



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK

***How can higher education institutions attract more students from the Czech Republic and Denmark to participate in an international mobility using social media marketing activities?***

Master Thesis

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## **Abstract**

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has been focusing on the promotion of the international mobility among higher education students. This leads to the increase of the internationalization of higher education institutions by incorporating ingoing and outgoing mobility programs giving their students the chance to gain greater awareness of different cultures, advance their communication skills and language competency as well as higher interest in international economic and political issues. Nowadays, there is high competitiveness among higher education institutions to attract the best students. Since the technology is on the rise, higher education institutions have started incorporating social media into their marketing strategies. Therefore, this paper will take a closer look on how can universities attract more international students via social media.

The research design utilized in this study was the cross-sectional design applying the quantitative survey method. 190 usable responses were gathered and included in the data analysis using the statistical program of SPSS conducting the multiple linear regression analysis. The results of the analysis established the significant influence of the social media trendiness and word of mouth as well as the destination choice and the institution choice concerning students' study abroad decisions.

## **Executive Summary**

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has been focusing on the promotion of the international mobility among higher education students, which led higher education institutions to the increase of their internationalization by incorporating ingoing and outgoing mobility programs giving their students the chance to gain greater awareness of different cultures, advance their communication skills and language competency as well as higher interest in international economic and political issues. Nowadays, there is high competitiveness among higher education institutions to attract the best students. Since the technology is on the rise, higher education institutions have started incorporating social media into their marketing strategies. Therefore, this paper has chosen to take a closer look on how can universities attract more international students via social media. In addition, research questions concerning the factors influencing students' decision to participate in a study abroad, the social media marketing activities influencing their decision to study abroad as well as the way higher education institutions can utilize social media marketing activities to attract more students were raised.

Regarding methodology, this paper has applied an objectivistic and positivistic approach. The research design utilized in this study was the cross-sectional design applying the quantitative survey method by collecting a primary data. The sampling technique used was non-probability convenience sampling method, which resulted in 190 usable responses that were then included in the data analysis using the statistical program of SPSS conducting a factor analysis, reliability statistics and finally, the multiple linear regression analysis.

The results of the analysis established the acceptance of four out of seven hypotheses formulated. The social media trendiness and word of mouth as well as the destination choice and the institution choice were determined as significantly influential factors concerning students' study abroad decisions. The other three hypotheses related to the social media interaction, informativeness and customization were rejected.

This study concluded that the range of all the factors that might influence student's decision to participate in a study abroad is extremely broad suggesting that there is a great number of specific aspects further research can address to determine the reasons why are these factors influencing international mobility in specific circumstances. In addition, higher education institutions' might

utilize their social media accounts by appointing one person responsible in order to provide their students with the latest information and possibility to share their opinions and experiences.

This paper has its limitations when it comes to the sampling method applied as well as the data collection method or the way the literature review was carried out. Overall, this paper aims to help higher education institutions to identify the social media marketing activities that could attract more international students. Thus, further research might approach this topic from several different perspectives making it more specific when it comes to higher education institutions' marketing strategy.

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## **Abbreviation List**

EHEA - European Higher Education Area

EU – European Union

HE – Higher Education

EEA – European Economic Area

ERASMUS - European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students

HDI – Human Development Index

MUD – Multi-User Dimension

WWW – World Wide Web

UGC – User Generated Content

SMMA – Social Media Marketing Activities

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

WOM – Word of Mouth

# **1 Introduction**

Over the past decades, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has been promoting the progress of international student mobility as a focal point of the education ministers, the same holds true for the policies of the European Union (EU) because of the benefits it brings for the EHEA members, higher education institutions and students themselves (Netz, 2015). Programs such as the Erasmus+ make it possible for students, academics, staff, researchers and many others to explore the world while gaining valuable experience, education and training (European Commission, 2017). Higher education institutions are more and more forced to face the challenge of internationalization of education systems because of the rapid increase of students' mobility all over the world (Singh, 2016; Jiani, 2017). By creating ingoing and outgoing mobility programs for higher education students, universities become more internationalized and equipped to provide the support young students require in order to acquire international experience of working and living in a global economy and society (Daly, 2011). Studies have shown that study abroad participation brings various benefits to undergraduate students including, among others, "greater intercultural awareness and communication skills, advanced second-language skills, greater tolerance and acceptance of others, increased interest in international economic, political, and cross-cultural issues" (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015, p. 32). International student mobility is beneficial not only for students in a form of personal and professional development as well as their future career opportunities but also for higher education institutions by being perceived as prestigious and of high quality (Souto-Otero, et al., 2013).

In the following, the research background will be elaborated on by presenting the challenge of Internationalization of Higher Education, that is the reasoning behind higher education institutions' decisions to internationalize, which is highly influencing the international student mobility (Seeber, et al., 2016). Next, since this paper's focus is on higher education students, the generational group of Millennials will be presented as the focal point of this study. In addition, the concept of Social Media will be explained to better understand the impact this marketing tool has on the lives of the Millennials and point out to the lack of literature available that would help marketers incorporate this tool into their marketing strategy (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The

research background will be followed by the formulation of a problem statement and research questions based on a discussion of the problem. Lastly, the structure of the paper will be demonstrated.

## **1.1 Research background**

### **Internationalization of Higher Education**

Researchers have established the importance of internationalization being of a great concern to universities because of the increase of extant studies focusing on internationalization in higher education (Dewey & Duff, 2009). Higher education institutions augmented in size, scope and complexity of their international, intercultural or global actions by incorporating activities such as study-abroad programs, foreign language courses or access to higher education to foreign students (Seeber, et al., 2016; Altbach & Knight, 2007). These actions provide students among others with cross-cultural understanding, international perspectives and skills, and enhance their knowledge of foreign language (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Hence, two concepts, globalization and internationalization, that are very often being confused or used interchangeably in combination with one another despite their different meanings when it comes to the understanding of international aspects of higher education require explanation of their relationship (Knight, 1999; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Globalization is perceived as “the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education toward greater international involvement” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290). Thus, the need for globally competent citizens, those who are open-minded and at the same time are actively pursuing understanding of cultures to be able to interact, relate, exchange information and work outside their own ambience, demands higher education institutions to be internationalized (Dewey & Duff, 2009). Since internationalization can be understood in many different ways, there is not a consensus among scholars on its definition (Dewey & Duff, 2009). Maringe and Foskett (2010) in Lumby and Foskett (2016, p. 96) define internationalization as “the integration of an international or intercultural dimension into the tripartite mission of teaching, research and service functions”. According to Knight (1999) it is one of the possible means of how a country can react to the effect of globalization while recognizing the nation’s individuality. Nevertheless, these two concepts go

hand in hand with globalization being the catalyst while internationalization is the proactive reaction (Knight, 1999).

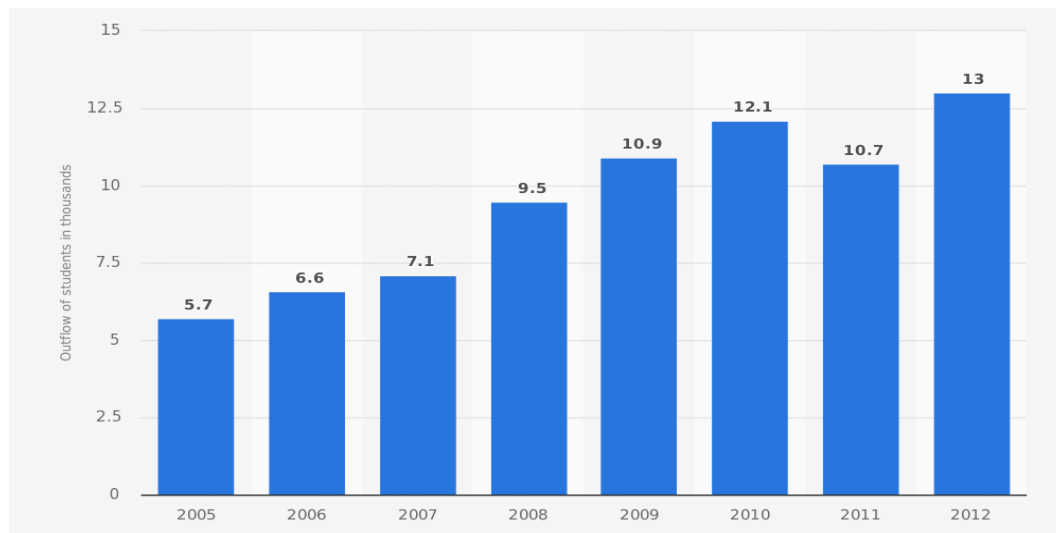
Internationalization can be driven by multiple actions, motivations or rationales (Seeber, et al., 2016). Lumby and Foskett (2016) and Knight (1999) consider political, economic, academic, and cultural/social actions as the rationales influencing internationalization. These four categories of rationales are not impacting internationalization individually, on the contrary they are closely associated and integrated into one another (Knight, 1999).

The motivations to internationalize may vary according to Altbach and Knight (2007). First, being profitable might be a key motive not only for the for-profit internationalization projects but also for non-profit universities who are having financial difficulties (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Second, the growing demand of young people obtaining access to higher education in countries with lacking capacity is the reason behind the creation of branch campuses, independent institutions following foreign academic models or franchised foreign academic programs (Ritzen & Marconi, 2011; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Third, traditional internationalization via providing students with study-abroad programs, intensive foreign language programs, international studies included in the curricula or intake and sponsorship of foreign students enhances the way how universities are being perceived making them competitive, prestigious and strategic (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Seeber, et al., 2016). Fourth, programs such as Erasmus+ make it possible for students to study in a different country across Europe and overseas because of the Bologna process harmonization of academic systems ensuring compatibility in terms of degree structures, credit transfers and academic qualifications across the European Union and partner countries, thus internationalizing Europe (Netz, 2015; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Fifth, individual internationalization is caused by students facing their decisions concerning destinations and field of study and therefore funding international education, since more than two million students are, sometimes with the help of their family, funding their own academic work (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

According to the European Commission's (2018) statistics, during the years of 2001 to 2012 the number of students from the EU undergoing tertiary education in another EU, EEA or candidate country had increased from 348.700 students to 663.700 students. This study has chosen to look at the case of the Czech Republic and Denmark, that is higher education students whose home country is either the Czech Republic or Denmark. The reason being the significant economic,

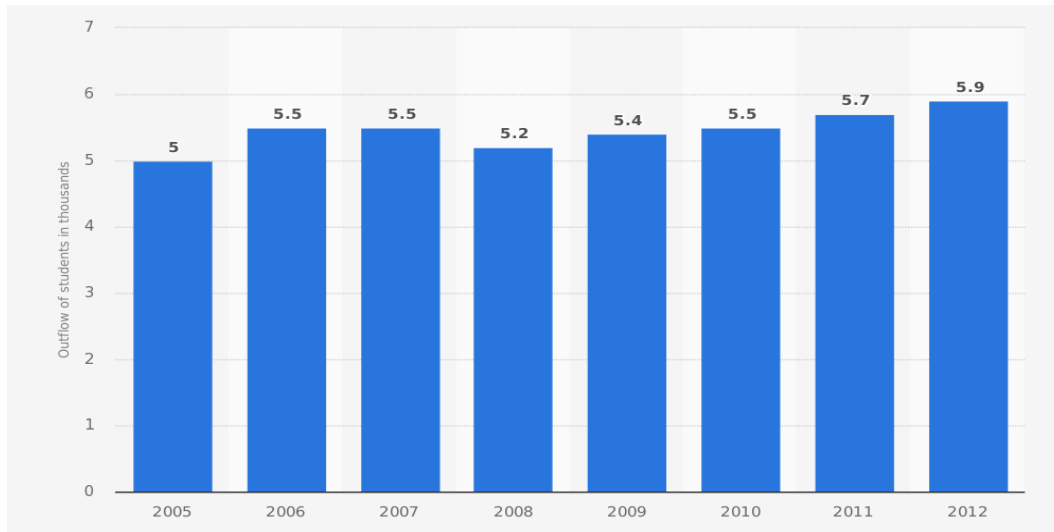
educational and cultural differences among these countries as well as the amount of educational expenditure by the Danish and Czech government being 8,5% of the Danish GDP and 4,3% of the Czech GDP, which is affecting the educational development as well as international mobility in these countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2016).

According to the Human Development Report from 2016 these two countries' Human Development Index (HDI) shows their status as very high human developed countries, Denmark being ranked 5<sup>th</sup> and the Czech Republic being ranked 28<sup>th</sup> (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). When it comes to the international mobility, the Czech Republic had sent over 5.700 students in 2005 and more than 13.000 students in 2012 doubling the number of students participating abroad over the period of seven years (see figure 1) (Statista, 2018).



**Figure 1:** Outflow of university students to EU-27, EEA and candidate countries from the Czech Republic from 2005 to 2012 (in 1.000)  
Source: (Statista, 2018)

In comparison, the outflow of students in Denmark had been considerably stable since 5.000 students participated in a program abroad in 2005 and over the period of seven years the number had increased only by 900 (see figure 2) (Statista, 2018). One must consider the population in both countries with 5.78 million habitants in Denmark and almost double, 10.59 million habitants, in the Czech Republic (Statista, 2018).



**Figure 2:** Outflow of university students to EU-27, EEA and candidate countries from Denmark from 2005 to 2012 (in 1.000)

Source: (Statista, 2018)

## Millennials

A group of individuals born during the same period of time experiencing similar life journey, which impacts their ideas, attitudes, preferences, values and beliefs, even though they are coming from different cultures and backgrounds, their way of seeing the world is similar, that is a generational group, a cohort (Knittel, et al., 2016; Schewe & Meredith, 2004). Millennials, also known as Generation Y, young adults or the “Look at Me” generation, are perceived as well-educated and adapted to technology, confident trying new products and services, eager to gain success without earning it, they are self-confident, self-absorbed, attached to their cell phones and computers and not aware of the life around them (Moore, 2012; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Knittel, et al., 2016).

Every generation is described by its starting and ending point, that is years of birth being the starting point and 20 or 25 years later, usually a time when individuals are grown and prepared to have children, being the ending point (Schewe & Meredith, 2004). However, there is not yet a consensus among researchers on the exact point commencing and ending Generation Y (Bolton, et al., 2013). Researchers such as Moore (2012) and Weiler (2005) describe Generation Y’s starting point as the year of 1980, Bolton et al. (2013) as of 1981, in comparison with Martin

(2005) and Tulgan (2011) who identify Generation Y as of 1978. The ending point of this generation varies between the years of 1990 and 1999 (Tulgan, 2011; Moore, 2012; Weiler, 2005; Bolton, et al., 2013). Therefore, this paper will interpret Millennials as individuals born between 1980 following Moore (2012) and Weiler (2005) and 1999, since every individual born during this period of time will attain one's majority, thus of legal capacity eliminating the need of a parental consent.

## **Social Media**

The concept of social media has been evolving throughout centuries to the present day, thus, there is no consensus on a specific origin and time of its first mention in the history (Edosomwan, et al., 2011). Some researchers claim that first social media reference emerged in 1792 with the use of telegraph in order to send and receive information and it continued in the late 1800s with the presence of social interaction via telephone and radio until the 1970s with the development of Multi-User Dimension (MUD) followed by the creation of World Wide Web (WWW) in 1990 (Edosomwan, et al., 2011; Lederer, et al., 2000).

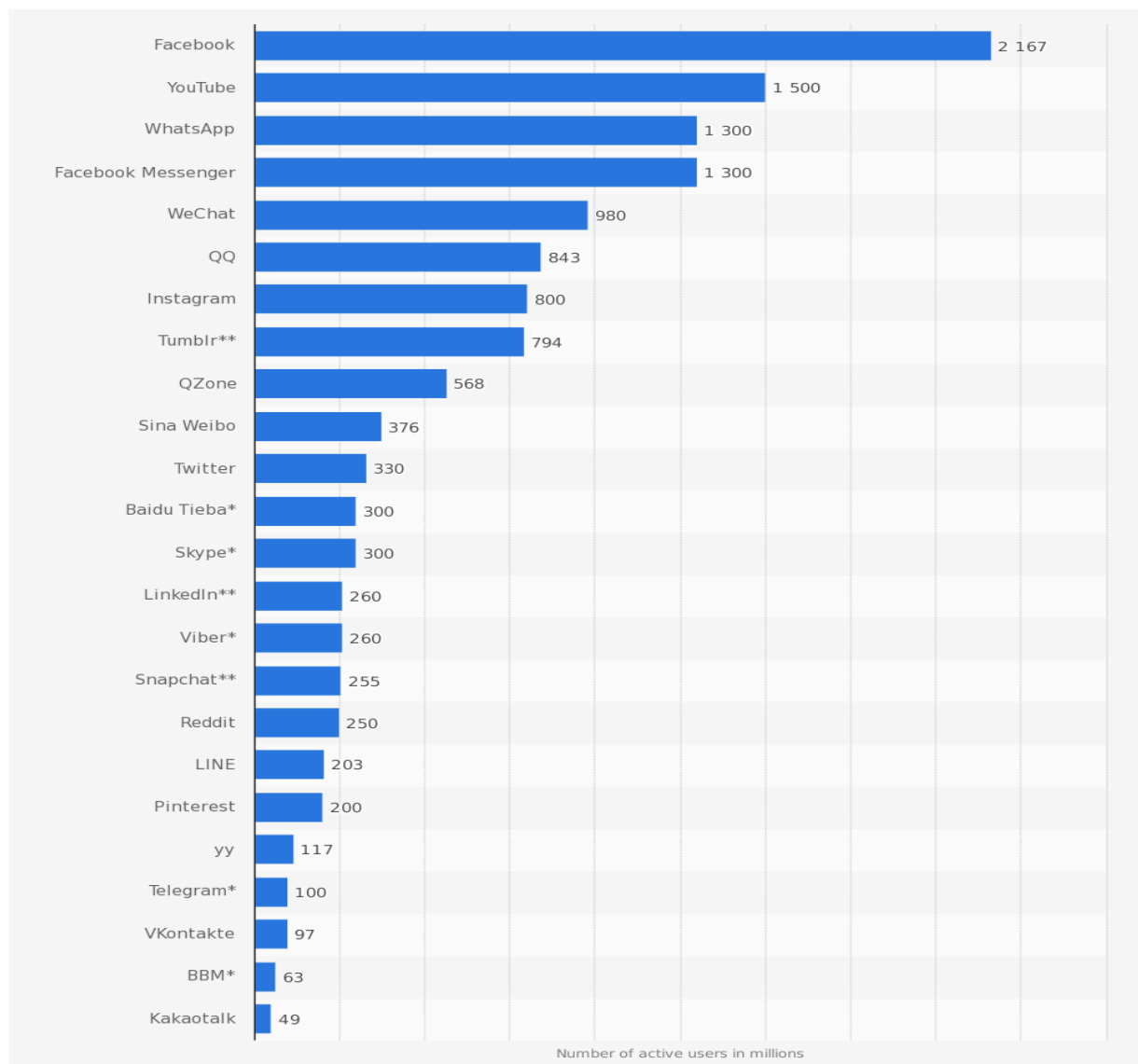
The phenomenon, sometimes called consumer-generated media, according to Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2004, p. 2) in Mangold and Faulds (2009, pp. 357-358) "describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues". Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) present social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" by distinguishing between the concepts of social media, Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC) themselves. Another concept that is sometimes being mistaken with social media is one of a social network or social networking, which is the exchange of knowledge, data or services between people, organizations, businesses, thus creation of relationships (Edosomwan, et al., 2011).

There is a variety of different types of social media including social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), creativity works sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr), business networking sites (LinkedIn), Collaborative websites (Wikipedia) or user/company-sponsored blogs or websites and many more (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Most of these social media platforms were



launched in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, out of the most popular was Wikipedia in 2001, MySpace and LinkedIn in 2003, Facebook one year later followed by YouTube and Yahoo!360 in 2005 and Twitter in 2006.

Nowadays, as seen in figure 3, Facebook is according to the statistical analysis by Statista (2018) the leading platform with over 2.1 billion of monthly active users, YouTube is ranked second with 1.5 billion users followed by WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger with 1.3 billion users. Instagram, which was launched in October 2010, ranked seventh with 800 million monthly active users and is currently the fastest growing platform worldwide (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Statista, 2018; Instagram, 2018).



**Figure 3:** Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2018, ranked by number of active users in millions  
Source: (Statista, 2018)

Since 2010 the number of social network users worldwide has increased from less than one billion users to more than 2.4 billion users in 2017 expecting to reach more than three billion users in 2021 according to Statista (2018). In comparison, 67% of Danish internet users were active users of social media compared to 46% of Czech social media users in January 2017 (Statista, 2018). The dominant platform in both countries is Facebook with 67% of social media users in Denmark and 42% of adult social media users in Czech Republic in 2016 (Statista, 2018; FOCUS, 2016). The majority of social media users in Denmark is aged between 16 to 44 years over 87%, in Czech

Republic it is between 16 to 34 years of age with more than 80% followed by those aged from 35 to 44 with 51% (Statista, 2018; FOCUS, 2016).

Even though, social media has been rapidly growing and expanding during this century becoming an influential factor when it comes to consumer behavior, purchase behavior, post-purchase behavior, awareness, attitudes and evaluation, marketing managers are lacking academic literature to guide them when integrating social media into their marketing communications strategies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

## **1.2 Problem Discussion**

Many researchers have focused their studies on international student mobility and students' experiences participating in a study abroad, although, there is a lack of literature concerning the factors that are influencing students' decision-making process leading towards participation in study abroad programs (Goldstein & Kim, 2006). Among those studies focusing on this issue, professional and personal development have been identified as the most common factors followed by financial costs, language competence, previous mobility experience and organizational support, etc. (Lesjak, et al., 2015; Böttcher, et al., 2016; Daly, 2011; Doyle, et al., 2010). Several studies investigating the benefits of such programs have proven the determination of the factors influencing participation in programs abroad to be of high significance (Goldstein & Kim, 2006).

Nowadays, when higher education institutions compete amongst each other in order to attract the best students, recent study by Peruta and Shields (2018) suggests the use of social media as a reasonable source of communication between the universities and their current students, potential students, parents and community members. According to Hesel (2013) in Peruta and Shields (2017) students use social media when deciding which university to apply to, mostly to find out how their everyday life will look like when attending a university, what activities and social life the university offers.

Based on the research background and problem discussion the following problem statement and research questions were formulated.

**Problem statement:** *How can higher education institutions attract more students from the Czech Republic and Denmark to participate in an international mobility using social media marketing activities?*

Based on the problem statement, multiple research questions were formulated in order to provide this paper's research focus:

**Research questions:**

1. *What are the factors influencing higher education students' decisions to participate in an international mobility?*

The first research question provides a foundation and guidance for the literature review and simultaneously the creation of an analytical framework.

2. *What social media marketing activities influence higher education students' decisions to participate in an international mobility?*

The second research question's purpose is to carry out an empirical research based on the analytical framework in order to identify social media marketing activities influencing students' decision-making process.

3. *How can higher education institutions utilize social media marketing activities to attract more international students?*

The third research question aims to provide practical implications and future research suggestions to higher education institutions based on the findings derived from the empirical research process.

### **1.3 Structure**

This paper's structure is composed of five main chapters (see figure 4). The first one is introduction, which includes a brief introduction of the problem, research background, problem discussion including the problem statement and multiple research questions, and the overall structure of the paper. The second chapter is focusing on the methodology of this study, mainly

the research strategy and design, the literature review methodology and data collection methods. The third chapter consists of the literature review and the analytical framework. The fourth one includes the data analysis and the findings, and lastly, the fifth chapter follows with a conclusion, the paper's limitations, practical implications and suggestions for future research.



**Figure 4:** Structure of the paper  
Source: Author's creation

## **2 Methodology**

This chapter will be taking a closer look at the research strategy, the literature review methodology and the research design implemented in this paper. Next, the data collection process will be elaborated on including the data sources utilized, the data collection method applied as well as the sampling method followed by the operationalization describing the way the questionnaire was constructed. Lastly, the data analysis process will be presented, the quality criteria considered and ethical considerations.

### **2.1 Research Strategy**

When writing an academic paper, scholars studying the philosophy of science have argued about the importance of being able to determine how to formulate the research questions and what research methods are applicable to address these questions (Kuada, 2012). Researchers might not be aware of addressing philosophical paradigms when making a choice of the appropriate research questions or research methods, that is articulating the assumptions made about ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology (Kuada, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Researchers that are able to identify the significance of clear assumptions embedded in paradigms present their work with a clear basis to their audience that is more understandable while creating a space for themselves to reflect on their work (Kuada, 2012).

In order to provide a reasoning behind this study's position when it comes to paradigms and assumptions, it is necessary to present the concept of a paradigm itself as well as the one of epistemology and ontology. In addition, either deductive or inductive method will be applied, thus providing the interpretation adapted by this study.

The understanding of a paradigm is heavily associated with Kuhn's (1970) work, specifically his book called "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009). Even though some research disciplines have great differences, there are some similarities such as the point pertaining to a focus being a phenomenon leading towards the creation of a display of questions that need to be addressed. Those include the research questions related to the central point, which lead to the presentation of how the study will be conducted in order to provide answers for these questions

followed by the interpretation of the findings and the concluding remarks. These research questions define a paradigm. (Kuhn, 1970; Kuada, 2012)

According to Kuhn (1970) when one looks at paradigms concerning the discipline of natural sciences, every paradigm is eventually condemned to its end by a new incoming one. On the contrary, Törnebohm (1984) at Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) was describing the evolution of paradigms from the perspective of the discipline of social sciences as one paradigm being able to coexist next to one another, that is once there is a new paradigm, it does not take the place of the previous one, it exists side-by-side. Since this paper's focus falls into the field of social sciences, its stance regarding paradigms follows the approach by Törnebohm (1984).

To address the philosophical viewpoints, one must define the concept of ontology, Kuada (2012, p. 58) describes it as “the nature of what the researcher seeks to know”, hence as “the knowable” or “reality”. The world around social sciences is by scholars being understood in two different ways, either it is perceived by an individual as a reality affected by the external forces or it is possible to be influenced and created by an individual's actions (Guthrie, 2010; Kuada, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Ponterotto, 2005). When it comes to the way one perceives the truth and defines the reality, it all goes hand in hand with the way researchers look at the connection human beings have with their environment (Kuada, 2012). This study perceives the decision about study abroad and higher education enrollment as being a reality that is surrounding higher education students, for that reason the objectivistic approach will be applied (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Kuada, 2012).

According to Ladyman (2002, p. 5) epistemology is “the branch of philosophy that inquiries into knowledge and justification”. The question that arises concerns the distinction between knowledge and belief when it comes to the way one's research should be understood; some scholars have identified the discipline of social sciences as a base for further investigation thus more on the side of knowledge, others have been looking at the ways to examine the field of social sciences as being based on inner experience rather than facts, hence belief (Ladyman, 2002; Kuada, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Ponterotto, 2005). This paper will be investigating the motivation of higher education students' decision to study abroad and the way how universities can attract more students via social media, therefore the positivistic approach will be applied.

The objectivistic approach being labeled as positivism implies that when examining the cause and effect behind a social phenomenon, theories describing mentioned phenomenon can be adapted as a basis for the formulation of hypotheses leading towards the clarification of the meaning of a specific social phenomenon (Kuada, 2012). If the view point of interpretivism would be applied, the explanation of a certain phenomenon would depend on a personal experience influenced by the intentions and the behavior of those individuals being studied, there is no need for empirical evidence (Kuada, 2012). The former called deductive is usually applied when using the quantitative methodological approach, the latter, inductive approach, is being employed when utilizing the qualitative research method (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Kuada, 2012).

## **2.2 FISI Classification**

Since this paper will be following the objectivistic alongside the positivistic point of view concerning ontology and epistemology, the philosophical paradigm this study will put in practice is established on the basis of the FISI classification of paradigms by Kuada (2012). This classification is characterized by functionalism, interpretivism, structuralism and lastly, interactionalism (Kuada, 2012).

Functionalism falls into the positivistic or objectivistic research type contributing to positivist epistemology (Kuada, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). This type of a paradigm is of popular use among scholars of the discipline of economics considering organizational decisions related to re-structuralizing as being in line with their operational setting. Organizational adaptation to changes of structure or strategy need a broad understanding of new circumstances, perspectives and theories. (Kuada, 2012)

Interpretivism is related to the interpretation of people's understanding of certain situations that they are involved in and the way they perceive the circumstances deriving from these experiences (Kuada, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). In this case, it is not about the explanation of one's actions as is the functionalist paradigm but more about the sense-making and creation of events and their surroundings, that is focus the investigation on the individuals and the way they define their actions (Kuada, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005).



Structuralism emphasizes human societies as being comprised of comprehensive systems of parts that are related to each other. This paradigm is looking at the collective rather than on one human being seeing the position of an individual as a part of a structured social system. Thus, focusing more on the elements such as size of an organization, type of industry or how many competitors are on the market when it comes to the discipline of business. (Kuada, 2012)

Interactionalism points out to the position of an individual when being part of an interaction and its influence on one's social life. Social interactions are at the center of all actions and realities surrounding human beings. They permit individuals to contribute to the society with their opinions and understandings and allow them to reflect on their experiences and share them with one another. Therefore, these opinions and understandings are considered to be subjective. (Kuada, 2012)

Researchers do not necessarily need to apply only one of these paradigms, hence there are certain combinations one can implement including the structural functionalism, the structural interpretivism, the interactional functionalism and finally, the interpretive interactionalism (Kuada, 2012). This study is implementing the combination of structuralism and functionalism, called structural-functionalism, due to its view on the social world as being a complex phenomenon comprised by certain parts, which are considered significant in order to understand it in its entirety (Guthrie, 2010; Kuada, 2012).

### **2.3 Literature Review Methodology**

The reasons leading researchers to provide a literature review when conducting a study include the ability to gain valuable knowledge concerning the research problem, that is the theoretical understanding of related concepts, and at the same time supporting the development of the audience's knowledge about given theoretical aspects of the research problem discussed (Webster & Watson, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2015). According to Bryman and Bell (2015) as well as Cronin, et al. (2008) one can identify two ways to approach a literature review process, being a thematic method, also known as narrative or traditional, and systematic method. This paper will be conducting a thematic literature review meaning the focus lies on a determined research problem that is being investigated compared to a literature review focusing on a certain discipline in its entirety. Although, when applying a systematic approach, one can avoid having biased research due to the complexity of the literature reviewed, the thematic one has a wider range when it comes

to the search of the literature itself while being less time-consuming, thus more suitable for the study at hand considering the focal point of this study. (Webster & Watson, 2002; Cronin, et al., 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2015)

This paper's literature review was conducted in multiple steps. First, it was necessary to establish the availability of the literature relevant to the problem at hand, that was conducted using the keywords such as *social media marketing*, *higher education marketing*, *international student mobility* and *study abroad decision*. Second, another search was conducted using varied combinations of different keywords related to the topic as seen in table 1. This research was carried out using the Aalborg University Library, the EBSCO database and Google Scholar. Overall, 43 peer-reviewed articles were utilized when conducting the literature review. These articles are covering the period from the year 1987 to 2018 to provide an extensive review of literature considering the evolution of theoretical concepts over time. Journals related to disciplines such as Economic, Management, Marketing, Education or Psychology were included. Moreover, 32 articles were applying structural-functionalism and 11 were applying structural-interpretivism.

<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Operator</b>	<b>Keyword</b>
Social Media	AND/OR	Marketing Higher Education University
Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)	AND/OR	Higher Education University
Higher Education	AND/OR	Mobility International Mobility Marketing
Mobility	AND/OR	Student Erasmus International
Study abroad	AND/OR	Motivation Decision

		Choice Destination
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**Table 1:** Keywords searched overview  
Source: Author's creation

## 2.4 Research Design

Research design is according to Kothari (2004, p. 31) “the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure”. When writing an academic paper, the research design is guiding the researcher when choosing the appropriate research method. Once a research design is established, it creates a basis for the data collection and the analysis of the data. Moreover, the researcher will be able to link all the different parts of the study itself, this includes the problem statement and the research questions included in the introduction chapter followed by the literature review, the collection and analysis of the data to the findings and the conclusion. (Kuada, 2012; Kothari, 2004; Bryman & Bell, 2015)

There are different types of research designs a researcher can apply when conducting a research study, some researchers classify research designs such as exploratory, descriptive and causal designs, others follow exploratory, descriptive and experimental designs (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010). Bryman and Bell (2015) categorize research designs as cross-sectional, experimental, longitudinal, comparative and case study. Considering this paper's research problem, the cross-sectional design will be implemented in order to investigate patterns of association among given variables (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This will be executed using a quantitative research collecting data via a questionnaire regarding the use of higher education institution's social media among students including the factors influencing higher education students to participate in a study abroad.

## 2.5 Data Collection

### 2.5.1 Data Sources

Two different sources of data can be used when carrying out a research study, primary sources or secondary sources (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010). Primary sources are those being

collected directly by the researcher. On the other hand, secondary sources have been previously collected by other scholars and have already been analyzed. In the case of primary sources, the data is original, needs to be analyzed and then interpreted, concerning the secondary sources, once the data is gathered, the interpretation process follows. (Guthrie, 2010; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2015)

Each source of data has its advantages and disadvantages, secondary sources are usually easily accessible because of the rise of technology, hence the costs are lower compared to primary sources (Zikmund, et al., 2013; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Even though the costs of primary data collection might be higher, the data collection can be customized to a concrete research problem, thus providing only relevant data; when using a secondary data, it might not be fully applicable to the purpose of the specific research problem (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The study at hand will be conducting a primary data collection via a survey, the reason being its cost-effectiveness considering the necessity to reach students from different countries. Moreover, it is one the most common methods applied when using a primary data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010).

### **2.5.2 Data Collection Method**

Since this paper will be conducting a cross-sectional design using a quantitative research method, self-administered, also called self-completion questionnaire will be employed (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As previously mentioned, this is a very cost-effective and at the same time less time-consuming method of data collection enabling the reach of students from various countries across Europe (Zikmund, et al., 2013; Kothari, 2004). According to Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad (2010) and Zikmund, et al. (2013) there are essential steps when constructing a questionnaire. The determination of the data required to answer given research questions is necessary followed by the definition of each variable related to the theoretical concepts. Once the variables are identified, questions can be made considering what types of questions can be used to obtain relevant data, their grouping, the amount of questions provided and the overall structure of the questionnaire. After the creation of the questionnaire, pretesting is necessary in order to uncover any discrepancies or limitations, which can be eventually corrected prior to the data collection itself. Lastly, the

proper method utilized to administer the questionnaire needs to be implemented to obtain the necessary amount of responses in a given period of time. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010; Zikmund, et al., 2013)

### **2.5.3 Sampling**

Bryman and Bell (2015) have identified two different types of sampling designs being a probability and non-probability sampling. A probability sampling, known also as a random sampling, consists of random individual elements because of an automated process which embraces all the representatives of the universe (Kothari, 2004). A non-probability sampling is, in comparison, defined as a concrete sample chosen based on the researcher's intentions and needs (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Kothari, 2004).

The paper at hand has chosen to apply the latter, that is the non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, which is based on the description by Bryman and Bell (2015) easily accessible and available to the researcher while very cost-effective. The sample chosen for this study includes the millennials from the Czech Republic and Denmark, particularly higher education students from the given countries. Higher education students were addressed via email as well as via social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

When it comes to the size of the sample discussed, it is a significant element that needs to be addressed prior the data collection (Hair, et al., 2015). It provides a foundation to the researcher considering the amount of data necessary in order to obtain acceptable and anticipated dimensions such as a confidence interval or the error of magnitude (Zikmund, et al., 2013). In addition, the representativeness of the sample's characteristics of population will enable the researcher to obtain valid and reliable results (Kothari, 2004; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

This paper has chosen to decide the sample size based on judgement considering the nature of the research problem, geographical reach of higher education students included in the sample as well as time-efficiency, hence the objective is to obtain a sample size of 150 to 300 samples (Zikmund, et al., 2013; Pirgaru & Turcan, 2017).

### 2.5.4 Operationalization

Operationalization, also called concretization is a process of identification of variables providing a basis for an analytical framework. This framework is constructed in order to confirm or reject hypotheses related to the theoretical concepts and the determined research problem. One must establish these variables as factors that are measurable. This process is usually applied when a deductive research approach is implemented. (Andres, 2012; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2015)

Table 2 includes the concepts related to the research problem presented operationalized into the sub-concepts, thus the variables, utilized in the survey to be seen in the appendix 2.

Concept	Sub-Concept	Item	Question	Source
SMMA	Interaction	The dialog created between the higher education student and the institution	Have a conversation or exchange opinions with others	(Godey, et al., 2016; Constantinides & Stagno, 2012; Kim & Ko, 2012)
			Stay in touch with my contacts	
			Share pictures and videos	
			Vote in polls	
	Informativeness	Providing truthful and relevant information	Search for information about a university	(Constantinides & Stagno, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017)
			Search for information about a study program	
			Obtain accurate information concerning a university	
			Obtain useful and complex information concerning a university	
	Trendiness	Providing the latest information as well as notice about upcoming events	Provides the latest information about upcoming events (fairs, open days, etc.)	(Yadav & Rahman, 2017; Kim & Ko, 2012)

			Provides the latest information about offered study programs	
			Provides the latest information about offered scholarships	
			Provides the latest information about higher education institution's accomplishments	
	Customization	Tailoring the social media content towards higher education students	Facilitates personalized information search	(Godey, et al., 2016; Seo & Park, 2018; Yadav & Rahman, 2017)
			Provides the information that I seek	
			Satisfies my needs	
			Makes recommendations according to my requirements	
	Word of Mouth	User-to-user information exchange related to the higher education institution's services or products	Pass on the information about the higher education institution on social media	(Godey, et al., 2016; Seo & Park, 2018; Yadav & Rahman, 2017)
			Post positive opinions about the higher education institution using social media	
			Recommend the higher education institution using social media	
			Encourage my friends and acquaintances to use the higher education institution's social media	

Factors influencing the international mobility of HE students	Study abroad decision	Influential factors	Future job/academic prospects and/or future earnings prospects	(Pirgaru & Turcan, 2017; Lesjak, et al., 2015; Daly, 2011; Doyle, et al., 2010; Netz, 2015)
			The value of a foreign degree	
			Unavailability of a study program I seek and/or lower quality of education	
			I want to develop my language skills	
			Recommendation from a friend or family	
	Destination Choice	Influential factors	Higher quality of education	(Pirgaru & Turcan, 2017; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Levatino, 2017)
			Possibility to obtain financial grant	
			Geographic proximity	
			Recommendation from a friend or family	
	Institution Choice	Influential factors	Reputation concerning the quality of education	(Pirgaru & Turcan, 2017; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002)
			Possibility to obtain a scholarship	
			Broad range of study programs and courses	

**Table 2:** Operationalization

Source: Author's creation

## 2.6 Data Analysis Method

The data analysis will be conducted utilizing the statistical tools of Excel and SPSS. First, the quality criteria need to be presented, hence to determine the reliability of the data, the reliability analysis will be performed using the SPSS statistical program establishing the value of Cronbach's Alpha; and a factor analysis will be carried out to demonstrate the convergent and discriminant



validity (Hair, et al., 2015). The results of these processes will be elaborated on in detail in the upcoming chapter called Quality Criteria.

For the purpose of establishing the relationships among one dependent and seven independent variables, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed with the help of the SPSS tools, once including the SMMA factors as independent variables and study abroad decision as the dependent variable, and a second one including the destination choice and institution choice as independent variables with study abroad decision being the dependent variable. This technique, a multiple regression analysis, is one of the most common and popular regression techniques since it relates to the relative impact of multiple independent variables on one dependent variable (Hair, et al., 2015). After the completion of the multiple regression analysis, a simple ANOVA test is presented consisting of various coefficients. Firstly, it is essential to determine the significance of the F value, that is the higher the value is the more deviation of the dependent variable is explained by its independent variables (Hair, et al., 2015). Secondly, the statistical significance of the independent variables needs to be evaluated so that the hypotheses formulated can be either accepted or rejected. Lastly, the coefficient beta will be presented to understand the relative influence the independent variables have over the dependent variable. (Hair, et al., 2015)

## **2.7 Quality Criteria**

When a research study is conducted, one must determine the quality of the criteria taken into consideration as well as the validity and consistency concerning the factors that are used to describe the study's concepts (Hair, et al., 2015). According to Bryman and Bell (2015) the reliability and the validity of a research study related to social sciences is among the most utilized criteria to establish a study's quality. The former is used to determine the consistency of a research study meaning obtaining similar results when the same topic is being studied by several researchers (Hair, et al., 2015; Kothari, 2004; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010). The reliability is usually applied when it comes to multi-item scales, that is multiple variables related to the same concept. Once the values of each factor on the scale are correlated, reliability is proven; the higher the correlation is, the higher reliability is presented. (Hair, et al., 2015; Kothari, 2004)

This study has chosen to apply the reliability statistics including the coefficient alpha, that is Cronbach's Alpha, to determine the reliability of this research (Hair, et al., 2015). The data analysis

was conducted using the SPSS program leading to obtaining a value of 0,903 as the Alpha Coefficient as shown in figure 5. The value of this coefficient should be higher than 0,7 to have a good strength of association but not exceeding the value of 0,95, which is known to be critical (Hair, et al., 2015). The Cronbach's Alpha value that resulted from the data analysis performed is between 0,9 and 0,95 meaning an excellent strength of association (Hair, et al., 2015).

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,903	,898	32

**Figure 5:** Reliability Statistics – Cronbach's Alpha  
Source: SPSS output

Once the reliability is tested, Kothari (2004) stresses out the importance of the presence of the validity testing. Validity is “the extent to which the recorded observations accurately reflect the construct they are intended to measure, (...) it is assessed by examining how well the observations agree with alternative measures of the same construct” (2010, p. 93). According to Hair, et al. (2015) there are three ways to look at validity measures, the content validity, construct validity and criterion validity.

The first one, content validity, is usually utilized in business research studies (Hair, et al., 2015), Bryman and Bell (2015) described it as a face validity. Since its validity measurements include non-objective and systematic determination of the scale's ability to explain the content of a given concept, researchers perceive this process as inadequate and rather implement the construct or criterion validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Hair, et al., 2015).

The second one, construct validity, is a method that researchers utilize in order to deduce hypotheses that are formulated on the basis of a literature review related to a research problem of a specific study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It determines whether an item is measured according to its given processes or not (Hair, et al., 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Two steps, the convergent and discriminant validity, need to be carried out in order to demonstrate construct validity (Hair,

et al., 2015). The former presents findings related to positive correlation among concepts and their measures that are determined by high values of correlation (Kothari, 2004; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Hair, et al., 2015). The latter, on the other hand, describes low levels of correlation, which means that the measures and the concepts do not correlate with each other (Hair, et al., 2015).

The third and last one is the criterion validity that is being established when the scale's values are providing a foundation to explain the values of a dependent variable being theoretically defined in order to estimate the findings or the presence of some related conditions (Kothari, 2004; Hair, et al., 2015). The criterion needs to maintain its qualities when it comes to relevance, reliability and freedom from bias (Kothari, 2004).

The study at hand has determined the convergent and the discriminant validity which eventually leads to the presence of construct validity. Table 3 shows the total average variance being 0,720, thus above 0,5 demonstrating the convergent validity of this study (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To determine the discriminant validity, the factor analysis was performed using the SPSS to obtain the correlation coefficient of 0,129 (see Appendix 1). If the average variance extracted (AVE) is higher than the correlation squared, then the discriminant validity is presented, in this case the AVE is 0,720 and the correlation squared is 0,016641 as seen in table 3 (Bove, et al., 2009).

Average Variance Extracted	Correlation = 0,129 Correlation <sup>2</sup> = 0,016641  <b>AVE &gt; Correlation<sup>2</sup></b> 0,720 > 0,016641
0,856	
0,746	
0,730	
0,659	
0,747	
0,696	
0,701	
0,623	
<b>TOTAL = 0,720</b>	

**Table 3:** Excel calculations to determine the construct validity  
Source: Author's creation based on the SPSS output

### **3 Literature Review**

In the following chapter, the review of relevant literature will be presented focusing on the theoretical foundations related to the factors influencing international mobility of higher education students, social media marketing activities (SMMA) and social media marketing activities in higher education followed by a formulation of an analytical framework applied to this study.

#### **3.1 Factors influencing international mobility of higher education students**

In the past 20 years, the number of students participating in an international mobility all over the world has been rapidly increasing (Jiani, 2017). The increasing international student mobility followed by the development of understanding of different cultures and competencies among individuals, organizations and countries are just some of the reasons behind the growing need of internationalization of higher education (Daly, 2011; Singh, 2016). Therefore, the future growth of international student mobility is a key action not only for the European Higher Education Area but also globally (Netz, 2015; Singh, 2016). A significant part of the international students' mobility flow includes higher education students, accordingly countries facilitating international mobility of students should focus a great number of resources to attract talents, international students, in order to optimize their trade systems, grow economically and enhance their economic status worldwide (Wei, 2013). As a result, the factors influencing the international student mobility and its dynamics are one of the most important matters of interest to educational researchers and the higher education policymakers (Kondakci, et al., 2018).

The majority of researchers have focused on establishing the factors that push students to study abroad and those that pull them towards a particular destination (Levatino, 2017). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) studied the “push-pull” factors that influence international student's choice of destination by applying the push (outbound) and pull (inbound) model by McMahon (1992). The push factors are those that motivate students to study abroad and are operating in the country of origin, the home country. On the other hand, the pull factors are those that are operating within the country of destination, the host country, and make the country more attractive in comparison with other potential destinations. (González, et al., 2011)

This model is a widely used framework among researchers when it comes to international students' motivations to study abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; González, et al., 2011; Lesjak, et al., 2015; Singh, 2016; Jiani, 2017). Accordingly, this paper will follow this framework when establishing the factors influencing higher education students' participation in an international mobility. Following the work of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Bodycott (2009), Lesjak, et al. (2015) and Jiani (2017) this study will look at previous research concerning the factors influencing students' decision to study abroad, followed by the factors influencing students' choice of the destination and lastly, the factors influencing students' choice of the host institution.

All in all, educational researchers have been in the past years focusing predominantly on the motivations of students all over the world to participate in an international mobility in order to guide the policymakers towards internationalization of their higher education institutions (Daly, 2011; Singh, 2016; Kondakci, et al., 2018). Therefore, this paper will be looking at the factors that influence higher education students' decision to participate in an international mobility.

### **Factors affecting students' decision to study abroad**

The literature offers a vast number of studies that are focusing on the factors affecting students' decisions when it comes to a study abroad participation (Souto-Otero, et al., 2013; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015). According to Singh's (2016) study on international students in Malaysia, these factors can be divided into three groups, the socio-economic factors, the environmental factors and the personal factors. The socio-economic factors include the costs, the reputation of the host university, the quality of the program, the teaching approach and facilities, the duration of the program, the uniqueness of the program, and the possibility to continue in a similar program in the future (Singh, 2016; Levatino, 2017; Souto-Otero, et al., 2013). The environmental factors include the religion, the safety and peacefulness of the country, the convenience of the location and the development of the country, the opportunity to improve language, the multiculturally friendly society, the need of a visa, and the low cost of living (González, et al., 2011; Singh, 2016). Lastly, the personal factors consist of the limited number of places in higher education in the home country, the possibility to relocate with a family, the restrictions on further study in the home country and the recommendations by others (Singh, 2016; Böttcher, et al., 2016). Other researchers have found similar results demonstrating mainly the significance of personal and professional growth possibilities, the financial costs, the language competence, the education and study

program, previous mobility experience, personal relationships or the interest in understanding of different cultures as the most important influential factors when deciding whether to participate in a study abroad or not (Doyle, et al., 2010; Daly, 2011; Lesjak, et al., 2015; Böttcher, et al., 2016; Levatino, 2017).

A study conducted by Lesjak, et al. (2015) has identified a variety of factors that are motivating European students to participate in an international mobility, among the most important motivations is to experience something new followed by a personal growth, understanding different cultures, meeting new people, improve language skills or to simply leave the home country for a semester. In comparison, Bodycott (2009) has established that higher quality of education and the international experience are among the most important factors for students in China. Levatino's (2017) research supports Bodycott's (2009) findings when it comes to the importance of the quality of higher education in the home country determining the unmet need for higher education in the country of origin as being the main reason encouraging students to choose to study abroad. Another study focusing on international students choosing China as their destination identified a number of different reasons that motivated these students to participate in an international mobility, specifically "the optimistic belief in China's future development prospects (...), the bright prospects of learning the Chinese language (...), the access to scholarships to support study abroad (...), to promote career development (...), to explore a new way of life by experiencing a different culture" (Jiani, 2017, pp. 569-571).

The international student mobility brings students a wide range of benefits that play a significant role in the decision-making process leading to a study abroad participation (Lesjak, et al., 2015). An extensive research conducted by Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2015, p. 32) presents numerous benefits for not only students, but also for the institution itself, those include acquiring "sophisticated cognitive skills, greater intercultural awareness and communication skills, advanced second-language skills, greater tolerance and acceptance of others, increased interest in international economic, political, and cross-cultural issues, higher commitment to peace and international cooperation (...), enhanced personal development and global citizenship, greater academic engagement and higher graduation rates". Similar findings were presented in Dolga, et al.'s (2015) study focusing on the factors influencing exchange students of the Erasmus program from the perspective of their professional and scientific development, their personality

development, their social life and personal relationships, and other aspects of their life including eating habits, future plans in terms of career or a family and their free time habits.

Nevertheless, everything has its negatives, Souto-Otero, et al. (2013) and Doyle, et al. (2010) have identified potential barriers discouraging students to participate in an international mobility. To mention a few, the financial costs, the lack of language competency, the lack of information about offered programs and institutions, the lack of support by both, host and home country, the need to prolong studies or personal relationships. Considering all the possible barriers, one can notice the connection between the barriers, the benefits and the factors in general, all of those have a significant impact on the students' choice to study abroad whether it is a positive one or a negative one (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Goldstein & Kim, 2006; Daly, 2011; Souto-Otero, et al., 2013; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015).

To sum up, higher education students are influenced by a number of different factors whether they are personal, economical, political, professional or other. Some are positively influencing their final decision to participate in a study abroad, some are negatively influencing their decisions. However, if the decision about a study abroad participation is positive, it brings a lot of benefits to the students themselves as well as to the host and home country, and the institution. (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Souto-Otero, et al., 2013; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Lesjak, et al., 2015; Bodycott, 2009).

Thus, the factors influencing students' decision about the destination country and the institution will follow.

### **Factors affecting students' destination choice**

The research focusing on the determination of factors influencing the students' destination choice is not that broad compared to the research provided in terms of the decision to study abroad in general (Bodycott, 2009). Kondakci, et al.'s (2018) paper presents a pattern followed by international students when choosing a destination of their study, that is the habit of students from the East to choose the West countries as their destination. This goes hand in hand with the fact that Asian countries are those sending the most students while countries with developed economy and well-known languages (e.g. English, Spanish, French, German) are receiving the greatest number of students (Kondakci, et al., 2018; Statista, 2018; Vögtle & Windzio, 2016). Accordingly, some

of the factors affecting students' choice of destination are the existence of an international agreement between countries, the existence of common border or the proximity of the country of origin and the host country as well as the cultural, socioeconomic and institutional similarities (Vögtle & Windzio, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Jiani, 2017). Similar results were identified by Wei (2013, p. 120) demonstrating the importance of the bilateral economic relationships among countries, the economic factors such as "per capita GDP gap between countries" and the educational factors including the enrollment rate or the higher education budget.

Lesjak, et al. (2015) and Bodycott (2009) have described several different factors that are more related towards students' personality and interests than the economical, political or geographical aspects of the host country. Students are motivated to choose a specific country as a destination to study in when there are rich natural attractions and sights, it is safe and secure place, yet to be discovered by tourists, rich in culture, arts, history, offers high living standards and interesting night life as well as it is easily accessible, not very expensive to live in, sustainable and ecological, very popular and lastly, students are familiar with its language and lifestyle. The destination choice does not necessarily have to possess all these characteristics. (Bodycott, 2009; Lesjak, et al., 2015)

Taking everything in mind, students are influenced by the economical, political, societal and cultural characteristics, comparing their home country and other destinations of their interest and at the end usually selecting the country that is more developed in at least some of these characteristics than their home country (Bodycott, 2009; Kondakci, et al., 2018).

### **Factors affecting students' institution choice**

There is an evident research gap when it comes to the factors affecting students' decision about the institution they apply to when participating in a study abroad (Constantinides & Stagno, 2012). The choice of an institution to study at is significantly influenced by academic, administrative and environmental characteristics, those consist of the quality of education, the staff's expertise, the program's similarity to the home institution, the high number of international students enrolled, the recognition of previous qualifications as well as alumni recommendations (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Jiani (2017) describes similar findings in the study concerning the why and how Mainland China is being the higher education study abroad destination, thus identifying aspects such as the



value of high quality of the education, good reputation, geographic proximity and cultural similarity to the country of origin.

Nonetheless, no matter what factors influence which choice, a referral or a recommendation from alumni, friends, relatives about either their previous experience participating in a study abroad, a specific location or an institution is essentially affecting students' decision. Although, students receive information from a wide range of distinct channels, the information obtained from someone from their personal network is perceived as more reliable, correct and relevant compared to the official information sources. (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Constantinides & Stagno, 2012; Jiani, 2017)

Overall, the factors influencing the students' institution choice have not been researched as broadly as the factors influencing the study abroad decision in general. Nevertheless, it all goes hand in hand with the study abroad decision as well as the destination choice, even though there is not a consensus among researchers whether the study abroad decision is the first choice followed by the destination and institution choice or if the decision process has a different order. (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Constantinides & Stagno, 2012)

### **3.2 Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)**

Billions of people are connected through social media in this very moment, thus giving marketers new ways of how to reach them, consumers, and create personal relationships (Seo & Park, 2018; Godey, et al., 2016). The understanding of social media when used for marketing purposes is essential for both company managers and researchers (Felix, et al., 2017). Due to the rapid increase of the importance and accessibility of social media, leading organizations more and more tend to utilize these sources to promote and market their brand, to create customer engagement and to internally communicate with their employees (Seo & Park, 2018). Therefore, making the traditional way of obtaining information out-of-date (Seo & Park, 2018).

The use of social media can be studied for various reasons such as customer's purchase behavior, brand management, customer relationship management or employee recruitment, among others (Felix, et al., 2017). Researchers have defined social media marketing (SMM) in many distinct ways depending on the focus of their study (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). In general, it is the

“company’s process of creating and promoting online marketing-related activities on social media platforms that offer values to its stakeholders” (Pham & Gammoh, 2015, p. 325). According to Felix, et al. (2017, p. 123) it is an “interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other communications channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders”. Chang, et al. (2015) studied an interaction and information effects of social media marketing, hence describing it as different ways to use social networking sites like Facebook in order to build relationships with consumers, share content or unite the organization’s supporters. Choi, et al. (2016) focused their study on the interaction and word of mouth arising from social media marketing. This led to their definition of social media marketing as the use of social networking sites (SNS) to interact with customers with the aim to create word of mouth (WOM), increase customer loyalty, influence customer equity and drive customers’ purchase intention towards the company’s products or services (Choi, et al., 2016).

This paper will be examining the way how higher education institutions utilize social media marketing to attract more international students, thus following Yadav and Rahman’s (2017) definition of SMM utilized in a study focusing on the perception of SMMA by consumers in an e-commerce setting. Therefore, SMM is “a process by which companies create, communicate, and deliver online marketing offerings via social media platforms to build and maintain stakeholder relationships that enhance stakeholders’ value by facilitating interaction, information sharing, offering personalized purchase recommendations, and word of mouth creation among stakeholders about existing and trending products and services” (Yadav & Rahman, 2017, p. 1296).

As SMM has been defined in a number of distinct ways, its activities have been characterized by various researchers differently depending on the setting they were applied to (Seo & Park, 2018). Kim and Ko (2012) have classified SMMA in their study of luxury fashion brands as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word of mouth. Other researchers studying the social media marketing included in their activities components such as perceived risk, communication, information, support for daily life, promotion and selling, advertisements, events, access or social response and activity (Yadav & Rahman, 2017; Seo & Park, 2018; Godey, et al., 2016). Based on the above-mentioned studies and the factors influencing international mobility of higher education students, this paper divides SMMA in the setting of higher education into five dimensions: interaction, information, trendiness, customization and word of mouth (WOM).

Considering the purpose of social media to communicate and share ideas with others, interaction on social media platforms provides an insight into the behavior of consumers who add content (Seo & Park, 2018). According to Godey, et al. (2016) it is significantly influencing the way brands communicate with their customers and motivating users to contribute by creating user-generated content. In the higher education setting, interaction on social media between students contributes to students' identity development and relationship creation between peers (Chi, 2011).

Informativeness is when social media provides consumers with accurate, valuable and complex information (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Social media gives people from all around the world the opportunity to share information among each other (Chan & Guillet, 2011). Information seeking is one of the most common reasons behind the use of social media, it has also a significant impact on the intention to participate in an exchange of news, opinions or ideas (Choi, et al., 2016). It drives people to eventually interact and build dialogs in order to receive the information needed than simply passively take in information from social media (Taubenheim, et al., 2008).

Trendiness represents the latest and trendiest information about organizations' services or products that is provided to the consumer (Seo & Park, 2018). Godey, et al. (2016) have established that including trendy and current information on social media has a positive effect on consumer behavior and brand equity. Consumers search for inspiration meaning they follow brands to receive the latest information (Godey, et al., 2016).

Customized content of marketing communications is necessary in order to create consumers' engagement (Chi, 2011). Customization or personalization means that organizations tailor their services towards the needs and wants of their consumers to be able to achieve consumer satisfaction (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). When creating customized content, it includes targeting a specific segment and tailoring the information depending on its interests, which in turn enables consumers to find the information they seek (Kim & Ko, 2012; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

Lastly, word of mouth is a marketing tool that can be very powerful in influencing consumers' decisions and purchase behavior (Balakrishnan, et al., 2014). Online WOM or e-WOM allows consumers to endorse, review and recommend brands by sharing experiences and opinions on social media (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). It is a consumer-to-consumer communication that is

considered to have greater value for consumers in terms of credibility, relevance or empathy than information created by marketers (Godey, et al., 2016).

### **3.3 SMMA in Higher Education**

In the past years, higher education institutions have been facing a lot of challenges concerning internationalization, tuition fees, perceiving students as consumers, understanding the value for money and the importance of institutional marketing (Bolat & O'Sullivan, 2017; Singh, 2016). These challenges go hand in hand with the evolution of technology and increasing competition forcing educational institutions to change their approach towards students and what they can offer them in order to gain competitive advantage and be able to attract students (Sandlin & Peña, 2014; Bolat & O'Sullivan, 2017; Constantinides & Stagno, 2012). Higher education institutions are adapting the traditional ways (e.g. letters, campus visits, viewbooks) as well as new non-traditional ways to attract and recruit students because of the increasing need for higher education, which leads to a higher competitiveness among these institutions (Peruta & Shields, 2018).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century offers a broad range of new non-traditional marketing methods for higher education institutions to utilize when interacting and communicating with students (Sandlin & Peña, 2014). Since the millennials, also called as the “digital natives”, have reached the age to attend a university, higher education institutions need to adapt their marketing methods towards their target audience, the millennials (Peruta & Shields, 2018). The use of social media by higher education institutions is considered as an ideal method to engage with currently enrolled students as well as prospective students due to its interactive and two-way communication nature, and rapid growth of users especially among the millennials (Constantinides & Stagno, 2012; Statista, 2018). From social networking sites to institutional blogs and university websites, higher education institutions utilize various social media platforms to engage with their students, to market and differentiate the organization from others as well as recruit future higher education students (Sandlin & Peña, 2014). According to Krachenberg (1972) at Fagerstrøm and Ghinea (2013) higher education must be involved in marketing activities, not only by exercising one-time actions when necessary but also by having a marketing strategy in place utilizing multiple channels and dimensions that are mutually integrated.

Before going in depth on how to integrate SMMA into a marketing strategy, there are different reasons behind the utilization of social media by higher education institutions other than solely recruitment of new students that are worth mentioning (Peruta & Shields, 2018). The most common use of social media among universities, especially social networking sites such as Facebook, is to create personal profiles, university pages and relevant groups to communicate with students and create close relationships (Roblyer, et al., 2010; Blankenship, 2011). Moreover, higher education institutions use social networking sites as a learning tool, to facilitate collaborative learning and working in groups, and to develop their capabilities and content learning (Arquero & Romero-Frías, 2013). Another example of the use of social media among higher education institutions is to allow enrolled students to share their experiences from their time at the university, hence create student-generated content on social media platforms (Sandlin & Peña, 2014; Bolat & O'Sullivan, 2017). This means that higher education institutions can not only better understand their students but also help the prospective students to get an insight on the students' everyday life at the universities, something that the traditional media cannot provide (Sandlin & Peña, 2014; Assimakopoulos, et al., 2017). Although, higher education institutions have been attempting the integration of social media into their marketing strategy, the use of social media is still relevantly unexplored when it comes to branding and marketing of universities (Bolat & O'Sullivan, 2017; Peruta & Shields, 2018).

When developing a social media marketing strategy, it is essential to keep in mind the objectives, the purpose of the strategy (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017). Creating a Facebook page or promotional videos on YouTube is not a marketing strategy (Fagerstrøm & Ghinea, 2013). It is all about profound understanding of why students use these platforms, what for and how they influence their decisions about higher education enrollment (Fagerstrøm & Ghinea, 2013). Higher education institutions cannot simply use social media strategies that other companies focusing on products and services apply to attract new customers and raise purchase intention. In this case, universities need to adapt a new and unique way to reach their target audience, therefore it is essential to know who belongs into their target segment. This also means creating customized content depending on the target audience, which may include current and future students, their parents, teachers and professors, and either appeal separately to each target group or all at the same time. (Constantinides & Stagno, 2012; Peruta & Shields, 2018)

Even though the social media marketing strategy for higher education institutions is unique, the strategic tools that other businesses use to develop their marketing strategy are the same or similar being: “marketing segmentation, market differentiation, market positioning and market planning” (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006, p. 330; Constantinides & Stagno, 2012). First, market segmentation is a method used to divide large groups of potential consumers into smaller sub-groups depending on their needs and wants, which eventually match the goals of the organization (Dickson & Ginter, 1987; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). In the higher education setting these segments can be characterized as international students, enrolled students, prospective students, hence high-school leavers and also parents of all of them (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Peruta & Shields, 2018). Second, market differentiation means creating a unique strategy focusing specifically on the needs and desires of the consumers in order to achieve their satisfaction and loyalty. Every target segment has different needs and desires that need to be satisfied, therefore consumer-oriented organizations differentiate their strategies depending on those target segments in order to achieve the organization’s objectives and goals (Al-alak & Tarabieh, 2011). Third, market positioning or positioning strategy has been described by Doyle (1983) at Brooksbank (1994, p. 10) as “the choice of target market segment which describes the customers a business will seek to serve and the choice of differential advantage which defines how it will compete with rivals in the segment”. In the higher education context, it is important for organizations to re-position themselves depending on their target segments, which might include a situation analysis to make sure that the established strategies present the institution in the way they are supposed to in order to attract consumers (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Duffy (1998) at Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, p. 331) defines five positioning dimensions: “a university’s learning environment, reputations, graduate career prospects, destination image and cultural integration”. Fourth, the creation of a marketing plan is a very complex step consisting of multiple components that need to be addressed such as market situation, target market, competitive analysis, marketing objectives, marketing mix, marketing implementation and final performance evaluation (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017).

As previously stated, social networking sites are one of the most commonly used social media platforms (Roblyer, et al., 2010; Assimakopoulos, et al., 2017). When it comes to Facebook, it is crucial to develop strategies that will boost visibility of posts and generate engagement, this means

create a strategy regarding the type of posts, the frequency of posting, the timing and finally a call to action. The choice of the appropriate content accompanied by appealing visual media posted at the right time with an action making the audience to participate will generate higher engagement than random posts without specific strategy and objectives. (Peruta & Shields, 2018)

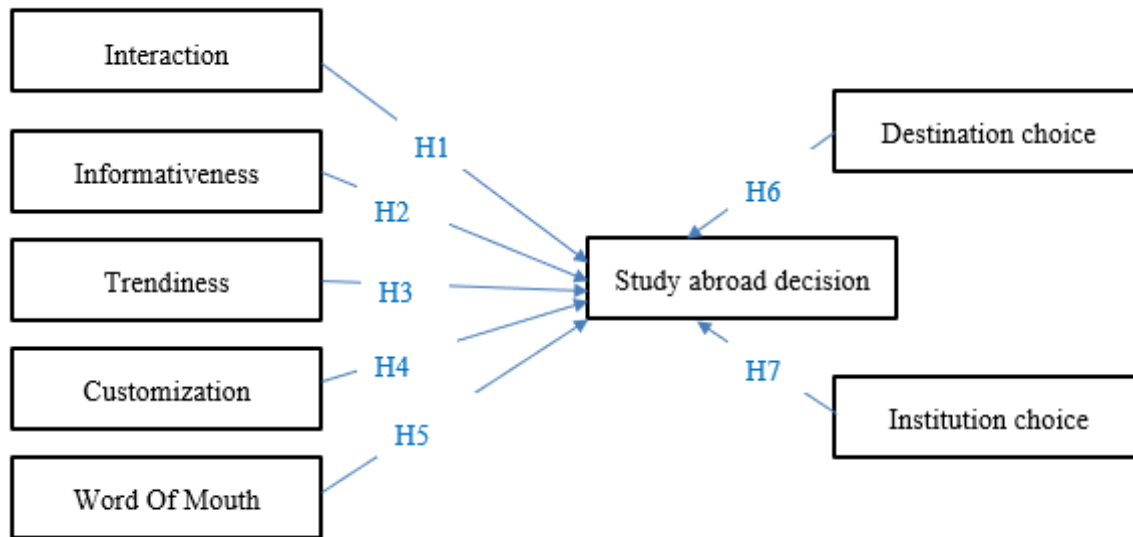
Moreover, by adapting students-generated content on social media, the authenticity of posts can have a positive impact on prospective students' engagement with the higher education organization and create increased interest to seek more information about the institution, which is a first step towards a future student's enrollment (Sandlin & Peña, 2014).

### **3.4 Analytical Framework**

Due to the extensive number of different factors influencing students' decision to participate in an international mobility identified by researchers, it is not feasible to include each factor into the analytical framework. Therefore, this paper will formulate the analytical framework by incorporating three variables that are superordinate to all the factors influencing students' decision to participate in an international mobility such as the decision to study abroad, the destination choice and the institution choice considering the weight of these variables based on the literature research provided.

Moreover, the analytical framework will also incorporate social media marketing activities considering the context of higher education such as interaction, informativeness, trendiness, customization and word of mouth based on the literature research provided by Yadav and Rahman (2017), Godey, et al. (2016) and Seo and Park (2018).

The framework seen in figure 6 is formulated to provide a guide for educational and marketing researchers when establishing a marketing strategy for higher education institutions with the objective to attract more international students to enroll into their programs, that is to attract more higher education students to participate in a study abroad programs.



**Figure 6:** The Analytical Framework  
Source: Author's creation

Based on the literature review conducted, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**The Hypothesis 1:** The interaction on an institution's social media has a significant influence on a student's study abroad decision.

**The Hypothesis 2:** The informativeness of an institution's social media has a significant influence on a student's study abroad decision.

**The Hypothesis 3:** The trendiness of an institution's social media has a significant influence on a student's study abroad decision.

**The Hypothesis 4:** The customization of an institution's social media has a significant influence on a student's study abroad decision.

**The Hypothesis 5:** Word of mouth has a significant influence on a student's study abroad decision.

**The Hypothesis 6:** The choice of a destination has a positive influence on a student's study abroad decision.

**The Hypothesis 7:** The choice of an institution has a positive influence on a student's study abroad decision.



## **4 Data Analysis**

This chapter will be presenting the data analysis by describing the descriptive statistical data and the findings of the data analysis itself including the determination of the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses tested.

### **4.1 Descriptive Data**

The data collection was performed from the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2018 till the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2018 using the application of the Survey Xact. The total of 206 responses was obtained. Considering the research problem of this paper, respondents that are not using social media as well as those born before 1980 or after 1999, that is other than Millennials, were not considered when conducting the data analysis. Overall, 190 usable responses were included in the data analysis as seen in table 4.

49,5% of the respondents are from the Czech Republic and 50,5% are from Denmark out of which 57,4% are female and 42,6% are male. The majority of the respondents was born between the years of 1994 and 1990 (43,7%) followed by those born between the years of 1999 and 1995 (32,6%), only 21,1% of the respondents were born between the years of 1989 and 1985, and only 2,6% between the years of 1984 and 1980, that is the oldest group of the Millennials.

Out of the 190 respondents, more than half (51,6%) has obtained a bachelor's degree when it comes to the highest education completed, 27,9% of the respondents have completed high school, 17,9% have obtained a master's degree while only 4 respondents have completed vocational education and 1 has obtained a doctoral degree.

Regarding the social media use, the respondents had to choose at least one social media platform that they usually use, almost all of them (97,9%) have chosen social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and others. 90% of the respondents has chosen YouTube, 60% of the respondents are using Wikipedia, 40,5% utilize the social media platform of LinkedIn, 24,7% of the respondents use blogs, 16,8% use organizations' websites and 16,3% use other types of social media platforms. The majority (32,6%) of the respondents uses social media 2 to 3 hours per day. 21,6% uses social media more than 4 hours per day, 19,5% uses it 1 or 2 hours on a daily basis while 17,9% of the respondents uses social media 3 or 4 hours per day and only 8,4% of those participating in the questionnaire use social media less than 1 hour per day. The usual time of the

day when the respondents access social media is in the evening, that is between 5pm and 9pm (43,7%). That is followed by 19,5% and 18,9% of the respondents accessing social media during the night (after 9pm) and during the afternoon between 1pm and 5pm, respectively. 12,6% of the respondents have chosen the option morning meaning they usually access social media before 11am. Only 5,3% of the respondents are accessing social media during lunchtime, between 11am and 1pm.

When it comes to the respondents' participation in a study abroad, more than half of them (52,6%) have previously participated in a study abroad, some of them have visited more than one country when studying abroad. The most common destination country among the respondents is Spain with 17 responses followed by Denmark (10), United Kingdom (10), France (8), Sweden (6), Czech Republic (6), Germany (5), Cyprus (4), Malta (4), Netherlands (4), USA (4), Portugal (4), Italy (3), Greece (3), Norway (3), Austria (2), Belgium (2), Finland (2), Slovakia (2) and countries such as Australia (1), Hungary (1), Iceland (1), North Korea (1) or Yemen (1).

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Home Country	Czech Republic	94 (49,5%)
	Denmark	96 (50,5%)
Gender	Female	109 (57,4%)
	Male	81 (42,6%)
Age	1999 – 1995	62 (32,6%)
	1994 – 1990	83 (43,7%)
	1989 – 1985	40 (21,1%)
	1984 – 1980	5 (2,6%)
Education	High School	53 (27,9%)
	Vocational Education	4 (2,1%)
	Bachelor Degree	98 (51,6%)
	Master Degree	34 (17,9%)
	Doctoral Degree	1 (0,5%)
Social Media Use	Social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	186 (97,9%)
	YouTube	171 (90%)
	LinkedIn	77 (40,5%)
	Wikipedia	114 (60%)
	Blogs	47 (24,7%)
	Organization's website	32 (16,8%)
	Other	31 (16,3%)
Social Media Use – Daily Frequency	Less than 1 hour	16 (8,4%)
	1 – 2 hours	37 (19,5%)

	2 – 3 hours	62 (32,6%)
	3 – 4 hours	34 (17,9%)
	More than 4 hours	41 (21,6%)
Social Media Use – Time of Day	Morning (Until 11AM)	24 (12,6%)
	Lunchtime (11AM – 1PM)	10 (5,3%)
	Afternoon (1PM – 5PM)	36 (18,9%)
	Evening (5PM – 9PM)	83 (43,7%)
	Night (After 9PM)	37 (19,5%)
Study Abroad	Yes	100 (52,6%)
	No	90 (47,4%)
<b>Total Answers</b>		<b>190</b>

**Table 4:** Descriptive Statistical Data  
Source: Author's creation

## 4.2 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the multiple linear regression analysis in the SPSS program. First, the multiple regression analysis was performed incorporating Study Abroad Decision as the dependent variable and Interaction, Informativeness, Trendiness, Customization and Word of Mouth as the independent variables. This process led to the acceptance of two hypotheses tested, that is the H3 concerning the social media trendiness influencing the study abroad decision and the H5 related to the word of mouth having a significant affect on the study abroad decision. The H3 significance value being 0,000 and the H5 significance value being 0,001 was the reason behind the acceptance of these two hypotheses since the level of significance for both hypotheses is below 0,05. The H1, H2 and H4 with a significance level of 0,770, 0,714 and 0,897 respectively were rejected due to the significance level being above 0,05.

The hypothesis H3 demonstrates that the trendiness of an institution's social media has a significant influence on a student's study abroad decision. If an institution keeps updated its news feed on its social media accounts with the latest information about all the upcoming events, study programs offered, scholarships possibilities or the institution's accomplishments, student's decision about a study abroad participation might be significantly influenced towards making the final choice, which could eventually lead to the increase of an international mobility. The beta coefficient of the H3 hypothesis presents the relative relationship between the trendiness and study abroad decision showing the unit increase of the dependent variable, hence the study abroad decision will increase by 0,386. The H5 hypothesis shows that the word of mouth has a significant

influence on a student's decision to study abroad. If students hear about an institution from a friend or family, get a recommendation about an institution or read positive opinions and reviews on an institution's social media accounts, it significantly influences their study abroad decisions and eventually the international mobility of students might increase. The beta coefficient related to the H5 hypothesis shows an increase of the study abroad decision by 0,243 in the case of the word of mouth. (Hair, et al., 2015)

Second, once again the multiple regression analysis was performed, this time including the study abroad decision as dependent variable with the destination choice and the institution choice being the independent variables. In this case, both hypotheses the H6 and the H7 were accepted due to their significance level being 0,000, that is above 0,05. The H6 hypothesis shows the choice of a destination has a positive influence on a student's study abroad decision. If students choose a destination of their study abroad period no matter if its due to its educational quality, geographic proximity, financial support provided or simply because it was recommended by a friend or family, it will have a positive affect on their final study abroad decision thus increasing the international student mobility. In this case, the beta coefficient demonstrates a unit increase of a study abroad decision by 0,714 when it comes to its relative relationship with the destination choice. The H7 hypothesis determines the choice of an institution having a positive influence on a student's study abroad decision. Once students choose their institution they want to apply to for their study abroad period, which could be affected by the institution's reputation related to the quality of education, the possibility to obtain financial support or the opportunity to choose from a variety of study programs, among others, their study abroad decision will be positively influenced meaning it might lead to the increase of the international student mobility. The beta coefficient for the hypothesis H7 is showing a unit increase of 0,649 of a student's study abroad decision. (Hair, et al., 2015)

The following table 5 presents the hypotheses that were accepted being the H3, the H5, the H6 and the H7.

		Trendiness	Word of Mouth	Destination Choice	Institution Choice	Results
H3	Beta Std. Error Sig.	0,386 0,047 0,000				Accepted

H5	Beta Std. Error Sig.		0,243 0,047 0,001			Accepted
H6	Beta Std. Error Sig.			0,714 0,078 0,000		Accepted
H7	Beta Std. Error Sig.				0,649 0,090 0,000	Accepted
	R <sup>2</sup>	0,149	0,196	0,509	0,421	
	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0,144	0,187	0,504	0,418	
	F	32,900	22,763	97,033	136,964	
	Sig.	0,000	0,001	0,000	0,000	

**Table 5:** Multiple Regression Analysis – Hypotheses Accepted

Source: Author's creation based on the SPSS output

When looking at the coefficients of all the four hypotheses accepted, the institution choice is the most significant factor when it concerns the study abroad decision since its F-value is the highest (136,964). It is closely followed by the destination choice with an F-value of 97,033. The trendiness and the word of mouth have very similar F-values meaning their factor of significance is almost on the same level. When it comes to the R<sup>2</sup> coefficient of these four variables, the higher the value is, the more significant the variable is. In this case, it is apparent that the destination choice and the institution choice are more significant than the trendiness and the word of mouth. This also suggests that the trendiness and the word of mouth are not the only factors having a significant influence on a student's study abroad decision. Considering the destination choice and the institution choice, there might be also other factors influencing a student's study abroad decision, although it may not be in such extent as with the previous two variables. (Hair, et al., 2015)

In comparison, the table 6 shows the hypotheses that were rejected, that is the H1, the H2 and the H4.

		Interaction	Informativeness	Customization	Results
H1	Beta Std. Error Sig.	0,022 0,062 0,770			Rejected
H2	Beta		-0,031		Rejected

	Std. Error Sig.		0,046 0,714		
H4	Beta Std. Error Sig.			-0,10 0,056 0,897	Rejected
	R <sup>2</sup>	0,196	0,196	0,197	
	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0,183	0,187	0,179	
	F	15,144	22,763	11,322	
	Sig.	0,278	0,741	0,615	

**Table 6:** Multiple Regression Analysis – Hypotheses Rejected

Source: Author's creation based on the SPSS output

## 5 Conclusion

The following chapter will present the conclusion of this study providing the answers to the research questions. In addition, the practical implications for higher education institutions in the Czech Republic and Denmark will follow as well as the limitation of this paper and recommendations for future research.

### 5.1 Conclusion

This paper has presented three research questions. The first one was: *“What are the factors influencing higher education students’ decisions to participate in an international mobility?”*.

Based on the literature review provided, researchers have mostly focused on the factors that influence student’s decision to study abroad from the perspective of the home country, that is factors such as the country’s educational system, the support of their home institution or the country’s economic development, and from the perspective of the host country. This includes relationships between the home and the host country or the presence of bilateral agreements, among others. In general, there is a broad range of different factors that are influencing student’s decision to participate in a study abroad. Researchers have identified the personal and professional development, the financial constraints, which goes hand in hand with the possibility to obtain a financial grant, the language competency, previous mobility experience or personal relationships, to name the most common.

Moreover, some scholars have identified the significance of the destination choice and the institution choice having an influence on a student’s study abroad decision. The most common factors impacting student’s destination choice are the economic, political and geographical aspects of a host country. Students from the East tend to choose countries located on the West as their destination of a study abroad period meaning that students choose countries that are more economically developed compared to their home countries. For some students it is not of such a value whether the host country is more developed or closer to its home country rather than if it is a safe place with a lot of cultural and historical sights as well as not too expensive to live in.

Accordingly, the choice of an institution has a value for some students when deciding whether to participate in a study abroad or not. Usually the most important factors are higher quality of education, the presence of certain programs that are not available in the home country, the variety of programs and courses offered, the possibility of a scholarship, the recognition of previous qualifications or simply recommendations from alumni.

All in all, the range of all the factors that might influence student's decision to participate in a study abroad is extremely broad suggesting that there is a great number of specific aspects further research can address to determine the reasons why are these factors influencing international mobility in specific circumstances.

The second research question is: *“What social media marketing activities influence higher education students' decisions to participate in an international mobility?”*.

According to the data analysis presented, out of the five factors of social media marketing activities being interaction, informativeness, trendiness, customization and word of mouth, the trendiness and the word of mouth were established as the most significant social media marketing activities influencing student's decisions to participate in a study abroad programs. This means that the up-to-date information provided on the higher education institution's social media accounts, whether it is concerning certain events such as fairs or open days, the study abroad programs offered or possibilities to obtain scholarships, among others, has a significant impact on the way students decide about their future study abroad experience.

In the case of word of mouth, recommendation from a friend or family is one of the most influential factors when it comes to students' study abroad decisions, mostly because one has already an established trustworthy relationship with the other person, and therefore no need to be reluctant about the value of their recommendation. The presence of positive comments, reviews and the possibility to share opinions with others on the institution's social media accounts has also a significant impact on students' decisions and helps them reach the final choice about their future study abroad experience.



The last research question presented is: “*How can higher education institutions utilize social media marketing activities to attract more international students?*”.

Higher education institutions might utilize the presence of social networking sites by incorporating them into their marketing strategy and appointing one person responsible for the maintenance of the institution’s social networking accounts. This means providing an up-to-date information to their students and possible applicants about all the upcoming events such as fair trades, open days or festivals as well as share the latest news regarding the institution’s or the currently enrolled students’ accomplishments. Another advantage of having social networking accounts is that students can share their opinions and experiences about the higher education institution with others and make recommendations. This might help the institution the understand the students wants and needs as well as it might facilitate the encouragement for other students to experience this opportunity with their peers by applying to the institution’s study abroad programs. Universities might also endorse students to create their own blogs about their positive study abroad experience and help them promote it on their social media accounts, which could help possible applicants to relate to higher education students’ lives and thus lead them towards a decision about their participation in a study abroad program.

## **5.2 Practical Implications**

The paper at hand demonstrates the results of its data analysis concerning the social media marketing activities and the destination and institution choice in relation to higher education student’s study abroad decisions. These findings could be utilized by higher education institutions as well as educational institutions in general in order to draw conclusions and practical implications applicable to the institutions’ specific circumstances. First, since the trendiness was established as one of the significant factors influencing students’ study abroad decisions higher education institutions could incorporate social media into their marketing strategy making one person responsible for the administration of the institution’s social media accounts. That way they can provide an up-to-date information to their students and possible applicants about all the upcoming events as well as share the latest news regarding the institution’s or the currently enrolled students’ accomplishments. This could help prospective higher education students to get an insight of the everyday life at the university, which might eventually impact their study abroad

decision. Second, the word of mouth has been presented as another influential factor concerning students' decisions to study abroad. The above-mentioned strategy could also raise more awareness of the institution's social media by allowing students to share their opinions and experiences. That way the institution might not only have better knowledge about their actions and their impacts on students' lives, but it might also facilitate students' need to share their experiences and encourage other students to share them with them by applying to the institution's programs.

Third, the destination choice and the institution choice were established as significant factors influencing students' decisions to participate in a study abroad programs. Higher education institutions might utilize these findings when preparing their social media content and considering the type of information they will share with their audience. The information about their international agreements with foreign universities, the possibility to obtain scholarship or financial grant or to apply to various study programs might be useful to keep updated and to make sure the students have easy access to this information.

### **5.3 Limitations**

The study at hand has its limitations that need to be addressed. First, in terms of the methodology applied since the data collection was conducted using mostly personal social media accounts, the sample is not very representative of its population. Utilizing a probability sampling method instead of non-probability sampling might bring distinct more conclusive, consistent and valid results. Second, a combination of a quantitative and a qualitative approach, that is mixed method approach, could be applied in order to support the quantitative data with a qualitative data such as in-depth interviews with higher education students that have previously participated in a study abroad program and would be willing to share their experiences. Third, this paper has carried out a thematic literature review concerning the factors influencing student's decisions to study abroad and social media marketing activities in general as well as those utilized in higher education. When conducting a systematic literature review, more relevant literature might be discovered and applied to this study influencing the formulation of the analytical framework, and thus the findings.

## **5.4 Future Research**

This study could be approached from various distinct perspectives and thus suggestions for future research will be presented. Since this study was related to higher education institutions in the Czech Republic and Denmark, the reach was quite broad thus presenting very general results. Researchers could look at a specific higher education institution in a certain country and analyze its characteristics more in depth in order to provide specific recommendations related to its social media marketing strategy towards students' enrollment.

Moreover, a closer look could be taken at the way how universities utilize social media marketing activities in the present time. That is obtain information for instance by interviewing, utilizing focus groups or case studies directly with those responsible for the higher education institutions' social media marketing strategy applied to attract new students in order to identify current trends and gain an overview of social media marketing tools commonly implemented by higher education institutions. This could lead to the identification of specific habits acquired by higher education institutions that eventually influence students' decisions to study abroad.

In addition, one could take a closer look at other marketing tools higher education institutions could utilize that might be influential on the international mobility of students and higher education students' enrollment in general. One can establish their current marketing strategy and identify the tools that are incorporated in it with proper analysis of different target segments including not only the Millennials but also their parents, which have a significant influence on their children's future higher education enrollment and study abroad decision as well.

Overall, this topic can be approached from several different perspectives one can think of making it more general or more specific, therefore the research gap keeps being present and yet to be studied in the future concerning different circumstances impacting the problem at hand.

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## Appendix 1:

### Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
1	6,830	25,298	25,298
2	2,394	8,866	34,164
3	1,926	7,133	41,297
4	1,704	6,312	47,608
5	1,477	5,469	53,077
6	1,297	4,804	57,881
7	1,164	4,310	62,191
8	1,007	3,730	65,921
9	,932	3,452	69,373
10	,818	3,030	72,404
11	,779	2,885	75,289
12	,749	2,775	78,064
13	,669	2,480	80,543
14	,611	2,264	82,808
15	,555	2,055	84,863
16	,549	2,033	86,895
17	,473	1,751	88,646
18	,457	1,694	90,340
19	,422	1,564	91,904
20	,387	1,434	93,338
21	,341	1,263	94,602
22	,334	1,236	95,838
23	,303	1,123	96,960

24	,274	1,014	97,974
25	,224	,830	98,803
26	,194	,719	99,522
27	,129	,478	100,000

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

## **Appendix 2:**

### **The Questionnaire**

My name is Katerina and I am a master student at Aalborg University in Denmark studying International Marketing. Currently I am working on my master thesis researching how can universities attract more international students via social media. My research focuses on higher education students from Czech Republic and Denmark. Therefore, I would like to ask you to fill out this survey If you are a student from either Czech Republic or Denmark. This way, you will help me in my last step towards finishing my master's degree.

All of your answers are anonymous and will be used confidentially. This survey will take approximately 5 minutes.

Thank you for your participation.

When you are ready, please, answer the following question and press next to continue.

#### **Do you use social media?**

- (1) ☐ Yes
- (2) ☐ No

#### **What types of social media platforms do you use?**

- (1) ☐ Social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- (2) ☐ Youtube
- (5) ☐ LinkedIn
- (3) ☐ Wikipedia
- (4) ☐ Blogs
- (6) ☐ Organization's website
- (7) ☐ Other

**How many hours per day do you use social media?**

- (1) ☐ Less than 1 hour  
(3) ☐ 1 - 2 hours  
(4) ☐ 2 - 3 hours  
(5) ☐ 3 - 4 hours  
(6) ☐ More than 4 hours

**When do you usually access social media?**

- (1) ☐ Morning (Until 11AM)  
(2) ☐ Lunchtime (11AM - 1PM)  
(3) ☐ Afternoon (1PM - 5PM)  
(4) ☐ Evening (5PM - 9PM)  
(5) ☐ Night (After 9PM)

**Do you agree with the following statements? I use social media to:**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Have a conversation or exchange opinions with others	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Stay in touch with my contacts	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Share pictures and videos	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Vote in polls	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Search for information about a university	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Search for information about a study program	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Obtain accurate information concerning a university	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Obtain useful and complex information concerning a university	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>

**Do you agree with the following statements? I use higher education institution's social media because:**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It provides the latest information about upcoming events (fairs, open days, etc.)	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
It provides the latest information about offered study programs	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
It provides the latest information about offered scholarships	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
It provides the latest information about higher education institution's accomplishments	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
It facilitates personalized information search	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
It provides the information that I seek	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
It satisfies my needs	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It makes recommendations for me according to my requirements	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>

**Do you agree with the following statements? I use social media to:**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pass on the information about the higher education institution	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Post positive opinions about the higher education institution	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Recommend the higher education institution	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage my friends and acquaintances to use the higher education institution's social media	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>

**Have you ever studied abroad?**

- (1) ☐ Yes  
(2) ☐ No

**What is the country of your study abroad period?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Do you agree with the following statements being influential when making a decision about participating in a study abroad program?**

Study Abroad Decision

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Future job/academic prospects and/or future earnings prospects	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
The value of a foreign degree	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Unavailability of a study program I seek and/or lower quality of education	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
I want to develop my language skills	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation from a friend or family	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>

**Do you agree with the following statements being influential when making a decision about the choice of a destination for a study abroad?**

Destination Choice

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Higher quality of education	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Possibility to obtain financial grant	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Geographic proximity	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>

### Destination Choice

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Recommendation from a friend or family	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>

**Do you agree with the following statements being influential when making a decision about the choice of an institution for a study abroad?**

### Institution Choice

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reputation concerning the quality of education	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Possibility to obtain a scholarship	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>
Broad range of study programs and courses	(1) <input type="checkbox"/>	(2) <input type="checkbox"/>	(3) <input type="checkbox"/>	(4) <input type="checkbox"/>	(5) <input type="checkbox"/>

**What is your home country?**

- (1) ☐ Czech Republic
- (2) ☐ Denmark
- (3) ☐ Other

**What is your gender?**

- (1) ☐ Female
- (2) ☐ Male

**What is your year of birth?**

- (1) ☐ 1999 - 1995
- (2) ☐ 1994 - 1990
- (3) ☐ 1989 - 1985
- (4) ☐ 1984 - 1980
- (5) ☐ Other

**What is the highest degree of education you have completed?**

- (1) ☐ High School
- (2) ☐ Vocational Education
- (3) ☐ Bachelor Degree
- (4) ☐ Master Degree
- (5) ☐ Doctoral Degree

Thank you for your participation!

### **Appendix 3:**

### Appendix 3: Literature Review Table

Author(s)	Year	Method	Participants	Country Context	Concepts looked at	Philosophical paradigm
Kondacki, et al.	2018	Secondary data - Social network analysis	-	global, 229 countries	student mobility	SF
Seo and Park	2018	Survey	302	Korea	SMMA	SF
Peruta and Shields	2018	Secondary data - content analysis	-	USA	HE SM marketing	SF
Jiani	2017	Interview	42	China	study abroad factors	SI
Levatino	2017	Case study	-	Australia	student mobility	SI
Felix, et al.	2017	In-depth interviews, qualitative survey	7, 50	Europe	SMMA	SI
Yadav and Rahman	2017	Scale Development Study - Focus groups, Open-ended surveys, Item generation, Item judging	18, 55	India	SMMA	SI

				Taiwan, Vietnam, Nigeria, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, Spain, Columbia, China, Thailand		
Bolat and O'Sullivan	2017	Focus group interviews	12, 12		HE marketing	SI
Assimakopoulos, et al.	2017	Survey	343, 300	Macedonia, Greece	HE SM marketing	SF
Melchiorre and Johnson	2017	Conceptual Paper	-	-	HE SM marketing	SF
Böttcher and Araújo	2016	Secondary data	199488	global, 33 countries	student mobility	SF
Singh	2016	Focus group interviews	70	Malaysia	study abroad factors	SI
Vögtle and Windzio	2016	Secondary data - Social network analysis	-	global, 41 countries	student mobility	SF
Godey, et al.	2016	Survey	845	China, France, India, Italy	SMMA	SF
Choi, et al.	2016	Open-ended survey	393	USA	SMMA	SF
Dolga, et al.	2015	survey	89	Romania	erasmus mobility	SF
Lesjak, et al.	2015	Survey	360	26 European countries	student mobility, motivational factors	SF
Netz	2015	Secondary data - Survey	31679, 15748, 12186, 14422	Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands	student mobility	SF



Luo and Jamieson-Drake	2015	Secondary data - Survey	3584, 1833	USA	study abroad factors	SF
Pham and Gammoh	2015	Conceptual Paper	-	-	SMMA	SF
Chang, et al.	2015	Survey	392	Taiwan	SMMA	SF
Balakrishnan, et al.	2014	Survey	150	Malaysia	SMMA	SF
Sandlin and Peña	2014	in-depth interviews, journal entries, focus groups	16, 165, 8	USA	HE marketing	SI
Souto-Otero, et al.	2013	Secondary data - Survey	17845	7 European countries	student mobility, motivational factors	SF
Wei	2013	Secondary data	-	global, 48 countries	student mobility	SF
Fagerstrøm and Ghinea	2013	Secondary data	-	Norway	HE SM marketing	SF
Arquero and Romero-Frías	2013	Social networking analysis, survey	105	Spain	HE SM marketing	SF
Constantinides and Stagno	2012	Survey	400	Netherlands	HE marketing, study abroad factors, social media	SF
Kim and Ko	2012	Survey	362	Korea	SMMA	SF
Daly	2011	Literature Review, conceptual framework	-	-	student mobility	SF
González, et al.	2011	Longitudinal study	812	29 countries	student mobility	SI
Chi	2011	Survey	502	Taiwan	SMMA	SF
Chan and Guillet	2011	Secondary data	109	Hong Kong	SMMA	SF
Al-alak and Tarabieh	2011	Survey	195	Jordan	Marketing Strategy	SF

Doyle, et al.	2010	Survey, Focus groups, Interview	1368, 8-10, 23 + 8 + 17	New Zealand	student mobility, EHEA	SI
Roblyer, et al.	2010	Survey	62, 120	USA	HE SM marketing	SF
Bodycott	2009	Small-scale study	251, 100	China	study abroad factors	SI
Taubenheim, et al.	2008	Literature Review	-	-	SMMA	SF
Goldstein and Kim	2006	Longitudinal study	282, 179	USA	student mobility	SI
Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka	2006	Literature Review	-	-	HE marketing	SF
Mazzarol and Soutar	2002	3 surveys	780, 152, 689	Indonesia, Taiwan, China, India	student mobility	SF
Brooksbank	1994	Literature Review	-	-	Marketing Strategy	SF
Dickson and Ginter	1987	Conceptual Paper	-	-	Marketing Strategy	SF