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Market Mapping Central European Universities : How Universities Are Attracting High School Students



**KAMK • University
of Applied Sciences**

Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration (BBA)

Spring 2022



**KAMK • University
of Applied Sciences**

Abstract

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Title of the Publication: Central Europe University market mapping: How the universities are attracting the high school students

Degree Title: Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business

Keywords: university, market mapping, benchmarking, social media

This thesis was conducted as a part of my Bachelor of Business Administration degree at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences. The research aimed to create an international marketing plan for the commissioning party – Kajaani University of Applied Sciences and conduct interviews with students who have experience of studying in Central European countries to better understand the local market in Central Europe for education.

The ultimate goal of the international marketing plan would be to obtain enrollments from Central European countries, with a focus on countries such as Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. The marketing plan includes procedures for short- and long-term marketing goals and solutions for attracting international students.

Foreword

It was a long way, until this point, it is hard to believe, and I would like to use these next few sentences to show my gratitude.

I thank my family who supported me with unconditional love and generosity during this process. Special thanks to Kirsi Sievers and my thesis supervisor Janus Pitkänen. For their patience and ability to answer my questions anytime I needed, and endless guidance. It was a great experience to be part of this school for three and a half years.

List of Abbreviations

KAMK	Kajaani University of Applied Sciences
UAS	University of Applied Sciences
HES	High Education Institution
EU	European Union
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation Development
EEA	European Economic Area
UNIZA	Žilina University

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1 Introduction

The thesis focuses on Central European countries, how universities in those countries are using their know-how to attract national students, but more importantly on international students or students who decided to study English degrees, and not in their home countries. We will study why students from countries such as the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, and Germany are willing to study abroad.

1.1 About Kajaani University of Applied Sciences

The Kajaani University of Applied Sciences or short KAMK was established in the year 1992, and it was one of the universities which obtained a permanent status to teach in Finland. It is important to add that only six years after establishing themselves as a university, they started to offer degree programs taught in English. (KAMK, 2020) KAMK in total currently has three schools, two of which offer programmes taught in the national language – Finnish. These schools include programs for engineers, data science/IT, the game development industry, the mining industry, and nurses.

The School of Business offers studies in English, and we can split these studies based on the level: Bachelor and Master. There are four Bachelor's degrees offered at KAMK such as International Business, Sports and Leisure Management, Tourism, and Esports Business. The only master's degree offered at KAMK is in International Business Management. The Bachelor's degree can be studied at KAMK also part-time, and around 700 people are using this option according to vipunen.fi in 2021. The total number of students in programmes taught in the Finnish language in the academic year of 2020/2021 was over three thousand students while almost one hundred sixty thousand students are attending universities of applied sciences in Finland. (Vipunen, 2021) The number of international students in universities of applied sciences in Finland from the year 2001 until this day is higher than thirty thousand, meanwhile, nearly three hundred fifty students came to KAMK from EU/EEA. (Figure 1) Approximately one percent of all international students who came from EU/EEA countries to Finland studied at KAMK.

	New students	Students		New students	Students
2001	231	828	2001		1-4
2002	303	888	2002	1-4	6
2003	321	989	2003	1-4	1-4
2004	309	1,023	2004	1-4	6
2005	330	1,041	2005	1-4	9
2006	327	1,113	2006	6	9
2007	261	1,065	2007	1-4	12
2008	294	1,074	2008	1-4	12
2009	363	1,122	2009	1-4	6
2010	438	1,368	2010	12	24
2011	498	1,590	2011	1-4	18
2012	450	1,734	2012	9	24
2013	498	1,833	2013	1-4	18
2014	474	1,857	2014	6	18
2015	507	1,884	2015	9	18
2016	492	1,839	2016	9	21
2017	699	1,983	2017	12	30
2018	681	2,124	2018	9	30
2019	711	2,268	2019	18	36
2020	828	2,496	2020	12	42
Total	9,018	30,102	Total	129	339

Figure 1 – Number of international students in Finland and KAMK through years 2001-2020

1.2 Background for education in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Germany

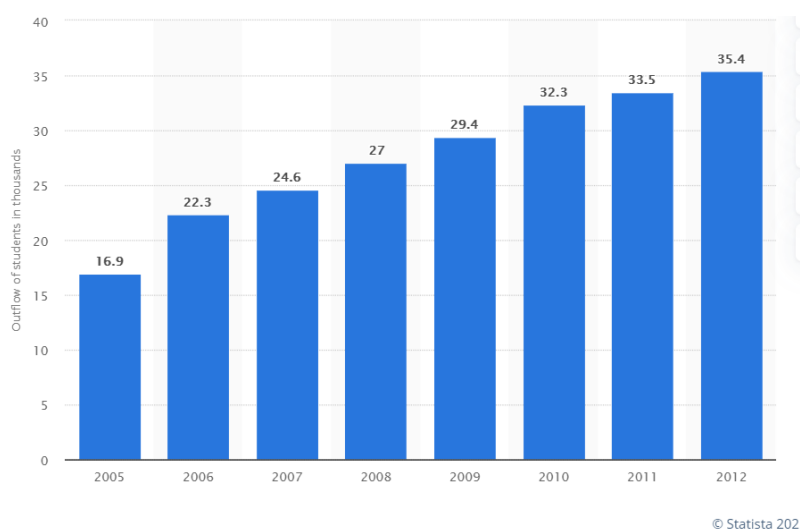
In order to better understand students, brief information will be provided on the three states where the mapped universities are located. Figures are provided at the end of the presentation of each country to see how many students chose to study abroad in the EU or EEA from the selected Central European countries between the years 2005 and 2012. It can be seen that the trend of students studying abroad was increasing even after 2012 and most of the time there were increasing values each year. (Eurostat, 2020). According to a survey conducted by an agency from Czechia, SCIO18, students choose universities abroad based on the quality of the education. (Zuzana Petková, 2017). State universities offer degree programs for people from EU/EEA students for free, but it might be different in private universities and sometimes a fee is required when studying in a foreign language. (StudyIn, 2017)

1.2.1 Slovakia

It is general knowledge that Slovakia gives less from GDP to education than other OECD countries. (Zuzana Petková, 2017). According to the statistics, more than thirty thousand students from Slovakia study abroad and more than ten thousand from the Czech Republic. (Statista, 2021) One of the top countries where Slovak high school graduates are going to after finishing their studies is the Czech Republic. This is because of the relationship in the past, collateral agreements, language similarities between the two countries but interestingly the second most popular destination for

Slovak graduates is Denmark. (Roman Hutira, 2019). From Figure 2, it can be observed that students in Slovakia want to study abroad more often. In 2018, there were sixteen European Union states where a majority of the tertiary graduates from abroad originated from Europe, with this share, Slovakia achieves a large percentage of 93.1 %. (Eurostat, 2020)

Figure 2 Slovakia: university students to European countries (Statista, 2012)



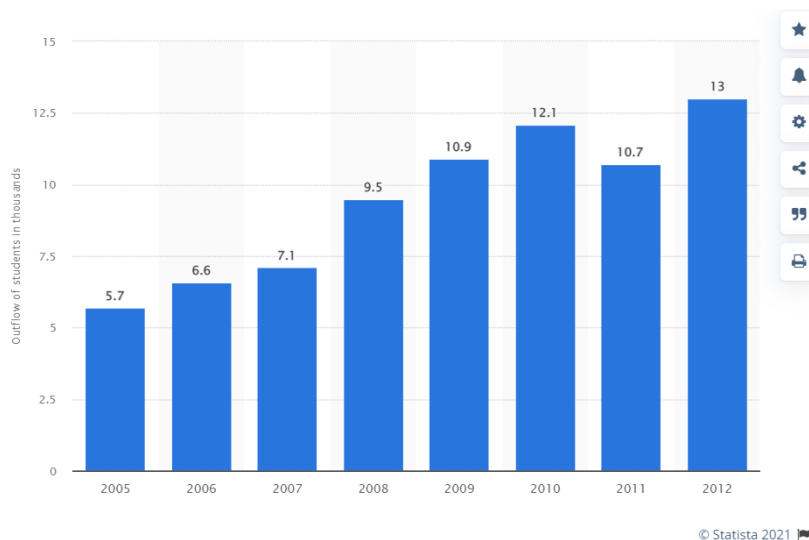
Since KAMK does not have any partnership university in Slovakia for international degrees, Žilina University was chosen because of similarities between a Finnish university of applied sciences and a Slovak university. The similarities consist of the area of the university and the degrees offered for international degree students.

1.2.2 Czech Republic

The number of students in the Czech Republic who are studying a full degree outside their country is around ten thousand people. (Statista, 2021). Even though the Czech Republic has more than double the population of Slovakia, many brains of today's world are staying inside their home country. According to the Director of Masaryk University in Brno, M. Bék, schools in the Czech Republic have a better functioning system than in Slovakia which resulted in a migration of students to the Czech Republic from Slovakia. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are no exception to student migration. Universities in both countries have two semesters: winter and summer semester. The winter semester usually starts at the end of September and ends in February. Directors

of the university have the right to decide when the semester starts, therefore there are no specific dates across the country to begin a new semester at the university.

Figure 3 Czech Republic: university students to European countries (Statista, 2012)

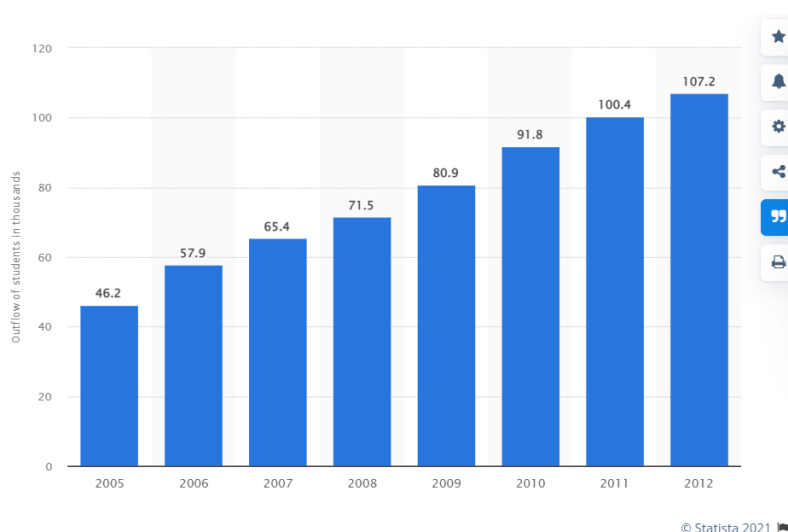


In this thesis, the social media of the University of Ostrava will be analysed. The University of Ostrava is one of the partner universities of KAMK, therefore they have some correlations such as the population of students at the university, a similar approach of teachers, utilities of the university, and study offerings.

1.2.3 Germany

German universities are considered one of the best in the world, but they are hardly seen in the global rankings. (Labi, 2006) With a large number of people living in Germany, it will not come as a surprise that Germany ranks in the top 5 of countries, where students choose to study abroad. More than one hundred thousand Germans choose to study abroad every year. (WordAtlas, 2021) Germany is well known for its study portfolio mostly in engineering, manufacturing, or construction. As education is different between countries, also the length of studies may differ between countries. The winter semester in Germany starts on 1 October and ends at the end of March. The summer semester starts on 1 April and ends on 30 September. (Jana Schieweck, 2021). In table 4, there is a visual representation of how many students have studied abroad from 2005 until the year 2012.

Figure 4 Germany: university students to European countries (Statista, 2012)



German universities that will be analyzed as part of the thesis are KAMK's partnership universities: Harz University and Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt. Both universities are universities of applied sciences, focusing more on the practical side of the studies for their students. The number of students in these universities can be comparable to the number of students at KAMK.

1.3 Problem Statement

People from different parts of the world can study on the totally opposite side of the world, as has been seen during the pandemic; people have been studying and working from home. Most people who applying to universities choose their school for the quality of education, future possibilities within the region they study , or at least in the country where studies took place. One of the reasons why people also want to study at a certain university is to experience the university culture, meet new people. What Finland can improve is to bring more international students to Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences, and especially what KAMK can do is to attract students from different corners of the world.

In the thesis, the problem of lacking international students in the Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK) classrooms will be tackled and how new students can be brought to KAMK, when the education industry is very competitive with high quality universities. The aim of the thesis was to answer what are the reasons by which high schoolers, or their parents choose their next step in life – university. The main research questions will be studied: what type of marketing should KAMK use in marketing in order to attract international students, what are the social media

channels for KAMK to be in? Personalization of ads based on age, is that a good idea? If so what platforms? How Slovak / German / Czech universities promote themselves that KAMK can copy? How can KAMK connect with higher education institutions?

1.4 The objective of the thesis

The objective is to bring a new perspective to the commissioning party – Kajaani University of Applied Sciences about the student market in Czech, Slovakia, and Germany such as understanding students' wants, needs, and decision making in the mentioned countries. Social media which will be studied in this research will be Instagram and Facebook. In addition, schools' marketing strategy for Tiktok and Youtube will be presented. To receive a better perspective on the lives of high schoolers in the selected countries, interviews will be conducted with people from the selected countries.

If applicable, the emphasis will be on degrees such Sports and Leisure Management & Esport Business as the commissioning party see these degrees with the most potential as something special and not very common in other universities or universities of applied sciences.

Deeper problems will be described such as the location of the studying places, student statistics, recommendation for KAMK social media channels, showing strengths and weaknesses by implying SWOT model and providing an outlook what are the benefits and disadvantages of studying at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences in Finland. Last year, a worldwide pandemic happened, which affected many sectors in the world, including education. Therefore, there will be provided a perspective on how pandemics changed the way how people study nowadays and what impact it creates on educational institutions.

2 Theoretical framework

In the theoretical background, the thesis will be built on three main stages. The first stage is about students and their reasons why they want to study abroad. The second stage will bring a theoretical foundation for social media platforms and how they are operating. The last stage will deliver the theory behind assessing the commissioning party – KAMK, and the theory supporting a benchmarking/marketing strategy which can be later found in the next chapters of the thesis. For the theoretical framework, data will be gathered from secondary sources such as books, journals, in other words, secondary sources are created for someone who did not participate in the project.

2.1 Reasons for studying abroad

There were many discussions in the past how the university should approach students in order to make students to fill out application forms for their degree programme. After graduation, the number of students who go back to their home country and people who stay after graduation differs. Between students, there are considerable differences based on gender and race as well as an expectation about the earnings after graduating from school. (Montmarquette, Cannings, Mahseredjian, 2002) Some countries have conducted studies about international students' attraction and retention (Leiškalne et al., 2018)

Studying abroad can mean in the future better connections or larger possibilities of finding a job; they might enjoy work in the field of their interest based on what they are studying. (Sojkin, 2012) Generally speaking, men are interested in education with career possibilities after graduation meanwhile women are more inclining to study because they genuinely like the subject and want to make an impact in the area of study. (Skatova, Ferguson, 2014) Deciding to study abroad is not an easy choice, luckily in Finland countries from European Union are not obligated to pay any tuition fees but for some families that can be a factor which they need to consider, especially from countries such as Slovakia and the Czech Republic since their monthly income is significantly lower than in Germany. The experience from abroad cannot be valued by money (Školsky Portal, 2019). A student wants to travel, experience different cultures, and be more autonomous. Before deciding which school the student should apply to, money plays a big role. Therefore, while attracting a student with a personal advertisement, one needs to consider using this strategy to persuade the parents as well, since they will be the ones who will most likely pay the expenses,

such as rent, food, basic needs of their child at least for some months until he/she will find a job or some way to earn more money in the new environment. A higher level of education can bring possibilities in the future when applying for jobs. As mentioned before, there are different types of people, and for some, experiencing the university culture is enough. After a while, they do not see the benefits for themselves and might drop out.

It is not secret for marketers or salespeople that their product is only as good as their skills to sell it. Marketing knowledge is packed and sold as a commodity. (Holbrook, 1995) The first contact is very important, marketing blended into many industries. Nowadays, patients, students, basically anyone can be recognized as a consumer. (Hackley, 2009) University reputation is more important for parents than for children. The reputation of the university can be seen from multiple angles such as the reputation of the alumni, current students who are attending the school, ranking of the school, and employability. All have been students at some point in our lives, and sometimes stigmas are true; most of the times students are poor and are living from month to month. For that reason, students are looking for universities, or states in this case, since KAMK is free for EEA/EU students, if the state has some programs to help the students and how is it with working conditions, . This aid could be also gained in Finland and Denmark. If the conditions are met, Denmark can pay around ¼ of thousand euros per month for students (Hutira, 2019)

No.	Items	Determinants
1.	Choice of pursuing higher education	(a) Student – the type of life, (b) professional advancement, (c) family opinion and expectation, (d) family's financial support (e) job qualification
2.	Choice of university	(a) Marketing efforts (b) professional development (c) university tradition (d) courses offered (d) university reputation (e) accessibility of financial aid

Table 1 Factors determining decisions on pursuing a university education (Sojkin, 2012)

2.2 Social media platforms

The second part of the theoretical background is about social media platforms, where are the best places for the commissioning party to attract the students. The aim is to discover what apps

students use nowadays. If there are some new platforms, how we should act on them, what type of behavior can bring us the likes, comments, engagement, interactions, and possibly inviting new students to attempt to study at Kajaani University of Applied sciences in Finland. This second part will be connected with other Universities of Applied sciences and how our close competitors are doing their advertisements, of course, as KAMK, we cannot compare a small University of Applied Sciences with Yale or Stanford, therefore, we need to find universities with the approximately same size and similar fields to have the best examples for comparison. In the research, bigger universities will be excluded due to the reason stated above but the primary research will be conducted on the Universities which are offering English-taught programs.

Social media can be understood as two-way communication between users. Users can create and share content on these specific networks in order to update their followers on what is going on in their lives. The updates can be in form of pictures, videos, music clips, status, memories. (Karlíček, Král, 2011). According to Shanid (2019) consumers are engaging in ways of liking, commenting in order to express their views. In the six-year time from 2013 to 2019, the use of social media increased more than double, and now almost every second company is using social media for marketing purposes. (Eurostat, 2019)

The Covid-19 arrived in Europe around March 2020, without a doubt, it changed the way how people lived their lives, especially in the education sector, where students were pushed to follow the classes from their homes. On average young people are spending almost an hour per day more online than before the pandemic. (Vivadu, 2020) Smartphones are part of our lives, and every seven out of ten person in Slovakia prefers using a smartphone to engage online. For Czechs, it is the opposite, according to StatCounter, still, majority of people are using desktop pc over a mobile phone. There was a small difference between device usage in Germany, but the desktop computer was in the first place.

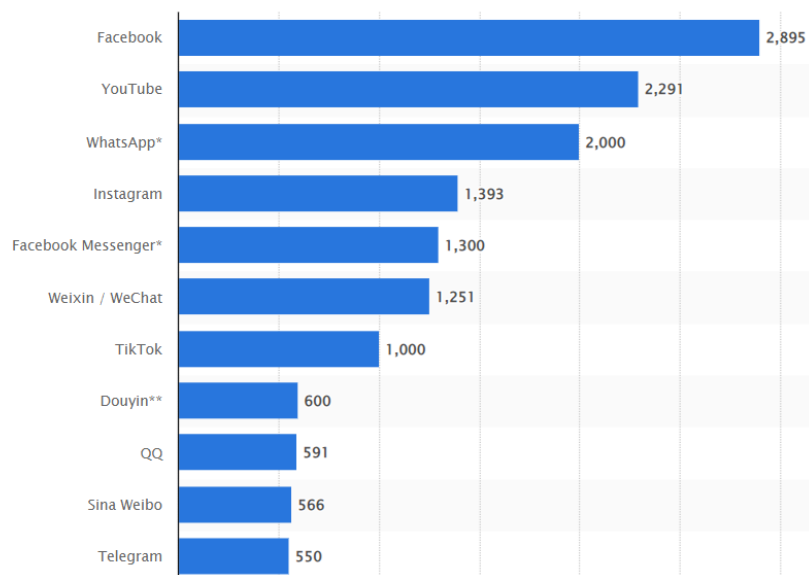
Company Meta is owning the three biggest social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Figure 5). Facebook is social media platform on which users can share their pictures, memories, and get easily in touch with their friends. Instagram is a simplified version of Facebook with an emphasis on mobile phone users. On both of these platforms' users need to be more than 13 years old and verify their identity with an email address. According to StatCounter at least 75 percent of people in Germany, Slovakia and Czechia are using Facebook as their top channel. This includes all devices and all age groups. To put it into the perspective of numbers, Facebook is welcoming over four hundred users every month from all European countries. (Statista, 2021). Our main focus group on social media is people who are 16 to 18 years old or parents of these

kids. (Sehl, 2021) WhatsApp by Meta is used primarily for work relations, in the past people were exchanging business cards but nowadays is more professional to exchange phone numbers. Due to the reason that WhatsApp is primarily social media where you talk one on one or talk in private groups, it will be not compared in this paper.

TikTok was launched as a short-form video sharing platform, primarily for lip-syncing and dancing videos, TikTok has grown into a fully-fledged video service, with content available for all types of viewers. (Iqbal, 2021) Currently, in 2021, TikTok is averaging one billion monthly users worldwide and one hundred million in Europe.

YouTube is a free video-sharing website on which is very easy to set up an account and upload videos made by yourself. Youtube's overall rank in social media platforms is second, (Table) even though it has a different function than Facebook for example. These platforms support creative people to share their ideas and large audiences. The usage of YouTube is more than twice compared as TikTok. The length of videos differs on many variables, but mostly young people like to watch videos that are a bit longer than 10 minutes. (Vivadu, 2020)

Figure 5 Most popular social networks worldwide, ranked by number of active users (Statista, Oct 2021)



2.3 Marketing plan theory

There has been developed a globally competitive environment, where the decreasing number of student enrolments and reduced income, due to decreasing government support, makes

education institutions look for additional financial funding elsewhere, to ensure their survival and competitive potential. (Oliveira, Figueira, 2015) According to Malcolm McDonald, one of many positives of creating a marketing plan is the ability to react to change, an organized way to detect rising opportunities and threats, and making communication better across the company. (McDonald, 2006) According to the Independent School Management, when people are going to your campus, they are already almost sure where they want to study but they want to hear if the things that are preached on social media are true.

By using the ten steps of the strategic marketing planning process scheme, we will be able to increase advantages, and balance in long run. These ten steps come in four phases from establishing your goal, through reviewing on a decided basis, up to formulating the strategy clearly across the fields, and knowing how to allocate enough funds into the project. The most important part of every single project is to know what you want to achieve, set your boundaries, create a goal. If people understand the goal of the project, then they will know what the team will do, might do, or never do. Corporate objectives include return on investment, funding, how many people are working on this project, and what social image this project is bringing.

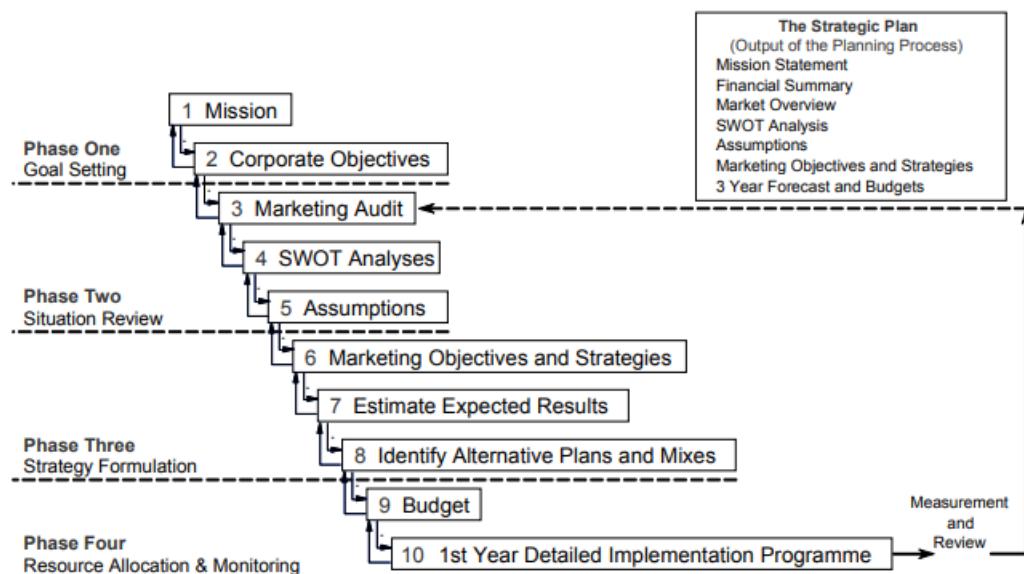


Table 2 The ten steps of strategic marketing planning

After we set up our goal's framework, we will continue in phase two which consists of tasks to review the situations. A marketing audit will state all the external and internal forces within the project, map the market, where we are operating into deep length. SWOT Analysis will be described separately later in this chapter. When we are looking back at our plan after six months, one year, assumptions will provide us a perspective, on how we were thinking the market will

move. An objective is what you want to achieve. A strategy is how you plan to achieve your objectives. (McDonald, 2006) We can apply the theory of the four Ps here. Product, price, place, and promotion. For the school the product is to provide a learning experience to students, the price for EU/EEA students is in principle zero. (Not including rent, health, food, and much other necessary expenditures) One of the last steps of marketing planning is the company budget. After everything is written down, tested, put into practice, we will have an implication program set for the specific number of months or years, depending on each case after the period is done, we need to review it and see if, the results are according to the predictions if company is losing money.

2.3.1 SWOT Analysis

To analyze Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, we will be using SWOT analysis to provide strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. After analyzing these, we will know better how we can personalize our ads, and marketing efforts.

SWOT analysis is a simple, straightforward model that provides guidance and is helping to put fundamental information as a basis for the development of marketing plans. SWOT analyses enable to identify organization's core capabilities such as potential strengths and utilizing those in exploiting opportunities and counteracting threats. (Razzaq, 2013) It accomplishes this by determining an organization's strengths (what a company can do) and weaknesses (what a company is not able to do) in addition to opportunities (possible favorable circumstances for an organization) and threats (possible unfavorable circumstances for an organization). (Danca, 2013)

The strengths and weaknesses are internal factors. These factors can affect the business positively or negatively such as shortage of labor, company debt, or advanced technology. Strengths need to be realistic, in order to assess the best from the company. When answering questions, the focus needs to be put also on the customer perspective. The questions for SWOT analysis, are simple and easy to understand. The goal is to answer what our company can do better than the competitor. The weaknesses can be discovered by customer-related analysis. Even if these weaknesses can be seen as minor first, they will create a larger problem when the time will pass by.

Opportunities and threats are part of the external factors such as the industry company is competing in, culture, political environment or legislation. (Danca, 2013). Employees of the company should have enough information to be able to make decisions when and how to reply to customers on social media. If the reply is inadequate, it might create an impression that the

customer's message is unwanted. (Ramsay, 2010) Threats and opportunities are relying on gut feelings of the maker because hardly any person can predict future.

2.3.2 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is recognized as an essential tool for the continuous improvement of quality. One of the most important parts to not miss while doing social media marketing and setting up the goals for the future is an observation of well-supported continuous benchmarking procedures. Assessing a company's own work on social media against competitors in the most important business field is a top concern for organizations to twist social networks into business benefits. (Oliveira, Figueira, 2015) It is important to know what we are benchmarking and the industry we are in before, we will start to benchmark. Collecting data needs to be done with a strategy put in place, after data is collected and analyzed, we can find disparities. According to Oliveira and Figueira, there are seven important factors to look for when designing a strategy for social media marketing.

Table 3 Editorial model for the design of social media strategies High educational Institutions

Education	Research	Society	Identity	Administration	Relationship	Information
- Promotes higher education courses (educational offer)	- Informs on and / or calls for participation in: congresses, seminars and other scientific meetings	- Promotes / informs on organizational partnerships and contracts and patents, knowledge / technology transfer	- Institutional events (celebrations, awards and tributes, graduation ceremonies, etc.)	- Informs on deadlines and administrative processes	- Fosters conversation	- Streams external relevant information, news and regulations related to academic areas, political and societal issues (economic and social impact)
- Promotes complementary training (internal or external)	- Promotes / informs on internal and external research results / awards	- Promotes employability, streaming placement offers and career opportunities	- Students, faculty and staff honorable mentions	- Informs on procedures and admissions	- Requires opinions	- Introduces current internal, external, societal or academic issues propelling audience involvement
	- Promotes / informs on internal and external publications (papers, articles, books, proceedings, etc.)	- Promotes other organizations' initiatives / performance	- Institutional promotion, advertising (identity, image, reputation)	- Promotes and informs on support services (goals, contacts, working hours, etc.)	- Boosts emotional connection between organization and publics (greetings, humor, sympathy, motivation, etc.)	- Informs on recreational and cultural initiatives with no particular connection to schools' scientific areas (concerts, sports events, etc.)
		- Promotes demonstrations, exhibitions and showcases, conducted by students or faculty	- CSR initiatives			
			- Institutional clipping			
			- Participation / representation in fairs and exhibitions			

Observation is a method in which data is collected by observing a subject or people in order to avoid any bias during the collecting of information and follow-up evaluation. Observation is done participant natural space to avoid biases. (Cowie, 2009) In most cases, during observation, we need to have permission to do so. The structured observation method is collecting the data based

on the schedule or some regular intervals. Unstructured observation method will be used in order to acquire marketing information from specifically selected schools.

3 Methodology

For methodology, we will be using qualitative measurements, such as observation, documentation for social media marketing, and interviews of seven students who were on exchange at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences and one high school graduate from Slovakia who decided to study abroad straight after completing his/her high school studies. Everything will be afterwards analyzed with an inductive approach.

From the research were excluded universities from the capital's cities such as Prague, Bratislava, Berlin, and cities with a larger population than one million inhabitants since the comparison between these universities of Applied Sciences and KAMK, will give us no real data nor perspective how these universities are attracting their students through their marketing. Bigger cities or overpopulated areas provide bigger capacities for students, more studies offered overall, and therefore, a bigger budget which can be used in order to attract students through ads, campaigns, events. As an example, we can see data from the Czech Republic, how much universities in larger cities are dominating in a score, number of publications smaller universities, even though smaller universities are slowly establishing their ground. (Fiala, 2013)

For the marketing part and market mapping of the Universities, primary data will be collected from the population of four schools, two schools located in Germany one school for the Czech Republic, and one for Slovakia. In the Czech Republic school is located in the city of Ostrava where KAMK has a partnership with one of the universities. In Slovakia, the research will consist of analyzing international taught degrees of Žilina University and two universities from smaller cities in Germany – Harz and Ingolstadt. Secondary data will be used in addition to the primary data because not all the schools wanted to participate. Important secondary sources are databases, articles, social media platforms where schools are active. For research to satisfy the needs of the commissioner party, it is important to mention, that the schools need to have International taught degrees programs in their offerings.

3.1 Data Protection

Data of all participants were one of the highest priorities during the research, interviews, analysis. For security reasons, data was transferred into a computer after interviews were conducted. Only

Microsoft OneDrive was used in case of backup since the author was traveling with a computer and there was the danger that the data will be lost. All the locations with data were protected by the security passwords. The data was anonymous, and readers are not able to recognize respondents by their answers. The data will be deleted once the thesis will be corrected by the teachers and submitted into the thesis portal. The permission from respondents to record was obtained before or at the beginning of the interview.

3.2 Analysis of the data

A recording app was used during the interviews to capture the voice of the respondents. After the interviews were finished, the recordings files were as soon as possible relocated into a computer, and the data was written into a Word document by hand. When the transcribed data was in a text form, the first step of analysis could start. Understanding the data as best as you can is the first step. Continuing by coding, selecting the general main points of the answers. Coding results gave us the foundation on which thematic research could start, and later on more prominent themes were formulated from the codes. After the initial themes were established, analyzing the suitability of the themes, and naming them followed. Finally, at the end of the thematic analysis, began the process of writing the final report. (Caulfield, 2019) The simplified version of thematic analysis can be found below:

1. Studying the research data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Locating themes
4. Analyzing the suitability of the themes
5. Naming the themes
6. Writing the research report. (Caulfield, 2019)

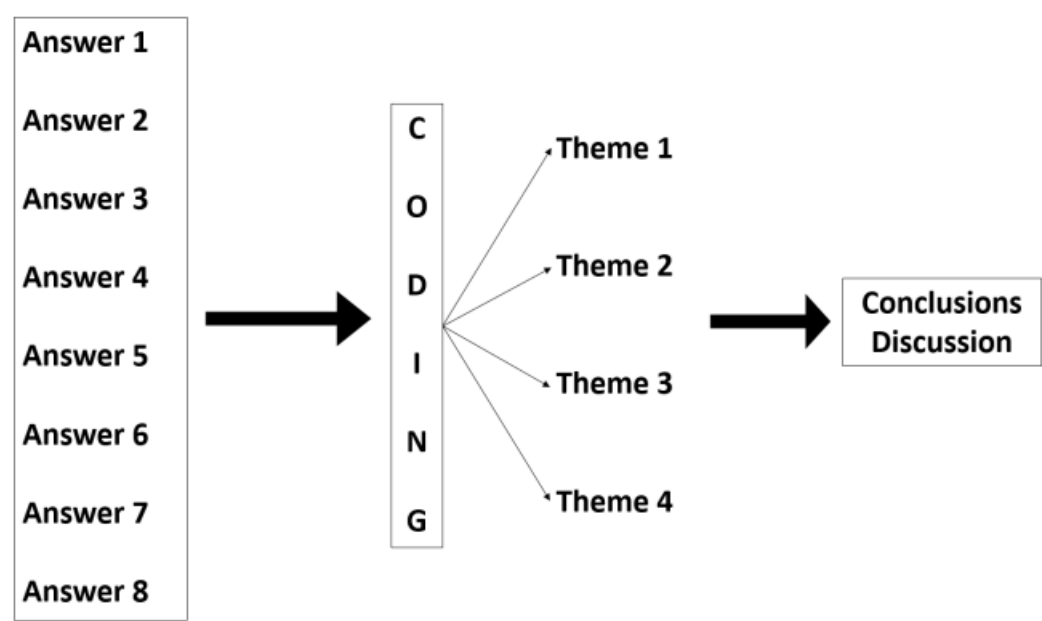


Table 4 The process of data analysis (Caulfield, 2019)

3.3 Sampling method

Purposive sampling was the method chosen for the research. Purposive sampling is a method, where a specific group of people or individuals is preferred in order to achieve the eligibility of the research. Convenience sampling methods were used considering the interviewees are in close connection to the author of the research. (McCombes 2020.)

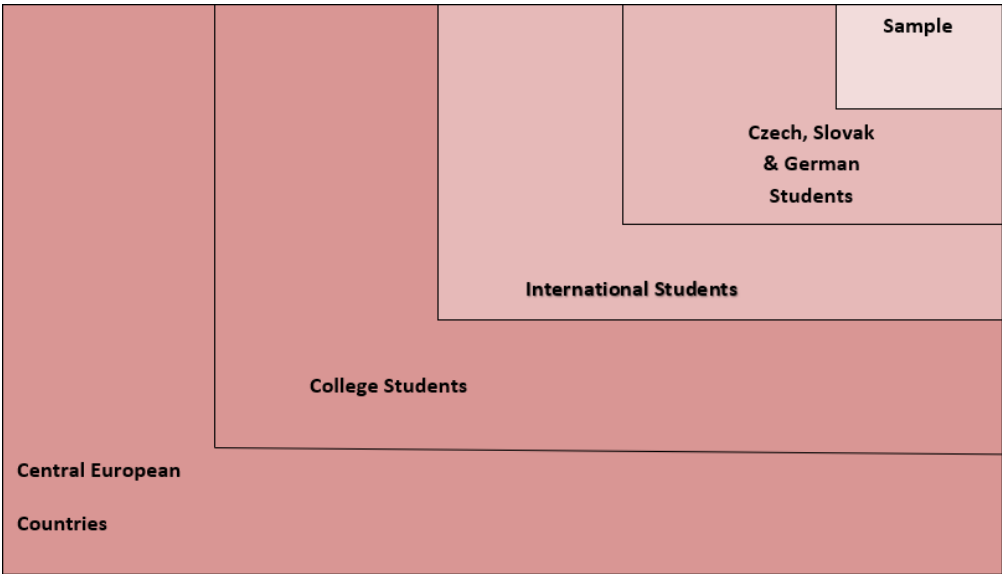


Table 5 Process of selecting the candidates for interview

3.4 Research Assessment

The research has been successful if the author will have research questions answered. Answers will provide new information which can be built upon on. From the respondent's answers opportunities for logical answers to make well-organized conclusions. Lastly, research aims will be achieved.

3.5 Reliability and validity

Due to the time conditions where students from chosen countries were not able to participate in the interviews, for personal or any other type of reasons, the final number of interviews is eight. It might be seen as a low number of respondents which might raise the risk of reliability of the thesis, but the author considers it as enough to do an assessment of themes in a proper manner. The questions used in the interview were used to produce in-depth answers from the participants.

Validity is how well the fundamental questions are answered before doing what they are supposed to answer. (Cureton, 1951) In terms of the validity of the research, the questions were constructed to be short and clear for participants in order to be understood as not all participants were fluent in the English language. Interviews were done in friendly environments, so the participants can feel at ease to prevent respondent bias. Respondent bias indicates diverse circumstances that can have influence the person who is being questioned. Bias can be accomplished on purpose or unintentionally. (Gene F. Summers, Andre D. Hammonds, 2016)

4 Research results

Results consist of the interview analysis with exchange students from European countries such as Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, and how they are obtaining information about universities of their interest. Following with examination of Kajaani University of Applied Sciences main social media channels and additionally comparing it with other schools in the most popular platforms.

The interview was focused on the two main points of literature which were then transferred into themes. The reasons how people are selecting their university and the importance of social media in student's decision making, are the research themes. Additionally, in the interview were questions about the emotions, when participants were applied to schools, in order for the researcher to evaluate those emotions and bring what student's standards are to the commissioning party.

The selection of the university puts more focus on the needs of the students and why students are choosing the specific university. Therefore, questions were asked in order to find out if the factors which Sojkin is mentioning align with theory, and we could apply them for KAMK in future marketing.

Social media questions were asked to find out what platforms nowadays students are using and therefore, there is considerable importance for schools to be active. If students are not making decisions based on the school social media page, what are the other ways to attract them.

4.1 Student Analysis

The research was conducted on the eight students, seven of them were part of the Exchange program at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, and the remaining one was chosen from Slovakia. The last person was chosen due to the lack of International Students from the country about which research was conducted. Since the students were already attending the Erasmus program, there were studying for at least two semesters in their home universities. The number of interviewees was identical on both sides – four men and four women which equals fifty percent of the sample. The largest group of participants were from Germany, and most students were studying International Business. All the participants were in the 20-26 age range.

Gender	Men	Women
Amount	4 (50%)	4 (50%)
Study occupation	5 International business (4 + 1 Sports), 1 Teaching , 1 Sports, 1 Tourism	
Nationality	5 Germans, 1 Slovak, 2 Czech Republic	
Age	20-26	

Table 6 General information about participants

The majority of the respondents, six out of eight, stated that they were using study portals and information provided from the high schools to see what options they have for studying higher education level. Two of the respondents asked their older friends or siblings, who already have experience in higher education level, and what they think about the school, subjects they are learning. Only three participants checked the school's website before applying. (Probably numbers were higher but as a primary source, because checking students' portals, asking friends). In this first question number of results is higher since participants were able to choose multiple sources of getting the information. Most of the respondents who are using the studying portals are respondents studying in German Universities. (Figure 7)

Table 7 Information research before applying

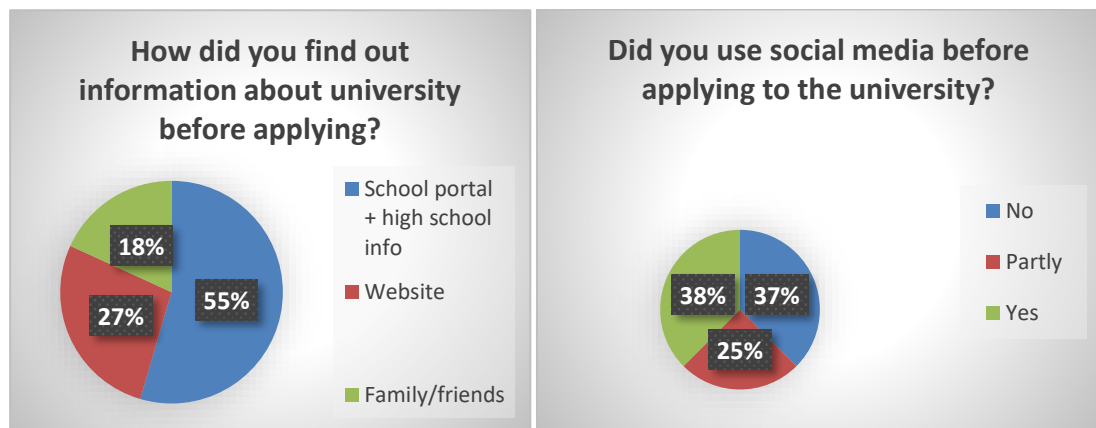


Table 8 Social media usage before applying to uni

A large percentage of students (75%) find it very simple and easy to make and send applications for submission. Only two people have problems, and mostly it was due to the amount of paperwork. One participant was required to send also letter to the university by mail with personal details. This student was already in his fourth year of studies, and that might be the reason why he/she was the only one to use the mail system since all the younger participants were using only internet services provided by the study portals or universities themselves. What is surprising in this interview is that students from Germany, either none of the respondents used social media

to check their chosen university social media page, or just partly meaning they check the rankings of teachers and rankings of school compared to the other universities in the same fields. The reasoning was they believe there is not any additional information provided which they need. Therefore, only students from the Czech Republic, and Slovakia were using social media to check the universities, their ambassadors. The most popular social media platform for students was Instagram.

The reasoning to choose their university differs across gender as well as the nationalities. Overall, students were looking for studies with favorable curriculums, live close by the school, and emphasize the reputation of the university. For one of the participants, it was important to feel included and have the experience of the University culture, therefore the priority was to choose a large student city, on the other hand, more students preferred to live close to home, either because of the family or partners.

The question if students feel the pressure to attend a university was asked by the researcher because if students feel pressure to study, to get a degree, certification, they do not put much emphasis on the place or studies offered because they want to make the family happy. This was not the case with these participants. (Sojkin, 2012) More than half of the students are seeing this as a challenge but in a euphoric way, some students on other hand feel the pressure but more on themselves because they submitted only one application, so if they are not accepted, they would need to work or create plan b.

4.2 Social media Analysis

The total estimation of active social media users is 4.48 billion worldwide. (Dean, 2021)

According to Chi (2021), the most important marketing channels include a podcast, social media marketing, SEO marketing, influencer marketing & video marketing. People when they are on the internet, they like to learn new things, clear their minds, have fun. Even in 2019, Germany was under the European Average when it comes to listening to podcasts, it is becoming more common for people to tune in while they are working, enjoying their leisure time. (Statista, 2019) There are many different types of podcasts that could be done by students, teachers and put online for viewers to listen to. As well as podcasts, many social media platforms such as

Instagram, TikTok are promoting their creators to upload video content. The video content does not have to be polished as much as on YouTube, because people value authenticity.

Comparing social media with other Universities can be beneficial because we can learn from them. For that reason, I contacted the four Universities, three of them are partner universities of KAMK and one university is located in Slovakia. As it was stated in the methodology, these universities - Harz University and Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt, Ostrava University, and Žilina University. Even universities which are part of this research have more studies offered in English, we can find niche study offered at KAMK – Esport business. On average each school has about five to six social media platforms where they are active and engaging with their students. The most common ones are Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter. In appendix 2 can be found the questions which were asked to these universities, unfortunately, only Ingolstadt University was able to answer partially the questions, since the school does not want to share their information with the outsiders. Ostrava University replied as well but after exchanging the emails addresses, I did not hear from them. The school is using a central organization and university social communication team who is in charge. It was important to see which university would reply because the algorithm on social media platforms is prioritizing companies and therefore their growth when they are active and engage with people. We can see that social media presence in Slovakia is higher than in the Czech Republic and Germany for the educational institution because the university of Žilina is having quite high numbers of views on their official YouTube channel.

To rank the universities based on the social media number of followers, Ingolstadt would take the first place, continuing with Ostrava University on second spot, Harz University third, and at the end Žilina University. If Kajaani University of Applied Sciences is included in the rankings, it would be either second last or last place. Every university is uploading regularly on their Instagram page at least 4 times a week except for Žilina University (short. UNIZA), on the other hand, UNIZA is having several profiles depending on the type of study. Harz University is considered the best out of other universities in terms of using social media, even if they have a

lower number of followers their engagement on the posts is high. Engagement rate is calculated by the number of likes, comments, shares, and clicks on your post. (Meta for business insights)



Table 9 Example of Instagram profile, number of posts, followers and following

4.2.1 Facebook & Instagram

The Kajaani University of Applied sciences has a four international degrees taught in English, which is less than any other university mapped in the research, nevertheless, the university should have enough materials for posting. During the racking period, KAMK was averaging three to four followers per day. If the social media campaign is executed correctly, the results can double the number of followers per day. According to Chi (2021), videos plays an important part in social media occupancy and therefore they should be included as an active part of the content. The themes of the videos correspond with the suggested post themes mentioned in the paragraph above. It is beneficial for a company to post a picture, story, or video content with humans in it, whether they are customers or employees (Bakhshi, Shamma, Gilbert 2021) since the posts with faces gained more engagement. The post with faces receives on average receive 38% more likes and 32% more comments compared to a post without a face. Posts can include students, alumni, teachers, courses, activities inside or outside on school premises, nature of the city. Engaging people can be done through stories, where social media manager is asking multiple sets of questions or giving people the space to ask questions themselves.

The KAMK's website is visually pleasing, modern, informative, and supports the suggested brand image. The commissioner party should pursue to maintain the website style in the future but naturally include relevant campaigns and information. Search engine optimization nowadays is an important tool in increasing awareness, especially if the keywords are examined with care (Chi 2021). The keywords enable the possible customers to gain awareness about the client company's contributions. Having a presence in the exhibitions, fairs, where young students are coming to look for the university would be beneficial for KAMK. During the pandemic the fairs might be held

virtually but that might be easier to be managed and schools do not have to spend a lot of money for traveling, and PR's might have more time to prepare the visuals/talking. The marketing schedule is based on the data collected from authors – Chi, Meta for Business. The best way to follow up with the social media for the commissioner party is by doing so on weekly basis depending on the results they want to achieve. The most practical way is to monitor social media platforms using free tools such as Meta Insights, where we can easily find statistics about engagement, comments, reply to the messages from customers, plan and schedule posts, stories for the upcoming days, or weeks. Another free tool to use would be Google Analytics, where we can measure advertising ROI. Utilizing these programs is a great way for the school to comprehend whether social media marketing is succeeding or not. The company's resources define how many measurement tools can be used and utilized.

Marketing Schedule	
Facebook	Instagram
Informative content regarding the service	More aesthetic content
Presenting students/ teachers	Presenting students/ teachers
Presenting relevant facts	Presenting trends & challenges
Pictures and videos: Convenient, informative	Pictures and videos: engaging, short
Emphasis on older customers	Emphasis on younger customers
Upload at least twice per week	

Table 10 Marketing schedule for KAMK

Sponsored · 🇫🇮

What is E-learning?

It means the learning process is in the electronic form via the Internet. The transition from traditional teaching to learning based on computer technologies developed over several decades.

During this semester, we are offering coding, branding, math, business courses.

Want to know more about our offerings?

Please visit us at: kamk.fi/en

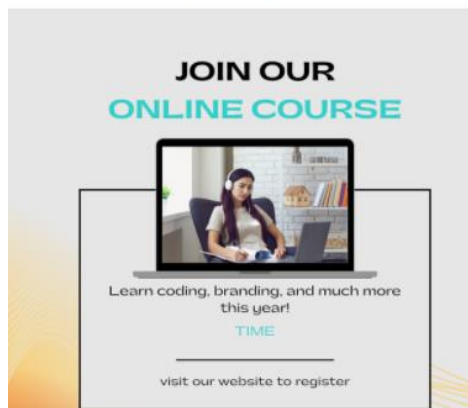


Table 11 Example of Facebook/ Instagram advertising

4.3 SWOT Analysis

The commissioner party's strengths are related to the uniqueness of the Finnish education system, which is ranked in the top 3 in the world. Most of the years are also consecutively number one in the world, right before education in Singapore or China. The education gives a student a free space for his or her self-development, educators in Finland think, that schools should teach what young people need in their lives rather than trying to self-memorize hundreds or thousands of words, to bring national scores up. (Sanberg, 2013) KAMK is one of the few universities of applied sciences in Finland which has active cooperation with Japanese universities, which can be used by their students for an exchange program in Japan for six or twelve months. Students who decided to study in business programs have the possibility to apply for a double degree, meaning in the same amount of time they would receive two degrees. This possibility is only available if students choose to study as an exchange in German or Russian partnership universities with KAMK. School culture is very friendly, and teachers are always welcoming, and they will answer any question. Kajaani University of Applied Sciences might be a small university, but it is a strength

on which school is building because fewer people, friendlier the atmosphere and people can broaden their relationships either with students or teachers, so after finishing the school you will have valuable contacts. The small university also brings easier access to the principal and less bureaucracy when filling the paperwork. The time, which is saved, can be then reused in the current project. One of the latest projects in KAMK is with gaming development students, designing the games or even the players who are trying to get experience in the gaming industry as a coach, players, managers, analytics. Therefore, this side of the studies is very strong and students who are studying Esports can get the real experience already in school because school organizations are supported by the school. Support can be financial, social, materialistic. In the small university, you are getting that feeling that you count.

As weaknesses of the commissioner party are associated with the location, in comparison to other bigger cities in Finland and Kajaani, when traveling there takes much longer and there are fewer transportation options to choose from. A quality small school program requires a relatively high per-student expenditure; the small school's enrollment makes it difficult to offer a broad and versatile curriculum, which might result in canceling of specific classes due to the lack of students. This might be a problem as well for activities outside the curriculum but still located on the school grounds. There are not that many options to choose from when it comes to activities after school, which could be sports, math clubs and radio.

Opportunities for the commissioner party are associated with the student growth during the studies and after graduating, finding a company, job opportunity in the region to stay. Currently, a school is working already on one similar project to keep the students in the Kainuu region. Using the latest technology can help Kajaani University of Applied Sciences to influence potential students for applying, such as trends provided in the social media apps. Elaborating on partnerships will increase interest in university connections and the external community. Based on the demand of the market to learn subjects, a school should provide classes which are in trend, matching societal interests and curricula.

The last part of the SWOT analysis is a threat, a small number of students which is creating varied and contrasting psychological environments for the students. Therefore, the school needs to constantly explore ways how to build positive attitudes and the school must capitalize on a close relationship. Small schools need to constantly innovate, bringing a new solution because if they stop for a moment the enormous competition would take over. Innovation can come with creating new curriculums, job opportunities after school.

5 Discussion and Recommendation

Based on the results mentioned in previous chapter number four, the author is presenting ideas for improvement. Hopefully, these options would increase goals stated by the commissioner party, gain more engagement on social media platforms, improve search engines, and after all help schools to obtain more enrollments from students. The improvement points are mentioned below:

1. YouTube and TikTok Strategy

The more platform you are using, the easier it is for search engines to find you and rank your score. We can see on the picture below already KAMK's official YouTube profile. YouTube prefers content that is longer than 10 minutes, and the school has the number of minutes which is the social media provider likes. Nine out of ten of the best-performing videos on YouTube have custom thumbnails. Therefore, the recommendations for schools in order to utilize viewers would be. Firstly, before uploading the video, we need to ensure that we have correct hashtags put in the place to be seen by people who are searching for similar subjects, as well as trying to fill out more the description boxes, even with school websites, other social media channels. The second one, YouTube like any other social platform, when they released a new feature, is encouraging creators to use it as much as they can, in exchange for more visibility. It would be useful for KAMK to use Shorts on YouTube, which is a maximum of one-minute content, highlights the most important parts. For example, in the ten minutes video of students with bachelor's degrees in Esports Business, was there something relevant to what they said? Was there some joke, and we could share the laugh with our viewers? Lastly, the video upload can be scheduled, so there is no need to upload multiple videos at the same time. Rather have one strict schedule, even one time per week but be consistent than rather upload three videos at once. An algorithm is important when using social media.

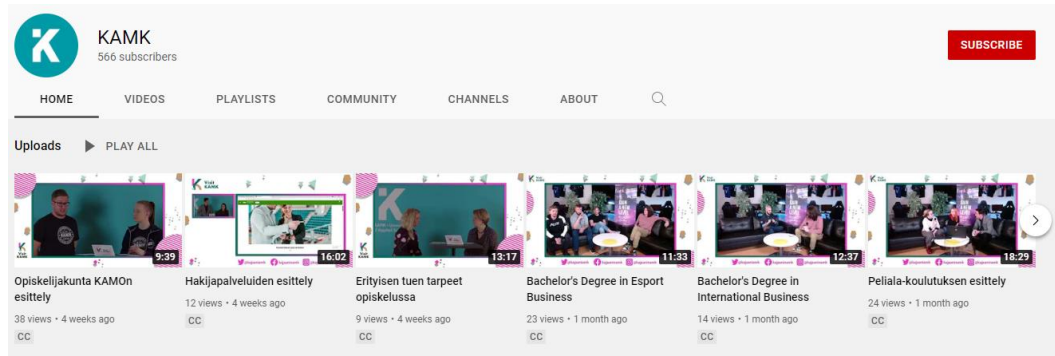


Table 12 Official YouTube profile of KAMK

In the last few years, the phenomenon named TikTok entered the social media scene and had a breakthrough. The platform is mostly for young people, and that might be the reason why KAMK should be there. TikTok as well as YouTube Shorts provide people short videos which are no longer than one minute. In simplicity, TikTokers use songs, dances, short texts to engage their viewers, mostly with issues, life events that are happening to all of us; they are funny, sad, informative, life hacks, and tutorials. The school could assign students to take care of their TikTok, where they would post about life on campus, in the dormitories, or at school. In addition, as previously, it is useful to have many videos, but it is important to have a schedule of posting them on a regular basis.

2. Implementing a school podcast, hashtags

School podcasts could give the space for the school to discuss interesting topics, and that would have added value for parents and students because they would have an easier time understanding the school long term and short-term vision and values.

The school might have students to experience with their podcasts, and this could bring other students. There are several podcast theme possibilities, from entertainment with jokes, music, tv show, quizzes. As mentioned during the section with YouTube, hashtags are very important and are creating engagement from community to community, as well it helps search engines and people to search and dig deeper into other social media accounts you own.

3. School portals

Barely any of the students from the German universities of applied sciences reach out on social media to check what the school is offering on Facebook or Instagram. As to quote one of the participants and friend, “my school does not have many followers and I am not sure what they

are doing on their social media, I definitely see that in future people will be using social media more to double-check the schools before applying". It is hard to tell if students will be still checking Instagram or Facebook before applying but they will be searching for information. We need to be ready to catch them. Instead of waiting for people to go to social media channels, we can reach out to school portals in countries, where we want to get our students from, and arrange half an hour-, or hour-long meetings about our school, benefits for studying at KAMK. If that would be too time-consuming, we can create an ad, post it on school portals.

6 Conclusion

The Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, a school that may be small by size, can leverage social media marketing and use it to its advantage. The school has been ahead in specific areas for a while, an example in the technological advancements, is creating Esport Business degree, and teaching students about the importance of LinkedIn. Education industry consist of large number of people with age variety from seven to eighty, some parents are involved in the education industry indirectly because of their children, it might be a challenge to create creative ads which will appeal to both of the age categories. Personal marketing strategies will need to be put into place.

As the demand to move forward is growing from year to year, universities are slowly required to enter and be active on social media in order to attract students. The Kajaani University of Applied Sciences should be active on both social media platforms – Facebook and Instagram on a weekly basis and create content that correlates with the desired brand image. The suggestion regarding the brand image from the author's perspective is creating value, teaching people about the culture, why the school is beneficial for students to apply to, giving opinions and statement on the topics which are happening, to bring the face of the school as a community and appeal to people as much as possible.

Marketing theories change fast, and people who will be managing social media accounts for companies in the future should be aware that they need to be flexible in this industry. Bringing an open-minded approach might be essential. Social media can help us to broaden our knowledge of theories and what is the latest trend. If KAMK wants to be successful, they need to implement a more consistent approach for uploads and use more the tools which social media platforms provide.

In the future, the following research could apply if there are differences between the graduating majors and their university decision-making. The marketing is changing and conducting this research again in five years can bring different results because with a certain amount of inevitability some social media platforms will disappear, some companies will be too old for young people, or they would be afraid to innovate.

The thesis brings useful information and implementation for international marketing for the commissioning party where recommendations are for both long-term and short-term marketing actions.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Interview model

Interview with students of Applied Sciences

Jan Teodor Dobrovolny LBI18S

Before the interview, interviewer is meeting with interviewees in pleasant place to ensure people are feeling more relaxed and easier to talk to which will enable to get in-depth answers from interviewees. Small talk was used as well, to carry the friendly atmosphere.

Start of the interview:

- Introduction
- Thank you for joining me for the interview about how big of impact social media platforms has on your enrolment into university.
- For better analysis interview will be recorded on my mobile phone, is it okay?
- All the data are anonymous

After the interview:

- checking audio
- short notes about impressions from interviewee,
- notes about surroundings
- notes about my performance (was I satisfied?) What can I do better next interview

General part

- 1, Where are you from? And at which University do you study?
- 2, How long are you studying at university?
- 3, What degree are you studying?

Experience part

- 1, How did you find out information about your university? (Before applying)
- 2, How was the applying process?
- 3, Did you use social media to check the school where you are applying?
- 4, Why did you choose your university?
- 5, Was there any pressure into going to university?
- 6*If you will apply for master's degree, will you do social media check?

APPENDIX 2:

Interview – contacting UAS through social media channel.

Good day (name of university),

I am currently working on my thesis how Universities of Applied Sciences are using their social media channels, and I would love to ask you a few questions if you have time.

- 1,** Who is in charge of your social media channels? Students? Professionals?
- 2,** Do you have different teams of people for different social media platform?
- 3,** Do you have a marketing plan by which you are progressing?
- 4,** How often do you use paid advertainment?

Thank you for your time!

Jan T. Dobrovolny

