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SOCIAL SCIENCES, BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET

A Savonia UAS Student Recruitment Marketing
Research

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the international student recruitment and marketing of Savonia University of Applied Sciences. As nations possess unique cultures, it is probable that the marketing channels and contents of Savonia UAS need to be differentiated in accordance with the varied demands and preferences of its diverse potential students.</p> <p>Initially, a comprehensive literature review was conducted on the topic of international higher education and its marketing. Subsequently, an online survey was published concerning the marketing platforms and contents of Savonia UAS. The survey gained responses from a total of 64 students, all of whom were current students of international degree programs of Savonia. The majority of the respondents, 48 students, were international students originating from 23 different nations, while 16 of the respondents were Finnish students. Based upon their respective countries, the respondents were further categorized into five separate continental groups: Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East and Russia.</p> <p>The results indicated that different regional preferences existed among the five aforementioned continents regarding the initial platform of discovery, the recommended platform of promotion, and the demanded type of marketing content. Overall, the internet and social media proved to be the most popular promotional platforms, while the most demanded type of content was information on the student experience. For Savonia to reach and attract international prospects better, it is recommended to recognize the different platforms where its target audiences reside, focus on the most suitable platforms based upon the selected target group's preferences, and adhere to the content needs of the prospects with an emphasis on positive word-of-mouth promotion. The findings of this thesis could assist Savonia in identifying and targeting certain popular online platforms as well as in recognizing different levels of demand for the specific types of requested promotional content.</p>			
<p>Keywords</p> <p>International Higher Education, Higher Education Marketing, Student Recruitment, Online Marketing</p>			

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1 INTRODUCTION

Knowledge has always been universal. Along centuries of continuous development, the exchange of information from person to person has gradually caused nations to evolve from agricultural societies into industrial societies into knowledge-based societies, which today host bustling centers of science, technology and innovation. (Varghese 2008, 9.) The universal appeal of knowledge and the novel economies' need for educated human capital may be few of the fundamental catalysts for the rapid internationalization process of the higher education industry. In the late 1900s, the sector experienced a global boom in its growth as students began to search for international competencies and higher education institutions continued to develop their infrastructures and capacities (Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino 2006, 1; Mazarol 1998, 163; Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, 3).

The student mobility of degree-seeking students has surfaced as a significant factor within international higher education in the 21st century: Around 2.7 million mobile students were calculated around the world in 2005, which signified a notable increase of nearly 61% from the former student statistics deriving from 1999. In 2007, the global higher education enrollments were stated to be 40% higher than in 2000, with "*more people participating in higher education than ever before.*" (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, 3.) Moreover, while the average number of mobile students had amounted to around 40,000 students between 1985-1995, the average between 1995-2004 had nearly quadrupled by accumulating to more than 155,000 students (Varghese 2008, 15). At least 4.3 million mobile students were calculated in 2011 according to more recent statistics, and future figures for 2025 are furthermore projected to reach up to 8 million mobile students (Statista Research Department 2019-04-29). As the growing statistics suggest, higher education has established itself as a substantial worldwide phenomenon, and the global growth of international higher education can be considered crucial for the future development of multicultural societies and wealthy economies all around the world.

Most authors recognize and emphasize that fierce inter-institutional competition is increasing within the international higher education market (Chen 2008, 6; Ivy 2001, 276; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, 3; Varghese 2008, 11; Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, 7). The escalating phenomenon is most likely affected by the growing number of consumers and the sheer size and monetary value of a global market. Currently, around 19,400 institutions have been registered in a worldwide higher education database, and altogether, the institutions are operating in a total of 196 nations and territories (the International Association of Universities and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2020). Such a large pool of potential competitors is the reason why implementing effective marketing research and competitive marketing strategies is extremely vital for an institution's success. For example, one carefully conducted market research could assist in discovering opportunities, like niche markets or competitive advantages, which could be utilized to increase the income of an institution and solidify its competitive stance in the market.

The idea for this thesis topic derives from an international marketing course that was attended in autumn 2018. A group assignment was conducted on Savonia's international marketing and competitive position, and the final report comprised of an internal analysis of Savonia, a PESTLE analysis, a SWOT analysis and a Porter's five forces analysis. The plentiful nature of the topic was encouraging enough to help inspire a more in-depth inspection into Savonia's international marketing and international higher education as a whole. The interest in the topic ultimately evolved into a research about Savonia's international recruitment and its plausible improvement.

This thesis will begin with a comprehensive theory chapter based upon the reviewed literature relating to international higher education and its marketing. Afterwards, the focus will shift onto the research of the thesis, which will be thoroughly reported and analyzed. The utilized research method is an online-based survey, which will portray students' experiences of Savonia's promotional platforms and their suggestions for Savonia's marketing platforms and contents. The survey will deliver both quantitative and qualitative results due to its design incorporating open-ended questions. Lastly, the final conclusions and suggestions will be discussed through combining and comparing the research results with the theory. Two encapsulating graphs will be presented along with the conclusions; the graphs will efficiently summarize the research results as well as utilize some of the theoretic marketing models. A conclusive and concise strategic plan will be concocted and recommended for Savonia's online marketing platforms with the guidance of the information-rich graphs.

2 HIGHER EDUCATION THEORY: INTERNATIONALIZATION AND MARKETIZATION

International higher education is a tumultuous concept that has been consistently discussed, debated and altered since the late 20th century to the early 21st century. The vast concept offers researchers a wide variety of aspects to contemplate: How have higher education institutions internationalized? How is higher education marketed? How can higher education institutions succeed in an international market? Where lies the optimal balance between commercial and academic motives? What is the core purpose of higher education? Questions and topics like such have catalyzed and upheld the relentless development of the higher education sector.

The aim of this theoretic literature review is to cover the essential topics for this thesis and formulate an overarching comprehension of the broad concept of international higher education and its marketing. The covered literature, dating from late 1990s to mid 2010s, has been thoroughly investigated, extracted and discussed within this theoretic chapter. The attained information has been compressed and divided into five sub-chapters, which will discuss the industry's historical development, current and new trends, various benefits and costs, applicable marketing models, and Finnish market aspect.

2.1 History and Development

Like knowledge, education has always been a **universally appealing** asset. Throughout the times, the purpose and nature of education have undergone many alterations before becoming what they represent in the modern era. The current stage in the evolution of the concept is the result of several decades of authors, experts and researchers conceptualizing, reimagining and rebuilding the meaning and purpose of international education. This initial chapter will discuss the history of international education and its evolution, internationalization and current status.

International education held quite a different meaning about a hundred years ago. During the colonial reign, international education was facilitated under the assumption that overseas students would return to their home countries and act as "*ambassadors*" for the colony by further spreading its ideology, values and knowledge. Such form of education served as a way of empowering the administrative influence of the colonial powers. The "*envoy intent*" within overseas education was especially prominent before the Second World War. The core purpose of education began to shift as nations abruptly required more human resource development and investment for post-war reconstruction. (Varghese 2008, 13.) Thus, the concept of retaining international students for **economic growth** began emerging as a topic of great importance to both developed and developing nations.

Varghese (2008, 14) implies that post-war international education began to receive **significant funding**: for example, national governments invested funds into scholarships and study-abroad programs for the first time. He mentions that from the 1950s to the 1980s, universities were not levying any tuition fees, which consequently caused private funding to grow in popularity. The "*no fees*"-tactic may have acted as a marketing strategy, which was utilized against the amplified rival forces

during the Cold War. Chen (2008, 2) cites that subsidization of overseas students was viewed as "*a form of foreign aid*" during the 1960s and the 1970s. By the late 1990s, however, profit-driven motives had triumphed over the humanitarian motives within international student recruitment (Cudmore 2005, 47). Higher education first began to be perceived as **an exportable service** in the 1980s and the 1990s when the sector began to grow rapidly as a notable portion of the service industry in certain countries (Cai, Hölttä and Kivistö 2012, 219; Mazzarol 1998, 163).

Soon after the end of the Cold War, decision-making processes shifted away from biased alliances and strategies and began to rely on the modern market-based forces. So began another shift in the nature of education as it transformed from **government-controlled to privatized**, which was exemplified by the extreme drop in government funding witnessed in the 1980s and the 1990s (Chen 2008, 2). Full-cost tuition fees began emerging during the 1980s as institutions became competitive corporate entities operating under marketing principles and as higher education evolved into an expensive investment requiring deep buyer deliberation (Cai et al. 2012, 219-220; Chen 2008, 2; Cubillo et al. 2006, 2). In 1991, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) was founded to advocate in favor of international education (Saarinen 2012, 241). Currently, the international market for students accounts for billions of dollars (Varghese 2008, 11). Higher education is viewed as a market-based service and it is traded globally under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) as established by the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Cudmore 2005, 40; Varghese 2008, 15).

With a growing reliance based upon free market fluctuations, the eventual emergence of **marketing models** being applied to academic institutions contributed to a plethora of opinionated discussions about the fundamental nature of education. A lot of opposing debate has focused on the different market-based roles imposed upon educational stakeholders and institutions; In 1985, Kotler and Fox (cited by Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, 319) argued that "*Students are raw materials, graduates the product, and prospective employers the customer.*" On the contrary, students could also be viewed as customers with degrees being the product (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 9).

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 9) note that the concept of students as consumers and other newly introduced marketing terminology raised concern among the academia, because it seemed like academic institutions were steadily transforming into commercial businesses like any other. Consequently, the notion of higher education marketing received backlash and it was discredited by some as the "**commoditization of knowledge**" (Chen 2008, 6). Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007, 4) reference Barrett (1996, 70), who criticizes the marketing phenomenon: "*It is both regrettable and ominous that the marketing focus, explicitly borrowed from business, should be accepted and even welcomed.*" The authors also paraphrase Gibbs (2002), who echoes the view: "*The international market in higher education has commoditized education which has embraced a business model of competition almost without questioning the appropriateness of the tools being used.*" Moreover, marketing is viewed by some as obtrusive and manipulative, thus lessening the value of education and the institution (Chen 2008, 6). Some extreme opponents argue that educationalists should refrain from marketing activities altogether, because business and marketing values

are in moral contradiction with the values represented by educational institutions (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 9).

Subsequently, it was later concluded that higher education was **a service instead of a product**, and that the marketing of services differed greatly from the marketing of products (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 9-10). Cubillo et al. (2006, 3) quote a specific marketing definition for higher education: *"Higher education is a pure service and is characterised by a greater amount of interpersonal contact, complexity, divergence, and customization than other service businesses."* Historically, services have tended to be disregarded due to their inherently intangible and perishable nature, and such service-specific characteristics can cause problems that require thorough and calculated marketing strategies (Mazzarol 1998, 163-164). Papers indicate that today, the nature of education services is highly people-oriented and individualized – educational rather than transactional. Relationship marketing is recommended on the grounds that it seeks to develop *"a strong network of relationships and interactions between the organisation and its customers."* (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 10-24.)

Furthermore, the added dimension of internationality in higher education has influenced a lot of discussion and appraisal. Chen (2008, 5-6) reviews that while marketing of higher education was perceived negatively and it attracted a lot of debate and lament, internationalization of higher education, in contrast, was widely well-received: it was perceived as the next appropriate step in the advancement of higher education in the 21st century. With the combined nature of universal knowledge and domestic ownership, educational institutions can be characterized as dual entities consisting of two innate facets – the international and the national (Varghese 2008, 10).

Generally, the term *"internationalization"* does not have a consensus definition due to differences between countries, cultures and educational institutions (Chen 2008, 4). Wit and Knight (1999, 14) theorize that *"Internationalisation of higher education is one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalisation yet, at the same time respects the individuality of the nation."* Globalization and internationalization are perceived as separate yet closely interrelated topics: internationalization is a proactive reaction to globalization, which, on the other hand, can be considered a catalyst to internationalization. **Internationalization of higher education** is further clarified as *"The process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution."* (Wit and Knight 1999, 14-16.) The integration of internationality was explored by Hamrick (1999), who listed four common outlooks for internationalization of higher education institutions: international studies, intercultural communication, foreign aid and preparation for multiculturalism (cited by Cudmore 2005, 42-44). Chen (2008, 5) notes that foreign students especially catalyze the internationalization of an institution by influencing *"policy, academic programs and curriculum, research and scholarly collaboration, export of knowledge and education, and student experience."*

Lastly, the economic impact of international education around the world is not to be understated. Varghese (2008, 9) explains that today, skilled human capital is the most crucial resource for advancement of modern **knowledge economies**, which must have potency to embrace and produce knowledge. Otherwise, a lack of knowledge could serve as a severe hindrance to both economic and social growth. Higher education is a vital supplier of the economies since it facilitates the production and distribution of increasingly demanded knowledge. With today's readily available higher education, it is plausible to enforce increased economic turnover also in developing countries, which are still considered technologically inferior. (Varghese 2008, 9.)

However, it seems that the inner priority for most of international higher education remains focused on the benefit of the host country. The nation-centered principle is exemplified by the large financial and marketing investments made in retaining overseas students for economic welfare instead of returning them to their home countries to elevate the economic and social standing of developing countries. As Varghese (2008, 26) describes, *"Universities are public institutions that maximize social welfare in the host countries, but the same universities are commercial ventures in developing countries."* Nevertheless, the novel knowledge-based economies ought to always monitor, assess and renew their higher education systems in the face of new arising challenges and shifts that may present themselves in the ever-changing construct of international higher education (Crisan-Mitra and Borza 2015, 191).

2.2 Mobility Trends of Degree-Seeking Students

It has already been established that the number of mobile international degree-seeking students will continue to grow in the future as higher education further solidifies its noteworthy position within the international market. Verbik and Lasanowski (2007, 3) emphasize that international student mobility specifically has become a topic of great importance within the educational landscape in the last 10 to 15 years. The degree-seeking mobility numbers have since experienced consistent growth: the estimated mobile student number amounted 1.8 million in 2000, 2.1 million in 2002, 2.7 million in 2005, and 3.4 million in 2009 (Choudaha and Chang 2012, 1; Cudmore 2005, 42; Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, 3). Based upon the increasing growth rate, authors such as Böhm, Davies, Meares and Pearce (2002) have declared future projections that estimate the figures to climb up to 7.2 million mobile students in 2025 (cited by Varghese 2008, 11). Some experts even approximate as much as 15 million mobile students for 2025 (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 196).

While future predictions remain relatively imprecise for now, the irrefutable influence of the growing overseas student market has presented educational institutions with both possibilities and difficulties along with an increasingly competitive market (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, 3). Recently, the traditional leading countries have begun to encounter competition from newly emerging opponents due to the **variable market-based factors** influencing the country choice of a student; the phenomenon is founded upon the changing international preferences and needs of the modern students of the 21st century. This chapter will elaborate on major student destination countries as

well as current developments in degree-seeking student mobility. Furthermore, this chapter will enlighten on some of the underlying country choice factors that have engineered the trends behind the contemporary framework of student mobility.

In their research paper, Verbik and Lasanowski (2007, 3) investigated contemporary student mobility patterns and found that countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have generally managed to recruit over 90% of all mobile students; the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany and France accommodate for over 70% of them. Varghese (2008, 16), also researching cross-border student mobility, notes that most student flows are heavily affected by **regionality**: most often, students from China travel to Japan, students from India and Indonesia migrate to Australia, and students from Latin America head to North America and Western Europe. Moreover, almost 90% of students originating from the Western countries relocate to countries of the same region. With the exception of Central Asia, the majority of the mobility nonetheless seems to indicate an outward flow from developing countries to developed OECD countries. (Varghese 2008, 16.)

In the 1970s, engineering and business management used to steer trends by being the most sought-after academic degree programs. The title was later usurped and maintained by computer science from the 1980s till now. A difference in chosen studies seems to also exist for students who choose tuition in an English-speaking country in comparison with those who choose to study in a non-English-speaking country: science, engineering and business management are highly pursued programs in English-speaking countries whilst arts and humanities are found more attractive in non-English-speaking nations. (Varghese 2008, 11-19.)

2.2.1 Leading Countries

Verbik and Lasanowski (2007, 4-5) specify that roughly 45% of all overseas students migrate either to **the United States, the United Kingdom or Australia**, which are consequently recognized as the key players in education export. Out of the major trio, the US is the reigning global leader with around 565,000 enrolled students in 2006 in comparison with the UK's 330,000 students and Australia's 280,000 students. The authors rationalize that one of reasons behind the countries' success lies within their diverse consumer base: the three English-speaking countries have managed to attract students from a wide selection of different countries consistently for many years now, especially from India and China, the world's two largest importers of education. Along with well-maintained recruitment, the leading institutions have concocted impressive marketing strategies to target potential students with some academies providing quite abundant financial subsidies. The US, the UK and Australia are firmly believed to remain the leading host nations due to their experience, understanding and acknowledgement of cultural and financial benefits generated by foreign students. (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, 4-5.)

Following in the footsteps of the education behemoths, **Germany and France** incorporate for 20% of international students with both countries enrolling an average of 257,000 students in 2006. The

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports evidence that together with the UK, the three European countries are the prominent regional leaders: it is estimated that three out of five students traveling to Europe decide to study in the UK, Germany or France. (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, 5.) Verbik and Lasanowski (2007, 5-6) refer to Germany and France as the "*middle powers*" of the international student market due to the fact that they "*consistently perform well without threatening the leadership of the US, the UK and Australia.*" The authors speculate that the reasons behind the two countries' prosperity in the market may involve socio-cultural and historical bonds with regional European countries, the nations' limited tuition fees, and the expanded application of English as a means of communication within tuition.

Amounting to a lesser yet still respectable portion, **Japan, Canada and New Zealand** together constitute for 13% of the overseas student market, and they annually attract between 75,000 to 115,000 students in what Verbik and Lasanowski (2007, 6-7) describe as "*peak and decline*" pattern. The authors insinuate that the countries' apparent reliance on familiar Asian markets with no focus on expanding further abroad might pave way for their eventual downfall in the overseas student market. The phlegmatic growth results from the vulnerability and loss of competitiveness created by dependency on one or two source countries. In contrast to the "*peak and decline*" trend, developing countries have begun to experience growth in student numbers with **China, Singapore and Malaysia** attaining 12% share of the international student market. Verbik and Lasanowski (2007, 7) explain that the Asian nations have drastically invested in developing their strategic initiatives and international competitiveness by deploying a copious number of human and financial resources, introducing English-instructed tuition, and utilizing their lower costs of living and tuition for marketing value.

2.2.2 New Developments

Varghese (2008, 18) proclaims that a novel trend is on the rise. Although the US remains the undefeated leader in quantitative student numbers, **the share of foreign students** in the US only amounts to 3.4% of the country's total tertiary education students. On the other hand, countries that are viewed as smaller players in the field of international education amount to distinctively higher percentage shares in comparison with that of the leading education nation: Canada's foreign student share amounts to 10.6% of total students, Germany and France both to 11%, the UK to 16.6%, Australia to 19.9% and New Zealand to 28%. (Varghese 2008, 18.)

Verbik and Lasanowski (2007, 3) also observe a new shift in student mobility and state that the past desire of students towards major education destinations may be discontinued: in the recent years, the US, the UK and Australia all have experienced a slump in foreign student enrollments. The phenomenon may be the result of **privatization of funding** in higher education: Varghese (2008, 26) stresses that "*The changes in the direction of flow are influenced by the cost of education rather than by any political considerations.*" The changes are the result of the previously discussed perish-

ment of former colonial conventions and political advocacy prior to market-based principles; ideological affinities no longer control the majority of the student flows, instead, the cost and return of education do.

Because most students today are depending on their own resources to finance tuition, the mobility flows are mostly dictated by the perceived value of education and other variable factors. Varghese (2008, 22) researched the influential factors behind modern student mobility trends, from which the **cost of education** seemed to manifest as one of the most fundamental factors. He deduced that the increasing inbound flow to developing countries was influenced by their relatively lower living expenses and tuition fees in comparison with those of developed nations.

Moreover, **language familiarity** seems to steer some students towards familiar and regional nations. Currently, English is recognized as the *lingua franca* of education (Saarinen 2012, 243). Thus, the popularity of the US, the UK and Australia can be understood as well as the newly emerging preference of other English-speaking nations like New Zealand and Ireland. (Varghese 2008, 23.) Varghese (2008, 23-25) explains that students furthermore gravitate toward institutions with **assumed academic superiority**: students from developing countries perceive institutions of developed countries as more prestigious and technologically advanced, therefore offering better quality education. The author lists additional mobility factors such as procurement of foreign language and culture, employment opportunities, alleviation of visa restrictions, and reinforcement of economic welfare.

According to Cai et al. (2012, 220), the international education trends will remain similar for the next 15 years. It is therefore crucial to investigate current student mobility trends due to the fact that they can, in fact, be influenced by external marketing efforts as expressed by a higher education institution. The benefit and value that students may perceive in gaining an international degree are only a portion of many factors that direct modern market-oriented student flows. Further implications of international education for individuals, institutions and entire nations alike will be discussed next.

2.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of International Higher Education

Thus far, the overall impact of international education has been discussed mainly positively concerning the development of economies, institutions and individuals. Some of the recognized positive effects include the steadfast growth of the industry, the freedom of operating under marketing principles, and the encouragement, assimilation and appreciation of knowledge and multiculturalism. Nonetheless, such great advances toward a new global era of knowledge seem to beckon for just as great impediments on the flip side. As acknowledged earlier, the host countries accommodating foreign students tend to strive for retention of said students in order to boost domestic economy. The phenomenon is a significant catalyst to a so-called "*brain drain*"; which can be defined as the emigration of talented and educated human capital out of the country of origin.

In their research paper for potential costs and benefits of international higher education, Jibeen and Khan (2015, 197) articulate that **brain drain, commercialization and lower quality education** are currently recognized as the most dangerous and damaging effects of international education by most countries. This chapter will acknowledge and depict such costs and disadvantages among others associated with international higher education, yet the tremendous benefits and advantages accomplished by the industry will not be dismissed or downplayed either. The issues will be reflected on and assorted according to the viewpoints of a nation, an institution and an individual.

2.3.1 National Perspective

The global market of higher education export amounts to billions of dollars annually, which demonstrates the industry's intense consumer demand and high potential for profitability. Mazzarol (1998, 163) compares the figures of education export to the export of wheat and notes that education industry's 1.4-billion-dollar worth is not far from wheat's 1.5 billion dollars. For all nations, international education export market offers a generous opportunity to **boost, mobilize and diversify revenue** (Cudmore 2005, 47; Varghese 2008, 26; Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, 3). Subsequently, the gained income helps in the subsidization of domestic students (Varghese 2008, 26).

Finance aside, a more prevalent issue persists in the ageing populations of developed countries: since childbirth rates are low and domestic labor force is gradually depleting, the developed nations are experiencing **a dire need of human resources**. The shortage of labor is another reason why developed countries tend to strive for the student retention policy: with capable graduates that remain in the host country, the nations are able to replenish their labor force and stabilize the economy. (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, 1-3.) The countries that benefit from retained students are therefore experiencing "*brain gain*" as described by Jibeen and Khan (2015, 197). Although most of the retention benefits seem to manifest in developed countries, developing nations nevertheless manage to cultivate new social and economic capacities thanks to education import. Moreover, Western universities have established international affiliations in support of "*transfer of knowledge, advanced policies and global research for enhancing investment and measuring impact.*" (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 197.)

The major global downfalls associated with education export stem from **the pronounced favoritism and influence of the Western countries** and their culture over other nations. As it was established earlier, Varghese (2008, 26) describes universities as commercial ventures in developing nations. The claim is further validated by Ubadigbo (1997), who expressed great concern over the targeted enrollment policies of the US universities: the universities had focused on the monetary benefits brought by wealthy students whilst disregarding less fortunate students of poor countries (cited by Cudmore 2005, 50-51). Jibeen and Khan (2015, 197) also observe that universities raise fees for their overseas branch campuses, which results in great deprivation of funds from the students of developing nations for the sake of financing the developed institutions. The authors declare that it seems that the Western countries obtain the main financial benefits in every aspect of international higher education.

However, Jibeen and Khan (2015, 197) caution the profit-driven universities: *"As stakes get higher, pursuing goals which are more commercial than academic in the long run, come at a cost."* They conclude that the original objective of improving the quality of education by enhancing the learning environment is unlikely to succeed if the internationalization of higher education is founded on **transactional motives rather than educational motives**. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 6-7) also quote a variety of sources on other issues manifested by the marketization and privatization of higher education. The effects comprise of three widely recognized phenomena: national and international competition, funding issues, and widening participation or social segmentation. Major national concerns connected to the internationalization of higher education also include innate threats such as the loss of national and cultural identity, homogenization of global curriculum, and discrimination between socioeconomic classes (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 197). Any of the viable events could be equally detrimental to nations, cultures and societies alike.

Complications caused by lack of inter-institutional communication and jurisdictional supervision also pose problems for nations due to the imbalance in technological standards and other varying circumstances. Registration and appraisal issues can arise between sending and receiving countries because some nations are providing insufficient data on their institutions (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 198). Occasionally, people even crudely exploit higher education in a fraudulent manner. Varghese (2008, 26-27), citing Hallak and Poisson (2007), illuminates on the deceitfulness of the industry: *"At times, providers are dubious, some institutions are bogus, and some degrees are fake. Further, in some instances it is found that admission rules are relaxed, the evaluation process is distorted, and examinations are faked in different ways."* Additionally, Jibeen and Khan (2015, 198) mention that illegal external accreditation services exist and operate under a fake impression of justly assessing higher education programs.

2.3.2 Institutional Perspective

For academic institutions, positive outcomes like increase in revenue and resources are expected and desired. However, the enriched student environment and the international market presence bestowed by **cultural diversity** are viewed as more valuable assets for international success as suggested by the previous discussion about the distorted motives of profit-driven academies. Internationalization of a campus helps both teachers and students acquire working experience in multicultural context as well as international orientation, both of which further contribute to upgraded academic quality (Varghese 2008, 24; Jibeen and Khan 2015, 197). Cudmore (2005, 47) emphasizes that the presence of international students is vital for a campus' development of intercultural teaching, research and perspective, which further advocate for the continued relevance and importance of international higher education. Moreover, exchanges between institutions facilitate the maintenance and development of science and scholarships (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 197).

However, due to the wide-spread influence of Western higher education, Western institutions can be perceived in a negative light. In an effort to effectively market their institution and build a competitive brand, some overseas ventures of institutions have been labeled and condemned as **academic colonization**, which can severely damage the reputation of an institution and create harmful stigma (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 198). Cudmore (2005, 51) also acknowledges the phenomenon and notes that the export of Western values and culture is a cause of concern for developed institutions. Heightened tuition fees and profit-oriented principles also further discredit Western academies and raise concern for quality insurance, as the quality standards within higher education have seemingly lowered (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 198).

Cudmore (2005, 51) insinuates that the image of an institution could be further corrupted if an academy enrolls students from countries with poor history of human rights. Galway (2000) also discovered that people had misperceptions about international students' impact on the availability of seats in a degree: some believed that international students relieved local students of their seats (cited by Cudmore 2005, 51). Jibeen and Khan (2015, 198) also note that it is challenging to integrate and sustain the quality of international students' academic experience.

2.3.3 Individual Perspective

Out of the three subjects, the students are the ones that seem to gain the most significant benefits of international higher education. For countries and academies, the industry is surely a profitable source of income and an upfront opportunity for integration of cultures. However, for a single student, studying abroad is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, which might just signify the biggest change in their life.

Gaining an international degree in today's knowledge-based society is in great demand because the degree has **a premium in the labor market**, especially for the ones in specialized and selected fields (Varghese 2008, 11). According to Varghese (2008, 24-25), *"It is more difficult to come across an unemployed foreign degree holder even when the unemployment rate is very high in the country of origin."* He adds that salary expectations for an international degree are notably higher than those offered to domestic degree holders. As an investment, international higher education also has a better rate of return in comparison with financial placements in other sectors. The employed degree holders proceed to thrive financially due to their improved economic standing and paying capacity, which furthermore contributes to the overall increasing welfare of individuals in developing countries. International education also presents the possibility of professional long-term immigration and international citizenship along with alleviated visa formalities. (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 197; Varghese 2008, 25).

Another important aspect of a student's international journey is multiculturalism and the advantages accumulated through it. Students can travel to foreign countries and gain irreplaceable experiences and memories thanks to student mobility and its several advocate programs such as Erasmus and

Socrates (Varghese 2008, 24). Multicultural environment can also help nurture **international characteristics** within students that will prove valuable not only in the labor market but also in the globalizing society. The international characteristics include traits such as tolerance, open mindedness, cognitive flexibility, respect for others, and foreign language capability. Such perks cultivate ethical commitment and encourage individual introspection, which help students to "*develop a sense of responsibility and civic engagement.*" (Jibeen and Khan 2015, 197.) The discovered downsides to international higher education for individuals include only two previously mentioned issues: discrimination in developed societies instigated by the increasing socioeconomic differences, and the possibility of inconsistent study experience originating from the institution's hardship with experience quality standardization.

A great advancement of an industry cannot prevent the reverse drawbacks that follow, but they can be eliminated. If higher education institutions remain focused on stabilizing the balance between their transactional and educational objectives, the institutions could be able to provide students with the life-altering academic experience one by one. Subsequently, the new internationally competent and oriented human resources could lead a new era of economic improvement and cultural appreciation. It is therefore no surprise that intense competition persists between institutions for a share of a market that is filled with such grand opportunities. The only way to understand the mechanics of success within the industry is to comprehend the framework behind student recruitment process, which is orchestrated and managed through the efforts of marketing.

2.4 Marketing of International Higher Education

The advantages of international higher education are plentiful, and therefore, gaining a share of the overseas student market is perceived as desirable by many rival institutions around the world. However, claiming the benefits – in other words, recruiting the students – is dependent on the marketing efforts and capabilities of an institution. The marketing of international higher education is a topic of great intricacy that has been frequently disassembled and analyzed by a multitude of authors over the years. In their systematic review of higher education marketing literature, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 6) scrutinized past papers and found that an increasing number of universities have begun to adapt value-adding marketing concepts and theories in search for competitive advantages and a share of the market.

Nonetheless, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 7-8) argue that the current literature on international higher education marketing is "*incoherent, even inchoate and lacks theoretical models that reflect upon the particular context of HE and the nature of their service.*" They further critique that research on higher education marketing has relied on notions and empirical data derived from services marketing, which, however similar, has some contextual differences and structural incompatibilities with higher education and its ways of operation. Mazzarol (1998, 165) also reinforces the fragmented image by suggesting that no prefabricated marketing strategies exist for internationally operating higher education institutions. Although the theoretical development for marketing of international higher education seems to be an ongoing process, this chapter will address and analyze

higher education-affiliated marketing concepts, characteristics and factors that the recent literature has most notably discussed.

2.4.1 Defining International Higher Education Marketing

Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003, 319) state that the core purpose of marketing comprises of the dedication of all marketing efforts to the fulfillment of the needs and demands of consumers. The authors further elaborate that *"If customer requirements are not satisfactorily fulfilled, or if customers do not obtain what they want or need, then marketing has failed both the customer and the organization."* In 1985, Kotler and Fox (cited by Chen 2008, 6) defined **education marketing** as *"the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets, to achieve institutional objectives."* The authors elaborated that the institution's offerings must be tailored to the target market's demand along with managing pricing, communication and distribution in order to notify, stimulate and serve the market. With the prevalence of marketing terminologies, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 7) note that national governments invest in the improvement of the higher education sector under the assumption that *"Students are, or will become, informed consumers making rational choices of higher education courses and institutions."*

The international aspect of higher education marketing was also briefly discussed by Chen (2008, 3-4) in her paper for understanding international students' choice of Canadian universities. She notes that whilst marketing and internationalization are two separate concepts, **the dynamic evolution** that has occurred between them has obscured the boundaries between the two. The author discovered that the literature on marketing discussed factors deriving from internationalization, such as exchange programs, research cooperation and sister city programs. In contrast, literature on internationalization frequently relied on common marketing terminology, such as the marketing mix, which comprises of product, price, place and promotion. Chen (2008, 6) concludes by stating that *"The marketing of higher education shares some parallels with the phenomenon of the internationalization of higher education—it has become an integral part of higher education."*

In order to plan and establish effective marketing, the characteristic of the service or the product – the *"what"* of a business – must be investigated and identified: plausible perks must be utilized, and threatening cons should be nullified. As previously established, a lot of debate circulated around the actual product of higher education, whether it was graduates for employers or degree programs for students. In 1980, Levitt (cited by Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, 319) proposed that universities' offerings consisted of **three different products**: the core product, the tangible product and the augmented product. The core consists of the benefits endorsed by a college degree, such as employment opportunities and lifestyle upgrades. The tangible features include physical properties such as the campus, gym facilities, library and laboratories. Lastly, the augmented level comprises of intangible qualities such as student loans, library memberships and job placements. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003, 319) stress that if the properties are not implemented, students will be dissatisfied.

On the contrary, Cubillo et al. (2006, 3), citing Grönroos (1994), suggest **three different levels of services** that students will assimilate when they enter a host country: the core service, auxiliary services and secondary services. The core service comprises of the tuition of an institution, the auxiliary services include the academy's other activities, and the secondary services signify the supply of services and products of the host city and the host nation. The inclusion of external secondary services proves that certain aspects of higher education marketing are beyond the influence of a single institution. It is therefore common for various national governments to intervene and raise international competitiveness of their higher education sector by placing heavy investments in the development of the industry (Cudmore 2005, 49).

It is concluded today that higher education belongs to the service industry, and subsequently, it falls under several service-associated issues along with peculiarities of its own. In his study of success factors for international education marketing, Mazzarol (1998, 164) borrows theory from Lovelock (1983) and discusses **the characteristics of education services** based upon five different elements: nature of the service act, customer relationship, level of customization, nature of demand relative to supply, and delivery type of the service. He finds that higher education is a service influenced by a high degree of human interaction: in an environment of uncensored intercommunication, an intangible asset, knowledge, is steered towards the minds of students, with whom the institution can develop strong customer loyalty due to the prolonged delivery of the service. The author furthermore notes that the level of customization (mass lectures versus individual tutoring) varies between institutions. Demand is liable to only slight fluctuations while supply (availability of staff and facilities) may prove capricious to manage. Lastly, while delivery type of service has traditionally required student attendance on campus, modern advances have also introduced offshore tuition programs and distance education as alternative methods.

In the same paper, Mazzarol (1998, 164) also uncovers **four problematic traits** that hinder service enterprises. He references Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1985) on four fundamental characteristics of services: intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity, and perishability. The incorporeal nature has historically led to the dismissal and even complete rejection of services in favor of tangible products: Mazzarol (1998, 163) notes that a common practice for services was to utilize them only as supporting assets useful in the marketing of products. The author explains that intangibility makes it impossible for services to be stored and that challenges may arise in the setting of prices, promotion of the service, and protection of patents. In the case of academies, implications like defective promotion, misinterpreted class capacities, and controversial pricing may manifest issues that require articulated marketing strategies to regulate and monitor.

The issue of separating production from consumption within higher education is also certainly topical, since a group of consumers, a class, contiguously partakes in the learning process produced by teachers, which accordingly proves vital for the success of an institution. Heterogeneity of services may complicate quality control and standardization of an academy, and perishability might cause a shortage or surplus of supply. (Mazzarol 1998, 164-165.) Mazzarol (1998, 165) also notes an additional service-associated problem of centralizing production: academies have attempted to centralize

supply with mass lectures and large classes, but the efforts have usually fallen flat due to individual learning differences and an unbalanced ratio of students and teachers. Higher education, in comparison with other service industries, may also manifest additional problems: for example, higher education must be supplied at the host country during the initial stage of internationalization process (Cubillo et al. 2006, 3).

2.4.2 Consumer Behavior of Potential Students

After a thorough examination of the internal perks and faults of a product or service, the marketing of a business ought to understand what attracts consumers to purchase their offerings and how they should market the offerings to gain a share of the market – the “*how*” of a business. As emphasized earlier, the decision to study abroad is one of the biggest changes that a student may fulfill in their life; it is an important notion that some authors also tend to underline (Cubillo et al. 2006, 2; Jibeen and Khan 2015, 197; Mazzarol 1998, 165). Since the expenses that are being invested in gaining a degree are substantial, the long-term purchase and commitment to one is therefore a choice characterized by **deep buyer deliberation** (Cubillo et al. 2006, 2). It is the reason why Mazzarol (1998, 165) suggests that the marketing of an academy beckons for both sensitivity and sophistication. Consequently, the consumer behavior of students is a major aspect for educational institutions to consider and analyze.

Varghese (2008, 13), quoting Cummins (1993), lists students’ **motives** for overseas tuition by three major categories: a lack of domestic facilities and their inability to provide desired subjects, the business value of an international degree, and the acquisition of knowledge and experiences in a foreign country. The final college choice of student, however, is dependent on a number of interconnected **purchase factors**. Cubillo et al. (2006) conducted research on the decision-making processes of international students and compiled a practical graphic model encapsulating the manifold findings of their investigation. All variable factors they discovered can be observed in figure 1, which depicts the level of complexity and deliberation of a student’s tuition purchase decision. Furthermore, Chen (2008, 6-7) adds that college choice is a constant interactive process between a student and an institution; the final decision will depend on the compatibility of the characteristics between the student’s expectations and the institution’s offerings as well as the successfulness in the communication of the value demanded and the value supplied.

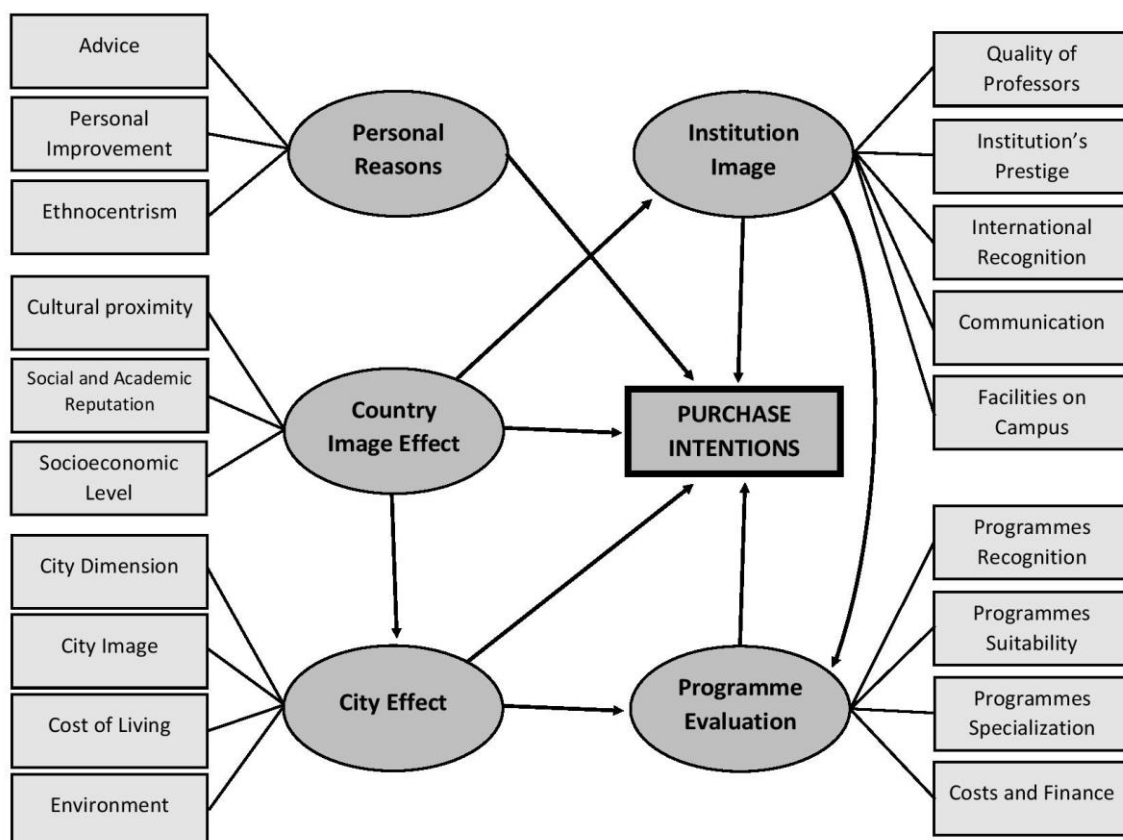


FIGURE 1. A model of international students' preferences (Cubillo et al. 2006, 7.)

2.4.3 Appliance of Marketing Models

Several authors contributing to the literature have concocted and suggested different ideas and concepts as to how higher education should be marketed in order to produce fruitful outcomes. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003, 319) heed to **the stakeholder concept**, which was originally introduced by Kotler and Fox in 1985. The former authors define the notion as the pronounced significance of all entities involved in the education process such as governments, employers and the immediate families of students. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003, 319-320) elaborate that in order for institutions to succeed, they must nurture relations to their respective stakeholders, which can be managed through **relationship marketing**. Citing Gummesson (1994), the authors describe the marketing method as an interactive network of relations between an organization and its consumers with the exchange of values and support residing at its core. It is the reason why marketing efforts should not only be directed at students but the rest of the stakeholders as well.

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 24) also indicate their support for relationship marketing within higher education, as referenced earlier in the initial chapter. According to the authors, relationship marketing has recently been recognized as the most compatible strategy within higher education due to its policy of integrating students to help the brand building and marketing of institutions. They deduce that *"After all, even the best marketers and advertisers could not promote a HE institution if the service staff (e.g., lecturers, office managers, secretaries) were not responsive to the students' needs and expectations."*

The subject of **marketing communications** was inspected by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 18) in their systematic literature review. They cite a 2003 study by Gray, Fam and Llanes, who found that the rapid development of online-based promotion had led to **the world wide web**, along with print media, being recognized as one of the most important sources for university information among Asian markets. In a more recent study, Kuzma and Wright (2013, 54) address the marketing of higher education through social media and confirm that *"The application of social media for marketing and advertising is now well established in many commercial organisations."* They suggest that with its inevitably increasing influence and coverage, universities are more receptive towards the assimilation of social media as a means of marketing communication, because it can assist with activities like recruiting prospective students and engaging with the alumni.

Kuzma and Wright (2013, 55-64) further propose that **social media marketing** can have a direct correlation to an institution's success and impact its educational conventions. The utilization of social media may lead to a complete revision of an institution's brand, as contemplated in a 2011 article by Anyangwe (cited by Kuzma and Wright 2013, 55): *"Senior management teams in universities will increasingly have to face marketing questions about the brand, the way it is projected and the way they seek to develop it."* The authors further quote that social media is a hybrid of the marketing mix, and marketing experts ought to apply it to orchestrate consumer conversations in accordance with the business' principles and objectives. Nonetheless, Kuzma and Wright (2013, 64) do not recommend sole reliance on social media for student recruitment and marketing strategy, even despite its overall cost-effectiveness.

Past literature has also experimented with applying common strategic tools to higher education marketing. In their review, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 26-27) establish that several studies approached marketing on strategic viewpoints such as segmentation, positioning, targeting and branding. According to the authors, some empirical studies on higher education additionally suggest *"marketing segmentation, market differentiation; market positioning and market planning,"* which are prevalent marketing concepts used in the business sector.

Chen (2008, 7) explains that **segmentation and targeting** represent a way of examining how prospective students select their higher education institutions. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 27) quote that segment profiling is a modern method of market segmentation, and in the case of universities, three common segments are recognized: high-school leavers, mature students and international students. **Positioning** exemplifies the way an institution compares to other institutions within the market (Chen 2008, 7). According to Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 28-29), academic institutions may need to reposition themselves in the market in order to maintain consistent student enrollments. The authors quote Medina and Duffy (1998), who recognized five prominent dimensions of brand positioning for academies: learning environment, reputation, career prospects for graduates, destination image, and cultural integration. **Differentiation** of an institution necessitates the successful communication of added value in the market. It is furthermore suggested that an institution ought to investigate whether it has a *"reputational pull"* or a *"facilities pull"* in order to differentiate its brand. (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006, 28.)

Moreover, the image, reputation and brand of an institution are an aspect of marketing that seem to receive an especially large amount of discussion and appraisal. In 1995, **image** was defined by Kotler and Fox (cited by Ivy 2001, 276) as *"the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions a person has on an object."* Ivy (2001, 276) explains that the image of an institution is not absolute but affiliated to the images portrayed by other institutions. He further states that the image of an institution is susceptible to impressions formed by word of mouth, past experiences and marketing efforts of the institution. Moreover, the perceptions of the public can be formed upon lacking and even incorrect information; yet, the formed image based upon the estimated weaknesses and strengths of an institution will determine people's participation in its operations. (Ivy 2001, 276.)

In 2001, Nguyen and Le Blanc (cited by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 20) encapsulated the concept of **reputation** as *"the result of the past actions of an organization."* It has been discovered that the interactions between institutional image and reputation advocate for improved customer loyalty with staff and campus facilities acting as critical factors in the perceptions. In an interesting peculiarity, image and reputation are construed differently in higher education than in other service businesses. For example, a company with a good reputation is expected to garner high sales and high demand, but an academy with good reputation is associated with limited sales: academies with noble prestige tend to enroll a fewer number of students, which only further improves their high-value image. Traditionally, if a company rejects clientele, the business will gain negative reputation. (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 20-21.)

A brand, on the other hand, symbolizes the competitive identity of an organization that is dedicated to raising awareness, reaffirming positive impressions, and refuting false notions in the market (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, 3). In a study of brand harmonization within British universities, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007, 4-5) highlight the ever-growing importance of branding as a competitive edge within the international market of higher education; possessing a distinguishable image in the market is a valuable competitive asset that may influence a potential student's willingness to apply to an institution. Like the marketization of higher education, branding has also received criticism: according to the authors, some criticize that *"Branding is anathema to higher education: it implies central control and consistency, whereas universities have to be about freedom and action. Branding in business is about creating personality where none exists but there's almost too much personality in universities."* Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007, 7) assess that the literature on higher education branding is also at a proportionately pioneer stage, and the studies implemented on the subject are meager despite its increasing significance.

Moreover, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007, 10-11) cover the concept of **brand architecture** as an important structure for managing and marketing a university's services. The brand framework is of dual nature: it can be either monolithic or freestanding. Monolithic or corporate approach is subject to unilateral policy of branding everything under the main corporate name – all sub-brands are connected to the corporate brand. Freestanding or house-of-brands approach, on the other hand, has its emphasis on individual branding of every service or product a business has

to offer. The authors note that individual branding can give institutions and their sub-parts autonomy and the freedom to target their intended market, which may vary by degree program. The corporate approach, however, can lead to the erosion of such diversity and differentiation. Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007, 11) heed to the importance of **brand harmonization**, without which brand architecture would lack clarity and commercial effectiveness. The concept signifies an organization's brand coherence within its presentation and the organization's operations.

Finally, Mazzarol (1998, 165-167) introduces a comprehensive list entailing **17 critical success factors** for higher education institutions in the international market. The list consists of the following:

1. Promotion and recruitment:
 - Use of private recruitment agents
 - Size of overseas advertising and promotion budget
 - Possession of offshore recruitment offices
 - Use of government information offices overseas
 - Size of international student enrolments
2. Image and resources:
 - Level of market profile or recognition
 - Strength of financial resources
 - Reputation for quality
 - Size and influence of alumni
 - Range of courses and programs
3. People and culture:
 - Level of innovation within the institutions' culture
 - Level of customer orientation within culture
 - Effective use of information technology
 - Quality and expertise of staff
 - Level of technical superiority
4. Coalition and forward integration:
 - Possession of international strategic alliances
 - Possession of offshore teaching programs

The previously discussed marketing issues can be neatly concluded by the list above. To succeed internationally, the marketing of a higher education institution should contemplate and target any of the listed attributes in an attempt to find competitive edge and differentiate. In a study based upon the success factors, Mazzarol (1998, 172) found that out of the four main categories of success factors, image and resources and coalition and forward integration were identified as the ones with most positive association with international success. In other words, **the respectable image and international connections** of an institution are the most crucial marketing assets with the greatest amount of leverage in the international market. According to the author, the research findings are applicable to institutions residing in most of the leading education exporter countries.

Overall, the broad concept of international higher education marketing incorporates a great variety of aspects to investigate and discuss. Along with modern interventions, it is a subject of relentless alteration and development in the worldwide market. Academic institutions should therefore consecutively monitor developments and seek for novel ways of improving their international marketing efforts and capacities.

2.5 Internationalization of Finnish Higher Education

Finland, like other developed countries, is also experiencing the economically damaging repercussions that are inflicted by an ageing population. The Nordic nation requires competent labor force to immigrate to fulfill new job openings as well as the positions left vacant by retired natives, who furthermore increase the need for elderly care. Such developments have contributed to national conversation about multiculturalism in society alongside other effects of globalization. (Crawford and Bethell 2012, 189.) Despite ranking high in global education quality listings annually, Finland seems to lag behind in terms of internationalizing its higher education. According to Cai et al. (2012, 216), higher education export is **an emerging phenomenon** in Finland, and consequently, the academic discussion on the export of education has been proportionately meager in the country. For Finnish institutions to gain leverage in the international market, what reformations, if any, should be implemented in the constitution of Finnish higher education? In this final chapter, Finnish higher education will be discussed through the literature addressing the Finnish institutions and their development, export preparedness, and internationalization of campus environments.

Internationalization of Finnish higher education initiated in the late 1980s, during which internationalization of research was the foremost subject of investment. The early 1990s witnessed a rise in political support for international degree programs as well as "*internationalization at home*"-studies for Finnish students. By the 2000s, the emphasis had clearly shifted onto the development of foreign language study programs. (Saarinen 2012, 241-242.) Saarinen (2012, 242-243) notes that the number of international degree programs in Finland multiplied rapidly: during 1996, students were presented with 75 English degree programs, yet by 1999, the number of English degree programs had already been almost doubled. By the end of 2010, 335 international degree programs were offered by the Finnish universities and polytechnics. Moreover, Wächter and Maiworm (cited by Saarinen 2012, 243) discovered in 2008 that Finland ranked first in Europe based upon the proportion of institutions offering English language programs. Finland also ranked second after the Netherlands based upon the total share of English-taught programs against all programs.

Steps toward the internationalization of Finnish higher education have been further instigated by **the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (MoE)**, which has published reformative papers and directives over the years (Crawford and Bethell 2012, 189-190). Cai et al. (2012, 215-221) observe that one of the more recent reforms by the MoE underlined the encouragement of exporting fee-based education services. According to the authors, Finland was well-known for its promotion of tuition-free higher education until 2006, when the country made overseas tuition fees compulsory.

The MoE views higher education as a profitable opportunity, which is compiled of two assumptions: global demand for higher education is ever-growing, and Finland needs economy-boosting sectors that could strengthen employment and increase revenue. Whilst the current legislation offers Finnish higher education a promising foundation for international entry, the actual penetration of the market, however, is expected of the institutions and their capabilities for professional marketing. (Cai et al. 2012, 216-217.)

According to Crawford and Bethell (2012, 190), each Finnish higher education institution possesses a strategy for internationalization, which strives for international cooperation, increased international enrolments, extended exchange programs, and greater international image. In 2007, Hölttä (cited by Cai et al. 2012, 218) categorized **the internationalization of Finnish universities** by five successive methods: internationalization through individual mobility, bilateral institutional agreements, international programs, institutional and disciplinary networks, and the market. Cai et al. (2012, 218) note that the modes may coincide with one another, and that the most traditional means implemented among Finnish institutions seem to include all except internationalization through individual mobility and the market. Despite each institution possessing an international strategy, Finnish higher education does seem relatively inexperienced with the international market, as the most common internationalization approaches suggest the industry's reliance on second-hand information and experience of others.

2.5.1 Export Readiness of Finnish Higher Education

In their research for export readiness of Finnish higher education institutions, Cai et al. (2012, 221-222) unravel the different elements of export readiness. According to the authors, the concept of export readiness indicates a university's focus on fulfilling the demands of the respective stakeholders involved in international student recruitment. It comprises of three essential sub-concepts associated with export market orientation: **export competence, management commitment and export coordination**. Export competence signifies an organization's competitive edge in the export industry, and common sources for it may derive from the organization's previous experience and export expertise. Management commitment portrays a management's favorable attitude towards education export, and such attitude can result in proactive and responsive managerial decisions. Export coordination refers to the integration of interfunctional capacities, which strives for the utilization of export opportunities through fluent harmonization of an organization's internal units and external affiliations.

Cai et al. (2012, 222) conducted qualitative interviews with representatives from Finnish universities and polytechnics with the addition of officials from the CIMO, an export association, and the Finnish embassy in China. The authors assessed the export readiness of Finnish higher education institutions based upon the three previously mentioned elements of export readiness. Regarding export competence, specifically previous experience, the authors explain that fee-based degree programs directed at overseas students are a completely novel phenomenon in Finnish higher education, thus, the institutions possess **no considerable previous experience**. The authors note that Finnish

institutions have experience of fee-based education solely from postgraduate studies such as short-term training and certificate-based education, yet even such training is targeted at Finnish students.

Concerning the aspect of export expertise, Finnish higher education is in its nascent phase. Even in general terms, some university representatives state that Finland is **an underachiever in marketing**: *"Finns are not good in marketing. That is one of the problems we have. We intend to be too modest perhaps and maybe a bit too honest also in some cases."* It is further suggested that Finland ought to adapt a more American approach to marketing. (Cai et al. 2012, 223.) The interviews conducted by Cai et al. (2012, 224) furthermore showcase contrasting views between the interviewees about the Chinese student market: some fathomed that the market contained great potential while some considered it saturated. The opposing outlooks demonstrate **lack of knowledge** about the specific market areas and local demands of students. The authors remark that the only uniform view the participants shared was that Finnish institutions need to target niche markets where they can benefit from their competitive advantages.

However, the evident lag in the academic internationalization process is not being disregarded, in fact, Finnish institutional administrators and leaders are well aware of their delayed progress. The second crucial aspect to export competence, management commitment, constitutes of two assets: commitment and attitude, with the latter determining the nature and level of commitment. (Cai et al. 2012, 224-225.) Cai et al. (2012, 225-226) noticed **varying attitudes** concerning Finnish higher education: Some interviewees exuded positive outlook and saw great opportunities and benefits awaiting in the international market. Some endorsed the governmental incentives but favored a charitable approach to the international market over a commercial approach. Lastly, some remained rather skeptical of internationalization. Cai et al. (2012, 226-227) conclude, *"The more positive attitude institutional managers have towards exporting, the more able they are to commit the time and effort to developing export education activities and handling the risks of internationalisation."* In essence, a positive mindset optimizes management commitment. Ultimately, whilst the commitment of a management is essential, the authors also suggest incorporating the attitudes of other academic staff members.

Maintaining fluent communication between entities ensures effective operations. The third aspect, export coordination, can be divided by three different scopes: inter-institutional coordination, national coordination and international coordination (Cai et al. 2012, 227). Among the implemented interviews, it was found that inter-institutional coordination between Finnish institutions was deficient, since other domestic institutions are viewed as **competitors instead of partners**; an institution's export operations are managed independently rather than in liaison, and information about the international market is withheld rather than communicated forward. One interviewee lamented the institutional isolation yet remained hopeful: *"We are such a small country and maybe in a long run all universities of applied sciences can get a fraction in the education markets of countries like India and China. Maybe in the beginning we have all sorts of competition and even jealousy between the universities of applied sciences, but I believe there is a tendency towards cooperation."*

They concluded that the institutions ought to develop the programs together. Regarding international coordination, associations like the CIMO, the Finnish embassies, and the export association Finpro (current Business Finland) have tremendously assisted Finnish higher education in gaining presence abroad. (Cai et al. 2012, 227-229.) However, Cai et al. (2012, 229) note that higher education institutions themselves have not majorly contributed to the operations of the international associations.

Cai et al. (2012, 229) also mention some **external limitations** that restrain the international development of Finnish higher education. The authors list issues like limitations of the legislation, shortage of finances, ambiguity of laws, and lack of subsidization from the government, all of which can discourage Finnish institutions from advancing to the international market. Moreover, Cai et al (2012, 216) remind that Finland is a geographically isolated country, which has quite high living expenses, crude climate and a complex language; thus, the country characteristics may also cause Finnish higher education to be shunned by prospective students and immigrants.

2.5.2 Internationalization of Finnish Campuses

After attaining an international student base, how have Finnish institutions managed internationalization on campus? Crawford and Bethell (2012, 193) conducted studies from which they discovered that the notion of *"simply having international students on campus results in internationalization"*, as also promoted by the MoE, is not necessarily true. According to Saarinen (2012, 246), the main aspiration of Finnish internationalization is **"both to attract foreign students and to internationalize Finns."** Crawford and Bethell (2012, 191-192) explain that one of the most common ways for internationalization within Finnish higher education has been the concept of *"internationalization at home."* It includes aspects such as international education within teaching, extracurricular activities inducing intercultural interaction, maintenance of multicultural relationships between staff and students, and the convergence of university community and ethnic minority groups. Despite the righteous aspirations, some studies have elicited that higher education institutions experience lack of unification between host students and international students, both abroad and in Finland as well (Crawford and Bethell 2012, 193).

Intercultural characteristics that emerge in a diverse environment may induce a rich and productive atmosphere on campus, but cultural differences can also lead to **social segregation** if managed improperly or negligently by the educational staff. In their study of comprehensive internationalization, Crawford and Bethell (2012, 193) discuss some of the cultural tendencies and divergences that might naturally separate host students from other students. When integrated into a foreign culture, host students may experience negative feelings, like anxiety or frustration, when they come in contact with culturally different students, and they anticipate a complex interaction that differs from the norm.

A primary divider is **language**, which is an especially intricate matter in Finland's case. English, as the most common means of international communication, is a second language for both Finnish and

non-English students, so interactions require additional intellectual effort. Linguistic abilities among students may vary, and some can find continuous communication in another language emotionally and cognitively arduous. Moreover, the Finnish style of verbal and non-verbal communication can predispose for awkward encounters, as cultural differences may exist in aspects such as taboo topics, use of silence, and personal space. Other significant differentiators include a lack of common interests, age differences, and unawareness of popular culture. (Crawford and Bethell 2012, 193-194.)

According to Crawford and Bethell (2012, 196-197), Crawford's (2008) previous study of the Buddy Project in the University of Jyväskylä suggests that Finnish programs lack proper means of integrating international students with host students: The Buddy Project, a voluntary program intended for integration of Finnish and non-Finnish students, did not succeed in establishing long-term relationships between the students. Instead, problems such as language barriers, scheduling issues and motivation deprived the relations between the students. Apparently, such result is a common outcome. The participants in the program expressed a need for increased institutional guidance and support, especially in the initial introductory phase of the integration process.

Crawford and Bethell (2012, 201) conclude that the internationalization of higher education does not simply happen, but it requires active and premeditated measures to be taken in order to achieve **comprehensive internationalization**: *"A change that is both broad – affecting departments, schools and activities across the institution – and deep, expressed in institutional culture, values, and policies and practices."* Subsequently, the successful integration of international aspects within an institution's research, tuition and atmosphere can enhance its brand image, one of the most vital marketing assets. A diverse and tolerant environment can be furthermore utilized within an institution's marketing activities.

Concerning Finland's emerging stance in the international higher education market, Cai et al. (2012, 230-231) conclude that the shift from the former Nordic higher education model to a pure market-based model is laborious: *"The success of this transition may, on the one hand, depend on how clearly the Finnish government and Finnish HEIs identify the challenges and find corresponding solutions."* Based on their research, the Finnish institutions lack previous knowledge, sufficient motivation, clear vision, and coherent coordination between external and internal entities. Additionally, the most accessible markets for the institutions seem to reside in transitioning and developing countries. To increase the overall export competency of Finnish institutions, the authors suggest few corrective measures:

1. Implementing in-depth market and export research
2. Showcasing and sharing successful experiences between institutions
3. Employing overseas experts and collaborating with agencies in target countries
4. Improving coordination between institutions both nationally and internationally

Finnish institutions could develop their export competence by investing into few or all of the aforementioned notions. Alongside maintaining comprehensive internationalization on campus, the Finnish institutions could eventually penetrate the international market and compete on par with rival academic nations.

3 RESEARCH ON SAVONIA'S MARKETING PLATFORMS AND CONTENTS

A brief survey about Savonia's marketing platforms and their contents was implemented and directed towards the international degree programs students of Savonia. At the moment, Savonia offers six international degree programs. They consist of four bachelor's degree programs: business administration, mechanical engineering, nursing and internet of things; and two master's degree programs: digital health and energy engineering. (Savonia-ammattikorkeakoulu 2020.) At the time of the research, energy engineering was not yet existent as a degree program at the polytechnic.

The topic of international marketing is considered an important research focus for Savonia, because **internationality** is one of the institution's key attributes as a higher education provider (Savonia-ammattikorkeakoulu 2020). Some of the polytechnic's main aspirations include maintaining and improving the number of international enrollments, a diverse campus environment, multicultural studies, and a rich network of international collaborations and projects (Oksanen 2020-03-19). Research on international recruitment and marketing could essentially provide the institution two assets: important information to utilize in its marketing as well as reassuring confirmation for the institution's beliefs or estimates about certain markets.

Savonia has determined certain countries as the focus points of its recruitment marketing, and the institution even has assigned regional experts for some of the nations. The focus countries comprise of Albania, Chile, China, Estonia, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Russia and Spain. (Oksanen 2019-09-17.) Unfortunately, the survey managed to collect only a few responses deriving from the intended focus countries. Nonetheless, the upcoming survey results do comprise of a rich variety of countries and cultures: altogether, the respondents represent the accumulated continental perspectives of **Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East and Russia**. The unearthed regional preferences and differences that will be portrayed and discussed within the result analysis could offer Savonia insight on how to differentiate its marketing to properly fit the needs and demands of its geographically and culturally separate prospects.

3.1 Background and Implementation

The survey and its design and publication were originally managed by a Savonia representative, Miisa Ruotsalainen. During discussions for thesis research with Anna Laukkanen, the survey and its results were shared and forwarded through email for later inspection and possible reutilization. Ultimately, the contents of the survey were deemed suitable for the topic of the thesis and applicable for further research. The questions in the survey were determined to remain identical in later releases in order to preserve coherence between all survey answers and to ensure efficient analysis.

The content of the survey comprised of **three essential questions** that were modeled as open-ended questions. They inquired survey participants the following:

1. *"How did you find out about the study possibilities in Savonia UAS before applying? (E.g. Facebook, StudyLink.com, StudyinFinland.fi etc.)"*
2. *"What would be the best platforms for promoting Savonia in your home country?"*
3. *"What kind of content would you prefer to see when looking for study opportunities in Savonia? (E.g. videos, stories from the students, information about Finland etc.)"*

In essence, the first question (discovery) clarifies what has already worked in favor of Savonia, whereas the second (platform) and the third (content) question allow for suggestions about what could be further improved in Savonia's promotion, all according to the current students. A few additional questions consisted of inquiries for the respondents' names, their degree program and home country. The plausible degree program options included all five of Savonia's international degree programs that were being offered at the time: business management, mechanical engineering, nursing, internet of things, and digital health. The nature of the survey was **quantitative as well as qualitative**: Some of the responses to the aforementioned questions revealed specific platforms and certain content types that gradually accumulated themselves to represent their popularity in concrete numbers. The qualitative nature of the survey showcased itself especially within the third question, as the respondents tended to freely describe their preferred content and even give advice and examples of new plausible marketing content for Savonia.

The original survey was conducted by Miisa Ruotsalainen in 2018, and it gained 26 responses. Twenty-one of the responses derived from students of various national backgrounds while five of the responses originated from Finnish students studying in international degree programs. The survey was later rebuilt in Webropol 2.0, an online tool designed for survey construction, and released for the second time by Virpi Oksanen on May 15, 2019. The survey gained nine responses, which consisted of eight international students and one Finnish student. Thereafter, the survey was recreated once more in Webropol 3.0, and it was released for the third time on September 9, 2019. The third publication gathered 29 responses, 19 of which were international students and 10 were Finnish students.

The 2019 surveys were distributed through the school email. The survey published in May was sent to 86 recipients, and they consisted of business students, engineering students and internet of things -students. The final survey published in September included the previously mentioned students with the addition of nursing students, and altogether, it covered 314 recipients. The respondents in the May survey belonged to classes that had already studied a year in Savonia at the time, and the September survey covered classes enrolled from 2017 to 2019. It was decided during survey publication process that digital health master students would be excluded from the survey due to their studies only incorporating distance work.

3.2 Respondent Data and Survey Results

Overall, the survey collected **64 responses** from Savonia students of various national backgrounds. Most of the respondents, 22 out of 64, were mechanical engineering students. Business administration students were second with 18 respondents, nursing students third with 16 respondents, and internet of things -students fourth with 8 respondents. The distribution of all respondents by degree program can be witnessed in the figure below.

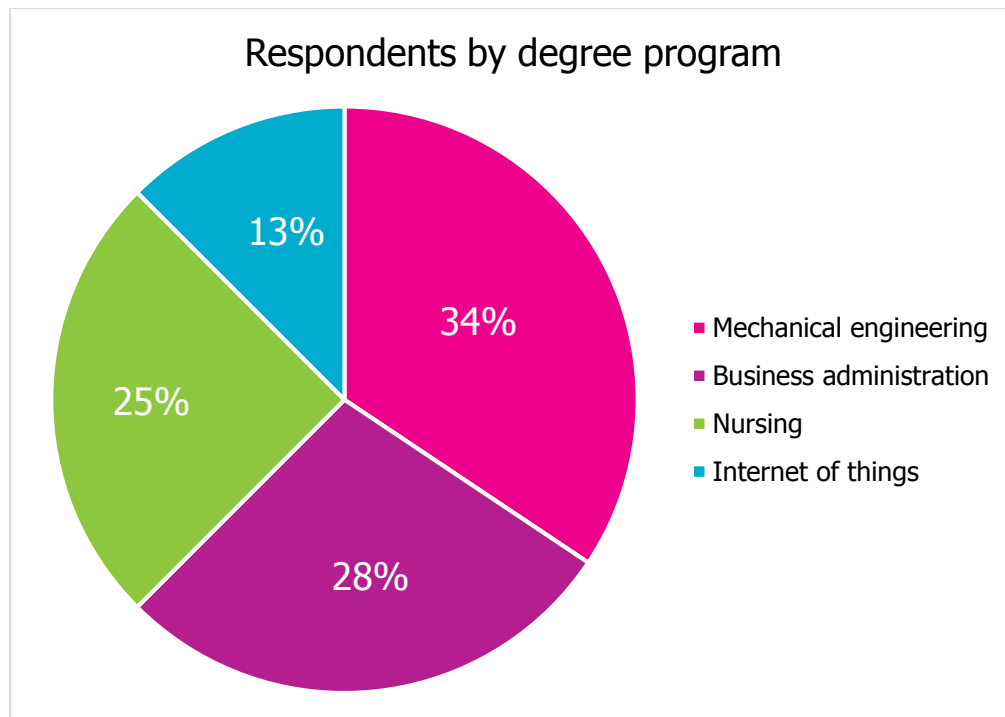


FIGURE 2. Respondents by degree program (%)

The respondents' degree programs that are witnessed in figure 2 are distributed quite fairly with none of the degree programs overly dominating the chart or being nearly diminished from it. The largest share of respondents, 34%, derive from students studying mechanical engineering, and the smallest share of respondents, 13%, identify as internet of things -students. Business administration students with 28% and nursing students with 25% are distributed the most fairly among the four degrees when considering that the most optimal distribution percentage for the degree programs would be an equal 25% per degree. Mechanical engineering students and internet of things -students represent the two extremities on the distribution scale: the mechanical engineering respondent amount is nearly tripled in size (2.6 times larger) in comparison with internet of things -respondent amount. Nevertheless, the respondents' degree program does not act as a major factor within the research since Savonia's objective of increasing the number of international students is not restricted nor targeted into a specific degree program. Instead, the goal is to formulate a more general impression of what all prospective students might search for in an institution rather than in a specific degree program.

Altogether, the 64 respondents represent **23 different countries**. Sixteen of the total responses derived from Finnish students, and they represented the largest sum of respondents originating

from the same country. In comparison, the next biggest respondent country group was a tie between China and Bangladesh with six respondents each. Below, figure 3 illustrates the distribution of all the countries amongst the respondents. The specific statistics for each country can be witnessed in figure 4.

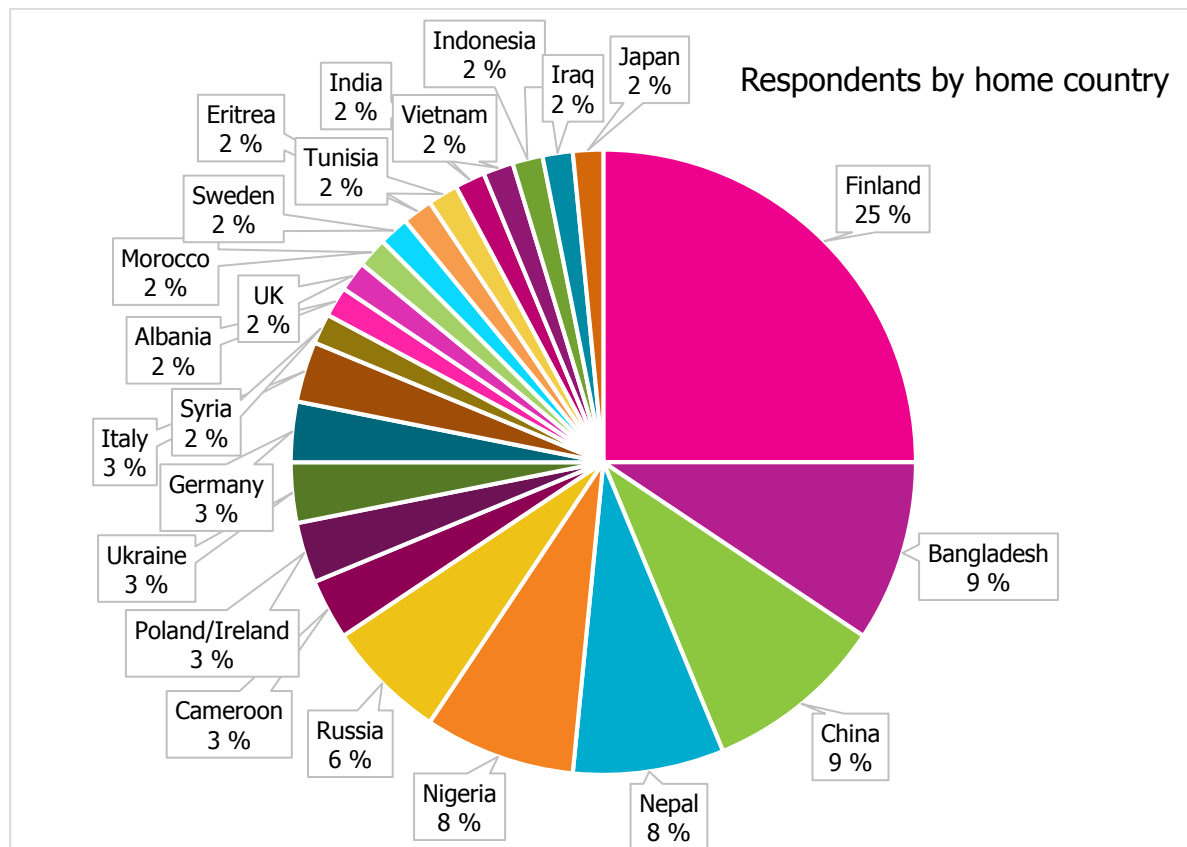


FIGURE 3. Respondents by home country (%)

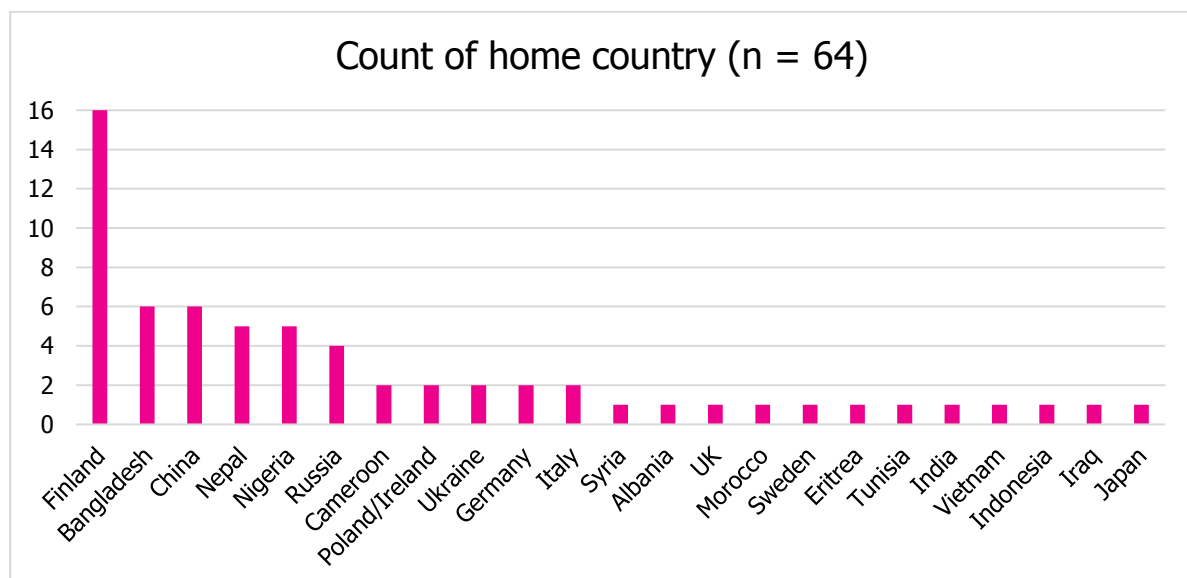


FIGURE 4. Respondents by home country (n = 64)

The first issue to be addressed is **the ratio of Finnish students to international students**. The international degree programs that are the targeted sample do incorporate Finnish students, and consequently, the survey results include many Finnish respondents and their views: 25% precisely.

If the analysis solely contemplated the views of international students, the survey would have 16 responses less to offer, and the survey would amount to a total of 48 responses instead of 64. However, the domestic views that the Finnish respondents convey about preferred marketing platforms can provide a helpful contrast as to what attracts international students to Savonia in comparison with Finnish students. Moreover, the marketing contents wished by all the respondents can be perceived universally as what most students would prefer to consider when searching for an amicable higher education provider. The fact that the Finnish students may have also answered either from their own perspective or contemplated issues from an international student's perspective has also brought additional variation and helpful insight into the mix. The Finnish responses are definitely not disregarded but in fact integrated for a better comparative analysis in order to create a more multi-layered entirety.

Although the Finnish students represent the majority group, **the international share of respondents** accounts for 75% of total responses nonetheless. Respondents from Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Nigeria and Russia represent 41% of the total responses, or 54% of total international responses. The respondents are further categorized into greater geographical regions in an effort to simplify the pie chart from figure 3 and gain a clearer understanding of where the respondents generally originate from. In continental terms, 27 of the respondents hail from Europe, 21 from Asia, 10 from Africa, 4 from Russia and 2 from Middle East. The Russian respondents are exceptionally classified as a separate continent under the country name since their precise origin (European Russia or Asian Russia) cannot be retrieved. The continental pie chart can be witnessed in figure 5, where the influence of certain types of cultures and societies within the survey results can be realized.

In fact, **the combined continental pie chart** seems to have an analytical advantage over the figures simply listing the respondents' home countries: Figure 4 verifies that out of the total number of countries, 12 countries are each represented by a single respondent and five countries are each represented by two respondents. Subsequently, 17 out of the 23 countries, or 74%, are solely represented by one or couple respondents each. Even though national diversity is considered truly beneficial for the sake of the survey, a comparative analysis cannot depend upon one or few respondents to reliably represent the views of an entire nation. On the other hand, a joint grouping between all regionally and culturally synonymous areas allows the respondents' views to be accumulated to represent a larger continental area with increased reliability. Therefore, analyzing the results based upon the continents listed in figure 5 proves more advantageous for the sake of the survey analysis and its reliability.

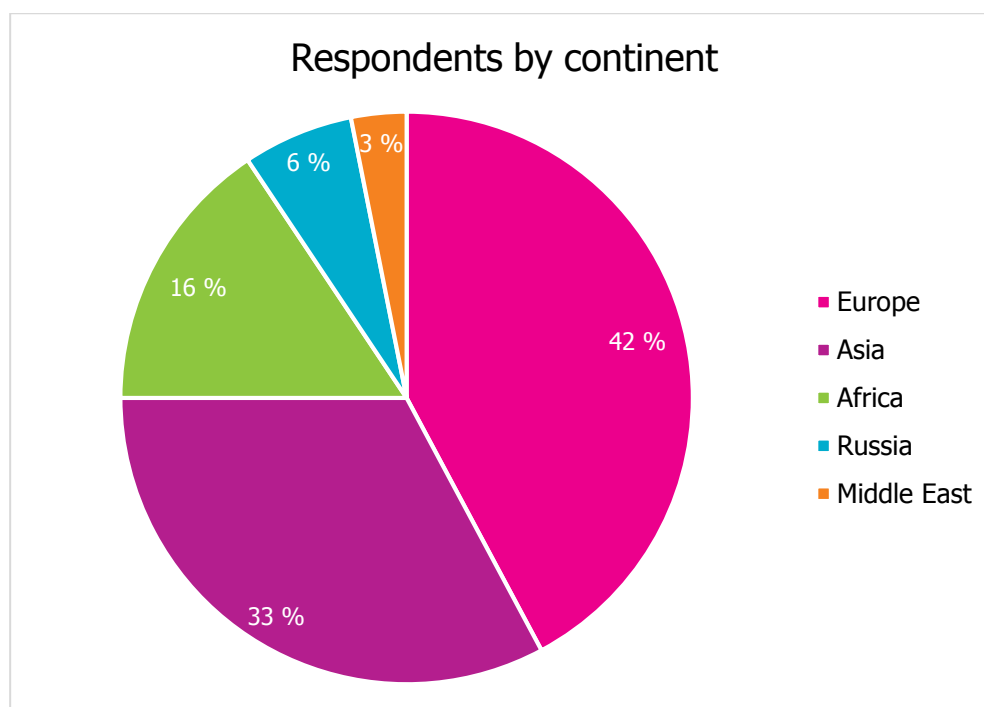


FIGURE 5. Survey respondents by continent (%)

It is apparent from figure 5 that the respondents comprise of mainly Europeans and Asians with 42% and 33% of the responses respectively, and together they constitute for 75% of all respondents. As mentioned earlier, the 16 Finnish respondents account for 25% of all responses; if the Finnish group were considered separate from the rest of the Europeans, the European respondents would total to 11 respondents or 17% of all respondents within the survey. So technically, the largest international group within the survey consists of students from Asia at 33% with a total of 21 respondents, from which the majority originate from China, Bangladesh and Nepal. The nations that represent the majority within the European group include Italy, Germany, Ukraine and Poland/Ireland. Respondents originating from Africa are next with 10 respondents or 16% of all respondents, from which half originate from Nigeria. Lastly, Russian respondents account for 6% with four respondents and students from Middle East amount to 3% with two respondents. Theoretically, when utilized as a factor in comparative cross analysis, the Asian group and their responses are the ones with most reliability due to the size of their sample. Regardless, the amalgamation of all countries positively affects the validity of all the other continents' responses too.

Since many of the written responses to the open-ended questions echoed similar or identical contents, **the main research questions** of the survey were carefully scrutinized and deliberately divided into synonymous categories to assist with comparative analysis. Among the responses, several students tended to mention more than a single issue. Thus, the following results that will be illustrated in percentages will add up to more than 100% due to the fact that the different responses are not exclusive of one another. The indicated factorial (n) will also exceed that of 64 respondents.

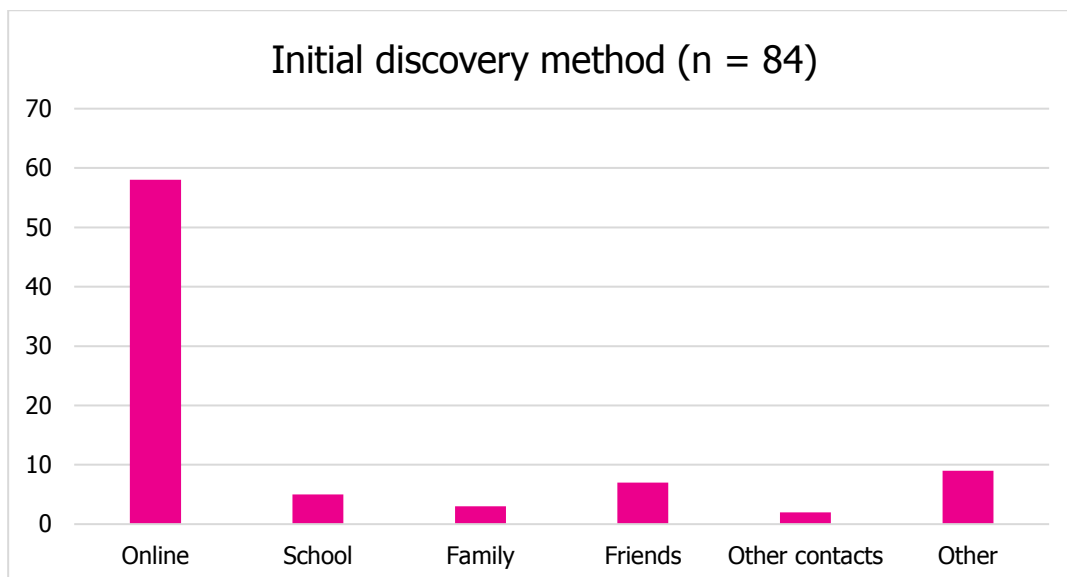


FIGURE 6. The initial discovery method of Savonia (n = 84)

First, the results in figure 6 showcase that 58 or 91% of the respondents reported **discovering Savonia** through an online platform. Some of the most frequently mentioned platforms included Study in Finland (16), Studyinfo/Opintopolku (15), Savonia's own website (10) and StudyLink (4). A few responded with social media sites like Facebook (3) and Instagram (2). The next significant factor was mutual friends, which influenced seven or 11% of the respondents to discover the polytechnic. After friends, school and teachers affected five or 8% of the respondents and family and relatives three or 5% of the respondents. Other contacts, including a Savonia graduate and an international studies company, influenced two or 3% of the respondents. Nine or 14% of the respondents reported other various sources, which comprised of factors like open-door events, school trips, adverts and banners, life in Kuopio and Savonia's reputation.

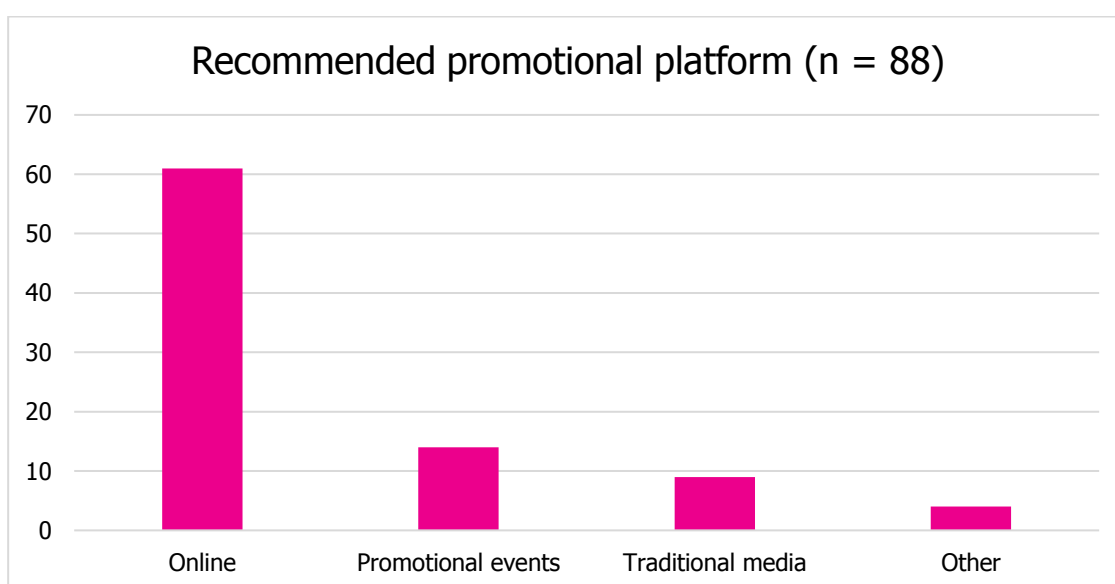


FIGURE 7. The recommended promotional platform for Savonia (n = 88)

Secondly, 61 or 95% of the respondents referred to an online platform yet again when inquired about **the best promotional platform for Savonia** in their respective home countries (figure 7).

However, the emphasis from informative study websites had clearly shifted onto social media. Some mentioned social media in general (10) whilst the majority specifically nominated Facebook (23) and Instagram (14) as the best platforms to promote Savonia in their home country. A few also mentioned Youtube (3), Twitter (2) and Snapchat (1). Chinese respondents distinctively promoted the platforms Weibo (5), WeChat (5) and Baidu (1). In case of Russia, a respondent recommended a Russian social network VK (1) and Telegram (1). Besides social media, some assured that Savonia's own website (4) was sufficient enough for promotion in their home country, and some recommended additional search engine optimization for the site. Only a meager number of respondents recommended sites like Studyinfo (2) and StudyLink (1).

In addition to online platforms, 14 or 22% of respondents suggested promotional events like fairs, exhibits and school visits. Moreover, nine or 14% of respondents suggested more traditional mediums like television (3), newspaper (3), banners (2) and radio (1). Lastly, four or 6% of respondents stated other ways of preferred promotion, like word of mouth and networking.

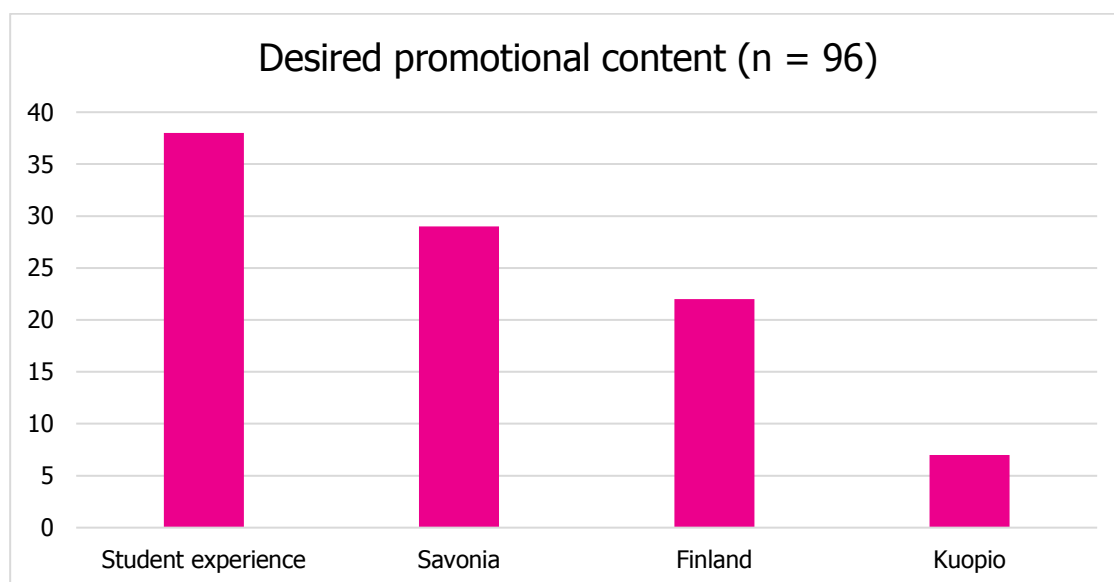


FIGURE 8. The desired promotional content from Savonia (n = 96)

Thirdly, the respondents expressed an abundance of specific suggestions and different needs that were desired within **Savonia's promotional content**. As seen in figure 8, the main content demands were recognized and they were divided into four categories: information on Finland, information on Kuopio, information on Savonia, and information on the student experience. Out of the four, the student experience collected the most responses pertaining to it: thirty-eight or 59% of all respondents expressed desire for information about the student life. The majority wanted to hear student stories and experiences (33) about studying at Savonia. The respondents wished to see content about student activities, social life, part-time job opportunities, improvement of skills, internship experiences, and after-school life. Some hoped for personal insight on how to manage and avoid difficulties, and some wanted Savonia to showcase situations that the students generally undergo. Additionally, many respondents wanted to learn how to successfully manage through the school admission and "*the whole procedure*," which ranges from application process to the first

exam. Some emphasized that the promoted student experience should be reaffirming in a motivating and encouraging manner.

The second highest demand was information on Savonia with 29 or 45% of the respondents demonstrating a need for various institutional content. Many students expressed interest in wanting to learn about the campus and other facilities (9), studying and course contents (6), classroom activities (3), and future teachers (2). Some respondents suggested showcasing projects, internationality, campus and study environment, IT skills, and future opportunities. Some wished for additional content such as more pictures of the degree programs and more international events. One respondent wished for the credit system to be explained. A few also suggested underlining Savonia's freeness of tuition and its practicality over theoretical nature.

The third most requested type of content was information on Finland with 22 or 34% of respondents indicating their desire for knowledge about the country. The respondents recommended presenting matters like Finnish culture and customs, Finnish summer, and the strengths of Finland. Some suggested showcasing practical issues such as the easiness of visa procurement and the handling of necessities like Kela. Some expressed interest in discovering career opportunities and learning about the average graduate salary in Finland.

The least requested content consisted of information on Kuopio with seven or 11% of the respondents noting the significance of the city. They recommended displaying information about Kuopio's lifestyle, location and housing systems. One respondent suggested placing emphasis on the "cozy and cool" nature of the city.

Lastly, the medium of promotion was also covered by most respondents. The results showcased that 33 or 52% of all respondents wished for student stories and 30 or 47% wanted video material. Other less requested types of information delivery included pictures from campus, degrees and facilities, slogans about Finnish education and study opportunities, comments from students, interviews with teachers, and a "frequently asked questions"-interview with students.

3.3 Continental Clustered-Column Analysis

The responses of 64 students provide the analysis with a lot of data to digest. To start off, two separate analytical factors can be recognized within the respondent data: degree program and home country, from which the latter has been transmuted into a more analysis-friendly factor, continent. Together, **the degree program and continent** can be cross-tabulated into an illustrative comparison chart: a clustered column chart. Granted, it was established that Savonia does not seek focused marketing measures for each degree specifically, thus rendering the factor a redundant one. However, a cross tabulation between the two respondent factors is helpful in showcasing degree program prevalence by each designated continent – and the combined data do manifest some interesting notions that are worthy of analytical consideration. Below, figure 9 displays the distribution of the continents by degree program.

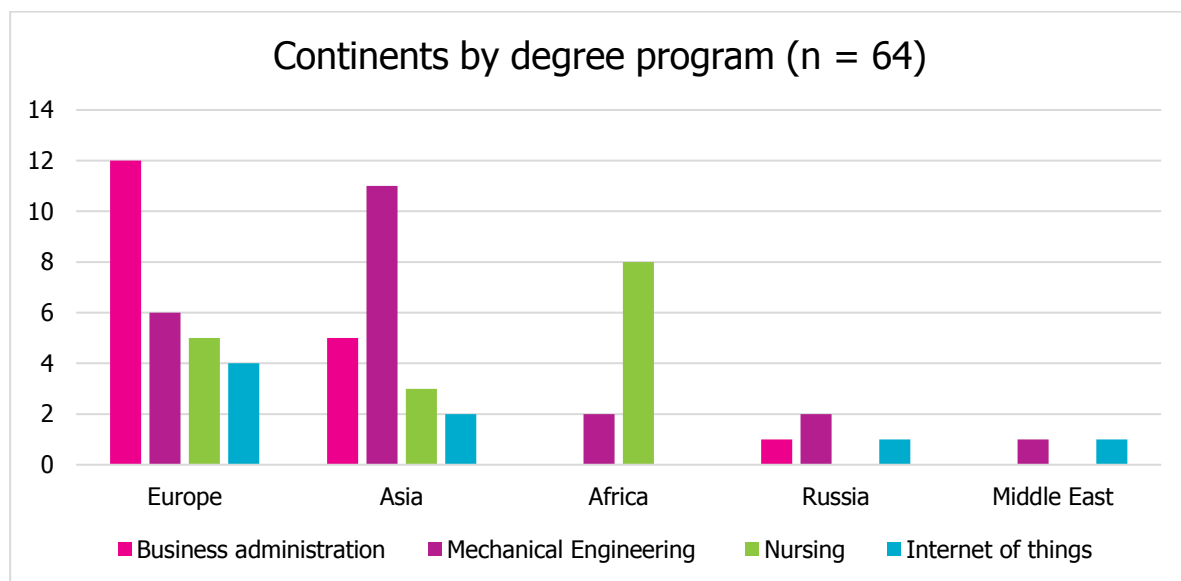


FIGURE 9. Continents by degree program (n = 64)

According to the data witnessed in the figure above, some of the degree programs are seemingly **more popular among certain continents**: Business administration is most popular among Europeans with 12 out of 27 studying in the degree program. Out of Asian respondents, 11 out of 21 distinctively belong to mechanical engineering students. Nursing is seemingly prevalent among African respondents with 8 out of 10 studying in the degree program. Internet of things -degree program is the only variable that seems more evenly distributed among the continents. The differences in data generate a few questions: do the prospective students from each of the continents lean more towards specific degree programs due to unknown reasons or certain circumstances? Or are the results merely an accumulated coincidence caused by random respondents of coincidental origin happening to participate in the survey at the given time?

Ultimately, the chart does not represent the preferred degree programs of the respondents, but the actual current degree programs they are enrolled in; although similar, the two factors do not embody quite the same meaning. Moreover, the sample size of the survey is merely a glimpse of Savonia's actual number of enrolled international students, so the chart does not justly portray the entirety of the polytechnic, only the entirety of the survey. However, since the chart does suggest a preferential pattern among Savonia's recruits, it would be worthwhile to investigate why prospects from different parts of the world are attracted to the specific degree programs of Savonia. It could help the institution to understand the prospects' needs and demands better, and consequently, Savonia could implement more compatible and direct marketing strategies.

Next, **the main results** to the open-ended questions are addressed. The results incorporate responses of dual nature: some respondents narrowed down their answers to be short and concise, while some respondents wrote lengthy and in-depth ponderings, especially in the third question. All of the upcoming clustered-column charts have been divided according to the five recognized conti-

nents. The aim of the following analyses is to assist Savonia in understanding the cultural differences and preferences regarding marketing platforms and contents according to the respondents' assigned regions of origin.

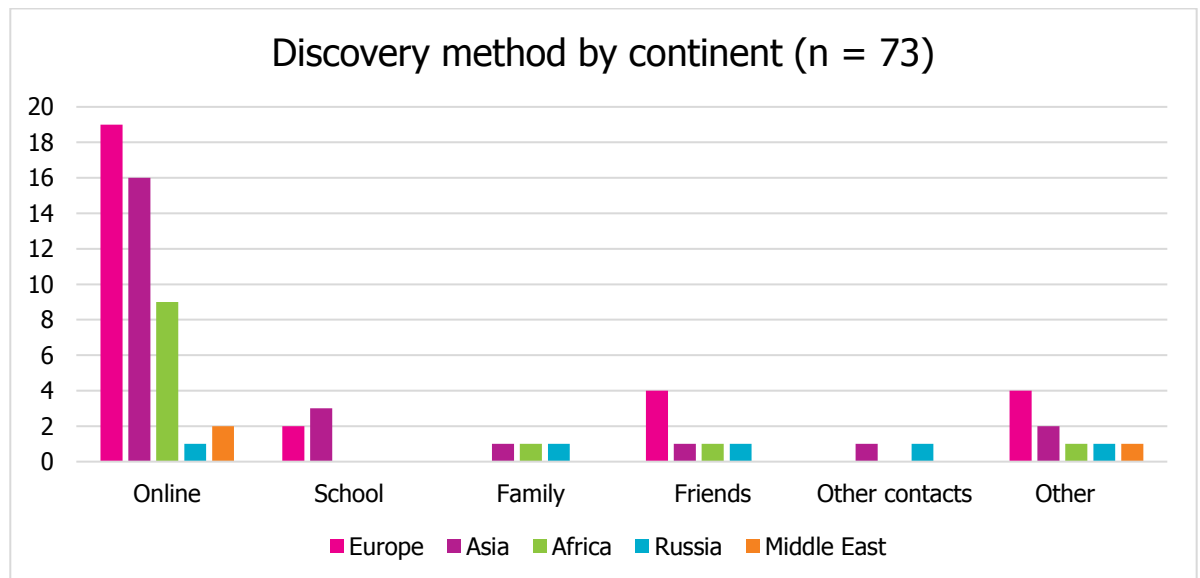


FIGURE 10. Discovery method by continent (n = 73)

First, the distribution of all responses associated with the discovery factors is displayed continentally in the cross-tabulated figure 10, which assists in showcasing both the discovery differences and the significance of each factor regionally. Within the chart, **the dominance of online platforms** is illustrated accordingly among all the continents. The other factors have garnered notably less significant figures in comparison, which demonstrates their lower level of influence in the respondents' discovery of Savonia. All continents are present at the clustered column for online method of discovery, which represents the obvious majority for all continental groups with the exception of Russia.

Russia and Middle East do not seem to possess a significant presence within the online column, but it is only due to the illusion created by the smaller sample size in comparison with the other continents' sample sizes: Russia and Middle East only account for four and two respondents respectively, so their presence within columns will nonetheless seem meager beside other comparatively larger continent groups, like Europe's 27 respondents and Asia's 21 respondents. So, even though Middle East may seem less prevalent in the column for online discovery method, in reality, it actually accounts for both of the respondents, or rather, all its respondents. In case of Russia, its respondents are more evenly distributed throughout the chart: all of the discovery factors apart from school are mentioned once within the received responses. However, such result based upon a few mentions does not outright prove that Russian prospects are more affected by other factors over online platforms. Yet theoretically, the continent's presence among the various factors does imply the increased likelihood of having multiple influential factors affecting a Russian prospect over one overly dominant factor.

Besides the online medium of discovery, some comparative observations can be drawn when inspecting the rest of the discovery results continentally. For example, the Asian group has learned of Savonia more through **school** rather than through family, friends or any other contacts, which is an interesting notion. It is likely that the respondents may have been influenced by the polytechnic's inter-institutional collaborations in China, which are focused on the promotion of Savonia's operations and opportunities for Chinese students seeking international tuition (Oksanen 2020-03-19). In the case of Europe, **friends** seem to affect the respondents more than family and other contacts. They are additionally influenced by school and other factors, in both of which the Finnish respondents can be assumed to have steered the results: the domestic students have already learnt of Savonia because of possible class trips to the institution and the general reputation of Savonia in Finland. The African group does not demonstrate any significant distinctions among its results other than having no school affect the students to discover Savonia.

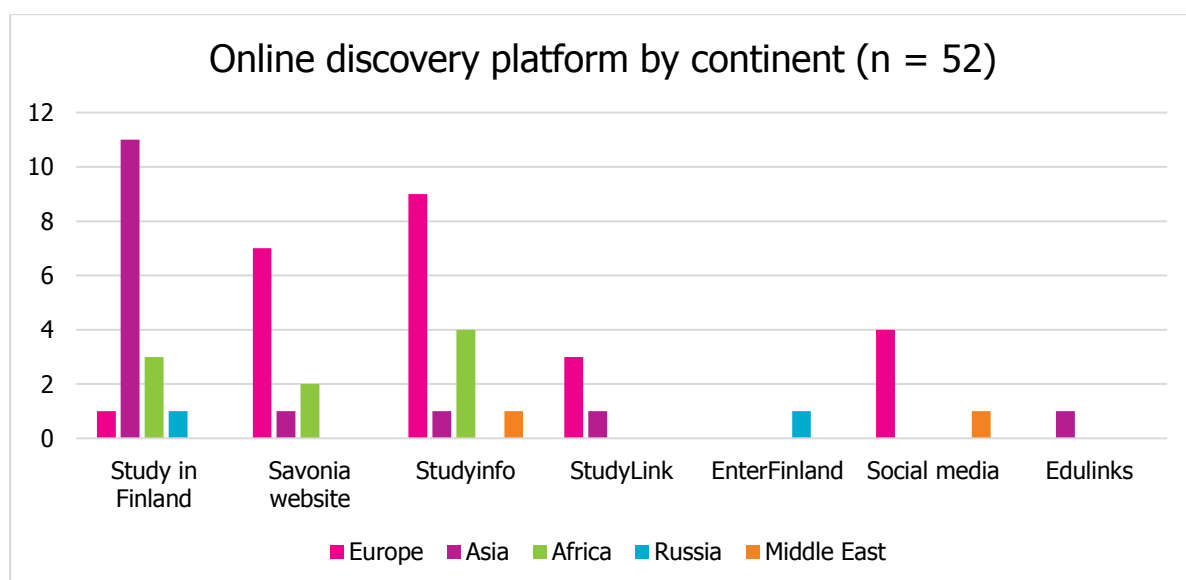


FIGURE 11. Online discovery platform by continent (n = 52)

The overly dominant online method of discovery, which alone is too general and ambiguous to scrutinize, has been further divided into different online platforms that were specifically appointed by the respondents for the next cross tabulation. The results can be witnessed in figure 11, which highlights some notable differences between the continents. First, the website **Study in Finland** gained the largest amount of acknowledgement overall, and a vast majority of it derived from the Asian respondents. **Savonia's own website** gained a lot of recognition from the European group, whereas **Studyinfo** rose to be the most popular website among both Europeans and Africans. **Social media** also managed to gain responses, and most of them originated again from the European group. Other sites like StudyLink, EnterFinland and Edulinks were mentioned less frequently.

Based upon the results and the distinct variance between them, a few conclusions can be drawn from each of the continents' usage and preference of online platforms for information retrieval. In Asia's case, 11 respondents mentioned discovering Savonia from Study in Finland -website, while four of the other websites were addressed just once by the group in a surprisingly sharp contrast.

The results suggest that Study in Finland -site is greatly preferred among Asians prospects for seeking information about study opportunities in Finland, and as a result, just over half of all the Asian respondents have discovered Savonia through the site.

When scrutinizing the European group, the effect of Finnish respondents can be recognized yet again: Studyinfo, or Opintopolku in Finnish, was the most notable discovery website among Europeans, and out of the nine total mentions, eight of them originated from Finnish students. Studyinfo is a common site in Finland to search for postgraduate studies, which the survey results now further confirm. Rest of the Europeans tended to have visited Savonia's website and StudyLink to learn about the polytechnic instead, which demonstrates different focus areas of their online information search. They have also discovered Savonia through social media, which may signify Savonia's success in online marketing either through focused advertising or through its own social media accounts.

For African respondents, Studyinfo is also the most popular platform with Study in Finland and Savonia's website also gathering a fair share of their mentions. No extreme differences in numbers exist between the three nominated platforms, but the results are all quite evenly distributed throughout the group's responses. The fair distribution of the nominations suggests that African prospects may not rely on one generally popular information retrieval website like the Asian group seemingly does, but rather, their online browsing is split between various sites.

In case of Middle East, respondents also referenced Studyinfo and a social media site, Instagram, though it should be mentioned that one of the respondents had already been living in Kuopio for two years. Concerning the more obscure websites, a Russian respondent that had discovered Savonia online mentioned a site titled EnterFinland, which is an online site for the Finnish immigration service (Finnish Immigration eService 2020). Naturally, the site's focus resides more on managing immigration issues rather than discovering tertiary education. Edulinks was nominated by a sole Asian respondent, and it is a Vietnamese site intended for discovering study opportunities abroad (Education Links Limited 2020).

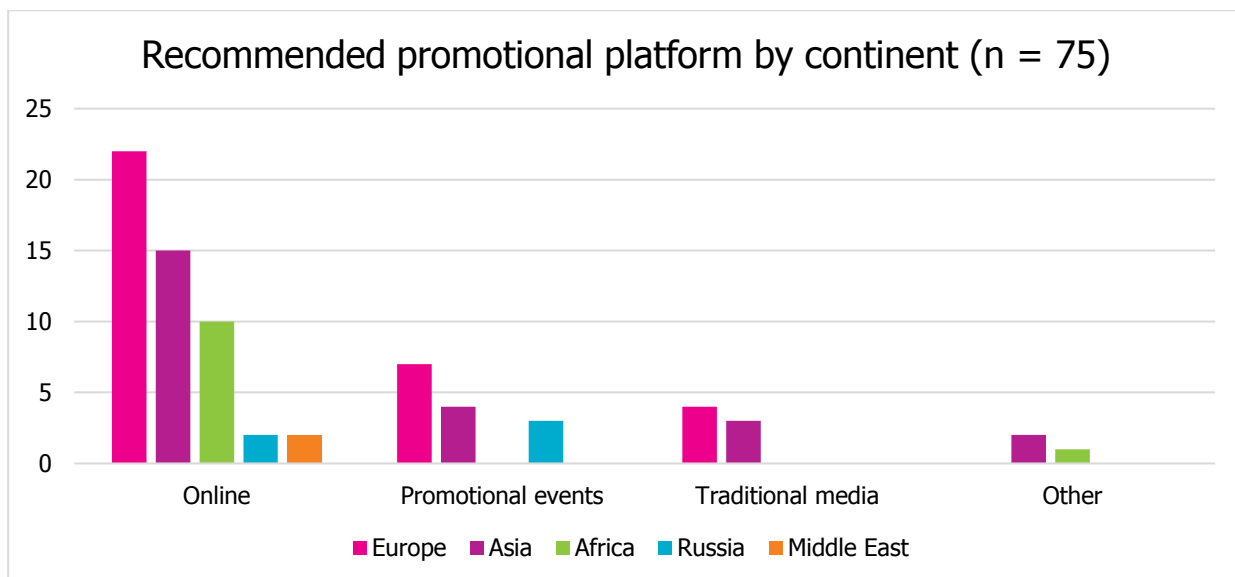


FIGURE 12. Recommended promotional platform by continent (n = 75)

Next, the above figure addresses and displays the cross-tabulated results regarding the second question about the best promotional platform in each of the respondents' home countries. In figure 12, **an online platform** can be witnessed representing the blatant majority on most of the continents' behalf yet again. The second most popular option among the continents is promotional events, which is closely followed by traditional media like television and newspaper. It seems that the continents follow a similar sort of pattern regarding the preferred medium of promotion: most continent groups peak within the online column, emphasizing the popularity of an internet medium, then along the following columns, the regions' responses gradually shrink in accordance with the factor's assumed lesser popularity. The downward slope is visualized well by the Asian and European group. The African group, however, gathered no responses pertaining to promotional events or traditional media. Whilst technically all of its 10 respondents answered preferring online platform as a means of promotion, one respondent added that friend-to-friend outreach by recommending the institution also works great, hence the group's one response in the "other"-column.

Despite their sample size and the results' comparatively minor deviation, for Russian students, the preference of **promotional events** seems to somewhat overcome that of online platforms concerning the promotion of an institution, and it is something worth noting. Russia and Finland, despite their cultural differences, are proximate neighboring countries, specifically when considering the European Russia. The university fairs, open-door days and promotional talks that the Russian respondents suggested can be more effortless to implement due to the relatively short distances between the regions. For example, Saint Petersburg is only a two-hour car ride away from the nearest Finnish border. Though flashy exhibits are more financially strenuous in comparison with online marketing, the promotional influence of arranged events could prove to be more impactful, convincing and long-lasting.

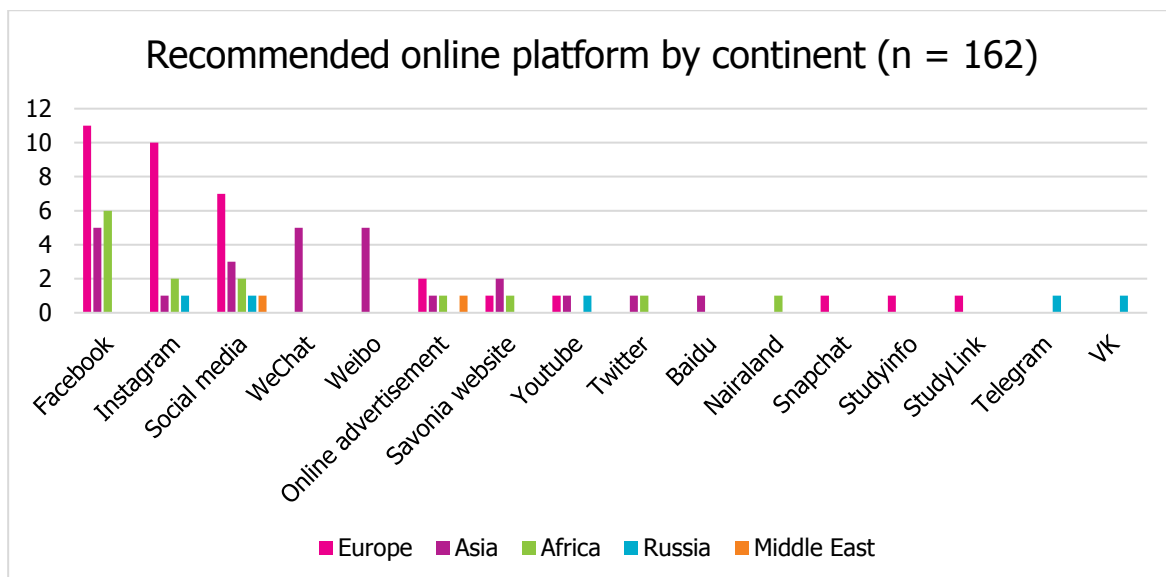


FIGURE 13. Recommended online platform by continent (n = 162)

The cross-tabulation chart above is a further decomposition of the prevalent online factor presented in figure 12. Figure 13 represents a convolution of various internet platforms that respondents have yet again specifically nominated as the best promotional platform in each of their home countries. Overall, the majority of all the continents can be witnessed in the first five clustered columns: **Facebook, Instagram, social media, WeChat and Weibo**. Within the factors, a few differentiations between the continents can be recognized. As a promotional platform, Facebook represents the number one for Europeans and Africans, and the site is popular among the Asian group too. However, the Asian respondents recommended both Weibo and WeChat to an equal number of responses as well, and they are both Chinese-owned social media platforms (Digital Crew Pty. Ltd. 2009-2019). Both Russian and Middle Eastern responses are more scattered throughout the chart, Russia more along the less mentioned platforms.

Besides the top five platforms, a multitude of other online platforms have also been nominated, some by a few responses and most just by a single nomination. A few of such sites can be recognized to be more **regionally restricted** and presumably popular within specific continents: Telegram and VK are strictly mentioned by the Russian group, Baidu by the Asian group and Nairaland by the African group. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy to remark that all continents agreed on social media generally as a promotional platform, and all of the groups are present within its clustered column, regardless of the difference in the number of responses. Additionally, despite its overall fewer number of mentions, online advertising was also suggested by nearly all of the continents.

Based on the accumulated results, Facebook prevails as the most popular online platform by responses gathered from three of the continents: Europe, Africa and Asia. A close contender behind Facebook is Instagram, which garnered a vast majority of its mentions from Europeans. It is interesting that Instagram is significantly less prevalent among the other continents aside Europe. Overall, it seems like the chart's top three platforms are dominated by the European group, as they possess a notable majority in each factor in comparison with other continental groups. To address the

influence of Finns, five Finnish respondents responded in favor of Facebook, while four Finns promoted Instagram. The Finnish group does not really affect the balance between the factors, unlike within the online discovery platform results in figure 11, but the responses are, in fact, quite evenly divided. Thus, it can be deduced that Finnish students share quite a similar mindset with rest of the Europeans in the matter, and it can be stated that the European group as a whole does refer social media as the best promotional platform, especially Facebook and Instagram.

In the Asian group's case, however, their preferences additionally present Weibo and WeChat as the best promotional platforms for the Asian market, or more precisely, the Chinese market. In fact, all five mentions for both Weibo and WeChat derive strictly from the Chinese respondents. Rest of the Asian groups' responses are distributed among the other platforms, such as social media, Facebook and Savonia's website. Other less frequently mentioned platforms among the group include Baidu, a Chinese search engine (Seth 2019-06-25), and other more globally known platforms like Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, and lastly a promotional method, online advertisement.

The African group showcases their promotional preferences residing mainly with Facebook. One of the African respondents specifically stressed the significance of Facebook by stating that 20 million Nigerian youths seek for university admissions annually and that they all have Facebook profiles. A few from the continental group additionally suggested social media and Instagram as platforms. The least referred platforms for the group include online adverts, Savonia's site, Twitter and Nairaland, which is an online forum for Nigerians (Osewa 2005-2020).

In case of the Middle Eastern group, social media and online adverts are established as the preferred online platforms, which is fully in coherence with the general opinion of most of the continents. For Russians, the preferred platforms are dispersed everywhere along the chart: the continent does not have an obvious favorite due to overall lack of answers pertaining to online platforms, but the given results offer multiple online platforms to consider. Platforms that seem regionally popular in Russia are VK (VKontakte) and Telegram, which are both Russian-founded platforms intended for social networking and instant messaging (Cook 2018-02-08). The group also referenced more generally known social media sites like Youtube and Instagram, but the lack of difference in quantitative results makes it harder to assert whether the Russian prospects prefer domestic platforms over global platforms. One Russian respondent did comment in favor of VK by explaining that it is number one social network in Russia and that many people utilize it for learning new information. They also insinuated that Youtube and Instagram are fairly popular among Russians as well.

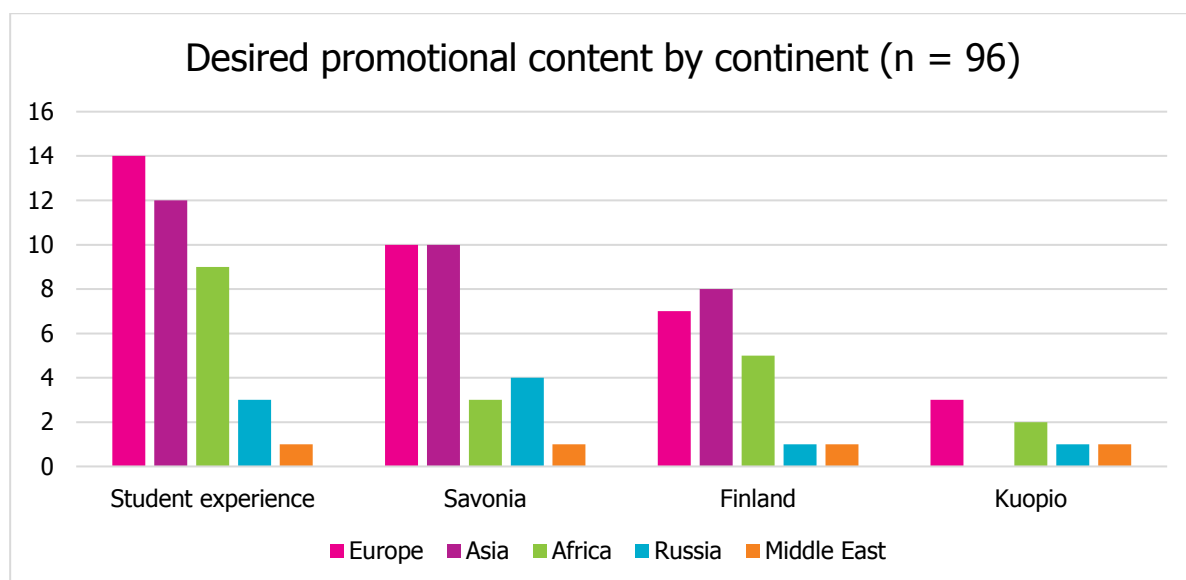


FIGURE 14. Desired promotional content by continent (n = 96)

The final cross-tabulation chart showcases the scrutinized and categorized responses of the freely written responses that have accumulated to represent the continental groups' content demand and the preference of each content. The four different content types that were identified within the survey responses were **Finland, Kuopio, Savonia and student experience**. The student experience is most demanded type of content overall, and it is the most acknowledged content among Europeans, Asian and Africans. Savonia ranks second: the factor is equally popular among Europeans and Asians, and as for Russians, it is the most requested type of content. Finland ranks third with most of the demand originating from the Asian group. Lastly, Kuopio ranks fourth by gathering a few mentions among most of the continents, the majority deriving from Europeans.

A further disassembly and continental classification of the four different factors would prove rather challenging, since the freely written responses, especially the ones with a lot of contemplation invested into them, seem to vary randomly between individuals despite their affiliated continents. As witnessed in the earlier chapter reporting the respondent results, the written answers incorporated a multitude of specific suggestions for promotional material, such as interviews with future teachers, photos of campus, videos of students, information on how to pass the application process, housing systems in the city, presentation of the Finnish summer, informative slogans of Finnish education, and so on. It would be arduous to assign each specific issue to each continent, and even then, the chart would be quite convoluted and incomprehensible due to a large number of different factors. Having the intricate sub-factors assembled under one all-encompassing factor is the only effective method of displaying the results as an illustrative chart, and thus, figure 14 offers the most readable presentation of the continental distribution and differences between the four content factors.

A closer inspection of the continental differences in content does manifest some noteworthy variances to discuss. The European group exhibits a steadily declining line in desired content, which begins from the most popular type of content, the student experience, and ends with the least desired type of content about the city. The Asian respondents showcase a more stable balance between

their demanded types of content, which suggests a more synonymous mindset among the continental group, but they are completely missing acknowledgement for the local city. In the African group's case, their desire for information on the polytechnic is rather low in comparison with the other groups. Within other columns though, the African group's demand seems to correspond with that of the other groups. For Russians, however, information on Savonia is slightly more emphasized over information on the student experience. Middle Eastern group granted mentions for each type of content, so the continent is perfectly distributed along the chart.

For good measure, the impact of Finnish respondents among the European group should be inspected once again, since in beforehand, the Finns can be presumed to be more aware of the city, the polytechnic, and naturally, the country. However, it seems that the 16 Finnish respondents have been integrated quite evenly on the chart along other Europeans: Three Finns suggested delivering information on Finland, which means that four more European students wished for content on the country. Regarding the groups' responses gathered in favor of Savonia, five responses originated from Finnish students, and the other five responses derived from international European students. In favor of student experience, nine Finnish respondents contributed their answers along with five other European respondents. Concerning Kuopio, all three European responses originated from Finnish students. Besides the last factor, the responses from Finns and other Europeans are in quite decent balance with one another; the domestic group does not unsettle the overarching European opinion – rather, it strengthens the continental consensus.

4 SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To summarize, the survey results strongly indicate that **the internet** is the best platform for Savonia to utilize as a marketing platform. Majority of the respondents discovered Savonia online, while some reported discovering Savonia through other means like social circles and the marketing efforts of the institution. Non-online marketing platforms recommended for Savonia included promotional fairs and traditional media, but their level of acknowledgement was notably lower in comparison with that of social media. The most suggested online platforms comprised of Facebook and Instagram. The Russian respondents were the sole continental group to recommend promotional fairs over online promotion. Furthermore, regional differences surfaced within the results, particularly among preferred online websites. Most continental groups favored **globally popular** social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. For Asia and Russia, however, recommendations for **regionally popular** social media sites like Weibo and VK were equal or greater in comparison with the groups' suggestions for global social media sites. Lastly, the most demanded type of content proved to be **student experience** among three of the five continents. The Russian respondents reported desiring material on the campus slightly more, whereas the Middle Eastern content needs were evenly distributed among all four content factors.

In total, **91%** of respondents discovered Savonia's study opportunities through the internet and **95%** furthermore recommended its utilization. Such monopolistic predominance leads to an assumption that most prospective students today rely heavily on the internet to seek and discover their higher education providers. The results support the earlier-mentioned marketing communication study of Gray, Fam and Llanes (2003): they also confirmed that the world wide web was one of the most important sources for university information among Asian markets with a sample size of around 1,000 students (cited by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 18).

Moreover, **the age range of higher education segments** typically includes teenagers, young adults and adults, who are generally perceived to be the most avid users of the internet and social media. For example, the two most popular platforms displayed in figure 13, Facebook and Instagram, both have a userbase share of 58% and 65% respectively consisting of people aged between 18 to 35 (Clement 2019-08-09). When the figures are combined, they amount to a massive number of prospects that can be instantly reached by adverts or other online marketing means. Thus, the main target segments of higher education could be attained effortlessly and cost-effectively through the most contemporary form of interactive marketing communication. The internet's utilization for the recruitment and marketing of an institution is therefore perceived to be highly advisable, and it is practically expected of Savonia as well as other academies.

However, as mentioned earlier as well, Kuzma and Wright (2013, 64) remark in their social networking study that **social media should not be the only aspect** of an institution's marketing strategy. The authors quote a 2006 study by Roach, who found that in a sample size of 1,000 prospective university students, only 56% reported preferring web sources over print material in higher education promotion. If the marketing efforts of an institution were fully invested into online platforms

and other promotional methods were to be completely disregarded, it would make the institution completely dependent on the fluctuating trends of the internet, which is never a desirable situation. Instead, the risks should be dispersed among several investment options that stabilize profit rather than be focused only into one investment option that may erratically fluctuate in the market. Additionally, the online-only tactic would totally eliminate the prospects that do not consume online media, which could be a massive lost opportunity for potential profit.

The continental differences that surfaced in the results were especially prominent in **the variance of preferred online platforms**. The results support Kuzma and Wright's (2013) research about universities' utilization of social media for recruitment and marketing, in which they also found that universities from Africa, Asia and Europe utilize variable online platforms to varying degrees. The authors' conclusions and the survey results unify especially in the declaration of **Facebook's global popularity**: Kuzma and Wright (2013, 63) found that the usage of Facebook among all three continents was high and ubiquitous, and subsequently, the survey results ranked Facebook as one of or the most recommended platform(s) by the respondents from Africa, Asia and Europe as well. The authors argue that the reason for their results resides in the cultural differences in social media usage and attitudes among the university marketing officials and their audiences. Moreover, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 18) note that Gray et al. (2003) also discovered in their Asian market study that the students had varying media preferences, which the latter authors argue to be *"related to differences in cultural values, levels of Westernisation and communications infrastructure in their home countries."*

Additionally, Savonia seems to have a distinct pattern of attracting students from certain geographical areas **more towards particular degree programs**: as witnessed in figure 9, majority of the European respondents were business students, most of the Asian respondents were engineering students, and the largest share of the African respondents were nursing students. The results suggest that the regional prospects may have an affinity towards the said degree programs for one reason or another. The occurrence relates to the literature assessing the brand architecture of universities, where Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007, 10-11) discuss the branding of universities' products – including degree programs. As previously mentioned, the authors recognize two branding methods: a corporate approach and a house-of-brands approach. From the two, **the house-of-brands approach** could perhaps be an applicable branding method for the target-market-prevalent degree programs of Savonia. Since the degree programs seem to garner more attention from specific regions, why not individualize the brand of a degree program and afford the product more leeway to differentiate and target its corresponding markets? Nonetheless, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007, 20) warn that an institution may gain ill reputation if brand harmonization is not achieved, regardless of the institution's branding approach.

In marketing, it is crucial to distinguish the most suitable platforms in order to reach the targeted audience effectively. However, it is also important to acknowledge and learn about the existence of different types of **consumer segments**, as suggested by the literature (Chen 2008, 6-7; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 27-28). When the survey results are inspected and reflected on generally,

a distinct difference can be realized between the students' utilization of informative study websites and social media. The majority of respondents, 78%, reported discovering Savonia through an informative online platform like Study in Finland and Studyinfo; yet interestingly enough, 77% of the same respondents recommended investing marketing promotion in social media and known platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The peculiar contrast between the results raises a question of the students' online actions and intentions leading up to the discovery of Savonia: had the students deliberately searched for higher education, or had they discovered the polytechnic by coincidence?

As addressed by authors like Cubillo et al. (2006), the purchase decision of a potential student is a deep and complex one, as it comprises of multiple influential factors to consider (figure 1). It is therefore why prospects tend to inquire the informative study websites: they want to learn more about the country, the city, the institution and the degree program before deciding to integrate the factors in their lives for the next several academic years. So, the ones actively seeking higher education possibilities, **the active prospects**, can most likely be reached on informative study websites the best. However, how about the age-appropriate prospects that are not seeking higher education as actively or are not even considering it? The *"passive"* browsers? Based upon the survey results, the reviewed research of Kuzma and Wright (2013) and visible modern trends, social media could be one of the better platforms to locate, reach and communicate with the intended target segments of higher education, both active and passive. Whilst active prospects may browse both study sites and social media, **passive prospects** are more likely to reside on social media only, because the platform can be experienced as a relaxing leisure activity rather than as a deliberate data collection. Perhaps therefore so many of the respondents recommended utilizing social media over informative websites as a promotional platform: it could be the initial platform of discovery for many prospects.

In the survey's case, the prevalence of informative websites among the discovery results suggests that the majority of the respondents had purposely searched for information on higher education, Savonia and Finland (figure 11). The small addition of social media within the discovery results can either signify an accidental discovery: a respondents happened to stumble across an advert or a social media profile of Savonia; or a premeditated data collection: the respondents purposely investigated the social media presence of the polytechnic. Nonetheless, the survey results provide evidence that informative study websites may have benefitted Savonia to a great extent in the recruitment of new students.

Nevertheless, should the institution choose to target active prospects or passive prospects? After all, the majority of the respondents encouraged Savonia to pursue the online audiences of social media, even though the accumulated results suggest study websites to have more positively influenced Savonia's student recruitment. So, what is **the difference between passive prospects and active prospects**? Do they simply reside on different online platforms, or do they have different marketing needs to which the institution should cater separately to? Does the difference even matter? As referenced earlier, Varghese (2008, 13) quotes Cummins (1993) on three motives that provoke prospects to seek higher education: deficiencies in domestic facilities, the business value of an international degree, and the procurement of knowledge and experiences in a foreign country. When

applied to the discovered survey segment, it could indicate that prospects might be passive because they are neither concerned of nor fazed by any of the three motivating factors. As for the active prospects that are already considering the purchase of higher education, the assigned purchase factors by Cubillo et al. (2006) may be the attributes that are the focus of their information retrieval, and the factors may affect their final purchase decision to varying degrees.

Theoretically, the difference between the two segments may lie in their different stages of purchase progression: The passive prospects are nascent consumers that may have yet to be encouraged by **the motivating factors** of Cummins (1993) to begin considering higher education abroad. Active prospects are advanced consumers that may be already contemplating and ranking their higher education options based upon **the purchase factors** of Cubillo et al. (2006). A segmental difference might also exist in the matter of persuasion: Are the passive prospects harder to inspire to pursue higher education in an institution because of the lack of motivators? Or are the active prospects harder to convince because they might have already dedicated themselves to finding one critical aspect – a specific degree program, a dream destination country, or a total cost of tuition – that the institution may not be able to influence or offer? It is truly a complex issue to unravel because the prospects' motivations and needs can highly alternate by each individual, hence both of the factors could make the purchase decision as difficult as the other.

The individualized and intricate needs of higher education prospects are the reason why relationship marketing is seen as the best marketing strategy for higher education (Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, 319-320; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006, 24). However, relationship marketing is not really applicable in the recruitment of new students, as the strategy requires extended construction of interactive relationships based upon the fluent communication of values. Instead, an average student enrollment experience constitutes of the prospect merely applying to the entrance exams of their choice through study websites, usually without any actual consultation or interaction with the institutions themselves. In other words, the decision to enroll to an academy is entirely up to the prospect alone and their **perceived image of the institution**.

Consequently, the only way an institution can influence the enrollment decision of a prospect is to manage how they present themselves in public, which is the reason why **brand building** for higher education institutions is so important. The significance of successful branding is supported by some of the recited authors: Cubillo et al. (2006) identify institution image as one of the five culminating factors influencing a potential student's final purchase decision. Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007) also note the increasing competitive significance of branding in higher education. Mazzarol (1998) additionally defines image and resources as one of the four main critical factors for success in the international higher education market. Besides simply managing it, an institution should also attempt to **differentiate its brand** among the vastly competitive market. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 28) insinuate that the institution should research whether it has a "*reputational pull*" or a "*facilities pull*," and then seek to differentiate its brand by focusing on either of the assets that is perceived to lure prospects in the most.

All in all, the difference between passive prospects and active prospects does not really have an impact marketing-wise. The two segments can be characterized by varying deliberation processes and alternating levels of motivation, which are both factors that could make the recruitment process easier or harder. The only conspicuous difference between the segments lies in their preferred online locations, **social media and study websites**, from which one or both could be invested into as marketing platforms. An institution should strive to gain enough online coverage to begin appearing frequently on the online feeds of prospects – be it through social media management, online advertising, or search engine optimization; all in order to leave a lasting impression of the institution on the online-browsing audience. Again, differentiating oneself among the plentiful higher education market is advantageous, because prospects will remember the institutions that **stand out** better; prospects are more likely to be reminded of the institutions that make an impression and consider them when they contemplate the topic of higher education. In the best-case scenario, prospects might be inspired to pursue higher education possibilities because of the garnered promotional coverage, which could be further strengthened by motivational and convincing marketing content.

To effectively encapsulate the survey results, **a condensed graph** was created based upon the online-related results of the first two questions of the survey, which incorporated the *“discovery”*-question and the *“platform”*-question. Figure 15 includes and divides the mentioned online platforms by two factors: segment type and continent. Informative study sites are suggested for active prospects; for passive prospects, social media sites are recommended. Both online platforms are further categorized into continents according to the mentions given by their respective respondents. The graph includes all the accumulated mentions for all online platforms from both the *“discovery”*-question and the *“platform”*-question. The numbers portrayed within brackets after the website name indicate the total number of mentions for the platform by each continent group. The most popular online platforms have been bolded for the sake of clarity. The illustrative graph could be helpful for Savonia in locating **the most optimal online marketing channels** on both social media and study websites based upon the selected regional focus group(s).

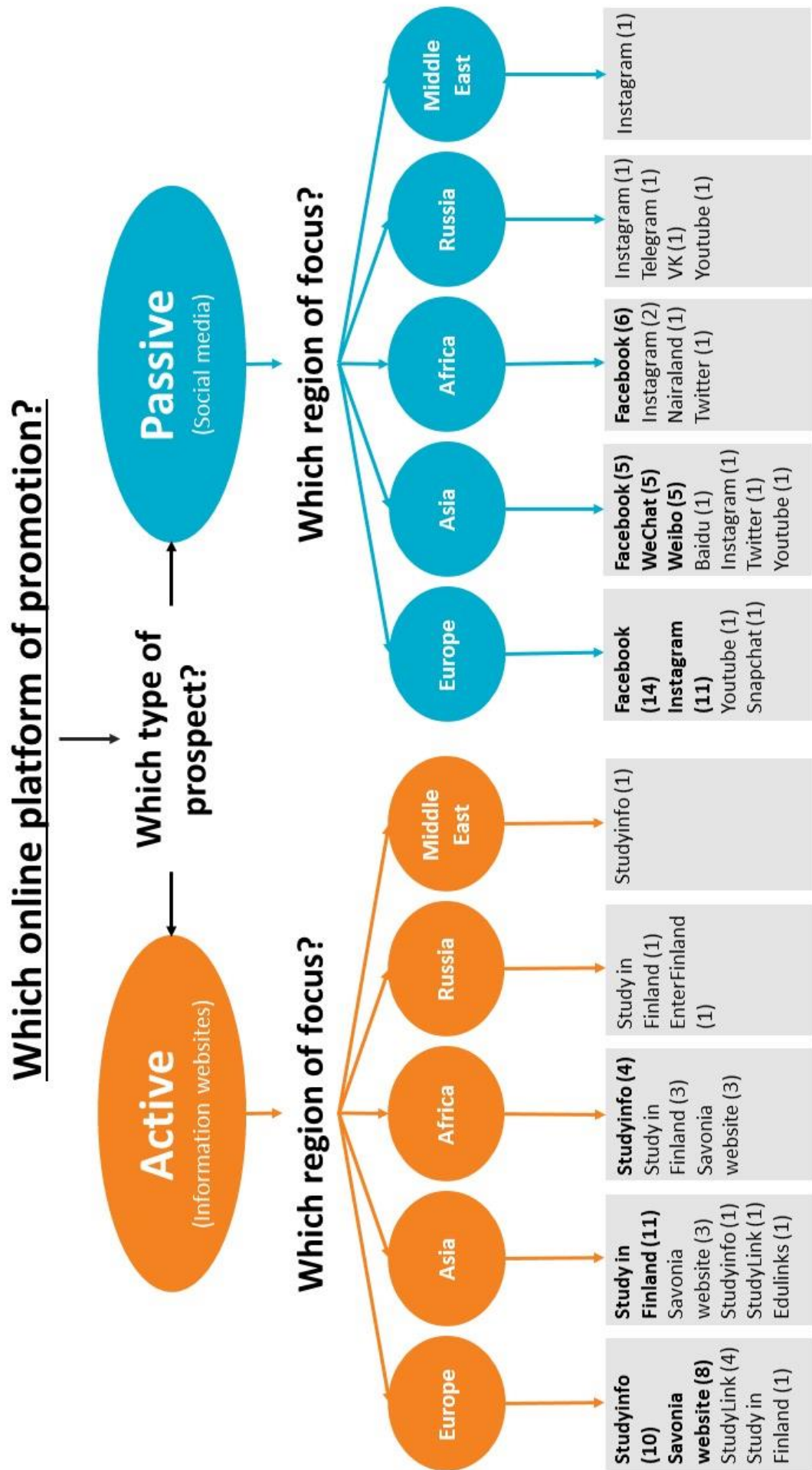


FIGURE 15. A map of the optimal online marketing platforms by prospect and region (n = 114)

As for marketing content, information on student experience arose as the most demanded type among nearly all of the geographical regions. The factor included suggestions for content like student stories, student interviews and student advice. What especially makes student experience unique from the other content factors – Savonia, Finland and Kuopio – is the fact that it can only be told by the students themselves. The other factors can be reviewed and discussed by anyone, but no one else undergoes the student experience but the student. In fact, the student experience can include all of the factors: a student can express their experiences and opinions on the school, the country and the city. Such distinct aspect of the factor – anything as told by the students – defines the student experience as an intriguing method of marketing, which could be referred to as **word-of-mouth promotion**.

The impact of word-of-mouth promotion is far more persuasive in comparison with the effect of usual commercial advertising. It is a matter of **trust**: consumers trust their families, friends, and other friendly persons rather than faceless corporate entities. Therefore, anything as told by individuals is going to sound far more convincing to the consumer than anything as advertised by a corporation. Word of mouth was also a significant influencer in some of the respondents' discovery of Savonia: approximately 19% of the respondents stated that they had been encouraged by family, friends or other contacts to learn about the polytechnic. Authors such as Ivy (2001, 277) and Verbik and Lasanowski (2007, 8) also mention about the significance of word of mouth as a marketing tool. On its own, word of mouth is uncontrollable: an institution cannot control the context or the nature in which it is discussed within close social circles. However, with promotional content on positive student experiences, the institution can add to the general discussion and evoke **positive associations** with its name and image. Moreover, a well-maintained brand image can influence word of mouth to remain positive in the long-term.

Interestingly enough, the different types of requested content identified in the results seem to somewhat correspond with the main factors defined in the work of Cubillo et al. (2006). As presented in figure 1, the authors list five major factors influencing a potential student's purchase decision: personal reasons, institution image, country image effect, city effect, and program evaluation. In the survey results, the responses for content were distributed among four factors: student experience, Savonia, Finland and Kuopio (figure 8, figure 14). Instantly, some similarities can be realized between the two data sets: the desire for information on the city of Kuopio connects with the prospect's consideration for the city effect, the need for content on Finland with the country image effect, and the demand for material on Savonia with both the institution image and the program evaluation. When the data from the two studies are combined, **different levels of importance** can be assigned to the purchase decision factors presented by Cubillo et al. (2006) based upon the percentage shares of the requested content types of the total survey respondents.

The ranked purchase factors in figure 16 give Savonia insight on which of the purchase factors **matters from most to least** to potential students of Savonia. Based upon the mentions given to Savonia, the institution image and program evaluation both possess a weight of 45%, and they are

the most significant subjects of consideration for potential students. Next important factor is country image effect with a weight of 34%, which mimics the share of Finland from the total content responses. The city effect is last with a weight of 11%, which mirrors the significance of Kuopio to the survey respondents. Personal reasons, which includes the sub-factors advise, personal improvement and ethnocentrism, could not be rightfully attached to any of the content types as mentioned by the respondents. In contrast, student experience and its significance of 59% could be applicable to any of the purchase factors; as it has been discussed, the student experience can be considered a completely separate method of marketing communication, whereas the other factors are rather just **subjects of promotional content.**

Similar connections can also be witnessed between the specific sub-factors of the main purchase decision factors and the respondent recommendations for promotional content: For example, Cubillo et al. (2006) determine that one of the influential sub-factors of institution image includes facilities on campus, and subsequently, many of the survey respondents confirm its importance when they reported desiring material on Savonia's campus and its other facilities. Furthermore, the quality of professors is deemed as an important sub-factor by the authors, and a few of the respondents did mention wanting to learn about their possible future teachers of Savonia. The wished content on future opportunities can additionally relate to the sub-factor of program evaluation, program suitability; information on the graduate salary can correlate to the socioeconomic standing of Finland, and so on. Basically, the combined data of the two studies in figure 16 complement themselves by further defining what kind of content would **specifically the potential students of Savonia** prefer to view to make a knowledgeable and conscientious purchase decision.

Weighted purchase factors of potential Savonia students:

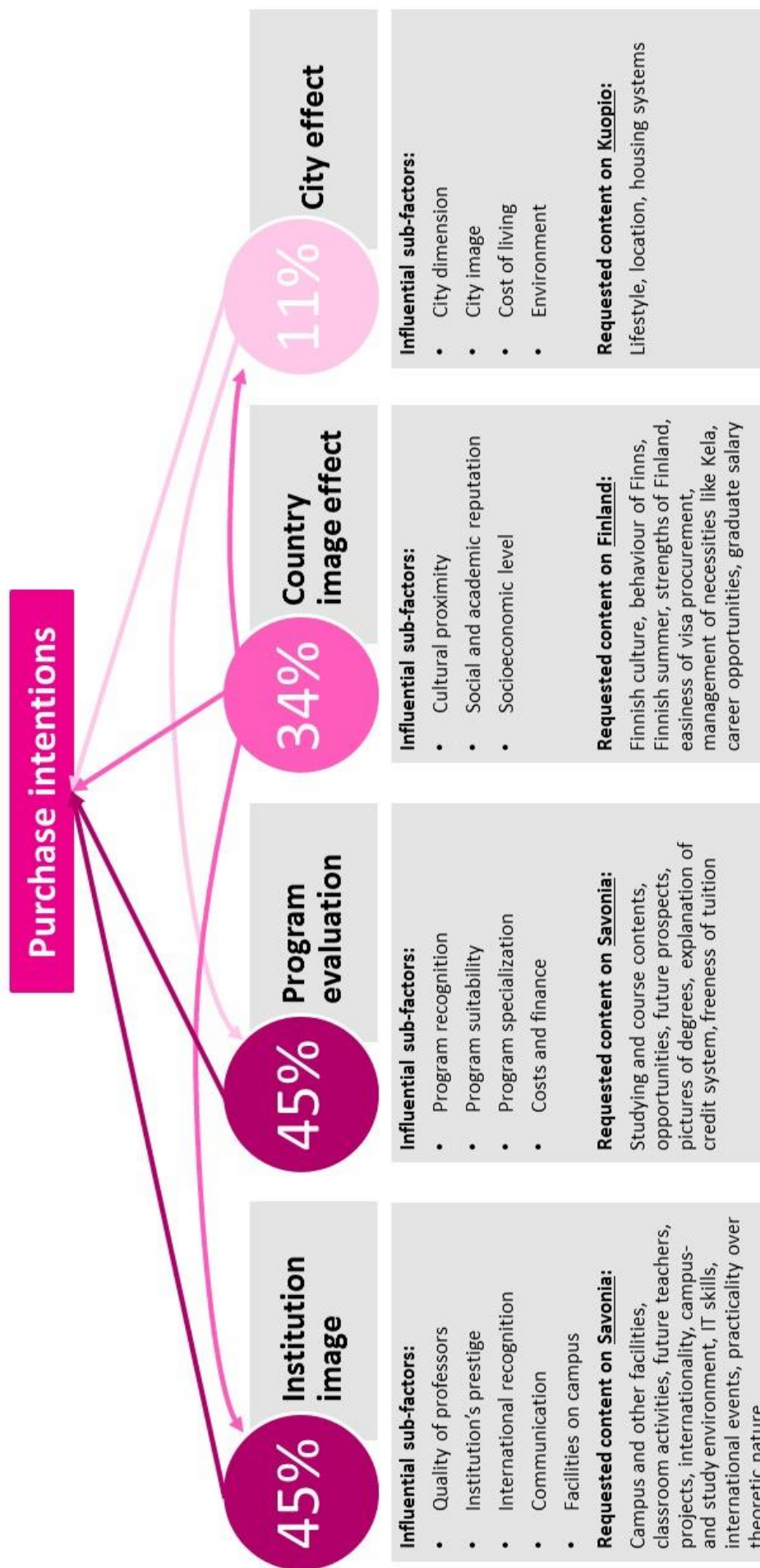


FIGURE 16. The weighted purchase factors of Savonia students (%)

In a final conclusion, the theory and survey results together confirm that the internet and social media are truly the best modern platforms for reaching the desired target segments of higher education. Nonetheless, the outreach channels of an institution should remain **diverse and plentiful** beyond the internet, so that the institution could also reach prospects that might still favor other media material over the world wide web. Other effective promotional platforms for Savonia constitute of promotional fairs and traditional media like the newspaper, television and radio. Among the results, only Russia was conspicuous in its preference of promotional fairs, so perhaps Savonia could direct and focus more **event marketing** towards Russian prospects. The institution could also further inspect their other target audiences and discover what non-online promotional platforms they may prefer. Ultimately, despite its evident popularity, cost-effectiveness and effortlessness, the internet should not be the only method of marketing promotion, but rather, just one aspect of the institution's diverse and rich pool of marketing outreach channels.

A simple three-step action plan was actualized to truly encapsulate and utilize the theory and the results of the survey. The plan consists of a strategy regarding the effective utilization of online platforms for international student recruitment and marketing. The focus of the strategic plan is on online platforms because the survey results were mostly filled with responses pertaining to the internet and various specific websites. The recommended plan is the following:

1. Acknowledge the online segments types (active/passive) and continental preferences (global/regional)
2. Focus promotion on the correct platforms based upon the selected focus group(s) (figure 15)
3. Emphasize word-of-mouth promotion and strive to meet the content demands of students (figure 16)

The initial step includes recognizing the differences among the various types of prospects, which could help in locating the usual online habitat of the selected focus group. Does the target market reside on informative study websites or social media? Do they prefer global or regional websites? After a specific target audience has been decided, the data in figure 15 could be utilized to select the most suitable online platform. For example, if the target market were Asia, Savonia would reach Asian prospects the best through Study in Finland, Facebook, WeChat and Weibo. European and African students preferred the sites Studyinfo and Facebook the most, so promotion on the two websites could reach and attract a European and an African online audience. Granted, most of the European responses in favor of Studyinfo consisted of Finnish students, so the best platform for international Europeans would be Savonia's website.

Lastly, Savonia could highlight positive student experiences in its promotion because the self-explained experiences of current students are what potential students want to see the most. Since it is about creating trust, the word-of-mouth content could strive to be authentic and sensible in nature rather than over-the-top positive. Moreover, the other content demands as presented in figure 16 could be integrated and showcased in the institution's promotional efforts, possibly, yet again,

through the students' word-of-mouth promotion. The estimated weights given to each of the factors help illustrate the level of demand, which could assist Savonia in deciding the amount of work input invested into each or some of the factors' content creation. Additionally, Savonia could strive to maintain a generally positive brand image through marketing strategies like relationship marketing, which could further enhance its national and international recognition and competitiveness in long-term.

Because the international market of higher education seems to be relentlessly changing and developing, academic institutions ought to **embrace the same energy**: by constantly investigating the markets for changes in preferences or needs, higher education institutions can remain up-to-date on the latest developments in the industry and fabricate timely strategies. For now, Savonia could become more competitive in the industry by reaching the prospective online students and adhering to their promotional needs according to the three-step action plan. Ultimately, from now on, it is recommended for the polytechnic to carefully monitor and analyze the ever-changing international market and **adapt and evolve** into serving the international prospects and their needs to the best of Savonia's marketing capabilities.

4.1 Validity, Reliability and Future Research

The number of respondents is the most fundamental factor that could have been further improved to increase the reliability and validity of the survey. The lack of respondents manifested especially when the respondents were divided into their respective continents: when grouped together, the Russian group and the Middle Eastern group only amounted to four and two respondents respectively, which does not notably increase the reliability of the continents' responses. The sample sizes of the two groups were also not sufficient enough to display distinct differences between the respondents' answers. Most often, the results within the Russian and Middle Eastern groups tended to demonstrate only slight or no differences at all, which made it challenging to distinguish any regional preferences (figure 10-14). The European group and the Asian group, however, did attain enough responses to display regional preferences in a distinct manner. It could be argued that the African group had too few respondents with just 10 students, though the quantity did prove to be enough to portray visible preferences among the group's results. Nonetheless, the larger the sample size, the better the reliability.

The publication and distribution of the survey could have been altered to collect more responses. First, the number of publications for the survey could have been higher. Along a time duration of approximately a year, the survey was published twice during the research although it could have been published more frequently. Secondly, the survey was published for the first time during late spring, which also could have been timed better: students may already be quite mentally resigned from school activities because of the nearing summer break, which can lead to lessened online traffic on school-related sites like the school email. It might be the reason why the initial publication in May only gathered nine responses. The second publication, which was released during prime school time in early autumn, gathered 29 responses, which was a significant change in contrast with the

May publication. The May publication was also sent to fewer recipients than the September publication, which may have also contributed to the fewer total quantity of responses. Thirdly, the method of distribution was also solely through the school email. To increase the probable number of respondents, the survey could have been issued additionally through Savonia's international subject teachers: for example, they could have distributed the students the survey as printed sheets in class or encouraged the students to partake in the online survey during computer class.

Another area of improvement could be in the design of the survey. All the questions were set as open-ended questions where the respondents could freely write their responses. The answer format made the analysis of the results challenging and time-consuming, because the results needed to be manually calculated and categorized in order to generate illustrative charts and effective analysis. The manual human inspection and interpretation may have allowed for numerical discrepancies as well as miscategorized responses in the results. Some written responses also needed to be overlooked due to their ambiguous, incomprehensible or uncategorizable content. To prevent such issues, the survey could have been modified to include checkbox questions instead of open-ended questions. The responses may have not been as varied and unique, but they certainly would have been more manageable and explicit, especially with a significant number of respondents. So, if future research were to occur, especially if the desired sample size were larger, it would be suggested to utilize checkbox questions, which could be drafted based on the student answers provided in the survey results. For example, a future sample could be asked to assign importance levels to the content factors student experience, Savonia, Finland and Kuopio on a scale of 1-4, with four being the most important purchase factor and one being the least important purchase factor.

Moreover, the phrasing of the survey questions could have been altered. Two of the three main questions listed possible answer options inside brackets after the question. For example, the content question was portrayed as the following: "*What kind of content would you prefer to see when looking for study opportunities in Savonia? (E.g. videos, stories from the students, information about Finland etc.)*" Though helpful, the ready-listed examples may have influenced some of the respondents to mention the said examples more often than their own thoughts or in addition with their own thoughts, which may have affected the final results. If the examples were not given, would the respondents have answered differently? Thus, would the final results have been different? If the survey format had included checkbox questions, the examples could have been integrated within the selectable options. Perhaps when open-ended questions are utilized as a data collection method, it is best not to include a list of examples so that the respondents can remain as unaffected by the survey maker(s) as they can. When examples are wished to be included, it would be best to fabricate a whole list of selectable answers instead of inclining the respondents to certain aspects within open-ended questions.

It is true that the survey could have been altered when the original format came into the disposal of the thesis research. However, 25 responses had already been gathered with the original survey; if the questions or format were even slightly altered, it would have been even more strenuous and

challenging to accurately combine and compare the results of two similar yet separate surveys. Instead, the survey was decided to remain identical with the original publication because then the results would be influenced and gathered in a consistent manner, thus preserving the possibility for a more accurate comparative analysis between the older and newer results. In retrospect, the deliberated planning and implementation of a research is possibly the most vital part of a research, because the research method and the number of results will ultimately determine the success of the research and the validity of the final conclusions. In the case of this thesis, it could be stated that the analysis and conclusions of the research are as thoroughly scrutinized and discussed as they can be on the basis of its 64 total respondents.

The reviewed theory and its reliability should also be noted. The most notable issues with the utilized references arise within the following facts: most of the source material is online-based, and some of the utilized articles could be considered outdated. The former may have contributed to a decrease in literature variety, and the latter may discredit the validity of the applied theory. All theory was discovered through the Google Scholar search engine, which was utilized more than once in search for relevant theory. Most articles were attained through ResearchGate, and all of the collected literature was free of charge. As Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, 7-8) observe, the supply of literature on the subject is quite sparse and lacking in itself; therefore, it may be more difficult to obtain both suitable and timely articles for research purposes. For this thesis, the theory was meticulously searched for, and in the end, a total of 18 academic papers from different reputable authors were studied thoroughly in order to reconstruct an all-inclusive theory passage on the different aspects of international higher education and its marketing. As a result, a multitude of professors and researchers have contributed their knowledge to the public and this thesis, be it through the pages of a book or the scans of an online publication. This thesis has greatly benefitted from their research and is now ready to present its own contribution to the existing literature.

Opportunities for future research could be derived from the information collected and discussed in this thesis. While this thesis addressed continents in general, a more specific research could be implemented on the focus countries of Savonia: Albania, the Baltic countries, Chile, China, Kosovo, Mexico, Russia and Spain. The nations and their target segments could be further inspected for their preferred promotional platforms and content: do they prefer online promotion or non-online promotion, which online websites do they favor, what kind of content they desire, and so on. The preferential degree program affinities of Savonia's students could also be investigated and addressed: what exactly attracts Europeans to study business, Asians to study engineering, and Africans to study nursing? What are the main reasons? Perhaps in addition, a branding research could be implemented on the international degree programs: how could the degree programs be individually branded and marketed to suit the culturally different prospects' needs and demands?

Moreover, a possibility for consumer behavior research could exist in the differentiation between the theorized prospect segments: for example, Savonia could inquire its students about whether they had discovered the institution on purpose or by accident, what motivated them to pursue higher ed-

ucation, were they searching for specific traits in an institution, what made them finalize the purchase decision, and so on. An in-depth study could also be conducted on the promotional effect of word of mouth: why is it so convincing, and how could it be effectively integrated in Savonia's marketing? Besides the listed topics, a market as complex and competitive like international higher education can offer prospective researchers an abundance of feasible research topics, the implementation of which could prove highly beneficial and supportive to the relevant literature and its continued growth and advancement.

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