



SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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Membership acquisition among the international students of SeAMK

Case study of SAMO

Thesis work

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Thesis abstract

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This thesis work was done as a commission for the student union of Seinäjoki university of applied sciences SAMO. The objective of this thesis work was to help the membership acquisition of SAMO and to explain why international exchange students join at a higher rate as members compared to international degree students. The thesis topic was chosen as multiple student unions around Finland have lost a considerable number of members due to increased competition in the student card provider market. At the same time universities of applied sciences have increased their recruitment of international student. This gives SAMO an opportunity to increase their membership numbers for the coming competition.

This thesis research marketing and membership acquisition theory, also the executive director of SAMO was interviewed. The pivotal findings of the theory were, in membership acquisition social connections and community should be taken into consideration. In marketing a marketing plan is crucial and both digital and traditional marketing should be considered.

From the theory a survey that used mixed method was produced. The survey was sent to all international students of SeAMK, there were 70 respondents to the survey. The survey seems to indicate that international students are not getting enough information about SAMO to join as members. This seems to also explain partly why exchange students join at a higher rate than degree students. Also, events and orientation day had an impact on whether a student joined SAMO.

¹ Keywords: Student union, membership acquisition, marketing

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Tämä opinnäytetyö tehtiin toimeksiantona Seinäjoen ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelijakunta SAMO:lle. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli lisätä opiskelijakunta SAMO:n kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden jäsenhankintaa ja selvittää miksi kansainväliset vaihto-opiskelijat liittyvät useammin kuin kansainväliset tutkinto-opiskelijat. Opinnäytetyön aihe valittiin, koska usea Suomen opiskelijakunnista on menettänyt huomattavan osan jäsenistään uusille opiskelijakortin tarjoajille. Samaan aikaan ammattikorkeakoulut lisäävät kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden määriä. Tämä antaa SAMO:lle mahdollisuuden lisätä jäsenmäärään mahdollisen tulevan kilpailun vuoksi.

Opinnäytetyössä tutkittiin markkinointia ja jäsenhankinnan teoriaa. Myös opiskelijakunnan toiminnanjohtajaa haastateltiin. Teorian keskeiset löydökset olivat, jäsenhankinnassa tulee ottaa huomioon sosiaaliset suhteet ja yhteisöllisyys. Markkinoinnissa tulee ottaa huomioon markkinoinnin suunnittelu ja perinteisen ja digitaalisen markkinoinnin edut ja haitat.

Näiden pohjalta opinnäytetyölle rakennettiin kysely, jossa käytettiin monimenetelmää. Tämä kysely lähetettiin kansainvälisille-opiskelijoille, kyselyyn vastasi 70 kansainvälistä-opiskelijaa. Kyselyn tulokset viittaavat siihen, että kansainväliset-opiskelijat eivät saa tarpeeksi tietoa SAMO:sta, jotta he liittyisivät. Tämä näyttää myös selittävän osakseen tutkinto- ja vaihto-opiskelijoiden jäsenmäärien erot. Jäsenyyteen vaikuttaa myös miten paljon opiskelijat ovat käyneet tapahtumissa ja olivatko he osallistuneet orientaatio päivään.

¹ Asiasanat: opiskelijakunta, jäsenhankinta, markkinointi

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Terms and Abbreviations

SAMO Student union of university of applied sciences of Seinäjoki

SeAMK University of applied sciences of Seinäjoki

UAS University of applied sciences

€ Euro

% Percentage

½ Half

1 INTRODUCTION

Universities and universities of applied sciences (later referred to as UAS) are looking for more international degree students, as the number of Finnish students is declining. This decline is due to the aging population of Finland. In the strategy of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (later referred to as SeAMK) there is an emphasis on internationalizing the school. This means that in the future SeAMK will hope to be a more international school and have a larger population of international degree students and international exchange students. Student Union of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (later referred to as SAMO) represents all the students of SeAMK both Finnish and International students. As SeAMK has plans to increase the number of international students in the school, SAMO will have a larger obligation to represent these students and to have them as their members.

Currently, most of the international exchange students join SAMO, but international degree students join at a vastly lower rate. If SeAMK increases the number of international degree students, this will lead to a decrease in the share of students who are members of SAMO. For SAMO it is advantageous to maintain a high membership percentage. This will help as; a high membership percentage will mean that SAMO has the authority and credibility to be the voice of the students at SeAMK. There is also a fiscal reasoning for having a high membership percentage; a substantial amount of the revenue to SAMO is made up by membership fees. Currently, some student unions are having trouble with their memberships and face fiscal problems because of it. To make sure that this does not happen to SAMO, the increase in international students as members is vital.

1.1 Thesis topic and purpose

Hirsijärvi et al. (2009, 77-80) comment that a good research topic should have the following qualities. They argue that the topic should be of interest to the author, be applicable to the authors scientific field, be meaningful in either a scientific or societal context, should teach the author something, and accentuate the authors' abilities and experiences.

The chose topic of this thesis is the membership acquisition of international students for the student unions SAMO, as the author believes that the topic fulfils all the requirements that listed above. The topic has interest to the author, as the author has studied international business and as such has had many interactions with the international population of SeAMK. Also, the author has a connection with SAMO as the author has been on the board of SAMO as the vice-chairperson and as the chairperson and later was elected on the board of Suomen opiskelijakuntien liitto SAMOK ry as the vice-chairperson, which is an organization that assists student unions nationally. As of these reasons, the subject of membership acquisition of international members is something that the author is familiar with and has a connection to student unions. The author argues that the topic is also relevant to the field of the author. As stated previously, the author studies international business and as this study is focussed on an international population. Also, the author has studied marketing as part of his studies and the theory of the thesis is focussed on marketing. The author believes that this topic is applicable to the field that he studies.

This thesis was made as a commission for SAMO, as it is the belief of SAMO and the author that the topic of this thesis is important and relevant. In chapters 2.5 it is explained that student unions are facing new market competition that has left some student unions in a financially hard position. In chapter 2.6 it is explained that as UAS are recruiting more international students the incentive to pursue international students as members has never been higher. These two factors make this thesis topic important and relevant.

When the author graduates from SeAMK, the author hopes to be employed in a student union, union, association, or some type of non-profit organization. Membership acquisition, which is the topic of this thesis work, would be beneficial to these types of organizations and thus would help the authors career development. Also, as the theory of this thesis work is partly based on marketing which will also be also helpful in the author career development.

The author also argues that the thesis work is societally significant, as the subject of international member acquisition has not been studied in the context of student unions. The author also believes that SAMO provides a more meaningful and enjoyable studying experience for all international students. This means that the memberships are beneficial to the

students, as they will have a more pleasant experience in Seinäjoki and in Finland. It is beneficial to SAMO as they will be more financially secure because of more members, and this would also be beneficial for SeAMK. If the international students have a pleasant experience in SeAMK and Seinäjoki because of SAMO, this will mean that once they return to their home country word of mouth could increase the number of students wanting to study at SeAMK.

The research question of this thesis is, how can SAMO acquire more international students as members? This research question also has two supplementary research questions. Why international students join as members, and why international exchange students join at a higher rate than international degree students? The theory of this thesis work was written based on these questions and based on the theory the survey questions were formed. In chapter 7 the survey results were used to answer the research questions.

1.2 Research structure

This thesis has been divided into seven parts. The first chapter focuses on the introduction of the thesis, the thesis topic, and the thesis question. The second chapter focuses on SAMO and the reasons for the existence of the thesis work. The third chapter focuses on the theory of membership acquisition, non-profit organizations, and student unions. The fourth chapter is centred around marketing theory, digital and traditional marketing, and other marketing concepts. The fifth chapter focuses on the theory of the research, how the research was conducted and the reasoning behind the research methods. In the sixth chapter the thesis is focused on the survey results and their analysis. The last chapter is the conclusions, where the author gives his answer to the thesis question and recommendations to SAMO on how to improve the membership program.

2 STUDENT UNION OF SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

2.1 Student unions

In Finnish law for UAS's (Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences 932/2014) requires UAS's to have a student union, this law also gives students unions responsibilities that they must comply with. The law states that (Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences 932/2014) the purpose of the student union is to act as a link between its members and to promote their public, social and spiritual aspirations, as well as their aspirations to study and the student's position in society. The task of the student body is to prepare students for active, alert and critical citizenship. Also, the student unions have the responsibility to name students in different work groups that operate inside the school and to keep track of the operations of the Finnish student health services. The law also imparts how the student unions should be operated. The student union must have a board and a body of representatives. This law gives student unions a broad permission to operate, currently student unions have broadened their operations from the responsibilities that the law bestows on the student unions.

The law gives student unions the responsibility to do trusteeship work, to help students with their studies and to be their trustee inside the school. Currently, student unions still engage in trusteeship work for the students, but also have started to provide different types of services, events, commodities and membership benefits. The executive director of SAMO J. Erkkonen (personal communication, April 24, 2022) comments that today in addition to trusteeship SAMO offers events, parties, tutoring, arranges sport shifts and other types of services.

The main service that student unions provide is the memberships to the student union, this grants the students with many benefits and discounts (SAMO, n.d.-b). The cost of the membership is dependent on the length of the membership (SAMO, n.d.-c). Exchange students usually stay for one or two semesters, one semester costs 25€ and two semesters' costs 35€. Degree students who typically stay for the whole degree can purchase a membership for three- and half-year costing 85€. Table 1 shows the prices of SAMO

memberships according to the length of the membership. The price structure has been built as such to induce students to buy longer memberships as they are cheaper than buying a half year membership every semester. This is beneficial to SAMO as the organization does not have to renew sales every semester.

Table 1. SAMO membership prices (SAMO, n.d.-c).

Length of membership	Price
4 years	90€
3.5 years	85€
2 years	60€
1 year	35€
½ year	25€

2.2 Obligations and functions of the student union SAMO

According to Autio et al. (2016), SAMO was founded in 1996 and operates at SeAMK. SAMO has eight board members, twenty-person body of representees and five employees (SAMO, n.d.-e). SAMO provides trusteeship for all students who study in SeAMK and lobby for the students, inside the school and in the city of Seinäjoki. SAMO also provides tutoring for the students, this means that second year students help the first year students to acclimate to student life and studying in a UAS. SAMO sells memberships for the students of SeAMK that provide different types of benefits and discounts around Seinäjoki and in Finland (SAMO, n.d.-b). SAMO arranges different types of events, these include hangout evenings where students can play board games, parties that are held at night clubs, trip-to-Lapland where international students can visit Lapland and many other events. SAMO also holds weekly sport shifts where members can go and play different

types of sport ranging from football, basketball and floorball. The executive director of SAMO J. Erkkonen (personal communication, April 24, 2022) comments that there is difference in attendance between the types of events. For hangout evenings there are usually between 5-15 students attending, sporting and cultural events the amount of people attending could reach 50 students. Parties are the largest type of event that SAMO organizes depending on the party there could be from 400 to 800 students.

On 17.3.2020 the government of Finland declared an emergency power act, which prohibited gatherings of over 10 people and public services like library's, swimming halls and schools were closed (Finnish Government, 2020). The limitations on gatherings loosened and tightened in the following years, and on 14.2.2020 the reversal of these limitations started (Mediauutiset, 2022). The executive director of SAMO (personal communication, April 24, 2022) commented that while the COVID-19 restrictions were in effect SAMO was unable to arrange any events or parties. He continued that the impact COVID-19 had on memberships sales was that SAMO could not get any international members as they could not enter Finland because of the restrictions. He also commented that COVID-19 still affected SAMO as that some students still study from their home countries, and this made it almost impossible to sell memberships to these students.

2.3 Current marketing actions

In their marketing SAMO uses both digital and traditional marketing (SAMO, n.d.-a), the differences between these two types of marketing are analysed in the fourth chapter. In digital marketing SAMO operates three different Instagram accounts, one for everything that SAMO does called student union SAMO, SAMO sports which focuses on sport shifts, tournaments and sport trials. The third Instagram account is called SAMO Bailaa which focuses on the parties that SAMO arranges. SAMO also operates a Facebook page which host the same content as the SAMO Instagram account. These social media platforms are used to inform and communicate with students about events, parties and everything that SAMO does.

SAMO also operates a website that is used for practical information about SAMO such as what SAMO does and trusteeship, from this webpage students can also apply for

membership to SAMO. On their website SAMO engages in search engine optimization. SAMO also does traditional marketing as the executive director J. Erkkonen of SAMO (personal communication, April 24, 2022) explains that SAMO markets by having posters up on the walls of the school, having flyers that are given out from pop-ups and that the student unions also operates their own office, which is in the centre of the school which is also used to market SAMO. He adds that even though SAMO also markets in traditional ways, social media is the most important marketing channel that SAMO uses.

2.4 Membership loss in student unions

Currently some student unions are losing a considerable number of members, Collin (2021) explains; the new competition from student card providers that are not affiliated with student unions has increased. That has affected student unions' memberships, as the article states that the student union of Turku has lost 2 700 members and the student union of Metropolia has lost 6 000 members. Collin mentions that membership payments are the main source of income for many student unions. In the article the executive director of student union of Turku also mentions that membership amounts also affect the trusteeship work that the student union does. As when the student union only has a minority of the students as members, this brings up the question does this organization have the power to represent all the students.

The executive director of SAMO comments (personal communication, April 24, 2022) that this member loss has not affected SAMO yet, but this is something that looms over the student union as they have seen what has happened in Turku and Helsinki. He explains that 50 percentage of the revenue to SAMO comes from the membership payments. This means that, if the same member loss were to happen in SAMO as it happened in Turku and Helsinki, this would mean a downsizing in SAMO. Therefore, it is important for SAMO to prepare for the future and increase the number of international members.

2.5 Internationalization of UAS

One of the four values in the strategy of SeAMK (n.d.-b) is internationalization, in the same document they list that they aim is to internationalize the community both students and

teachers and to internationalize the whole county of Southern Ostrobothnia. In an article by Seppälä (2019) explains why this internationalization is happening in some UAS. As the Finnish government has a goal that 50% of the younger population should have a university or a UAS degree (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.). This is getting harder as the article explains that younger generations are getting smaller by the year. Seppälä (2019) points out that UAS are trying to meet this goal by getting more international degree students to their school and that this trend is going to grow in the coming years.

As this trend towards more international students grows, it gives student unions an opportunity. As more international students start studying, student unions can increase the number of members that they have. Currently, SAMO has a considerable number of the international students as members, but there is difference between international exchange students and international degree students. Exchange students join at higher rate than international degree student, even though international degree students stay for a considerably longer time the executive director of SAMO comments (J. Erkkonen, personal communication, April 24, 2022). The aim of this thesis work is to help SAMO to get more international members and to better understand why there is a divide between the memberships of international degree and exchange students.

2.6 Difference between exchange and degree students

In UAS of Seinäjoki there are two types of international students, exchange students and degree students (SeAMK, n.d.-a). Degree students stay in SeAMK for the whole degree. SeAMK provides four bachelor programs and one master's program. These programs last from three and a half years to four years, and when they graduate, the student will get the diploma from the UAS of Seinäjoki. International exchange students' study in foreign university or UAS and come to SeAMK for either one or two semesters and then return to their home university. International exchange students stay for a considerably less time in UAS of Seinäjoki than international degree students. Even though international degree students stay a considerably longer time at the school, only a small portion of the international degree students join as members opposed to the international exchange students from which 90% joins as members explains the executive director of SAMO J. Erkkonen (personal communication, April 24, 2022).

3 ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERSHIP ACQUISITION

As new students start every year membership acquisitions become extremely important for student unions, as the organizations needs to sell memberships to all the new students as they start school. Even though this thesis work focuses on the marketing aspects, there are still many ways of acquiring membership that do not focus on marketing or that can supplement marketing in the pursuit of membership acquisition. The third chapter focuses on the theory of organizations and membership acquisition.

3.1 Membership acquisition

Ibrisevic (2021) comments on an article that the only way to keep improving membership program is to keep track of the progress, to evaluate that progress and to act when it is needed. Ibrisevic argues that tracking member engagement, collecting feedback and understanding how well the membership program is doing will help to better the program, and that interviewing some members who have left the organization will help the organization to make improvements. This point is also mirrored by Morand (2019), he comments that organizations should interview members on why they are leaving.

Morand (2019) suggests that when trying to acquire more members that one method is to ask for help from the current members. This help could be in the form of hosting meetings, where current members bring friends who are currently not members, and when these people become members, they can again bring more friends who are not members. Morand also suggest that interviewing current members on why they became members, why have they stayed and what are the biggest benefits of the membership to them.

Membership acquisition is important, but as important is to make sure that members stay members and that they do not leave the organization. Johnsen (2021) comments that during the pandemic some organizations saw their renewal rates dropping. He suggested that to combat this organization should offer discounts to those whose memberships are expiring and for his organization this has played an important role.

3.2 Marketing as a non-profit organization

Vuokko et al. (2004, p.24) categorize that there are seven distinct characteristics of non-profit organizations that affect the marketing of non-profit organizations. Non-financial goals being in the fore front, there might be more demand than supply by a large margin, instead of products non-profit organizations usually supply services or paradigms, the exchange relationship is different, the criteria for activities and goals are judged differently than other organizations, there is tension between the mission and the wishes of the clients, and the importance of volunteering is great. These factors that differentiate non-profit organization marketing and should be considered while marketing a non-profit organization.

Ayyıldız et al. (2017, p.161) comment that the customers of non-profits can be categorized into two distinct categories, supporting customers and primary customers. They explain that supporting customers are the difference between non-profit organizations and profit organizations. Supporting customers are volunteers and donors who participate in the non-profit organizations by providing labour, service materials or contribute monetarily. Primary customers are the target group of the organization, and this group is the main aim of the organization, this is the group that benefits from the services of the non-profit. In the case of SAMO the supporting customers could be argued to be the volunteers, board members and the school. The primary customers would be the students.

3.3 Volunteering and networking

Abilas membership study (Myers, 2016) found that even though volunteering was not one of the biggest reasons to join an association it still has an impact on if a person would join an association. Ptack (2021) comments that volunteers are essential for the success of the Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce. He adds that there are many positions that volunteers occupied such as ambassadors committee, membership team, finance committee, Grow MN committee and many others. He also states that in their organization there are many ways that they thank their volunteers.

On the webpage of SAMO (n.d.-e) it is stated that SAMO is an organization ran by the students and that students can be part of the decision-making process and participate as

volunteers. International students can also participate and join the board or be volunteers for the organizations, this however is not as prevalent as the Finnish students explains the executive director J. Erkkonen of SAMO (personal communication, April 24, 2022).

In its mission, SAMO (n.d.-e) states that the student union's pursuit is to help students enjoy student life without the feeling of loneliness. Myers (2016) found that the sixth and seventh top benefits for members to join associations were networking and socializing. According to Bergeron (2021) events and conferences are a great tool for associations, and that they are also a great way to increase revenues for non-profit organizations. She also added that these events can be used as a learning and networking opportunity for members and that this is one of the most valuable benefits for members. Quarls and Zirulnick (2021) argue that events can have the effect of increasing member loyalty and grow membership. They continue that there are two types of membership growing events, those that get the organization in front of people who have never heard about the organization and those events where people who are familiar with your organization can be turned from potential member to member.

3.4 Meaning of student unions for international students

International students at the Finnish UAS are an area that has hardly been researched, but there is one thesis work done by Pyhtinen (2020) who wrote a thesis work on the meaning of student union membership for international students for the student union of Rovaniemi. Bachelor thesis works are usually not used as sources for other thesis works, but as this specific topic has not been researched, this thesis can give valuable insights to the topic and to the authors thesis work. This thesis will not be used as theoretical framework, but it reinforces this thesis. The objective of the study was to find improvements to the operations of the student unions and to find what the international students wanted to see from the student union.

In the conclusions part of the study the Pyhtinen (2020) found that international exchange students were much more familiar with the student union than international degree student even though international exchange students stay only a fraction what international degree students stay. Both groups were still very unaware of what the student union did or offered

for members. The author hypothesizes that this fact could be caused by lack of communication from the student union. International students also confused the student union with other student associations.

In the questionnaire, the international students who were not members answered that reason was because there was not a good reason to join the student union, but they also answered that they were not sure what the student union did. All in all, the international degree students were much more unsure on what the student union did, oppose to the international exchange students. The author hypothesizes for this was that the introduction prior for the international exchange students was much more thorough and because of the structuring of tutoring in which the tutors are more engaged with the international exchange students. The students had also said that the benefits associated with the membership were not clear. When asked, most international students did not know what channels the student union used to communicate with students, but when asked for a preferred channel they were the same that the student union already used.

4 MARKETING

The marketing association of America (2017) defines marketing as the activities, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. In the book *Marketing communication: principles and practice* Varey (2001, p. 4) defines marketing as

“Marketing is concerned with creating and sustaining mutually satisfying exchanges of value between producer/servers and their customers. It has both a managerial orientation and an organizational/social function.”

A digital marketing agency Web FX (n.d.) argues in their article that marketing can be split into two categories, traditional media and digital media. They argue that traditional media encompasses television, radio and print advertising in their mind it also includes direct mail, cold calling and door-to-door. They argue that new media is mostly something that is conducted on the internet, this would include search engine optimization, pay-per-click advertising, content marketing, social media and email marketing. In the same article, they identify some strengths of traditional and digital media. Traditional media having the advantage that it can reach a large audience, but new media allows to target different types of customers. New media allows more flexible budgets in the form of pay-per-click that is advantageous for organizations that do not have large marketing budgets.

As this thesis work was done for the student union SAMO, the marketing theory discussed in this thesis work focuses on the main channels that SAMO uses in their marketing.

In an article for the *Non-profit Communications Report* (2018, p. 7) they argue that a marketing plan is an essential part of the marketing process. They propose that a strong plan contains six components. Creation of a problem statement. What are the challenges that the organization is facing? Determining business goals and then turning them in to marketing goals. This means that if an organization must increase profits, an organization needs to work out how much they need to market and how to market. Comparing the organization to a similar organization and understanding what they are doing right. To segment customer base and determining how to message to these groups. The organization must

conclude what their organization provides which others are not providing. Lastly to choose what type of events and activities interest the segments that the organization has chosen to market to.

4.1 Traditional marketing

An article on Lucid Advertising (n.d.) describes traditional marketing as marketing that is not done online, and as digital marketing has overtaken traditional marketing in many industries it still should not be forgotten. Marketing school (2020) comments that traditional marketing can be divided into four major groups direct mail, print, broadcast and telephone.

Walker (n.d.) states in an article for T.E. Digital states that event though digital marketing has overtaken many parts of marketing, traditional marketing still offers some advantages that digital marketing does not offer. With traditional marketing reaching the local audience can be easier, local newspapers, radio or mail that is sent to local post codes can be effective ways of reaching a local audience. Nayar (2018) points out that traditional marketing also offers something physical, hard copies like flyers, pens and magazine ads are things that customers can keep and reference later. An article on Simplilearn (2022) comments that traditional ads unlike digital ads cannot be skipped or blocked, TV or radio ads will be played multiple times and thus reminding the customer of the product.

As stated previously the advantage of traditional marketing is that it can offer physical material that endures unlike digital marketing which is temporary, and an article on Visme written by Velarde (2021) talks about the different types of printed marketing, the use cases for them and the advantages of printed material. Velarde comments on printed materials that they are especially good form of marketing when large amount of people visit the organization example conferences or trade shows, and that print material come in many forms. First Velarde talks about brochures and that they are one of the most common printed materials. Brochures are usually double-sided paper that has been folded in three, the purpose of a brochure is to give information to the customer about the organization, they can be given or left in a brochure stand for customers to pick up. Then she remarks that flyers are a similar type of printed material, and that they differ from the

brochure as it is a single printed page, and it is not folded. Because flyers are much simpler than brochures and as such do not offer as much information. Flyers are usually given to people walking down the street flyers need to be eye-catching. Posters are a printed material that is displayed on a wall, posters need the same eye-catching effect as flyers as if they are not people will just walk past them comments Velarde, and that posters can be used for example concerts, events or special deals. Velard remarks that when creating printed material there should be a QR code that potential customers can find more information about the company or the event.

In an article by Georgas-Tellefsen (2019) argues that traditional marketing also has distinct disadvantages. Georgas points out that traditional marketing can be more expensive as there are the expenses from production and the media buy. In the same article, she points out that traditional marketing does not offer any metrics or any data to see what impact the ad is having. Georgas remarks that in traditional marketing the targeting or sub-segmenting the potential customers is much more challenging than other forms of marketing provide. The only way to achieve this in traditional marketing is to use direct mail. Walker (n.d.) comments that traditional marketing lacks the potential of being engaging, traditional way of marketing is a passive form of marketing.

4.2 Digital marketing

In 2019 digital marketing spending surpassed traditional marketing ad spends in the United States of America (Insider Intelligence, 2019). In an article Bailey (2020) states that digital marketing can be defined as marketing that is done on the internet. She continues that there are many types of digital marketing which include social media, websites, content marketing, pay per click and search engine marketing.

According to Statista (2021), the most popular types of social media worldwide in order are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat and TikTok. According to the Statistics Finland (2014) the median age of a graduating UAS student is 26 when looking at his age group with this fact in mind the most popular types of social media in order are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and TikTok (Pew Research Center, 2021). Another important statistic is user engagement, the amount of time that the user

spends on the app. By monthly hours spend on the app, YouTube is the highest with 23 hours, followed by both TikTok and Facebook both with 19.6 hours and in third place being WhatsApp (Statista, 2021a). Even though these are the most popular types of social media that the average UAS student uses they still not might be the platform that members want to be communicated through. In Abila's membership engagement study (Amanda Myers, 2016) they found that 35% millennials wanted to be communicated by social networking sites and that 58% preferred email. Email being more popular still does not mean that social medias do not have a place in a marketing plan.

Advantages of digital marketing. An online bootcamp Simplilearn (2021) argues that digital marketing provides many types of advantages those being global reach, lower costs, analytics and optimization. They continue that these are all advantages that can be achieved without using any advertising or spending money, as creating content on the major social medias is free, but that when using money, it opens the opportunity to utilize pay-per-click, search engine optimization and targeting.

Digital marketing offers many advantages over traditional marketing. In her article Jennifer Bailey (2020) comments that over 57% of the global population uses the internet and people on average are on the internet almost seven hours a day, this means that there is a large audience and many opportunities to market to people. She continues that digital marketing offers the possibility of engagement, traditional marketing can be only used to inform the public about your product or service. She adds that with digital marketing organizations can engage with the audience and see what they think about the brand or product by the audiences' comments or likes. Nayar asserts (2018) that digital marketing also makes measuring the return on investment much easier. Services like google analytics or other services make it easy to see how many people visited the website, how long they stayed or how many people clicked on the ad. With this information companies can see what works and what does not and then make changes to their marketing plan. When considering a marketing strategy one of the first things to consider is what is the segment that you are marketing to because one type of marketing does not t work for all consumers. With traditional marketing there is potential to market to different segments, but digital marketing makes this process effortless with just a press of a button. On the Google Ads

webpage (n.d.) they comment that they allow organizations to target customers based on their age, gender, location, interest, or hobbies and even parental status.

Disadvantages of digital marketing. Digital marketing also has disadvantages. In a paper Veleva and Tsvetanova (2019) listed some of them. They argue that the internet is full of ads from pop-up-windows, banner ads and interrupting video material and that this can lead to irritation in the consumer and as such lead to affecting the consumer's attitude toward the company in a negative way. They continue that digital marketing also leads to the problem that the company needs to build a trust to a consumer that they do not see in person. This means that when considering a digital marketing the company must take into consideration the different type of psychology of online consumer behaviour. They also argue that in digital marketing you can have engagement with your consumers, but this can also lead to negativity. Negative comments and information about the product of company are visible to all the users which can lead to damage to the company's image or brand. They add that digital marketing also includes the usage of technologies that track and collect data from the users, this can lead to privacy issues that some users might find problematic and thus leading to lack of trust in the consumers. Lastly the point out that digital marketing offers many technical solutions, and this can lead to over emphasizing the technical solutions over the actual content.

Content marketing. In an article on Mailchimp (n.d.) they define content marketing as a strategy in where content is created, this could be videos, podcasts, articles or other media and this media is used to attract, retain and engage with an audience. They continue that this strategy promotes the brand, establishes credibility and helps to remind the customer of the product or service that the organization offers.

Shastri states (2018) that content marketing produces earned audience and that traditional marketing produces rented audiences. He argues that with content marketing the company offers the audience value, and such choose to consume the marketing that the company provides and that you own the audience. With traditional marketing Krishna sees that this is a rented audience as the company pays money to others that already have an audience so the company can get the message to that audience. With this method when the campaign is over the rented audience cannot see the company's content and as such,

they are no longer potential consumer for the company. He adds that content marketing also has the advantage that the company is building trust with the consumers.

Meta. According to Statista (2021b) Facebook is the biggest social media channel with over 2.9 billion monthly users and Instagram is not far behind with its 2 billion monthly users. This makes them very attractive social media platform for marketers because of the large reach that can be achieved. Both social media platforms are owned by the company called Meta (Facebook, n.d.). This makes marketing easier as you can manage both Facebook and Instagram from the same place called meta business suite (Facebook, n.d.). You can launch post, ads and respond to messages. This makes advertising on these platforms more efficient. Dessler (2020) reasons that Instagram and Facebook also have an advantage to YouTube and Tik-Tok as in that the creator does not have to use videos. He argues that even though videos can create more engagement to your post, making video content is requires more time, resources and knowledge to produce. This means that Facebook and Instagram have an advantage as marketing platforms as they do not require a higher investment in the form of video content as you can also create content that is only in the form of pictures or text.

E-mail as a digital marketing tool. In a study by Hudák et al. (2017, p. 343–346) about the importance email in e-commerce they found that in the wider public email was considered untrustworthy and as an unsolicited form of marketing. In the study they concluded that it proved to be one of the most effective ways of marketing, building a brand, improving relations with customers, promoting sales and acquiring new contacts. The authors of the study list five tasks that a newsletter should fill in both business to business and business to customer newsletters. A newsletter should lead reader to ordering products or services, provide information for customers and for potential customers, increase the credibility of the brand, remind the customer of the company and to receive feedback. In their study, they compared the return on invest of email marketing to different types of digital marketing. They found that email marketing had a higher return on investment that SEO, content marketing, paid search and social media.

In their study, they used eye tracking technology to determine what made customers click on emails. They found that the subject line of the email had a large impact on if the customer opened the email. The first three words on the subject line had the most impact and that most customers did not read more than five words on the subject line. The authors recommend that the following should be considered when creating e-mail, time that the e-mail was sent, that the subject message should not be longer than seven words and that when the recipient views the email the subject and sender can be displayed in different ways depending on the device.

The authors also recommend that when using e-mails as marketing that the organization should collect data and measure the impact of the newsletter. The authors recommend using Google Analytics, as it provides page views and time spent on the site, the number of conversions, bounce rate and revenue generated by the e-mail campaign. With this information the newsletter or campaign can be modified for better results.

Websites and search engine optimization. In a *Forbes* article by Kaplan (2020) he argues that every business should have a website. In the article, he goes on to list benefits that a website has on an organization. Kaplan argues that websites give the organization credibility as not having a website may make people question the legitimacy of the business. He also argues that websites help customers and the owner save time as customers do not need to call and ask for locations, opening times or other useful information. He adds that websites can also be used to post updates and announcements to the customers. Kaplan comments that one of the most intriguing reasons to have a website is that it can generate leads. Lastly, he comments that having a website that is SEO-optimized can help with sales as the website will show in Google searches.

To optimize a site for search engines there are things that Google (n.d.) recommends site owners to do. Google recommends being descriptive and to use accurate descriptive titles for all webpages and to put different topics, services and products on different pages. They also recommend being topical and to keep the website up to date, this will make sure that if there are new trends that your page can be found. Also, Google recommends getting referrals from other sites, as this will help with search engine optimization.

TikTok. Geysler (2022) states that TikTok is a video-sharing app, in which users can create and share short form videos any topic. In the same article he comments that TikTok's popularity has been growing immensely and that in October 2018 it was the most-downloaded video and photo app in the Apple store globally. This growth has not stopped, and in March 2022 the app was available in 150 countries and had 1 billion users according to Doyle (2022). TikTok also has a high amount of engagement according to Dean (2022) as the app had the highest engagement with an average length of sessions being 10.85 minutes and the second highest engagement being held by Pinterest by having a session length of 5.06 minutes. In the same article Dean also mentions that in the U.S.A 47% of the users are aged between 10 and 29 years.

Table 2. The disadvantages of traditional and digital marketing.

Digital marketing	Traditional marketing
Can be annoying	High cost
Negative engagement	No metrics
Privacy issues	Passive form of marketing
Technicality over content	Not engaging

Table 3. The advantages of Digital and traditional marketing.

Digital marketing	Traditional marketing
Global reach	Local audience

Low cost	Physical advertisements
Analytics	Hard to ignore
Optimization	
Engagement with the audience	

4.3 Strategic decisions in marketing

Vuokko et al. (2004, p.139) argued that when making strategic decisions for marketing there were three interconnected things that should be considered. Segmentation, focus and positioning.

Segmentation means that the population is divided into different categories, for example potential employees, customers and members. Vuokko et al. (2004) reminds that these categories are too broad and should be further divided. For example, potential employees could be salaried employees or volunteers, and this could be further divided by age or other factors. Segmentation is not merely dividing the population, but creating segments that have a purpose in marketing, and this is the main question of segmentation. What are the relevant segmentation criteria?

After the population has been categorized into different segments the next step is to focus on one or more of these segments. The organization must prioritize, if the organization chooses to market to all segments the marketing resources will be divided so thinly that it will have no effect.

Positioning is deciding what kind of organization will be to different segments. Positioning is finding out your competitive edge. This decision should be based on being engaging with the segments, having competitive edge and being profitable. The organization needs

to find their place in the market. Where does the organization position it self. What is the niche that the organization fills.

4.4 Marketing mix

The *Economic Times* (n.d.) define marketing mix as

“set of actions, or tactics, that a company uses to promote its brand or product in the market.”

The most well-known marketing mix is the 4ps (product, price, place and promotion) this marketing mix was introduced by McCarthy in the 1960s according to Oxford reference (n.d.-a). In 1982 Booms and Bitner added three more Ps to the 4ps, those Ps being people, process and physical evidence (Oxford college of marketing, n.d.).

Lake (2021) states that with the marketing mix allows organizations to make successful marketing decisions, these decisions can help an organization to become superior and flexible in its market, to refine collaboration between the people and subsections of the organization, and to expand the strengths and to limit the weaknesses. She adds that by working through the marketing mix, an organization can create a strategy that can help the organization to reach consumers, improve sales and grow the organization.

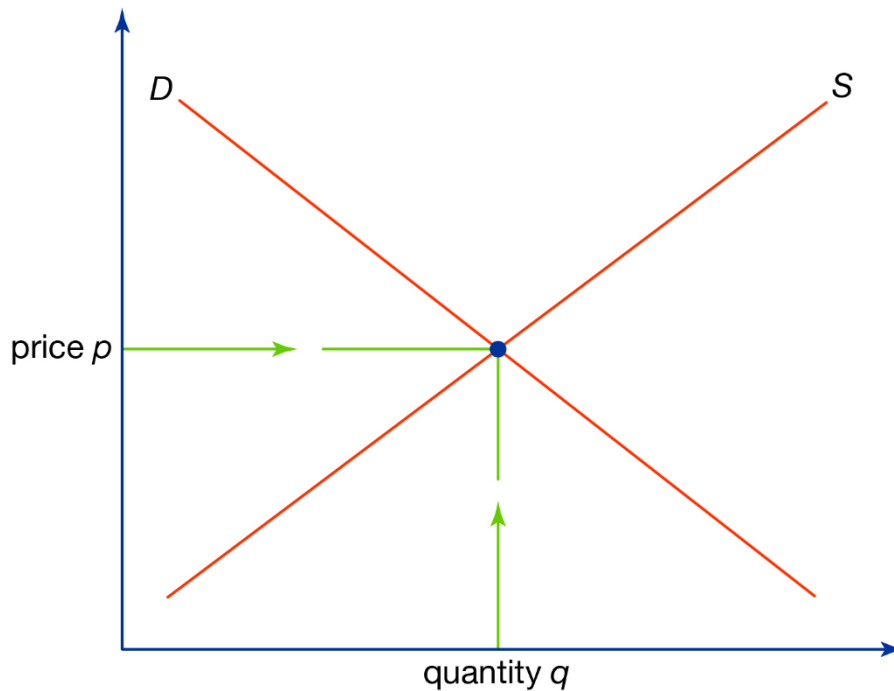
Queensland's government (2017) defines product as referring to what you are selling, including all the features, advantages and benefits that your customers can enjoy from buying your goods or services. Oxford college of marketing (n.d.) defines product as a product, service or a combination of that meets the core needs of the customer.

Queensland's government webpage (n.d.) describes price as

“This refers to your pricing strategy for your products and services and how it will affect your customers. You should identify how much your customers are prepared to pay, how much mark-up you need to cater for overheads, your profit margins and payment methods, and other costs.”

They continue that price of a good will determine its demand, with more demand for a product the price will increase and with less demand the price will decrease. Figure 1 demonstrates this concept, as supply goes up demand lowers, and these two forces will find their equilibrium when the two forces meet.

Supply and demand



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Figure 1. Relationship of price to supply and demand (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2022).

Oxford college of marketing (n.d.) defines Place as where the customers make the purchase. The place can be a physical location such as a store or it can also be an online presence where customers can buy the product or service.

Oxford college of marketing (n.d.) comments that promotion is communication about the product to the customers to generate awareness, interest, desire or action. The Queensland's government (n.d.) asserts that promotion is

“activities you use to make your customers aware of your products and services, including advertising, sales tactics, promotions and direct marketing. Generally, these are referred to as marketing tactics.”

People in the marketing mix are defined by Oxford college of marketing (n.d.) as the people in the forefront when interacting with customers, whether that be taking and processing their enquiries, taking sales or getting feedback from the customers. This interaction can be in person, online through website or social media or by phone.

The Queensland's government webpage (n.d.) describes process as how does the customer get a hold of the product or service. How easy or hard it is to get the product from the company. Oxford college of marketing (n.d.) continues that the process can also refer to the customer journey from the enquiry of the product until the making of the purchase. How long does the customer have to wait until a response, or how long does it take for an employee to reach out to the customer.

Oxford college of marketing (n.d) defines physical evidence as how the company looks to the customer. This can be the appearance of the establishment, uniforms of the employs, online reviews or the website. Queensland's government webpage (n.d.) asserts that physical evidence can also encompasses the packaging of the product, branding or interior design of the store.

4.5 Relationship marketing

Oxford reference (n.d.-b) defines relationship marketing as

“Marketing activities aimed at building long-term relationships with parties (especially customers) that contribute to a company's success. The goal is to ensure long-term value to customers, producing enduring customer satisfaction.”

In a paper published in the European journal of marketing by Vincent and Webster (2012). In the paper, they explored relationship marketing in the context of an Australian wine association. In their paper they found that it was important for the members to identify with

the goals and values of the association. This finding could be mirrored in the Abila's membership engagement (Amanda Myers, 2016). This study found that code of ethics was the most important thing for members.

In the study they found that

“Relationship benefits seem to have an indirect impact on retention through satisfaction as members have to find the benefits to be satisfactory in order for them to enjoy their membership and want to maintain it”.

5 RESEARCH

5.1 Quantitative and qualitative research

Hirsijärvi et al. (2009, p. 136) argue that research can be split into two methods, those methods being quantitative and qualitative method. He continues to comment that the distinction between the methods can be summed up as follows, quantitative method being the more pragmatic research method and he describes qualitative research method as more of an epistemological research method. In his article Streefkerk (2022) argues that quantitative research is more focussed on testing theories and hypotheses and qualitative research is more focussed on exploring ideas and formulating a theory or hypothesis.

Bryman (2012, p.35) defines quantitative research as a research strategy that highlights quantification in the collection and analysis of data. Bryman (2012, p.36) states that

“quantitative research entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories and that has incorporated the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism and embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality”.

Bandari (2021) explores the different types of quantitative research methods. He lists that there are four different types. First, he lists experiments which he describes as controlling a variable to see its effect on a dependent variable. The second research methods he lists is survey which he describes as asking questions of a group of people by phone, online or in-person. The third method being systematic observation as identifying a behaviour or an occurrence and monitoring it in its natural setting. Lastly, he lists secondary research which he describes as collecting data that has already been collected for other purposes.

In the same article he also lists the advantages of using quantitative research method. He argues that quantitative research is easier to replicate in the future this is because data collection and be standardized and used again, and that the study can be reproduced in other cultural settings, with different groups or at a different time and that these results can

be compared statistically. He also adds that quantitative research can be used for large samples and that quantitative research method can be used to test hypothesis.

Bryman (2012) contrast quantitative research with qualitative research as a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection of and analysis of data. He continues that this research method emphasizes and inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research. He asserts that qualitative research rejects the practises and norms of the natural scientific model and positivism in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world.

The university of Texas Arlington (2022) defines qualitative research as a process that tries to find a deep understanding of a social phenomenon within their natural setting, this research focuses rather on the why this this social phenomenon is happening rather on the what is happening. The University also points out that this type of research relies on the direct experiences of individuals rather than a logical and statistical procedures.

5.2 Mixed method research

The research method chose for this thesis work is mixed method research, as the survey includes both quantitative and qualitative questions. The author argues that to achieve an adequate understanding of the needs and wishes of international students pertaining to the student unions membership that a mixed method research is needed. Tegan George (2022) argues that mixed method can aid in gaining a better understanding than either quantitative or qualitative could alone. She continues that mixed method combines the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

This thesis work has two aims, to help SAMO in their membership acquisition and to find a reason for the different membership rates between the international degree and exchange students. This means that the objectives of this thesis work are very pragmatic and as Hirsijärvi et al. argue (2009, p. 136) that quantitative research is the more pragmatcal of the two research methods. Quantitative research is also described as being narrower and more concise according to Greenfield (2016). As this the thesis research is very concise and limited to only a subset of a population this being international students in SeAMK and

their membership in a particular organisation means that quantitative research is advantageous in this thesis work, but quantitative research alone possesses problems. In her article Bhandari (2022) remarks that some of the disadvantages of quantitative research are that it can be superficial, and it can have structural biases. She comments that quantitative research can be precise and restrictive and that this may be inadequate when complex concepts are at play and that structural biases can lead to incorrect conclusions. The author concedes that the author does not represent the group under research and thus there is most likely thing that the author did not take in account in the making of the survey question. Because of this the survey has qualitative portions to better understand the population under research and thus mixed method was chosen for this thesis work.

5.3 Survey research and research implementation

Lavrakas (2008, p. 860) describes survey as research method used by social scientist to study and impart data about people and social phenomena. He adds that surveys as scientific because accepted process that can be observed and reproduced, and that this process is meticulous and structured. He continues that a survey can be used to learn about the participants attitudes and conduct and learn more information about the participants. He concludes that this information can combined and to make an analysis of the survey population.

The research method chosen for this study was mixed method research that was implemented as a survey which was conducted in a web-based survey platform called Webropol. The link to this survey was sent via email to all international classes and a WhatsApp group that consisted of international students. The survey link was sent using these two methods on 26 April.2022 and the survey was closed on 5 May 2022. If the student answered the survey, they were able to participate in a raffle. The raffle prizes were coffee passes to the school's cafeteria and lunch coupons for the school's restaurant. This raffle was implemented to entice more participation in the survey, the prizes were provided by SAMO. When the survey closed 70 international students had answered the survey. 47 of those who answered were degree students and 23 were exchange students. The survey included 26 questions, which included choice and multiple-choice questions, some

questions could be answered as an open question and the last question was also an open answer question.

5.4 Validity and reliability

Reliability is defined by Howell et al. (2022), who consider research to be reliable if the data which is derived from test, experiment or other measuring process can be repeated. They add that without this reliability it would be impossible to formulate theories, draw conclusions or to draw conclusions. They define validity as how precisely the research reflects the concept that the author is trying to measure, as reliability is concerned with the repeatability of the study, validity concerns about how accurately the research is examining the subject of the research.

The author believes this research to be valid and reliable for the following reasons. The survey had an excellent response rate. Uitti Päivi is one of the student counsellors at SeAMK, she commented that in SeAMK there are 155 international bachelor's degree students and 51 exchange students (P. Uitti, personal communication May 16, 2022). The survey had 47 degree students and 23 exchange students as participants. This would mean an answer rate of 30% for degree students and 45% for exchange students. The survey also represented the population in membership amounts and had comparable amounts of both degree and exchange students. To achieve this response rate, the survey was sent out multiple times and a raffle was conducted for the survey. The survey was sent to all international students and the survey protected the anonymity of the participants, by not having any information that could be used to single out students from the survey. The survey questions were drafted by using the theory of the thesis and by the operations of SAMO. Also, the survey answers were analysed with different segments to assure more accurate results.

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1 Survey answers

The questions from one to six and question eight were segmentation question. In chapters 6.2 and 6.3 these questions will be used to compare answers and see how different segments answered different questions.

Questions 1, 2 and 3. The first question of the survey asked if the respondents were degree or exchange students, there were 70 answers. 47 of the respondents were degree students and 23 were exchange students. The second question asked the degree students what they studied, there were 47 responses. 33 studied business administration, 4 studied automation engineering and 8 studied nursing. The third question was aimed at exchange students and asked what they studied, there were 23 answers. 18 studied business, 2 studied nursing and 3 studied engineering. In both categories exchange and degree, majority of the respondents studied business. This mirrors the amounts of students who study in SeAMK both in degree and exchange.

Question 4. The fourth question asked which year the participant was studying at; this question was only for degree students as all exchange students' study for one or two semesters. The question had 47 respondents. 28 answered that they were in their first study year, 12 were in their second year and 7 answered that they were studying on their third year. This could be explained as the longer the student had studied the higher chance there is that they have quit the school or that they have graduated, meaning that there are less students every year.

Question 5. The fifth question asked about which continent the respondents were from, there were 70 answers. The answers were that 34 were from Europe, 20 from Asia, 10 from Africa and 6 from America. This could be explained as students who come from the European Union do not need visas, but student who come from elsewhere do need visas, this process can be timely and expensive, and thus limiting the number of students who come from outside of the European Union.

Question 6. The sixth question asked the participants where they studied from, there were 70 answers. 88% of the participants studied from Seinäjoki, 6% lived outside of Seinäjoki but visited Seinäjoki for lectures and 6% studied from outside of Finland. As the executive director of SAMO J. Erkkonen (personal communication, April 24, 2022) commented that some international students still study from outside of Seinäjoki, because of COVID-19. Even if some students study from outside of Seinäjoki this question confirms that most students did study in Seinäjoki. This means that they could attend SAMO events and could use the benefits and discounts that SAMO provides for those who are members and thus SAMO could recruit these students.

Question 7. The seventh question asked where the participant heard about SAMO, 70 participated in this question and gave a total of 155 answers. The answers were as such, 18 for social media, 42 from tutors, 23 from classmates, 15 from teachers, 6 from SAMO website, 11 from SeAMK website, 29 from orientation week, 7 by email, 3 somewhere else and 1 had never heard about SAMO. This question shows the importance of social connections and traditional marketing, as the Figure 2 shows. Tutors were the most common way of hearing about SAMO and after that orientation week and classmates after that. Social media was only fourth and after that teachers. This means that word of mouth is big part of communication for SAMO, and as tutors are an important part of the marketing process for SAMO. Email and SAMO both had under 10% and SeAMK website with 16% had more than the SAMO website. Only one participant had not heard about SAMO. Two participants who had heard about SAMO from somewhere else commented that they had heard about SAMO from Tuudo and from the information desk at school.

7. From where did you hear about SAMO (Student union of SeAMK)?

Number of respondents: 70 , selected answers: 155

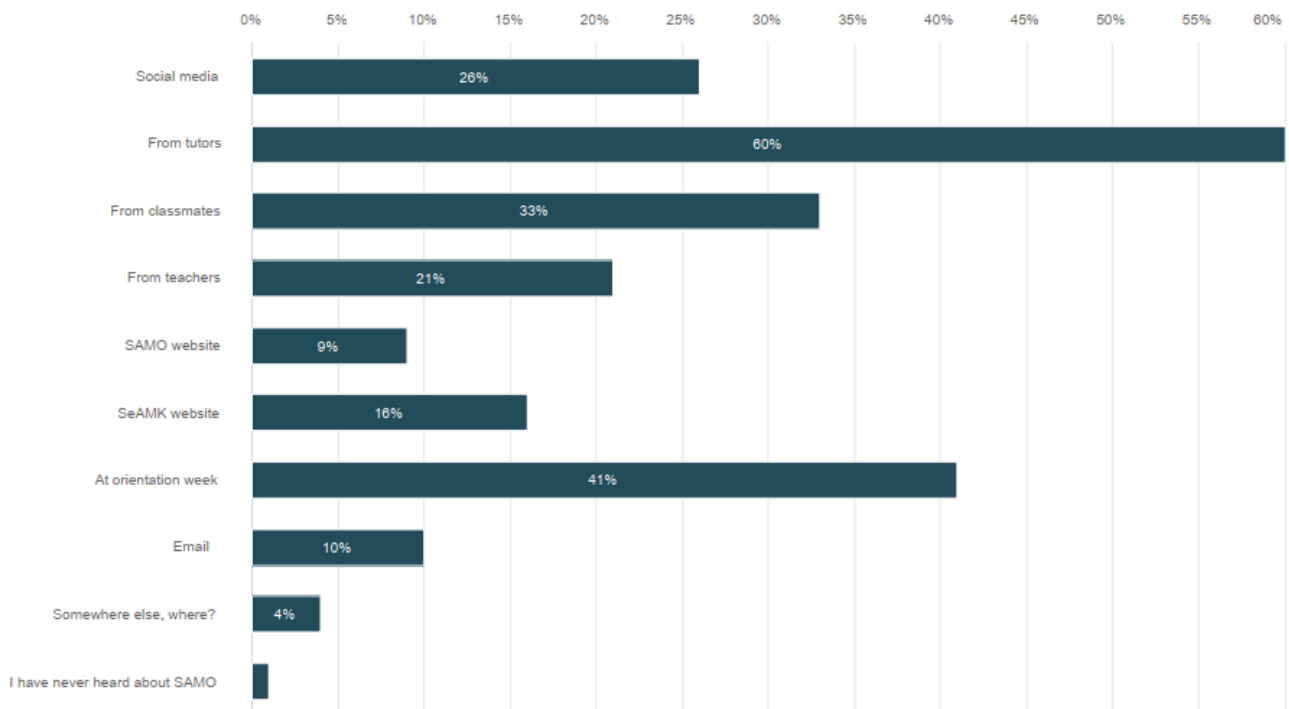


Figure 2. Source of information about SAMO.

Question 8. The eight-question asked whether the participant was a member, not a member, that the participant had been a member but currently was not and that the participant did not know if they were a member. 42 answered yes, 24 answered no, there were no answers to the option that they had been a member and 4 participants were not sure if they were members. Even though only 4 people did not if they were members or not, it is still troubling that a student was not sure of their membership's status. This could mean that the memberships do not offer enough and such they were not aware. It could also be that the student had not used his membership and as such did not know. There is also a chance that the student got all the benefits that they required without SAMO membership.

Question 9. The ninth question was for those who members had been, but currently were not. There were no participants who had been members, but currently were not.

Question 10. The tenth question asked if they were not members why that was, there were 24 answers to this question. 7 answered that they did not know what the benefits of

joining were, 4 answered that the membership did not offer enough, 5 answered that the membership was too expensive, 1 had never heard about SAMO and 7 answered that for some other reason. 5 of these other reasons was that the student did not live in Seinäjoki or that they had just moved, 1 commented that the benefits were not worth much for international students and 1 stated that they did not have enough time. This means that the most popular reason for not joining was not knowing what the benefits for joining were, so a lack of knowledge on the part of the student.

Question 11. The eleventh question was what made them join SAMO, this question had 42 answers. 31 answered that the benefits and discounts made them join, 6 joined for the events, 4 for the sport shifts, and 1 for the community. With 74% benefits and discounts was the by far the most important reason for joining SAMO.

Question 12. The twelfth question was about how well the students knew about SAMO; this question had 70 respondents. Events, benefits/discounts and sport shift options had quite similar results. The least known thing about SAMO was trusteeship by a large margin, 65% chose either 1 or 2 as their answer and only 4% answered 5, but as in the thirteenth question about what would make the participant join or renew their membership only 6% answered that more trusteeship would make them join or renew their membership this is not something that SAMO should concentrate on if membership sales is their goal. The second least known activity that SAMO provides was tutoring, with 49% answering either 1 or 2. This could mean that some students have not had any connection with their tutor, this would be unfortunate as tutors were the second most popular way of hearing about SAMO for international students. This could also mean that students did know about tutors, but did not know that SAMO provides this service, if this is the case SAMO should make sure that this fact is brought up more often. Parties were by far the most well-known service followed by benefits and discounts.

12. How well do you know what SAMO does?
 1 being I didn't know SAMO does this
 5 being I know this service very well

Number of respondents: 70 , selected answers: 428

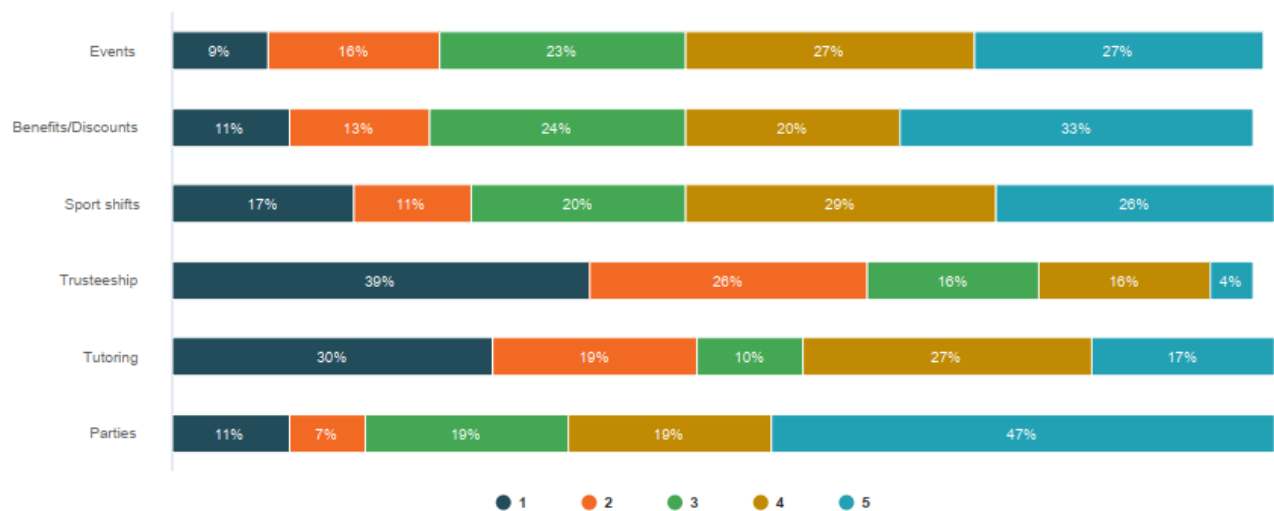


Figure 3. Respondents' knowledge of SAMO.

Question 13. The thirteen questions asked what would make the participant join SAMO or to renew their membership, this question had 70 respondents and they could give multiple answers and they gave 186 answers and can be seen at Figure 4. 41 participants answered that better communication from SAMO, 13 wanted more parties, 21 wanted more events, 18 wanted more sport shifts, 26 wanted more international events, 15 wanted more cultural events, 4 wanted more trusteeship, 30 wanted more benefits and discounts, 14 were happy with SAMO as it is and 4 wanted something else. Better communication was the most chosen answer, this would mean that most students even if not completely happy with SAMO are content with the services but think that they lack the knowledge to participate and use these services. The second most popular option was more benefits and discounts, as this is the core business model for SAMO this is not surprising, but as trusteeship is the reasons for the existence of student unions, it is quite surprising that it had only 6, but this can be explained by the twelfth question as trusteeship was the least known service that SAMO provided.

13. What would make you join SAMO or renew your membership?

Number of respondents: 70 , selected answers: 186

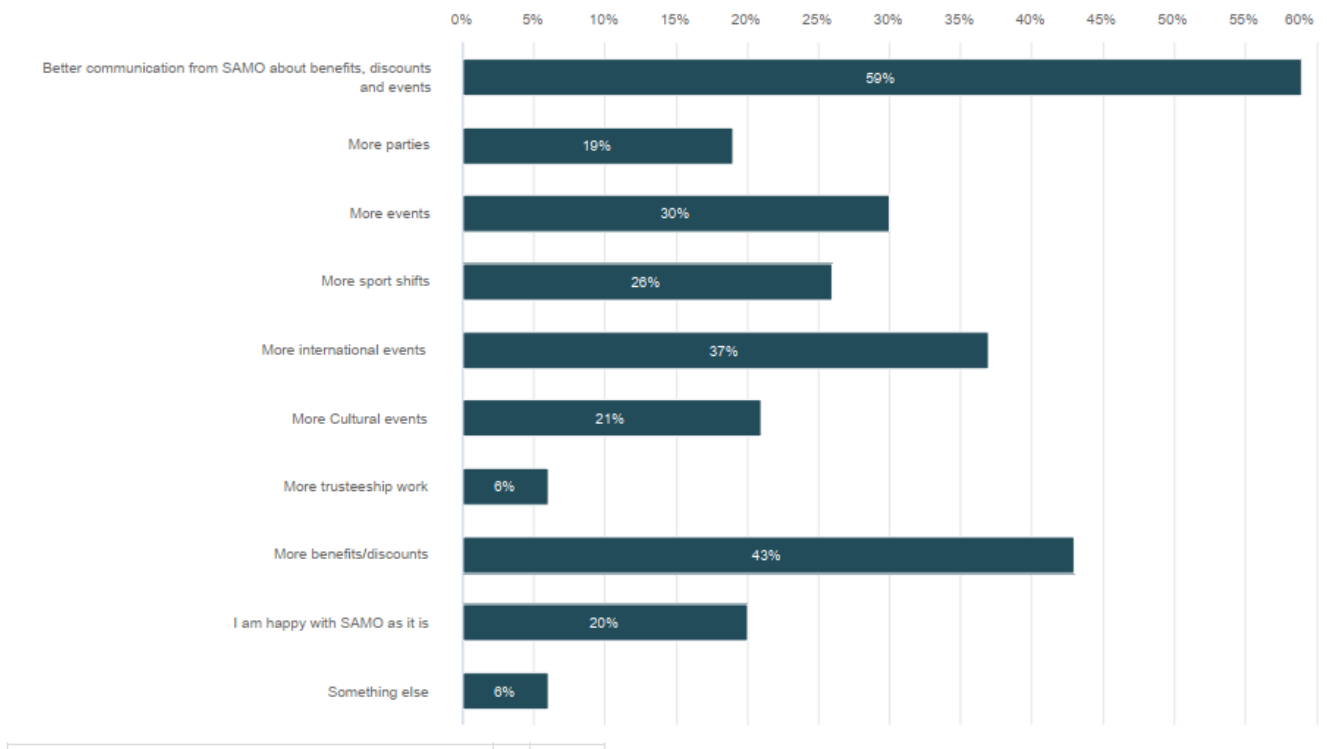


Figure 4. Respondents reasoning for joining or renewing their membership.

Question 14. The fourteenth question asked where the participants got their information about SAMO, 70 responded to this question and as it was possible to give multiple answers, there 159 answers. Instagram had the most votes with 37, this is not a very big surprise as Instagram is a very popular social media channel. What is surprising is that Facebook as an information source had the least votes with 7 votes, even though Facebook is the more popular social media globally. After Instagram, the highest votes went to classmates with 31 votes, then 25 votes to tutors, and then posters with 18 votes. This reinforces the idea that traditional marketing, social connections and word of mouth have a big part in the marketing of SAMO. After these followed email with 13 votes, teachers with 10 votes, webpage with 9 votes and Facebook with 7 votes. After these the options were that the participants did not get information about SAMO which got 4 votes and 3 votes for that the participants did not know that SAMO communicated in English. These two options combined 7 votes are largely in the minority, but still represent a flaw in the marketing of SAMO that should be improved on. In the interview with the executive director (personal communication, April 24, 2022) he remarked that social media is the most important

marketing platform for SAMO, this might not be the case as Figure 5 shows. Even though Instagram is the most popular choice, the following three options tutors, classmates and posters/flyers are all traditions media.

14. Where do you get your information about SAMO?

Number of respondents: 70 , selected answers: 159

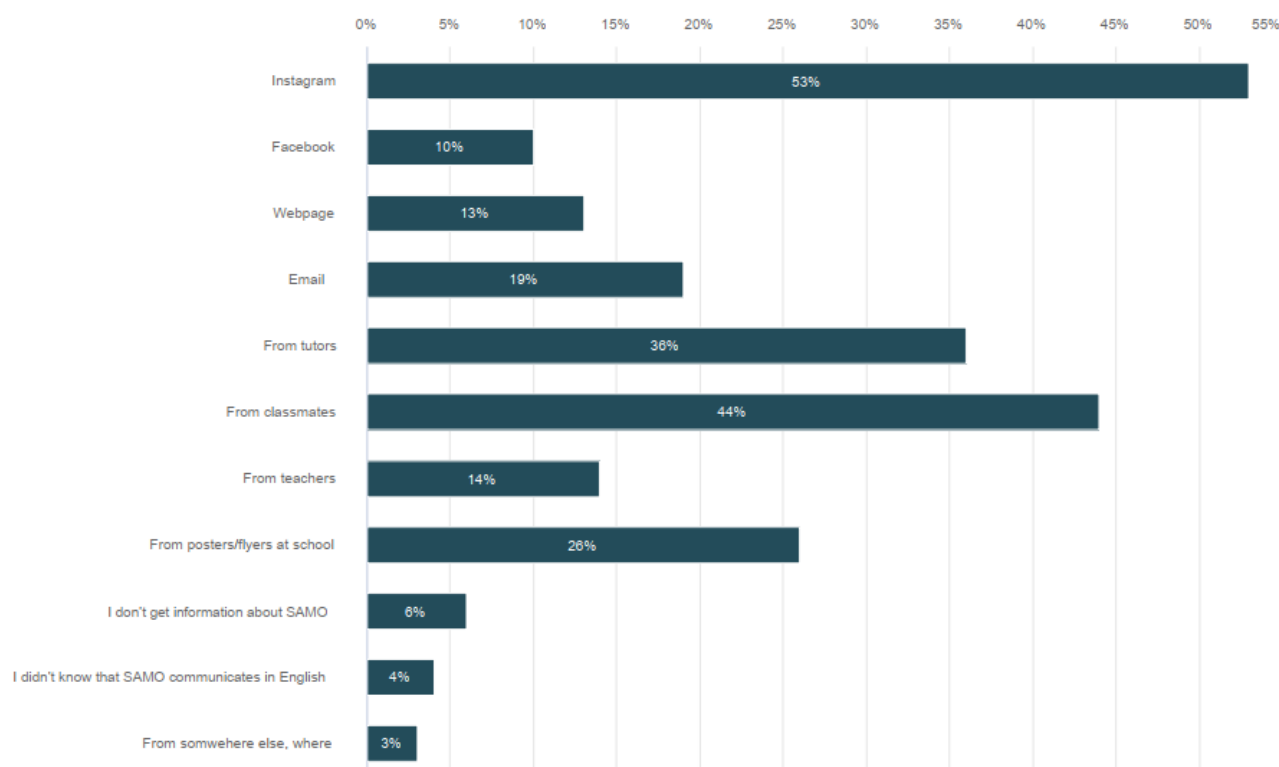


Figure 5. Information source about SAMO.

Question 15. The fifteenth question asked how would the participants rate SAMO's marketing, there were 70 respondents. The participants voted as 3 for poor, 16 for fair, 40 for good, 4 for excellent, 5 for I do not know and 2 for I do not know that SAMO communicates in English. 57% of the participants answered that the communication from SAMO is good, this number could be considered a success in SAMO part, but when compared with the thirteenth question what would make the participant join or renew their memberships there 59% wanted better communication from SAMO. This would implicate that SAMO still has to improve their marketing.

Question 16. The sixteenth question asked how often the participant would like to receive a newsletter, there were 70 respondents. Majority of the respondents wanted to receive a

newsletter either once a week or every other week, once a week 21 and every other week 15. Only 3 participants wanted to receive every other month and 3 once per semester. Only 6 participants never wanted a newsletter. SAMO currently sends a newsletter once a month, 52% would want to receive a newsletter more often, either once a week or every other week. This would be in line with international students wanting better communication from SAMO and the current communication is not enough.

Question 17. The seventeenth question was about were the participant give enough information about the SAMO on orientation day, there were 70 respondents. 34 participants thought that they were given enough information and 10 answered that they were not. 11 did not attend the orientation day and 15 did not remember. As the seventh question showed the orientation day was one of the most popular ways of hearing about SAMO, the 51% who either did not remember, did not attend or did not get enough information about SAMO on orientation day is quite alarming. This could be one of the major reasons why some students do not know SAMO as well as others.

Question 18. The eighteenth question was which channel would the participant prefer that SAMO communicate through. There were 70 respondents, and they could answer multiple times and this question had 157 answers. The answers were split as such, Facebook 12, Instagram 48, WhatsApp with 28, email newsletter 21, TikTok 7, tutors 12, posters 4, flyers 6, pop-up-stands 2, mail 12 and 1 somewhere else 1. Instagram had the most with 46, followed by WhatsApp with 28 and 21 with email newsletters. Traditional marketing such as posters, flyers and pop-up-stands have the least votes, but mail had more than Facebook. In the theory part of this thesis, it was discussed that digital media has the potential to be annoying and maybe some students think that way and would prefer to be communicated through a medium that is not full of ads and thus want to be communicated through the mail. Social media being the most common way that students want to be communicated through is not big surprise as the executive director commented that social media is the most important way of communicating to students. Still tutors have a considerable part in the marketing of SAMO.

18. Which channel would you prefer that SAMO communicate through?

Number of respondents: 70 , selected answers: 157

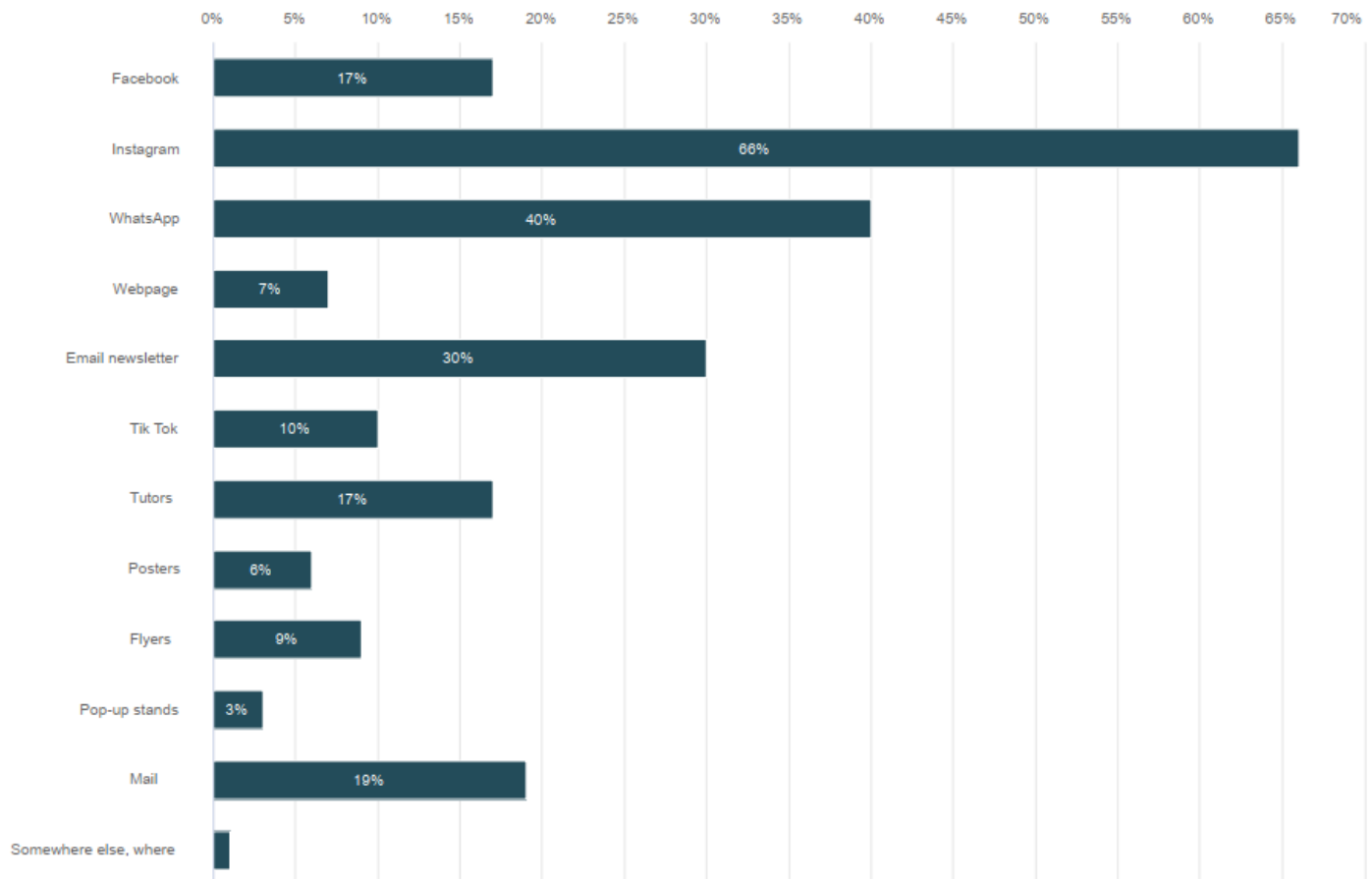


Figure 6. Preferred communication channel.

Question 19 and 20. The nineteenth question asked what kind of content the participants wanted to see from SAMO there were 70 respondents, and they could choose multiple answers, there were 169 answers. The answers were given as such, 51 for videos about events, 36 for videos about parties, 28 for videos about sporting events, 9 videos about SAMO board and office, 5 for podcast, 36 for newsletter about what is happening in SAMO and 4 for something else. Most participants wanted to see video content, be that from event, parties or sporting events. Newsletters for what is happening in SAMO also had a great number of votes, but podcast and videos about SAMO office had the least. As discussed in the theory part that video content has better engagement but is much more labour-intensive. Even with this labour increase this is something SAMO should consider in the future. The twentieth question asked what types of videos the participants wanted, long or short form video, there were 54 answers. 69% wanted short form video, this would

mean platforms like YouTube shorts, Tik-Tok, Snapchat or Instagram reels, 9% wanted long form videos from 1 minute to 10 minutes, and 22% wanted both.

Question 21. The twenty-first question asked what types of events the participants had visited, there were 70 respondents, and they could give multiple answers, there were 134 answers given. The answers were given as such, 34 for sport shifts, 11 for sport trials, 17 for non-alcoholic events, 50 for parties, 14 for trip-to-Lapland, and 11 for something else. Parties had the most votes at 71% followed by sport shifts at 49%. The rest of the answers hovered around 20% those being sport trials, non-alcoholic events and Trip-to-Lapland. This could be because parties are the largest events that SAMO organizes, as the executive director (personal communication, April 24, 2022) commented that parties can have 800 students attending, so as they are the most popular type of event it logically follows that this is the type of event that most students have participated in. Also, according to the executive director sporting events have around 50 people attending, this means they are much smaller events, but are only 20% less popular than parties with international students. This means when the size of the event is taken into consideration, sport shifts are the most popular event with international students.

Question 22. The twenty-second question asked how many times the participants had visited SAMO events, there were 70 respondents. The answers were given as such, 5 for one event, 6 for two events, 9 for three events, 8 for four events, 22 for over five events and 20 for I have not visited any SAMO events. These answers show that there are almost two groups, those who visit event frequently and those who almost never visit any events. Considering that SAMO organizes events almost every week, and some students have not ever participated raises questions. Is this lack of participation the reason of SAMO communication or are there groups of students who are not interested in any events that SAMO arranges.

Question 23. The twenty-third question asked the participants how often they would like to attend SAMO events, there were 70 responses to this question. The answers were given as such, 2 for none, 8 for once or twice a semester, 15 for once a month, 18 for twice a month, 19 for once a week, 7 for twice a week and 1 for every day. The most common answer was once a week with 27% followed closely by twice a month with 26%. Once a

month had 21% and 12% for once or twice a semester. 10% wanted to attend an event twice a week. SAMO holds parties once a month and has some type of events every other week. This question shows that there is demanded to have more events in a month.

Questions 24 and 25. The twenty-fourth question asked the participants whether they knew that they could volunteer for SAMO, there were 70 respondents. Only 31% of the participants knew that they could volunteer for SAMO. The twenty fifth question asked the participants would they like to volunteer for SAMO, there were 70 respondents. 27 answered that they would like to volunteer for SAMO, 24 did not want to volunteer and 19 did not know. 39% of the participants wanted to volunteer for SAMO, this means that there is a lot of potential volunteers in the pool of international students.

Question 26. The twenty-sixth question was an open question where the participants could leave comments or suggestions for SAMO.

Most of the open comments focused on communication. The main message from the comments was that currently not all the information was in English or that the information was harder to find.

When there are events, sometimes it's not that clear for us as exchange students what is going on and how some events are working. A lot is communicated in Finnish (for example the text on tickets (pub crawl, Wapu) and maybe you can also sell English tickets, so the exchange students know better what is going on. (H1)

As comment H1 explains, the problem is that it is not always clear for international students some events work. Even if the information on social media is in English, some of the communication from SAMO is only in Finnish. This leaves international students confused. In the open answers section, there were also other comments that gave the same criticism that SAMO lacks clear communication.

There were also multiple comments about international events. Some commentators wanted there to be international events and complained that some events were only in Finish. One

participant commented that they wanted international students to participate more in events. Also, some participant commented that they would like to see more events that were not parties. This is something that was seen on the twenty-third question which asked how often the participants would like to attend events, and the answers gave the impression that some students would like to see more different types of events.

6.2 Survey segmentation

As stated at the start of the sixth chapter, the first questions in the survey were segmentation questions which would be used to compare the different segments and their answers. There were 7 segmentation questions, but not all of them could be used, either because of low response rates or that they correlated so heavily with other answers. Question 2 and 3 which were about the participants are of study could not be used as most of the participants were business students. 72% of degree students and 78% of exchange students and thus comparing against other areas would not give accurate results. The fifth question about from which continent the participants were from. These answers correlated whether the students were degree or exchange. As over 90% of the exchange students were from Europe and most degree students were from outside Europe. The sixth question was planned to be a segmentation question, but as most of the participants studied from Seinäjoki further analysis from this question could not be done.

The fourth question about which study year the student was on was also a segmentation question. Although there were not many differences between the answers whether the student was on their first or third year of studies, there was one major difference. When this group was compared in the question about memberships the third years were much more likely to be members than those of second- and first-year students. One would assume that with the passage of time students would be less likely to renew their memberships, but the opposite is evident here. This could be because of COVID-19, as the third-year students started their studies at autumn of 2019 when COVID-19 had not affected Finland, but the students in their first and second year would have been affected, and as SAMO could not organize events which could leave to fewer members.

As stated at the start of this thesis, the thesis questions are why international students choose to join SAMO and why there is a difference between international exchange and international degree students in the membership amounts. Therefore, most of the analysis will be focussed on these two segments.

6.3 Differences between members and non-members

This chapter focuses on the differences between members and non-members and the answers that they gave. This analysis will go over only the question that had major differences between the two segments. From 70 participants, there were 42 members and 24 non-members.

Question 1. In the first question, we can see the difference between members and non-members. In the interview with the executive director (2022) he stated that most exchange students join as members, this is supported by the survey as there was only one exchange student who was not a member. There were 21 degree members and 21 exchange students who were members, and 23 degree students who were not members. This shows that most exchange students join as members, while degree students have a much lower participation rate at memberships.

Question 12. The twelfth question asked the participants to rate their knowledge between 1 and 5 on activities that SAMO provided, there were 70 respondents. As figure 7 shows, members were more aware of all the activities that SAMO provided. It is hard to know if this causation in that if a student is a member, they follow more what SAMO does and therefore members have more knowledge about what SAMO does or is this correlation where if the student knows more about SAMO they are more likely to join as a member. It could be argued that the most valuable reason to be members were the benefits and discounts, and in this question 59% of the members rated their knowledge of benefits and discounts as 5 or 4 opposed to non-members only 34% rated their knowledge at 5 or 4.

12. How well do you know what SAMO does?

1 being I didn't know SAMO does this
5 being I know this service very well

Number of respondents: 70 , selected answers: 428

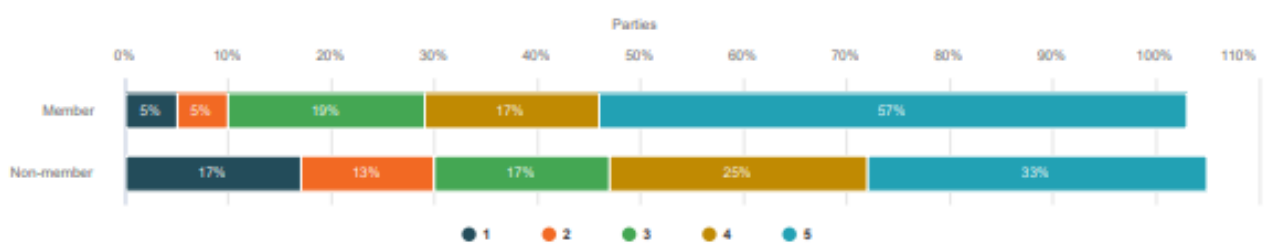
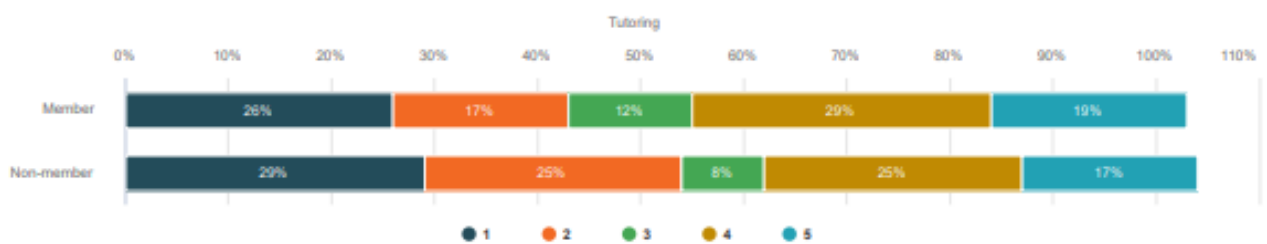
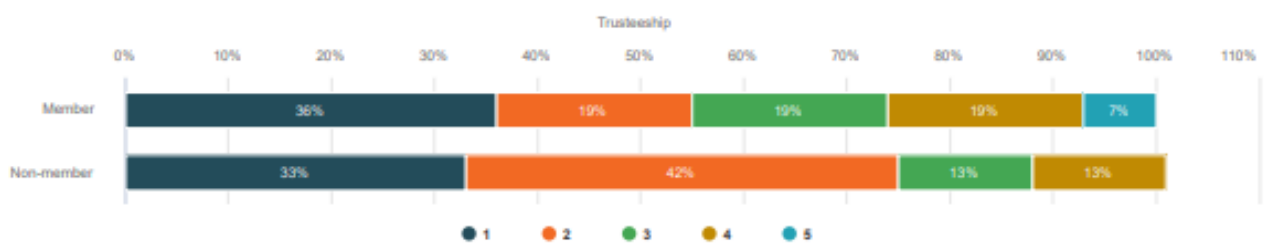
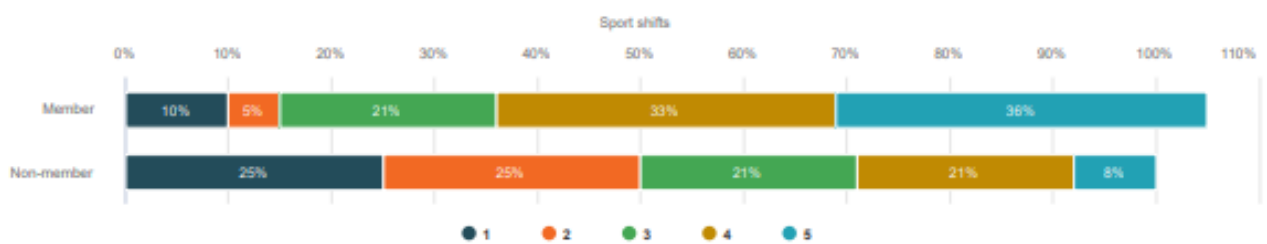
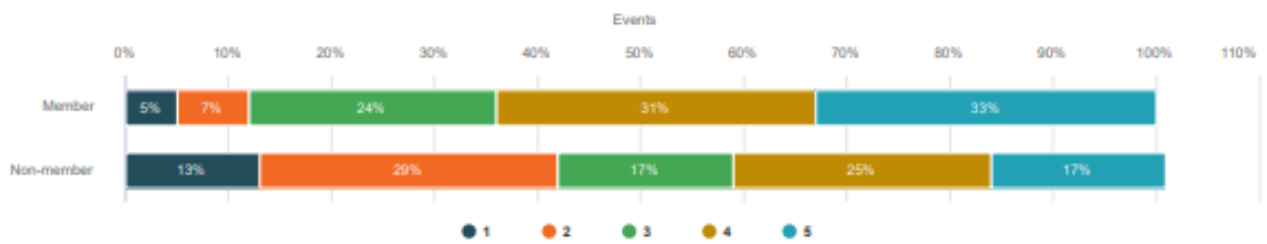


Figure 7. Members and non-members knowledge of SAMO.

Question 13. The thirteenth question asked what would make the participants join as a member or renew their membership. Figure 8 shows all the answers that were given, and it shows that members wanted almost everything more than non-members. This could be because members are more aware of the services and events that SAMO provides and thus wanted more. Non-members wanted more cultural events and trusteeship work. Non-members wanting more trusteeship work could be because most non-members are degree students and as such need more trusteeship work as they study for longer. As an exchange student you only stay in SeAMK for a maximum of two semesters, if something is wrong you may not want to complain and just wait until you leave. Opposed to degree students who must stay for the whole three and a half years, and this would make them want to see more trusteeship work. There were two open answers. The first thought that degree students were not as well integrated to the community, and that he felt that Finnish and exchange students were the focus of SAMO. The other open answer asked that SAMO should improve their communication.

13. What would make you join SAMO or renew your membership?

Number of respondents: 70 , selected answers: 186

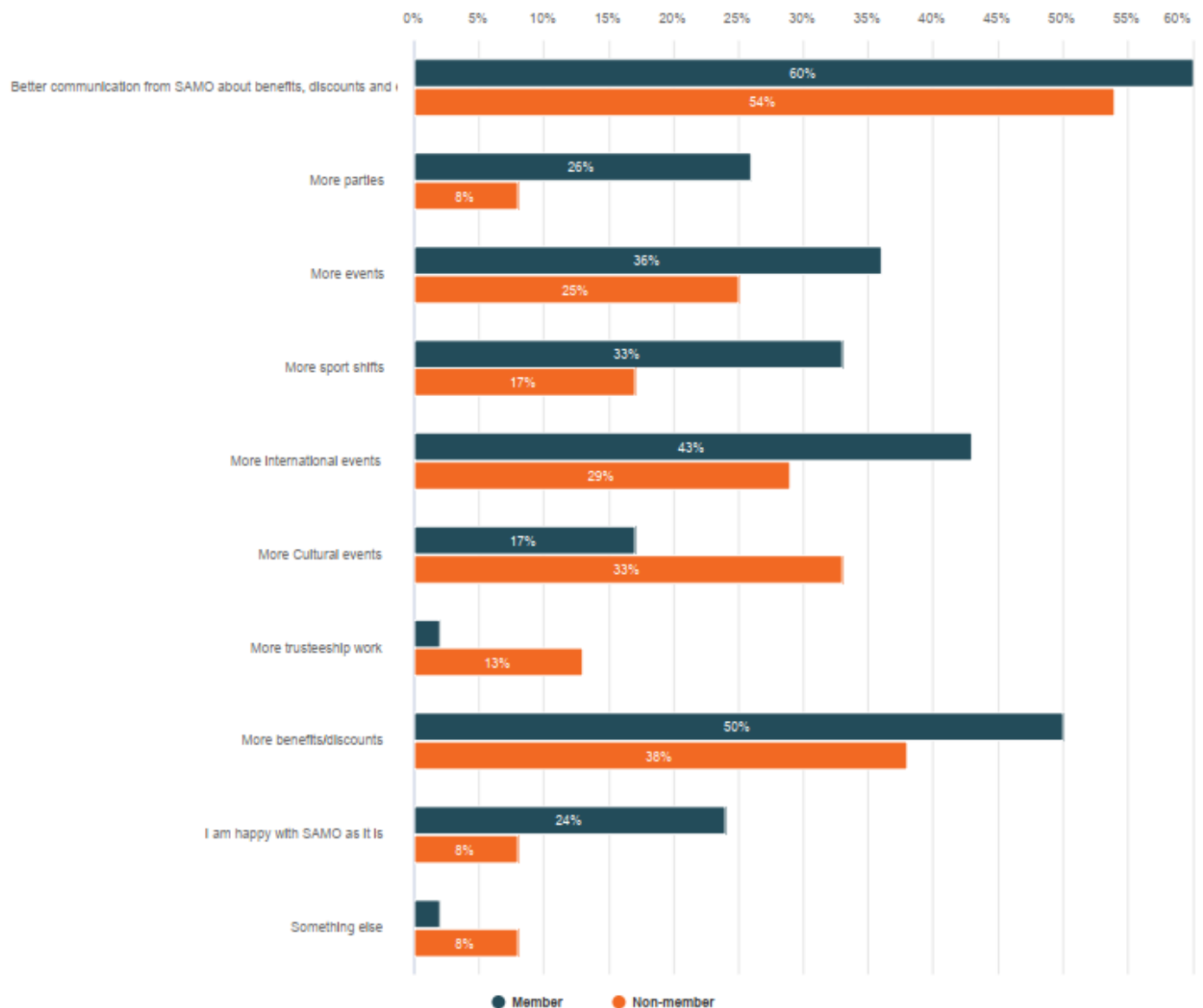


Figure 8. Members and non-members reasons for joining or renewing their membership.

Question 14. The fourteenth question asked where the participants got their information about SAMO. In this question there were major differences between the two groups. In the question, you could choose multiple answers and Instagram got 31 answers from members, but only 5 from non-members. This could mean that when you join to be a member you follow SAMO on Instagram or that those who follow become members. Non-members were more likely to get their information about SAMO from tutors, classmates and teachers. This could mean that as people do not give as accurate information as the source for

example Instagram, these students do not get the best information about SAMO and as such do not join to as members. The answers by non-members were much more varied than members. Most members got their information from Instagram, non-members source of information was much more varied, this could mean that non-members do not have full information about SAMO, as they must piece together much more of the information. Non-members were also much more likely not to get any information about SAMO, or they did not know that SAMO communicated in English.

Question 15. The fifteenth question asked the participants how they would rate SAMOs communication. Non-members rated SAMO communication much lower than members. This reinforces the idea that non-members do not get enough information that or the information they get is not sufficient.

Question 16. The sixteenth question asked how often the participants would like to receive a newsletter. The most votes for non-members were once a week, this could mean that as non-members think that they do not have the required knowledge of SAMO they want to see more frequent communication from SAMO.

Question 17. The seventeenth question asked whether the students were given enough information about SAMO on their orientation day. 25% of non-members answered that they did not attend the orientation day, and as in the seventh question where you heard about SAMO one of the most chosen answers was on orientation this could mean that SAMO is losing a lot of potential members as many who do not attend the orientation day do not become members. Curiously more members answered that they did not get enough information about SAMO on orientation day opposed to non-members.

Question 22. The twenty-second question asked how many events the participants had visited 58% of the non-members had not visited any SAMO events. As students do not visit any events this could lead to the students believing that SAMO does not offer anything to the student, and as 45% of the members had visited over 5 events this could also suggest the same thing. This could also have the same problem as the twelfth question that this could either be a case of correlation or causation.

Question 23. The twenty-third question asked how often the participants wanted to attend events most non-members only wanted to attend events either once a month or twice in a month. On the other hand, 38% of members wanted to visit an event once a week.

Question 25. The twenty-fifth question asked would the participants want to volunteer for SAMO. 62% of non-members wanted to volunteer for SAMO and only 24% of members wanted to volunteer. This could mean that those who are not members want to improve SAMO.

6.4 Differences between degree and exchange students

This chapter focuses on the difference between the answers of degree students and the answers of exchange students.

Question 5. The first major difference is seen at the fifth question which asked from which continent the participants were from. Almost all exchange students were from Europe 96%, only one was from America. This could be because of programs such as Erasmus which help European students to arrange their exchange period and the exchange agreements that SeAMK has with other schools. These two factors make it considerably easier to arrange an exchange from an EU country to Finland opposed from outside of EU as that requires a visa which makes the process harder. Most degree students came from Asia, followed by Europe, Africa and lastly America.

Question 7. The next differences can be seen in the seventh question that asked where the participants heard about SAMO. 12-degree students had heard about SAMO from their teachers and only 3 exchange students had heard about SAMO from their teachers. This probably does not mean that degree students teachers are more vocal about SAMO, to achieve these numbers it would only take one or two teachers to talk about SAMO, but it is not an insignificant source for degree students to hear about SAMO. Exchange students were much more likely to hear about SAMO at orientation day than degree students, this discrepancy is explained by the seventeenth question. Exchange students were also more likely to hear about SAMO from their classmates, this could be explained by the fact that

as more exchange students are members, then there is a greater chance that they would hear about SAMO from their classmates compared with degree students.

Question 11. The eleventh question asked why the participant joined SAMO. Only 5% of degree students joined because of events while 25% of exchange students joined because of events. This trend of exchange students engaging with parties and events will continue through the whole survey. Most degree students joined for the benefits and discounts at 86% while exchange students were at 62%. 5% of exchange students joined because of the community. The difference in this question could mean that as exchange students are here for a shorter time, they look for more experiences like parties or community from SAMO and degree students who stay for a longer time they are looking for the quality of life improvements like discounts and other benefits from SAMO.

Question 12. The twelfth question asked the participants how well they knew SAMO. Exchange students were more aware of what SAMO does in every category except tutoring. This could be because more exchange students are members and thus could be more aware of the services that SAMO provides. As discussed in the previous chapter benefits and discounts were the most important service for degree students for joining SAMO, but in this question shows that exchange students are more cognisant of the benefits that SAMO provides. This could mean that one of the main reasons for degree students not joining is that they do not have enough information about the memberships and the benefits that it provides. Exchange students were exponentially more likely to know about event, parties and sport shifts. Again, this could be either that as exchange are more likely to members, they are more cognisant of the services or that they are here in Finland for more experiences and thus more likely to seek out these experiences.

Question 13. The thirteenth question asked what would make the participants join or renew their memberships. Figure 9 shows that degree students were significantly more likely to want better communication from SAMO than exchange students. As discussed in previous chapters it is plausible that degree students do not have enough information and here it shows that they are also cognisant of that fact. Exchange students wanted more parties than degree students, but degree students were much more likely to want more cultural events. 39% of exchange students were happy with SAMO as it is compared to only 11%

of degree students. This question also had an option to leave a comment and one participant left a comment. This participant thought that SAMOs focus was on Finnish students and exchange students and the international degree students were forgotten. This comment would be in line with the fact that exchange students were more likely to think that the communication from SAMO needed to be improved.

13. What would make you join SAMO or renew your membership?

Number of respondents: 70 , selected answers: 186

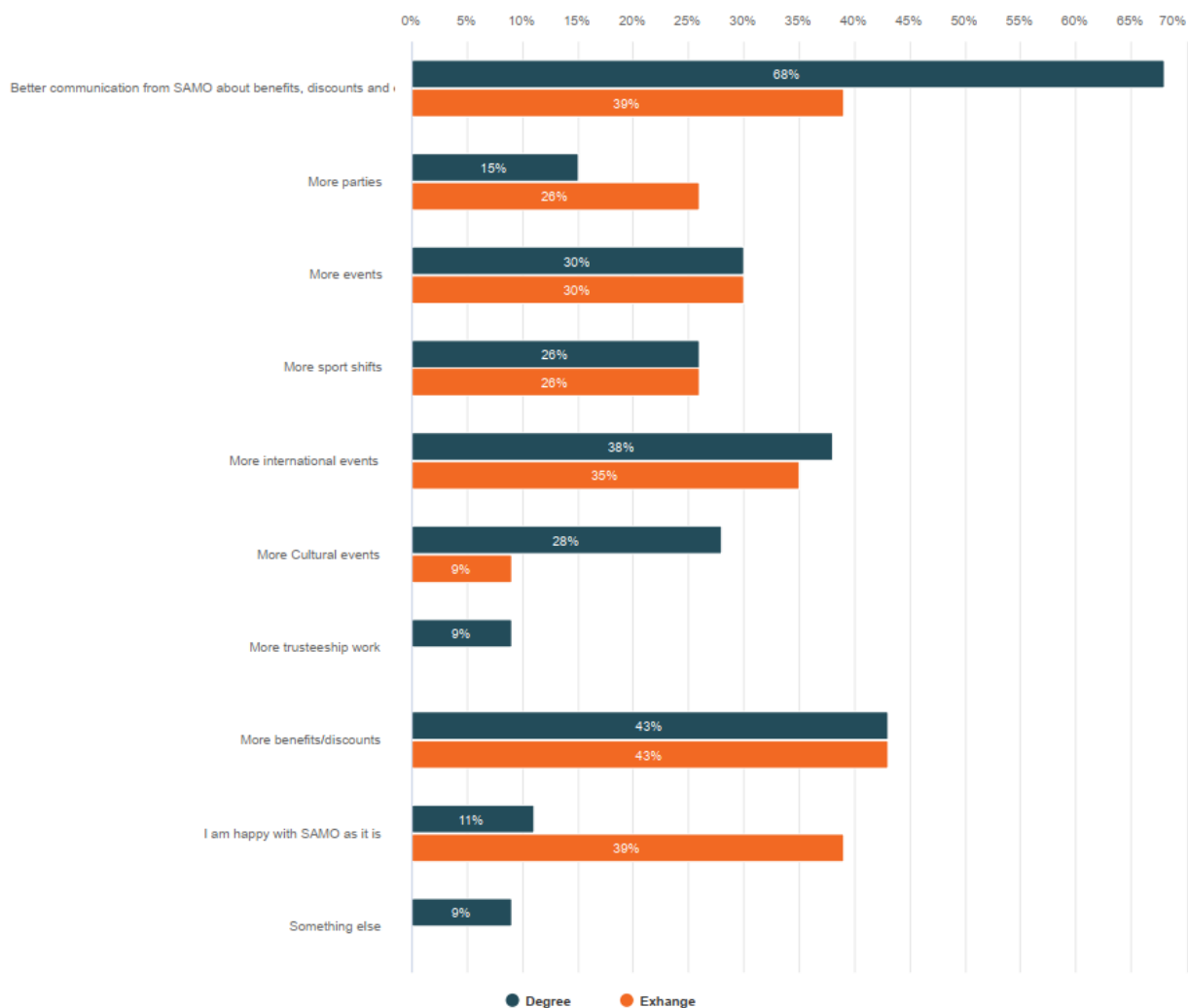


Figure 9. Degree and exchange students reasoning for joining or renewing their membership.

Question 14. The fourteenth question asked where the participants got their information about SAMO. For exchange students, the most popular answers were Instagram, classmates, tutors and posters at school. For degree students, their most popular options were

the same, but much less compared with exchange students. For degree students, Instagram was also the most popular option, but it was half as popular compared to exchange students. This is because there were categories that only degree students chose. There were two places that only degree students got their information from, those were Facebook and teachers. Also, only degree students either did not get information about SAMO or that they did not know that SAMO communicated in English.

Question 15. The fifteenth question asked how the participants would rate SAMO marketing currently. Figure 9 shows that degree students were more critical of the marketing of SAMO than exchange students. 6% of degree students rated SAMO marketing as poor while no exchange students rated the marketing as poor. 30% of degree students rated the marketing as poor and 9% of exchange rated it the same. 49% of degree students rated the marketing as good and 74% of exchange students rated it good. Only exchange students rated SAMO marketing as excellent, and only degree students answered that they did not know how to rate SAMO marketing or that they did not know that SAMO communicates in English. Now these answers can be compared with the fourteenth question which asked where the students got their information, and those channels that degree students used more than exchange students could be considered bad channels as they produce worse results. These channels were Facebook and teachers. It could be the case that Facebook is not a great platform for informing about current events as the information could be buried under everything else. For teachers, it could be the case as they are not a representative of SAMO do not have the most relevant or current information about SAMO and thus leading to worse outcomes in the communication department.

16. How would you rate SAMO's marketing and communication at the moment?

Number of respondents: 70

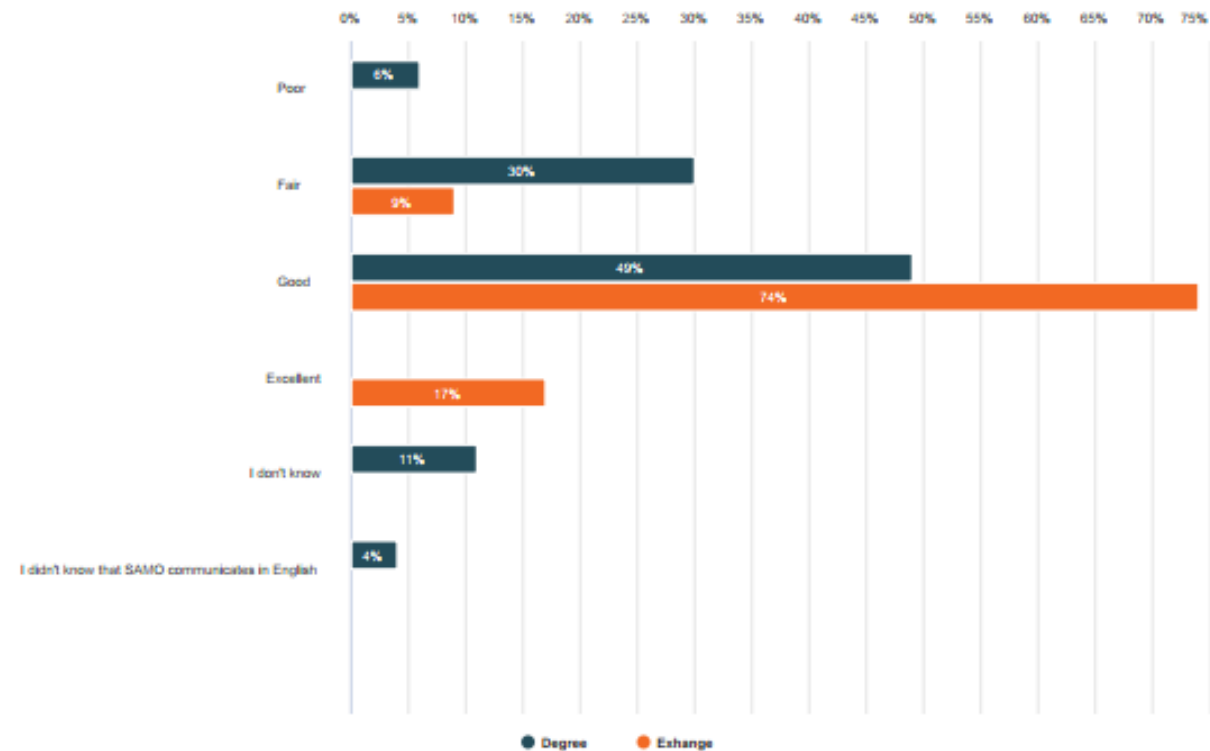


Figure 10. Degree and exchange students rating of SAMO marketing and communication.

Question 16. In the sixteenth question which asked how often that participant would like to receive a newsletter there seems to be two groups in the degree students. There were no exchange students who did not want to receive newsletter only degree students, this same outcome was with once per semester choice, but degree students wanted to receive a newsletter once a month more often than exchange students. This could mean that there is a group of exchange students who do not care about SAMO and do not want to be informed, but another group of people who think that they do not have enough information and would like to be informed more in the form of newsletters.

Question 17. The seventeenth question asked whether the students had enough information about SAMO on their orientation day. Here there are major differences between degree and exchange students. 21% of degree students did not attend the orientation day opposed to 4% of exchange students. As the executive director told in his interview (2022) degree students could have visa issues other complication and that is why they do not arrive at orientation day, and therefore they did not attend as much as exchange students.

45% of degree students answered that they got enough information about SAMO opposed to 57% of exchange students. This discrepancy could be explained if SAMO presents a different type of info to degree students or that the orientation day is different for degree and exchange students.

Question 18. In the eighteenth question asked what platform the students would prefer that SAMO would use in their communication. There were many differences between the two groups. Exchange students preferred Instagram, WhatsApp, tutors, and flyers. Degree students preferred channels were Facebook, Webpage, email newsletters and mail. If SAMO wants to increase the amount of degree students as members, the channels listed here should be the priority of their marketing efforts, as this could lead to degree students being better informed on SAMO.

Question 21. The twenty-first question asked what events the students had attended; exchange students were more likely to have visited every type of event SAMO had provided and in some cases such as sport shifts or Trip-to-Lapland exponentially more likely. The next question also confirms this point, as the question is how many times you have visited a SAMO event. 57% of exchange students had visited more than five times while 38% of exchange students had not visited any SAMO events. This is not in line with the other answers that degree students have given in this survey and strengthens the argument that exchange students are more likely to want to have experiences while they are in Finland and thus are more likely to attend events.

Question 23. The trend that exchanges students enjoy events and parties more is continued in the twenty-third that asked how often the participant would like to visit SAMO events. Exchange students want to visit events much more often than degree students, 48% of exchange students wanted to visit an event once a week, 17% of degree students wanted to visit an event once or twice in a semester and 28% once a month.

Question 25. The twenty-fifth question asked whether the students would like to volunteer for SAMO. 49% of degree students wanted to volunteer and only 17% of exchange students. This difference could be explained as exchange students stay only for a maximum of one year, and this is not usually enough time to attend the board of SAMO or the body

of representatives. There is still potential from degree students, even though degree students are less likely to attend events they still want to participate in volunteering for SAMO. This could be used to the advantage of SAMO as a recruitment tool and to get valuable ideas and comments about SAMO and thus increase their membership amounts.

7 ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will explore the survey's findings in relation to the research questions and provide SAMO an approach to improve their membership acquisition of international students as members. This chapter will also discuss the limitations of the study and propose future research.

7.1 Conclusion

As stated at the start of this thesis work, the thesis question was how SAMO can acquire more international students as members and why international degree students join at a lower rate than international exchange students?

The author argues that these two questions are interwoven, as shown in the chapter 6.3 with question 1. As there is a correlation between membership and whether the students are degree or exchange. There were only 1 exchange who was not a member compared to degree, where over half of the participants were not members.

In the authors opinion for SAMO to acquire more international members, SAMO needs to focus on their marketing. In chapter 6.1 question 13 shows that the most pertinent reason for joining or renewing the membership was better communication about membership benefits and discounts from SAMO. This is further evidenced in the chapter 6.3 question 12, where non-members are much less informed about membership benefits and members. In chapter 7.2 the author has listed proposals for solving both issues.

As to why more exchange students are members than degree students, the survey seems to indicate that exchange students are more well informed than degree students. In chapter 6.4 question 12 explains that exchange students are more informed on SAMO than degree students and that question 15 shows that they are happier with SAMOs communication than degree students. This could mean that the communication channels that SAMO uses do not interest or reach degree students. Another explanation for the discrepancy in memberships numbers, could be found in chapter 6.4 question 21. Exchange students were much more likely to visit event than degree students. This could be because

exchange students are more well informed about SAMOs events and as such participate more, or that because they participate more, they are more likely to be members.

The results of this thesis work seem to mirror the findings of the thesis work done by Pyhtinen (2020). Pyhtinens conclusions was also that the international students lacked the knowledge about the student union, and that the students felt that the communication was lacking. In Pyhtinens thesis concluded also that exchange students were more likely to be members than degree students.

7.2 Proposals for SAMO to improve the membership acquirement

In 4.3 chapter of this thesis Vuokko et al. (2004, p.139) argued for the importance of segmentation, the survey suggests that degree and exchange students are two distinct segments as they look for different types of services from SAMO. Exchange students seem to be more interested in events, parties and experiences and think that SAMO is the organization that can provide these experiences form them. The survey results seem to indicate that degree students would be interested in the services that SAMO provides, but currently the marketing is not reaching this population. The types of communication channels could be affecting this lack of sufficient information. It also seems that orientation day contributes to students joining SAMO and as not all degree students do not arrive on time to participate in the orientation day this leads to some degree students not having the necessary information to join SAMO.

As communication was one of the main differences between the two groups, this should be the place with SAMO should focus on. With this information SAMO should consider the promotion from the marketing mix, and how can they generate interest, desire and action in these two segments. As the theory and the survey suggest social media is a powerful marketing tool and should be one of the main marketing channels that SAMO should use. Instagram was an affective channel for marketing, as it allows to for photo and video content, and it was a popular marketing channel with international students. The study by Hudák et al. (2017, p. 343-346) and the survey suggest that email marketing is effective and wanted by the international students. SAMO should consider releasing newsletters on a more frequent basis. Even though Instagram is the most popular choice, traditional

marketing was also very influential with the international students, tutors, classmates and posters/flyers were all options that very popular answers. When SAMO is implementing their strategic marketing decisions they should not forget traditional marketing.

The survey results show that most international students had their first contact of SAMO by a tutor. In marketing mix one of the p's is people, those who sell the product, in this case that would be the tutors. SAMO could use tutors as a more effective source of membership acquisition, this would mean that SAMO should increase the amount of training for tutors and make sure that they have the tools and knowledge to give a good first impression of SAMO, as this could lead to more sales of memberships.

International students were also very likely to hear about SAMO for the first time in orientation day, but as many international students especially degree students were likely to miss or not attend orientation day means that this could also be reason for the discrepancy between the two groups. SAMO should contemplate on which day the orientation day is being held and reconsider it, to make sure that as many degree students could attend.

One p of the 7 p's of marketing mix is product, and for SAMO their product is memberships, but the memberships offers' many different benefits. The survey seems to indicate that benefits and discounts were the most important reasons for membership, as indicated by the eleventh and thirteenth questions. This means that when promoting memberships, the priority should be on the benefits and discounts. Also, as SAMO improves their memberships, adding new benefits and discounts should be the priority.

As explained in the chapter 3.3 volunteering can be a powerful tool for membership acquisition and as twenty-fifth question indicates there are many international students who would like to volunteer for SAMO. SAMO should consider how they can implement more international students as volunteer, as they could provide important information on how the membership program and communication could be improved to serve the international student better. Chapter 3.3 also explores the importance of events as a tool of membership acquisition. In the survey international students showed an interest in more events. SAMO should consider recruiting international student as volunteers and letting them produce

new types of events. This could be a way of getting more volunteers and simultaneously improve the event spectrum of SAMO.

7.3 Limitations of the study

Even though the survey had a good number of respondents when compared with the size of the population, the answers gained from this thesis work could still be misrepresented. The participants were more likely to be members and as such could have been influencing the results. The author also recognizes that as the author is not from this population, there might be intricacies that a non-international students might not understand, as such there might be questions that the author did not know to ask and that might be reasons for not joining SAMO that the questionnaire did not cover.

The author recognizes that the thesis falls short in the question of why exchange students are more likely to members than exchange students. As it is hard to distinguish correlation from causation. As the exchange students are more likely to be members is this because they are more informed about SAMO, or because they are more informed about SAMO mean that they are members. Further research is needed to find a conclusion to this question.

7.4 Future research

The finishing of the survey and conclusion of the research have brought up new questions that should be researched further in the future. As this thesis work only targeted the international population which is quite small compared to the population of the school, research into the Finnish students and their membership acquisition could be helpful for SAMO. Those answers could then be compared with the answers given here. Further research could also be done for more specific parts of the thesis, such as what type of benefits and discounts the international student would want and what type of events the international student would prefer. The thesis done by Pyhtinen (2020) which also concluded that exchange students were more likely to be members than degree students. The author thinks that this is quite peculiar, as two organizations have the same problem with two distinct segments. The author hypothesizes that there might be cultural and social reasons that

explain this difference. If the degree students in Rovaniemi are also mostly outside of Europe just as in SeAMK, there might be cultural and social reasons that explain this difference in memberships. This would need more research, and this research should also be conducted in multiple schools around Finland.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview of Jani Erkkonen

Appendix 2. Interview of Päivi Uitti

Appendix 3. SAMO membership survey for international students of SeAMK

Appendix 1. Interview of Jani Erkkonen

24.4. 2022 Questions for the executive director

Has SAMO seen the affect of competition in the student card market?

The opening of the student card market has not affected the sales of memberships, but the threat of of competition is something that is on our mind. We have seen how this has affected student unions in Turku and in Helsinki

How and where does SAMO market itself, both traditional and digital marketing?

SAMO uses both traditional and digital marketing. Social media is the most important marketing channel that SAMO has, but SAMO also markets in traditional channels. SAMO uses posters, flyers, roll ups and arranges pop up in the halls of the school. Also SAMO has their office located at the center of the school where we market. One of the most important types of marketing is the orientation day when students start school, SAMO has a spot on this day and can talk about the things that SAMO can offer to students.

Are there any differences between memberships with international degree students and international exchange students or how do these groups differ from each other from the perspective of SAMO?

The major difference is that almost all exchange students join as SAMO members and only a small portion of the degree students join as members. Degree students are not as active as international exchange students, they don't participate in events as regularly. One reason for this could be that when orientations are held almost all international exchange students are present, but all international degree students don't arrive at time for the orientation. This could be because some international degree students come from non European countries and need visas that could take time.

What does SAMO do?

SAMO sells memberships, arranges parties, events, sports shifts, tutoring and trusteeship.

Who many people typically participate in SAMO events?

Well, that depends largely on the type of event. Hangout evening it could be from 5 to 15 people, sport event or other cultural events it could as high as 50, but parties are by far the biggest events. Typically parties bring around 400 to 500 students, but larger parties as the opening of the school year or vappu can bring 800 students.

How much of the budget of SAMO is made of membership payments?

About fifty percentage of the revenue that SAMO makes comes from membership payments.

How has COVID-19 affected the operations of SAMO?

When COVID-19 restrictions were in effect SAMO didn't arrange parties or events and the student unions cafe wasn't open. COVID affected sales of memberships only because the school didn't take in international students otherwise the sale of memberships wasn't affected. COVID has the affect that some international to this day study from their home country or from another city, and selling memberships to these students is almost impossible.

Can international students volunteer for SAMO?

International degree students can join the board and the body of representatives. International exchange students can join different kinds of work groups ran by SAMO. This volunteering is not as prevalent as the Finnish students.

Appendix 2. Interview of Uitti Päivi

Santeri Kujanpää 13.5.2022

My name is Santeri Kujanpää, I am doing my thesis work on international student of SeAMK and their memberships in SAMO. As part of my thesis and the validity of it I need to know how approximately how many international student study in SeAMK, both exchange and degree students. If you would be so helpful, thank you in advance.

Best regards
Santeri Kujanpää

Uitti Päivi 16.5.2022

Hei Santeri


In SeAMK English taught programs we have international students as follows:
(International = does not have Finnish citizenship)

AE 20
IB 105
RN 30
Exchange students 51
Active double degree students 15

With regards
Päivi

Appendix 3. SAMO membership survey for international students of SeAMK

SAMO membership survey for international students of SeAMK

 Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

This survey is part of a thesis work that aims to help the student union of SeAMK (SAMO) to improve their membership program and to improve their marketing for the international students of SeAMK. At the end of the the questionnaire you have a chance to participate in a raffle for Tsumppi hot beverage passes and Sodexo gift cards! The survey is anonymous and your answers will not be connected to the raffle

1. Are you a degree student or an exchange student? *

- Degree student (You are in SeAMK for a whole degree 3-5 years)
- Exchange student (You are in SeAMK for a semester or two)

2. What do you study?

- Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business
- Bachelor of Engineering, Agri-food Engineering
- Bachelor of Engineering, Automation Engineering
- Bachelor of Health Care, Nursing
- Master of Business Administration, International Business Management
- Something else, what _____

3. What do you study?

- From Field to Fork
- Gateway to Cultural Management
- Gateway to International Business
- Gateway to Library and Information Studies
- International Business Management (Master)
- Professional Studies in Applied Gerontology

- Professional Studies in Construction Engineering
- Professional Studies in Nursing
- Professional Studies in Physiotherapy
- Professional Studies in Social Work
- Professional Studies in Technology
- Something else, what _____

4. How long have you been studying? *

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year
- 5+ years

5. Which continent are you from? *

- Europe
- Asia
- Africa
- America
- Australia

6. Where do you study from? *

- Seinäjoki
- Outside of Seinäjoki, but visit Seinäjoki for lectures
- Outside of Finland

7. From where did you hear about SAMO (Student union of SeAMK)? *

- Social media
- From tutors
- From classmates
- From teachers
- SAMO website
- SeAMK website
- At orientation week
- Email
- Somewhere else, where? _____
- I have never heard about SAMO

8. Are you a member of SAMO? *

- Yes
- No
- I have been a member, but currently I am not.
- I am not sure

9. If you have been a member, but are not currently, why? *

- The benefits weren't good enough
- I didn't use the benefits/discounts
- The membership was too expensive
- I haven't been to the office to pay for a new membership
- Some other reason, what? _____

10. If you are not a member, why? *

- I don't know what the benefits are for joining
- The membership didn't offer enough
- The membership is too expensive

I have never heard about SAMO

Some other reason, what? _____

11. What made you join SAMO? *

The benefits/discounts

Events

Sport shifts

Trusteeship

Community

I don't know

Some other reason, what? _____

12. How well do you know what SAMO does?

1 being I didn't know SAMO does this

5 being I know this service very well *

	1	2	3	4	5
Events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefits/Discounts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sport shifts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trusteeship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tutoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. What would make you join SAMO or renew your membership? *

Better communication from SAMO about benefits, discounts and events

More parties

More events

More sport shifts

- More international events
- More Cultural events
- More trusteeship work
- More benefits/discounts
- I am happy with SAMO as it is
- Something else _____

14. Where do you get your information about SAMO? *

- Instagram
- Facebook
- Webpage
- Email
- From tutors
- From classmates
- From teachers
- From posters/flyers at school
- I don't get information about SAMO
- I didn't know that SAMO communicates in English
- From somewhere else, where _____

15. How would you rate SAMOs marketing and communication at the moment? *

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent
- I don't know
- I didn't know that SAMO communicates in English
-

16. How often would you like to receive a newsletter on what SAMO does? *

- Once a week
- Every other week
- Once a month
- Every other month
- Once per semester
- Never
- I don't know

17. Were you given enough information about SAMO on your orientation day? *

- Yes
- No
- I didn't attend the orientation day
- I don't remember

18. Which channel would you prefer that SAMO communicate through? *

- Facebook
- Instagram
- WhatsApp
- Webpage
- Email newsletter
- Tik Tok
- Tutors
- Posters
- Flyers
- Pop-up stands

- Mail
- Somewhere else, where _____

19. What kind of content would you like to see from SAMO? *

- Videos about events
- Videos about parties
- Videos about sporting events
- Videos about SAMO board and office
- Podcast
- Newsletter about what is happening in SAMO
- Something else _____

20. Would you prefer shorter or longer videos? *

- Short (from 10-60 seconds)
- Long (from 1-10 minutes)
- Both

21. What events have you visited? *

- Sport shifts
- Sport trials
- Non-alcoholic events
- Parties
- Trip-to-Lapland
- Something else _____

22. How many times have you visited SAMO events? *

- 1

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+
- I have not visited any SAMO event

23. How often would you like to attend to SAMO events? *

- None
- Once or twice a semester
- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- Every day

24. Did you know that as a member you can volunteer for SAMO and help to improve SAMO for all members? *

- Yes
- No

25. Would you be interested in volunteering for SAMO or joining the board of SAMO, joining the body of representatives, tutoring or some type of work group? *

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

26. Open comment. What would you like to see SAMO do or change about

their operations, event, memberships or something else?

Thank you for participating in the SAMO international students membership survey. Once you press submit the survey will end. If you want to participate in the raffle press submit and wait and the page will direct you to the raffle!