How to find the right university?

A study about students’ online search behavior when searching for higher education using Google Analytics

LOUISE BERGLUND
A study about students’ online search behavior when searching for higher education using Google Analytics

by

Louise Berglund
En studie om studenters sökbeteende online vid syfte att hitta högre utbildning med hjälp av Google Analytics

Louise Berglund

Examensarbete INDEK 2017:133
KTH Industriell teknik och management
Industriell ekonomi och organisation
SE-100 44 STOCKHOLM
Abstract

Over the last decades the world have become more connected through increased globalization and digitalization, and with that the opportunities to study abroad have increased. The number of students enrolled at university-level education abroad have more than five folded since 1975 and the number is expected to keep on growing. With the increased opportunities to study abroad it has become crucial for universities to ensure that they attract the right students, and for students to find the program that is the best fit for them. The search for the right university is a long process for prospective students, and the process is different from person to person. Students come from different backgrounds, which means that not all international students are the same. Previous research have identified different segments of international students, and one particular segment is the focus of this thesis. The purpose of this thesis is to study the behavior of Highfliers, students with a high academic preparedness and high financial resources, and based on the behavior investigate how these students can be targeted.

This study is done in cooperation with StudyPortals, a global study-choice platform. StudyPortals was founded to make global education more transparent, and to empower the world to choose education. Today, prospective students can find more than 100 000 study programs and courses from more than 2450 universities around the world on several portals belonging to StudyPortals.

Through quantitative studies, Google Analytics and surveys, data have been analyzed to identify the search behavior of Highfliers.

Findings indicate that Highfliers are likely to search for education through search engines and university websites. They mainly use search words connected to the study and/country they wish to study in. Some findings differ compared to previous research, in terms of information needs. To target more Highfliers it is necessary to offer more value adding services to ensure a better retention.

Key-words
Search behavior, student migration, consumer behavior, web analytics
Sammanfattning

De senaste decenierna har präglats av en ökad globalisering och digitalisering, vilket har bidragit till en mer sammanlänkad värld. I och med detta så finns det idag bättre möjligheter att studera utomlands. Antalet studenter som studera på universitets nivå utomlands har ökat kraftigt sedan 1975, då var siffran mindre än en miljon, men idag är siffran kring fem miljoner. I och med att det har blivit mer attraktivt att studera utomlands så måste universitet se till att de lyckas attrahera rätt studenter, samtidigt som studenter söker efter det rätta programmet. Processen att hitta det rätta programmet är tidskrävande och processen varierar från student till student. Vidare så har studenter inte samma bakgrund, därför att det viktigt att inse att inte alla internationella studenter är likadana. Forskning har visat att det är möjligt att segmentera studenter utifrån olika faktorer. Denna studie syftar till att studera hur student segmentet Highfliers, studenter med en stark akademisk och finansiell bakgrund, söker efter utbildningar online och hur denna information kan användas för att attrahera dessa studenter.

Denna studie är genomförd i samarbete med StudyPortals, en online studieval platform. StudyPortals grundades med syftet att göra global utbildning mer åtkomlig, och att uppmuntra världen att välja utbildning. Idag kan framtida studenter hitta mer än 100 000 utbildningar och kurser från mer än 2450 universitet runt om i världen på någon av StudyPortals hemsidor.

Denna studie har huvudsakligen haft ett kvantitativt fokus, genom analys av data från Google Analytics och frågeformulär.

Baserat på den analyserade datan så kan Highfliers beskrivas på så sätt att de huvudsakligen använder sökmotorer och universitets hemsidor för att hitta rätt information. De använder sökord kopplade till den utbildning och land de vill studera i. Vissa resultat skiljer sig från tidigare forskning, speciellt angående vilken information Highfliers behöver. För att kunna attrahera fler Highfliers krävs tjänster med högt mervärde.

Nyckelord
Sök beteende, student migration, kundbeteende, web analytics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2.4</td>
<td>Highflier Index</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.5</td>
<td>Search Behavior</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Analysis and discussion</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Highflier search behavior</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Website content</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Discussion about methods used</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References 82

Appendices 86
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>International Students enrolled</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Common European Framework of Reference</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Overview of the survey sent to newly registered users</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Choudaha, Orosz, and Chang student segmentation</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Banov, Kammerer, and Salciute student segmentation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Segmentation divided by continent Choudaha et al.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Most frequent segmentation for each country Banov et al.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Information needs of International Students bound to the US</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Average time spent online per day Statista</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The 5P Model</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Four-Stage SEM Process according to Dodson</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Overview of the different keyword matchers in Google AdWords</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Four-Stage SEO Process according to Dodson</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Share of sessions by country</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Share of sessions by new and returning visitors</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Share of sessions for highfliers since January 2015 until April 2017 on a monthly basis</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Share of sessions by Medium</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Average Bounce Rate by Medium</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Average Bounce Rate since January 2015 until April 2017</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Average pages visited per session since January 2015 until April 2017</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Share of sessions by landing page types</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Average amount of pages visited per session by landing page types</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Share of sessions by landing page types per mediums</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Comparison over time average Bounce Rate for article pages</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Comparison over time for conversion rates</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>The changes in share of completions of the Highflier segment</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>The changes in share of highflier completions for each goal type</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The changes in share of goal value for highfliers</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Share of respondents per country for survey 1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Distribution of responses of survey 1</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Distribution of channels used by highflier respondents to survey 2</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Distribution of keywords used by highflier respondents to survey 2</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Distribution of highflier index scores among the respondents</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Keywords used when searching for a degree programme</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Average Bounce Rate by country</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Average amount of pages visited per session by country</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Average session duration by country</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Share of sessions by age</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Share of sessions by devices used</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Share of sessions by Affinity Category</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Share of sessions by In-market segment</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Share of sessions by Other Categories</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Share of sessions for highfliers since January 2015 until April 2017 on a daily basis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Share of sessions by Channel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Average Bounce Rate by Channel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Average amount of pages visited per session by Channel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Average session duration by Channel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Average amount of pages visited per session by Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Average session duration by Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Comparison of average pages visited per session for Google</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Comparison of average time spent per session for Google</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Comparison of average bounce rate for direct entry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Comparison of average time spent per session for direct entry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Comparison of average bounce rate for referrals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Comparison of average pages visited per session for referrals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Comparison of average time spent per session for referrals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Bounce Rate by landing page types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Average session duration by landing page type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Bounce Rate by landing page types per mediums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Average amount of pages visited per session by landing page types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Average session duration by landing page types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Share of sessions by landing page types per gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Bounce Rate by landing page types per gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Average amount of pages visited per session by landing page types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Average session duration by landing page types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Share of sessions by landing page types per country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Bounce Rate by landing page types per country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Average amount of pages visited per session by landing page types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Average session duration by landing page types per mediums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Comparison of average bounce rate for GSA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Comparison of average pages visited per session for GSA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Comparison of average time spent per session for GSA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Comparison of average pages visited per session for articles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Comparison of average time spent per session for articles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Comparison of average bounce rate for home page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Comparison of average pages visited per session for home page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Comparison of average time spent per session for home page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

1. Overview of threshold for English knowledge .......................... 10
2. Overview of threshold for Economic classification .................... 11
3. Sample countries used for quantitative studies ....................... 12
4. Overview of parameters for quantitative analysis ........................ 16
5. The top three information areas highfliers seek Choudaha and Chang .................................................. 25
6. Highfliers usage of information sources .................................. 27
7. The top three information areas highfliers seek .......................... 28
8. Overview of possible profiling features .................................... 29
9. Examples of Goals and KPIs for SEO ..................................... 44
10. Overall Google Analytics figures for All Users and Highfliers ....... 47
1 Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study and presents the problem statement of the thesis. Furthermore, the purpose, research question, delimitations and contribution of the thesis will be presented.

1.1 Background

In 2013 the global education market was valued to $4.4 trillion, a figure that was about $2.5 trillion in 2005. Some major drivers for this increase is the entry of private organisations on the market, an increase in adult learners, and the importance of education in knowledge-based economies. (Strauss, 2013) In 2014, global education expenditures reached $5 trillion, and the size of the education market was eight times the Software market and three times the Media and Entertainment industry. (global, 2017)

With the increased globalization the opportunities for studying abroad has increased over the past decades. In 2012 more than four and a half million students were enrolled at university-level education outside of their home country. Since the start of the new millennial the number of foreign students enrolled worldwide has more than doubled, and the annual growth rate has been almost seven percent. Looking back further, in the time period 1975-2012 the amount of foreign students have more than five folded, from 0.8 million to 4.5 million students. (OECD, 2014) In 2010 the UNESCO Institute of for Statistics (UIS) estimated that the global stock of international mobile tertiary students (students who successfully enrol in university after high school) to three million, a figure that in 2000 was 2 million. (Neill, 2012) International students is estimated to make up roughly eight percent of the total tertiary enrolment in OECD countries. On a Master level and doctoral level, the amount increases further to 13 percent and 22 percent respectively. (OECD, 2016) Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of international students enrolled in OECD countries, as can be seen Asia have the highest representation of international students abroad. A study by the British Council, found that China, India and South Korea is expected to have the largest outbound mobile student flows in 2020 with 585k, 296k and 134k respectively. The fasted growing absolute outbound student flows during the next decade is expected to come from India, 71k, Nigeria, 30k, and Malaysia 22k. The most popular destinations by 2020 is mainly English speaking countries, United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, with Germany following as the first non-English speaking country but China and Malaysia is also expected to have a large amount of inbound students by 2020. (British Council, 2012)

StudyPortals was founded in 2007, at a time when there was a lack of information regarding international Master degrees in Europe. In order to solve this problem, the founders wanted to make global education more transparent through online platforms. Today, StudyPortals aims to empower the world
to choose education and help students around the world to find their dream study programme. Ten years after its founding, StudyPortals have several portals where prospective students can find Bachelor degrees, Master degrees, PhD degrees, Language courses etc. Currently more than 2,450 participating universities around the world can be found on these portals. (StudyPortals, 2017a) Furthermore, StudyPortals offer different services for both students and institutions. They help students find the right programme, no matter the place in the world. This is acheived by offering all English taught programmes on their websites, provide a state of the art search tool that will make it possible to find the best fit study programme for any student and by constantly developing new services/tools that will make it easier for students to decide where to study. Some examples of tools that StudyPortals developed in the Wishlist and the Comparison study tool. The comparing study tool is just what the name entails, a tool that compares different study programmes from different criteria. Once a student has chosen an interesting study programme it can be added to the Wishlist. The Wishlist is a tool where students can store and organise programmes that they are interested in so that they do not lose track of them. Moreover, as lack of financial means can be a hinderen for many qualified students to study abroad, StudyPortals created the Global Study Awards together with partner organisations. The scholarship aims to help students fulfil their dream to study abroad and the scholarship is awarded twice a year. At the same time, they help institutions to embrace performance-based online marketing as well as to reach and inform students about programmes. (StudyPortals, 2017b)
1.2 Problem Statement

Students searching for an education do so under different conditions. Some have a strong academic record but have limited financial resources, while others have a low academic record but no financial constraints. Furthermore, some look to go abroad to experience the cultural difference and have limited focus on the actual education, while for others the education is more important than experiencing a new culture. Due to this, StudyPortals have decided to focus on a specific type of student in order to focus their services to fit to these students needs and to ensure that the students applying to universities are the best fit. Based on a study conducted by the World Education News and Reviews StudyPortals target audience is called Highfliers. This group of students have a high academic preparedness and also high financial resources (Choudaha et al., 2012). The audience was primarily chosen due to the fact that these individuals are not financially limited to go abroad and they have the qualifications to be accepted. Moreover, when communicating with universities StudyPortals aims to promote that they have the best students using their platform. Based on the report, StudyPortals have defined their highfliers as:

*Potential full degree master students who are open minded, ambitious, and independent, from anywhere, digital native and have a proper internet connection (could be mobile, at least 3G), aged 18-28, wishing to study abroad or online in English, have high academic preparedness, and have access to the necessary funding (via own savings, relatives, potential part-time job, or high likelihood of getting a scholarship).*

As a result, much of the communication that StudyPortals have with their users is adapted according to highfliers. The crucial first step for StudyPortals is to get highflier traffic to the website, and in order to do that StudyPortals needs to know how highfliers search for degrees online. At the moment online targeting is not done fully according to the highflier definition as StudyPortals do not know much about the search behaviour of highfliers. StudyPortals make some assumptions when choosing what students to target but there is no knowledge to fall back on. If StudyPortals would gain more insights regarding how highfliers search for education online, such as what key words they use, StudyPortals can then improve their targeting of ads and optimize the content of their websites.

Furthermore, at the moment StudyPortals does not have an overview of the amount of highfliers among the registered users. Currently there are almost two million registered users and the amount of daily registrations is around three thousand. With increased efforts to target highfliers it becomes interesting to track whether more highfliers actually register. If this is not the case then resources are not allocated in the right way and the efforts should change in order to attract more highfliers.
1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this Master Thesis is to investigate how StudyPortals can improve their online targeting of highfliers. Furthermore this study aims to contribute to the field of consumer behaviour by providing further research on young individuals search behaviour online.

1.4 Research question

Based on the purpose, two main research question has been formulated along with a sub research question to help answer the second main research question:

RQ1: What is the online search behaviour of a highflier seeking a degree abroad?

RQ2: What actions does StudyPortals need to take in order to improve online targeting of highfliers?

Sub-RQ: How can StudyPortal track the intake of new highfliers?

1.5 Delimitation

To begin with, for this study an international student is defined as someone who moves abroad with the sole purpose of pursuing a degree of higher education. OECD use two different terms in their literature, the first being foreign students and the second being international students. The two have in common that they are not citizens of the country where they study, but the difference is that the foreign student originally they or their family immigrated to the country (OECD, 2014).

As purpose and research questions entail, this thesis will only focus on highfliers who fit the definition defined by StudyPortals. The definition will be adapted to fit the scope of this thesis, and with that the methods and tools used to answer the research questions.

During the analysis only data from one of StudyPortals’ websites will be analysed as there are roughly eight portals in total connected to StudyPortals. So the chosen website will be Mastersportal as it was the first website created and the website attracting the most visitors. Moreover, a segment will be created in Google Analytics that will represent Highfliers. However, it is important to note that not everyone who fits into the criteria of the segment is a Highflier.

1.6 Contribution

There is much literature regarding web search behaviour and how students search for academic research. However much of the literature focusing on how student search for education abroad focus on the sources and the key information area they are looking for. WES have conducted several studies related to this
topic and they will be presented in the literature review, however none of the literature go into depth what students are exactly are searching online in terms of search words. Another limitation with the studies from WES is that they only focus on international students that aim to study in North America. This study aims to provide a broader perspective of how students search for.

1.7 Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction presents the background and problem formulation that later leads to the research questions and purpose of this thesis. Furthermore, the expected contribution of this thesis is also presented.

Chapter 2: Method presents the research design and data collecting methods that will be used as well as how and why these methods were chosen.

Chapter 3: Literature Review relevant literature for this research is presented to provide an overview of the topic, introduce theories and provide research gaps in existing literature.

Chapter 4: Results presents the results from the empirical study in two forms, first the analysis of data from Google Analytics and then the results of a survey.

Chapter 5: Analysis and discussion this chapter include an analysis and discussion about the results and the method used and how the method affected the results.

Chapter 6: Conclusions this chapter will give a conclusion of the study and answer the research questions. Furthermore suggestions future research areas will be presented.
2 Method

The following part will present the method of choice for this study. This includes an explanation of two quantitative studies, the literature review and other materials used during this study.

2.1 Research Structure

The thesis will be divided into two parts. The first part will focus on the online search behaviour of highfliers. This part will aim to answer the first research question, which will be done through a literature review and quantitative analysis. Firstly, the literature review will include literature regarding online search behaviour, student profiles, consumer behaviour and the usage of search engines. Secondly, the quantitative analysis will focus on the existing digital marketing data of StudyPortals. The analysis will provide the first insights to how highfliers use search engines and the outcomes of this analysis will contribute to the second part. The second part will focus on the second research question and therefore also the sub research question. In order to answer these questions the literature review will also cover target marketing, online marketing, customer profiling, customer behavior and AdWords. Furthermore, the opportunities for tracking the intake of highfliers will be done through a quantitative analysis of the user data-base. The outcomes of the study will be a highflier index ranking. Rather than simply determine the distribution of highfliers and non-highfliers the index would show the degree of highflier each user is and the index can in some cases be used for targeting registered users.

In order for a study to be relevant, it must have a high validity and a high reliability. High validity means that the right thing has been studied, meaning there is alignment between the purpose, method, literature and discussion. High reliability entails that the study has been conducted in the right way, and that the study could be repeated. High validity pre-requires high reliability but high reliability does not guarantee high validity. (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2015) In order to ensure a high validity multiple sources will be used in order to create a chain of evidence (Novotny, 2016). This will be applied for data, theories and methodology, and the aim is to achieve triangulation within the three fields. Furthermore, in order to achieve validity according to Blomkvist and Hallin, the literature review, method and discussion will continuously be put in comparison to the purpose, problem statement and research questions to ensure that they are fulfilling their role.

2.2 Data Collection

Firstly, a literature review will be conducted in order to acquire knowledge about consumer behaviour, target and digital marketing, customer profiling and the usage of search engines. Articles that have a general focus as well as only focus on students will be considered relevant. This is due in order to bridge the
gap between general theories and theories already applied in the context of students. The literature review will be based on articles and reports that have been collected from sources such as KTH Primo and Google Scholar. The literature is stored using a software called Mendeley, which makes it possible to sort articles according to articles and other sources according to topic. Moreover, as this thesis is written in latex it is easy to export references to a bib file using Mendeley. These are search engines providing a wide range of academic/scientific articles, reports and books. Key words includes: Student mobility, student migration, consumer behaviour, customer segmentation, customer profiling, target marketing, digital marketing, AdWords, search engines, search behavior, student search behavior, web analytics, google analytics.

Secondly, the quantitative analysis of StudyPortals online marketing will analyse the tangible data such as the share of sessions, search words, landing pages, mediums used etc. This data will provide a general impression of how highfliers search online but in order to confirm the details surveys will be sent to the registered users in StudyPortals database. The two quantitative studies will be further explained in the following section.

2.3 Quantitative Analysis 1: How does highfliers find StudyPortals?

This section will describe the method used for conducting the first quantitative analysis in order to find out how highfliers find StudyPortals. As mentioned earlier the data for analysing the online research behaviour of a highflier will be collected from Google Analytics and through surveying StudyPortals’ user-database. The analysing of StudyPortals’ user-database is conducted in two ways, the first one is a short survey that is included in the welcome email a new user receive after registering with StudyPortals. The second way is through a larger survey to all users in the database to give users a highflier index, this survey is connected to the second quantitative study and will therefore be explained later on in this thesis. This first part focus on how the sample used in Google Analytics was developed, then a description of what data is analysed in Google Analytics is presented and lastly the questionnaire to newly registered StudyPortals users is described.

2.3.1 Selection of sample

To begin with, some of the parameters in the highflier definition can not be judged from Google Analytics. In accordance with the definition an alternative definition will be made that can be applied to Google Analytics. In Google Analytics it is possible to create a segment in order to see how a certain type of visitor behave on a website. This tool will be used to create a highflier segment in Google Analytics and then compare their behaviour with other users. What is important to note is that the segment represents potential highfliers and not every visitor who fits the segment criteria is a highflier, however the segment is
as close to a highflier as you can come, which is why the sample will be referred to as highflier. The following segment settings will be used:

1. Age: 18-34
   - The two youngest age spans Google Analytics have is 18-24 and 25-34, and since the defined highflier is between 18 and 28 the age span 18-34 will be used.

2. Browser Language: English
   - Only those who view the StudyPortals website in English will be included as those who translate the website are considered to have too poor English knowledge to be a highflier

3. Country of origin: Based on English skills, Internet users and Economic status
   - To determine the countries to include an analysis of three parameters will be done to segment out countries. A further explanation of this will follow later on.

4. Technology: All but Opera and Opera Mini
   - Visitors who use Opera are removed as this browser is primarily used in Africa and these countries do not make it on the list in point three.

As mention in point three, a list of countries will be collected who all fulfil three requirements. Firstly, a majority of the population have access to internet, the population generally perform well on English tests and reach the higher grades as well as the country is considered a upper middle income or high income economy. A further description of each requirement and how each of them are determined will follow below.

**Digitally native and access to Internet**

Firstly, countries with a low amount of internet users will be removed. The World Bank defines an Internet User as:

> Internet users are individuals who have used the Internet (from any location) in the last 12 months. Internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV etc. (The World Bank Group, 2016)

This data has been collected from The World Bank, the CIA and Internet Live Stats. In order to compare the three sources’ data it has been converted to *Internet Users per 100 inhabitants*, which is the measurement used originally by The World Bank and it entails the percentage of the population who have access to internet. As an example, in Denmark 96 out of 100 inhabitants have
used the internet during the last 12 months, which then mean that 96 percent of the Danish population are Internet Users. A total of 219 countries were analysed, A threshold of 66 users per 100 inhabitants were chosen, which then represents two thirds of the population. The average amount of internet users was among all three sources was 41 users per 100 inhabitants and the Median was 42 users per 100 inhabitants. However, this number is considered rather low and as highfliers are supposed to be digitally native it is required that there are many internet users in the country to increase the likelihood of a visitor to be a highflier.

**English Knowledge**

In the highflier definition Academic Prepardness includes whether someone has taken an English proficiency test and is able to study abroad in English. This means that countries who generally have a poor level of English will not be analysed in the quantitative study. There are many different language tests available for students to take, such as the IELTS, TOEFL, Cambridge English Advanced (CAE) and Cambridge English Proficiency (CPE), and all these providers publish statistics about countries respective test performance. The TOEFL providers have data for 173 countries (Educational Testing Service, 2008), while the IELTS only have data for the 40 best performing countries (IELTS, 2017). The CAE test have data for around 90 countries and for the CPE test around 60 countries (Cambridge English, 2017a) (Cambridge English, 2017b). All countries represented in the CAE, CPE and IELTS test is also found in the data with TOEFL results. When the data is combined a majority of the countries, 97 out of 176, have results from at least two different tests.

In order to determine the threshold for whether a country "passed" the test or not the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is consulted, an overview of the CEFR scale can be found in Figure 2. A Proficient user of English will reach level C1 or C2, C2 being the highest level on the scale, while a Basic user will be on A1 or A2 level, where A1 is the lowest level. For a user to be able to study abroad they should reach at least B2, but preferably C1 level.(Council of Europe, 2001) The available data show the percentage of test takers who reached each score (for the CAE and CPE) or the average total grade (IELTS and TOEFL). The threshold level is therefore set to B2 level in the CEFR scale due to the fact that if a country generally perform well, meaning test takers reach at least B2 on average the population is generally good at speaking English and is therefore likely to meet the English admission requirements of universities abroad. With the help of converter the CEFR level B2 is converted into the equivalent grade for each test, which can be viewed in the table below.

**Economic status**

The last parameter is the economic status of the countries, this aims to classify countries according to income and then used to eliminate countries where
Figure 2: The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scale compared with Cambridge English tests and the IELTS (Cambridge English, 2017c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAE</td>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE</td>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Overview of threshold for English knowledge

the population generally have a low income. As a highflier is able to finance studies abroad the person should have the necessary funds through personal savings or working. If the person originates from a high income country it is more likely that the person have a good opportunity for earning the necessary funds through work or from family. The World Bank classify economies in four different categories, which are low income, lower middle income, upper middle income and high income. Countries are classified based on their Gross Net Income (GNI) per capita for the year before, and in the table below the level of GNI per capita required for the different classifications are shown. (The World Bank Group, 2017)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>GNI per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Income</td>
<td>$0-$1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Middle Income</td>
<td>$1,026-$4,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Middle Income</td>
<td>$4,036-$12,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Income</td>
<td>$12,476 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Overview of threshold for Economic classification

This classification is also one of the indexes that the United Nations use to classify countries. In order to increase the validity of the study, the GNI data that the United Nation provides was used to compare countries using the same thresholds for GNI per capita.

**Final sample**

After all the parameters were analysed the following list of countries was created:

*As Google is blocked in China, China will not be included in the Google Analytics data analysis however the country will be included in the other quantitative analysis studies as the country has proven to have many highfliers, which will be presented in the next chapter.*

**2.3.2 Google Analytics Data Analysis**

Data from Google Analytics can be divided into three different areas. The first is the **Audience**, which show who is visiting your website, what are their interests and what device are they using. The second area is **Acquisition**, which show if a visitor came through a search engine, social media, email, referral etc. The third area is **Behavior**, which show how they behave on your website, amount of registration goal is interesting to observe as StudyPortals aim for highfliers to register with their website. For all of these areas there are several key figures that Google measures to provide an overview of how a website is performing. In the list below a simple Google Analytics glossary is presented (Mangold, 2017):

**Measurements**

- **Average Session Duration**: The average length of a session.
- **Bounce Rate**: The percentage of single-page sessions in which there was no interaction with the page. A high bounce rate entails that many visitors only visit one page and then leave the website.
- **New Sessions**: An estimate of the percentage of first time visits.
- **Pages/Session**: The average number of pages viewed during a session.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Monaco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China*</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Slovenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Sample countries used for quantiative studies

- **Sessions**: A single visit to a website, consisting of one or more pageviews, along with events, ecommerce transactions and other interactions.

### Acquisition

- **CPC**: Cost-per-click can be seen in the Acquisition reports and typically refers to people clicking through to a website from paid ads.

- **Direct**: Direct traffic includes people who typed the websites URL into their browser or clicked a link in an email application (that didn’t include campaign tags). Direct sessions will also include other cases where Google Analytics is unable to identify the source of the click.

- **Landing Page**: The landing page is the first page viewed during a session, or in other words, the entrance page.

- **Mediums**: Medium is one of the four main dimensions for reporting and analyzing how people found a website. Medium tells you how the message
was communicated.

- **Not set**: Not set in the Source/Medium report occurs when a campaign tagged URL hasnt been fully constructed, source is not fully defined.
- **Organic**: Refers to people clicking on a free link from a search results page.
- **Referral**: A referral is reported when a user clicks through to the website from another third-party website.
- **Social**: Traffic coming from social media, including Twitter and Facebook.
- **Source**: Source tells where a message was seen.

As mentioned in chapter one, this analysis will be conducted on the Masterports website as this is the website generating the most traffic and the most important portal/product for StudyPortals. Below follows a description of each area and what data will be analysed.

**Audience**

An analysis of the Masterports audience will aim to confirm that the created highflier segment actually is representative and inline with the definition. This is primarily achieved through viewing the interests of the highflier segment. Google Analytics displays the interests visitors express through their online travel and purchasing activities. Based on the definition some interest areas can be identified that correlate with highfliers, such as Employment/Career Consulting Services, Travel, Financial services/Investment services and Education. Lastly, the audience data provides a general overview of who these viewers are in terms of distribution of nationalities, age, gender, new/recurring visitor and what device they use when visiting Masterportal.

**Acquisition**

As mentioned earlier, acquisition data show what medium a visitor used to find Masterportal. This data will be divided into different categories to compare different parameters such as if the medium varies from country to country, how highfliers differ from other users and how different mediums lead to registrations. Moreover, the impact mediums have on key figures such as bounce rates, pages viewed per session and the average session duration will also be analysed. Lastly, it would also be possible to see what search words a visitor used to find Masterportal, however due to the privacy protection from Google only some of this data is visible, however there is different ways around this and that will be explained in the next section.
**Behavior**

Behavior data show how visitors behave on a website, such as what is the first page they visit, how many pages do they visit and what page is the last one they see before they leave. As mentioned in the last section, it is not possible to see the search words of all visitors, however by investigating the different landing pages it does provide an idea of what visitors searched for. So the analysis of the behavioral data will aim to understand what information highfliers are searching for, how they behave on the website and what kind of pages make highfliers register on the website. This data can also give a general idea of what purpose the highfliers have when visiting Mastersportal, do they only search for study programmes or do they also read articles how to prepare an application etc. Moreover, the behavioral measurements bounce rate, pages viewed per session and average session duration provides insights to how visitors experience the website and if the content is relevant for them. A high bounce rate will indicate that landing page did not please visitors enough to make them want to continue interacting with Mastersportal. This can be further validated by looking at the number of pages visted and the average duration per session and if these figures are low then it is an indicator that the page does not satisfy visitors enough to stay.

**Conversion**

A conversion is a user creating value for the website. Conversions are defined by the website owner in Google Analytics and then assign a value to each goal. StudyPortals have five goals defined. The first one is leads, which means someone fills in a form on the website. The second goal is premium clicks, with is a click on a link. The third and fourth goals are banner click and text banner click, which are banners on the website from universities. The last goal is registrations, each user that register on the website is a conversion. The goals, conversions and the conversion rate will be analysed to see how much value Highfliers are generating for StudyPortals.

### 2.4 Quantitative Analysis 2: Surveys to StudyPortals database

Data for the highflier index will be collected through a survey to the registered users. The survey will be constructed so that it will be possible to evaluate the respondent according to the highflier definition. According to Blomkvist and Hallin (2015, Chapter 2, p. 89) the theory most suitable to the purpose of a study should be used when constructing questions for a survey and therefore one can borrow questions from previous studies, which is why the questions are partly based on the questions used by WES when they first created the Highflier segment. However as StudyPortals have made extended the definition of a Highflier some questions will be added in order to find highfliers according to their definition. Furthermore, the survey was constructed in Surveygizmo as this tool is already used by StudyPortals, which makes it easy for the company
to use the survey in the future. The main type of questions used were close-ended questions such as multiple choice and checkbox questions, as these types of questions are easy for respondents to answer and it is more simple to analyse compared to questions where respondents have to write text. Most of the multiple choice questions included the option "Other - Write In". In order to ensure that the questions are well formulated and the layout is good the survey was tested by employees from StudyPortals who are knowledgable in user experience and how to formulate questions to be more understandable. Moreover based on the first responses some new options were added that were frequently recurring in the "Other - Write In" option in order to reduce the amount of "Other - Write In" responses.

The survey was distributed via email to registered users in the StudyPortals database. The sample was created based on the list of countries that was created in the previous section, however many respondents are from a country that is not on the list this is due to the fact that they currently live in a country that is on the list. The survey was sent in two rounds, and in total the survey was sent to 97458 users. The first batch was sent to users who registered an account before 2016, and the second batch was sent to users who registered with StudyPortals between January and July 2016. In order to collect a large amount of responses StudyPortals often use incentives to attract more users to respond to surveys, also literature has found that incentives have a positive impact on the response rate (Blumberg, Cooper, & Schindler, 2011, Ch. 7, p.223). In order to see the impact of incentives some respondents received an email stating you could win a voucher worth of 50 while some received an with no incentive. The selection of those that received the incentive and those who did not receive an incentive was choosen randomly so everyone in the sample had the opportunity to be chosen to receive the incentive. For the second round only emails with the incentive was sent as it did help with collecting more responses. Even though rewards can have a negative impact on the quality of responses, there are studies that found no impact on quality when using incentives to increase response rate, such as Laguilles, Williams, and Saunders (2011), Singer and Ye (2013) and Goritz (2004). The common measurement for response quality is the number of short answers, comments, number of words written and if comments are favorable towards the survey sponsor. (James & Bolstein, 1990)(Singer & Ye, 2013) These concerns are more fitting when the usage of open-ended questions are used, which is not the case for this survey however in the analysis a comparison between the responses of those with incentives and those without will be presented to ensure that there is no sign of bias.

Measurement
Based on the definition of a highflier the survey will tackle certain parameters in order to create the overall index score. In the table below an overview of the parameters and how the parameter will be evaluated.
### Table 4: Overview of parameters for quantitative analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Related question</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Preparedness</td>
<td>Preparation tests</td>
<td>Weighted score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language tests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age of respondent</td>
<td>Binary score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital native and internet connection</td>
<td>Place of origin</td>
<td>Weighted score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial situation</td>
<td>Ability to fund their studies</td>
<td>Weighted score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likelihood of receiving a scholarship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Background</td>
<td>Potential Master student</td>
<td>Binary score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to study abroad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Preparedness**

The academic preparedness determines if the student has taken the required tests for studying abroad. This includes language tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, and academic tests, such as the Graduate Record Examination, GRE, subject specific tests or university specific tests. Furthermore, this measurement will include if the respondent feels academically prepared to study abroad and if their English would be as good as his/her fellow students when studying abroad.

**Age**

The parameter of age will be determined by if the respondent is between the ages of 18 to 28. If the respondent fits the criteria then he/she will receive the full score of one. If the respondent is older than 28 then he/she will receive a score of zero as there is no possibility of he/she to fulfil the criteria. A possible extension to this parameter could be to give a score to those who are younger than 18 as they will one day fit the criteria. However, at this moment it will not be taken into consideration.

**Digital native and access to internet connection**

If a respondent fits into the age criteria it is very likely that the person is digitally native. However in some countries the amount of people with access to internet is low, which is why the country of origin also will be taken into consideration when scoring this parameter. The World Bank stores data about usage of internet and mobile subscriptions around the world, this data can help to classify if the person is digitally native and has access to internet. Countries with a large amount of internet users per 100 inhabitants, atleast 66, will receive a score of 1.5. Countries with 50 to 65 internet users per 100 inhabitants will receive a score of 1. Countries with a score between 25 and 49 will receive a score of 0.5 and the remaining countries will receive a score of 0.
Financial situation

As a highflier is defined to have access to the necessary funding to study abroad this parameter will determine how the student will finance the studies. If the student have enough personal savings, support from family/friends, or is a strong candidate to receive a scholarship then he/she is likely to have the money to study abroad and receive a score of 1. If a respondent is working part-time or is supported by the local government then the respondent receive a score of 0.5. This is based on what is in StudyPortals definition of a highflier.

General background

In order to analyse if the respondent is open minded, ambitious and independent answers from both the general background and other parameters will be taken into consideration. The level of ambitiousness will take into consideration the answers if a respondent have done any extra-curricular activities. If a student is working part-time, does an internship or participates in volunteering activities it can be because one wants to learn more and it looks good on a CV.

Study ambitions

This parameter will determine whether the respondent is interested in international education and if the student is a potential Master student, both of these two measurements are graded with one or zero.

2.4.1 Survey to newly registered users

Figure 3: Overview of the survey sent to newly registered users
As mentioned previously, Google Analytics comes with one significant limitation, much of the data from users regarding how they found a website is protected. This simple survey aims to reduce the limitation by asking new users how they found StudyPortals. As new visitors have a higher registration rate among highfliers on the StudyPortals website they are more likely to remember how they found StudyPortals. The questionnaire consist of only a few questions and the flow chart in figure 3 illustrates the survey. The first question, "Where are you from" is used to determine if the person is likely to be a highflier or not. The list of countries that is collected for Google Analytics is used to choose what countries are interesting and what countries are not interesting. The next question determines the medium used to find StudyPortals, depending on what medium the user used follow-up questions are asked. The result is collected and summarised to see what mediums are the most common ones together with how the medium was used to find StudyPortals (search words etc.).

Both surveys conducted for this study can be found in appendix 1.

2.4.2 Previous research done by StudyPortals

In order for StudyPortals to continuously improve their website they send out surveys to users to get more insights about how users are using their website as well as what information and services are useful for them. Some of this research is useful also for this thesis as the question are connected to how students search for education online. Firstly, one continuous survey that StudyPortals share with their users, they ask when a user would like to start studying, this survey is quite simple as it is presented in an email and based on the time frame when a respondent wishes to start studying. A link will provide the necessary steps a user needs to take in order to start studying within their chosen time frame. Data will be collected starting from the 1st of January 2016 until 21st of May 2017, then the data will be filtered based on the country of the respondent. Although there is no question about where the respondent is from, Surveygizmo provides details about what country and city the respondent was located in when filling the survey, so this available data will be used to filter the responses. The value of the responses from this survey is to know when students would like to start studying as it provides insights to how long in advance students start searching for education abroad.

Moreover, in 2016 StudyPortals conducted a survey about how students select their higher education institution. The interesting questions from this survey is:

- If you have important decisions to make, lets say, choosing a study programme. How would you make this decision?
- How many programme options did you consider before you applied for your last study?
- Do you use computer programmes like Excel, Word, Evernote or online tools to structure information? If yes, which programmes/online tools?

- What are the main pieces of information from a study programme you would compare?

The results of this survey provide more behavioral details about how students search for education abroad. In order to filter out respondents who are not potential highfliers there are questions about how old the respondent is and what is the nationality of the respondent and these questions will be matched to the highflier definition to filter out respondents. Lastly, a third survey was sent out to collect information about what important factors students consider when narrowing down what programmes to apply for. The survey primarily focus on how users prefer information to be displayed, however many of the questions are about what information is important to the user, which is why the results from these types of questions will be collected and analysed. Also this survey includes questions about the age, nationality and current education level, and this information will be used to filter the responses.
3 Literature Review

This chapter will introduce the main theoretical concepts and literature required for this thesis.

3.1 International Student Migration

As mentioned in the introduction, the amount of students studying abroad has increased tremendously over the past decade. This has resulted in an increase of research conducted in the fields of student migration, the impact of studying abroad and student decision making. This section will present past research in order to get an understanding of what influences students to study abroad.

3.1.1 Student Segmentation

Student segmentation is used to better understand the students who are searching for an education. The segmentation provides information about demographics and future aspirations of students, and it describes how these characteristics associate with the students behaviour. (Choudaha et al., 2012)

As previously mentioned, the World Education Services (WES) conducted a study in 2012 analysing the US bound international students. The study, *Not all international students are the same* by Choudaha et al. (2012), made a segmentation based on the academic preparedness and financial resources of the students. Furthermore, the study also investigated how the students searched for information about different universities and programmes. On top of this, the study *Mapping Generation Z*, by Banov et al. (2017), conducts a similar study with the difference that they do not focus on US bound international students but rather teenagers across the world interested in studying abroad. Furthermore, the authors look at the attitude and perceptions of high school students, the so called Generation Z, on studying abroad and the result is also shown in a student segmentation.

There are some differences between the two studies that are important to mention. Firstly and as already mentioned, the study by Banov et al., figure 5, have the target group of Generation Z, individuals born 1999-2004, while Choudaha et al., figure 4, make no age limitation but instead focus only on students bound for the US. Furthermore, while Choudaha et al. reached more countries than Banov et al., 115 vs 27, Banov et al. had a larger amount of responses overall, 5255 vs 1600. The total time period differed by three months as Banov et al. surveyed for three months longer, can be one reason for the big difference in amount of responses. Another reason for the large difference could be that Banov et al. had their survey available in 16 languages, however the content remained the same, while the survey by Choudaha et al. was only available in English.
Moreover, the two studies measured financial resources differently. Banov et al. measured financial resources by looking at the education, profession and employment of the parents. While Choudaha et al. asked about what financial resources would be available for them when studying in the US, options included personal savings, support from family and friends, loans, scholarships and aid from the university. For Choudaha et al. the largest segment was found to be the Strivers (30 percent), the students with low financial resources and high academic preparedness, while for Banov, Kammerer, and Salciute the largest segment was the Cultural Hitchhikers (36 percent), students with low financial resources and more interested in the cultural experience of going abroad. Furthermore, the differences between the segments in both surveys differ significantly. The difference between the largest and smallest segment in Choudaha et al. is nine percent (Strivers vs Strugglers), compared to 24 percent for Banov, Kammerer, and Salciute (Cultural Hitchhikers vs Resumé packers).

Figure 6 and figure 7 illustrate the distribution of the segments between continents and countries respectively. Figure 6 show that most continents have a similar distribution between the segments, only the Middle East and North America have large peaks of certain segments. Banov et al. conclude that the younger generation have a stronger focus on the cultural aspects of going abroad rather than educational.
Figure 5: Student segmentation according to Banov et al.

Figure 6: Segmentation divided by continent Choudaha et al.
3.1.2 Motivation to go abroad

The choice to study abroad can be discussed from different perspectives, which Beine, Noël, and Ragot (2014) do in their article The determinants of international mobility of students. Firstly, from the perspective of human capital, deciding to move abroad to study can be viewed as an investment. The decision to move is often made due to expectations of future benefits such as a higher salary and better job opportunities. Secondly, migration can be viewed as a consumption choice, and consequently have non-monetary reasons. These students do not only take into account the expected return from higher education but also the context under which they will study. The authors present two models, which were originally proposed by Mark Rosenzweig in his paper Global wage differences and international student flows, to explain why international student mobility to developed countries. In the first model, the school-constrained model, a student migrates to another country because of lack of educational facilities in the home country, regardless of the level of education return. In this model the student aspires to gain human capital and then move back home to benefit from the returns of the education. In the second model, the migration model, the student uses a student visa to both enter the country but also to stay
in the country, in order to avoid low returns of education in the home country. For this model a quest for high return is the main determination of the student. The two models are useful for investigating how student migration if affected when the return of education changes. If the return of education increases, then in the school-constraint model student migration will increase whereas in the migration model the flow of students will decrease. On the other hand, if the quality and quantity of schools increase, the student flow in the first model will decrease but increase for the second model. Consequently, the authors argue that student mobility can be determined by the same determinants as for migration of workers. (Beine et al., 2014) Chang, Schulmann, and Lu (2014) found that the main motivation of highfliers to go abroad was to expand career and life opportunities as well as education quality is higher abroad compared to their home countries.

3.1.3 Information-seeking behavior of prospective students

Another important aspect that (Choudaha et al., 2012) investigated was the information students need for making a decision.

![Diagram of Information needs of International Students bound to the US per region of origin Choudaha et al.](image)

Figure 8: Information needs of International Students bound to the US per region of origin Choudaha et al.

For Strivers and Strugglers financial aid is one of the most important information that they need. Another important aspect for both is the reputation of the school. For a Highfliers and Explorers the most important information needs is the reputation of the school. Depending on the country the information need also varies significantly, which is illustrated in figure 7. As can be seen in Africa students tend to focus on tuition fees and costs of living as well as financial aid.
opportunities in order to study abroad. Those students originating from the Middle East are the most likely to seek information about application requirements and student services. Furthermore, students from Asia and Oceania are the most likely to ask for information about career prospects after graduation. As shown in both studies the factors that influence the decision partly depends on where the student is from. Wei (2013) conclude that economic factors weigh more than educational factors for students from developing countries. Factors that students might take into consideration is "per capita GDP per country gap between countries" or "higher education expenditure as a percentage of GDP". This pattern is also shown in figure 8 as students from Africa and Latin America, continents with a significant amount of developing countries (IUUG, 2015), prioritised information related to costs. On the other hand, educational factors were more important for students of developed countries. Factors such as "student-teacher ratio" or "higher education enrolment rate" were likely factors they would take into consideration, similar trends can be seen in figure 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Highfliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application requirements</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/religious accommodations</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition and cost of living</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid opportunities</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of school</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career prospects after graduation</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program content/course offerings</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program structure, including credit transfer</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student services (campus safety, student life)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty research and expertise</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: The top three information areas highfliers seek Choudaha and Chang

Furthermore, in a follow-up report, Choudaha and Chang (2013) investigate effective enrollment strategies for international students. The authors found that the information-seeking behavior varies among prospective Bachelor, Master and PhD students. Prospective international Bachelor students seem to prioritise academic and language support throughout their studies as well as require more information about tuition fees and cost of living. Prospective Master students are more likely to use online discussion forums to obtain information about studying abroad, compared to Bachelor students. Moreover, almost half of all prospective Master students listed university reputation as the most important information need. Table 5 show an overview of the most important information areas, the percentages represent how many listed the information area in the top three.
As done in the report Choudaha et al. (2012), Choudaha and Chang (2013) also investigate the behavior of prospective students from China, India and Saudi Arabia. The authors found that around 36% of the Chinese respondents were highfliers, while 22% of Indian students and 33% of Saudi Arabian students qualify as highfliers. While Indian students have a good level of English and a high academic preparedness, however they usually lack the financial means to study abroad, resulting in a majority being strivers. While most Saudi Arabian students are classified as Explorers, 39%, they often lack the required English language preparedness level, although as previously mentioned one third of the students still fall into the highflier category. Chinese students have similarities with the Saudi Arabian students as they have the financial means to study abroad many students do not have the necessary academic preparedness as 37% of the respondents fall into the Explorer category. Furthermore, Chinese tend to seek for information about studying abroad on online discussion forums and the students are highly interested in information about career prospects after graduation. Similarly to the Chinese, Indian students prioritise career prospects after graduation together as well as program content and course offerings as the most important area of information they seek. The Saudi Arabian students list program offerings and content, application requirements and location as the most sought information areas. On top of this, among all countries, the Saudi Arabian students were the ones who most frequently listed program structure/transferability of credit as the most pressing information need.

Banov et al. (2017) found that in most countries the student him/herself and the parents have the most influence on decisions to study abroad, in countries with a strong patrilineal social structure (such as India and Thailand) the parents have more influence than the student. Furthermore the authors found that exchange organisations show some degree of influence, while they found that schools and teachers have limited influence on the students choice in going abroad. Similarly and Choudaha et al. and Choudaha and Chang researched what channels are important for students when seeking higher education, a summary of what Choudaha and Chang found can be viewed in table 6. Choudaha et al. investigated what channels students used while searching for information about studying abroad. The most frequently used channels were institutional websites as well as family and friends, which 90% and 67% of the respondents used respectively. The usage of most channels were equally distributed between the four segments. The most significant difference was the usage of agents, which was the largest in the Explorer segment. Overall the authors found that the usage of agents were the largest among those with a low academic preparedness, the Explorers and the Strugglers. Choudaha and Chang (2013) found that out of the 2992 respondents, 902 were classified as highfliers, which equals to almost one third of the respondents. Moreover, among prospective Bachelor students 20% rated family and friends as one of the most trusted sources of information. Educational consultants followed in second place. The authors argue that factors such as relatively young age, complex admissions process
and parental influence in decision-making, impact these results. Prospective Master students on the other hand, ranked admissions officers (33%), current students (16%) as well as family and friends (16%) as the most trusted sources of information. Both prospective Bachelor and Master students use social media to seek information about studying abroad, however universities are not always present on these channels. When comparing Chinese, Indian and Saudi Arabian students in terms of used sources, Chinese students are more likely to use online discussion forums as well as Chinese social media sites. While Indian students favour information from family and friends as well as from current students, as also found by Banov et al. Lastly, Saudi Arabian students on the other hand report a low usage of social media channels and instead favour university websites, web searching and talking with family and friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information source</th>
<th>Highfliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational consultant</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media managed by university</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media NOT managed by university</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education fairs (in person)</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual education fairs</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/University websites</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and friends</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web search</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online discussion forum</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust in Information source</th>
<th>Highfliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational consultant</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions officer from an university</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Faculty</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni from university</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current student at university</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and friends</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Highfliers usage of information sources

In their study *Bridging the Digital Divide: Segmentation and Recruiting International Millennial Students* Chang et al. (2014) aimed to get a better understanding of Millennials and how they specifically use technology and the psychographic characteristics that influence their information seeking behaviour. In total 4,852 prospective international students were surveyed by WES. As Millennials are born from the 1980-2000, they fit the age criteria of highfliers defined by StudyPortals, which makes this study interesting. One of the main characteristics of Millennials is their usage of technology. Millennials frequently use social media platforms and mobile devices as well as frequently check their email. As the reports presented earlier also confirm, technology have had a strong im-
pact on how international students search for education. Chang et al. found that 91 percent of the respondents used computers during their search process, around half (56 percent) used a smartphone and one fourth used a tablet. Furthermore, the authors found that Master students prefer word-of-mouth endorsements from current students. Many use online discussion forums or social media to connect with students to hear more about their experiences. Among highfliers, 23 percent used online discussion forums during their search for education abroad. Similarly to Choudaha and Chang, Chang et al. also found that Highfliers are more reputation orientated than the other segments, this trait is stronger among prospective Master students than among prospective Bachelor students. Also Lu and Schulmann (2015) found that highfliers ranked career prospects and school reputation, 44 percent and 32 percent respectively, as the most important institutional factor when searching education abroad. In table 7 an overview of the most important information needs for highfliers according to Chang et al. can be viewed. Many similarities with table 5 can be seen for the respective categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Highfliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application requirements</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition and cost of living</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid opportunities</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of school</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career prospects after graduation</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program content/course offerings</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student services (campus safety, student life)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty research and expertise</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: The top three information areas highfliers seek according to Chang et al.

3.2 Customer Behavior

This section introduces basic theories about customer segmentation and how to create a product to influence customer behavior so that using a product becomes a habit.

3.2.1 Customer Segmentation

In order to stay competitive it is important to know your customers, what do they want, what are their needs etc. To realise this, one can divide customers into segments as well as profile them. From the customer profile a company can use effective marketing strategies to match the right information to the right customer. After a customer segmentation is done, a profiling can be performed. (S. Jansen, 2007)
Simply put, market segmentation is the process of dividing customers, or potential customers, in a market into different segments. This is done due to the notion that customers are not the same and do not have the same needs. (Mcdonald & Dunbar, 2012) Similarly to Mcdonald and Dunbarr, another definition of customer segmentation presented is the process of making smart decisions about how numerous different traits of the customer profile are relating and consequently give important patterns and segments among customers. (Dadhich, Vidhani, & Upadhyay, 2016)

Customer profiling is used to create a persona in order to get to know your customer better. A profile is created by collecting information about the customer and their behaviour. A simple profile consist of at least age and gender, other features that can be used for profiling can be seen in table 8. A customer profile could also help finding new customers, by using demographic data from external sources (S. Jansen, 2007). King and Jessen (2010) have a technical focus in their definition, they define customer profiling as:

*an automatic data processing technique that consists of applying a profile to an individual, namely in order to take decisions concerning him or her; or for analysing or predicting personal preferences, behaviours and attitudes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographic</td>
<td>Regionally, nationally, globally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and ethnic</td>
<td>Language, does ethnicity affect taste or buying behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic condition, incomes</td>
<td>Average household income, power of the customer, payment difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and purchasing power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values, attitudes and beliefs</td>
<td>What is the attitude towards the product/service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life cycle</td>
<td>How long have the customer been regularly purchasing products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and awareness</td>
<td>How much does the customer know about a product, service or industry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment method</td>
<td>How much brand building advertising is needed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How was the customer recruited?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Overview of possible profiling features

Furthermore, from the technical point of view, profiling is computerized method that make use of data mining in order to place individuals, with a certain degree of probability and therefore a risk of some errors, in a particular segment in order to make decisions related to those individuals. On top of this, King and Jessen argue that profiling does not depend on human intelligence but rather on statistical analysis of masses of figures related to observations extracted from a
database (King & Jessen, 2010). Table 8 presents a list of features that can be used when making a customer profiling.

### 3.2.2 The Hook Model

The Hook model was developed by Eyal and it is a four step process that ensures that customers keep coming back for more without costly advertising. The four stages of the model is *Trigger, Action, Variable Reward* and *Investment*.

**Trigger**

A trigger is the initator of the hook cycle, and it comes in two forms external triggers and internal triggers. An external trigger is embedded with information, which tells the user what to do next. It could be in the form of a push notification, email or a Web site link. There are four types of external triggers, namely paid triggers, earned triggers, relationship triggers and owned triggers. Paid triggers are, as the name entails, paid advertising such as ads on a search engine. These triggers are not sustainable due to costs and therefore they should not be relied on. Earned triggers on the other hand, are free triggers and cannot be bought as they are in forms of hot viral videos, being mentioned in the press or featured app store placements. In order to benefit from these types of triggers much effort is required in terms of media relations. Moreover, a relationship trigger is essentially word of mouth as it involves one person telling others about a product or service. This can be done through sharing links, a Facebook like or a product referral. The last trigger is owned triggers, which is as Eyal is a piece of real estate in a user’s environment. A downloaded app or a push notification only appears if the user wants it there. These triggers only occur after a user has signed up for a service by giving an email address, installed an app or subscripted to a newsletter. The longterm goal with the cycle is for users to have an internal trigger to use the desired product. An internal trigger manifests automatically in a user’s mind as it associates a feeling to a product or service. In order to fully reach a habit the product or service needs to tackle the pain a user is experiencing.

*Question to answer: What does users really want? What pain is the product relieving?* (Internal trigger)

*Question to answer: What brings users to a service?* (External trigger)

**Action**

The next step in the cycle is the action, which is a behavior done with the expectation to receive a reward afterwards. By clicking on a picture or link a user will receive the reward in the form of an emotion or a feeling. In order for the action to be taken, a user needs to have the necessary motivation and the ability to take the action. The level of motivation determines if the user will take action or not. The right motivators will promise desirable outcomes.
such as satisfying a scratch or fear can also be a good motivator to result in action, such as buying a helmet to prevent head injury. Moreover, the action should be easy to take meaning it should not require too many steps in order to complete, easier is better and will result in a higher adoption rate. Registering for a web site can take time and includes several steps to complete, however now Facebook enables users to login to other website with the same credentials, which reduces the time and effort needed to register.

Question to answer: What is the simplest action users take in anticipation of reward, and how can the product be simplified to make the action easier? (Action)

Variable Reward

The third step in the cycle is variable reward. The key in the hook cycle is to create a craving for more, which is achieved through variable reward. There are three types of reward, rewards of the tribe, rewards of the hunt and reward of the self. The first one is related to social acceptance and is driven by our connection with other people. Facebook provides several types of social reward. When we login to Facebook we receive endless of content shared, commented and liked by friends, all of these features offer tribal validation, which will make users keep coming back for more. The reward of the hunt entails pursuit of resources and information, a good example of this is gambling on a slot machine. The machine rewards the gambler in random intervals, just enough to make the gambler stay in pursuit of winning the jackpot. Lastly, the reward of the self is the reward one gets when we conquer obstacles or completing a task. Playing a video game that includes collecting badges, leveling up and unlocking special abilities fulfill the player’s desire for competency and the more rewards the player receive the more time is invested into the game.

Question to answer: Are users fulfilled by the reward yet left wanting more? (Variable reward)

Investment

The final step in the cycle is the investment, in order to create a habit the user needs to invest into a product or service. The more time and effort that is put into a product or service, the more a user value it. One of the success points for IKEA has been the packaging process, as they put customers to work by assembling their own furniture. Studies have shown that customers feel more love for the furniture they assembled by themselves. The stored value a user put into a product increases the chances that they will use it in the future, and once a user has invested effort into a product they are less likely to switch to a competitor. Once a user has gone through the cycle several times a habit will slowly occur and the need for external triggers is gone.
Question to answer: What "bit of work" do users invest in the product?
Does it load the next trigger and store value to improve the product with use?
(Investment)

3.3 Digital Marketing

This sub-chapter will introduce the concept of digital marketing and then focus primarily on search engine marketing.

3.3.1 Digital Marketing Overview

In today's society using the internet, social media, mobile apps and other various digital communication technologies is a part of our daily lives. According to The World Bank Group, there are 43 internet users per 100 inhabitants in the whole world. For OECD countries this figure is significantly higher, 77.2 users per 100 people. (The World Bank Group, 2016) Similarly, the Internet World Stats found that 49.2 per cent of the global population are internet users on March fourth 2017 (Internet World Stats, 2017). Furthermore, with many countries having access to the internet more and more time is spent online. According statista internet users spent an average of 118 minutes on social networking per day during 2016 (Statista, 2017a).

Figure 9: Average time spent online per day Statista

In figure 9 the development since 2012 can be seen. Moreover, in 2015 the average adult spent 20.5 hours online per week in the UK, a figure that has doubled
over the last decade. One important driver for the increase in online usage is social media, which currently has more than two billion users worldwide. (Stephen, 2016) With the increase in digital exposure there has been a shift in the usage of marketing channels, to focus more on digital marketing. This due to the fact that, consumers today are searching for products online, they purchase and consume products online and consumers share experiences about products with other consumers online. (Stephen, 2016) Simply put, digital marketing is about understanding people, how people use a technology and how a company can leverage that to engage more with customers. Smith (2012) define digital marketing as the practise of promoting products and services using digital distribution channels via computers, mobile phones, smart phones, or other digital devices. Similarly, Fenwick and Wertime (2008) defines digital marketing as the use of digital channels to have a continuous, two-way, personalized dialogue with each customer. The dialogue then leverage data from customer interactions and the real-time behavioural data and customer feedback can be used to improve and optimize interactions.

Consumer are moving away from being passive viewers to active participants. Consumers are now creating, contributing to and commenting on promotion of products and services. This results in that marketers needs to engage more with consumers and together create value for both parties. Fenwick and Wertime Furthermore, outspending the competition in spending does not longer guarantee an effective campaign. New parameters such as consumer interaction and involvement needs to be taken into consideration as well as what each channel is generating in terms of participant engagement. (Fenwick & Wertime, 2008) In addition to that, companies need to determine what channels are the right mix for their marketing needs.

Furthermore, digital marking enables companies to easily expand campaigns beyond a specific location as well as make media adaptable to on-demand, always-on and unscheduled. This is due to that new technology makes it possible for consumers to free themselves from scheduled activities.

The 3I Principle

The 3I principle is a key component when forming a successful marketing strategy, and the 3Is form the foundation for all digital marketing methodologies. The three principles are Initiate, Iterate and Integrate. (Dodson, 2016)

The principle states that the customer is the starting and finishing point for all digital activities. It is important to keep in mind that digital channels are not the traditional broadcasting channels, as digital channels can initiate a two-way communication unlike broadcasting which is a one-way channel. With this two-way communication channel companies are able to listen to what their customers are saying online as well as see what they are doing online. By
knowing how customers act online and listen to what they are saying companies are able to create more effective activities online. (Dodson, 2016)

The second principle is the iteration. After publishing an ad online companies can tract the click-through rate, response rates and the conversion rates. Based on these numbers companies can easily tweak an ad in order to make it more efficient, which can be done over and over again to find the most efficient solution. In order to make an efficient iterative process marketers need to be open to what customers are doing when interacting with a campaign and be prepared to change it accordingly. This will result in campaigns improving over the course of its lifetime. (Dodson, 2016)

The last principle, work on three levels. The first level is to use knowledge gained from one channel and apply it to a different channel. If the search engine optimization realise a specific keyword is powerful to use, it can be applied in the email marketing campaigns to improve the results in that channel. The key is to integrate all efforts across all digital channels. In a similar manner, the second level entails integrating efforts from digital and traditional marketing efforts. Keywords used by customers online can be used in a script for radio to improve the effectiveness of that communication channel. This will result in more coherent communication and more effective marketing campaigns. Lastly, when using digital marketing companies obtain an immense amount of data about their customers. This data can be useful to analyse in order to make better business decision, such as what part of the digital marketing budget should be increased or decreased. Tools such as Google Analytics is helpful to obtain an overview how customer end up on a website and what visitors convert more quickly. (Dodson, 2016)

### 3.3.2 Search behavior

As mentioned in the previous chapter, more and more individuals are using the Internet to search for information through various search engines such as Google and Yahoo. The pool of available information is endless and new information/data is uploaded every single day. On average, Google processes over 40,000 search queries every second, which equals over 3.5 billion searches per day and 1.2 trillion searches per year, this number was reached in 2012. (Internet Live Stats, 2017)

Whenever a user conduct a search online, they reveal information about themselves. This information can later be summarized and a user can be categorized into several search behavior categories and then be analysed to indentify the customer’s needs. Based on the categories a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy can be developed in order to meet the customer’s need and make campaigns effective. There are three key players operating in the search engine and each of these players is a stepping stone on the path to reach and engage with
customers. If each component is not addressed then the end goal cannot be reached. The three components are:

1. **The searcher**: The one searching for a product or service. Companies want searchers to look for the keywords associated with the company, which is why companies need to understand the search behavior of a person so that relevant searchers can be targeted appropriately.

2. **The website owner**: A website needs to be optimized so that it is aligned with customers search behavior, if not then the website will not be found. Companies need to outrank, outperform and outbid competitors in order to be successful.

3. **The search engine**: The tool that analyses websites to determine if they are relevant to a searcher. If a search engine has not indexed a website then it cannot understand what it is about and then the site will not be displayed in the Search Engine Result Page.

With the amount of data available it is critical to understand how people use search engines and what are the search engine trends on the Web. In the beginning the general trend was to use Web searching for entertainment purposes but this later shifted and now the Web is used as a source of information. Through increased knowledge in this area, companies can directly impact pay-per-click marketing, Web and Internet search engine design as well as web-site-optimization strategies. (B. J. Jansen & Spink, 2006)

Furthermore, B. J. Jansen and Spink compared the interactions that occur between users and Web search engines. The comparison is done from the perspective of session length, query length, query complexity and content viewed among the Web search engines. The authors found that findings from a study only focusing on one Web search engine cannot be generalized to all Web search engines. Moreover, the authors made four main discoveries. Firstly, they found that the users are viewing fewer results pages. Secondly, searchers on US-based Web search engines use more query operators than searches on European-based search engines. Thirdly, they found statistically significant differences in the use of Boolean operators and result pages viewed. Lastly, they found that results from studies of one particular Web search engine cannot be generalized to another Web search engine.

Hsieh-Yee (2001) reviewed studies on the Web search behaviour of children and adults, the studies were conducted between 1995 and 2000. Hsieh-Yee found that studies on children would describe the interaction with the Web, while research on adults would focus on describing search patterns, effects of selected factors on search behaviour. These factors included information organization and presentation, type of search task, Web experience, cognitive abilities and affective states. Moreover, Hsieh-Yee discuss the challenges of researching Web search
behaviour. One major challenge with researching the Web search behaviour is to obtain a sample that is representative of the population, while keeping in mind that the user population continuously is growing and changing. In order to address this issues one study conducted frequent surveys and compared their results with other user data. On the other hand, many other studies have used qualitative methods and focused on learning more about users’ interaction with the Web, in these cases generalizability was not a concern. Moreover, another challenge is the complexity of Web search behaviour as many factors can affect search behaviour. In order to tackle this challenge many studies use multiple data collection methods.

In order to understand customers the 5P Customer Search Insight Model can be used:

1. **Person**: General information about the searcher such as age, sex, religion, language and socioeconomic group.

2. **Place**: Data can provide the country or city the customer is in as well as if it is a rural or urban area.

3. **Product**: Entails what topics, interests and product areas is the searcher looking for and therefore gives a hint what need the customer has.

4. **Priority**: A search query can give an indication of the purchasing time frames the customer has, which will show how urgently the customer need the product or service. On top of this it also show the window for engagement of the customer.

5. **Purchase**: Companies can find out how and where the searcher want to buy and what stage in the consumer purchase model they are in.

To illustrate how the 5P model see figure 10

Only the most relevant search results will appear on the Search Engine Result Page (SERP), so all three key players should be analysed according to the 5Ps to ensure that a website is a strong contender against competitors. Customer search behavior should influence every part of a SEO and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) strategy. If a company cannot understand their customer, who they are, what their online habits are and how to meet their needs, companies are not able to convert customers from website visitors to loyal customers. The the two following sections, SEM and SEO will be presented further. The SEM chapter focus on paid search results, online ad, and the SEO chapter focus on organic search results.
3.3.3 Search Engine Marketing

One important and effective tool to acquire a large audience online is through SEM. In simple words, search engine marketing allows firms to place ads on search engines such as Google and Yahoo! and the firms mainly pay when a user clicks on an ad, the so-called pay-per-click (PPC) or (cost-per-click CPC) method. (Boughton, 2005) Many digital marketing methods, such as display advertising, are marketer initiated whereas search is consumer initiated. (Fenwick & Wertime, 2008, p. 96) If firms manage to create a good SEM strategy they will be able to generate steady traffic levels as well as a high return on investment (ROI). Due to the high attractiveness level of SEM the competition level has increased and made it more challenging for companies to afford to bid on search words. As a result companies have to expand campaigns to include several search engines and keywords. Companies who are solely focused on online business are able to choose between different types of SEM strategies depending on what audience they want to attract. Some common tactics include opt-in (subscribe to newsletters or other services), viral (word of mouth), banner ad (text or media-based advertisements on websites), search placement (SEO, make pages appear more relevant) and pay-per-click (keyword). (Boughton, 2005) A key driver for SEM being attractive for marketers is that the searchers are already actively in the market for something, which means that they have already shown interest by searching for information and it is the ultimate opt-in. A single search query can result in hundreds or thousands, sometimes millions, of results and as a result users rarely go beyond the first result page. (Fenwick & Wertime, 2008, p. 96) As previously mentioned, the competition for search words is large.
and it becomes even more crucial for companies to have a high ranking since searchers rarely go beyond the first result page. In order to ensure that your website will appear on the first result page, companies use SEO to improve the content of their websites so that it is search engine friendly. SEO focuses on the free and organic searches, so if a searcher does not click on your ad it might click on a website that appears below the ads and then the company does not pay for the click. The pay-per-click is a radical shift from the traditional media where companies paid for exposure and now companies only pay for results. The PPC structure has been a major revenue driver for search engines, an astonishing 99 percent of Google’s revenues in 2005 came from keyword advertising (Fenwick & Wertime, 2008, p. 97) In 2014 Google reported that ads generated more than $62 billion in revenues while Yahoo! generated $2.6 billion in revenues from search, which represents half of Yahoo!’s revenues, in total 90 percent of their revenues are from ads (Marvin, 2015) (Statista, 2017b).

Dodson (2016, p. 46) present a four step interative process for developing a successful SEM strategy. Figure 11

![Figure 11: Four-Stage SEM Process according to Dodson](image)

**Goals**

The first step is to set goals, but first it is important to understand what the main benefits of SEM are and how the ranking from Google works. SEM comes with several benefits, such as that it allows companies to reach the right people at the right time, it is cost-efficient and the company has full control over the
campaign as they decide how much to spend and bid, what should be shown for the campaign as well as how often and at what times an ad should be displayed. Google AdWords use a ranking formula to decide if an ad is displayed on the SERP, and this depends on two parameters, which are the maximum CPC that a company is willing to pay and the quality of the keyword. (Dodson, 2016, p. 47-49) The quality of the keyword is determined by several factors:

1. **Ad copy**: does the search word match the content of the ad and is the user directed to a relevant landing page.
2. **Landing page**: the stand-alone webpages dedicated specific products or services. The quality score is improved if the landing page is fast-loading, relevant and reference the search query.
3. **Account performance**: If an account has been performing well over a period of time then the account will be viewed as a strong advertiser who works hard to provide relevant results.
4. **Click-Through Rate**: A high CTR will yield a higher quality score from Google as it means that advertiser’s campaigns are relevant to search queries.

**Setup**

The next step in the process is to setup the actual campaigns. The first thing to do is to set up the parameters of the campaigns. Firstly, the budget for a campaign should be determined, the budget is defined per day and it defines the amount of money per day that will be spent. The next parameter is the locations to be targeted, specifically the countries and regions. The third parameter to decide on is the networks. There are two main networks to choose between, Google Search and the Display Network, which is used on Google’s partner websites Gmail, Youtube etc. The fourth parameter is the keywords, that the ads should be connected to. Furthermore, the bid per click should be entered. The bid is the maximum bid that a company is willing to pay for a click on an ad. Lastly the actual ad is inserted and then everything is good to go.

When selecting the keywords for the campaigns it is important that those are relevant for the searcher, as the keywords will affect the quality score of an advertiser. Furthermore the ad copy, landing page, bids and the like are defined by the selected keywords. The challenge is the choose the keywords that will generate the highest return and that are fitting to the company’s services. If the keywords are not relevant then the ad will be irrelevant to users and the company spends money on the wrong audience. Dodson suggest using Google Trends or keyword planner to uncover suitable and popular keywords. Google trends show the historical search trends for particular keywords or categories. It provides a good overview of popular search terms and categories. Keyword planner show the volume for specific keywords during the last 12 months, and it will
suggest keywords to use and how much traffic can be expected for the respective keywords. What is important to keep in mind is that there is different options for matching the keywords with the search queries, in figure 12 an overview of the different options can be found. (Dodson, 2016)

Manage

In AdWords it is possible to get a good overview of how campaigns are performing and the data displayed can be customized by the user so that the relevant data is displayed. Furthermore, it is possible to go more in depth into different campaigns to see how keywords, ads, ad groups and ad extensions are performing. There is also the opportunity to optimize campaigns and what results can be expected if the daily budget is increased. Moreover, by connecting Google Analytics goals with AdWords conversions can easily be tracked as Google Analytics will show what users are doing on the actual website of the company. Another advantage of linking Google Analytics with AdWords is that one can compare how different PPC campaigns are performing.

Analyse

The last step in the paid search process is to analyse the progress, success and/or failures of the campaigns. By creating different reports such as Keyword performance reports, Ad performance reports, Campaign reports and Dimensions report one can easily analyse different types of data. The reports can be adapted according to the user’s preference and what he/she would like to analyse. Depending on the objectives of the campaign it is important to look at the

Figure 12: Overview of the different keyword matchers in Google AdWords (Dodson, 2016)
right kind of KPIs, so if the objective is to increase brand awareness then the KPIs should not focus on sales, conversion or ROI but rather traffic metrics. If KPIs are performing well the bids can be revised, perhaps they should be increased. On the other hand, if a KPI is not performing well then the bids should maybe be decreased. Below some relevant KPIs are presented.

1. **CTR**: This KPI measure the relevancy of a campaign, meaning how relevant an ad and landing page is to the keywords used by a user.

2. **Average CPC**: Measures the success of a campaign and whether it is contributing to the success of the business.

3. **Conversion rate**: Evaluates the efficiency of campaigns by determining the quality score and if the user is getting value or not from the clicks.

4. **Quality score**: Determines the quality score of a keyword, which directly impacts the ranking in the SERP.

**Search Engine Result Page Positioning**

The SERP is the returned list of results that match a search query made by a user. The SERP consist of different sections, the top part show the paid listings that are identified through the yellow ad flag, under the paid search listings are the organic search results that are listed according to their relevance to the search phrase. As 91 percent of searchers do not go beyond the first result page it is crucial to develop a strategy that is competitive enough to get a webpage on the first result page. The paid listings generally get 30 percent of the click-through-rate and the remaining 70 percent goes to the organic search results. Although, being on the first result page is not a guarantee that a webpage will have a good click-through rate as the top five organic search results get 67 percent of the click-through rate. As a result it is important to strive for a position in the top three. (Dodson, 2016, p. 9) The order of ads is based on the revenue that the ad is generating to Google; that is, the cost-per-click times the amount of clicks. So in order to have a good ad placement the add needs to have a high click through rate, so the size of the bid is not the sole influencer on the ranking. (Fenwick & Wertine, 2008, p. 98) B. J. Jansen and Resnick (2006), researched the effect of sponsored links on ecommerce information seeking on the the Web, and found that 82 percent of searcher viewed the nonsponsored links first. The authors also found that self-efficacy and experience with searching does not increase the likelihood of viewing sponsored links. Moreover, the authors also found that the order of the sponsored links does not affect the searcher’s evaluation of the links.

Yang and Ghose (2010) found that the presence of organic listings will benefit the paid ads, and vice versa, as it increases the probability of a higher click-through rates. This means that companies who place well in organic searches will benefit from having paid search advertising as well. This can be described
as a "second opinion effect" as the link will appear both on the organic search result and the paid result.

### 3.3.4 Search Engine Optimization

As already mentioned it is crucial for webpages to perform well in the search engine ranking so that it appears on the first result page when a searcher uses a relevant keyphrase. The main challenge with reaching the first result page is that marketeers does not know how search engines rank websites. Algorithms are constantly changing and being improved to defeat the search engine optimizers. Generally, search engines wants to ensure that a users find what they are looking for quickly and therefore the search engine wants to list the most relevant pages connected to a search phrase first.

Fenwick and Wertime, p. 99-102 list six steps to ensure a high ranking and to sustain the ranking. Firstly, *think like a search engine!*”, the search engine looks at individual pages not the whole website. This means that pages can be adapted to fit different key phrases and consequently rank high for different key phrases. Secondly, *think key phrases not keywords*, since most users primarily search for phrases rather than single words it is important to think of the phrases that should lead to a website. Once the key phrases have been identified then the phrases can be assigned to different pages to which it fits the best. It could be the case that some phrases do not match existing pages, and if so it is important to consider if this phrase is relevant for the site. The third listing is *search engines can’t yet make much sense of pictures*, search engines can only analyse pictures through the alt tag that they had, a descriptive verbal tag. Where a user see a picture the search engine “see” a blank area, which is why it is important to include a descriptive tag so that the search engine knows what the picture illustrates. Fourthly, *search engines probably give more weight to content that is frequently updated*, if a website is using trendy key phrases it is recommended to update the pages frequently as search engines attempts to find freshly breaking stories. The fifth important step to keep in mind is that Google is believed to have more than 200 signals that is uses for ranking sites and these signals can be divided into *on-page* and *off-page criteria*. The on page criteria analyse how many times a search phrase occur on a page and how important it seems to be. (Fenwick & Wertime, 2008, p. 101) Moreover, if stuffing keywords on a page will not guarantee a high ranking. When the search engines were still developing then it was possible to cheat the system by filling pages with search words, however those days are gone as search engines are smarter today, page risk severe penalties and risk being removed from the SERP. (Dodson, 2016, p. 19-20) The off-page criteria analyse how other pages related to a particular page. The main metric that the search engine measure is how many other pages link to this page and also how important those linking page are. The last step is to revise the *quantity, quality and context of incoming links* to each page, as well as the whole website. These links have a significant impact on how high a page is ranked with respect to a particular key phrase. Moreover, the type of
sites who link to a page also matters. Therefore having well trusted sites, with a genuine connection to the content, linking to your website will contribute to a high ranking from Google.

Dodson (2016) present a model for creating a successful SEO strategy, which consist of four stages that can be viewed in figure 13.

![Figure 13: Four-Stage SEO Process according to Dodson](image)

Goals

In order to set proper SEO goals, one must first understand the benefits of using SEO as these will be the main drivers when developing a SEO strategy. If proper and realistic goals are not set, there is a risk of loosing in the competitive search engine world. When setting goals for SEO companies should not only address customer pain but also evaluate the company’s pain and create a beneficial ripple effect on all three SEO key players. After identifying a business pain, view it as a goal and then create a strategy to achieve that goal, lastly in order to monitor the progress of solving the pain, assign Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to the strategy. If company is suffering for a decline in online orders, the goal can be to increase conversions by increasing website visitors through on-page optimization. In order to monitor the progress of the strategy KPIs such as sales and online inquiries can be defined. There are many different types of KPIs and goals for online websites. Depending on what the business is, a goal such as conversion can be classified as different things. For one company it could be watching a video while for another company it might be registrating
Table 9 provides an overview of different goals and KPIs for SEO.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Goals</th>
<th>Types of KPIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Organic traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversions</td>
<td>Visitor numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visability</td>
<td>Click-through rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>Downloads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility and status</td>
<td>Online inquiries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market leadership</td>
<td>Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competative advantage</td>
<td>Website engagement and the like</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Examples of Goals and KPIs for SEO goal setting according to Dodson

The outcomes of achieving the ultimate goal of SEO is to be ranked number one on the SERP, and there are many benefits that come with achieving this:

1. *Increased organic click-through rates*

2. *Increased engagement* since more searchers will explore and spend longer periods of time on the website.

3. *Enhanced reputation* due to a top listing, which yield credibility, status and reputation.

4. *Market leadership and competitive advantage* by outranking competitors.

5. *Increased conversions* due to more searchers visiting and interacting with the website.

**On-page optimization**

The first step to on-page optimization is to review the structure of the website. There should be a clear hierarchy among the pages so that there is a clear flow through the website. If the structure is unclear and not appealing customers are likely to bounce, meaning they will go back to the SERP or click down the tab without having interacted with a website. A high bounce rate will also impact the ranking that Google gives to websites, which is why it is important to have a good structure so that visitors will stay on a website. As mentioned by Fenwick and Wertime, it is crucial to ensure that content is up-to-date as searchers and search engines tend to favor websites that are up-to-date. Some other indicators of importance are domain name, page title, main headings, mentioned in text or in alt tags as well as in the HTML meta tags. However if the phrase does not appear naturally, the phrase is repeated mindlessly, on the page the search engine is able to notice this and it will give the page a poor ranking. (Fenwick & Wertime, 2008, p. 101)
The step is to optimize the technical mechanics of a page and ensure that the keywords are mentioned. To begin with, url links are a good place to insert keywords rather than strings of numbers and symbols such as &=%?/. By including keywords in the url link it is also more clear where a visitor will be taken if they press the link. An example of a good url link:


Next the webpages must be named appropriately so that it is relevant for the content, not all keywords need to be in the page name just enough to make it relevant and then the content can do the rest. Some searchers scan the first few sentences on pages, which makes it crucial to incorporate the keywords in a natural manner so that the searchers are less likely to bounce. Moreover, another tool to help a search engine to understand the content of a page is Meta tags. Tag are not the most crucial tool to achieve a high ranking but it is nonetheless useful. Meta tags can be added to titles, this tag will display content on the SERP and make sure that searchers understand what the website owner offer, and be used as description, which are about 150-160 characters and it should be used like a sales pitch.

**Off-page optimization**

The third step in the SEO process is the Off-page optimization, which is to ensure that the inbound links from external sites are of high quality. Off-page optimization is important as search engines care more about what other sites says than what the website owner says about their own site. Inbound links can be considered as votes of confidence, and the more votes of confidence the more authority and credibility it will gain. Linking can be done in different manners such as a simple Click here, by writing out the complete link or a more descriptive keyword link. Cooperation with social media sites, influencial bloggers, industry leaders or governmental companies can help increase the trust and populatiry of a website. The last step in the off-page optimization is social sharing. Social sharing is free advertising, which is why all webpages should be easy for visitors to share through various social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

**Analyze**

The fourth and final step in the SEO model is to analyze and review the performance of the goals defined in step one. Google Analytics is a popular tool for analysing SEO performance as it provides a huge variety of highly detailed data for free. To measure the SEO success or failures Dodson propose three KPIs:

1. **Position**: This KPI show how efficient the applied SEO measures have been as it will display the ranking on the SERP.
2. **Traffic**: This KPI measure the traffic volume achieved for the relevant search terms and serve as the basis for calculating conversions. It will show traffic sources, visitor numbers and the volume from specific search words.

3. **Conversions**: Show how much conversions the organic SEO is generating.

Analyzing should be an on-going process and should be done weekly or monthly to ensure that the goals are on track. Furthermore, special campaigns that might yield a peak in traffic should be recorded so that the data can be analyzed properly. Lastly, another important factor to investigate is the bounce rate, which should be minimized at all costs. Google Analytics will show what pages, keywords and traffic sources have a high bounce rate and based on this changes can be made to decrease the bounce rate.
4 Results

This section will present the results from the study conducted on Google Analytics, the two surveys sent out to the StudyPortals database and the other surveys previously done by StudyPortals.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis 1: How does highfliers find StudyPortals?

The results from the Google Analytics analysis will be presented based on three categories, audience, acquisition, behavior and conversion. Furthermore data from both the highflier segment and All Users will be shown to compare how highfliers search for education abroad compared to other visitors. In table 10 an overview of the overall figure of the time period can be found. These numbers serve as a comparison when results for different channels, mediums, types of landing pages etc. are presented. The key findings are described in text and the figures can be found in Appendix 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Share of sessions</th>
<th>Bounce Rate</th>
<th>Pages/Sessions</th>
<th>Avg. Session Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highfliers</td>
<td>13.36%</td>
<td>54.18%</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>00:03:41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Users</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>52.58%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>00:04:10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Overall Google Analytics figures for All Users and Highfliers

4.1.1 Audience

Almost half of the sessions generated by the highflier segment originate from users in the United States, 23.6%, and the United Kingdom, 22.7%. The gap to the remaining countries is significant as users from Canada represents 7.3% of the sessions, users living in Germany represents 5.5% and users from the The Netherlands represents 4.4% of the sessions, figure 14. Similarly half of all new users are from the United States and the United Kingdom, Canadian and German users are on third and fourth place respectively with 8% and 4.7%, and Australia represents 3.8% of all new users. The distribution among countries differ for the All Users segment as the largest share of visitors comes from India, 14% of all sessions, with the United States, 8.99%, and the United Kingdom, 7.72%, follows in second and third. Other countries that are highly represented overall is Nigeria, 3.4%, and Pakistan, 3.05%. Germany, Canada and The Netherlands are among the ten countries with the largest share of sessions among All Users.

The distribution between female and male is almost half half, as females represent 54% and males 46% of all sessions. The distribution of male and
females among All Users is more even compared to the highflier segment, as males represent 49.3% of the sessions, and females 50.7% of all sessions. A majority, 53%, of the sessions originate from users who are between 25-34, and the remaining 47% originate from users who are between 18-24, figure 38. Users in the age span 18-34 represent about 80% of the All Users segment, while the remaining 20% is from users older than 34.

Overall new visitors represent 64% of all sessions and consequently returning visitors represent 34% of all sessions, figure 15. The new visitor and returning visitor figures among All Users are practically identical to the highfliers, the difference is only one tenth of a percent. A great majority of the users visit Mastersportal on a desktop, 65%, 31% use a mobile phone and the remaining 4% use a tablet, figure 39. Similarly to the highfliers, a great majority of All Users visit Mastersportal on a desktop, 62%, one third use a mobile phone and the remaining 5% use a tablet.

Based on the affinity categories highfliers can be viewed as technophiles, movie lovers, TV lovers, travel buffs and news junkies, figure 40. As for the in-market segments, highfliers are focus on education categories, employment categories, travel categories and financial services, figure 41. Lastly, the most recurring other categories for the highflier is the Jobs & Education, Arts & entertainment, References & dictionaries, travel and Social networks, figure 42. The interest of All Users are quite similar to the interests of highfliers, the main difference is that the All Users segment has a stronger focus on entertainment categories and education categories focused on preparing for university.
The share of sessions belonging to the Highflier segment has over the last two and a half years steadily increased. In January 2015 the share of Highfliers was 10.7% and at the end of April 2017 the share was 14.7%, figure 16. There is a clear low point in November 2016, as during that month the share of Highfliers was only 6.8%, however the month after the share was back on the same level as before, around 14%. When observing the changes in share of sessions on a monthly basis the growth is developing quite steadily, however on a daily basis the differences are more significant. The graph is no longer linear and the data points are more spread out and show great variance, figure 43. Over the last years the greatest share of Highflier sessions was 21.48% on the 14th of February 2016, while the minimum non zero value is 3.64%. The correlation between the Highflier sessions and All Sessions is 0.81, which entails that when one of the to increases the other increases too, which is logical. The standard deviation of the share of Highflier sessions is around 2.98% and the average share of sessions for Highfliers is 13.19% while the median is 13.39%.

4.1.2 Acquisition

A strong majority of users have used organic search when searching for education. 82% of all sessions originate from organic search, such as Google or Yahoo. The remaining sessions mainly originate from either Referrals, 8.5%, and Direct, 7.5%, while the rest of the channels together represent the remaining 2%. Diving further into the channels Google is the most used medium as 83.5% of all sessions originate from Google. Other search engines such as Bing and Yahoo together account for 1% of all sessions. After Google the most used medium is
Direct entry with 7.75% and Referrals, 6.55%. The most used referral medium is the Distancelearningportals, one of StudyPortals websites that focus on online education. The paid search mediums such as AdWords represents 0.7% of all sessions. The trend of using Google is also visible when looking at what mediums the users from the respective countries use. At least 75% of users from countries defined in the highflier segment use Google as a medium, and the second most used medium is Direct entry.
The main difference between the highflier segment and All Users is that channels such as emails, paid search and direct have a slightly larger share among All Users. Organic search still represent the largest share with 74% and Direct have the second largest share with 12%. Moreover, Google is the most commonly used medium with 77% of all sessions originating from Google. Google AdWords represent 3% of all sessions, which is significantly lower than for the highflier segment. The share of users who enter Directly is 13%, also this number is larger compared to the highflier segment. The Referrals have a lower percentage for the All Users segment as 4.86% of all sessions originate from Referrals.

Different channels show difference in bounce rates and average pages visited per session. The largest bounce rates, and above the highflier average, comes from the users originated from an organic source on Google, Bing or Yahoo. Users who enter directly have a bounce rate of 52.55%, rather close to the highflier average. While the lowest bounce rates originates from sources with a very low share of the sessions, clicking on a button in an email sent by StudyPortals, these sources have a low share of new users. The overall bounce rate for referrals from StudyPortals is 35.76%, while referrals from Facebook have a bounce rate of 43.86%. The lowest bounce rate for all All Users are those originating from StudyPortals Referral sites, which has a bounce rate of 28.09%. Most other mediums have a bounce rate just above the average for All Users, sessions from Google have a bounce rate of 53.4% and sessions from direct entry have a bounce rate of 54.9%. The largest bounce rate is from the paid search from Google, these sessions have an average bounce rate of 67.5%.

The channel that results is the most pages visited per session is the paid searches from Google, as it has an average of 7 pages per session. After that
follows the referrals from StudyPortals, after which users on average visit 6 pages per session on Mastersportal. The Search engines Yahoo and Bing yield a low page/session result as users tend to only visit around 2.8 pages after originating from these sources. Moreover, referrals from StudyPortals had the lowest bounce rate for All Users, this category also have the largest amount of pages visited per session with 6.13 pages per session. Sessions from Google, Bing and Yahoo on average visit 4 pages per session. As paid search from Google had the highest bounce rate, it also has the lowest amount of pages visited per session with 2.95 pages. The users entering directly visit on average 3.69 pages per session.

On average users from the highflier segment spend three minutes and forty seconds per session. Users originating from AdWords spend the most time on the website as they spend eight minutes per session. While the shortest amount of time is from the users who used Bing to find Mastersportal, they spend less than two minutes per session. Sessions originating from Google, Emails and Direct entry spend around three and a half minutes per session. While Referrals from StudyPortals pages and Facebook spend little under five minutes per session. The average session duration for All Users is just above four minutes per session. Unlike the highflier segment, the average session duration for sessions originating from AdWords is little over two and a half minutes. The sessions originating from all types of referral sites are on spend on average six minutes per session. The referrals from social media spend around four minutes per session while referrals from StudyPortals spend around six minutes per session. Lastly, the sessions originating from organic sources last on average four minutes, as does the sessions that were Direct entries.

**Comparison over time for mediums**

The bounce rate for both Highfliers and All Users follow a similar pattern, in September 2015 there is a peak for the Highfliers but the rest of the months the difference is small, see figure 19. Furthermore, there is a negative correlation, -0.393, between the bounce rate and the amount of pages visited per session for the highflier segment, meaning when the bounce rate increased the amount of pages visited decreases and vice versa. However, for the All Users segment the correlation is 0.0496, which entails there is not a strong correlation between the two measures. Moreover, the amount of pages visited for both Highfliers and All Users does not follow the same pattern, which can be seen in figure 50. Unlike the previous two graphs, the average session duration for Highfliers and All Users does not follow the same pattern, the Highflier segment has several low and high peaks, and on average the highflier segment has sessions lasting shorter than All Users. Furthermore, there is a strong positive correlation between the pages visited per session and the average duration per session, as the correlation is 0.767. Lastly, there is a strong negative correlation, -0.515, between the bounce rate and the average session duration.
entailing that when the bounce rate increases the session duration is decreased.

Figure 19: Average Bounce Rate since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors originating from Google

The bounce rate for both Highfliers and All Users follow a similar pattern, both segments have either a low or high peak, see figure 52. The variance in the amount of pages visited per session is larger for the highflier segment compared to the All Users segment, 0.898 compared to 0.192, please see figure 20. Moreover, similarly to the previous section, the average session duration varies significantly over time and the variance is significantly larger compared to the All Users segment, figure 53. Furthermore, the average duration and the amount of pages visited per session have a strong positive correlation, both for the highflier segment and the All Users segment, 0.658 and 0.866 respectively. Lastly, both the average visited pages per session and average session duration have a negative correlation with the bounce rate. For the highflier segment the correlation is -0.341 and -0.181 respectively, while for the All Users segment the correlation is -0.611 and -0.589.

There is a strong correlation between the bounce rate of Highfliers and All Users, 0.748, figure 54, as the two graph lines seemingly follow each other. Furthermore, the correlation between the two segments is stronger when looking at the amount of pages visited per session, figure 55, as the correlation is 0.863. Also in this graph the lines follow one another quite clearly. Furthermore, as was the case for the previous mediums, there is a negative correlation between the average pages visited per session and the bounce rate, for the highflier segment the correlation is -0.495 and for the All Users segment the correlation is -0.376. Lastly, the correlation between the average session duration of highfliers and All Users is stronger compared to the previous mediums as for referrals it is 0.759, figure 56. Moreover, also for referrals there is a strong correlation between the session duration and pages visited per session, as it is 0.800 for highfliers and
0.956 for All Users. Also the correlation between the bounce rate and session duration is negative for referrals, as it is -0.396 for the highflier segment and -0.331 for All Users.

4.1.3 Behavior

Landing Pages

To begin with, the landing page type with the largest share of sessions for the highflier segment is the articles, which are 44.7% of all sessions. The second largest share belongs to the Study Option pages, which makes up 18.7% of all sessions. The third largest share belongs to the home page, which is 14.5% of all sessions. Other landing page types popular among the highflier segment is the country pages, 7.7%, Ranking Country page type, with 4.5%, and the Global Study Awards with 2.93% of the sessions. Articles is also the most common landing page type for the All Users segment as 19.19% of all sessions begin on an article page. The study option pages is also the second most common landing page type with 15.89% of all sessions landing here. Just like for the Highflier segment, the home page is the third most common landing page with 7.43%.

The landing page type with the largest percentage of new visitors is the articles, which almost 80% of the sessions are new sessions for the highflier segment and 73% for All Users. The landing page type with the largest share of first time visitors for All Users is the Ranking pages, with 75% first time visitors. On average for the highflier segment 64.7% of sessions are from first time visitors, the same figure is 65.1% for All Users. The landing page type with the lowest share of first time visitors for the Highflier segment is the search pages, with 32.7% first time visits and for All Users it is the account page with
47% first time visitors. With the exception of the Account and Home page, all other landing page types on have a high rate new visits, as the average new sessions for all of them is above 60% for Highfliers. For All Users the account page, home page, global study awards and search page all have less than 60% first time visitors, the remaining landing page types have more than 60% first time visits.

Moreover, the type of landing page with the lowest average bounce rate for Highfliers is the home page and search pages, with 18.38% and 20.48% respectively, figure 57. For All Users the lowest bounce rate is with the Home page and the country page, 24% and 39% respectively. While the largest bounce rate for both Highfliers and All Users is on the article pages, with an average bounce rate of 81% and 76% respectively. Also the Ranking Country and The Global Study Awards pages have an average bounce rate above the overall average for the Highflier and All users, 63.8% and 59.27% for the Highfliers and 65% and 66% for All Users respectively.

Furthermore, the landing page type that results in the most pages per sessions is the home page for both segments, as visitors on average visit almost twelve pages. Highflier visitors landing on the country, discipline and search pages on average visit at least six pages per session, for the country page the figure is even higher as those visitors on average visit almost eight pages per session. Also for All Users visitors landing on country and discipline pages result in visiting
around six pages per session. For Highfliers the landing pages with the lowest amount of pages visited is the Articles, Global Study Award and Studies pages, with an average below two pages, which means that many visitors does not go beyond the landing page. Similarly for All Users, visitors landing on an article or the Global Study Awards page visit only 2 pages on average.

Figure 22: Average amount of pages visited per session by landing page types

Lastly, as mentioned earlier the average session duration for the highflier segment is a little less than four minutes and for All Users it is just above four minutes. The Home page is the landing page that results in the longest session duration, as sessions last almost ten minutes on average for both segments. Furthermore, the country, search, study option and discipline pages result on average in sessions of four minutes, the sessions starting on a country page last almost six minutes on average. Sessions starting on an article page or the Global Study Awards page have the shortest duration as the average duration is around two minutes or less for both segments.

Landing Page by Medium

Organic search is the most dominating medium among the landing pages for both segments, figure 23. Only for two types of landing pages is organic search not the most recurring medium for the Highfliers and one landing page type for All Users. Firstly, for both segments the Global Study Awards most visitors originate from other StudyPortals’ sites or enter directly. For the Account pages little over half of the visitors originate from paid search. The bounce rates for articles is high no matter the medium used to enter the page for both segments, see figure 59 Furthermore, for most landing page types the bounce rates does not differ radically between one another for Highfliers. The Account landing page type is the only one with a significant difference in bounce rate depending on
the medium used, as the paid search have result in a large bounce rate, 70.01%, while the organic search have a low bounce rate, 5.89%. However, for All Users the bounce rate varies for landing page type and the medium used. For the account page type the bounce rate varies from 11.23%, for visitors originating from emails, to 77.25% for users originating from Facebook. Moreover, visitors originating from StudyPortals referrals and land on a country page have a low bounce rate; 29.88%, while visitors originating from email have a high bounce rate, 72.10%. The search pages and the home page have on average low bounce rates for all the medium used.

![Landing types sessions share page by medium](image)

Figure 23: Share of sessions by landing page types per mediums

In terms of the average amount of pages visted per session, the most significant differences between the mediums is for the home page, Highflier visitors originating from organic search visit 13 pages per session on average while visitors originating from paid search visit 6.38 pages per session on average. A similar trend can be seen in for All Users, with the addition that visitors originating from email visit almost 25 pages per session. Overall, for Highfliers, visitors originating from organic search tend to visit more pages on average, figure 60. However, for All Users the StudyPortals referrals result in at least as many pages visited as Google, and in some cases StudyPortals Referrals result in more pages visted per session, e.g for ranking pages StudyPortals referrals result in visitors on average visiting 9.25 pages while for visitors originating from Google visit 2.62 pages. For Highfliers visitors originating from organic search also spend on average more time on Mastersportal compared to visitors originating from other mediums, figure 61. However, for All Users the session duration varies more and from page to page and medium to medium. Visitors originating from
the StudyPortals Referrals and landing on the account page spend on average around 17 minutes per session. Visitors originating from emails spend almost 15 minutes per session after landing on the home page. Overall the home page result in the longest session duration.

**Landing page by gender**

There are no significant differences between what landing pages different genders land on, figure 62. Male visitors land more frequently on ranking pages compared to females, while the only available data for study and search pages show that only females land on those types of pages. Furthermore the bounce rates between the two genders does not vary significantly, figure 63. Females tend to leave the account page more frequently than males, while males tend to leave the university pages more frequently than females. Moreover, there no significant differences in the behavior between males and females when it comes to amount of pages visited per session on average, figure 64. Lastly, figure 65 show that male visitors spend slightly more time, about one minute, on discipline page compared to female visitors, while female visitors spend almost one minute longer on the country page compared to male visitors.

**Landing page by country**

The most common landing page type for most countries is the home page, both for Highfliers and for All Users. However, for quite some countries, such as the United States and Australia, the article page is the most common landing page type, figure 66. For All Users the Article pages are also common landing pages as well as the study options pages. As previously shown the bounce rate for the article landing pages is quite high also for countries as it reaches at least 75%, figure 67. Furthermore, the bounce rates for the ranking pages and the global study awards page is also quite as it reaches above 60%, with the exception of visitors from South Africa who have a lower bounce rate, around 30%. The overall average amount of pages visted per session for highfliers when landing on a university page was around 3 pages, however for visitors originating from Germany is higher around 6 pages per session, figure 68. Lastly, visitors from the United States tend to stay longer on Mastersportal when landing on a ranking page compared to other visitors. Furthermore, as just mentioned visitors from Germany visit a large amount of pages when landing on university pages, these visitors also spend a twice as long as the overall average for the university pages, figure 69.

**Comparison over time for landing page types**

The average bounce rate of Highfliers landing on the Global Study Awards has a positive correlation, 0.792, with the All Users segment, figure 70. Moreover, similarly the correlation between the average amount of visited pages for the Highflier segment and All Users is positive, 0.835. As a result, the two lines follow each other and when one line peaks the other usually also have a peak compared to the month before, figure 71. The correlation between the
average bounce rate and average amount of visited pages per session is negative for both the highflier segment and the All Users segment, -0.268 and -0.0378 respectively. For the All Users segment the correlation is close to zero which is a sign that there is no relationship between the two variables. Lastly, the average session duration for the two segments generally falls below the overall average for both segments, figure 72. Moreover, the correlation between the two segments is positive, 0.600, but not as large as for the past two variables. On top of this, there is a positive correlation between the average amount of pages visited and the average session duration for both segments, with 0.350 for the All Users segment and 0.412 for the Highflier segment. The correlation between the bounce rate and average session duration is also negative for both segments, -0.389 for All Users and -0.550 for the Highflier segment.

As shown in the previous section, the bounce rate for article pages is very high for both segments. Over time the average bounce rate for both segments behave similarly, which is shown in the correlation between the two as it is 0.799, figure 24.

![Average Bounce Rate since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on Article landing pages](image)

Figure 24: Average Bounce Rate since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on Article landing pages

Furthermore, just like in the previous section the average amount of pages visited per session for the article pages have over time been relatively low for both segments. One difference, compared to previous examples, is that the correlation between the two segments is negative, -0.220, for the average amount of pages visited per session. This can be seen in some parts of the graph, figure 73, as during some months the two segments behave in opposite directions but overall there seems to be no relationship between the two segments. There is a similar negative correlation between the average amount of pages visited per session and the bounce rate for both segments, as it is -0.248 and -0.153 for All Users and Highfliers respectively. The average session duration for both segments for
article pages lies below the overall average for both segments. Moreover, the
two segments behave similarly, which is seen both in the graph and in the po-
itive correlation, 0.470, figure 74. Furthermore, both segments have a positive
correlation between the amount of pages visited and the time spent per session,
the correlation is stronger for the All Users segment, 0.573, while the Highflier
segment has a correlation of 0.323. Lastly, the correlation between the bounce
rate and session duration has a stronger negative relationship compared to the
correlation between the bounce rate and average amount of pages visited per
session. For the Highflier segment the correlation is -0.642 and for the All Users
segment the correlation is -0.642.

The last page type to present is the Home Page. The bounce rate for the
home page is below the average for both segments, and the changes over time
also are also below the average. There are no major differences in how the
segments have varied over time, which is also seen in the correlation as it is
0.489 and the standard deviation for the two is 4.5\% (Highflier segment) and
2.74 \% (All Users) entails that the bounce rates are not largely spread out,
figure 75. Furthermore, as seen in previous sections the home page as a landing
page results in a high average amount of pages visited per session. Over time
this value has been well above the average and the Highflier segment show
greater variation over time compared to All Users. There is a small positive
correlation between the two segments, 0.432, which can be seen in figure 76.
Moreover, there seems to be no correlation between the bounce rate and pages
visited per session for the Highflier segment as it is almost zero. However, for
All Users correlation is much stronger as it is -0.660, so for visitors not fitting
to the Highflier segment seem to be the contributer of pages per sessions or
bounce rates decreasing/increasing. As in the previous cases the average session
duration for the home page is well above the overall average. As in the previous
example the Highflier segment show greater variation over time compared to
All Users, figure 77. There is a little correlation between the two segment for
this measurement, 0.249. While the correlation between the amount of pages
visited and the session duration is stronger for both segments, 0.759 and 0.667
for the Highflier segment and All Users segment respectively. The bounce rate
and the session duration for both segment have a negative correlation between
each other, for the highflier segment the correlation is greater compared to the
pages visited per session, as it is -0.332, while for the All Users segment the
correlation is slightly smaller, -0.527.

4.1.4 Conversions

The overall conversion rate for Highfliers is 6.92\%, while for All Users it is 8.01\%.
Since November 2015 the daily conversion rate has varied from 0\% up to 20\% for
highfliers, however the average is 6.76\%. The conversion rate’s development over
time is shown in figure 25, where the monthly maximum is 8.64\% in January
2017.
The share of completions per month for the highflier segment, the number of completions for highfliers divided by the number of completions for All Users, is shown in figure 26. The average share of completions for the highflier segment is 11.7% and the curve resemble the curve for the share of sessions for Highfliers. There is a positive correlation between the two, 0.79, indicating that when the amount of sessions for highfliers decrease/increase so does the number of conversions for highfliers, and vice versa.
The goal type that highfliers overall have the most even share of completions is the premium clicks. The qualified lead is the most varying goal type as some months it has a large share while other months it has a low share, figure 27.

Figure 27: The changes in share of completions for each goal type of the Highflier segment over time.

Lastly, similarly to the goal completions the total share of goal value for highfliers have a similar shape to the share of highflier sessions. Also here there is a positive correlation between the goal value and the highflier sessions, 0.72.

Figure 28: The changes in share of goal value for the Highflier segment over time.
The pages generating the most completion and goal value for Highfliers, is the Global Study Awards page as 24.07% of all completions and 21.41% of the goal value is created on this page. The second page with many conversions is named (entrance), with 12.92% of the conversions and 13.19% of the goal value for highfliers. The account page represent 5.84% of the conversions and 5.26% of the goal value. Moreover, two study pages (Data science at Harvard and Data Science at EIT Digital Master School) together represent 4.6% of all conversions and 5.99% of the goal value for highfliers. Lastly, Google is the medium leading to the most conversions as it generated 72.41% of all conversions.

4.2 Quantitative Analysis 2: Surveys to StudyPortals user database

This section will present the results from previous research done by StudyPortals and the results from the surveys conducted during this thesis.

4.2.1 Previous research done by StudyPortals

When do you want to start studying abroad?

To begin with, a total of 194125 responses between the 1st of January 2016 and the 22nd of May 2017 were included in the analysis, of these responses roughly 18%, 35578 responses, came from countries matching the highflier criteria. The largest shares of responses came from the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Germany and Canada, see figure 29 for full details. The largest share of potential highflier respondents, 13191 (37%), wishes to start studying within 4 to 12 months from the time of the response. The second largest share of respondents, 8521 (23.95%), wishes to start studying within the next four months. The third largest share of respondents, 7266 (20.42%), wishes to start studying within 1 to 1.5 years from the time of the response, see figure 30.

Selecting Higher Education

The survey had 650 responses and of these 48 responses fitted into the highflier criterias. 38 of the respondents were between 18 and 24 years old and the remaining 10 were between 25 and 34 years old. The country with the largest share of responses was South Africa with seven respondents, followed by Lebanon and Spain with 4 responses each. Most of the respondents, 36 respondents in total, had already obtained a Bachelor.

Most of the respondents, 28 responses, considered between one and three programmes the last time they applied for a study, while 14 respondents considered between three and ten study options. The last 6 respondents considered at least ten or more study options. Furthermore, in order to keep track of and structure the obtained information many of the respondents use different tools to store information. The most popular tools were Microsoft products such as Word and Excel, as well as Evernote, Sticky Notes application or the traditional paper and
pen. Once respondents have to compare different study programmes they would primarily compare the following aspects:

- Fees and costs
- Country and Location
- Future career prospects and jobs
- Ranking
- Courses and content
• Admission and application information

What are the important factors to consider when selecting higher education

This survey had 490 responses and 57 came from respondents matching the highflier criterias. Like the previous survey most of the respondent, 44 respondents, were between 18 and 24 years old and the remaining 11 respondents were between 25 and 34 years old. The amount of responses were spread out, but the country with the most responses was Russia (six responses), followed by Greece, Spain and the United States (five responses each). Most of the respondents, 53 out of 57, were either pursuing a Bachelor degree or already hold a Bachelor degree. The remaining four either have a high school diploma or is pursuing a high school diploma.

The respondents were asked to rank the most important aspects when searching for a Master’s programme, the list below show the ten most important aspects according to the respondents.

1. Course fees
2. Scholarships
3. Living costs
4. University rankings
5. Chance of being admitted
6. University connections with industry
7. Culture
8. Accommodation availability
9. Part-time work
10. Teaching style

The most important costs that respondents expect to be included in the cost of living is rent, utilities, public transport, supermarket costs and cost of eating out for lunch and dinner. Furthermore, the most important type of ranking for the respondents were “top ranked universities in a specific field” rather than a general university ranking. Lastly, when reading about a study programme’s tuition fee the respondents expect it to include the actual course fees but quite some respondents also expect a possible application fee, cost of materials and cost of books to be included in the tuition fee.

4.2.2 Survey to newly registered users

The survey had a low response rate, as in total 370 users responded and of these respondents 38 were from a country matching the highflier list. Most of the respondents found StudyPortals through a search engine, a few were recommended the site by others or came through an external site such as Facebook, figure 31. Moreover, those who used search engine primarily used keywords fitting into the category ”Study a specific degree”, as 11 out of 26 respondents choose this option. Study a specific degree in a specific country was the second most used option, with 5 respondents choosing this option, figure 32.

![Figure 31: Distribution of channels used by highflier respondents to survey in welcome email](image-url)
Looking at all respondents, search engines are still the most common tool used to find StudyPortals. Facebook is the clear second placed medium, with 79 out of 370 respondents. Most of those who found StudyPortals through Facebook did so through a friend who liked, shared or commented on a StudyPortals post or the respondent found StudyPortals official account. Moreover, the study a specific degree is the most chosen keyword type, followed by Study in a specific country and study a specific degree in a specific country with 50, 37 and 33 respondents respectively. Those who used a ranking related search word, 15 respondents in total, searched for the best university to study a specific degree.

Figure 32: Distribution of keywords used by highflier respondents to survey in welcome email

4.2.3 Survey responses

In total the survey had 15761 unique impressions, the amount of people who opened the email. Of these impressions there were 2508 clicks on the survey, the average click through rate for the emails with incentive and those without the incentive is 16.5%. In total there were 2269 responses by may 13th when the final data was downloaded, however 773 of these were partial responses, which means that they left the page while a response was still recorded.

The largest share of responses came from European countries, 45%, and the second largest share is from African countries, 29%. Asian countries represent 16%, North American countries 7%, South American countries 2% and Oceania 1%. The largest share of respondents are between 23 and 28 years old, 40.78%. The second largest share are between 18 and 22 years old, 26.12%. Moreover, 19.15% are between 29 and 35 years old, and the remaining 14% are either below 18 or above 35 years old. Furthermore, most of the respondents have either obtained a Bachelor degree or a Master degree, 36.22% and 27.56% respectively. Moreover, about 4% of the respondents are still in high school. Of the respon-
dents 868 out of 1253 are currently searching, applied or got accepted to study abroad, 334 are not searching for their next education at the moment and 51 are searching for education in their home country. About 80% of the respondents received the invitation to fill the survey and possibly win a voucher, and 18% filled the survey without an incentive to do so. The remaining 2% are not shown if they had an incentive or not, meaning their ID was not visible after downloading the results.

A large share of respondents have done volunteering activities or been involved in some sort of student organisations. Moreover, 428 responded that they have not done any extra curricular activities next to their studies. Furthermore, 847 respondents are currently working full-time or part-time or doing an internship.

Most the respondents who are currently studying fund their studies through family/friends, personal savings or work next to their studies. Furthermore, 175 respondents currently have a scholarship. The respondents who will/plan to start studying abroad, will finance their studies mainly through scholarships, working next to studying, being supported by family/friends and personal savings.

A great majority, 770 out of 867, of the respondents expects that their level of English will be as good as their fellow students at a future university abroad. About one third have already taken an English proficiency test and little over one fourth of the respondents still need to take an English proficiency test. Moreover, one fifth of the respondents do not need to take a test, and the remaining respondents have not taken a test.

Moreover, 747 out of 867 of the respondents feel academically prepared to enter a college/university abroad. Most of the respondents, 396 out of 867, do not know if they are required to take an admissions test to study abroad. Only 49 of the respondents have already taken an admissions test, but 129 stated that they have to take a test but still have not done so. The remaining 293 respondents do not need to take an admissions test. In total 178 of the respondents stated that they have to take an admissions test and most of them have to take a university specific exam, such as an entrance exam.

4.2.4 Highflier Index

Based on the responses from each individual response a highflier index was calculated for each individual. An overview of how many received an index score within a certain interval can be found in figure 33.

About one third of the respondents scored between 41 and 60 points on the scale and only 51 respondents scored between 81 and 100 points. The highest reached score was 92 and the lowest reached score was zero. The country with
Figure 33: Distribution of highflier index scores among the respondents

the highest average highflier score with more than one respondent was Norway, as it has five respondents with an average index score of 76, followed by Estonia with four respondents and an average of 72. Sweden had two respondents with an average score of 70 and Austria had three respondents with an average score of 69. Bahrain had the overall highest average score, but only one respondent came from Bahrain.

4.2.5 Search Behavior

Which primary Information Channels do you use when searching for a degree programme?

To begin with the first question about search behavior was about what primary information channels the respondent uses when searching for a degree programme. The overall distribution of responses show that more than half of respondents use University websites, StudyPortals and Search Engine when searching for a degree programme. The fourth most used channel is social media, 18.96%, followed by Family and Friend, 13.94% and Online Reviews (Online Forums where users share their experience from universities), 12.83%. Few students actually visit the university on campus or on an Educational fair and the usage of educational consultants/agencies, is also low among the respondents.

The usage of information channels does not differ radically between continents. The most used channels are the same as for the overall result mentioned above. The channels ranking does differ a bit, as for African countries StudyPortals is the most used channel and for respondents from Oceania search engines are the most used channel while for the remaining continents university websites are the most used channel. African countries are the most likely to use social
media as 27.4% of respondents listed social media as one of the channels they used, while North American students are most likely to use online reviews as an information channel, 17.72%.

No major differences can be seen when comparing students education level and their usage of information channels. Those who have chosen the option "Short courses/summer school/preparation course" as their most recent education level are use social media more than university websites. Also high school student tend to use social media as little over 20% of highschool students ranked this as one of their primary information channels.

Compared to all responses the respondents with a highflier index above 60 tend to use online reviews, education fairs and visiting universities more than the other respondents, yet the three most used channels are still the same. Education fairs are a popular channel among highfliers from South America, as is social media. For PhD students family and friends is an important information channel. Furthermore, high school student are the ones who used educational consultants/agents.

**What kind of Search Words did you use?**

Of the respondents who used search engines 50% used search words that fit one of the categories *Study a specific degree* or *Study a specific degree in a specific country*. The third most used search word type is *Ranking related search words*, e.g Best university to study Management, about 14% used these types of search words. Many students also search for scholarships, 11.86%, or to study in a specific country, 11.86%. About 8% of the respondents did not remember what kind of search words they used. Figure 34 illustrates the search words used by the respondents.

North American students use ranking related search words more than other continents, as 29.11% used this type of search word. Moreover, "study a specific degree" and "study a specific degree in a specific country" are the most frequently used search words types among continents as well. Scholarship related search words are the most popular among African students.

One significant difference on an educational level is that high school students are very likely to search for scholarship related search words, around 30% of high school students used these kind of search words. Bachelor students are also likely to use scholarship related search words as around 15% of them used this kind of search words.

The highflier respondents favor ranking related search words, as around 15% of them used those kind of search words. "Study a specific degree" and "study a specific degree in a specific country" are still the most common types of search words. North American highfliers used "study a specific degree" the most, but
after that ranking related search words and "study a specific degree in a specific country" reach the same share. African students used ranking related search words the most, compared to other continents. As mentioned earlier, the most common type of search word type for high school students was ranking related search words, which almost 40% used. Furthermore, scholarship related search words were also popular as around 30% used this search word type.

What information areas are the most important for you when searching for a degree programme?

The most important information that the respondents need is the tuition and cost of living, Application requirements and Financial aid opportunities. These three areas were all chosen to be one of the top three information needs by 63.84%, 58.31% and 45.47% of respondents respectively. Furthermore, 31.27% of respondents choose Programme content/course offering as one of the most important areas, while 24.63% and 23.26% of respondents choose Reputation of school and Career prospects after graduation as the most important information
areas. The least important area is *student services (campus safety and student life)* as only 5.60% of respondent ranked it as the most important information area.

The main differences on a continent level is that among European and North American students "program content/course offering" is among the top three most wanted information areas. Furthermore, North American and South American students are the ones who care the most about the reputation of the university, as 35.44% and 41.67% listed this area as important.

The information need of different educational levels do not vary greatly. PhD students are the most interested in the reputation of the university, while high school students are the ones who are most interested in career prospects after graduation.

Tuition and cost of living as well as application requirements are the two most important information areas also for the highfliers. However, highfliers rank program content slightly above financial aid opportunities. The school’s reputation is considered important by 26.59% of the highfliers and 19.05% consider career prospects after graduation as important. European student find the program content as the third most important information. South American students rank the school’s reputation as the second most important information. North American students are the ones who care the most about career prospects after graduation. Asian students also rank the reputation of the school relatively high. Moreover, Bachelor students are quite interested in the program content, as is the Master students. Furthermore, Master students also care for the reputation of the school. While PhD students are the ones who care the most for career prospects after graduation.
5 Analysis and discussion

This section will present an analysis and discussion of the results presented in the previous section as well as a correlation between the results and the findings in the literature review. Moreover, this section also includes a discussion about the methods used in this study.

5.1 Highflier search behavior

To begin with, the results from both the Google Analytics analysis as well as the surveys show that most students use Search Engines, primarily Google, when searching for education abroad. Most users seemingly prefer organic search results over the paid search results, indicating that students prefer results that receive a high ranking from the search engine and therefore should be more relevant to them. Moreover, also Choudaha and Chang (2013) found that web search is one of the most frequently used sources for highfliers to use when searching for education abroad. However, based on the results from the surveys in this study and the study by Choudaha and Chang university websites are the most popular source to use and the most dominating source. One major reason for this is of course that users cannot apply for a degree programme through StudyPortals, so they have to go to the university page at some point in order to apply for a programme at that university. Moreover, many users indicate that they use StudyPortals when searching for education abroad, which is not surprising as the survey was sent out to users registered with StudyPortals, as well as most respondents were offered the incentive and that can result in a bias in favor of StudyPortals. On the other hand, taking into consideration that the overall bounce rate for many types of pages is relatively high as well as the average amount of pages visited per session and the average session duration are relatively low it would not have been surprising if a large amount of respondents would have said they do not use StudyPortals, this will be further discussed in the next section. As found by Choudaha and Chang (2013) highfliers value the input from online reviews more compared to others, however in this study online reviews where not as highly ranked among respondents.

Furthermore, the channels are not the only way to tell how students search for education abroad the tools they use to store information also matters. As learned through one of the older surveys by StudyPortals that many students store the information they find through various tools such as Word documents, Excel files or through Evernote. As students seemingly arrange and store information through various tools mean they put in an extra effort to write down the information that they have gathered so that they later can compare universities and programmes. StudyPortals have two feature called "Wishlist" and Comparison tool. With the first tool students can add programmes that they are interested in to the wishlist, so that they will not loose track of them. This tool makes it easy for students to keep track of what programmes are interesting for them. The second tool, the comparison fuction, help students compare and
eliminate programmes not suitable for them, while the suitable programmes can be added to the wishlist. Based on rough estimations, roughly 75% of highfliers who visit the account page click on the wishlist button, compared to only 60% of All Users. These two figures are based on the amount of events (clicks) on the wishlist button divided by the amount of unique pages views on the account page, a more accurate number is not possible to obtain so this figure is more of an estimation. So more highfliers visit the wishlist page and consequently show more interest towards using the tool for storing programmes. Many of the respondents in the survey about selecting higher education also indicated that they would be interested in using an online tool for comparing and organising study programmes.

As found in the survey conducted for this study, a majority of users used keywords related to studying a specific degree or study a specific degree in a specific country. These types of keywords are broad, and the more words added to the search term the more exact it is becoming, such as ”Study master in industrial engineering and management at KTH” is a very exact search term while ”study in Sweden” is a more broad search term. The more exact a search term is the more it entail that students know what they would like to study and where exactly, however in some cases the where is not fixed, which means that there is an need for a student to find out where he or she can study the desired degree and compare studies if needed. This can also be seen in the word cloud created of keywords, which contains many words connected to specific studies, degrees and countries. Furthermore, as found in the studies by WES highfliers care about ranking of universities and also in the findings from this study it can be seen that the respondents also care about how prestigious a university is, which is also according to the definition of a highflier as the person is ambitious and consequently is striving to study at a highly ranked university.

The fact that students search for these types of search words can also be seen in the landing pages that they frequently land on. Many of the article pages that highfliers land on are connected to different studies such as ”top 10 reasons to study medicine” or ”what should I study to become a fashion designer?”. On top of this, the second most common landing page type is the study options pages, as an example of a page ”study psychology in the United Kingdom”. These study option pages are almost identical to the types of search words that visitors are using. This would indicate that visitors landing on study option pages have are there to gather information about how a certain programme looks in a specific country, where are visitors landing frequently on articles are searching for why they should study a specific degree or in a specific country. Moreover, although many articles focus on why students should study a certain degree and what you can become if you study a certain programme, many articles provide general information as they focus on explaining how the credit system works in Europe/USA, how to write a successful motivation letter and what universities in some countries have no tuition fee.
As found in both previous surveys done by StudyPortals and the survey done for this study, many of the important aspects listed by users are related to costs such as cost of living and tuition fees. Although this result differ quite a lot from the outcomes done by WES as there costs were not as highly ranked by highfliers as in this case. One reason for this could be that many of the respondents to StudyPortals' surveys are not as strong highfliers as those classified by WES. Another reason could be that even though highfliers have access to the financial means to study abroad they still care about costs of studying abroad in the sense of knowing what to expect rather than it being a hinderen to study abroad. Moreover, after cost related aspects the respondents ranked application requirements, programme content, university ranking and career prospects, which is more similar to what the studies conducted by WES found for highfliers. Overall the information needs listed by the highfliers in the studies done for this thesis resemble more the information needs of Strivers, those with high academic preparndness and low financial means. The Strivers rank cost aspects and financial aid opportunities higher than highfliers, so as mentioned earlier the respondents of StudyPortals surveys' might not be as strong highfliers as those identified by WES. While Banov et al. (2017) found that the Generation Z is more interested in the cultural aspects of studying abroad, this trend is not as visible in the results of this study. In the survey conducted for this study and the previous studies done by StudyPortals, cultural aspects have had a lower ranking among respondents.

As mentioned by (Hsieh-Yee, 2001), the main challenge with analysis search behavior is to obtain a representative sample as the population is continiously growing and changing. As also seen in the responses of this study compared to the studies by WES the answers differs and it could be that the population has changed since those surveys were done. Moreover, as already mentioned, Generation Z seem to have a stronger focus on the cultural aspect of studying abroad, which means that highfliers from this generation might be different from the highfliers from the Millenial generation.

By summarising all this information a profile can be made using the 5P model presented in the literature review. Based on the most common search words used by the highfliers "study specific degree in a specific country" such as "study master in supply chain management in Germany" and the other data from the results section we get the following profile:

1. **Person:** Between the age of 18-28, from high or middle income countries such as US or UK, any gender.
2. **Place:** Germany
3. **Priority:** Within 4 to 12 months.
4. **Product:** Master degree
5. **Purchase:** Online purchase.
The priority entails the length of the purchasing journey and therefore how long a visitor would use StudyPortals as a tool to find studies abroad. As most of the registered users wish to start studying abroad within 4 to 12 months it provides a window to engage with the visitors and much of the process is done online as applications and results are announced online. However, the key is to ensure that visitors are hooked and do not leave the website instantly, if the content is not aligned to the needs of searchers then StudyPortals will not bind the searcher for the duration of the purchase journey and an online platform with no visitors will not be successful.

5.2 Website content

As seen throughout the results from Google Analytics, many of the pages with a large share of sessions of highfliers also have a high average bounce rate and a low amount of pages visited per session as well as the average session duration is relatively short, this trend is also visible among All Users. As a result it is clear that much of the content on the pages are not enough to make visitors stay on the website and explore further. On top of this, as mentioned in the literature review, the bounce rate is taken into consideration in the SERP, which means that if the bounce rates will not decrease the StudyPortals pages will risk receiving lower rankings on the SERP. If the content is not up to date the search engine might give a lower score to a page. On the other hand, those visitors who land on the home page, Mastersportal.eu, is the main exception as these visitors tend to visit many pages, they spend a longer period of time on the website and they are less likely to leave the website after visiting one page. This means that the home page provides the relevant information and seemingly displays the next actions a visitor can take, in a way that is appealing to visitors. The article and study option pages seemingly fail to present the next steps for a visitor, which causes visitors to leave. Moreover, from the results it was also visible that visitors originating from referral pages visited more pages and spent more time on Mastersportal compared to the overall average. The bounce rate for these visitors was also lower compared to the average highfliers. One reason for this is due to the fact that many land on the home page, which as just mentioned results in a large amount of pages visited. Another impact can be that once a visitor is partly familiar with another website of StudyPortals it is easier to adjust to Mastersportals. Moreover, the Global Study Awards page result in many registrations, however it is important to keep in mind that in order to be eligible for the scholarship an applicant need to have an account with StudyPortals so many applicants create an account with StudyPortals from this page due to this. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the previous section, students are interested in scholarships and this page is therefore interesting for visitors. On the other hand, in the data for this page it can be seen that many tend to leave the website after visiting it as the bounce rate is above average for highfliers. The page displays actions to take for those who are in the stage to apply for a scholarship, as there are several apply buttons, however there is no clear action to take for those who have not yet applied for a study programme abroad.
Furthermore, as a large share of the visitors are first time visitors it is evident that the website is struggling to retain visitors as many seemingly do not return to the website. Moreover, visitors who have registered receive emails with articles, information about certain study programmes or tools such as the Wishlist, these email contain several links to the website but as seen in the results also the bounce rate of those originating from emails and direct is high. On top of that, the share Consequently, a user receives a trigger to return to the page but the content is seemingly not interesting enough for them to use the website and this can result in few visitors returning due to bad experiences in the past. Providing the triggers is not challenging, however finding the right trigger to get the user to take the wanted action so that the user receive the reward he/she wants is more challenging but this is how a user becomes hooked to a service. Many online services today have successfully made its visitors "addicted" to their services, such as the social media channels Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. For millions of people around the world browsing Facebook is a daily habit. These channels have in common that the content is generated by users, but they continously find new ways to make users come back and that is why they have become so successful. Currently, StudyPortals is missing this hook effect that will ensure that users keep coming back by themselves and remain loyal. When StudyPortals created Mastersportal back in 2007 there was a need to find information about Masterprogrammes abroad, but user behavior and needs change and now it is not enough to be a library for studies abroad, there needs to be complimenting services that are more value adding for students in order to ensure that students will return and remain loyal. An example of when users are triggered to take action is when StudyPortals investigates if students enrolled at a university abroad. Through frequent surveys offering students a gift if they enrolled at a university, that is a partner of StudyPortals, the company are able to track how many students they have helped. In this case the students go through a cycle, as they first received a trigger (email) with a clear action to take (tell StudyPortals where you started studying), with the reward at the end (a gift) and as a result the students make the investment to go through the process to receive the gift. In this case there is an clear benefit for the student to take action and in the end it brings value for StudyPortals as the enrolment information is crucial for them. Also in the two surveys for this study it is clear that when students have see a clear benefit they act and respond.

In order to get users more hooked to StudyPortals the Hook model by Eyal can be used. At the moment StudyPortals mainly use so called owned triggers through email newsletters and some paid triggers through SEM and social media channels. Through sponsored posts on Facebook the company can also receive relationship triggers through likes on a post or a post is shared. However, as mentioned by Eyal external triggers are not enough as the aim is to have users move through the cycle several times and in the end a user will an internal trigger to visit StudyPortals. However, the challenge for StudyPortals to create such a hook tool is that the time between purchases is long. Someone might visit
Bachelorportals and find a degree programme but then the person might not need to search for a programme or course again for at least two or three years. Then if someone found a Master through StudyPortals it is likely that they will not search for another education again, so a particular individual might only be a potential customer on at least two occasions. It can be that a user search for a short course, a language course or an online course through StudyPortals however compared to big social media sites the amount of purchases are limited. So there are only a few occasions when an individual will have the need to use a study choice platform. As a result, the cycle will need to be repeat several times during the time frame when a student is searching for a degree programme, which is usually between four and twelve months. In order for these cycles to take place there needs to be more value adding services that makes them go back to the site. The Wishlist is currently a tool to keep track of the programmes one is interested in but it has the potential to be something more. This tool could be more value adding if the content of the Wishlist would be used to send customized information to students about changes in application requirements, upcoming deadlines, relevant articles and fitting scholarships. It would be a step away from mass communication and step towards customized communication fitting each user. Currently, users who unsubscribe from StudyPortals emails feel it is too much spam so by adapting the communication to match the current location in the application process for each user this problem can be addressed as well to ensure satisfied students. By adding services that make every step easier from the moment you start the application process to the moment you graduate StudyPortals prolongs the relationship with students and remain in their mind for the future.

Lastly, if in the end an individual has graduated from a Master, and is not planning to study further, the individual should be a StudyPortals promoter. So when the individual hear the words Study Abroad (or something similar) there should be an internal trigger that makes them think of StudyPortals and then make a recommendation to use StudyPortals. This way the individual have recommended StudyPortals to someone else who consequently encounter an external trigger to visit StudyPortals. For every satisfied student who found their education thanks to StudyPortals is a potential promoter who can act as a relationship trigger for other individuals who are searching for their education abroad. This can only be acheived if the student had a positive experience and felt StudyPortals provided enough value that it made the student connect with the brand.

5.3 Discussion about methods used
The primary methods of this study have been focused on quantitative analysis of data. The analysis of data from Google Analytics comes with limitations as at the moment StudyPortals does not have a premium account, which means that the data visible is based on samples that represent between one to five percent of all data. As a result, the data is not 100% accurate as it is based on estimations.
Moreover, absolute numbers, such as number of sessions, are based on these estimations and these numbers are not the most trusted within StudyPortals, which is why many absolute numbers have not been used during the analysis as they are highly uncertain. Furthermore, not having access to the precise data makes it challenging in general for a company to conduct good and reliable analysis of a website's actual performance. Although the segment created to represent high-flyers in Google Analytics is based on several parameters with data from various sources to ensure validity, the segment is mainly representative toward western countries or developed countries. Not everyone who is from one of the selected countries is a high-flier and there will be countries that are not listed but there will be existing high-flyers from these countries. The data used to create the segment is available online and the sources are mentioned in this study, which makes it possible to recreate the segment and therefore contributes to a higher validity.

The creation of the survey was based much on the experience from StudyPortals. As they frequently conduct surveys among students they know how to formulate certain questions and what sort of follow-up questions to use. Moreover, many of the questions were based on previous work done by WES these questions were a good source of inspiration for how to conduct a profiling analysis through a survey. As mentioned in chapter 2 using an incentive for surveys can contribute to a decrease in quality, although there are studies who have not made this conclusion. However, for this survey the incentive did contribute to increasing the response rate and the unique amount of clicks were much lower for those who did not receive the incentive, 523 and 722 respectively in the first batch, and resulted in twice as many responses, which is why for the second batch all users received the incentive. As the questions in the surveys and the figures analysed in Google Analytics related to the research questions the validity can be considered high. Although if a qualitative analysis about the search behavior of high-flyers had been conducted the validity could increased unfortunately for this study the focus remained on the quantitative data but for future studies a qualitative approach could be interesting to confirm the findings of this study.

The method for developing the high-flyer index was based on common profiling measurements, and in order to determine the value for important parameters several factors played a part so that the value of the parameter would be representative. The academic preparedness and financial resources are important parameters in calculating the high-flyer index, which is why several measurements were used in order to have a more representative value for these two parameters. Using multiple sources does also increase validity, which is why this approach was chosen. Determining the weights of the different parameters was done in a simple manner as for this thesis the aim was to investigate how to track if more high-flyers are registering with StudyPortals.
6 Conclusion

This section presents a conclusion of the results of this study and the answers to the formulated research questions. Moreover, it concludes on the limitations of this study as well as proposals for future studies.

6.1 Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the online search behaviour of a highflier seeking a degree abroad?

Although the results from this study differs from the previous studies about highfliers there are some new findings in regards to how highfliers search for education online. When searching for a degree programme abroad highfliers start doing so between four to twelve months before the start of their new study. Their primary channel for seeking information is search engines and university websites. A large share also use StudyPortals or similar providers such as education consultants. Furthermore, highfliers know what type of degree they are searching for and in many cases they are also aware of where they would like to study. Consequently when they do a search query they search for a specific degree and a specific country. The results also show that highfliers use ranking related search words as they are striving to study at the best university. The information that matters the most for a highflier is the application requirements, programme content, the ranking of the university and costs of living.

Research Question 2: What actions does StudyPortals need to take in order to improve online targeting of highfliers?

Firstly, the sub research question will be answered.

Sub-Research Question: How can StudyPortal track the intake of new highfliers?

Tracking the intake of highfliers can be done on two levels. The first level is by continuing to use the created highflier segment on Google Analytics and the second level is by continuing to survey the database. If the company were to have the premium version of Google Analytics the provided data about the highflier segment would provide the accurate overview of how many of highfliers are visiting Mastersportal. Furthermore, continuously surveying the database will lead to a higher coverage and consequently a better overview of how many potential highfliers there are in the database. The respondents for this study seem to have more connections with the striver segment, if strivers represent a large share of StudyPortals’ users then it can be interesting to consider.

There is already a high traffic from potential highfliers landing on StudyPortals, however the challenge is to make sure that they return. As seen in the results from Google Analytics, there needs to be more work done to improve the content of the website to decrease the bounce rates and consequently increase session duration and the amount of pages visited. The highflier segment show interest in the article pages and these are common landing pages so further
investigations to why the articles are not performing well. The same recommendation applies to the Global Study Award as it is a valuable service and to generate more conversions. Furthermore, in order to fully retain users and to ensure that they will keep on coming back StudyPortals needs create more value for students beyond listing studies. By moving towards more customized communication that includes more clear value/benefits for students the incentive to visit one of StudyPortals websites will increase. It is clear that in the situations when a clear benefit has been presented to users, they react and take more actions, and consequently create more value back for StudyPortals. Targeting users with the relevant and customized information depending on what stage of the application process they are, what university and programme they are interested in, whether it is a Bachelor or Master etc. will bring users more value and give them more reason to come back to the website and increase the conversion and goal value, which currently is not very high for highfliers.

6.2 Limitations

Due to fact that the study is primarily based on quantitative data, there are limitation to this research. The fact that the response rate of the online survey was low can affect the generalizability of the study, especially in terms of the distribution of highfliers in the database. The fact that the data analysed from Google Analytics is based on a small sample there could be the case that the actual data differs significantly and that access to this data would have yielded different results. Several

6.3 Future Research

As this study about the search behavior of highfliers have focused on quantitative data that did not go into deepth about the behavior of a highflier, which is possible through a qualitative study. Therefore a study focusing only on the search behavior of students with a qualitative approach would be an interesting research area. Furthermore, as seen in this study users seem to react to incentives and therefore further studies regarding how users react to incentives and if incentives lead to more actions from users.
References


83


Appendices

Appendix 1: Surveys

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Tell us more about you!

Introduction

Tell us a bit about you!

At StudyPortals we continuously strive to improve and develop our services to users. To do so, we would like to find out more about our users. This survey contains questions such as who you as a person, what academic background do you have and your future aspirations. We hope that you can spare a few minutes of your time and answer this survey.

Your answers will help StudyPortals improve our services to students and help more students around the world reach their goal to study abroad!

General

1. Did you already start studying at university (eg a bachelor/ masters’ degree) abroad?
   - Yes, I started studying abroad
   - No, I am still in High School
   - No, I am studying in my home country
   - I am currently not a student
   - Other - Write In
2. What is your most recent obtained degree level?
   - High School
   - Bachelor/Undergraduate
   - Master/Postgraduate
   - PhD/Doctorate

3. Your current level of study:
   - Bachelor / undergraduate
   - Master / postgraduate
   - PhD / doctorate
   - Short course / summer school / preparation Course
   - Other

4. At what university are you currently enrolled?
5. When did you start studying? *

6. Are you currently searching for your next education programme abroad? *
   - Yes, I am still deciding where to apply
   - Yes, I will apply soon
   - Yes, I applied and I am waiting for results
   - Yes, I applied and got accepted
   - No, I am not searching for my next education programme at this moment
   - No, I am searching for an education programme in my home country

7. What university have you applied for? *
8. What university will you apply for? *

9. When will you start studying?

Profile

10. Are you currently employed? *
    - Yes, I have a full-time job/internship
    - Yes, I have a part-time job/internship
    - No
11. Have you done any other extra curricular activities next to your studies? *

☐ Course/Research Assistant at university
☐ Having my own company
☐ Internship
☐ Involvement in student associations (ESN, AEGEE, AIESEC, IAESTE)
☐ No
☐ Other - Write In (Required)

Max. answers = 3 (if answered)

12. How do you finance your current studies? *

☐ Personal savings
☐ Family/Friends support me financially
☐ I work extra in order to pay for my studies
☐ The government from my country provides financial aid to student (loans, grants, etc.)
☐ I have a scholarship/grant
☐ I take a loan (not from the government)
☐ I receive financial aid from my university
13. **How would you finance your studies abroad?** *

*Please only choose the options that you know with certainty are true.*

- Personal savings
- My family/Friends will support me financially
- I will work extra during my studies abroad
- The government from my country provides financial aid to student (loans, grants, etc.)
- I expect to receive a scholarship or grant
- I expect to take a loan (not from the government)
- I expect to receive financial aid from the university

14. **Have you already taken a language proficiency test or course?** *

- Yes for English (ELS, IELTS, TOEFL, CAE, CPE, or equivalent)
- No I still need to take a language test
- No, I do not need a language proficiency test for the country where I wish to study
- No, and I am not planning to take an English test
15. I expect that my English skills will be as good as fellow students at my future college/university abroad. *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

16. With the exception of language tests, do you need to take any other admissions test(s)? *

- Yes, I have already taken the test
- Yes, but I have not yet taken the test
- I do not know if I need an admissions test
- No, I do not need to take an admissions test
17. **What type of admissions test have you taken?** *

- National assessment test
- Subject specific test (such as for Medicine, Law, GMAT, etc.)
- University specific test (entrance exams)
- Other - Write In

18. **I feel academically prepared to enter a college/university abroad** *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Decision making
19. Which primary information channels do you use when searching for a degree programme? *

Note: you can only choose three. So choose the three that matters the most to you.

- [ ] University website
- [ ] StudyPortals
- [ ] Search Engines (Google, Yahoo etc.)
- [ ] Educational Consultant/Agents
- [ ] Education fair
- [ ] Social Media
- [ ] Family and friends
- [ ] Online Forums where users share their experience from universities
- [ ] Physically visiting the university to talk to students and teachers
20. What kind of search words did you use? *

- I do not remember
- Other - Write In

- Ranking related search words (e.g. "Best university to study Management")
- Scholarship related search words
- Study a specific degree
- Study a specific degree in a specific country
- Study in a specific country

21. Here you can provide the search words you used if you remember
22. Please select and rank up to three areas of information you seek when applying to colleges/universities abroad *

- Application Requirements
- Tuition and cost of living
- Financial aid opportunities
- Reputation of school
- Career prospects after graduation
- Program content/course offering
- Program structure
- Student services (campus safety, student life etc.)
- Faculty research and expertise
- Location

Final Information

23. Where are you from?  *

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Andorra
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Bahamas, The
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Barbados
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Bhutan
Bolivia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Canada
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Chile
China
Colombia
Comoros
Congo, Democratic Republic of the
Congo, Republic of the
Costa Rica
Cote d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Curacao
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Djibouti
Dominica
Dominican Republic
East Timor (see Timor-Leste)
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea
Estonia
Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Andorra
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Bahamas, The
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Bhutan
Bolivia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Canada
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Chile
China
Colombia
Comoros
Congo, Democratic Republic of the
Congo, Republic of the
Costa Rica
cote d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Curacao
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Djibouti
Dominica
Dominican Republic
East Timor (see Timor-Leste)
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea
Estonia
Ethiopia
Fiji
Finland
France
Gabon
Gambia, The
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Guyana
Haiti
Holy See
Honduras
Hong Kong
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Kiribati
Kosovo
Kuwait
Kyrgyzstan
Laos
Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Libya
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Macau
Macedonia
Madagascar
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mali
Malta
Marshall Islands
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico
Micronesia
Moldova
Monaco
Mongolia
Montenegro
Morocco
Mozambique
Myanmar
Namibia
Nauru
Nepal
Netherlands
Netherlands Antilles
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria
North Korea
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Palau
Palestinian Territories
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Samoa
San Marino
Sao Tome and Principe
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Serbia
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
South Korea
South Sudan
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Suriname
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Syria
Taiwan
Tajikistan
Tanzania
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24. How old are you? *

Max = 100 Must be numeric Whole numbers only Positive numbers only

Thank You!
Thanks a lot! Your input adds to our efforts to improve international education and help students worldwide!

If you are still searching for your dream studies abroad please visit our website and begin your search today!

As a thank you for filling out our survey, you have the opportunity to win a 50£ Amazon voucher! If you are the lucky winner you will be contacted later on.
We continuously strive to improve our services and one way to do so is by figuring out how our visitors found us.

1. **Where are you from?** *

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2. How did you find us?

- Search Engine - Google, Yahoo
- Facebook
- Article/Website mentioned StudyPortals
- League of Students Website
- Instagram
- Other - Write In

*
3. **What search words did you use?** *

- Study a specific degree (e.g. study master in business)
- Study in a specific country (e.g. study in The Netherlands)
- Study a specific degree in a specific country (e.g. study master in business in the Netherlands)
- Ranking related search words (e.g. "Best university to study Business")
- I don't remember
- **Other - Write In (Required)**

4. **What kind of ranking question did you search for?**

- Best university to study a specific degree (e.g. Supply Chain, Engineering)
- Best student cities
- Best countries for hiking/walking in nature
- Countries/cities with the best nightlife
- **Other - Write In (Required)**
5. Here you can provide search words you used

6. How did you find us on Facebook/Instagram? *
   - Sponsored post
   - StudyPortals official FaceBook/Instagram page
   - Hashtag
   - A friend shared/liked/commented on a StudyPortals post

7. What hashtag was it?
8. What was the name of the article/website?

Thank You!

Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us. To find your dream study please visit our website and begin your search!
Appendix 2: Figures

**Figure 35:** Average Bounce Rate by country

**Figure 36:** Average amount of pages visited per session by country
Figure 37: Average session duration by country

Figure 38: Share of sessions by age
Figure 39: Share of sessions by devices used

Figure 40: Share of sessions by Affinity Category
Figure 41: Share of sessions by In-market segment

Figure 42: Share of sessions by Other Categories
Figure 43: Share of sessions for highfliers since January 2015 until April 2017 on a daily basis

Figure 44: Share of sessions by Channel
Figure 45: Average Bounce Rate by Channel

Figure 46: Average amount of pages visited per session by Channel
Figure 47: Average session duration by Channel

Figure 48: Average amount of pages visited per session by Medium
Figure 49: Average session duration by Medium

Figure 50: Average pages visited per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors originating from Google
Figure 51: Average time spent per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors originating from Google

Figure 52: Average Bounce Rate since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors originating from Direct entry
Figure 53: Average time spent per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors originating from Direct entry

Figure 54: Average Bounce Rate since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors originating from Referrals
Figure 55: Average pages visited per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors originating from Referrals

Figure 56: Average time spent per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors originating from Referrals
Figure 57: Bounce Rate by landing page types

Figure 58: Average session duration by landing page type
Figure 59: Bounce Rate by landing page types per mediums

Figure 60: Average amount of pages visited per session by landing page types
Figure 61: Average session duration by landing page types

Figure 62: Share of sessions by landing page types per gender
Figure 63: Bounce Rate by landing page types per gender

Figure 64: Average amount of pages visited per session by landing page types

Figure 65: Average session duration by landing page types
Figure 66: Share of sessions by landing page types per country

Figure 67: Bounce Rate by landing page types per country

Figure 68: Average amount of pages visited per session by landing page types per mediums
Figure 69: Average session duration by landing page types per mediums

Figure 70: Average Bounce Rate since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on the Global Study Awards page

Figure 71: Average pages visited per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on the Global Study Awards page
Figure 72: Average time spent per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on the Global Study Awards page.

Figure 73: Average pages visited per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on Article landing pages.
Figure 74: Average time spent per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on Article landing pages

Figure 75: Average Bounce Rate since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on the home page
Figure 76: Average pages visited per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on the home page.

Figure 77: Average time spent per session since January 2015 until April 2017 for visitors landing on the home page.