

Alevtyna Byieva

Challenges and opportunities of  
South-Eastern Finland University of  
Applied Sciences education export to  
Ukraine

Bachelor's thesis

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<b>Abstract</b> The purpose of the study was to determine the most suitable digital marketing tools in order for South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences to expand the market for the degree programs onto the Ukrainian market. The research was conducted by usage of the qualitative and quantitative methods. The data that was used was from primary and secondary sources of data. The results of the study presented that long term goal of attracting the students from Ukraine could be achieved by usage of various social media platform advertisements with focus onto the personality of the potential prospect. The additional recommendations of future operations of the commissioner were composed with focus on the addressing the needs of the customer of South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences.		
<b>Keywords</b> Education export, Finnish higher education, Ukrainian education market, digital marketing tools.		

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

In nowadays, it has become widespread that students getting high education degrees, not in their country of origin. In recent years' number of international students in Finland dramatically small in comparison with a global number (20362 students in Finland and 4,85million students globally) (CIMO.fi, 2018). As a result, an opportunity for Finnish higher education to attract more international students from all over the world by using novel marketing and promotion approaches could be a possible research statement of the bachelor thesis.

## **1.1 Purpose of the study**

Attracting Ukrainian students can possibly expand the export market for XAMK degree programs. However, for reaching these goals, the university should develop and implement a suitable marketing strategy. Moreover, this research will help XAMK to choose the right way of using digital marketing for fresh students' engagement.

## **1.2 Prior research**

Recently, the ways of increasing Finnish educational programs export attracted huge interest of researches. There are many research papers focused on different universities and target markets. For example, Hollen (2017) showed great results in improving the desirability and visibility of the Porvoo campus for non-EU/EEA students. Investigation of marketing strategies for attracting international students to the "International Business and Sales Management Program of University of Eastern Finland" was conducted by Faiz (2018). Also, good performance was demonstrated by Vierimaa (2013) and Thuy (2014) in their study of attraction students from China, Vietnam in Finland educational institutions. However, any research about attracting Ukrainian students to XAMK, Finland by using digital marketing strategies is not found.

### **1.3 Research problems and research questions**

Entrance on the education export market is challenging since the presence of huge competitors' numbers. Ranking of the university, developed job market, permanent residency opportunity, research opportunity, visa processing complexing, scholarship are the main factors that influence the choice of potential foreign student. Therefore, the development of a suitable marketing strategy by XAMK for attracting foreign students is necessary. High reach and cost-effectiveness stand out in digital marketing among other existed strategies. Although, explore the benefits of using digital marketing for this promotion of education at Finnish universities is needed. Exploring such opportunities and problems can be a research problem of future thesis.

The research question can be worded as "Identification of main challenges and opportunities which XAMK may be faced during promotion education export in Ukraine using digital marketing strategy".

### **1.4 Aims and objectives of the study**

The aim of the study is the investigation of the challenges that can occur during the implementation of digital marketing activities by XAMK for attracting Ukrainian students. The research should propose a possible scenario of usage chosen scenario.

The objectives of the study are:

- To evaluate the Ukrainian education market and the ability of XAMK to export education to the target market
- To determine the most suitable marketing strategy for the Ukrainian market.
- To determine possible challenges during conducting digital marketing activities in Ukraine
- To define the main advantages of using digital marketing activities by XAMK
- To recommend the best digital marketing strategies for XAMK in terms of attracting students from Ukraine

## **2 EDUCATION EXPORT FROM FINLAND TO UKRAINE**

### **2.1 Educational system in Finland**

Finland is a Nordic high developed country with a population of 5.5 million people. High rankings in OECD PISA studies (OECD, 2020) confirmed Finland's education system as one of the most successful in the world.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC, 2021), the Finnish educational system consists of five stages. They can be determined as early childhood education, primary education, basic education, upper secondary education, and higher education. Chart 1 demonstrated the structure of the Finnish education system.

Kindergarten, day-care groups or private and private homes are places where early childhood education is carried out. This type of education is provided for kids from 0 to 5 years. Children at this stage are provided by day-care programs. Studying programs focused on communicational skills development as well as basic reading and mathematics skills.

The next level is pre-primary education which is compulsory for all kids above 6-year-old. At this stage, children are developing and improving their skills through different activities at school.

The third level of the Finnish educational system is basic education. Children from 7 to 16 are studied different mandatory subjects. The main reason for basic education is pupil's personal and academic knowledge development. Also, the development of self-study and self-assessment skills is vital at this stage. In Finland, the evaluation system of student performance generally consists of two components: self-assessment and the final assessment performed by the teacher of the given subject. Self-assessment is done by the student throughout the whole course, this process assists the student in raising their awareness of different stages in the educational process. The final assessment is performed by the responsible teacher. This assessment is typically done by a process of

comparison of the course objectives and student's achievements. With these assessments performed by a teacher as a basis combined with grades and a 14 basic education certificate established students will continue their education. There is no generalized exam final exam when the basic education level is completed.

## EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND

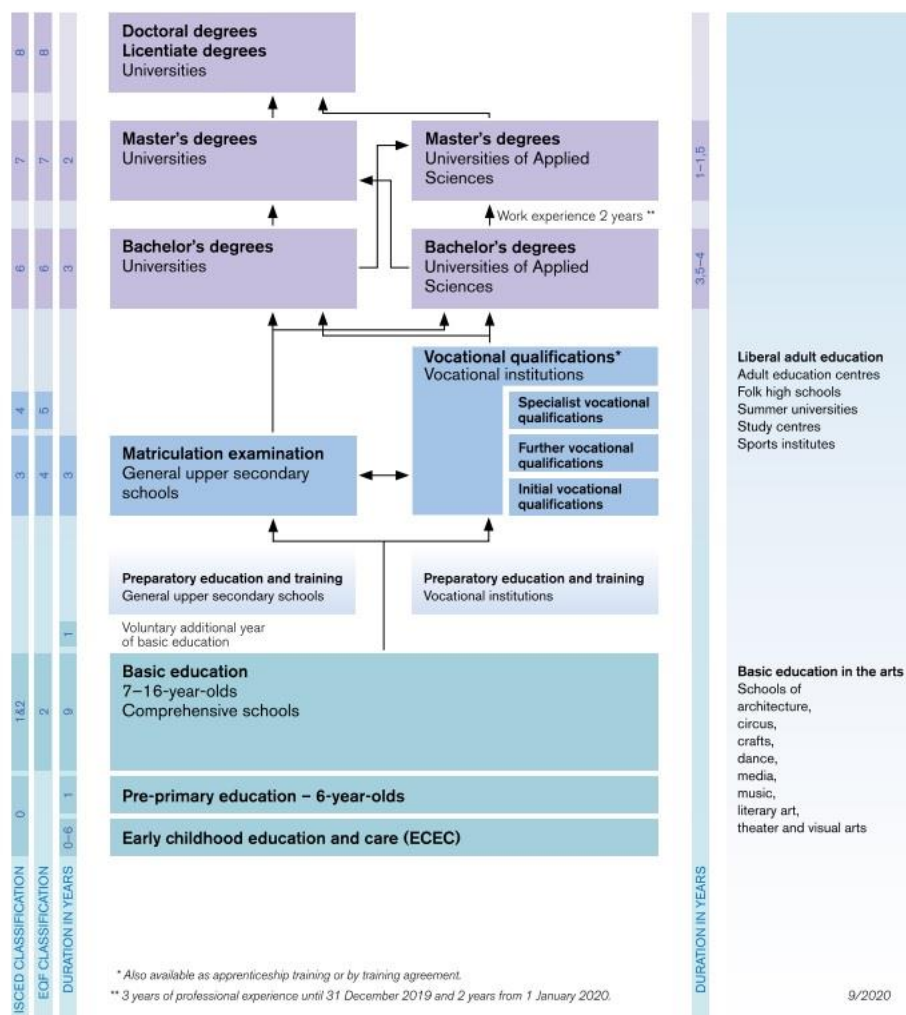


Figure 1. Finnish education system(Schatz, 2010)

In order to start upper secondary education, a student has to complete the basic level education and has to obtain grades off the necessary level. Only students who meet those criteria are admitted into the upper secondary education establishment. Usually, more than 90 percent of basic education graduates



pursue upper secondary education. Generally, upper secondary education lasts three years, with the study right given for two to four years. The learning objectives and aimed results of various subjects for upper secondary education are decided by the Finnish National Agency for Education. After the student completes the upper secondary education program, they will take the national matriculation examination. National matriculation examination consists of the mother tongue test and three free choice courses selected from the following list: mathematics, the second national language, a foreign language, or one subject from the student's curriculum. After the student completes the upper secondary education syllabus and the national matriculation examination a respective certificate will be presented to the student. On the basis of the certificate, a student can continue their education pass by applying to enter the higher education establishment (MOEC, 2021).

The higher education level is represented by vocational institutions, universities, and polytechnics. Entrance to any higher education institution requires a student's preference and a good score gained from the matriculation exam. Vocation institutions are concentrated on providing practical experience technics for those students who want to start their own working life. On the other hand, Universities and polytechnics mainly focused on getting an academic degree for students such as bachelor's, master or doctorate's degree. Also, at the universities students can get essential experience in the chosen field through researches and theoretical courses, while polytechnics developed strong theoretical and practical knowledge of the professional field (MOEC, 2021).

Schools in Finland are mainly funded by the local governments or municipalities. Privat schools are rare and open only with the approval from the Council of State. Finnish teachers have well-developed pedagogical skills, knowledge, and experience. Teachers work based on the national curriculum from Finnish National Agency for Education. This guidance includes a description of courses and their content, student assessment criteria, students and teachers' rights and responsibilities. Teachers must adhere to the national curriculum but autonomy and freedom in teaching methods are strongly encouraged. In order to respond to changes in education every ten years nation's curriculum is reviewed (Niemi, 2012).

Typically, a Finnish class consists of around twenty pupils. The academic year starts in the middle of August and ends at the beginning of June with breaks vary according to the local municipalities regulation (MOEC, 2021).

Different educational levels are required for different teaching positions in the Finnish education system. For instance, a bachelor's degree is necessary for kindergarten teachers while a master's degree is mandatory for any teaching position at the universities. Moreover, further teaching work must cover students' needs and concerns by using effective teaching methods and proactive learning. Finnish teachers can be considered as a key factor in providing high education level across the country (Niemi, 2012).

## **2.2 Finnish education export strategy**

In recent years we can admit that education institutions in developed countries are changing and searching for ways to become more business successful. Moreover, new aims demand not only delivering education services to people as a part of social welfare but also the implementation of novel corporate world practices (Molesworth, 2011; James-Maceachern and Derrick, 2019).

Export of education services can be considered as a primary direction towards an economically proficient business model for educational institutions. Subsequently, the successful export of higher education services has the ability to generate increased revenues for educational institutions (Bennell and Pearce, 2003).

In 2010, "Finnish education export strategy: summary of strategic lines and measures (MOEC, 2021) were developed in tight cooperation of a Country Brand Delegation, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Culture. It was the first document of its kind in Finland, which did not provide strict guidelines for educational institutions. Instead, it was declared that education institutions became "operators" and "engines" of education export which gave them freedom in future initiatives.

Educational export, in the context of Finland, can be divided into three main categories (Schatz, 2010):

- selling education equipment to other countries
- selling educational methods to other countries
- selling Finnish educational programs/degrees to other countries (to non-Finns outside and inside of Finland)

According to the educational export manual issued by the Ministry of Education of Finland majority of companies and higher educational establishments begin their activities connected with education export by improving, upgrading and optimizing their marketing technologies in order to reach the potential market. By implementing those steps it is possible to develop and execute the business plan and further steps of the education exporting process. Lack of the mentioned above steps and necessary infrastructure for the export of education can lead the higher educational establishment to receive financial and reputational losses (Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, 2010)

The most significant steps in the beginning of the export initialization process are the definition of the advantage and usefulness for the end customer, what benefits the customer gets, and what is the source of the benefit. Also, the place in the competition and the companies benefits have to be clearly established. All of this information should be reflected in the business plan based on competition analysis. These can help in recognizing the development challenges and conclusions that the service can be inappropriate for the customer until the major changes are implemented in the process.

In order to penetrate a new market effectively, the company should produce and offer solutions, services and products that can sustain competition on the target market.

According to (Schatz, 2010) there are certain components that are got to be taken into thought when considering the key issues of commercial practicality. Those are selecting the proper market and location besides the right offering. Correct partnership models, investment plan and a list of potential strategic partners have to be developed as one of the stages of planning the process the penetration into the new market. The sales and marketing approach of the company has to be adjusted to the local context of the desirable market.

## Key factors in commercial viability

### Right market and location

- Mature versus emerging
- Supply versus demand

### Right offering

- Detailed market-sizing research
- Aligning with local needs

### Right partnership model and partner

- Matched to risk/reward perspective
- Alignment of motivations

### Realistic business plan

- Linked to market-sizing
- Appropriate investment and expected returns

### Right sales and marketing approach

- Driven (appropriately for education)
- Appropriate for local context

Figure 2. Key factors in commercial viability (Schatz, 2010)

The main factors in commercial viability can be divided into the following groups: market and location, offering, partnership model and partner, business plan, sales and, marketing approach. The list of key factors in commercial viability is presented in Figure 2.

### 2.3 Educational system and educational markets in Ukraine

Ukraine is an Eastern European country of 44 million people bordering Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and Russia. The population of 15-24 years citizens is around 4.2 million people. The urban population is dominant and is 69%, while the rural is only 31%. The most densely populated areas are Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Donetsk, Odesa, and Lviv. The average life expectancy at birth is 72 years (UNESCO, 2021).

Total Gross Domestic Product based on Purchasing Power Parity in 2020 was 527,93 billion international dollars which are 12720 international dollars per capita. Real annual GDP growth is 3,2%. Nowadays, the main sector of Ukraine's economy is serviced with a 54,4% share of GDP, then it's industry sector with 22,6% and the third main sector is agriculture with 14,0%(FCDO, 2020). The share of GDP by the economic sector is presented in Figure 3.

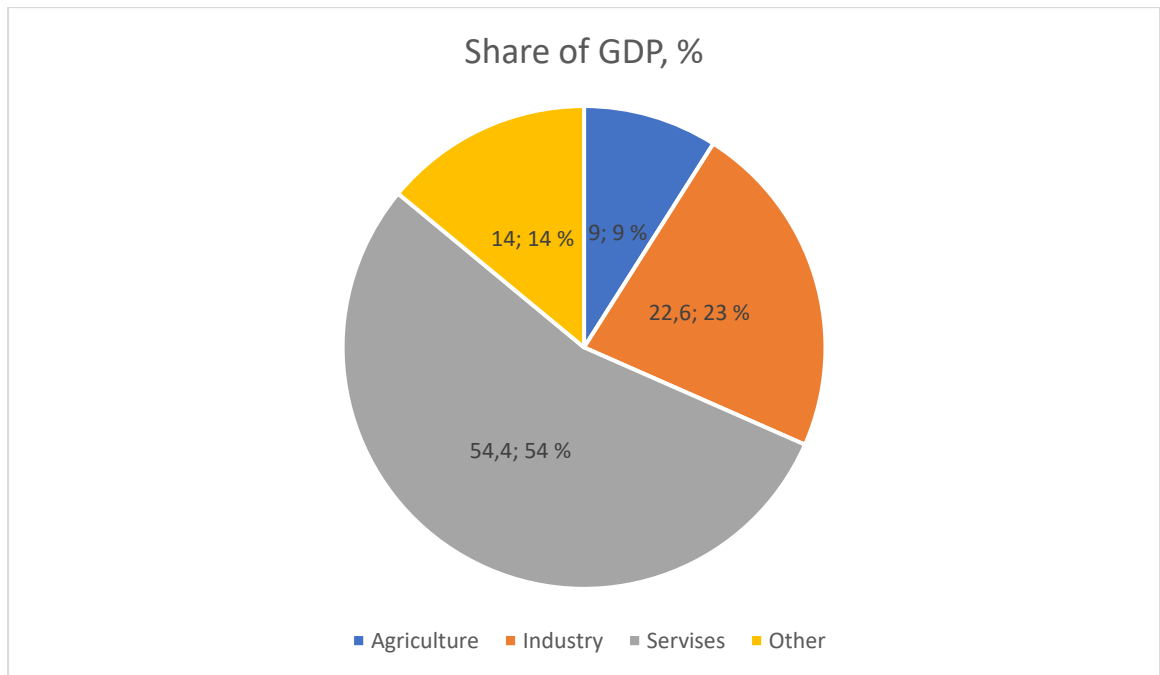


Figure 3. Share of Ukrainian GDP by economic sectors in 2020 (FCDO, 2020)

Ukraine is one the most educated societies with a tertiary gross enrolment ratio of 83 percent (UNESCO, 2014). According to 2019 World bank research “The Ukrainian educational system has strong advantages in education excellence, contributing to high levels of educational attainment and human capital development. However, skills demanded by the expanding sectors are different from those supplied by the education system and change has been slow.” (World Bank Group, 2019).

Ukraine’s educational system has been formed during more than 70 years of Soviet rule in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, Ukraine's educational system went through numerous reforms since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, including acceptance of private education at the government level. In 2005, Ukraine has joined the European Bologna system. Previous Soviet high education system assumed long single-cycle degree. While, new Bologna system assumed a two-cycle structure, except for some professional areas like medicine and veterinary medicine. Moreover, The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, grading scale of the Bologna system were successfully adopted by the Ukrainian educational system.

Administration of the Education system is conducted centralized by the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) from Kyiv. The State Inspectorate of Educational Institutions of Ukraine is the main organization in charge of quality assurance, curriculum development, teaching methods, examinations, and vocational education. Also, another supervisory authority is the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education which is the controller and regulator of tertiary education.

The education process of each level is mostly conducted by using the Ukrainian language, sometimes ethnic minorities languages (Russian, Hungarian, Romanian) are permitted for some educational programs. English is becoming to be popular for medium-high education, but the number of degree programs in English is smaller than in EU countries.

Normally Ukraine's academic year is stable with a start in September and the end in June.

Ukraine's education system consists of the following levels: elementary education, basic secondary education (middle school), upper-secondary education (specialized secondary education), technical and vocational education and training (TVET), higher education.

Since 2018, Ukraine has extended its school education from 11 to 12 years. Education is free of charge at public schools and compulsory.

Kids usually start their elementary school at the age of 6 and the length of it is 4 years. Elementary school can be divided into two main phases. Phase 1 (grades one and two) focused on adaptation to school and phase 2 focused on developing responsibility and independence.

Basic secondary school lasts five years (grades five to nine) and is available for all pupils with elementary school background. This educational level includes subjects like Ukrainian language and literature, foreign language, history, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, physical education, music, and art. At the end of ninth-grade pupils has the final state exam. Those who complete this exam successfully getting a "certificate of completion of basic secondary education".

All pupils with completed basic secondary education are eligible to enroll in upper secondary schools. New upper-secondary education regulations include transfer from two to three years for this level by 2027. Also, new rules require specialization of education for academic or professional purposes. Academic track will be able to prepare students for further university education, while professional will prepare students for further employment. All secondary education graduates who pass the final state examen are getting “certificate of completed general secondary education”

Technical and vocational educational and training programs (TVET) are able for students at the secondary and post-secondary level in Ukraine. There are three levels of TVET in Ukraine. Level 1 can be reached after short-term training programs (up to one year) that provide specific practical skills. These programs do not have any requirements and open for anyone of appropriate age. This type of program can award the title of Qualified Worker for successful students.

Level 2 TVET programs require the Certificate of Completion of Basic Secondary Education for admission. The program’s length is variative in diapason from one and a half to three years. Level 2 provides the title of Qualified Worker and access to tertiary education.

Level 3 is post-secondary and provided by colleges, vocational schools, or universities and lead to awarding of a Diploma of Junior Specialist or “Junior Bachelor”. The programs typically last from two to four years. Students can get diplomas in areas like nursing, agriculture, teaching, or engineering technology on this level

In high education, studies are organized in Anglo-Saxon style Bachelor and Master structure. The Ukrainian high education has four main degree levels: junior bachelor, bachelor, master, Doctor of Philosophy/art or science.

The Junior Bachelor is a short-term program that requires 90 to 120 ECTS credits. The length of the Bachelor's program from three to four years. Students must have upper-secondary school education for study in the Bachelor's program. The Bachelor program requires 180-240 ECTS credits. Those students who have Junior Bachelor or Junior Specialist Diploma may be exempt from

some parts of study requirements, depending on the program. Programs finally conclude with the final state examination, in some cases thesis or graduation project.

Study on master's degree program requires a Bachelor's Diploma and in some cases entrance examinations or interviews. Usually, programs are up to two years length (90 to 120 ECTS). In order to get the Master's degree students must defend Master thesis and state exams in some cases.

The highest educational level in Ukraine is Doctor of Philosophy/Art and Doctor of Science. Nowadays there are two types of doctoral levels in Ukraine. The first one is the Candidate of Science which is equal to Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) or Doctor of Art. The length of this program is at least three years, program also requires having a Master's degree or a Diploma of Specialist. Successful study implies mandatory courses (30-60 ECTS credits), research, and the defense of a PhD dissertation. The Doctor of Science is a research qualification that requires only research and defense of another dissertation. Also, a Doctor of Science requires a full professorship at Ukraine university from the candidates.

The general structure of Ukraine educational system is presented in Figure 4.



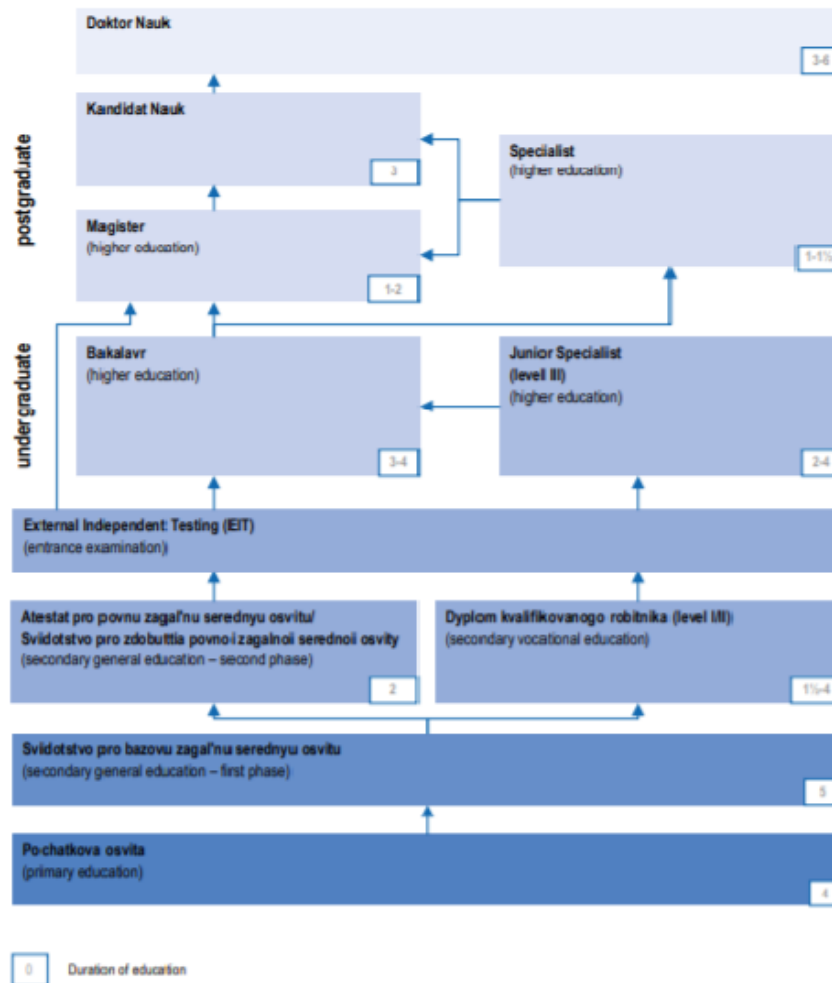


Figure 4. Ukraine educational system (Friedman, 2019)

The strong will to have modern and solid knowledge in proficient fields forced Ukrainians to consider high education abroad as a promising way to build their lives. Despite the recent annexation of Crimea by Russia and Ukrainian – Russian-backed separatists war conflict in eastern Ukraine, which caused damage to political and economic life in Ukraine, outbound student mobility has grown dramatically in recent years. In the period from 2014 to 2019, the number of degree-seeking Ukrainian students abroad has risen by 54 percent to 77219.

The Ukrainian abroad degree seekers preferably choose neighboring countries. The number of degree students from Ukraine in Poland more than quadrupled from 6110 in 2012 to 29 253 in 2016. Enrolments in Russia have also increased from 10 720 in 2012 to 22 440 in 2016. Germany and the Czech Republic were the third and fourth most popular destination countries with 9638 and 3245

students, respectively, in the 2016/17 academic year. The small number of Ukrainian students also presented in Italy, the USA, Austria, France, Slovakia, and Hungary (Friedman, 2019). The comparison of Ukrainian abroad students for 2017 is presented in Figure 5.

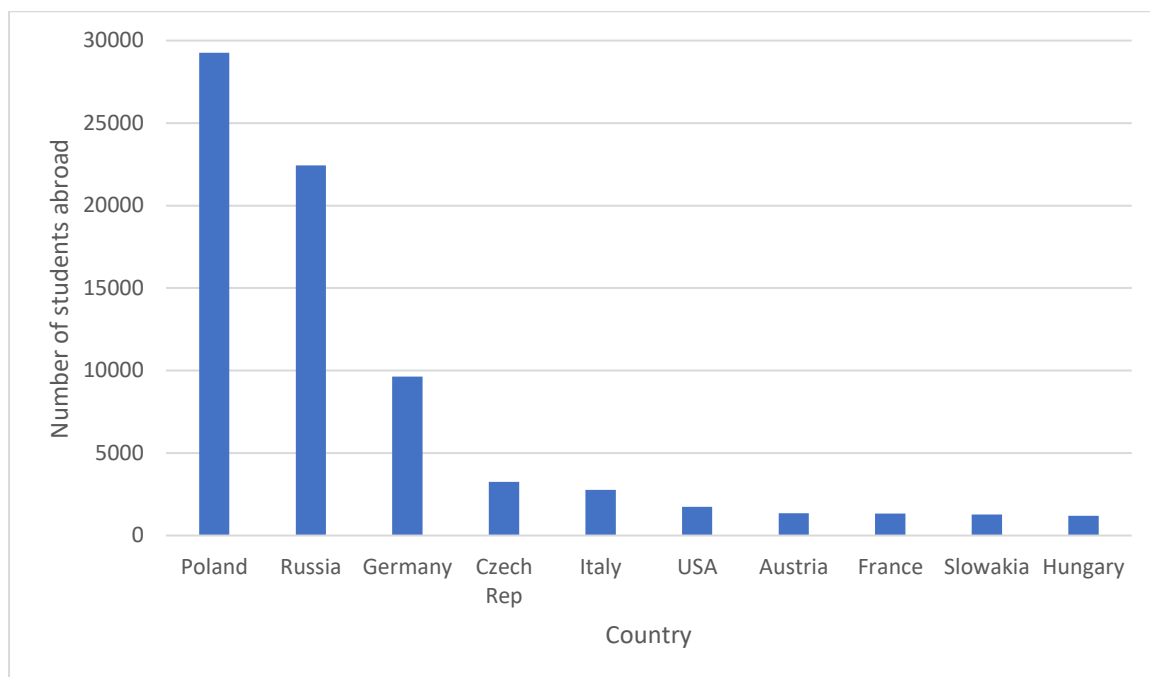


Figure 5. Number of Ukrainian students abroad in 2017(Friedman, 2019)

Ukraine has a high internet penetration rate in 2021 (79%) and further growth is expected (Educationfair, 2020)

Also, it is worth noticing that Ukrainians are searching for abroad education through search engine services or social media platforms. The most popular social media platforms in Ukraine in February 2021 are presented in Figure 6 (GlobalStats, 2021).

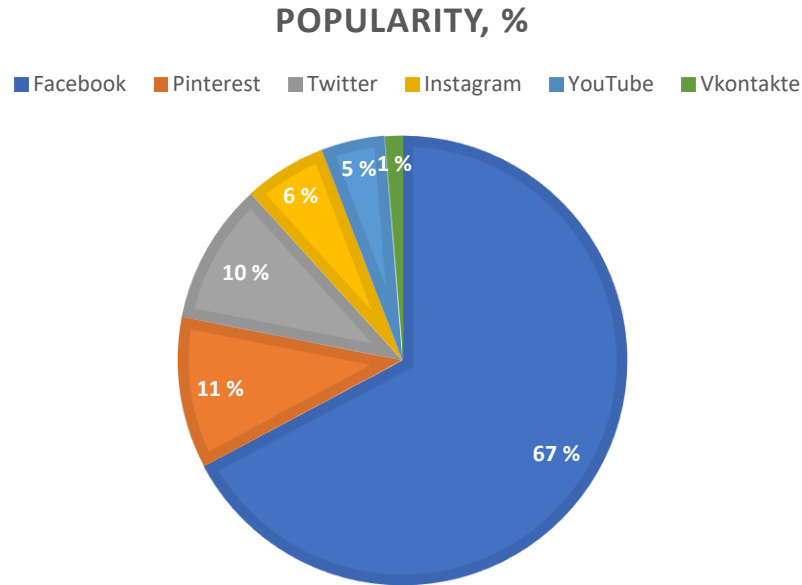


Figure 6. The most popular social media platforms in Ukraine, February 2021 (GlobalStats, 2021)

The aim of Finnish education institutions to export their services from one hand and the strong desire of Ukrainian people to get high education degrees abroad from another hand allows considering Ukraine as a promising market for Finnish universities.

Moreover, a high internet penetration rate and a big interest in social media platforms that would suggest to us that potential customers in Ukraine can be achieved by the appliance of digital and social media marketing tools.

### **3 DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY**

#### **3.1 Concepts and current trends in digital marketing**

Nowadays, the Internet, social media, mobile apps, and digital communicational technologies have become an integral part of everyday life for billions of people around the world. Statistics for March 2021 demonstrates that 4.66 billion people are active internet users (Statista, 2021a). Usage of social media technologies demonstrated high popularity and significant growth worldwide. In 2020 it was 3.6 billion social media users around the globe. The forecast for 2025 predicts an increase in the total number of social media users to 4.41 billion (Statista, 2020).

Meanwhile, all kinds of businesses start to rely on digital marketing due to the ability to achieve corporate goals at a relatively low cost (Ajina, 2019). Also, people increased time spent online searching for information, products, or services which causes organizations to make digital and social media marketing an essential component of their business marketing strategies (Stephen, 2016).

Business organizations can significantly increase revenue from using digital marketing in their company's strategies. Digital marketing enables companies to build up strong connections with their customers, improve awareness of their brands, influence attitudes of the customers, receive fast feedback on their services, and increase sales (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2020).

A significant challenge for companies exists in developing digital marketing strategies that will satisfy all needs of businesses and consumers, respectively. The appliance of different digital and social media marketing tools can lead to a successful embodiment of business strategies. In comparison to traditional marketing digital marketing has numerous advantages.

Digital marketing is lower in cost. One of the biggest items of expenditure is marketing and advertising cost. Marketing with the help of digital platforms can be an alternative that is more affordable. An example of a digital service that is able to provide large size savings is a subscription to an email marketing provider that can send emails about transactions or direct emails to the customers that are on the mailing list of the company.

Digital marketing can offer a considerable return on investments. Marketing through emails or social media platforms is low in price but can provide a substantial return on investments made.

The efficiency of a digital marketing campaign can be easily measured. In comparison to traditional marketing campaigns, the company doesn't have to expect the results during weeks or months. The results of a digital marketing campaign can be observed almost immediately.

The knowledge of the campaign results that can be accessed easily can provide a company with the necessary insight on adjustments that need to be implemented. If the campaign's performance is not on the desirable level it can

be stopped or adjusted easily. Comparing to traditional marketing in which the process of termination of the marketing campaign includes a big amount of paperwork, digital marketing offers tools that are easier to operate and terminate if necessary (Mangles, 2018)

As a brand's image and reputation are vital for the company's success under the circumstances of a modern market it should be well developed. A key component of the brand development process advanced website, a blog with high-quality and practical articles, comprehensive and interactive profiles on numerous social media platforms.

The targeting of digital marketing campaigns is more precise. Instead of the spray and pray method during which an ad is exposed to many people with the hope that a small number of people will be engaged by the advertisement, marketing on digital platforms allows the campaign to be more precisely targeted. The age, the location, and further characteristics of the customer can be adjusted.

### **3.2 Digital communication tools**

Due to digitalization marketing campaigns can be more global via the massive exposure that can be provided by digital marketing tools.

Numerous digital marketing tools can help with customer segmentation. Segmentation is the process during which bigger customer groups can be divided into smaller groups according to desirable classification. This can help to increase the efficiency of the campaign and to decrease the cost of the campaign. As an example segmentation of customers into different groups due to the location of the customers can decrease the cost of the campaign if the mentioned campaign is not available in some regions of the country where the company operates.

Efficient use of digital marketing tools can allow businesses not only to stay relevant but also to stay competitive. Usage of various digital marketing platforms allows companies to answer customer questions, to get rid of misconceptions,

and to reflect on customer feedback faster than with the help of the usage of traditional marketing tools.

In general digital marketing can be defined as “an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders (Kannan and Li, 2017).

Modern business uses different digital marketing tools in order to interact with potential customers and meet its marketing goals. The variety of digital marketing tools can be grouped as bellow (Bala and Deepak Verma, 2018):

Search Engine Optimization or SEO is a promotion of a website, so it will appear at the top of a search request in the target search engine (Google, Yahoo, Bing, or any other).

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is the tool that can drive traffic to your business. There are three main models of this tool: pay-per-click (PPC), cost-per-click (CPC), or cost-per-thousand-impressions (CPM) model. One of the most popular platforms for SEM are Google Ad Words (on Google Network) and Bing Ads (on Yahoo Bing Network). Display Advertising, Search Retargeting, Mobile Marketing, and Paid Social Advertising also can be considered as a part of Search Engine Marketing.

Products and services can be presented through customer-oriented blogs, e-books, case studies, how-to guides, question and answer articles, forums, news and updates, images, banners, infographics, podcasts, webinars, videos, or content for social networks. Content can be presented on different platforms in random forms. This type of tool demands customization of content for different platforms. For instance, the content for mobile devices should be bright and short. Efficient implementation of this tool is a good way for branding the business.

Social Media Marketing (SMM) implies driving traffic to your sites or business through social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, etc.). Customized content for different social networks can create awareness about

products or services provided by the company. Which in turn can enhance the company's brand and significantly increase sales.

Digital Display Advertising is a production and deployment on the internet platforms of different advertising formants with an aim to target potential customers. Advertising can be presented in different forms, such as text, image, banner, rich-media, interactive, or video. Also, digital display advertising can customize the main message according to the interests, gender, income, age of the customer.

Mobile marketing is the usage of two-way marketing communication tools between businesses and customers that take place via mobile devices. The websites, apps, and content customized for mobile devices are the most efficient mobile marketing tools.

The main interactive marketing tools are widgets and opt-in features. This kind of tool provides the ability to make the company website interactive, receive reliable and fresh feedback from the customers, and track their behavior.

Email Marketing is the sending of commercial letters through email to a potential customer. Modern email marketing software can be personalized content of the messages in the letter in order to develop trust between company and customer.

Affiliate Marketing is a performance-based on conversions-promotions, leads, or sales, where the company pays the publisher for new customers. Affiliate Network is widely used in the search for a necessary publisher, tracking and reporting the results of cooperation. Affiliate Marketing is a great solution for new or unknown business since it provides more traffic to the business through high-traffic sites. Famous sites with affiliate programs are Amazon, eBay, LinkShare, and Flipkart.

The main tools for providing Online PR are publishing PR articles in PR catalogs, press releases in online media, sharing video or audio materials containing commercial messages. The main advantage of Online PR is providing qualitative two-way oriented communication.

Google Analytics, Spring Metrics, Clicky, Mint, and Chartbeat are important Web Analytic tools. These services help companies to collect, measure, understand,

analyze, plan, report, and predict web activities for the company in order to reach marketing strategy goals (Mangles, 2018).

### **3.3 Social media marketing tools**

Nowadays, Social media marketing (SMM) is considered one of the most efficient digital marketing strategies due to its cost-efficient ability to build corporate brand image, easiness of building business-customer relationships, and ability to manage public relationships. Moreover, social media marketing is a promising marketing platform for small and medium businesses, since it provides access to a wide audience with relatively small investments from the company (Kang and Park, 2018).

It is also worth noting that reaching potential customers by appliance social media marketing strategy demands implementation of different toolkits that can be categorized as search engine optimization, paid search, data analytics, PR and influencer, email marketing/marketing automation, and content marketing tools.

In order to increase the visibility of the business for relevant searchers Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tools can be used in marketing strategy. Depending on the intended aim of the SEO following types of tools can be used(Mangles, 2018):

- keyword analysis
- rank checking
- site crawling
- backlink analysis

A keyword analysis is a type of SEO tool that allows to attract a bigger number of visitors, increase conversion and generally increase the amount of traffic on the set webpage. With numerous kinds of keyword analysis software (Google Trends, SEMrush, Keywordtool.io) users can check statistics for keywords search, the average organic position of the keywords, filter keywords by location, and set parameters for searching engines.



Rank checking is an SEO tool that helps to define the position of the website in the list of results of the search engine of a certain period. This tool can be used as an additional source of data to be used in further analysis. Examples of rank-checking software are Google Search Console, Moz Pro Rank Tracker, and Advanced Web Tracking service.

The main task of site crawling software is to detect mistakes in the links of the website and determine whether the website can be considered SEO friendly. Google Search Console, Screamingfrog, and Yoast are website crawling software systems that are some of the most popular on the market now.

A backlink is an SEO tool that can attract a target audience from websites with similar themes by placing a link to the webpage that is aimed to be promoted. The renowned backlink analysis platforms are Buzzsumo and Majestic Backlink History Checker.

One of the most efficient tools of SMM is paid search. Commonly, paid search results (Google Ads) are placed on the very top of the search engine result list, normally, with a marking that identifies the advertising nature of the search result.

Data analytics tools serve the purpose of analyzing the site's traffic. Based on the data provided by data analysis tools, customer behavior, website audience is analyzed which can assist in further optimization of the website functional capacity. Google Analytics is the most preferable data analytics platform among users due. Also, Kissmetrics can be considered as an effective data analytics software.

PR tools are mainly used for managing social media presence. Managing social media presence can allow the web page of the company to appear more appealing to the greater volume of target audience via assisting to generate more engaging and informative visual content. Biteable, Buffer, Buzzsumo, Missingletr are some of the tools that can help in managing social media presence.

Influencer endorsement can also be a productive way of promotion, as the product or service is displayed to the bigger audience that is loyal to the influencer. Influencer endorsement can be performed via a post or series of posts

on an influencer's social media accounts. An example of an influencer's post can be a blog post, visual material post(video or picture).

The platforms that simultaneously help in tele prospecting, email prospecting, social prospecting, and inbounds lead management during the implementation of SMM strategy can be considered as content marketing management tools. WordPress, Smartling, Trello, Episerver are frequently used content management systems.

Marketing automation tools are technologies that manage marketing campaigns across multiple channels automatically. Mainly this process is conducted through targeting customers with automated messages via email, web, social, and text. Moreover, messages are sent automatically with the appliance of different instructions (workflows). Workflows may be presented as templates, custom-build scratch, or targeted campaigns. As a result, efficient marketing automation tools provide a high number of leads generation, nurturing, and scoring for business. GetResponse, DataBowl, Segmetify are efficient marketing automation tools presented on the market.

Personalization tools tailoring company messages to customers based on information a company has about an individual behavior of the people. Consumers previous actions in web, purchase history, demographics, and browsing behavior is an example of individual behavior. Advertisement content, landing pages, emails, discount offers, sale alerts, product or service recommendations, and other types of brand messages can be personalized according to the need of each customer. Adobe Target and Google Optimize 360 are well-known personalization tools.

### **3.4 Digital marketing plan**

Nowadays, in the social and business environment, marketing is becoming one of the most important tools for management (Grayson and Sanchez-hernandez, 2010). Efficient application of marketing as a management tool requires the development of a specific plan. A marketing plan can be determined as an operational document for a business that has the desire to reach the target

market and generate new leads(Chen, 2020). The typical marketing plan includes the following functions and components:

- market research in order to set pricing and define market entries.
- conducting tailoring messaging in order to reach the target customer group.
- defining the most suitable platform for product or service promotion (digital, radio, internet, magazines, or mix of them)
- measuring the metrics that can show the results of a marketing campaign

The first step in the development of the marketing plan is the creation of the value proposition of the business. The value proposition of the business implies the value of products and services that can be delivered to the customer and it appears during a marketing campaign on the company website or in any advertisement materials of the company. Also, the value proposition shall conform to the following requirements:

- describe or state how a product or brand can solve customers' problems.
- describe benefits of exact product or brand using
- describe and convince customers why a company product/brand must be chosen among other competitors on the market.

Usually, the next step in the marketing plan creation is the identification of the target market and marketing channels for the product or service distribution. The effective marketing plan focused on the development of specific campaigns with a detailed description of their creation, timing, and placement. Moreover, the marketing plan should include marketing metrics in order to evaluate marketing campaign efficiency and avoid extra spendings during the further product or brand promotion. Relevant metrics data lets adjust marketing campaign at any point of implementation, ensure that the marketing platform shows effective results in the promotion.

## **4 COMMISSIONER**

### **4.1 Introduction of the commissioner**

South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Science (XAMK) is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest university of applied science in Finland. XAMK was established in 2017 when Kymenlaakso University of Applied Science (Kyamk) and Mikkeli University of Applied Science (Mamk) were merged into one educational institution. In 2019 XAMK had 9400 students and 750 faculty members in four campuses which are located in Mikkeli (4000 students), Kotka (2800 students), Savonlinna (700 students), and Kouvola (2000 students).

Nowadays XAMK trained skilled professionals with a practical focus on the value chain of the wood and forest industries, logistics, development of the new models in the digital economy, research, and discovering of the smart technologies solution.

All abovementioned areas of XAMK interest in turn can be divided into four main areas according to their research, development, and innovation (RDI) activities:

- Forest, the environment, and energy (new fiber products and processes, forestry and wood construction, electronics and materials, environmental safety and circular economy, renewable and efficient energy systems)
- Sustainable wellbeing (effective wellbeing services, equality, and empowerment of youth, smart and user-centered food services, responsible tourism)
- Digital economy (digital information management, user-oriented services, and design, game technologies, and business)
- Logistics, marine technology, and transport (maritime safety and emergency response, oil spill prevention and response, sustainable port logistics, railway logistics, intelligent transport systems of the future)

Each of the RDI activities relevant to the modern international standards has a deep correlation with regional needs and corresponds to the needs of the business.

Also, one of the main XAMK immediate objectives is the creation of new jobs in South-Eastern Finland with subsequent influence on the positive demographic development in the region.

Nowadays, XAMK can offer 44 Bachelor's programs and 29 Master's Degree programs. Degree studies conducted on a full-time, part-time and online basis depend on the needs of the student. Also, degree programs are divided into seven main categories: art and humanities; business operations in forestry; business administration and law; engineering, manufacturing and construction; health and welfare, information and communication technologies; services.

XAMK has five Bachelor's degree programs in English: Bachelor of culture and arts (game design), Bachelor of business administration (Digital International Business), Bachelor of business administration (Wellbeing Management), Bachelor of Engineering (Information Technology), and Bachelor of Engineering (Environmental Engineering). It's full-time studies which last 3,5-4 years (210-240 credits). Tuition is free for EU/EEA students and 6000 Euro per academic year for Non-EU/EEA students.

The Degree Programme in Environmental Engineering provides knowledge of environmental technologies. Students can learn about the causes, consequences, and prevention of environmental problems on a different scale. For instance, the scale can vary from an oil spill to a climate change and microplastics in water.

The Game Design degree gave necessary skills of game production with a focus on planning and developing games for different platforms.

The Digital International Business Degree Programme prepares experts for digital international business, marketing and commerce positions

The Information Technology (IT) program mainly focused on providing necessary knowledge of computer networking and implementation of services in a data center environment.

Degree in Wellbeing Management provides modern knowledge of identifying and coordinating the service needs for promotion wellbeing, developing and

implementing data-based wellbeing services, starting and operating own business.

XAMK has three Master's degree programs conducted in English: Master of Business Administration, International Business Management; Master of Health Care, Naprapathy, Master of Health Care/Social Services, Rehabilitation. In order to apply for a master's degree program, potential students must have a completed bachelor's degree. Studies based on multiform learning: classroom sessions, online studies, and independent work. Commonly it is a two-year study program (60-90 credits). Tuition is free for EU/EEA students and 7000 Euro per academic year for Non-EU/EEA students.

The Master's Degree Programme in Rehabilitation mostly focusing on developing and increasing professional competence in client-oriented and evidence-based rehabilitation.

International Business Management (IBM) program oriented on the international business aspects which helps to develop more competitive and efficient international management strategies.

In order to analyze XAMK in comparison to its competitors, it was decided to conduct a SWOT analysis of the educational establishment. Three main competitors were determined: Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Oulu University of Applied Sciences, and Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences.

The tuition fee for the non-EU citizen who attends Bachelor's Degree Program in XAMK is lower than in Haaga-Helia which can be assessed as a strength of this particular university (Figure 7), the average everyday expenses of all the cities where XAMK campuses are situated is lower than in comparison to Oulu and Porvoo, where Haaga-Helia of Applied Sciences and Oulu University of Applied Sciences are situated. In addition, average climate conditions are milder in Kouvola, which according to the conducted survey could be named as an advantage, since 49% of the respondents of the survey that was conducted as a part of thesis research mentioned "extreme weather" as one of the main disadvantages of studying in Finland.

University	1 <sup>st</sup> -year fee	2-4 year fee	1st-year fee with scholarship	2-4 year fee with scholarship
XAMK	6000 (9700 after 2021)	6000 (9700 after 2021)	3000 (4850 after 2021)	3000 (4850 after 2021)
Haaga-Helia	8500	8500	8500	6800 (but no more than 1.5 years)
Oulu	8000	8000	7500	4000
Jyväskylä	8000	8000	4000	4000

Figure 7. Tuition fees in XAMK, Haaga-Helia, Oulu, Jyväskylä universities of Applied Sciences (Haaga-Helia, 2021; JAMK, 2021; OAMK, 2021; XAMK, 2021)

From a geographic position point of view, XAMK is less attractive to the potential students in comparison with Haaga-Helia university due to its long distance to the capital area. Also, the XAMK campus in Kouvola has fewer entertainment opportunities than the Oulu university campus due to the local infrastructure development. Moreover, Jyväskylä university is placed higher than XAMK in UniRank of Finnish universities, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> place, respectively (UniRank, 2021) which also can affect the choice of potential students.

XAMK can enhance its competitiveness among other competitors by developing university awareness, adding changes to the website content with a focus on presenting relevant information about employment opportunities.

One of the main threats for XAMK is a difference in tuition fee in comparison to Jyväskylä UAP, where Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences has a lower tuition fee, which can attract a bigger number of potential students. Also, the bigger social media presence of Haaga-Helia can be included in the list of threats, due to its ability to generate a bigger number of potential leads. Moreover, cities, where XAMK campuses are situated, provide very limited entertainment options which can be an obstacle for applicants.

## 4.2 Introduction to the potential study case

Bachelor of Business Administration, Digital International Business Program has become the main focus of the present thesis study due to the quickly growing

digital marketing sector worldwide, due to this fact more specialists are necessary to fulfill the needs of the digital marketing operations.

Moreover, XAMK is highly competitive in the export of digital marketing programs segment of the market, which makes it able to expand onto the markets of a new region.

Nowadays, Bachelors of Business Administration is a full-time study program, that goes on for approximately 3.5 years. Studies are mostly located on the XAMK campus in Kouvola. The program is taught in English, which gives an opportunity to develop intercultural communication skills that are vital during international business administration. The study process is conducted with close cooperation to operating businesses, which can provide students with useful practical skills that can be used by them after the graduation during future employment. The program contains the core and complementary studies. After completing the core and complementary studies the student will be introduced to the operations of the company, will be able to make decisions based on that knowledge, will be able to manage different processes and components of the business, will be able to develop and innovate a product.

The current goal of XAMK is to expand its current number of International students to 850 by 2023, currently, XAMK has approximately 425 international students.

At the moment the biggest focus of the promotion of the Business Administration program lays in Russia, India, Nepal, China, Vietnam, and South Korea. The immediate plan is to expand the focus on Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia; Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Following this strategy and taking into consideration the rising interest in getting higher education abroad among Ukrainian citizens, it was decided to focus the current thesis study on the export of XAMK programs to Ukraine.



## **5 RESEARCH METHODS AND RESEARCH DATA**

### **5.1 Research approach**

In light of chosen research statement philosophy of interpretivism would be a promising method for further work on the topic. In general, interpretivism is a piece of subjective research that helps in collecting the data which afterward is broken down (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The researcher interprets the findings of the study to conclude the research issue. They trust that realism exists as a social setting. This philosophy mainly focuses on the viewpoints of research participants for a particular research problem. The researcher analyzes the data which has been collected through the interview which is interpreted by the analysts of interpretivism philosophy. Accordingly, to chosen topic above-mentioned philosophy could help in data accumulation through perception, making interviews, and interpretation of the results.

Exploring the challenges and opportunities that may be faced by XAMK if the university goes for promoting education export in target countries using digital marketing can be a promising research aim of the work. Application of the approach of digital marketing to enter into new markets is considered to be a suitable way to reach the aim of the research. Firstly, it is necessary to use search engine optimization to rank websites and attract a number of viewers. The key advantage of digital marketing is the ability to reach a larger number of potential clients and be able to inform them regarding their services. In technically developed countries, digital marketing will have high effectiveness in attracting clients through social media services (Chauhan and Pillai 2013).

Strategic marketing is the process of providing the best competitive value in comparison to competitors. It ensures optimum utilization of its capabilities to provide value to customers to maximize profit (Dolence, 2013). Strategic marketing focuses on the specific demand of customers for the purpose of providing services to meet their demand. Conway and Yorke (2014) discussed three questions of customers' demand and then by answering the questions institutions make a strategic plan for marketing education. The questions which type of services the market is required and where the services should be provided

and how the services should be produced and delivered (Conway and Yorke, 2014). The factors of competitive advantages if the strategy is applied. The strategic marketing plan helps the organization to get competitive advantages in the competitive market. The educational institution should conduct market research and analyze the market to get information regarding the market so that proper strategic decisions can be made. (Naude and Ivy, 2009).

In the case of the current study, the strategic marketing planning should consider every aspect of the target university and their capabilities to develop and implement the measures to achieve the strategic goal. The measurements should be in close correlation with the strategic goal. Moreover, all of these reach goals must be achieved with the right and proper university resource usage.

There three main types of research choices could be identified. These are – qualitative method, quantitative method, and mixed method.

The qualitative method implies work details information where descriptive information is collected from the source. During usage of this method primary and secondary data is collected from the same sources. The method helps collect insight information regarding particular issues and then to build a further hypothesis. Structured and unstructured methods can be applied to collect necessary data under this method.

As opposed quantitative research method identifies and quantifies the problem and then generates numerical data to analyze the problem. The structured method is the main tool for collecting data. The data mostly collected through social surveys, different types of interviews, and via online communication methods.

Usage of both qualitative and quantitative methods for conducting research is called the mixed method. Mixed method research can solve the problem which requires both opinions of experts and involving a large target audience.

Moreover, the mixed method could be considered as the most suitable for study, since the method ensures a deep understanding of the research statement. Another advantage of the mixed method is the ability to interpret several meanings of findings during the examination of the same scenario.

The quantitative method as part of the mixed method required collecting narrow data, which mostly is not changeable with time, from different people for better understanding the target market conjuncture. This specialization of research will require longitudinal studies.

In this research, both numerical and explanatory data are required. Two sources of data are necessary for data collection. The first one is a primary source that includes raw data from people and another one is a secondary which includes processed data.

In this case, the primary source could provide raw data which will be collected through a conducting survey and direct communication with potential respondents. A structured questionnaire for respondents must be prepared for getting high-quality raw data. Secondary data, required for this study, can be collected from journals, research articles, and newspapers. The secondary data must consist the number of foreign students in Finland, the possible number of students from the target area, the statistic of using digital marketing technics by XAMK.

Convenient sampling is suitable for this research since the projected population of the research is small considering a small number of students from Ukraine in XAMK.

The high level of research 'trustworthiness' could be reached through improving credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In addressing credibility, a demonstration of a true picture of the phenomenon under the scrutiny of the problem must be presented. To enhance transferability, sufficient details of research must be provided for readers to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which they are familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting. The dependability can be improved by striving to enable a further investigation to repeat the study. Confirmability could be achieved by demonstrating findings emerge from the data and not their own predisposition (Shenton, 2004).

## **5.2 Data collection**

In order to conduct the thesis research several tools of data collection were used:

- One-on-one interview of XAMK employees
- Questionary
- Literature review

An interview is the process of conversation, in which the interviewee is being asked questions by the interviewer to receive the necessary information to use it subsequently (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a). One-on-one interviews were used to collect the information about marketing activities of XAMK, additional information on general operations of XAMK that were not available in the open sources, data on export activities of XAMK. The interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams.

Interviewee 1 was interviewed to receive information on XAMK marketing activities. Interviewee 2 was interviewed in order to receive information on the development of the international network as well as the marketing activities of XAMK. Interviewee 3 was interviewed to receive information on such issues as international affairs, statistical data on XAMK operations, results of the 2021 XAMK campaign. Also, Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 5 were asked questions by email in Microsoft Outlook, most of the questions were regarding the XAMK newsletter composition and its efficiency in lead generating.

A questionnaire is the list of questions that respondents answer in order to give the conductor of the questionnaire the necessary data for analysis and further usage (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021b). The objects of the questionnaire were several groups of Ukrainian students of vocational college and university. The majority of respondents were students of Zaporizhzhya Vocational College #5 located in Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine and National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" located in Kyiv, Ukraine. The content of the questionnaire is in Appendix 1.

All of the theoretical information was gathered by reading and processing books, scientific articles, Bachelors´ s and Master´ s theses, statistical digests, internet publishers. Throughout the information search, only the sources published in recent years were used and processed, since the topic of the thesis is connected with the area that is changing dynamically, as well as the information in this area.

## 6 RESULTS

### 6.1 Qualitative approach: interview

As a part of the thesis research process, several interviews with XAMK officials were conducted. The interviews were conducted in order to dedicate and summarize existed experience of XAMK as a Finnish higher education exporter. Those are vital steps for further expansion into the Ukrainian market, in particular. At the present moment, XAMK exporting experience can be divided into the following categories: exporting plan and marketing activities; operational activities. The interviews revealed each of the abovementioned categories through different questions.

#### Export plan and marketing activities

Firstly, the existence of XAMK in the different foreign markets was discussed. Nowadays, XAMK can offer four education programs for export: Bachelor's degree, Masters degree, Double degree, and E-courses. In 2021 XAMK has 350 partners around the world. It is postulated that XAMK was focused on recruiting foreign students from EU countries, Russia, India, Nepal, China, South Korea, and Vietnam. Moreover, the university has permanent positive results in the abovementioned markets. This, in turn, lets XAMK build a strong recruiting network in Europe and Asia regions. International first-year students are predominantly from Russia, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, and Vietnam due to solid connections of recruiting department with those countries. Also, after introducing of study fee for non-EU citizens in 2017 the number of first-year students from Russia decreased. This fact leads to the reshaping of the international student's structure but did not influence the total number of international students in XAMK. In recent years, XAMK developed a new recruiting plan for international students. According to the new plan, the number of international students is expected to grow from the present 425 students to 850 students in 2023. In such a case, XAMK decided to pay more attention to developing new networks in Kazakhstan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

Entrance campaigns of recent years were discussed. Despite coronavirus pandemic in 2020 the total number of applications for international programs was

the highest throughout recent years and reached 1725, which is 40% higher than it was in 2019. Moreover, 589 applicants choose XAMK as a first choice university, which is 38% higher than it was in 2019. The game design bachelor's degree program is the most popular among applicants in 2020.

The second part of the interviews was related to the current marketing program of XAMK. Usually, the most active part of the university entrance marketing campaign starts in September and ends at the end of December, right before the starting of the application campaign. Since 2017 XAMK mostly oriented towards not only students with good academic performance but also those who can allow educational fees and other expenses. Also, advanced English language skills remains an important part of potential XAMK student.

Different markets demand different approaches during developing marketing campaigns. All of the marketing activities are divided into online and offline. The creation of awareness and increasing the number of applicants is the main goal of the XAMK marketing campaign.

Educational fares, promotional trips, and agents' work were the most popular offline activities during the XAMK marketing campaign in East Europe and Asia region. Educational fares are great for the creation of university awareness during a short period of time. On the other hand high participation fee, a low number of direct applicants generated through the fare make participation in education fare not profitable. Promotional trips were conducted in Eastern Europe during the pre-pandemic period. Representatives of XAMK made promotional lectures for high school students where all necessary information about XAMK is described in detail. Usually, one promotional trip covered from 4 to 6 countries, where 2-3 high schools are representing 1 country. The abovementioned marketing tool creates not only great awareness about XAMK but also increases the number of applicants from the school where those trips were conducted. This type of marketing tool can't provide immediate results, since previous experience demonstrated better involvement of the first-year high school students. It's connected to the fact that last year students have already chosen educational institutions for further study and it's hard to change their mindset. Traditional education agents demonstrated different results in the different markets, from 1 student by the agent in China up to

10 students by the agent in Russia. The main challenge during the work with agents is to achieve the right and proper representation of the university by the agent to the potential students. XAMK considers using agencies and agents as a promising tool in nearest future only if they will represent the university as it is stated in XAMK's marketing strategy.

Online marketing tools expand their share among all marketing activities of the XAMK. At the present moment, XAMK uses international educational portals and newsletters as the main online marketing tools in order to attract international students from desire areas. XAMK preferably uses Bachelorstudies.com as an international education portal. All the information regarding the study programs is available on the portal. Customization of potential viewers, the attraction of highly involved prospects create a great number of leads per expended amount of resources. Newsletters are a great channel of connection between the university and potential students since each letter can be customized according to the needs of each customer. Nowadays, online marketing tools demand further improvement of target group formation and definition, since advertisement content has to be tailored in order to be suitable for different target markets.

International office, Marketing communication department and Education programs department is responsible for implementing of educational services programs. The international department is responsible for the legislation part of the new export service. Also, one of the primary responsibilities is searching and establishment partnerships towards entrance onto the new exporting markets. The marketing communication department is responsible for the search, creation, and appliance of different online and offline marketing tools in order to create university awareness, attract new leads and increase the number of applicants. The educational programs department is responsible for the development and improvement of education programs that can be exported. All three departments work in close cooperation with each other, but the International Office has the main right during approving new ways of marketing strategy.

Sometimes, the duty of search of the new partners can be divided among academic staff since all of the university academic staff has good international networking which provides additional benefits during new partner's search. Moreover, new

partnerships formed during university tours which are conducted by the international department for potential customers that's are interested in finishing educational institutions. Nowadays, university tours are conducted only on a paid basis.

## **6.2 Quantitative approach: online survey**

The survey was conducted in order to collect information on the opinions of Ukrainian students on the Finnish educational market. The information collected from the survey (Appendix 1) participants contained requests, presupposition, and level of awareness of the Finnish educational market. There were 79 total respondents, all of the respondents were Ukrainian residents, who study in vocational college or university in Ukraine. Only the Ukrainian respondents participated in the survey in order to receive a cogent and trustworthy outcome.

### **6.2.1 Demographics**

Among 79 respondents, 42 were male and 37 were female. 27 people out of everyone who answered the questionnaire were under 18 years old, 41 people were from 18 to 21 years old, and 11 respondents were older than 25. This age gap can be explained by the fact that the respondents were a student of educational establishments of different levels, the usual age of the students of the vocational college in Ukraine is between 15 and 19 years old, and university students are usually 17 and older at the moment of entering the university.



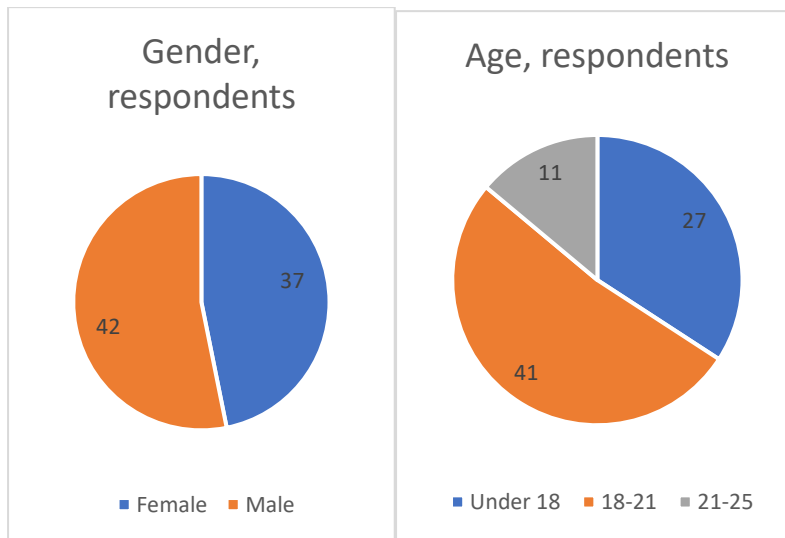


Figure 8. Gender and age distribution of the recipients

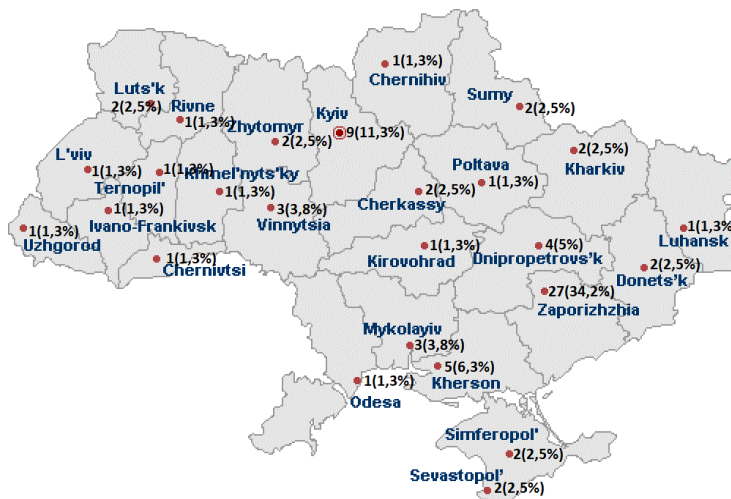


Figure 9. Home regions of the respondents.

According to the results of the questionnaire (Figure 9), residents from all the regions were represented in the survey. The biggest number of the respondents were from the Zaporizhzhya region and Kyiv region, this fact can be explained by the locations of one of the educational establishments students from which answered the questionnaire.

### 6.2.2 Intentions on getting the degree outside of Ukraine

Out of 79 respondents, only 22 were planning to continue their education. But, the majority of respondents were positive about going abroad in order to continue their education, which can indicate the interest of Ukrainian students not only in bachelor's degree but in work training and language courses. The information

about the interest of the respondents in the different study programs in Finland is presented in Figure 12. Only a minority of the respondents (22) expressed the readiness of considering Finland as a destination for continuing their studies, and the majority (59) expressed the intention to use the services of an agency (Figure 10).

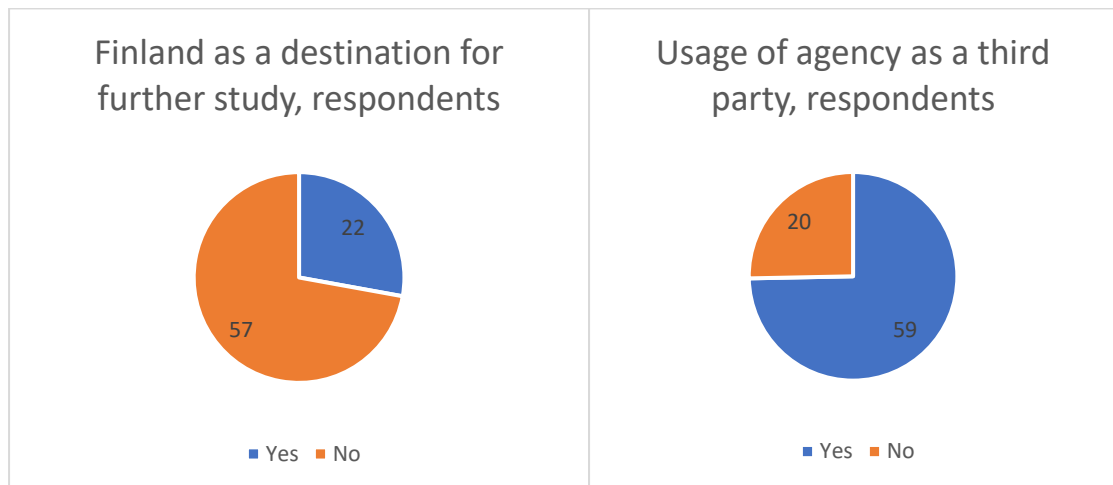


Figure 10. Consideration of Finland as a destination for continuing studies and usage of an agency

### 6.2.3 Awareness of the Finnish education market and expected advantages, disadvantages, and expenditure

The respondents' awareness of Finnish higher education is not high, the survey results showed that 45% of respondents were not aware of Finnish higher education, and almost a half of respondents who were not aware of Finnish higher education would have considered Finland if they were able to receive more information on the subject (Figure 11).

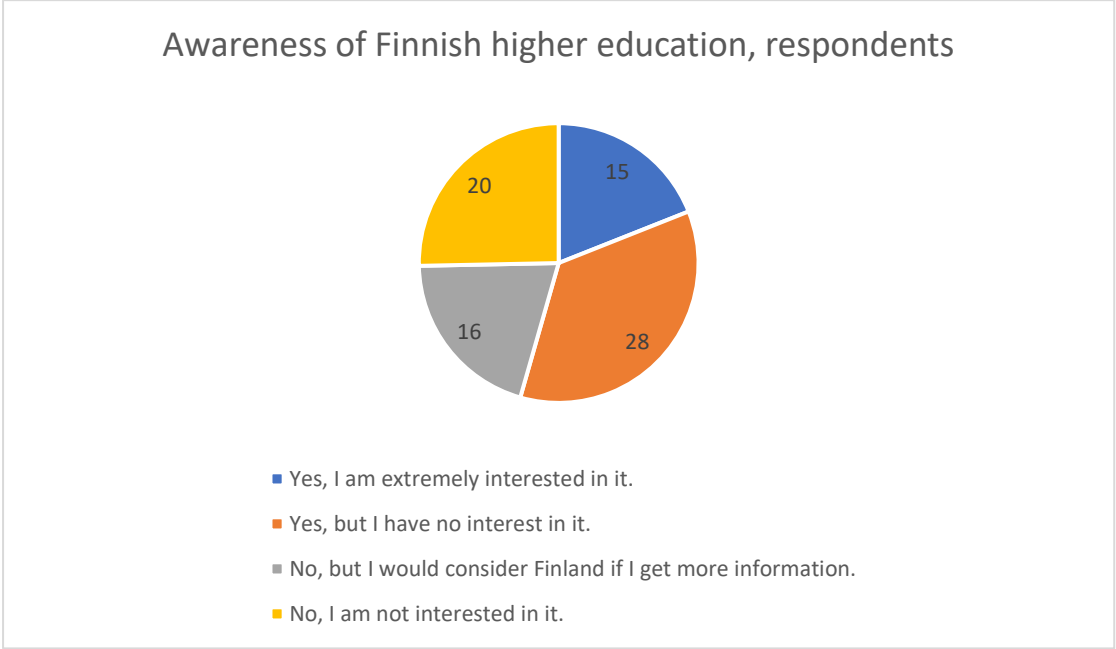


Figure 11. Awareness of Finnish higher education

While requesting information about the plans of the respondents on Finnish higher education, the respondents were asked not only about their interest in studies in Finland taught in English, but also about their interest in participating in studies taught in Finnish, language courses, and internships. That question was a multiple-choice question; the respondents were given an opportunity to express their interest in different kinds of studies in Finland (Figure 12). The majority of the respondents prefer full-time studies in English (80%), the second most popular study is language courses (42%). Also, respondents were less interested in full-time studies in the Finnish language (11%).

The kind of studies	Percentage of respondents interested,%
Full-time studies in Finland in English	80
Full-time studies in Finland in Finnish	11
Exchange studies in Finland	29
Part-time studies in Finland	27
Language courses in Finland	42
Internship in Finland	22

Figure 12. The interest of respondents in various kind of studies in Finland

Only 9% of the respondents were aware of the scholarships that were available when entering XAMK, the major percentage of respondents were not aware of the scholarships, e.g. Early Bird Scholarship that is available for XAMK students.

As for the awareness of Finnish higher education through the personal network, only 8% of respondents were acquainted with people who had studied in Finland, but the satisfaction rate of people who studied in Finland was very high.

The questionnaire was able to access the competitiveness of Finnish educational establishments among other foreign educational providers from the countries that were most popular among the Ukrainian students, those countries were Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, 38% assessed Finland “much lower”, 25% “lower”, 19% of respondents rated Finland as the “same” as other competitors. Moreover, 13% and 5% assessed Finland respectively as “higher” and “much higher” in comparison to other destinations of Ukrainian students.

Among the expected upsides of studying in Finland, the most mentioned were high-quality education and multicultural environment (51,9%), the least expected was “politically stable living conditions and immigration after the graduation” (25,3%) (Figure 13).

Advantage	Percentage of respondents that choose this option, %
High-quality education	51,9
Appropriate education system and policy	34,2
Innovative learning material	36,7
Multicultural environment	41,8
Affordable tuition fees and financial support	26,6
Politically stable living conditions and immigration after graduation	25,3

Figure 13. Expected upsides during studying in Finland

As for the disadvantages that the respondents expressed their concern about the biggest was “extreme weather” (49,4%) and solitariness (46,8%), which cannot be directly connected to the educational services, but the geographical location instead. The same issues could rely on another popular answer “geographical

issues”. Also, respondents admitted that costly fees (45,6%) can be a big downside during studies in Finland. A list of the results for all potential concerns is presented in Figure 14.

Concern	Percentage of the respondents answered,%
Costly fee (including tuition fees and living expenditures)	45,6
Extreme weather	49,4
Geographic issues (far from Ukraine)	20,3
Solitariness	46,8
Future career planning	26,6
Reputation of educational field	16,5

Figure 14. Expected downsides during studying in Finland

As tuition fees were introduced in 2017, one of the biggest concerns of the students surfaced. Since non-EU citizens are obliged to pay the tuition fee, the general level of expected expenditure can become one of the obstacles for many Ukrainian students entering Finnish Universities. Starting with the 2022 spring semester the tuition fee in XAMK will be increased from 6000 euros per academic year to 9700 per academic year. At least 26% of respondents can afford tuition fees in XAMK at the moment, and only 7% will be able to afford XAMK tuition fees after 2021.

#### **6.2.4 Possible tools of communication and impact**

Despite the high internet penetration rate, the variation of social media used by Ukrainian students is not very wide. The biggest social media use among the respondents is Facebook since 96% of respondents are active users of it. The runner-up is Instagram with 75% of users among respondents. All of the data concerning the usage of various social media platforms among the survey respondents are described in Figure 15.

Social media platforms used by respondents	Percentage of the respondents answered, %
Facebook	96,2
Instagram	74,7
Tiktok	64,6
Llkee	32,9
Linkdn	17,7
Pinterest	26,6

Figure 15. Social media platforms used by respondents

As for the possible digital marketing tools, the most preferred among the list of offered options was “advertisement post by an influencer”, since 47% of respondents voted for it. Almost the same number of respondents (43%) voted for a targeted advertisement post. Only 10% of respondents choose newsletter as a digital marketing tool of their choice.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Conclusions based on results and development ideas**

Based on the thesis research conducted that was described above certain conclusions can be drawn.

First of all, the main aim of the university is to double the number of its full-time international students from 425 to 850 by the year 2023. This should be achieved by performing marketing campaigns using various marketing tools, both offline and online. The existing digital marketing tools include newsletters and campaigns on online educational platforms. As for the offline marketing activities: promotional trips, cooperation with educational agencies, and educational fairs can be named. In comparison to offline marketing activities, online marketing activities have a high capacity to generate numerous potential leads with lower monetary expenses. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online marketing events have become the most promising, since they are not limited by the location and do not hold any potential risks for the XAMK employees who represent the university on such events, which is very valuable for the marketing campaigns in the nearest future. The university is now mostly focused on Asian and Eastern

European countries. Since 2017 when the tuition fees were introduced in XAMK, the focus on the potential applicants shifted from the most academically successful to the academically successful applicants that were able to cover their living expenditure and tuition fee.

According to the information received from the online survey, the preferable digital marketing tools in order to reach the potential leads in Ukraine are advertisements on social networking platforms, since only 10% of the respondents stated the newsletter as the digital marketing tool of their choice. As the majority of the students expressed their trust in advertisement posts by influencers and communities followed by them. Among the Ukrainian influencers the age of the target audience of whom is the same as the respondents of the survey, following influencers can be named: Sasha Pustovit with 2 millions of followers (Sashaabo on Instagram), Kateryna Yakymchuk with 1.3 million on followers (tatingkate on Instagram), Tetyana Samburska with 1.6 million followers (\_samburska on Instagram), Kristina Khrypta with 1,5 million followers (Kristina\_sharkadi on Instagram). Most of the mentioned above social media influencers have the biggest following on Instagram and TikTok, since Facebook (a platform that was the most popular among the respondents of the survey) is mostly used as a source of the news updates and as a messenger, which allows us to conclude that on the Facebook the most efficient digital marketing tool would be targeted post since it can be addressed to the target group of XAMK.

In addition, 28% of respondents stated that they would consider Finland as a destination for getting higher education, it can be stated that the Finnish education system has a low level of awareness in Ukraine. Because of this, the results of the marketing campaign can be achieved only in the long run, no short-term goals could be connected to the real lead generation from the Ukrainian market.

Since only 9% of the survey respondents were aware of the scholarships that are available during the studies in XAMK, promotion of the scholarships can be an additional component of the marketing campaign that could attract a bigger number of potential leads and increase the awareness of the university among the Ukrainian applicants in general.

Since 42% of the survey respondents are interested in language courses in Finland, XAMK could consider providing Finnish language courses for the international students online and offline, which can increase the awareness of the Finnish educational system in general and XAMK in particular among the Ukrainian students. Also, language courses can be a basis for full-time studies in Finnish, in which 11% of respondents expressed their interest.

Moreover, the “politically stable living conditions and immigration after graduation” was the least popular expected advantage among the respondents, XAMK could provide more information on further employment with a focus on advantages of Finnish degree in comparison to the degree in countries that are popular destinations to get higher education abroad among the Ukrainian students (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova).

In addition, solitariness was named as one of the biggest concerns among the Ukrainian prospects, also the limited entertainment options in cities where XAMK campuses are situated were mentioned in chapter 4. This can create room for improvement for XAMK. These improvements could be the creation of additional entertainment events for students, as well as extracurricular education activities for the students.

One of the tools that could be potentially useful in Ukraine is the usage of educational agencies since 75% of the respondents stated that they would use the services of the agency when applying to enter university abroad. Among the most popular educational agencies that act as the third party between the applicants from Ukraine and universities abroad, these agencies can be named: [edusteps.com.ua](http://edusteps.com.ua), [osvita.ua](http://osvita.ua), [proekt-obk.com](http://proekt-obk.com).

## **7.2 Reliability and validity considerations**

Reliability and validity are concepts that the author uses in order to evaluate the research quality. The validity assesses the precision and firmness of the tools that were used during the research. In addition, validity substantiates if the author was conducting the research according to the guidelines of the selected method (White, 2000). In order to confirm the validity of this thesis, two main data were collected and analyzed: primary data and secondary data. Primary data was



sourced from the interviews and survey, the secondary data was sourced from the literature review of academic books, articles of scientific journals. The literature review was mostly focused on the research target and was conducted on the basis of up-to-date sources. Also, the validity could be achieved by the constant cooperation with the thesis supervisor, who guided the conduction of the research and achievement of the goals of the thesis.

The reliability of the thesis assesses the stability of the research. The stability of the research of the thesis is based on the fact that the research tools of this thesis were used numerous times during similar researches and provided trustworthy results, which can guarantee the reliability of the current research.

### **7.3 Limitations and recommendations for future study**

The main limitation that can be included in this subchapter is the inability of releasing certain information about XAMK operations to the student. This information could give a wider angle on the current operations of XAMK and could be a basis on recommendations on improvement of XAMK marketing activities and choice of digital marketing tools and their further implementation.

In future, the similar research can be conducted with a focus on the comparison of the effectiveness of traditional marketing tools and digital marketing tools. The future analysis and comparison can provide additional insights on the usage of traditional and digital marketing tools this can be efficient in generating potential customers for XAMK. The respondents of a similar survey can be formed from the students of the high schools of the target markets since they also can be included in the useful potential prospects for XAMK. Also, the target group of the survey can reflect on examples of possible marketing activities by XAMK, and this way the most successful marketing activity can be determined.

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## **APPENDICES**

### Appendix 1. Survey

1.How old are you?

a)Under 18

b)18-21

c)21-25 d)older than 25

2.Are you male or female?

a)male b)female c)not ready to answer

3.What is your home region?

a)Autonomous Republic of Crimea

b)Cherkasy Region

c)Chernihiv Region

d)Chernivtsi Region

e)Dnipropetrovs'k Region

f)Donets'k Region

g)Ivano-Frankivs'k Region

h)Kharkiv Region

i)Kherson Region

j)Khmelnysky Region

k)Kirovograd Region

l)Kyiv Region

m)Luhans'k Region

n)Lviv Region

o)Mykolayiv Region

- p)Odesa Region
- q)Poltava Region
- r)Rivne Region
- s)Sumy Region
- t)Ternopil Region
- u)Vinnitsya Region
- v)Volyn region
- w)Zakarpattya Region
- x)Zaporizhzhya Region
- y)Zhytomyr Region
- z)Sevastopol
- z1)Kyiv

4.Are you planning to get a |Bachelor's Degree/second Bachelor's Degree?

- a)Yes
- b)No

5.Would you consider going abroad to continue your education?

- a)Yes
- b)No

6.Would you consider Finland as a destination for continuing your studies?

- a)Yes
- b)No

7.Are you aware of Finnish higher education?

- a) Yes, I am extremely interested in it.
- b) Yes, but I have no interest in it.

c) No, but I would consider Finland if I get more information.

d) No, I am not interested in it.

8. What study program would you be most interested in? (Choose 1 or more answers)

a) Full-time studies in Finland in English

b) Full-time studies in Finland in Finnish

c) Exchange studies in Finland

d) Part-time studies in Finland

e) Language courses in Finland

f) Internship in Finland

9. Do you know anyone who studied in Finland / studies there at the moment?

a) Yes. What is their opinion on their studies and overall impression? Please rate from 1 to 5, where 1: Very dissatisfied 3: Neutral 5: Very satisfied

b) No

10. Please assess the competitiveness level of Finnish education providers in comparison with other foreign leading education providers in Ukraine (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova).

a) Much lower

b) Lower

c) The same

d) Higher

e) Much higher

11. What would you expect from educational establishment in Finland? (Choose 1 or more answers)

a) High quality education

b) Appropriate education system and policy



- c) Innovative learning material
- d) Multicultural environment
- e) Affordable tuition fees and financial support
- f) Politically stable living condition and immigration after graduation

12. What are the disadvantages of studying in Finland are you most concerned about? (Choose 1 or more answers)

- a) Costly fee (including tuition fees and living expenditures)
- b) Extreme weather
- c) Geographic issues (far from Ukraine)
- d) Solitariness
- e) Future career planning
- f) Reputation of educational field

13. How much are you willing to spend on tuition fees per academic year? (Scholarship excluded)

- a) Less than 4,000 EUR
- b) 4,000 – 6,000 EUR
- c) 6,000 – 8,000 EUR
- d) 8,000 – 10,000 EUR
- e) More than 10,000 EUR

14. Which social media are you most frequent user of? (Choose 1 or more answers)

- a) Facebook
- b) Instagram
- c) TikTok
- d) Likee

e)Linkdn

f)Pinterest

15)What kind of social media advertisements are most acceptable for you?

a)Targeted posts

b)Ad post by followed influencers or communities

c)Newsletter

16)Would you consider using an agent while applying to study abroad?

a)Yes

b)No

17)Are you aware of scholarships that are available to apply while studying in Finland?

a)Yes

b)No