesting enough
- ☐ I didn't plan to apply at all

* 14. What could have prompted you to complete the application process?

- ◯ Application fee waiver
- ◯ Complete information about the application process on the Sqore website
- ◯ An email reminder
- ◯ Nothing
- ◯ Other, please specify:

* 15. Was the Sqore challenge still useful to you?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

* 16. What were the benefits of the Sqore challenge for you? Please, choose all that apply.

- [ ] I assessed the level of my knowledge
- [ ] I learned about Sqore
- [ ] I found a university I haven't heard about before
- [ ] I learned valuable information about the university of my choice
- [ ] Your variant (please specify):
- [ ] I learned about the different opportunities to receive financial aid
- [ ] I extended my network
- [ ] I got interesting experience
- [ ] No benefits at all

* 17. Are you going to participate in other Sqore challenges?

- [ ] Only those hosted by the same university
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Maybe

After this question the survey was the same for all the respondents.

* 16. In your opinion, how clear were the instructions for the challenge? Please, rate.

Not at all clear	Somewhat unclear	Fairly clear	Very clear	Extremely clear
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

* 17. Was there anything missing from the information about the challenge on the Sqore website?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

* 18. I wish there was extra information about …? Please, choose all that apply.

- [ ] Eligibility criteria
- [ ] Information about the prize
- [ ] Information about the deadlines
- [ ] Other, please specify:
- [ ] Basic information about the university
- [ ] Information about the university application process
- [ ] Information on the study and living costs at the host university

* 19. Was there enough supporting communication from Sqore during the challenge process?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

* 20. How useful for you were the reminder emails during the challenge?

Not at all useful	Slightly useful	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

* 21. How would you prefer to receive information about deadline reminders and your progress in the challenge?

- ◯ Email
- ◯ Personal message through social media
- ◯ Text message
- ◯ Phone call
- ◯ Other, please specify:

* 22. What kind of information would you like to see on the Sqore website? Please, choose all that apply.

- ☐ More stories from the past winners
- ☐ Interviews with the universities' staff
- ☐ Interviews with the students from Sqore partner universities
- ☐ Full list of universities and programs that Sqore is cooperating with
- ☐ Other, please specify:
- ☐ Information about the countries where the universities are located
- ☐ Information about the upcoming challenges
- ☐ Information about the past challenges
- ☐ Winning essays / case studies from the past challenges

* 23. What kind of challenges would you like to see more on Sqore? Please, choose all that apply.

- ☐ Challenges for the university scholarships
- ☐ Challenges for the application fee waiver
- ☐ Challenges for the financial aid to cover living costs
- ☐ Challenges for the cash prize
- ☐ Challenges for the travel grant
- ☐ Challenges for the traineeship opportunity
- ☐ Challenges for the job opportunity
- ☐ Other, please specify:

* 24. What is your age?

- ◯ Under 18 years old
- ◯ 18 – 22 years old
- ◯ 23 – 27 years old
- ◯ 28 – 32 years old
- ◯ 33 – 37 years old
- ◯ 38 – 42 years old
- ◯ 43 years or older

* 25. What is your current country of residence?

* 26. What is your country of origin?

* 27. What is your highest degree or level of education completed? If currently enrolled, state the highest level achieved.

- ◯ Still in the high-school, no diploma
- ◯ High-school degree or equivalent
- ◯ Uncompleted higher education (at college or university)
- ◯ Bachelor's Degree
- ◯ Master's Degree
- ◯ Completed some postgraduate credit
- ◯ Doctorate
- ◯ Post Doctorate

* 28. What is your current student status?

- ◯ Full-time student
- ◯ Part-time student
- ◯ Not a student

* 29. What is your current employment status?

- ◯ Full-time employed
- ◯ Part-time employed
- ◯ Unemployed

30. Below you can leave your comments / kind regards to the Sqore team concerning your experience in the Sqore Challenge.

31. Please, write down your email address if you wish to have the chance to win an Amazon voucher.

Appendix 2. Answers to the open-ended answer option in the questions

Question 1.

- earn
- tuition prices
- studying abroad
- Hosting of some of the biggest conferences so that it helps in all-round development of the students.
- It's really very interesting when there is multicultural diversity in which a student will have freedom of expression as well as speak if you can .
- I want to get a high degree qualification
- The willingness from the university to support the student to be more better at each of the student speciality.
- Gender equality
- Having the major I want available
- The opportunity to be part of a wide distinguished alumni after graduating and the opportunity for quality beneficial research.
- Provision of facilities such as studios, recreation etc.
- Human resources in the University
- Makes all the work more clear and easy to understand.
- i just love the things tha i mentioned below
- the program itself
- healthy environtment
- Fee Structure
- Exposure to practical aspects of the respective fields.
- Easy cost of living
- Research
- Hospitality and openness to international students
- Affordability especially in living expenses, culture diversity area/city.
- Emphasis on research
- It provide a platform to learn leap and lead(not only the technical but many more exposers like independency , handling of things etc)
- scholarship
- understanding between teacer and students ! destroy all hinders !!
- friendship and teamwork
- guaranteed scholarship or 50% tution waiver

Question 2.

- Non-existence of biases.
- Most of above are vital but also medication(facilities) is needed
- possibility to good conditions of studying
- free online master degree course
- Experience in forein country
- the availability of study material (Library)
- Supplemental studies through online studies at free cost to help students speed up their studies.
- Hospitable community within and around the university
- Support for students to work for the university
- Intercultural and extracurricular activities
- all
- access to literature

- Training a student so as to make him capable in excelling in jobs as well as further studies.
- It provide me a lesson , who to handle and work on your own way , by your own smart skills. (Simply , by the help of University , I can able to light up smart skills more effectively).
- Updated library

Question 3.

- the exposure to experienced field of study and aid. vast nature of exposure to various courses and available materials to help make you the best if you choose to be.
- there are so many things which motivate me to study abroad dreams as nightmares
- Meet new people and learn new things.
- Because more job opportunities are available abroad which I can get to know only if study in a foreign University.
- Mostly cultural diversity and learning new things to enhanced one's goals is vital for studying abroad.
- At the moment I am looking for a free Master degree online
- I love to discover new thing.
- There are better opportunities for teaching and learning in the course I want to pursue.
- My country can't provide an ideal environment to study continuously.
- nothing
- It'll make a strong person and give me new opportunities.
- to study with cultural and social diversity
- I want to see the world. By studying abroad, I will have an opportunity to experience different styles of education. I will be able to hone my language skills.
- explore new places, making new friends, learning new lifestyle, accepting the challange
- It makes my very ordinary Swedish business degree a bit more unique.
- I want to achieve my aims.There is a war in my country and it's a developing country.
- To learn new ideas from other countries
- To get exposure in business perspectives
- Want to experience all colours of world
- I am very interested in researching some new ideas , for example how can we done / made a particular thing more better. To done this I want some guidance plus response , I think in abroad preference of practical things is more than theoritical.
- I want enhancement in living standard.
- I want to expand my multicultural network

Question 5.

- just searching one scholarship
- Mail
- Internshala Newsletter
- I couldn't remember at this time but I'm I think it was through my quest to study abroad
- Email
- scholarship position

Question 6.

- I am looking for a free master degree course online
- To get exposure in business perspectives.
- i need a chance to prove myself
- I'm always aiming at challenging my knowledge and to get new experience
- I am very elated to study abroad and thereby get an opportunity to knack myself in a different culture and conditions.

Question 9.

- Design test. To actually design a product or service as opposed to just aptitude tests
- I social responsibility in the country each person will have if it is the winner
- nothing
- IQ test
- I don't understand how the winner is get selected.
- logical reasoning
- Logical and analytical skills.
- general knowledge
- Anything challenge that checks the proficiency of a student for the respective course he is interested in
- I think it's important to keep the questions difficult but still easy enough to be able to do spontaneously in between your job tasks or in a break between your studies. There's a threshold where I would want to put the test in my calendar in order to prepare. That preparation rarely happens and hence the test is never done.
- the passion !! behaviour !
- personal questions
- program related test

Question 10.

- competitive
- Hard to win when it reaches too many people
- But very challenging to individuals that lack certain skills.
- Although it was difficult but it's good in widening brain amd one's knowledgeable
- A bit too undisclosed.

Question 13.

- Sqore challenges are encouraging to go more further in researching for information
- It prepare a student who perform it to be familiar with particular university especially the historical background and the faculty which are in that university.

I. Subgroup of the challenge winners

Question 15.

- At the moment I am looking for a online course only

II. Subgroup of the challenge participants who applied to the university

Question 16.

- I didn't attend the university.

- I will will
- i didnt apply because i didnt win the challenge. i needed a scholarship to study in the university
- It give me a general information about admition requirement, another source of financing my studies(prodigy finance).
- Have not attended yet
- I have not attend the school yet.
- i did not go because i didnot win the tution waiver

III. Subgroup of the respondents who did not apply to the university

Question 13.

- Want scholarship or fellowship
- I was not having the fees required for the application .and it was at that stage of payment that i reached in for my application process.
- The Master program that i am looking for is not available on that university
- Can't afford it
- I need financial aid to study being for a middle class family.
- I wanted a scholarship

Question 14.

- Never applied thus don't know

Question 16.

- I got some experience logically
- Learnt even when I don't feel like
- I got to have an idea about where I stand in a crowd and the odds that I have of getting an admission along with scholarship.
- Opportunity to remember things I studied 10yrs ago

Questions from the general section of the survey

Question 18.

- opportunity for master degree online
- Information about where and when to find the results of the challenge
- especially information about the prize. Some schools don't even give alert, for we to know that at least someone actually won.
- I wish they could offer scholarship for those who are living in asylum.
- information on university program
- -
- About the winners and the respective cut-offs if there was anything as such.
- Scholarship opportunities available besides the sqore challenge

Question 22.

- information about English scholarship
- It will be so much interesting to hear about a memorable winner story of succeeding.
- A typical winning response of a student.
- Results of all who participated in the challenge.

Question 23.

- information about English scholarship
- It would be my pleasure to see most of the above being added as part of the challenge
- And many more as more the challenges, more will be the opportunities.

Question 30.

- i'd love this challenges more if it would help me with scholarships and aid to reach my desired goal. more thanks to sqore for an arranged and put together page, helping people.
- I would like to appreciate all of your team members on Sqore website. You guys prepared a great website and platform for the talented person all over the world to have a chance to fulfill their dreams. Thank you very much.
- it was a nice go through.i appreciate
- VERY GOOD
- I really appreciate the quality of information available at the sqore
- Hope
- I Don have any experience sqore plz help to get scholarships
- Great job with the website. Its really nice to see the efforts put in to connect universities and students.
- I had a good experience in taking challenges and I hope to be allowed to enter into other challenges as well and participate
- Congrats
- Very cooperative, helping...
- Sqore is an amazing idea of connecting hardworking students with high quality institutions, specially regarding those who can not afford to pay for the education. I was one of them and I will thank you forever.
- important
- Thank you very much for giving me the oportunity to study abroad!
- Thanks for the information and assistance will be glad if I could get an opportunity to attend the university program with financial aid.
- The whole team works hard to help and provide us with useful info.
- Enjoying
- I just have to thank you for the attention and patience you have with me. I have not yet reached a final, I just went to second stage and I believe that the universities that make the same competition of English should help with the costs or have some means of financing. Because English is important like any other course"
- Thanks
- It was a great experience participating in Sqore Challenge. Look forward to participating in more such opportublnities.
- I like the idea of Sqore. I would be very happy to see Sqore succeed. The only problem, if it has too many regular user, winning would be too hard and big part of the users would leave since they have nothing after a while. I think prices should be for a wider segment.
- It was amazing, you guys are really working hard to make this possible. So please keep that momentum
- thank you soo much for showing me a great path toward my future
- thanks for giving us great oppurtunities
- I love it
- It's too good to improve my skills and knowledge
- I wish you the very best! and Staying such a better team!
- Thank you for the opportunity to explore other options and further expand my educational horizon

- It was good
- Its good to find jobs internships scholarships etc. I will try to get jobs by it or try to win more and more prizes through it.
- Thanks Sqore for giving me the opportunities to explore myself with new myself.
- Its an interesting challenge
- I like the sqore challenge. I hope that one day I will win the competition and gain admission into the school.
- SQORE REALLY HELPS A LOT WITH INFORMATION THAT MAY BE OUT OF REACH. THANK YOU
- It is a helpful place to know more about the oppurtunities out there.
- keep it up guys there! we are product of you!!
- My experience was rally nice an oportunity for me i would like to win one day and meet new culture and be grow professionaly
- I really appreciate your efforts.
- i want to get more information from the challenge
- Keep it up guys, looking for more opportunities
- Nice work to the team
- Thankful sqore team to update me and give brief information To choose a right career option
- Very interesting and encouraging to serious student, wanting and hopeful to study abroad but lack financial aid
- Thankyou for keep updating good and useful information.
- They should make Challenges to accommodate more applicants
- i love sqore and looking forward fo more opportunities
- My experience in this program has been quite enormous...The organizers are well prepared, quite good, quite sociable, and quite academic.
- "dear
- i really see that sqore is a perfect way to gain a chance all over the world "
- SUPERB
- Thank you for awesome opportunity. I have had being a part of KTH master challenge 2015 (even I didn't win) but it gives me a new insight about the application process to study abroad. Hopefully in next opportunity, I could win and realise my dream to study abroad.
- i liked
- Thank Squore team for this questionnaire.with Sqore i have come to know about scholarshipship opportunities and also your challenges has been educative . even though i have not become a winner yet of any of your challenge, i won't quit, i will keep on trying . please some of your oppotunities should include travel grant. i noticed i have never seen any Nigerian winning your challenge. we are not all that bad; we still have some good, educative, serious minded and genuine guys among us. my greatest joy is to see me winning one of a university scholarship opportunity so that i can further in my studies. i wish to further in medical/clinical biochemistry. i love the medical field.
- i love
- The experience was good a learned alot and found some interesting and new things which is beneficial for me.
- It was so interesting .. And I I hope to win some day
- Spore has been exceptional in there dealings
- Engaging
- The website loads very slowly and logging in takes a lot of time
- Good
- I hope these responses can help sqore improve immensely.
- Sqore has been my favourite website since I came a cross it and I really enjoy participating in those challenges even if I never win since it teaches me new things

hence broaden my knowledgebase. Thank you Sqore and keep up with the good work!

- Good work, I really enjoy the survey but seriously am in need of scholarship for master in Economics, though I have second class lower in Economics. Will be looking forward, thanks.
- "In deed Sqore Challenge is best one..it leaves a positive impact for me especially on self assessment..it helps me for making comparison/ assessment of what I have learnt from bachelor degree and what I have scored in such challenge. Also a different mode of questioning such as business assessment question, aptitude test and language test it sharp me with my career perspective.. general questions concerning the university background it gives a general knowledge and makes me to be familiar with general matters.
- I kindly request for Sqore Challenge on particular University to help us in not only for tuition fee but also in living cost.(living costs prize)."
- Your website incredibly delightful , thanks to it I have believed in the forces. I wish you to remain the same great team for many years:)))
- Thanks to all the team members of sqore for the great job you are doing. You have in a way brought out the best in me through the innovative way of recruiting student.
- Thanks for the platform!
- Thank you for the opportunity you have been giving to me, to so many people through this challenge. May God bless your work.
- "Thanks a lot for the opportunity to take part in the challenges and competitions, really appreciate it, Best regards."
- I really like sqore because I find scholarships , and amazing opportunities to study abroad!
- Swore challenge is a very fascinating experience that brought out the best in me during the contest intellectually.
- I would like to know how Sqore select the winner because it will help me in the field I am lacking.
- I mostly try Sqore Challenges to see how much answers I can get right without having studied. It allows me to know about how I am retaining information. My experiences thus far have okay for the time the timing system seemed to have malfunctioned and I could not complete the questions.
- "I really appreciate the team of Sqore for the information give to student to participant in the challenge. Best regard. Samuel "
- none
- it is the best initiative in helping the student to get more information about the universities, which are offering good courses and scholarships for foreign students coming from developing countries.
- THANKS FOR THE OOPORTUNITY GIVING US TO SECURE A UNIVERSITY OUTSIDE OUR COUNTRY.
- "Innovative way to recruit students. All the best to the team"
- I don't understand why i don't win the challenge. Then the university should not contact me at all. No prize, no contact.
- I can get more info about challenging.
- You guys are doing some awesome work. Keep up the good work
- We are waiting more challenges from you..best of luck!
- good that you are
- Good
- It should provide further materials for studying before and after a specific challenge
- "Sqore team is a great team that encourages students and propect students to challenge themselves to achieve higher education levels. Therefore I wish to secure a space for studies in one of the universities affiliated with Sqore. Regards, George Wingu "

- great
- I hope things get better in the future.
- I always dreamed of studying abroad to have this apportunity to learn new cultures and to have this experience to make change in my life and the lives around me
- "It's really my humble thank you massage to this platform for aiming at developing the world in different areas. Thanks so much. "
- Thank you so much.This is really helping millions of people throughout the world.
- Need stuff like this.
- It is a great platform for me to explore opportunities for higher studies and i have learn a new experience from sqore
- Some universities put a deadline and when the deadline is reached they extend it again. So, they extended the deadline until another few months and I had to start my application again.
- Make more of this so there is more opportunity for us! ??
- IT WAS GOOD
- It was interesting challenge hope to see more
- please tell me some scholarship in the architecture field.
- Thank you for keeping this site alive since it's helping me a lot to experience new thing.
- I would love to see more challenges on online studies and scholarships or fee waivers and vouchers for studies.
- I love Sqore, it's super useful to find opportunities and easy to use. Something I think would definitely improve the experience of applying to a challenge is providing samples of winning essays, so this way we can have something to base our own essays on (not the content, but the style and format).
- The challenge is a novelty I have seen in my interraction with Sqore. It is a great way to improve interraction between sqore and users.
- "I appreciate the efforts if the sqore team and I hope the information supplied here in his survey help the company to get better. Adepoju Agemo"
- No comments
- I thank the squire team for their great support to students through the scholarships and grants I hope to win a challenge someday but while hoping I congratulate those who have won and I pray the squore team continues to inspire youngsters
- SATISFACTORY
- looking forward for the next challange ^^
- I really appreciate your helps to those who are looking for opportunities.
- quite challenging and interesting
- Useful.
- So far so good. Nothing will be comment
- thanks for the interesting opportunity and experience
- It was a good experience.... Hope to follow sqore newsletter.
- it is good to continue as it is
- "First of, thanks a lot for the making or rather designing the challenge in a very lucid, enjoyable and alluring way.
- Thanks for all the opportunities you provided us with(although I want being able to take the benefit from that).
- Thanks for providing us with the knowledge that we didn't have previously about various universities, their respective programs and their locations.
- Thanks for letting us explore our odds for getting benefited with the same.
- Lastly, thanks a lot.??"
- I accidentally put these comments in the "others" section of another question. Sorry for putting it in the wrong place but hope that was some good input!

- Wish swore can provide access to foundations/institutions that provide fully funded scholarships, grants and other such funding opportunities for postgraduate studies.
- N/A
- Thank you for organizing such interesting competitions to students.
- I want to study abroad but evertime when i completed the challenge i know i did not get good marks but i think for those people like me there should be anytother way to apply in universities.
- I hope that zone day i going to wib sholarship with you
- You guys are doing a great job however, some have left school years ago thus might forget some things learnt thus your year of completion of studies must be factored in the assessments.
- Thanks to Sqore
- Great
- I want to say thanks to the Sqore Group/Team for letting me know about the MEST Program.
- Thanks
- It was very interesting and knowledgeable task to done and I would like to thanks for this valuable and kind of information. I'll always ready to take future challenges and opportunities to grab them.
- Thank you ! i like ths experience !! contunue like that !! very useful challenge
- It was a wonderful experience
- I hope that there will be more challenges and that everyone could have the feeling of like "I think I will be selected here". Also, I hope that there will be more winners.
- I have none.
- Thank you for your role in the webpage and to help millions of students around the world to find amazing opportunities!
- Ok
- its a great experience to have one challenge
- .
- Some questions are irrelevant
- Overall It's a great experience but there is no communication regarding the results and the actual prizes one is supposed to get if one wins.

Thanks