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Purnima Gupta

# Developing a Marketing Communication Plan for the Master's Programme in Business Informatics, Metropolia UAS

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

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Thesis

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<p>The purpose of this thesis was to develop a marketing communication plan for the Master's programme in Business Informatics at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The Business Informatics Programme was looking for the way to increase awareness about itself, which would require multiple actions by the programme, such as to increase the number of website visitors, increase the number of subscribers/followers on social media, and improve conversion and lead management process, and similar actions. The business challenge was, however, that these actions were not defined as an actionable marketing communication plan.</p> <p>To address this challenge, the thesis started its work by investigating the current marketing activities in the programme. After obtaining a picture of the current state, the theoretical part of the thesis comprised of two parts: marketing communication management and a SOSTAC planning process. The marketing communication management focused on building buyer personas, new customer acquisition, lead tracking and measurement, lead management and use of referrals.</p> <p>The study resulted in a proposal for the marketing communication plan. It followed especially the SOSTAC model, and addressed the challenges identified in the current state of marketing of the Business Informatics programme. The proposed plan describes various activities that can be done as part of marketing communication. The plan also includes various tactics and control measures.</p>	
Keywords	SOSTAC, marketing communication, social media, lead management.

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## 1 Introduction

Marketing communications has significant role in achieving overall marketing success. It is a management process by which an organization engages with its wide audiences. By understanding an audience's communications environment, organizations seek to develop and present messages for their identified stakeholder groups, before evaluating and acting upon the responses received. By conveying messages that are of significant values, audiences are encouraged to offer attitudinal and behavioural responses (Fill, 2005).

Moreover, Marketing Communication Plan is a blueprint for an organization to develop a systematic approach to reach customers and engage them by building long-term relationships.

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences currently does not have a standardized approach to create awareness about its Master's of Business Informatics programme and therefore there is an urgent need to develop a strategy in order to generate interest among potential applicants. The main purpose of this thesis is to highlight gaps in current state of marketing communication process of Business Informatics programme and thereby recommend an actionable marketing communication plan.

### 1.1 Case Organization: Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

The case organization for this study is Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. This is Finland's largest university in applied sciences, which offers various programmes in the field of Business, Culture, Healthcare and Social Services and Technology. Currently Metropolia has about 16,400 students and 920 staff members. The university offers around 69-degree programmes in where 11 are offered in English. ([www.metropolia.fi](http://www.metropolia.fi))

The organizational value is based upon quality services, expertise, transparency and community spirit. It has 900 foreign degree students with near of 90 nationalities that encourage multicultural studying environment. The budget is EUR 97 million for 2019 that is very low as per stakeholders for various activities. ([www.metropolia.fi](http://www.metropolia.fi))

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The Marketing and communication team of Metropolia manages the current market communication activities related to BI programme. Whereas some activities related to communication and relations to student and alumni, are managed by Head of BI Programme and its Study coordinator.

## 1.2 Business Challenge

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences is facing a challenge related to the need to increase awareness of its potential applicants about the multiple offerings by this UAS. The same challenge relates to the Master's Programme in Business Informatics. According to the statistics from 2019 spring joint application process, the number of applicants was somewhat lower in comparison to other universities (internal document). The main challenge of the BI programme is to attract attention of the knowledgeable applicants, especially for the engineering side, as the Programme benefits from a mixture of experienced Business and Engineering participants who study in the same group and bring the latest insight from the industry to the study process.

Additionally, in relation to the business challenge, the key need is to create more market presence of BI programme in order to attract more highly-educated foreign talent, who would bring the necessary international perspective to the Programme.

## 1.3 Objective and Outcome of the Thesis

The Objective of this thesis is to develop a Marketing communication plan for the Master's Programme in Business Informatics at Metropolia AMK. The main purpose of the Marketing communication plan is to attract attention of a bigger number of highly qualified applicants.

The outcome of this Thesis is a proposal of the Marketing communication plan composed of applicable suggestions and sub-plans using various marketing and communication techniques to help Metropolia reach the targets above. The proposed plan should help Metropolia to increase awareness, increase the number of Website visitors, increase the number of subscribers/followers on social media, achieve a better NPS score, to improve conversion and lead management process, and improve on other marketing actions.

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Thus, the outcome of the Thesis is a new marketing communication plan for Business Informatics Master's programme that is planned to be put into action for the year 2020. The outcome is directed to the respective responsible persons as shown later in this study.

## 2 Method and Material

This chapter contains the research design used in this thesis, which includes research process, data collection and data analysis.

### 2.1 Research Design and Research Process

The Research design starts with the Objective which is followed by the Current state analysis of the current marketing practices at BI Master's programme. The conclusions from CSA were made based upon the current state analysis and stakeholders' inputs that were beneficial to understand the current marketing situation and to focus further steps to improve it.



Figure 1. Research design of this Thesis.

As shown in Figure 1, CSA is followed by the conceptual framework that identifies the theoretical aspects related to marketing communication management and SOSTAC planning. This logic of Research design helps to gather knowledge about making possible strategies and techniques to acquire new customers, lead generation and management. The conceptual framework also helps to find out ways to adapt the methods of analysis and implementing tools for marketing communication planning.

The Proposal is the new marketing communication plan for year 2020. The plan is made based upon SOSTAC analysis where all aspects identified from the current situation of case organization has been analyzed and merged together with the suggestions from literature for building the proposal.

Thus, the research part analyzes the current marketing communication practices and strategies used by BI Master's programme, while the focus area of the development part was to assess and investigate the gaps present in the current marketing communication of BI programme and propose improvements in the new marketing plan.

## 2.2 Data Collection

The data collection relied on the documentation analysis and interview method to gather relevant data in order to describe the situation more accurately and systematically and identify the current weaknesses.

In-depth interviews were considered as best approach to collect data because it gives more precise and valuable information from the real participants. The length of interview was about 30-90 minutes where many research questions have been asked based on categories like Metropolia as organization, its communication, customers and competitors. The target group of respondents is consisting of 4 current students and 4 stakeholders. The same stakeholders also participated in the Proposal building and Validation of the proposed plan (altogether Data 1-3 collections).

Figure 2 shows the rounds of data collections 1-3 in the research process to develop the Marketing communication plan for BI programme.

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Data Round	Focus	Data Type	Source	Record	Outcome
1. Current State Analysis	Finding & Analyzing Current Marketing Communication Plan	Interviews & Existing Data	Current BI Students Interviews (4) Stakeholder Interviews (4): - Communication Designer - Marketing Manager - BI Program Managers (2) Existing Marketing Calendar Current marketing communication documents	- Date - Time - Duration - Audio/Video - No. of Pages (Transcription)	- Student and Management level experience - To gather knowledge of current marketing communication plan and its implementation
2. Building Initial Proposal	Recommendation/Action plan	- Meeting/Interview	BI Program Manager	Written notes	To create the proposal in Metropolia with selected stakeholders
3. Validation of Final Proposal	Validation of Initial Proposal	- Meeting/Interview	BI Program Managers (2)	Written notes	To gather feedback for the adjustment of proposal

Figure 2. Rounds of data collections 1-3 in the research.

As seen from Figure 2, Data 1 was collected from target group of 4 current students and 4 stakeholders. Current students from Business Informatics programme have been considered with an aim to collect data related to student's perspective and their views about the pre-application and post-admission process. They were a good source of information also for benchmarking because they know about other competitive universities and other similar courses in the market and about admission process. The stakeholders' target group consisted of 4 persons from various areas who were part of BI programme directly and indirectly such as current and past Head of BI programme and few members from Metropolia's Marketing team. Some of the stakeholders were also

part of marketing committee at Metropolia so they have more relevant data and information related to current and future marketing communication efforts and planning.

### 2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Following methods have been used to collect data and information to identify the root causes of business problem and to analyze current market communication process of BI programme.

#### 2.3.1 In-depth Interviews

The In-depth interview was considered as the most appropriate method to collect information as it provides more accurate and comprehensive information. The interviews were included current BI programme students and stakeholders such as current and past head of BI programme, communication designer and development manager of master's programme. Table 1 below shows the detail of the interviews conducted. It has information about each interview, date, duration and topics of discussion.

Table 6. Interviews details for data collections 1-3.

Interview	Date	Duration	Topics
Interview 1 - Student	15-May-2019	40 min.	Reason of choosing BI programme, Students motivation; Metropolia communication process after application; feedback about Website and programme content; Social media; Internal communication
Interview 2 - Student	16-May-2019	40 min.	
Interview 3 - Student	16-May-2019	30 min.	
Interview 4 - Student	18-May-2019	30 min.	
Interview 5 - Communication Designer	21-May-2019	90 min.	Current marketing communication tactics; strengths & weaknesses; social media usage; Budget; Strategies; Alumni relationships; Corporate partnerships; Communication channels; Competitors. Potential customers; Website and more.
Interview 6 - Head of BI programme	23-May-2019	90 min.	
Interview 7 - Ex-head of Bi programme	27-May-2019	80 min.	
Interview 8 - Development	4-June-2019	40 min.	

As seen from Table 1, the duration of each interview was about 30-90 minutes and was recorded on Skype. Many research questions have been asked during the interview, which are related to their experience and knowledge about different aspects of marketing and communication of BI programme at Metropolia. The interview questions were designed based upon important factors such as competition, market, communication, budget resources, social media, Metropolia's Website and the current actions taken for BI programme. List of interview questions to stakeholders and students can be found in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively and result of interviews are discussed in Chapter 3.

Additionally, these interviews were used for the situational analysis in Chapter 5. Situational analysis is an important step to revise the current situation of any business for making a new marketing plan. It tells a lot about the current state of business from a new perspective. Situation analysis also makes a decision easier about choosing tactics and strategies because it makes us know about customers, competitors, resources and various other components. (Chaffey & Smith 2017) Therefore, in this study the analysis was used twice, in Chapter 3 for CSA, and later in the revised version, in Chapter 5 for proposal building.

### 2.3.2 Marketing Related Documents

Current marketing communication PowerPoint presentation and marketing calendar were collected from the Marketing communication department. The goal was collect and find useful information, and analyze the current marketing communication efforts done for BI programme. These documents had information of various marketing communication activities carried out throughout the year for the University's Master's programmes.

### 2.3.3 Online Resources

Metropolia University Website has been used to collect important information to analyze the current state of marketing communication of BI programme. Metropolia.fi has been emerged as a very contributing medium in analyzing and assessing the current state of BI programme popularity and university's marketing communication efforts tak-

en so far. The information collected has been used to compare Metropolia's KPIs (such as number of students, programmes, budget, courses and future) to other competitor universities like Haaga-Helia and Laurea. This information has been used in performing benchmarking.

Also opintopolku.fi (studyinfo.fi) has been used to get more information related to number of study places, fees structure, programme content, admission criteria and future opportunities for students at Metropolia's BI programme. It also covers other programmes offered at similar universities. Social media online pages such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram have also been observed to analyze competitors marketing communication efforts.

#### 2.3.4 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a method of measuring and improving organizational performance by comparing with the best. (Staphenhurst 2009, p. 51)

Benchmarking has been considered as an important tool to find out the gaps and to make improvement plan for marketing communication of BI Master's programme. It has been used in the following ways (as shown in Figure 3) to analyze Metropolia's current marketing and communication efforts:

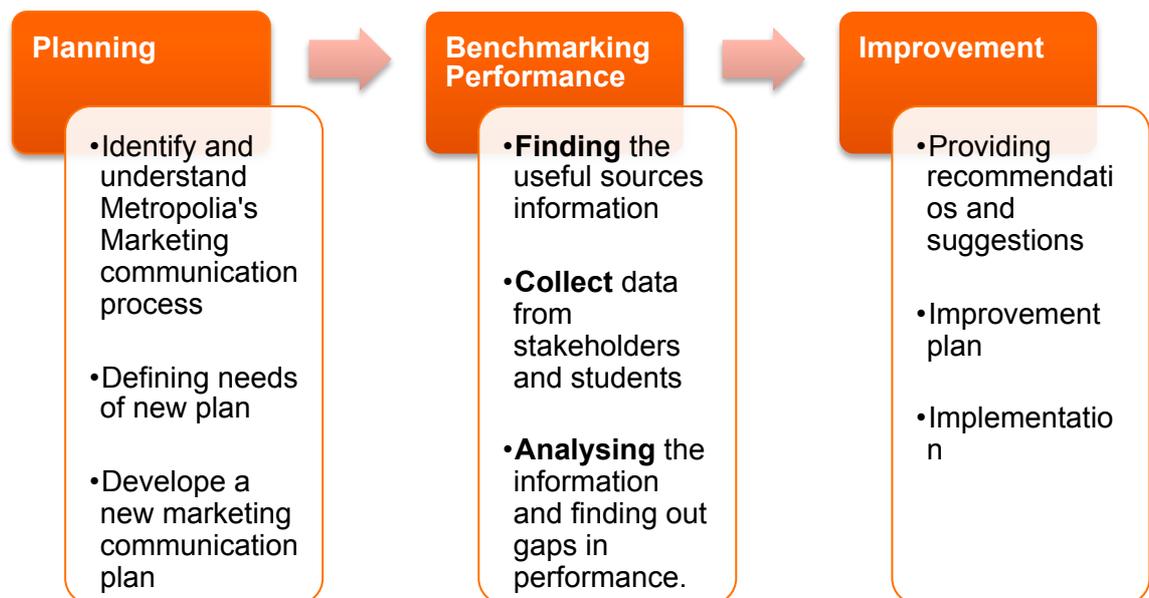


Figure 3. Benchmarking process in this study.

The benchmarking process consists of various phases like Planning, Benchmarking performance (Finding, Collect, Analyze) and Improvement. Planning is a phase in which the current marketing communication process has been identified and various needs have been found out to build a new plan. Whereas benchmarking performance process has involved the finding and collecting the information and data related to BI programme marketing communication efforts. The information has been collected from various stakeholders and students from current programme.

All data were analyzed using Thematic/content analysis and aimed to find out the strengths and weaknesses in the current marketing activities. The analysis also helps to generate ideas and suggestions for improvements. All recommendations have been put under improvement plan, which is to be implemented to promote the BI programme and its marketing communication.

The findings from the current state analysis are discussed in Chapter 3 below.

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### 3 Analysis and Interview Results

The chapter describes and analyzes the interview results obtained from the current BI Master's programme students and key stakeholders.

#### 3.1 Analysis of Interview Results

The main goal of the interviews was to collect information related to customers, market, competitors, communication as well as Metropolia as an organization in context to BI programme developments.

##### 3.1.1 Stakeholder Interviews

*Question 1: What are the strengths and weaknesses of BI programme?*

This question was asked to stakeholders to know the strength and weakness of BI programme. The strength and weakness are very important to know to analyze the current state.

Based on the interview results, the stakeholders find the programme very attractive to business and engineering students as the programme has content from both sides. The programme is very flexible to students in respect to schedule and plan. Teachers have years of industry experience that provide quality and valuable education opportunity to students. But there are many weak points came into notice as stakeholders found that the BI programme has a somewhat low reach rate to customers. Also, lack of budget and resources caused the decrease in the market presence of BI programme.

*Question 2: How do you market the university's programmes? Which is the most suitable and effective way of marketing the Masters of BI programme?*

The goal of this question was to know about current marketing strategies of Metropolia for its programmes.

Based on the interview results, the stakeholders indicated that lack of budget and resources have impacted the market presence of BI programme. Metropolia considers its own Website and studyinfo.fi as one of the most effective online platforms to market its

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programmes including BI programme. Marketing team uses some of social media channels such as LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook to posts about different events and activities of Metropolia university. There are many kinds of target applicants for BI programme: Employed (25-35 years); Unemployed and foreign people. There are also many potential applicants which includes own Bachelor's graduates, 'hidden' applicants who are not aware of BI programme. So, marketing the BI programme among these applicants is presently a challenge.

*Question 3: What social media channels do you use for communication?*

Social media is very important in every business in today's world and this was the reason behind this question.

Based on the interview results, the stakeholders said Metropolia uses various social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube are the four most used platforms to market and communicate about Metropolia and its different programmes.

*Questions 4: Who manage the social media communication?*

The goal of this question was to know the responsible team for handling communication through social media channels.

The Marketing team uses social media channels for communication and posting about new developments. However, very few programmes have their own social media pages that are managed by respective programme managers.

*Question 5: How do you manage internal communication among teachers and students?*

Similarly to external communication, internal communication is also very important for building strong network among teachers and students.

Based on the interview results, internal communication has been managed through online platforms such as OMA and Tuudo through which all-important information is shared among teachers and students. Additionally, Mastermind blogs is the other way

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to communicate and engaging students where articles and blogs about any topic related to study, event or life is posted very frequently.

*Question 6: How do you manage relationship with past graduates? How often do you communicate with them?*

This question aimed to know that how Metropolia manages relationship with alumni.

Based on the interview results, there are various things have been done by Metropolia to build a strong network with alumni. For example, Metropolia is developing an alumni online portal where every alumnus can register him and get informed about important events of Metropolia. Metropolia also sends alumni newsletters twice a year and invite them to yearly alumni meet up and Nordic business forum.

*Question 7: What is the current marketing communication plan and strategies of BI programme?*

Currently, Metropolia BI programme has limited budget for marketing communication activities. Thus, it must rely on the marketing team for promotion. Marketing team uses internal channels such as OMA, Tuudo and external channels such as own Website, newsletters, studyinfo.fi, and events to promote and market its programmes. BI programme manager and other teachers have taken some initiatives to promote it using their own social media channels among alumni and potential applicants.

*Question 8: How do you use direct marketing?*

Based on the interview results, this was recognized as the most effective method used by Metropolia to promote its programmes. Stakeholders said that 30-40% of applicants joined the programme only via direct marketing. The marketing communication department used to collect postal information about past students/alumni from population register for the year of 1998-2015 by paid service. Using this service, they sent letters to them about various courses and communicate about different programmes.

*Question 9: What are your thoughts about business informatics programme Web page?*

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BI programme Web page is the first thing, which is observed by applicants, so it is very important to know that what actions have been taken to improve and make it attractive to get more applicants.

Based on the interview results, the students have found the BI programme Web page is not very user-friendly. They said that the web page has quite a lot of text and information but it is not immediately unclear to users. Also, some of student stories and media posts are very old and have not been updated since long time.

*Question 10: Do you have some tie-ups or partnerships with some organizations to promote and fund the programme?*

Partnerships with public associations is also an important way to market about the business.

Based on the interview results, the stakeholders said that Metropolia has active partnerships with at least Logy.fi; Association of Finnish Traders, and Edunation. These associations help Metropolia in marketing its programmes via publishing online bulletins and advertising on their Website.

*Question 11: How do you manage marketing communication activities in low budget situation?*

Budget is a very important thing for any business, and it is a decisive factor in planning any marketing communication activity.

Based on the interview results, the stakeholder indicated that Metropolia has a lower budget that before and it impacts marketing communication a lot. They said that Metropolia must rely on inexpensive methods of marketing and communication to promote the programmes among target applicants. In such scenarios, Metropolia must rely on internal communication channels such as OMA, Tuudo; Social media; the University's own website; word of mouth and alumni to promote and market the programmes

*Question 12: Who are the competitors for BI programme and what are their marketing communication strategies?*

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It is very important to know business competitors and their strategies to sustain in the market.

Based on the interview results, the stakeholders find Haaga-Helia and Laurea University to be the strong competitors for applicants as they offer somewhat similar programmes in business and thus share same target applicants. It has been observed from the interviews that Haaga-Helia and Laurea seem to have a better budget than Metropolia. At least, this can be judged by their better presence, advertisements and promoting programmes on social media. They have also been noticed in organizing and sponsoring recruiting events; active usage of social media are their key activities in marketing communication.

*Question 13: What communication channels do your competitors use?*

Stakeholders find Haaga-Helia and Laurea University as strong competitors, which are very active on social media and promoting its programmes among applicants.

The most common social media channels used by them are Facebook; YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. Haaga-Helia has the largest number of followers/subscribers on social media channels.

### 3.1.2 Student Interviews

*Question 1: Have you ever heard of BI Master's programme before applying for this?*

The goal of this question was to check the awareness about the BI programme. Based on the interview results, some of participant students did not hear about the BI Programme prior to applying.

*Question 2: How did you get to know about Metropolia's BI Master's program?*

The goal was to know sources from which applicants get to know about the BI programme. Based on the interview results, some of participants got to know about the BI Master's programme from studyinfo.fi whereas some found it via Google search.

*Question 3: Why did you choose Metropolia's BI Master's programme over other universities programmes?*

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The goal of this question was to know about the reason of choosing Metropolia over other competitor universities. Based on the interview results, the students found Metropolia BI programme very interesting. They really like the programme content that consists of both IT and Engineering topics. The programme also has teaching sessions twice a month, which is very feasible option for working students.

*One of student said 'It is amazing to see a variety of courses offered in the BI programme curriculum.'* (Student Interview, May 2019)

*Other participant said "The BI programme in itself is very flexible. I am able to manage study along with my job. It is so nice to have it."* (Student Interview, May 2019)

*Question 4: What was your motivation about choosing it?*

Based on the interview results, the students found programme content very interesting because it consists of both Engineering and Business subjects. That was the real motivation factor for most of the applicants.

*Question 5: How was the communication process after submitting the application?*

The goal of this question is to find out how applicants felt about coordination and communication from Metropolia. Some of participants felt that Metropolia should send more frequent follow-up emails before the start of academic season. Some also said that response to applicant's queries should be more active and faster.

*One of participant said "It would be nice if there will be more follow-up emails or communication after signing up and before the start of programme."* (Student Interview, May 2019)

*Question 6: What are your thoughts about BI programme web page? Do you want to improve anything?*

The goal was to collect feedback from the web page visitors. Based on the interview results, the students said the content on BI programme web page should be shorter and more precise. Some student stories and video were very old. Participants also

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suggested that there should be more videos and stories from foreign students on the programme web page.

Question 7: Do you follow Finnish universities on social media? If yes, which one? Why?

The goal of this question was to know how people follow the universities or educational institutions on social media.

Based on the interview results, some of the participants were very active in following up Haaga-Helia on Facebook and LinkedIn. They found Haaga-Helia the most active university on social media. Next, was Aalto University. According to them, Metropolia has good presence on LinkedIn network.

*Question 8: What do you feel about Metropolia social media presence?*

Based on the interview results, most of the interviewed participants do not follow Metropolia on social media channels, except LinkedIn. LinkedIn seemed to be the most popular channel among participants.

*Question 9: How do you feel about communication within Metropolia?*

The goal of this question is to know about student opinion and experience about internal communication at Metropolia.

Based on the interview results, the students found internal communication at Metropolia generally occurring via OMA that is very complicated to use. They said announcements sometimes do not look clear and they sometimes feel lost because of bulky layout.

*Question 10: How often do you use Tuudo app and OMA?*

Based on the interview results, Tuudo app does not look popular among participants. Most of the participants said they use OMA only to check their study workspaces i.e., is only 1 or 2 times a week.

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Question 11: Do you think OMA is user-friendly? If no, what are the areas of improvement?

Based on the interview results, most of the participants found that OMA has lots of information and content. Sometimes it is difficult for them to focus and find the exact information needed. Some said that they do not want to go to OMA because of the above-mentioned reason. They said OMA should change to some user-friendly web-layout.

### 3.2 Findings from Marketing Communication documents

Some Marketing communication related documents such as current marketing communication PowerPoint presentation, media plan and marketing calendar were collected from the Marketing communication department. The goal was to collect and find useful information, and analyzes the current marketing communication efforts done for BI programme. These documents had information of various marketing communication activities carried out throughout the year for the University's Master's programmes.

	Media plan														
	September	October	November	December	January				February			March	April		
	vkot 35-39	vkot 40-44	vkot 45-48	vkot 49-52	VKO 1	VKO2	VKO 3	VKO 4	VKO 5	VKO 6	VKO 7	VKO 8	VKO 9	VKO 10	VKO 11
Google Adwords															
FB															
Instagram															
Linkedin															
Youtube															
RTB marketing															
Gmail															
Outdoor															
StudyPortal															
Other															
Newsletters															
Studia-fairt 3.-4.12.2019															
Minnofest															
Print adverts															
Helsingin Insinöörit															
Tradenomi-lehti															
HS koulutus															
etc															

Figure 4. Marketing communication media plan of Metropolia University

Media plan as shown in figure 4 shared by Metropolia's marketing team shows various tactics used such as Google ad words, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Real-Time bidding (RTB) marketing, Gmail, Outdoor, Study portal, newsletters etc. Marketing team uses these tactics throughout the year to promote and market various programmes offered by Metropolia University. The media plan looks attractive but there is still some scope of improvement to add some more tactical tools.

Based upon stakeholder's interview results, BI programme uses a marketing calendar which shows various marketing communication activities carried throughout a year such as editing the programme content, collecting and publishing programme content on Website, application process mapping, entrance exams, results, follow-ups, communication with applicants and joiners etc.

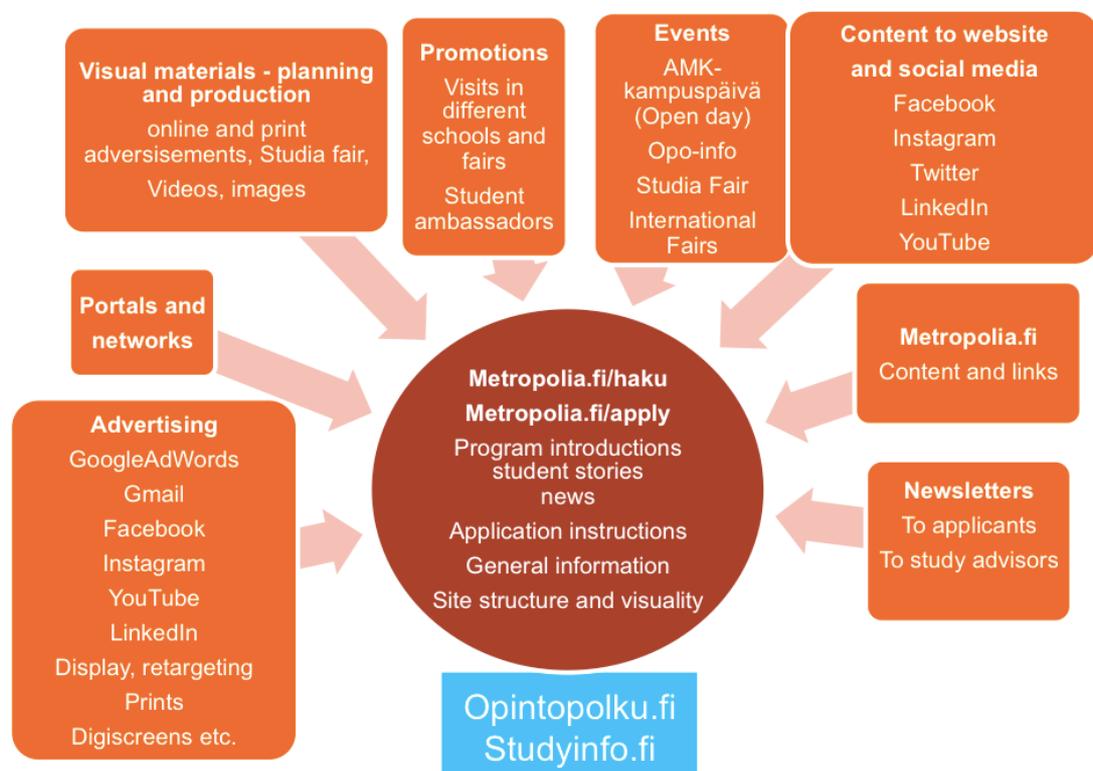


Figure 5. Tactics used by Metropolia University for marketing communication for Students and Applicants (2019)

As shown in figure 5, Marketing communication plan for 2019 included various tactics such as advertising, events, promotions, newsletters, visual materials, social media and these were focused on [metropolia.fi/apply](http://metropolia.fi/apply) and [Opintopolku.fi](http://Opintopolku.fi) ([Studyinfo.fi](http://Studyinfo.fi)) as shown

in Figure 5. The tactics and activities mentioned in marketing calendar and marketing communication plan need some improvements such as updating new content on website, proper communication with applicants before and after the admission process. More recommendations have been mentioned in Chapter 5.

### 3.3 Findings from CSA

From in-depth interview of students and stakeholders, I have analyzed some strengths and weaknesses of BI programme as shown in Table 3 below. Students found the programme very interesting as it is a blend of business and technology, which provides them many opportunities to explore and hands on various technical problems. The programme provides flexibility along with quality and expertise in education. Whereas after doing current state analysis there are lots of weaknesses came out related to marketing communication for example, BI programme has very low reach to target and potential applicants.

Table 6. Strength and weakness of the current marketing communication activities in BI Master's programme.

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mix of Business &amp; Technology</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Quality education</li> <li>• Expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low reach</li> <li>• Low engagement</li> <li>• Less Marketing efforts</li> <li>• No Budget</li> <li>• Less Resources</li> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Less market presence</li> </ul>

It has been noted from social media analysis that Metropolia is not very active on social media channels, which has caused low engagement of target and potential applicants. The budget is very limited or negligible for BI programme marketing communication purpose. Also, the marketing efforts are not exactly meeting the objectives. All these reasons are making the market presence very low for BI program.

All these above mentioned analysis and findings have been used in building the Marketing Communication Plan for Metropolia's Master's BI programme in chapter 5.

## 4 Conceptual Framework

This chapter is based upon existing knowledge and concepts in marketing communication management and marketing communication plan development. Various marketing principles of customer acquisition, leads management, conversion, referrals and more. An important part of conceptual framework is the SOSTAC model that is a very simple and useful technique, which helps the planners to build a marketing communication plan.

### 4.1 Market Communication Planning Process (SOSTAC)

Planning is an essential part of any business. The goal of marketing planning can be, for example, to build a market communication plan that aims to increase the number of customers.

According to Chaffey & Smith (2017), SOSTAC is a systematic planning technique, which is used by many professionals to build different kinds of plans such as marketing plans, corporate plans, digital marketing plans etc. SOSTAC planning framework consists of several stages described in Figure 4 below.



Figure 6. SOSTAC planning framework (Chaffey & Smith 2017, p.3).

The model starts with the Situation Analysis. The Situation Analysis describes the current state of marketplace and its customers. It also shows the changes happening in the market and how customer's response is changing. It maps the number of customers and the future forecast about the growth. It says a lot about 'who' 'why' and 'how'. Situation analysis is also very important as it measures the performance, which helps in taking important decision for planning the marketing and communication. (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

Setting Objectives follows the Situation Analysis. The objectives describe the motive behind putting the efforts for making marketing communication plan for BI programme. It shows the various reasons, benefits, and the purpose of making them. Objectives are mainly related to sell, marketing, business growth, KPIs and sustaining the business. (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

Setting the Objectives is followed by the Strategy. This is the step-wise process to achieve the objectives that also gives direction to reach specific goals. It finds out the ways by which customers can be acquired, converted and retained. (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

The Strategy is translated into Tactics. Tactics are detailed strategies which includes implication of various tools of marketing-mix, communication etc. It says which tool or technique is better to choose to get more customers. (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

The Tactics lead to specifying Actions. Actions are the planned steps that should be taken to achieve target objectives. To find out, which area of process is weak, and which is strong? What can be done to improve the process? How can the resources be used more effectively? What steps can be taken to optimize the Website? What can be done in internal and external marketing? (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

Control: It measures the success or failure of plan that has made to achieve the objectives. There is some analytics system that measures the visitors, duration, sales, conversion rates and more. It is very important to control the process so that needful actions can be taken accordingly. (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

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So, the concept of SOSTAC technique has been used to develop the marketing communication plan for BI program in chapter 5 where tactics and action plan has been proposed to improve the current marketing communication activities of BI programme.

## 4.2 Marketing Communication Management

Marketing communication is a management process through which an organization engages with its various audiences. (Fill & Jamieson 2006)

According to Rossiter & Bellman (2005), there are two main kinds of marketing communications: Advertising and Promotions. Whereas Public Relation and Personal selling are also considered as market communications but are managed separately from advertising and promotions.

Marketing communication management requires various activities such as building buyer personas, acquiring customers, tracking and managing leads and are explained below:

### 4.2.1 Building Buyer Personas

According to HubSpot (2019), Buyer personas are fictional, generalized representations of ideal customers. Building personas helps in personalizing marketing for different segments of existing and potential customers. It also allows creating the highly targeted content to influence the customers.

Modeling personas of site visitors is a powerful technique for helping to increase the usability and customer centricity of a Website (Chaffey & Smith 2017). Persona is a description of a person. It has been used widely in research for segmentation and advertising but since mid-90s, it has been proved as effective tool for improving Website design.

According to Chaffey & Smith (2017), personas are created based upon different customer segments such as existing/non-existing customers; web/non-web user; demographical; psychographical and behavioral patterns.

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#### 4.2.2 Acquiring new customers

Traditional outbound marketing approaches are fading out and have become less effective at spreading the word as people find them more interrupting in their daily life. Traditionally marketers used to use direct emails, telemarketing, TV, radio, print advertising and trade shows to reach the potential buyers. Most of these are now being avoided and neglected by customers as they think these are quite interrupting, and they are adapting to block this kind of marketers out. (Halligan & Shah 2014)

According to Halligan & Shah (2014), people now have opted new ways to shop and collect information about the product and services that they need. They use Internet to compare the things, which they want to buy. Marketers are also now adapted to this trend and promoting inbound marketing as their approach for marketing. Customers use Internet in following three ways: Google search, blogs and social media Websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and others. They search about the services and products on various Internet platforms and collect information.

Internet marketing with campaigning and advertising is more fast and effective way to attract customers.

#### 4.2.3 Tracking and Measuring Leads

According to Jon Miller, Co-founder and VP of marketing for Marketo, a lead is “a qualified prospect that starts to show buying behavior.” Craig Rosenberg, sales and marketing expert and founder of blog ‘The Funneloholic’ says that there are two elements to a lead — demographic and psychographic. (Rothman 2014)

Craig Rosenberg said that to track the lead assessing, the demographic fit is very important. It helps to understand the customer demographics such as gender, age, education, income, experience etc. Customer demographics are used effectively to design lead generation strategies.

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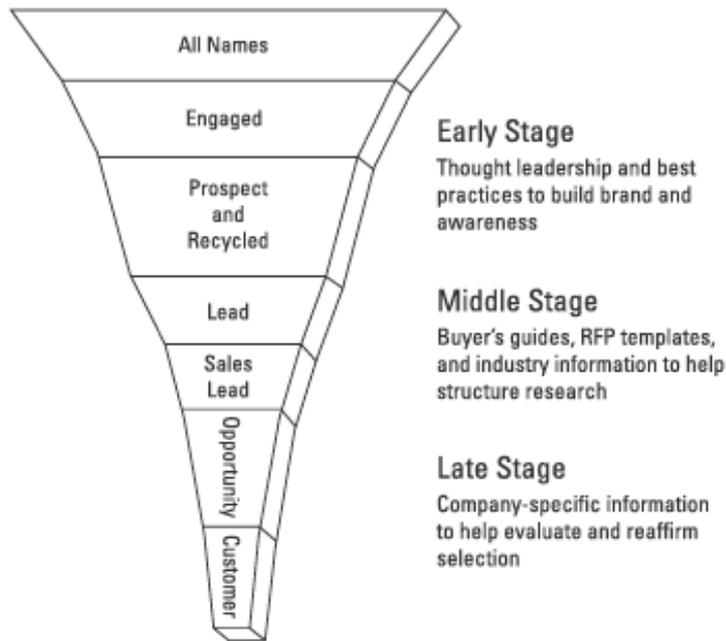


Figure 7. Sales funnel & buying stage map (Rothman 2014).

As shown in Figure 5, Sales funnel is an informative way to understand sales process, which is a step to lead generation. Top of funnel has the largest amount of leads and bottom of funnel is where a lead converts into a customer. (Rothman 2014)

Mapping lead generation efforts is important as it says a lot about the campaigns, messaging, and the business metrics.

#### 4.2.4 Conversion and Lead Management

The flow of leads created by inbound marketing, can be converted to paying customers. But some of these leads may take few days or even months to convert them into actual business. So, it is important to measure the quality of leads along with the quantity, which help in analyzing the effectiveness of marketing and to manage time in following up the leads. (Halligan & Shah 2014)

Some leads are qualified which are ready to be handed for sales for follow-up. But some leads which are not ready to sell such leads need to be nurture so that it can be converted to potential future leads whenever possible. Lead can be nurture through various ways like emails or phone calls. (Halligan & Shah 2014)

According to Halligan & Shah (2014), the quality of leads is measured and graded based upon their quality. Lead grade can be calculated based upon factors such as referral channels; Website visits; call-to-action taken and form resources. One must analyze from above factors that from where leads are generating more quality leads.

#### 4.2.5 Use of Referrals (ex-students/alumni)

According to Willmot (2014), there are various ways to get quality referrals to market business to new customers such, as shown in Table 3.

Table 6. Ways to obtain quality referrals (Wilmot 2014).

1. Relationship: One can build relationships with other professional educational institutions that can offer complementary services to your business with the purpose of exchanging referrals.
2. Events: Creating networking events such as breakfast/lunch seminars, workshops or some research topic discussion where the customers, ex-students/alumni and associates are invited. It will create a platform for referrals to exchange their views and give recommendations.
3. Word of mouth: It is also a form of referral where people tell each other what they know about the business and its might be good form to communicate with the customers.
4. Re-connect: Re-connect and connect with all ex-students and customers and check with them if they are interested to know about the business and like to recommend it.
5. Ask for testimonials: It is a very generous way to ask for recommendation in the form of a letter, email, message, video & audio recording for Website or a recommendation on social media pages like LinkedIn or Facebook.

The use of this referral system creates a power and an image that attracts new customers to the business.

Along with SOSTAC planning technique, the concepts of marketing communication management are very important to consider, as it is an essential part of any marketing communication plan. The above mentioned concepts have been applied while building the marketing communication plan for BI programme as explained in chapter 5 below.

## **5 Building the Marketing Communication Plan for Metropolia's BI Master's Programme**

This chapter presents the market communication plan for Metropolia's BI Master's programme, which has been developed using SOSTAC technique. In this chapter, the results from the CSA are also used from the previous marketing communication efforts of BI Master's programme by emphasizing on organization, communication, competitors, and customers as important components. The objectives, strategy, tactics, actions and control measures have been identified and discussed as a part of Marketing Communication Plan.

### **5.1 Situational Analysis**

Situation analysis is an important step to analyze the current situation of any business for making some marketing plan. It tells a lot about the current state of business. Situation analysis/Current state analysis makes decision easier about choosing tactics and strategies because it makes us know about customers, competitors, resources and various other components.

To analyze the current state of marketing efforts for Metropolia's BI programme, it is very important to know what actions have been taken so far to promote the programme at organizational level. How marketing team doing differently from competitors? How communication channels are working? And what is the response of customers? It is a good way to know the answer of these questions from the current state analysis. Based upon students and stakeholder's interviews, I have explained current state by focusing on main components: Organization, Customers, Communications and Competitors. Apart from these, I have also mentioned the current marketing calendar and analyzed the strength and weaknesses of BI programme.

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### 5.1.1 Organization

The result from communication designer interview showed that Metropolia University of applied science is a quite big educational institution that has a marketing communication team of 9 people who take care of various functions related to marketing communication of different bachelor/master's degrees programmes at Metropolia. The marketing communication includes various activities such as communications and marketing of Metropolia's degree programmes, student's recruitment, study fairs, educational marketing, web communication, social media communication management, Metropolia Website management, newsletters, strategy & stakeholder communication and change communication.

It has been observed during the stakeholder's interview that the above-mentioned marketing communication efforts taken by team are mainly to focus on marketing and promotion of all university's degree programmes, which makes the team very busy. Business Informatics programme has no specific marketing person. BI programme must depend on Metropolia's marketing communication team to make the programme look visible among applicants. There are also many gaps and lack of co-ordination between marketing team and the programme managers. Teachers and head of BI programme take their own efforts to promote and market the programme among students on various channels so that they can get good applicants.

During the interview with the key stakeholders, it has been found that head of BI Master's programme and teachers take their own initiatives to promote BI Master's programme using some internal channels (such as Oma, blogs, emails, newsletters) and external communication channels (via LinkedIn and other social media Websites). But sometimes these efforts are zero due to change of programme managers every 3-4 years that makes all efforts and planning executed go in vain.

### 5.1.2 Customers (Students/Applicants)

In this section, I have tried to emphasize on type of applicants for BI Master's programme at Metropolia, for example, who are the target and potential applicants? What makes them to join the programme? Where they get to know about the programme?

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*Target applicants:*

Based upon interview result as mentioned in chapter 3, target applicants can be categorized for BI Master's programme as follows:

*Employed:* The people from the age group of 25-35 years old business and engineering working professionals who want to know the business prospective of IT.

*Unemployed:* The people who are not working yet and want to join some job. The main objective of these applicants for joining the programme is to sharpen their skills and fulfill their career gap by getting international degree.

*Foreigners:* These are the people who want to move to Finland and join the job. And some them, don't have clear goals; they just come to Finland for travel and experience.

*Potential applicants:*

As a result, from stakeholder interview as mentioned in chapter 3, there are some applicants considered as potential applicants. These applicants are from business and engineering background who are very active and search the programmes via studyinfo.fi. They know about the criteria and programme content. Whereas there are some hidden applicants who are not aware of BI programme, but they like to find and apply for some business or engineering oriented programme. Other potential students may be the past students from Metropolia's business/engineering bachelor's degree programmes who might be interested to continue to do masters in BI. The social network of alumni and current students is very important and potential to get good applicants.

What makes students to join the programme?

As a result, from students interview as mentioned in chapter 3, the most important thing which student like is the combination of both IT and business field where in applicants can get exposure to cross-field hands on and environment to learn. Other side, the programme also offers flexibility as the sessions are only on Fridays or in evenings so that students can easily manage their work and study altogether.

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Where they get to know about the BI programme?

Two main sources have been come to place while interviewing the students (as shown in chapter 3). They get to know about BI programme from studyinfo.fi and other was google search. Google locates the metropolia.fi Website where they find BI programme with its course content and process of application.

Feedbacks:

Stakeholders mentioned in interview that Metropolia receive feedback from each graduated student every year via AVOP survey which is taken by students before their graduation process. These surveys provide information about evaluation of their education received and the things need to be improved at their university. The survey results are also helpful for BI programme for its further improvement and development. Metropolia uses these results for further improvement and planning of studies.

### 5.1.3 Communication

Based upon stakeholder's interview results (chapter 3), there are various communication tools have been used to promote and market the BI programme which are mentioned as follows:

*Partnership associations:*

In interview, stakeholders said that Metropolia has few partnerships with some associations and organizations that support the university by publishing its bulletins and programme contents. For example, Metropolia is a member of "Finnish Association of Purchasing and Logistics (Logy.fi)" and "Association of Finnish technical traders", which publish the online bulletins for Metropolia four times throughout the year.

According to stakeholder's interview result in chapter 3, apart from above, Metropolia has partnership with "Edunation", which promote the Metropolia University along with other university and publish its entire programme on its Website. As of now, Metropolia has no tie ups with any trade or market unions that can facilitate the programmes and its offerings.

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*Social Media:*

It is indicated by stakeholders in interview that teachers and programme manager takes their own efforts to promote and market the BI programme using social media channels. But the effort taken is worthless because every 3-4 year the head of programme need to rotate and change their role. So, the efforts done by programme manager during her role goes in vain.

As discussed in stakeholders interview result in chapter 3, the BI programme use Facebook and LinkedIn to share the related information. As there is lack of an official BI programme social media accounts so teacher/program managers use their own personal accounts for promoting the programme. LinkedIn seemed to be the best and most effective way to reach the master students and alumni and share the information with them. Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are considered as more appropriate for younger and bachelor's degree students.

*Direct Marketing:*

As per stakeholders in interview (chapter 3), direct marketing is the most important tool for communication of BI Master's programme. They said that until last year, direct marketing has been done with the help of Metropolia's marketing communication department in which letters had been sent to Metropolia's past students and alumni. The marketing communication department used to collect postal information about past students/alumni from population register for the year of 1998-2015 by paid service. Using this service, they sent letters to them about various courses and communicate about different programmes. It has been observed that 30-40% of students come to join the programmes from direct marketing. This is considered as the most effective marketing communication tool to reach the past students or potential applicants although it is expensive.

*Newsletters:*

Stakeholders informed in interview (chapter 3) that Metropolia uses postiverkko system where it sends newsletters to alumni and potential applicants. Alumni newsletters are sent 4 times a year, which target about to 5000-6000 registered alumni whereas applicant newsletters are sent almost every month or about 10 times a year, which target about 10,000 of potential applicants. Metropolia also sends newsletters to customers

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and stakeholders (of around 54,000 in numbers), which are sent 4-6 times a year. Marketing team feels that the approach of sending these newsletters is very effective and one of the best approaches to communicate and market about Metropolia programmes.

#### *Alumni Portal:*

Stakeholder from marketing team in interview (chapter 3) said that the Metropolia is developing an "alumni portal system" that is now under renovation. In Alumni process, they have had an alumnus register system, which is now moved to CRM system. Now they are going to have an alumni portal where everyone can log in by this portal to the system and use it. Users can also change their emails and see the information. The advantage for Metropolia is that it would be easier to share the information and the marketing team can look their emails and send the information directly.

#### *Emails:*

As said by stakeholder in interview (chapter 3) that the private emails are sent to past graduates about the Metropolia's programmes, events, certifications and other information. They use this information to share it with their friends and relatives to recommend the programmes at Metropolia. But email campaign is done only once a year in January that was very late.

#### *Blogs:*

As per stakeholders, Masterminds blogs is the online platform for students, teacher and partners of Metropolia's UAS degrees where they can publish various articles and blogs about various topics such as higher education, their students or working-life. These blogs are quite popular because they have high quality level of publication. The link of blogs is available on the Metropolia's Website, so it is a good way for communication and market the BI programmes. The main objective of this blog is to build a relation with alumni, master applicants and stakeholders by sharing various online, offline stories about study and no-study related topics.

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*Print media:*

Stakeholder also informed that print media was so much active until 2017 but due to budget cut, Metropolia is not able to afford the print media expenses. Online media sharing and blogs support the lack of print media.

*Events:*

Stakeholders informed during the interview about few events such as Educa which is the largest event for education and training sector where Metropolia participants each time by sharing information about its latest developments, programme offerings and other trainings. This event held at Messukeskus in Helsinki. Teaching professionals, students, working professionals, researchers and various multi-national companies visit the event. Next Educa fair will be organized on 24-25 January 2020.

Other event was Alumni meet which is held every 2<sup>nd</sup> year where all master level pass graduates and alumni are invited officially for the meet where they share their experiences and ideas for development. But it has been observed that people do not want to come either or do not feel it important. Every time the alumni meet only receive few people that is not make it significant and solves the purpose. (Chapter 3: Interview results)

And one more event was Nordic business forum; invitations are sent to current and past students. But very a smaller number of participants comes to attend these events. Metropolia needs to rethink and start organizing some seminar or more systematic events that can attract and motivate participants to join and come to the events. (Chapter 3: Interview results)

*Internet:*

As per interview results (chapter 3), It is mentioned that Studyinfo.fi (In Finnish, opin-topolku.fi) is the main source for getting applicants. This is the common online Website where each university posts information and content about their offered programmes. Students can choose the programmes based upon selection criteria and eligibility. There is also the option to fill the joint application form for many degree programmes offered by various universities.

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Other active channel for communication and publishing about programmes is its own Website: metropolia.fi where the university has posted all information about the programmes, associations, events, blogs, videos, student stories, feedbacks etc. Stakeholder also said in interview that Metropolia also uses Tradenomilitto as a platform to share the information and news about the upcoming development at Metropolia. Tradenomilitto is a group association of business graduates and professionals who shares it as a common place to share ideas and information about various topics. (Chapter 3: Interview results)

#### *Metropolia Website:*

As per stakeholder interview (chapter 3), there are many weak points have been observed in Metropolia's BI programme web page at metropolia.fi for example, it is very hard to find the English version of BI programme web page under Metropolia Business School and the Finnish version is under the progress of update. While interviewing the marketing communication team, it has been come to notice that publishing tool does not work well which is very important to help in jumping from Finnish to English version of web page. They said there is a need of new tool that can fix the issue. Whereas many users found that the stories and videos published on BI web page are quite old; the page should have new videos and stories about student's development and experiences. The page should also have stories from foreign students about their experience and life at Metropolia. The content of BI programme web page should be more précised and prioritize as per the need. (Chapter 3: Interview results)

#### *Internal Communication:*

According to a stakeholder in one interview, Oma is an official communication channel, which is used to share various kinds of information such as announcements, events, news etc. among students and teachers. But as per students and teachers' feedback, OMA has too much information such as daily announcements, which make it very complicated for users to find needful information. They feel very challenging to use it and some of the users do not want to go there or use it.

It has been observed from stakeholder's interviews that marketing communication efforts done by marketing team are not enough or are very silent which cause Metropolia to lose its business and market presence. The impact of budget cutting is so huge that

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it is affecting the business and market value of Metropolia. As per interview results (chapter 3), other competitors such as Laurea and Haaga-Helia, they have quite good budget and are very active in promoting the business by advertising and organizing the events for students.

#### 5.1.4 Competitors

Based upon benchmarking result shown in Table 4, among many competitors, Haaga-Helia seems to be the most active university on social media channels such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. It has largest number of subscribers between Metropolia and Laurea, which shows that Haaga-Helia has strong market presence and reach to the customers.

Metropolia has expertise, nice campuses, and educational service as the other competitors have. The main thing, which creates the difference, is the communication with customers (potential students). Communication channels used by Metropolia are not used actively and effectively whereas Haaga-Helia has more active and strong communication channels, which create a large potential customer base for them. (Chapter 3: Interview results)

As per stakeholder interview, it is known that there are few other universities such as Laurea, which has same kind of leadership course in Finnish known as Tietoohjajaminen, which also has quite good course content. Haaga-Helia also offers good programmes in business and IT. So, this scenario makes the market more competitive for Metropolia University to promote the BI programme among the applicants and get good students.

Stakeholder said in interview that in last ten years, Metropolia has lost its share of voice and this is the biggest challenge for it. Because ten years ago, the university was very active in outdoor campaigning, TV commercials radio and in offline/online marketing but now Metropolia as a brand is no more attractive in comparison to other universities. And this has impacted the BI programme because it is not getting good students in last few years.

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Table 4. Competitors Benchmarking

<b>Competitors Benchmarking</b>			
	<b>Metropolia</b>	<b>Haaga-Helia</b>	<b>Laurea</b>
<b>Strategy</b>	-Focus -Renewal -Growth	-Quality education -Sales, service & entrepreneurs -Innovation in networks	-Work life integration - Value & Quality -Entrepreneurship
<b>Similar Course Offerings</b>	Business Informatics (MBA)	Degree Programme in Business Technologies (MBA)	Service Innovation and Design (MBA)
<b>Annual fee (for Non-EU/EEA)</b>	11,000 €	9500€	10,000€
<b>Duration</b>	2 years	1.5-3 years	1.5-2.5 years
<b>Work Experience required</b>	3 years	Any work experience	3 years
<b>Marketing Channels</b>	www.studyinfo.fi www.opintopolku.fi www.metropolia.fi Tradenomiliitto	www.studyinfo.fi www.opintopolku.fi www.haaga-helia.fi	www.studyinfo.fi www.opintopolku.fi www.laurea.fi
<b>Website Analysis</b>	- Long text - Not updated - Improper social media buttons	- Clear content - Short and needed information	- Short text - Curriculum info - Electives info - Links to blogs - User friendly
<b>Job Opportunities</b>	Mentioned no where	Yes. Very active	Yes
<b>Social media (number of subscribers/followers)</b>	-Facebook (12,416) -YouTube (141) -Twitter (4,314) -LinkedIn (33,535) -Instagram (4,790)	-Facebook (15,943) -YouTube (719) -Twitter (5,125) -LinkedIn (35,676) -Instagram (6,009)	-Facebook (10,857) -YouTube (378) -Twitter (3,051) -LinkedIn (16,840) -Instagram (2,841)
<b>YouTube Videos</b>	53	227	241

\*Data last updated on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 from universities Websites and their social media pages.

I have made a competitor-benchmarking table mentioned as Table 4, which shows the KPIs of all three universities to compare their growth and applicants reach. It has been observed from the social media perspective that Haaga-Helia is the most active university among Metropolia and Laurea because Haaga-Helia has the largest number of subscribers/followers on social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram. Whereas Laurea has the highest number of YouTube videos and very active in video posts. It also has very attractive Website where the web layout is very user-friendly. Apart from this, Haaga-Helia and Laurea are also provide post-graduation recruitment support to students to find jobs or work-related projects.

#### 5.1.5 Current Marketing Calendar

Based upon stakeholder's interview results, I have made the following marketing calendar as shown in Figure 7.

<b>September 2019</b>	Change the text about BI Master's program.
<b>October 2019</b>	Collect info and publish info (programme content & web page) at studyinfo.fi
<b>January 2020</b>	Applicants apply for the BI Master's program.
<b>April 2020</b>	Applicants have entrance exam and interview.
<b>May 2020</b>	Metropolia send invitation letters to join the program
<b>September 2020</b>	BI Master's program start the season

Figure 8. Current marketing calendar of BI Master's program.

As shown in Figure 7, this calendar shows the different marketing communication activities carried throughout a year for BI programme. The activities included editing the programme content, collecting and publishing programme content on Website, application process mapping, entrance exams, results, follow-ups, communication with applicants and joiners etc.

### 5.1.6 Strength and Weakness of current Marketing Communication Activities in BI Master's Programme

From in-depth interview of students and stakeholders, I have analyzed some strengths and weaknesses of BI programme as shown in Table 3 below. Students found the programme very interesting as it is a blend of business and technology, which provides them many opportunities to explore and hands on various technical problems. The programme provides flexibility along with quality and expertise in education. Whereas after doing current state analysis there are lots of weaknesses came out related to marketing communication for example, BI programme has very low reach to target and potential applicants.

Table 5. Strengths & Weaknesses of BI programme's current marketing communication activities

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mix of Business &amp; Technology</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Quality education</li> <li>• Expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low reach</li> <li>• Low engagement</li> <li>• Less Marketing efforts</li> <li>• No Budget</li> <li>• Less Resources</li> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Less market presence</li> </ul>

It has been noted from social media analysis that Metropolia is not very active on social media channels, which has caused low engagement of target and potential applicants. The budget is very limited or negligible for BI programme marketing communication purpose. Also, the marketing efforts are not exactly meeting the objectives. All these reasons making the market presence very low for BI program.

## 5.2 Objectives

According to Chaffey & Smith 2017, the main idea of objectives is to find out where one is going? And where one wants to be? Many improvement areas have been observed during situational analysis, which can be the objectives for BI programme. The objectives are focused on improving marketing communication plan so that it can grow number of applicants and increase its market presence.

The primary objective of marketing communication plan is to increase the number of applicants for BI programme. Other sub-objectives are focused on to increase the customer's awareness, engagement, number of Website visitors, number of subscribers/followers on social media, conversion rate and NPS score. These above objectives are SMART (Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related) objectives based upon RACE (Reach, Act, Convert & Engage) framework. (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

### 5.3 Strategy

Based on interview results and situational analysis, I have chosen Digital Marketing strategy for Metropolia BI programme which will be more economical and effective to achieve the objective which is to grow the number of applicants.

There are 9 components should be considered while creating digital marketing strategy such as Target markets, Objectives, Positioning, Processes, Partnerships, Sequence, Integration, tactical tools and engagement. These components are called as TOPP SITE. (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

Considering some of the above components, I have included content marketing, email campaigning, alumni networking, partnerships, social media channels management, search advertisements and search engine optimization (SEO) as important parts of digital marketing strategy of BI programme. These actions will boost up the audience and reach to the potential applicants.

### 5.4 Tactics

As per stakeholders, the Metropolia has very limited budget for marketing. In this scenario, we must choose cost-effective or zero-cost digital marketing tools that will be helpful in generating good customers (applicants) base for BI programme.

I have created a tactics matrix as shown in Table 6 with reference from Chaffey & Smith (2017). This matrix includes various column and rows indicating benefits of tactic tools on buying process.

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Table 6. Low Budget Tactics Matrix (Chaffey &amp; Smith 2017).

Low Budget Tactics Matrix										
Tactics Matrix	Benefits →	Reach	Speed	Lead Time	Message size	Targeting	Personalization	Cost	Control	Credibility (Messages)
Objectives	Tactics Channel ↓									
Awareness	Sponsorships	High	Low/ Med	Long	Small	Low	Low	Med	Low	Med
	Social Media (Content Marketing)	Low/ Med/ High	Low/ Med	Short/ Med	Large	Med	Low/Med	None	Low/ Med	High
	Emails	Med	High	Short	Large	High	High	None	High	Med
Consideration	Website Incentives	Low/ Med	Low	Med	Med/ Low	Low/ Med	High (With audio marketing.)	None	High	Med
	Emails	Med	High	Short	Large	High	High	None	High	Med
	Social Media	Low/ Med/ High	Low	Short/ Med	Large	Med	Med/Low	None	Low/ Med	High
Decision	Search Ads & SEO	Med/ Low	Med	Long/ Med	Small	High	Med	Med	High	Low/ Med
	Email	Med	High	Short	Large	High	High	None	High	Med
	Website	Low	Low	Med	Med/ Low	None	High (With audio marketing.)	None	High	None
Post Admission Relationship Building	Direct email, Newsletters, Offers & Events invite	Med	High	Short/ Med	Large	High	High	Low (email) / High (DM*)	High	Med
	Social Media	Low/ High	Low	Short/ Med	Large	Med	Med	None	Low/ Med	High

The first column represents the buying process and second column shows the tactical tools used and other columns analyze the tactical tools across 9 different criteria's such as reach, speed, lead time, message size, targeting, personalization, cost, control and credibility.

## 5.5 Actions

Actions are meant to get the work done as planned. Means all tactics need to be divided into actions so that each tactic becomes a mini project. Every tactic should get a specified person and timescale to achieve it. (Chaffey & Smith 2017)

After choosing low cost tactics, the BI programme can make a Gantt chart where all marketing tactics are listed throughout the months of an academic year. First column in this chart as table 7 below, represent the tactical tools and first row header shows the months.

Table 7. Gantt Chart with Action Plan (developed based on: Chaffey & Smith 2017)

Months →	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Tactics ↓												
SEO/Ad words	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Website Update	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Social Media Posts	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Newsletters	X				X			X		X		
Emails	X			X			X			X		
Blogs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Events/Seminars			X							X		
Partners			X									X
Marketing												
Alumni-Meet up												X

This chart can be used also as marketing planner that has mentioned various marketing communication activities all around the academic year.

Here I have made other kind of market communication action planner for BI programme that looks more précised and includes tactics (methods/approaches), responsible person (who?), actions (what/how?) and time (how frequent?).

Both action plans shown in Table 5 & 6 are subject to change depending upon situations and performances.

Table 8. Action Plan for Managing Marketing Communication Activities of BI Programme

<b>Action Plan</b>			
<b>Tactics Tools</b>	<b>Who? (Responsible Person)</b>	<b>What/how? (Actions)</b>	<b>How often?</b>
<b>SEO/Ad words</b>	Metropolia's Marketing team	Optimization/Update	Weekly
<b>Website</b>	Metropolia's Marketing team	Regular update	Daily
<b>Social Media (Content Marketing) (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube &amp; twitter)</b>	Manager (BI Programme)	- Update - Posts (blogs, events, news, stories, videos etc.)	Daily/Weekly
<b>Events/ Study fairs</b>	Metropolia's Marketing team	Arrange/participate	Quarterly
<b>Direct Email (To potential applicants/alumni)</b>	Head of BI Programme	About events, seminars, new developments, projects, education offers etc.	Quarterly
<b>News letters</b>	Metropolia's Marketing team	News specifically about BI program	Monthly
<b>Blogs Posting</b>	Metropolia's Marketing team	Include blogs from BI program	Weekly
<b>Alumni Relation</b>	Head of BI Programme	Invitation to meeting/seminars	Quarterly
<b>Student Relation</b>	BI Study Coordinator	More Active response	Regular
<b>Customer Management</b>	BI Study Coordinator	More Active response	Regular

This action planner is cost-effective which make it an affordable approach to do marketing communication to reach alumni, students and potential applicants. It would develop an active and strong communication system.

## 5.6 Control

Control is the last step of SOSTAC planning model that map the progress of objectives achieved. It says whether the plan is succeeding or failing. Under control, various key performance indicators are measured to check about the progress. The main KPIs include BI programme web page visitors, duration, enquiries, leads, conversion rate, social media followers, engagement rate (likes, comments & shares), blogs subscribers & NPS. These KPIs can be measured frequently weekly or monthly during the academic year. The analysis of these KPI is very important to understand limit of successes and failure.

I have made a control metrics as shown in table 9 below, specifically to measure success of BI programme market communication plan as follows.

Table 9. Control Metrics for BI programme (developed based on: Chaffey & Smith 2017).

Control Metrics		
KPIs	How often? (Daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly)	Responsible staff member
BI program's web page visitors	Weekly/Monthly	Metropolia's Marketing team
Duration	Weekly/Monthly	
Enquiries	Weekly/Monthly	
Leads	Quarterly	
Conversion rate	Quarterly	
BI program Social media followers (On Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter)	Monthly	BI program (Manager)
Engagement rate -Likes -Share -Comments	Monthly	BI program (Manager)
Blogs subscribers	Monthly	Metropolia's Marketing team
NPS	Quarterly/Yearly	Metropolia's Marketing team

The KPIs mentioned in above Table 7 of control metrics can be measured and analyzed with the help of Metropolia's marketing team and BI programme manager. The data can be measured weekly, monthly, quarterly or yearly as per the need.

### 5.7 Key Findings from SOSTAC Analysis

There are various findings have been found during research and are mentioned as recommendation to follow under the proposed marketing communication plan as mentioned below:

Table 10: Key Findings from SOSTAC Analysis

- Re-Connect: Building a strong community with current students, past graduates and alumni that enhance the opportunity to have better communication by a common platform.
- Partnerships: There should be frequent and strong communication among work-life partners and university partners so that they can actively participate.
- More active Blogs/Videos: Metropolia BI programme needs to earn the media, for that it must launch innovative stories, videos and blogs, which will attract and influence the potential students and many professionals from the industries to the programme.
- Social Media: Metropolia BI programme needs to be proactive on social media channels such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. These social channels should be used to promote the programme by sharing student stories, events, seminar, videos, interviews, forums live telecast more actively on daily basis to engage the potential applicants. Marketing team recommended LinkedIn as the most appropriate channel to promote masters programmes such as Business Informatics. BI programme should also have success stories of students and study trip videos on YouTube that will help to influence the prospective applicants. Twitter is a social media platform that has not been used so far for marketing purpose so it may be a good opportunity for BI programme to use it for promotion and sharing the media. Metropolia uses Instagram for daily publication only and is being followed by young-aged people. BI programme should also use Instagram more actively to promote and market the pro-

gramme.

- Internal Promotion: Promote the master's degree BI programme via internal communication to past graduated and current students of bachelor's degree programmes. The past students from bachelor programmes need to be contacted by direct email for the further master's programme consideration and career prospects at Metropolia. The list of graduate people can be asked from Kaija Happasalo (Head of Bachelor Programme).
- Teachers should be automatically subscribed to Metropolia's bulletins/newsletters so that they can also know about the programmes; activities and events happening at Metropolia and can participate in spreading the word and in promotion and marketing.
- There should be BI programmes specific social media accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter so that people can follow them and know about the programme content, student and their success stories.
- To build relationship with big companies in Finland to promote the programmes and bring out outstanding projects and assignments.
- Content Marketing: There is also a need of active content marketing effort on various platforms such as LinkedIn, metropolia.fi, blogs and Facebook. The BI programme content needs to be more attractive by putting short texts. The content should have specific information instead of making it too bulky.
- Hire a Marketing trainee/Intern: As with limited budget, BI programme should hire/recruit a marketing trainee/intern for various programme related marketing communication activities so that they can do all efforts themselves and BI programme does not has to depend on Metropolia's team.
- Public Events: To rethink and plan more organized and systematic seminars and events for past graduates and students so that people feel motivated to join them.
- OMA Users: Many students and teachers find that OMA is not user-friendly as it

has lots of information that make it challenging for them to check and find the right things. They said that OMA needs a change where unnecessary information can be avoided to posts and the objectives of this channel need to be reframed.

- Effective Internal Communication: Few internal communication channels such as OMA and tuudo (mobile app for students) can be used for marketing communication about the BI programmes among students from bachelor's degrees or past graduates.
- Newsletters: Marketing team sends newsletters to alumni, potential applicants, customers and stakeholders many times a year. It came out as a most effective way to reach and communicate with them. These newsletters are more centric towards common Metropolia news, events and offerings. They don't make programme specific newsletters. So, BI programme should also adapt same practice of sending newsletters to market about its programme content and offerings at its own level without any dependency on marketing team.
- Building relationship with Alumni: Alumni are very important in creating potential customer base. BI programme should use alumni past graduates to communicate and spread the word about its programme content and advantages. BI programme should be very proactive in hosting some events and seminars where they host them very often so that they can build healthy and long-lasting relationships with them.
- Marketing booths: Metropolia can put marketing booths at airports and Helsinki city center to publicize and market about its programmes and career opportunities for foreign students at Metropolia.
- Job/Recruitment cell: BI programme should also have active job placement network where it can provide work opportunity to graduates in various organization. Metropolia should ties up with organizations where they can interview the students and provide them job offers in their organization.
- Developing relation with students: From students interviews it has been noticed that there is lack communication from BI programme to students after their ap-

plication get accepted. Some of them feel that there should be more connection and regular communication between BI programme department and students, so they feel connected and important. The information about the course should be shared before orientation.

- Customer relationship: Some students suggested that Metropolia should work on building customer relationship. The emails sent by applicants/potential applicants should be answered within 1 day which prevents them from switching to some other university or courses.

## **6 Validation of the Proposal**

This section validates the initial proposal based on feedback received from current and past Head of BI Programme. According to them, thesis has explained the current situation of marketing activities of BI programme very well. Due to lack of resources, the marketing plan looks quite vague. They found use of SOSTAC model very appropriate for the analysis of this case.

Many suggestions have been provided to have a thought process on how content marketing can be applied if sufficient resources are found. Other suggestions include organizing a workshop to collect different mindsets related to formalizing an approach for proper content planning.

Overall content of thesis has been considered as useful, rich & thoughtful. The effort of putting all these observations has been appreciated especially considering that it has been done under many limitations, participants and influences.

One of the suggestion was to involve more students during the interview process however the information collected from all interviewed students were on similar lines which suggests that adding more students would not have made any difference.

Some suggestion was made to put more emphasis on actionable plan. Overall Proposal was found holistic, diverse and logical to the stakeholders.

## **7 Summary and Conclusions**

This section contains the summary and final words for the Thesis.

### **7.1 Summary**

The Objective of this Thesis was to develop a Marketing communication plan for the Master's programme in Business Informatics at Metropolia AMK. The BI Programme is currently looking for the way to increase awareness about itself, which would require multiple actions by the Programme, such as to increase the number of Website visitors, increase the number of subscribers/followers on social media, and improve conversion and lead management process, and similar actions. The business challenge is, howev-

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er, that currently these actions are not defined as an actionable Marketing communication plan.

To address this challenge, the Thesis started its R&D work from investigating the current marketing activities in the Programme. After obtaining a picture of the current state, the theoretical part of the thesis comprised two parts: Marketing communication management and a SOSTAC planning process. The Marketing communication management part includes such components such as building buyer personas, new customer acquisition, lead tracking and measurement, lead management and use of referrals.

Based on the inputs from the current state analysis and from available knowledge from literature, a proposal for the Marketing communication plan was developed. It followed especially the SOSTAC model, and addressed the challenges identified in the current state of marketing of the BI programme. The proposed plan describes various activities that can be done as part of marketing communication. The plan also includes various tactics and control measures.

The result of Thesis is a proposal of an actionable Marketing communication plan in order to improve the current market communication process of the BI programme. The means proposed in this Thesis focus on the increase of the customer's awareness, engagement, Website visitors, subscribers/followers on social media, conversion rate and NPS score. To meet the thesis above-mentioned objective, SOSTAC technique had been used to create a Market communication plan. Using this technique, the situational analysis was performed where the analysis focused on 4 main components: Organization, Customers, Communications and Competitors. Apart from these, the strengths and weaknesses of BI programme were identified. After understanding the current state, Digital marketing strategy was chosen to achieve the objective in which various components such as content marketing, email campaigning, alumni networking, partnerships, social media channel management, search advertisements and search engine optimization (SEO) were included.

Considering these strategic components, a *Low budget tactics matrix* was selected which indicates the benefit of tactical tools for the internal buying-in process. The main points came out from the research are that Metropolia has very fewer funds available

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because of limited budget. Also, for BI programme, the budget is almost zero or negligible which has impacted the programme visibility to potential and target applicants.

Next, a Marketing planner was created using Gantt chart which showed the various market communication activities throughout the year for BI programme. Based upon the proposed Marketing planner, an Action plan was created which had information about the tactical tools, responsible person, action to be taken and time. This action planner was cost-effective which made it an affordable approach to do marketing communication to reach alumni, students and potential applicants. It would develop an active and strong communication system.

Next, the Control metrics were also created where KPI can be measured and analyzed by responsible staff member weekly, monthly, quarterly or yearly as required. The Metropolia's marketing team has few human resources, and due to that, the team is always busy with work and could not fully focus on the Programme's centered marketing communication activities. The low budget has also impact here in various ways, directly or indirectly.

So, this based upon thesis findings and results, BI programme must adapt the proposed marketing communication plan that is based on SOSTAC technique, which will help the programme to succeed and achieve the market presence. This plan is low-cost and can be used by BI programme manager to control the marketing communication activities independently.

## 7.2 Limitations

From the beginning of thesis, the primary objective of this thesis was to develop a new Marketing communication plan for Master's programme in Business Informatics so that it can create a better market presence and position itself better in competition by increasing awareness among potential applicants. The proposed plan is based upon the SOSTAC model which helped in analyzing the current situation, setting objectives, tactics and the action plan. Based on various tactics, the proposed plan should help to activate alumni, promote BI Master's programme internally and externally, using different social and communication channels.

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This thesis has a few limitations. First, 3Ms were not considered (Men, Money and Minutes) while building the new Marketing communication plan for BI programme. Also, the current and target number of Website visitors, subscribers/followers and conversion rate have not been included in the objective. The reason behind these limitations is non-availability of data and background information, which should become yet another area for development.

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**Appendix 1: The Questionnaire for Metropolia Stakeholder's Interview**

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of BI programme?
  2. How do you market the university's programmes? Which is the most suitable and effective way of marketing the Masters of BI programme?
  3. What social media channels do you use for communication?
  4. Who manage the social media communication?
  5. How do you manage internal communication among teachers and students?
  6. How do you manage relationship with past graduates? How often do you communicate with them?
  7. What is the current marketing communication plan and strategies of BI programme?
  8. How do you use direct marketing?
  9. What are your thoughts about business informatics programme web page?
  10. Do you have some tie-ups or partnerships with some organizations to promote and fund the programme?
  11. How do you manage marketing communication activities in low budget situation?
  12. Who are the competitors for BI programme and what are their marketing communication strategies?
  13. What communication channels do your competitors use?
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**Appendix 2: The Questionnaire for Student's Interview**

1. Have you ever heard of Metropolia's Business informatics programme before applying for this?
  2. How did you get to know about Metropolia's BI program?
  3. Why did you choose Metropolia's BI programme over other universities programmes?
  4. What was your motivation about choosing it?
  5. How was the communication process after submitting the application?
  6. What are your thoughts about BI programme web page? Do you want to improve anything?
  7. Do you follow Finnish universities on social media? If yes, which one? Why?
  8. What do you feel about Metropolia social media presence?
  9. How do you feel about communication within Metropolia?
  10. How often do you use Tuudo app and OMA?
  11. Do you think OMA is user-friendly? If no, what are the areas of improvement?
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