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# Developing a social media communication plan: a case study of the Quicker Steps project

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Developing a social media communication plan:  
a case study of the Quicker Steps project

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Social media is accepted as an effective communications and promotion tool. Social media tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogging and podcasting are leveraged by different organizations for creating profiles, establishing communication, interaction and launching promotional activities. However, promoters might encounter certain challenges in targeting potential audiences and maintaining interest and the interaction of the audience in their social media profiles.

The Quicker Steps project is a project with the purpose of disseminating knowledge and best practices of the diverse cooperation and partnership solutions between higher education institutions and working life in Finland, Luxembourg, Austria and the United Kingdom in order to develop opportunities for students to become more quickly employed after higher education. The promoting team of the Quicker Steps project uses Facebook and LinkedIn for communicating and promoting the current issues of the Quicker Steps project. The purpose of this thesis is to identify effective communication and content approaches, with a Finnish perspective, and to develop a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project.

The theoretical section includes theories of communication and social media as well as a discussion of the elements of a social media communication plan. The empirical research method was quantitative, with data acquired through a questionnaire, which was designed with precise, multiple response and open-ended questions.

The research results indicate that the Quicker Steps project has achieved a certain level of audience awareness and familiarity. However, the audience suggests that in order to increase audience awareness and interest, it would be desirable to create more effective methods of communication and approaches to content formation as well as developing a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project.

Key words: Social media, communication plan, effective communication and content approaches, conversation

Ahdia Nazari

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Sosiaalinen media pidetään tehokkaana viestintä- ja promotointivälineenä. Sosiaalisen median välineet kuten Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, bloggaaminen ja podcastointi hyödynnetään eri organisaatioiden voimin luodaakseen profiileja, käynnistääkseen kommunikaatiota ja vuorovaikutusta sekä lanseerakseen promotoimistoimia. Tietyt haasteet ovat kuitenkin välttämättömiä organisaatioille kohdentaessaan yleisöä ja ylläpitäessään yleisön kiinnostusta ja vuorovaikutusta heidän sosiaalisen median sivustoillaan.

Quicker Steps-projekti on kysymys työelämäyhteistyökäytäntöjen levittämisestä. Projektin tarkoituksena on levittää hyviä käytänteitä ja tietoa toimintatavoista, joilla edistetään nuorten nopeampaa siirtymistä korkeakoulutuksesta työelämään. Projektin ideonissa ja suunnittelussa ovat eri korkeakouluiden ja työelämän edustajat Suomesta, Itävalasta, Luxemburgista ja Isosta Britannista. Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoitus on tutkia tehokkaat viestinnän ja sisällön lähestymistavat Suomen näkökulmasta ja kehittää sosiaalinen media viestintäsuunnitelmaa joilla voitaisiin saada Quicker Steps projektin kohderyhmä kiinnostumaan ja motivoitumaan Quicker Steps projektista sosiaalisessa mediassa.

Teoreettinen osuus koostuu tärkeimmistä viestinnän ja sosiaalisen median teorioista sekä sosiaalisen median viestintäsuunnitelman elementeistä. Empiirinen tutkimus osuus toisaalta tehtiin kvantitatiivisena tutkimuksena tutkimuskyselyn muodossa jossa kysymykset olivat sekä tarkkoja, monitulkintaisia että vapaamuotoisia.

Tulokset osoittavat, että Quicker Steps projekti on saavuttanut tietyn tason tietoisuutta ja tunnettavuutta. Quicker Steps projektin kohderyhmän mukaan on kuitenkin luotava sekä tehokkaita viestinnän ja sisällön lähestymistapoja että sosiaalisen median viestintäsuunnitelmaa, jotta kohderyhmän tunnettavuus-, ja kiinnostuksen tason nousu olisi mahdollinen.

Avainsanat: Sosiaalinen media, viestintäsuunnitelma, tehokkaat kommunikaatio ja sisältö lähestymistavat, keskustelu

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Introducing the thesis

The emergence of social media websites facilitates communication and interaction with large numbers of people. The unique communication and promotional possibilities of social media are being leveraged by different organizations which enable conducting of direct conversations with the potential audience which is in contrast to the traditional communications of high degree presence of organization's direct control. The services of social media are democratizing communications and interaction, thus generating more interest and popularity in the use of social media websites for communication, dissemination of information and promotional purposes (Scott 2009, 230-231).

However, social media is a large media consisting of different promotional profiles in which unplanned targeting of the audience and non-strategic communication with them might be both time-consuming and distractive. Identifying and perceiving the sources of motivation and interest of the target audience are essential in developing connections with the audience and becoming interactive with them. Therefore, organizations need to focus more on developing attractive pages as well as interesting and valuable contents to gain and maintain interest and interaction of their audience on their profiles. Nevertheless, the primary question of the thesis is to investigate effective social media communication, content and promotional approaches under a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project to manage more efficient leverage of social media profiles and obtain differentiated social media profiles (Evans 2010, 16).

### 1.2 Introduction to the case study

The Quicker Steps project is a project with the purpose of disseminating knowledge and best practices of the diverse cooperation and partnership solutions between higher education institutions and working life in Finland, Luxembourg, Austria and the United Kingdom in order to develop students' possibilities to quicker become employed from higher education, nevertheless the focus of the thesis research will be limited to the Quicker Steps project in Finland. Considering the significant popularity of social media websites for communication and promotional purposes in Finland, the promoting team of the Quicker Steps project is also using the social media websites of Facebook and LinkedIn for communicating and promoting the purpose and current issues of the Quicker Steps project. The promoting team of the Quicker Steps project has managed to increase audience awareness of the project via Facebook and LinkedIn (The Quicker Steps project website).

However, certain challenges in acquiring more audience awareness of the Quicker Steps project, increasing interest and conversation of the audience in Facebook and LinkedIn regarding the purpose of the Quicker Steps project are coped with. In order for the Quicker Steps project to become differentiated and interesting for the audience on social media, there is a need for developing more attractive, interactive and valuable communication and content approaches.

### 1.3 Purpose of the thesis

The objective of this thesis is to investigate possible social media communication and content approaches to develop a social media communication plan for achieving audience awareness and promoting audience engagement in conversations regarding the purpose of the Quicker Steps project which is the case study of this thesis research. Furthermore, the theoretical section includes propositions regarding communication theory, social media websites and elements of a social media communication plan. Nevertheless, the empirical section consists of research assessments of methods and approaches of promoting audience awareness and interest of the Quicker Steps project on Facebook and LinkedIn and increasing their engagement in conversations.

### 1.4 Research problem

As the popularity of social media websites for communication and promotional purposes extends so does the number of organizations integrating social media into their communication strategies. The social media websites of Facebook and LinkedIn are utilized to promote the purpose of the Quicker Steps project and to increase audience awareness. However, acquiring audience awareness and interest of the Quicker Steps project on Facebook and LinkedIn appear to be challenging. Therefore, there is a need for developing effective and attractive approaches of communication and interaction with the audience as well as creating valuable and interesting content for them.

The primary question of this thesis research is considered as what types of communication and content approaches are efficient in attracting the potential audience and motivating them towards participation in conversations on the Facebook and LinkedIn profiles of the Quicker Steps project. The author attempts to evaluate communication and content approaches under a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project to manage more interactive and interesting profiles in Facebook and LinkedIn.



## 1.5 Research approach

The research approach of this thesis comprises of primary and secondary sources; the primary research method is quantitative and is conducted in form of a structured online questionnaire and the secondary research is based on different literature, Internet sources and accessible study materials of the case study. The respondents of the questionnaire, who have participated in the seminar of the Quicker Steps project, constitute of teaching staff of secondary schools, universities of applied sciences and universities, associations and different working life companies. Regarding the purpose of the Quicker Steps project, the background and expertise of the respondents are considered beneficial to the value and significance of the feedback. The purpose of the research is to determine possible effective communication and content approaches to support in managing more interactive and attractive Facebook and LinkedIn profiles for the Quicker Steps project (Adams & Brace 2006, 31-33).

## 1.6 Theoretical approach

The theoretical section will consist of different literatures on communication theory, social media channels and the communication and promotional possibilities of social media websites, relevant researches on the application of social media channels for communication and promotional purposes as well as the elements of a social media communication plan.

## 1.7 Framework of the thesis

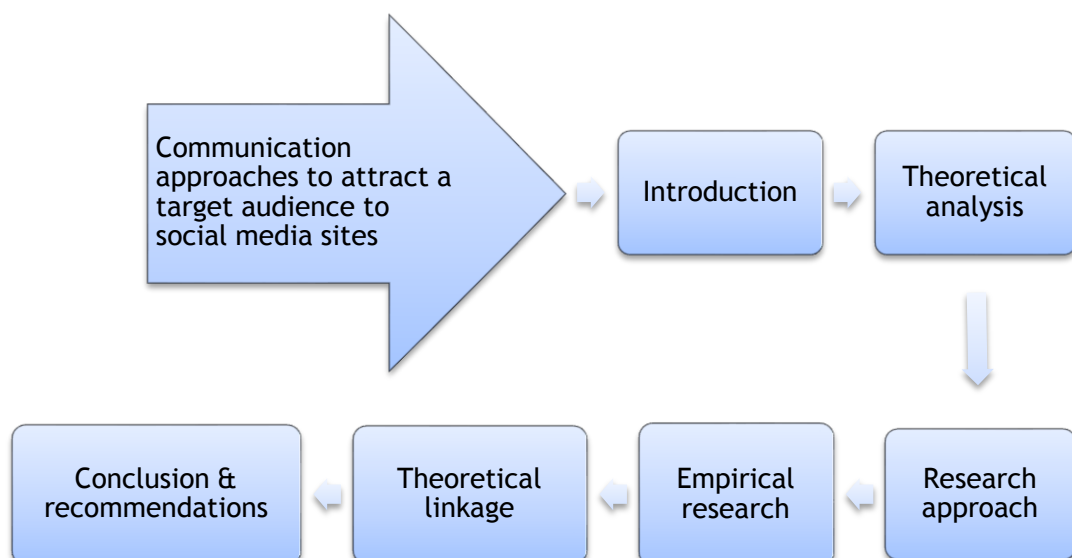


Figure 1: Framework of the thesis

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Introducing communications theory

According to Smith & Zook (2011, 120), communication is defined as the process of transmitting and exchanging of information through verbal, nonverbal and visual messages. Communication is not a unidirectional flow of information, meaning that communication is based on a reciproactive interaction between individuals in which information and intelligence are transmitted and shared. The process of delivering verbal, nonverbal and visual messages does not guarantee successful communication; the prerequisite for a functional and successful communication is receiving the message intended by the sender to be received. Messages that are rejected misinterpreted and misunderstood result in ineffective communication (Smith & Zook 2011, 120).

As people continue to reach their goals and acquire experience, communication skills become increasingly effective and valuable in achieving those goals. Good communication skills facilitate better understanding of other people and reduce the possibilities of being misunderstood. Therefore, communication is considered effective only in case the message is understood and the receiver is encouraged to act and contribute in different ways (Smith & Zook 2011, 120).

#### 2.1.1 Communication model

The communication model as shown in (Figure 2) demonstrates the factors that affect a communication process which is indicative of the fact that communication is effective if the received message is the message that is sent. A message is sent in a proper way (encoding) through a media channel to the receiver and as the message is transmitted through the noise, it reaches (decoding) the receiver. The case illustrated is ideal; according to the model the sender is assumed to be active, the receiver passive and the message is comprehended well.

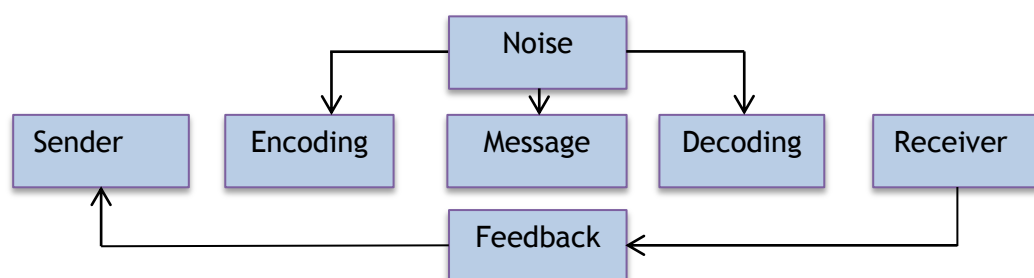


Figure 2: The communication process based on Schramm's 1955 model

A correct/incorrect decoding of a verbal, nonverbal and visual message by the audience is not guaranteed; the message might be accepted, rejected, stored and distorted through the external factors e.g. noise, poor listening and fatigue. Thus the sender monitors the development of the feedback whether the receiver is changing thoughts, expressions, behaviors and attitudes in order to be able to modify the message or the media channel approached (Smith & Zook 2011, 123-124).

There are different types of communication models in which the primary factors are distinguished as sender, message and receiver e.g. there is the one-way communication model as shown in (Figure 3) in which the sender is demonstrated as the sole communicator and the concern is assuring whether the message sent is received, thus not knowing whether the meaning conveyed through the message is shared between the sender and the receiver.

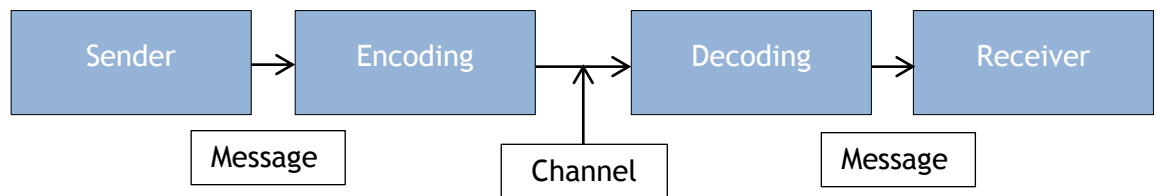


Figure 3: The one-way communication model

However, there is another communication process e.g. the two-way communication model as shown in (Figure 4) in which the role of the receiver as a communicator is also recognized through the feedback. This is considered as a simple example of interactive communication in which the sender communicates with the receiver through feedback (Communication process; Smith & Zook 2011, 123-124).

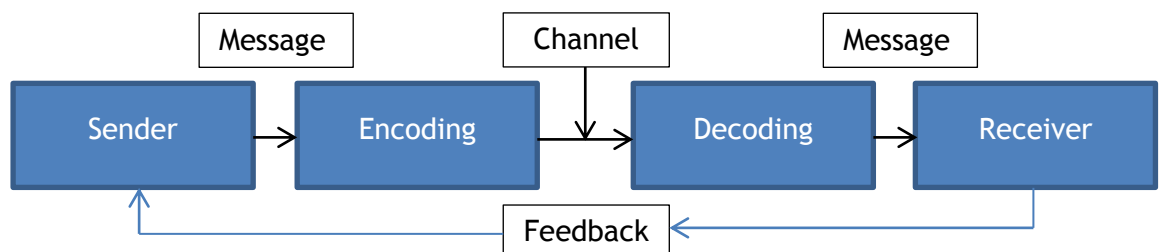


Figure 4: The two-way communication model

Different communication models are designed to meet the increasing needs and challenges of mass communication and promotion; the earlier described models are simplistic communication approaches and are not observed as alternatives for the current communication demands. In reality, communication is seen as a multi-step process in which opinion formers e.g. journalists, analysts and opinion leaders e.g. non-formal experts, advice providers who are in the position of influencing a target audience and being trusted for promoting new products, services and solutions. In a multi-directional communication, opinion leaders talk to each other, they talk to their listeners and listeners become involved with discussion groups and internet groups, leading to group influence. These interventions suggest that perception, selection, motivation, learning, attitudes and group roles affect the communication process (Smith & Zook 2011, 125-126).

Furthermore, considering the current web communication models which are centered on branding, the primary and important method of communicating with the audience is being engaged in conversations. The existence of social networking websites and the facilitation of online communities are considered ideal channels of communication and spreading information through word of mouth. Through social web communities, an audience becomes interactive and reactive to different topics that are being discussed and thus the flow of communication transforms into a web of communications between the target audience and the opinion leaders as shown in (Figure 5).

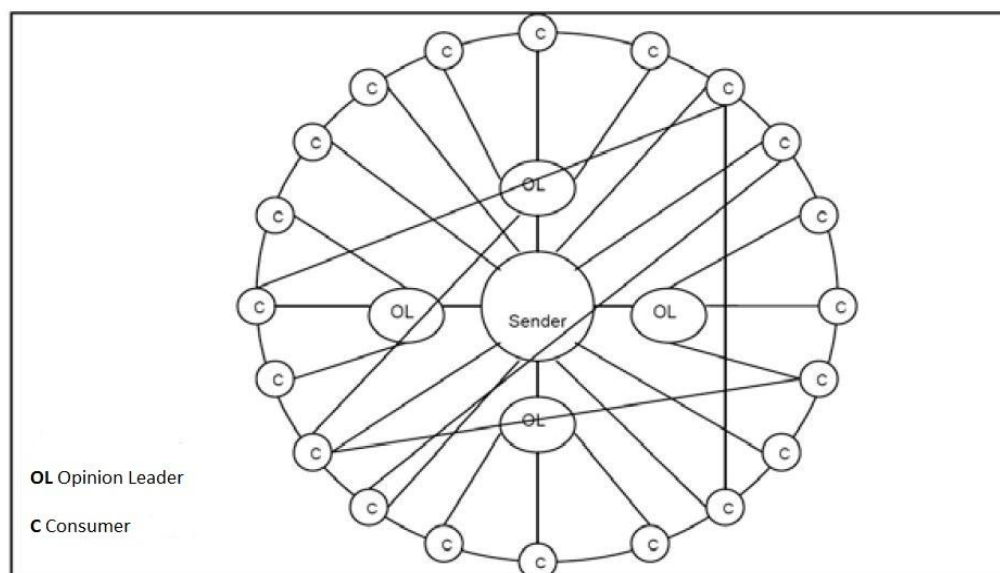


Figure 5: Advanced web communication model

Organizations facilitate conversation topics for the target audience to monitor and listen to what is being discussed, thus generating reasons to develop strong relations with the target groups. This type of advanced web communication as shown in (Figure 5) allows fast spread of information through word of mouth, as target groups become involved in conversations, creative ideas and interesting experiences are exchanged between target groups and from opinion leaders to the target audience and from opinion leaders to opinion leaders and from the organization as well. This information sharing includes both positive and negative discussions, which requires constant monitoring and observing of the organization (Smith & Zook 2011, 128).

Effective communication requires a good understanding and identifying of the target audience, their needs and expectations and the types of communication approaches and attitudes that should be applied in order for the audience to interpret and understand the signals and meanings intended.

### 2.1.2 Communication channels

Communication becomes possible by exchanging messages through a channel; therefore communication channels provide opportunities for interacting with each other and understanding the intentions, emotions and needs of each other. Communication channels exist in different forms and are referred to as traditional and new communication channels. Traditional communication channels are still popular and effective in maintaining contact with each other and transmitting information and knowledge, for instance face to face communication, telephone, team meetings and letters are considered traditional communication channels (Traditional communication channels, Leigh Richards).

The current extensive range of new communication technologies, referred to as new communication channels, are revolutionizing the process of communication, connectivity and interaction. The availability of new communication tools, websites and software are improving and managing a good quality of communication; examples of new communication channels are cited as mobile phones, the Internet, social networking websites and instant messaging. The selection process of a communication channel depends on the location, time, subject and the importance of the content being in question (Modern types of communication, Erica Starks).

## 2.2 The Internet as a communication channel

The emergence of new Internet-based communication channels has provided people with access to new communication possibilities to remain connected and interactive with each other. Internet-based communication capabilities such as websites, social media and discussion forums provide alternatives to the traditional communication media channels e.g. television, newspapers, letters, telephone, thus contributing to the diminishing use and popularity of traditional media channels. The Internet, being a pull medium, allows users the freedom of choosing and accepting the types of content that interest them. The current use of Internet-based communication channels such as social media for communication and promotion is quite significant and popular, the increasing involvement of people on social media websites is encouraging the organizations to reevaluate the benefits of these communication channels and start launching their own social media pages (Online communication; Weber 2009, 5, 33-36).

The Internet-based communication and promotion capabilities enable the audience to be a part of the discussion and contribute to it; therefore organizations are also forced to react to the user-generated content (UGC) and start monitoring those discussions. Nevertheless, the introduction of social networking technologies in their numerous forms has facilitated real-time interactions between organizations and the potential target groups, thus resulting in rapid dissemination of information and knowledge familiarity (Weber 2009, 39-40).

## 2.3 Social media websites as communication and promotion channels

According to Halligan and Shah (2010, 85), social media comprises of online websites that facilitate possibilities for launching profiles and becoming able to generate own content, referred to as user-generated content (UGC), create communities of friends, interact and share ideas, content, thoughts and relationships. Nevertheless, social media is defined as social networking and microblogging websites designed for social interaction which consist of group creation, message boards, blogs (online journals), video blogs, podcasts (distribution of multimedia files over the internet for playback), sharing pictures, videos and music, bookmarking (a link to a web site address saved electronically in a browser to facilitate quick access to the web page), instant messaging and other forms of commercial usages for marketing, public relations and customer service (Halligan & Shah 2010, 85; Scott 2010, 38-39).

Social media is a different media in terms of being designed with viral communication services for conversations, discussions, tagging, commenting and establishing connection with large audiences, which is motivating different generations to become active social media users from which are emerging opinion formers and opinion leaders. Social networking websites allow organizations a combination of a chargeable professional and non-chargeable user-generated content on their pages, that develop a balancing sense to the thoughts and comments which the dialog is afterwards continued by the user-generated content. Through social media, communication is less based on contained and controlled messages and more established on creating irresistible and democratized environments to which users are attracted (Evans 2010, 16, 26, 54; Weber 2009, 39, 40).

According to Smith & Zook (2011, 9), understanding digital communities helps organizations to improve and maintain their presence. Organizations need to understand that their target audiences have transferred from the outbound model of direct mails to the inbound model of social networking websites, thus controlling the flow of conversation and dissemination of information. Therefore, organizations are recommended to join the conversation and contribute to it rather than avoiding it and failing to communicate with the target group.

Different types of social media websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and MySpace are tailored with unique and functional features for purposes of communication and promotion, which are adding to the variability of communication media. The increasing promotional use of social networking websites indicates that social media is an ideal medium for organizations to transfer from regular websites to viral information dissemination and promotion. Nevertheless, word of mouth, even though both positive and negative, is an important characteristic of social media that might result in broad awareness of a brand, content as well as experiences which prompts the need for constant monitoring and interaction (Weber 2009, 41).

Social media is also popular in Finland, according to Helsingin Sanomat on average Finns aged 15 to 24 are spending one hour per day in the social media for communicating, interacting and enjoying their time. Nevertheless, according to statistics Finland more than 42 percent of the population aged 16 to 74 are registered into social networks and are using e.g. the services of Facebook and Twitter for personal and professional communication and connectivity. The multiple benefits of social media such as reaching large audiences are expected to encourage more Finnish organizations to integrate social media into their communication strategies with an approximate 65 percent of usage increase in near future (Sosiaalinen media vie tunnin suomalaisen päivästä, 2012; Usage of the Internet in Finland, 2010; Finland's social media landscape, 2011).

### 2.3.1 Research on commercial use of social media

According to a research based on corporate spending on digital media, a Finnish research on the subject was not available, the corporate usage of social networking websites is increasing which is supported by the fact that 80 percent of the companies plan to focus their investments on social media technologies and corporate websites. Thus, a large quantity of the investments, 69 percent, is allocated to social networks and applications, 43 percent to social media campaigns and 35 percent to blogs (Marketers increase spending on social and digital communication, 2011).

Furthermore, the research as shown in (Figure 6) indicates that an approximate 95 percent of companies and organizations have planned to apply a certain type of social networking website in their communication and marketing. Thus, in addition to a key focus on the corporate websites, the prioritized investments of companies in the social networking websites of Facebook is reaching 76 percent, Twitter 69 percent, blogs 57 percent, MySpace 5 percent and Orkut 3 percent (Marketers increase spending on social and digital communication, 2011).

*Which of the following digital media channels, if any, will you or your organization use in 2011? (select all that apply)*

Planned Investments in Digital	Brand Marketers	Agencies	Technologists/Other
Facebook	76%	96%	87%
Twitter	69%	89%	79%
Corporate website/microsite	80%	81%	74%
Consumer website/microsite	63%	81%	66%
Blogs	57%	75%	65%
Mobile application	46%	72%	52%
Mobile web	42%	73%	55%
Other social networking site	29%	40%	36%
Digital screen/environment	21%	44%	32%
Foursquare	17%	49%	28%
Other location-based service	9%	35%	18%
MySpace	5%	9%	6%
Orkut	3%	7%	2%
Other	4%	2%	4%
None of the above	1%	0%	0%

AnswerLab\*

Figure 6: Corporate use of digital and social media, a research by AnswerLab



The meaning conveyed by social media promotion, is referring to the communication being established through the social media websites for reaching and engaging with potential target groups and prospects. Nevertheless, a primary reason for using social media websites is to generate traffic on a site, increase awareness of a particular brand and receive feedback (Social media Communication Websites, 2011).

According to Answer Lab's research on the utilization approaches of social media channels as shown in (Figure 7), brand promoters and agencies cite outbound communications as their principal reasons for applying social media channels which is accounting for 77 percent and 81 percent of the respective respondents. However, it is specified in the research that agencies are more active users of social media channels for outbound communications than brand promoters in terms of better understanding their target audience (Marketers increase spending on social and digital communication, 2011).

*In which of the following ways, if any, does your organization use social media tools? (select all that apply)*

Use of Social Media Tools	Brand Marketers	Agencies	Technologists/ Other
Outbound communication w/ our customers	77%	81%	78%
To drive product or messaging innovation	54%	69%	62%
Inbound feedback from our customers	53%	67%	60%
To help us better understand our customers	48%	70%	52%
None of the above	3%	3%	6%
Other	2%	2%	3%

AnswerLab\*

Figure 7: The utilization approaches of social media channels

### 2.3.2 Transparency and openness in using social media

Being transparent in social media is critical for developing trust in the audience and engaging them in dialogues and conversations. Representatives of organizations in social media are expected to operate with real names and publish content that is consistent and relevant to their brand. Users of social networking websites need to remember that they have interdependent profiles, therefore representing and interacting in an open and implicit way is the most appropriate to be able to manage social media leverage and maintain reputation (Facebook marketing for dummies 2011, 25; Weber 2009, 17-18).

### 2.3.3 Interactive social networking websites

Interactive social media websites, known as Web 2.0, refers to the second generation of user friendly web development and design, which facilitate communication, information sharing and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 technologies are tailored for users who access Internet, use the Web and actively contribute through the social media networking websites (Web 2.0 technology & the social network websites, 2009).

Furthermore in this chapter, the author describes the most interactive and popular social networking websites that are applied for information dissemination and promotional purposes with regard to their functionality for promoting the purpose of the Quicker Steps project. However the focus is on Facebook and LinkedIn websites for being the current social media channels for communicating and promoting the on for the Quicker Steps project.

### 2.3.4 Facebook

Facebook, having an approximate 800 million users of different age groups, is the most popular social networking site and is also available in more than 70 languages. Facebook as a social media software is referred to as web-based programs and technologies that facilitate collaborative aspects in which users are allowed to contribute, create and customize in various methods that other software models do not provide. Facebook is designed with unique tools and features for interactive conversations, communication and promotion e.g. organizing a profile, contact information, adding friends, fans and creating communities, a Wall for publishing comments, News Feed for regular updating of information, groups and applications, sharing of photos, podcasts and videos and benefiting from methods of monitoring progress. (Facebook fact sheet, 2012; What is Facebook).

Nevertheless, the entire notion of Facebook is based on conversation, interaction and two-way communication. Therefore increasing awareness of a brand and attracting audience to conversations require a regular update of interesting and purposeful content, sending a welcoming page to the new visitors about the brand, adding value to the Facebook page through contests and offerings, posting debating questions that solicit the audience's opinions and integrating useful Facebook applications. Moreover, the communication and promotion capabilities of Facebook to maximize large potential reach of audience are attracting organizations to establish Facebook profiles to promote their brands and to incorporate Facebook into their communication strategies (Using a Facebook page; Westwood 2011, 95).

As mentioned earlier, Facebook is also popular in Finland, according to Finland Facebook statistics (2012) and Suomen väestö (2011), Facebook penetration in Finland is reported at more than 40 percent compared to its population, being around 5,401,267 million. Recognizing the multiple communication and promotional features of Facebook, the usage of Facebook among the Finnish organizations is also increasing. Facebook, being a popular, viral and functional social networking site, is used for promoting the purpose of the Quicker Steps project. Via the Facebook profile of the Quicker Steps project, the promoters of the project are able to manage promotional activities, publish contents to attract conversations and establish contacts with the target audience.

Developing diverse audience engagement strategies and sustaining an updated Facebook environment are essential for increasing awareness and interest in the audience regarding the purpose of the Quicker Steps project. Furthermore, integrating a Facebook profile with other social media channels e.g. providing automatic feed of new posts to Facebook wall, using free services to perform simultaneous update of Facebook and LinkedIn and establishing widgets for YouTube and Flickr feed to facilitate automatic adding of videos and images to the Facebook page maximize public awareness, search reach and availability of relevant topics to the project (Facebook marketing for dummies, 2011).

### 2.3.5 LinkedIn

LinkedIn, being used by 150 million users and available in 17 languages, is world's largest professional social networking and business to business website. Through LinkedIn, users become able to establish a profile that includes personal data, work experiences and academic credentials. LinkedIn's profile provides a possibility for professionals and business people to connect, inform each other of new job and business opportunities and share advice and information (Halligan & Shah 2010, 93; Westwood 2011, 95).

Contrary to Facebook, which is used by more various and extensive audiences, in LinkedIn the primary focus is on business and professionals. Through the users' list of connections, LinkedIn facilitates a path for the users to create online groups and be connected to their target audience that consist of work colleagues and business people interested in particular topics. Nevertheless, it is also possible to search for specific organizations' data and find individuals who might be on connection lists which is supported by LinkedIn facts that an approximate 4, 2 billion professional searches were conducted on LinkedIn's website in 2011. Moreover, LinkedIn's profile facilitates the possibility of being noticed by companies that are using LinkedIn as a recruitment tool (LinkedIn facts, 2012; Halligan & Shah 2010, 94).

LinkedIn is also popular in Finland and as it is considered a business networking tool, the primary users of LinkedIn's services consist of business managers and business professionals with decision-making authority. The number of people using LinkedIn services is increasing which is assumed to be related to the employment and business connection possibilities generated for professionals and job seekers. According to research, the current usage rate of LinkedIn in Finland is reported as 21 percent. Furthermore, considering the large reach of professional audience, the promoters of the Quicker Steps project has also launched a LinkedIn profile to target larger audience and maximize awareness of the purpose of the Quicker Steps project (Halligan & Shah 2010, 94-95; LinkedInin käyttö Suomessa, 2011).

Moreover, a prominent and effective LinkedIn profile requires active updating and attending, therefore a communication and promotion team should perform regular status updates, join groups with relevant interests and projects to increase exposure, answer questions as well as send messages and invitations to network members and other group members. Understanding and leveraging LinkedIn connections and recommendations might result in becoming accessible, introduced and recommended to others which provide credibility and awareness among users (Halligan & Shah 2010, 94-95; Promoting in LinkedIn)

#### 2.3.6 Twitter

Twitter, having more than 250 million users and being available in 21 languages, is a popular social networking site which facilitates microblogging, meaning that through this microblogging website users are able to post content in real time with a maximum of 140 characters. Through creating a Twitter account, users of Twitter become able to post short messages, also called tweets, from Twitter's site and a mobile device in the form of a SMS (Short Message Service) text message. Using the services of Twitter, as most of the social media websites, is based on establishing a complete profile including a photo, a short biography and location to facilitate quicker connection and communication with the potential audience (Halligan & Shah 2010, 105).

As the rest of the services of social networking websites, the services of Twitter are also used as channels for communication and interaction with large audiences. Nevertheless, the current use of Twitter by organizations for communication and promotional purposes is increasing, indicating that organizations are beginning to perceive the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of Twitter as a channel for communication and building relationships with partners and influencers (Twitter's fast and simple way to communicate, 2011).

Twitter facilitates real time connection with the audience to spread and share information, attract engagement in conversations, collect promotional intelligence and receive feedback. Moreover, the possibility of posting fast and short messages is also encouraging users in Finland to use the services of Twitter even though compared to Facebook the number of users of Twitter is minimal. The services of Twitter are believed to be popular in the media and technology fields, however careful attitudes towards sharing information are considered as primary reasons for not being active in using the services of Twitter. Nevertheless, launching a Twitter account for the Quicker Steps project might be quite influential in engaging the audience in fast and real time conversations (Forecasts on the development of new social media in Finland in 2012, 2012).

### 2.3.7 Google+

Google+, launched by the search engine Google, is a rather new social networking site that is omnipresent by being available on the navigation bar of Google's page. Through the profile of Google+, users are introduced to the Stream similar to Facebook's News Feed and are provided with access to viewing notifications and content sharing, which is considered similar to the methods designed for Facebook. The Circles+ feature of Google+ facilitate target sharing with various social groups which is different from Facebook's method of sharing with groups of friends (Launch of Google+, 2011).

The recent process of redesigning Google+ is an attempt to create a more functional and flexible social networking site thus expecting to attract more users. Through the services of Google+, users are enabled to start a conversation from search results and comment on conversations that appear on Google+ feed which might encourage a continuous discussion. Nevertheless, considering the regular postings, comments are possible to be shared with the entire Google+ and also be limited to specific circles of social groups, these comments then become visible on Google+ results in case relevant searches are conducted (Google+ conversation, 2012; Google+ redesign, 2012).

Even though Google+ is a new social networking site, the number of people using Google+ is estimated to be around 65 million and this number is expected to increase due to the simplicity and the variety of methods to start conversations, commenting and sharing photos, videos and results which are visible to large audiences. The current popularity of Google+ in Finland is not certain, however the design approaches of Google+ being similar to that of Facebook, confirms it as an interactive channel of communication and promotion (Popular social networking websites, 2012).

### 2.3.8 Live Journal

Live Journal, being used by more than 20 million people, is a vibrant social networking website and an online community that provides an environment for users to connect, and share content with common interests, thoughts and photos and design layouts in creative ways which become visible to large audiences. The services of Life Journal are categorized as basic, plus and chargeable, the basic and plus services consist e.g. of creating communities, commenting, using advanced search options, finding other profiles and interest search as well as text message notifications while the chargeable services comprise e.g. of accessing (Express Lane) for faster service during high traffic and advertising free in exchange for a monthly fee (About Live Journal, 1999; Live Journal features).

The services of Live Journal are also available in Finnish indicating that there is a demand for the services of Live Journal in Finland; users of social media are interested in experiencing different websites to discover more functional channels to convey their messages and content. Live Journal is also a recommendable channel for spreading information and reaching audience (About Live Journal, 1999).

### 2.3.9 Social media as conversations media

Social media is designed for conversations, meaning that the users' primary approach for becoming interactive and noticed is participating in conversations, contributing and be influential. Through social media different forms of conversations and interactions are possible to occur through e.g. videos, podcasts, photos and messages provided that the audience is motivated enough. However, organizations need to understand that the audience is not interested in being approached through advertisement but they rather expect to be able to share ideas and experiences, interact and establish relationships (Evans 2010, 35).

Through social networking websites the audience is provided with freedom of communication to engage in conversations that are important to them, thus organizations need to know that the prerequisite for the audience to become interactive in conversations on their social networking websites is creating quality and value with content. Nevertheless, conversations continue online regardless of the presence and input of an organization's monitoring team, therefore conversations need to be observed, listened to and replied to in order to be able in the long run to establish trusted relationships (Content and conversation, 2012; Evans 2010, 10-11).

### 2.3.10 Future of social networking websites as communication channels

Social networking technologies are revolutionizing the processes of communication, interaction and promotion. Even though social networking websites are still approached as rather new media, their influential and cost-effective possibilities of connecting and reaching broad audiences have resulted in significant popularity. The current trend is expected to continue as the use of social networking websites becomes an integrated part of the socialization, communication, face to face interaction, information sharing and promotion as shown in (Figure 8)(The future of social networks, 2012).

According to social media experts, there might be an evolution of social commerce in future as organizations profit, from the large audiences' shared interests, by building stores. Nevertheless, the massive share of information is believed to lead to the contraction of social media into more private segments, therefore granting more control to the users to express their opinions. The social networking websites of Facebook and Twitter are expected to be used as channels through which new technologies and business are developed (Future of social media, 2011; The future of social networks, 2012).

The current information collection process of organizations is expected, in an age of Web 3.0, to remove the need for searching on the web as information finds the users based on the data collected by the organizations, thus facilitating the right information to the right people which saves time and effort. The content that is displayed on the social web is also expected to be more customized to the needs of the audience, ensuring that the information is targeted to their interests. Moreover, in terms of better measuring the progress of return on investment (ROI) of social networking websites, organizations need to understand that the amount of engagement on their websites are more valuable than the number of member in their communities. Nevertheless, trust and transparency between the organizations and the audience is expected to be recognized to develop valuable information networks and physical communities (Future of social media, 2010-2011; Developments in social networks, 2012).



Figure 8: Future of social media

## 2.4 Introducing a social media communication plan

The application of social networking websites as communication channels is becoming mainstream, the cost-effective methods and approaches of communicating, promoting and reaching large audiences are encouraging organizations to invest more in social media. However, social media facilitate wide alternatives of profile pages with different content and purposes that maintaining interest and support of the audience towards profiles requires strategies to preserve diversity and consistent updating of a profile. Therefore, promoting teams e.g. promoting team of the Quicker Steps project needs to operate in alignment with communication and promotional strategies to better manage and leverage the communication and promotional capabilities of social media websites. Regardless of the size of e.g. a project and brand, there is the necessity of considering and understanding the needs, the dynamics of interests and motivations of the target audience in social media (Evans 2010, 15; Dunay & Krueger 2011, 37).

Furthermore, a communication plan is defined as a written document that includes an organization's communication objectives and the strategies to achieve those goals. A social media communication plan is essential in determining communication goals, promotional goals and resources, recognizing and understanding target audience, developing content strategy, approaching the right channels of communication and monitoring and measuring page activities. Nevertheless, structuring these general steps is important in aligning the objectives with the strategies and being assisted in consistent evaluation of the process (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 38; Preparing a communication plan).

However, a promoting team should be aware that the potential audience in social media does not want to be exposed to direct promotional messages and that instead the audience prefers being conversed with and listened to, thus generating a purpose for researching the audience and their motivations for interaction in order to use time and resources better in attaining predefined goals (Evans 2010, 2, 10; Dunay & Krueger 2011, 37-38).

## 2.5 Elements of a social media communication plan

According to Smith & Zook (2011, 226), different approaches exist for building promotional communication plans and social media plans, however there are essential elements that should be incorporated into each plan. The key elements of a promotional communication plan as shown in (Figure 9) consist of situation analysis, objectives, strategy, tactics, action and control (SOSTAC) (Smith & Zook 2011, 226).



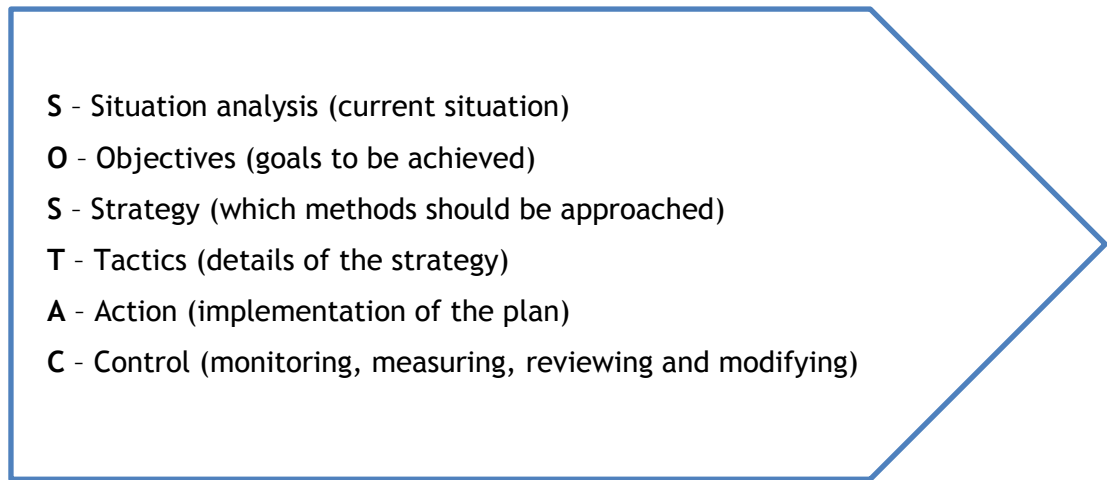


Figure 9: Elements of a promotional communication plan (SOSTAC)

According to numerous international experts, SOSTAC is perceived as a simple and logical structure which is applied in different situations and is possible to be changed and tailored to specific purposes. Thus, in order to build a comprehensive and functional social media communication plan based on SOSTAC, more detailed analysis regarding the target audience and the current situation should be performed. Furthermore, in the following section the author attempts to determine and describe the essential and specific elements of developing a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project (Smith & Zook 2011, 226).

### 2.5.1 Situation analysis

The situation analysis comprises of a review of the recent functions and processes performed and experienced, a review that includes comparisons of previous trends and performances as well as a short description of the strengths and weaknesses. In this case, the case of the Quicker Steps project, the focus is on the functionality of the current Facebook and LinkedIn profiles of the project including the conversation-, interaction- and promotion-relevant performances. Considering the situation analysis of the Quicker Steps project, an analysis of the target audience, the motivations, interests and expectations of the potential audience, as well as conversation progress, the types of communication approaches and the number of users joining and contributing to the online content should be accomplished (Smith & Zook 2011, 229).

Furthermore, a situation analysis process might also consist of the PEST (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) analysis that is relevant to communications, thus identifying political regulations, economic fluctuations, social trends and technological innovations that might influence the usage of social media communications tools and the behaviors of the audience in the social media websites. To further support the planning process, an evaluation of the current decision-making processes, the allocation of resources and their effectiveness should be performed (Smith & Zook 2011, 229; Dunay & Krueger 2011, 38).

### 2.5.2 Developing value proposition

The development of a social media communication plan, in the case of the Quicker Steps project, should be initiated by considering the value proposition of the concepts and solutions that are communicated and promoted to the audience. The audience expects a description of the value proposition to perceive the unique values, benefits and improvement qualifications delivered through concepts and solutions as well as the capability of tailoring the solutions to their unmet needs. Thus understanding the value provided is essential in developing the communication messages and strategies necessary to develop a communication plan and acquiring the support of the stakeholders in for future ideas and plans (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 39).

Furthermore, setting clear goals is an important part of understanding the value proposition and certain goals are more obvious than others. However in this case, increasing awareness and interaction regarding the Quicker Steps project through the Facebook and LinkedIn profiles of the project are the current and primary objectives. Thus creating an effective value proposition assists in providing reasons to induce the reaction of the audience to the promoted solutions and adjusting communication messages to the goals determined (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 39; Developing a value proposition).

### 2.5.3 Researching and understanding the target audience

An important part of forming a social media communication plan is performing a thorough research of the target audience, their reasons for engagement on the social media websites and their interests in participating in conversations. Even though there might be a predefined target group receptive of the current messages, in order to reach new audiences, further researching of the audience is needed; thus in implementing social media communication and promotional strategies, valuable time and effort are saved (Knowing the audience, 2011).

The process of researching large audiences is considered demanding, therefore segmenting social media users based on their activity and interest in numerous social media websites might result in a better understanding of the location of the audience. According to different sources, social media users are segmented into six different groups of Creators, Critics, Collectors, Joiners, Spectators and Inactives as shown in (Figure 10) (Evans 2010, 42-43).

Creators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social and active creators of e.g. blogs, videos</li> <li>• Users who show interest for hobbies, dislikes, services and solutions.</li> </ul>
Critics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active commentators on blogs and reviews</li> <li>• Commentators on quality of services &amp; solutions</li> </ul>
Collectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users who find and share information on the internet and submit them to the social sites.</li> <li>• Users who generate traffic on social media sites</li> </ul>
Joiners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive users of social media</li> <li>• Developers of conversations</li> <li>• Users who share experiences</li> </ul>
Spectators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users interested in observing and in avid reading of ratings and reviews.</li> </ul>
Inactives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users who are not yet participating on social media sites.</li> </ul>

Figure 10: Six distinct groups in social media

Nevertheless, this classification (Figure 10) might serve as guidance in better understanding these distinct groups and applying certain survey tools to understand which demographic among these groups represents the target audience. The utilization of survey tools e.g. Google and other survey software enable search for e.g. age groups and information regarding social media classification of a demographic which leads to identifying the types of users within each demographic. Furthermore, the search engines of social media websites facilitate fast access to extensive information of potential audience to determine psychographics, which is valuable in the communication and promotion process. However, social media websites and demographics are in constant change that relying only on surveys might be misleading; therefore regular research with supplementary survey tools are prerequisite for acquiring results (Finding target audience on social media, 2011; Evans 2010, 45).

#### 2.5.4 Defining objectives

Effective communication and promotion on social media websites are implemented in accordance with certain objectives which should be predefined. Regardless of the type and importance of a plan, defined and clear objectives assist in better and easier managing tasks as well as in later knowing the successfulness of the strategy and the possibility of having approached other alternative routes. Specified objectives facilitate prioritization in terms of requirements and the feasibility of the goals, thus enabling analysis of the goals and measurement of performance which is based on the SMART criteria that objectives should be specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and time specific (Evans 2010, 24; Smith & Zook 2011, 233).

After acquiring knowledge of the demographics and psychographics of the audience, a social media communication plan should include certain objectives such as building brand awareness, generating traffic on social media profiles, forming community of members who share the same values and being attentive to feedback and updates. In the case of the Quicker Steps project, a primary source of project awareness being the social media profiles of Facebook and LinkedIn, the current communication objectives might consist of applying approaches that function in generating and increasing awareness, exposure, attitudes, support and interest as well as attracting audience towards interaction and conversation (Smith & Zook 2011, 234; Dunay & Krueger 2011, 42).

As an important objective of a social media communication plan, attending to feedback regarding a brand is essential in becoming aware of the discussions of the audience and their favorite searchings on the social media websites. Different types of social media require different types of objectives, in this case the focus being on social media profiles, the goals defined should consider certain metrics that are applied to social media websites such as the number of fans acquired, the number of discussions started on fan and group page, the number of comments, photos and videos posted and tagged in, as well as the number of responses to topics received, the level of traffic generated and the number of pages visited (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 45-47; Evans 2010, 27).

#### 2.5.5 Defining strategic communication approaches

Strategic communication approaches are stated as integration of actions and resources to achieve certain objectives; to acquire strategy outcome, suitable tactics should be followed. Communications strategies facilitate harmonization of tactical communications tools such as approaching potential target audience, positioning of brand, selecting communications channels and prioritizing (Smith & Zook 2011, 235).

Furthermore, developing functional communication strategies for social networking websites are demanding, therefore knowing the audience and understanding factors for motivation and participation of the audience is considered a starting point for developing strategies and tactics (Smith & Zook 2011, 235-236).

As multiple forms of interactions and conversations increase on social media, the need for incorporating social media communication tactics in communication plans to induce attention, maximize awareness and maintain conversations also increases. In the case of the Quicker Steps project, the primary source of project awareness being the social media profiles of Facebook and LinkedIn, potential strategic communication approaches might consist of approaches such as informative messages with broader search engine supported links, controversial video feeds, locating and joining with communities who share same interests, seminars as well as events which assist in creating exposure, awareness, viral attraction, traffic and attracting audience towards interaction (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 14,43-45; Essential social media communication strategies for 2012).

As strategic responsibilities, project promoters should dedicate time and effort to building relationships with the audience, providing methods to help the audience, contributing and showing interest in contribution of the audience, appearing likeable to the audience by being sincere and authentic, focusing on value and quality, forming smaller and connected communities and incentivizing fans by treating them and reaching influencers. Furthermore, other strategic approaches would be applying social media applications that connect for instance with Facebook and LinkedIn to encourage fans to tell their friends regarding the project and purpose, distributing invitations that hold value to the fans and audience and launching the search engine optimization (SEO) which ensures finding of key words, content analysis and phrases regarding the project through search engines such as Google (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 16).

However, effective planning and maintaining strategic approaches for social media websites might require assistance of a professional social media host who is aware of social media communication approaches, techniques, trends and server infrastructure as well as social media monitoring desktop on a website. Active and efficient hosting might result in proper representation of the project brand, more interactive communities, dialogues and sharing of experiences between the brand representatives and the audience. Nevertheless, active hosting also consists of observing changes in social media websites in terms of application updates, new communication approaches and methods to extend reach in social media and maximize exposure (Weber 2009, 206).

### 2.5.6 Developing content strategy

Value is a central component of developing a content that is interactive, useful and inspiring to the audience to participate in social media conversations. Understanding the type of content that the audience finds valuable and tailoring that content based on that value might invoke interest in the potential audience, thus the social media audience perceives that they are being listened to and respected. Furthermore, creating valuable and appealing links facilitate quick dissemination of content on social media websites (Evans 2010, 225).

Moreover, delivering valuable and relevant content to the audience in order to enhance a project brand requires assessing current and available assets e.g. video materials, contributions and interests of the present audience. Different channels of communications e.g. web websites, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles should be observed and monitored while developing a content strategy, thus becoming able to determine the right content for the right communication channel. Nevertheless, promoters need to be aware that in order to be noticed on social media, content should be optimized for search and available on various topics (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 47).

In the case of the Quicker Steps project, content strategies might consist of dedicating high quality content that are purposeful to the target audience e.g. project relevant news, current employment issues and experts' input on the matter as well as corporate actions for attracting and encouraging students to become employed in early stages of studies which indicate the support of the project for important causes thus resulting in more awareness of the purpose of the project. Furthermore, promoting teams are able to build online groups and launch promotional campaigns based on causes relevant to the a project brand to spread information regarding e.g. government measures to handle students' unemployment and certain barriers to their progress in workinglife which might develop interest in the audience to become interactive.

Nevertheless, developing content based on assumptions regarding the interests of the audience might result in misleading, therefore creating content with value is essential to be based on conducted research. The culture of social media is built on digital fluency and inspiring content which implies that contents should be used to motivate participation and not to be used in abundance to confuse the audience. However, maintaining a consistent approach of communication and creating valuable content is determinant in engaging the potential audience to become interactive with a project brand for the long term (Halligan & Shah 2010, 30-31; Dunay & Krueger 2011, 48).

### 2.5.7 Action and implementation of content strategy

At this stage, details of the strategic approaches are required to implement the tactics planned. There is a need for active attention and consideration to details, proper communication planning skills, time management, management skills, prioritizing and the ability to manage with pressure and ensuring that tasks are performed. Furthermore, implementing a coherent content strategy requires knowing the audience and understanding their content of value and interest, acquiring content creators and determining sufficient resources (Smith & Zook 2011, 237; Dunay & Krueger 2011, 79-80).

Engaging through dialogues and discussions are basic methods of establishing relationships and promoting a project brand, therefore the more relevant, creative and valuable information that matter to the audience shared the more activity and traffic is generated on a site. Nevertheless, social media audience constitutes of social and conversation-oriented users who expect from a promoting team to be interactive, understanding and appreciative of the knowledge and experiences being shared. In this case, sharing insights and research materials in connection with the solutions being promoted might help the audience in better perceiving the advantages and possibilities in question. Facilitating relevant links to researches, articles, videos, resources, interviews and statements on the social media websites is effective in establishing credibility as a content aggregator (Dunay & Krueger 2011 83-84).

Furthermore, maintaining a common theme while posting updates on the social media websites assures pursuing and achieving of objectives. Therefore, there is a need for using proper conversation tone based on the audience and content type, thus managing in delivering both more conversational and research-oriented content. However, during the implementation of the tactics, project organizers should deliberate on potential problems regarding the consistency and functionality of the content tactics being used e.g. whether the content inspires the audience, addresses their needs, influences their decisions and exposes brand awareness (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 81-82).

Nevertheless, providing interesting applications on the profiles and delivering accessible content in different formats e.g. blog articles, webinars, videos, podcasts and webcasts is necessary to attract participation in conversations and maintain continuing interaction. According to numerous social media experts, the audience needs to be offered incentives to join communities and find reasons for regular interaction; thus a promoting team needs to consider a professional method of responding to the comments and conversations to manage quick and tailored responses and maintain coherent streams of materials and content on a page (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 89-90).

### 2.5.8 Monitoring and measuring page activity

Applying analytic techniques and sophisticated measurement tools to monitor activities and traffic on social media websites is recommended to achieve effective and reliable results. Measuring and analyzing quantity and intensity of conversations, interests, interactions, visits and traffic on a page determine the functionality and effectiveness of the selected communication approaches and content strategies. Monitoring search optimization and identifying trends and resonant contents allow a promoting team to adapt to a content strategy that the audience prefers (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 147).

Social media websites are designed with measuring and monitoring pages e.g. Insights that assist in observing progress of both users and interactions. However, depending on the necessity of the promoting team, access to additional information e.g. the types of keywords that are applied to find a page and the average length of visiting on a site as well as integrating certain chargeable analytics services that provide detailed data on page activities facilitate more efficient measurement and tracking of progress. Regular management of these analytic processes helps project promoters to attain new experiences and knowledge and incorporate them into improving communication and content strategies (Dunay & Krueger 2011, 147).

## 2.6 Summary of the theoretical discussion

The theoretical background provides readers with discussions regarding the theory and models of communication, the Internet as a new communication channel and introduction to social media as communication and promotion channels as well as the elements of developing a social media communication plan. The author attempts to emphasize on the importance of understanding communication process in the social media, understanding the audience of social media, acquiring content strategies and communication approaches that motivate and attract the audience to engage conversations via social media profiles of the Quicker Steps project.

Nevertheless, the theoretical section includes discussions of capabilities of interactive social media websites and the increasing use of social media websites by organizations for communication purposes and reaching large audiences. Moreover, the author assesses the need for determining objectives, resources and the audience while developing a communication plan to manage effective leverage of social media websites.



## 2.7 Theoretical framework

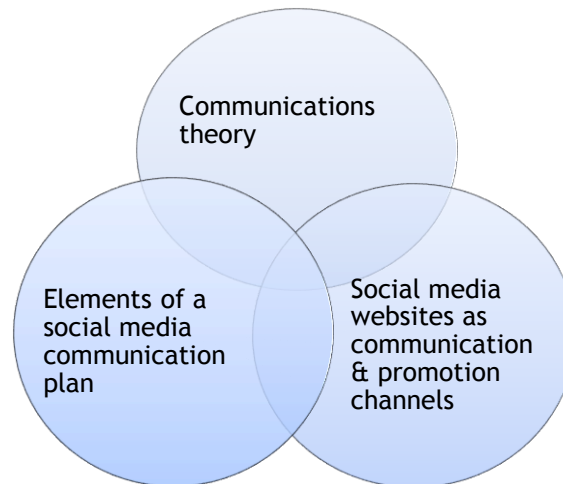


Figure 11: Theoretical framework

## 3 Research approach

Research is defined as investigation of a particular topic applying different reliable and academic resources. In general, researches are conducted to build facts, analyze information and attain new conclusions by searching, studying and reviewing information. Moreover, research consists of collecting primary data which is uncovering new information and secondary data which is evaluating existing relevant information and literature regarding a specific subject. Nevertheless, the primary objective of conducting research is broadening knowledge regarding specific problems and developing insights and solutions to those problems (Adams & Brace 2006, 4, 20).

Furthermore, researches might be conducted to determine facts, figures, opinions and feelings which are referred to as quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research is implemented to quantify responses, percentages and information, while qualitative research is undertaken to uncover information regarding thoughts, opinions and behaviors. Nevertheless, depending on the needs of research projects, three different research designs e.g. explanatory research, descriptive research and causal research are approached. The explanatory research design consists of gathering observations, feelings, reactions and providing a basis for further research. The second research type is the descriptive research design which is selected to establish real statements and facts of a situation rather than developing assumptions. Last but not least, the causal research design is approached to identify the link between cause and effect and to determine whether certain hypotheses are possible to be true (Adams & Brace 2006, 21, 23).

### 3.1 Selected research method

Researchers are required to determine suitable research methods to their problems in order to achieve as valid and reliable answers and solutions as possible. The principle data gathering methods are referred to as quantitative and qualitative research methods, in which the former consists of collecting and measuring responses through surveys and questionnaires while the latter is based on acquiring detailed information on opinions, feelings and reactions of respondents through interviews and discussions. Quantitative research is related to handling numbers, percentages and statistical analysis; while qualitative research is rather linked to the analysis of thoughts, behaviors and experiences of respondents (Adams & Brace 2006, 34, 38).

Nevertheless, the data collection method for this thesis is based on quantitative research which consists of both primary and secondary sources; the primary research method is quantitative and was conducted in the form of a structured online self-completion questionnaire. While, the secondary research was based on different literature and internet sources as well as relevant study materials and information of the Quicker Steps project case. The self-completion questionnaire which is a primary tool in conducting quantitative research is classified as an advantageous method in terms targeting large numbers of potential respondents and being cost-effective, even though self-completion depends on the willingness of the respondents to answer the questionnaire. Furthermore, the self-completion questionnaire for this research was observed and accepted by both the project coordinators of the Quicker Steps project and the supervisor of this thesis research (Adams & Brace 2006, 34-35).

### 3.2 Methodology and data collection

The research was planned and implemented in cooperation with the project coordinators of the Quicker Steps project. The research was conducted in the form a self-completion questionnaire designed with structured, multiple response and open-ended questions which supports precise and multiple responses as well as the opinions of the respondents in their own words. The questions were tailored to the needs of a specific sample of the population, consisting of teaching staff, associations and different working life companies, who were approached based on their awareness, background and expertise which might be effective in improving the communication and promotion of the purpose of the project. The research was conducted in the middle of April till late in May during which respondents were approached with online questionnaires through e-mail, social media websites and printed questionnaires by the project coordinators of the Quicker Steps project and the author of the thesis report (Adams & Brace 2006, 47).

During the implementation of the research, an approximate number of 80 respondents were approached with self-completion questionnaires, from which 45 valid responses were collected. The questionnaire was designed with the objective of collecting responses regarding the current level of awareness of the target audience of the Quicker Steps project in the social media, the possible social media communication and content tactics and approaches as well as the need for developing a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project. The responses were processed and analyzed by using the SPSS statistics software which delivers an organized presentation of the data in forms of tables and figures.

The research questionnaire was planned in accordance with the theoretical section and the research problems of the Quicker Steps project. The questions were structured to apply to the target audience of the Quicker Steps project and to acquire opinions regarding the level of awareness of the project, social media content and communication approaches and the need for acquiring a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project. Nevertheless, the questionnaire was proceeded with questions regarding the channels of familiarization with the Quicker Steps project, the social media accounts being used, the number of friends the audience have in social media which was asked for promotion and communication purposes, the members of the project in different social media websites, the types of communication and content approaches that would attract the audience, the possible suggestions of other social media websites for communicating current issues in addition to Facebook and LinkedIn websites and the requirement for a social media communication plan to have an active social media profile for the Quicker Steps project.

Furthermore, questions regarding the communication and content approaches were designed with numbers of (1= not important and 5= very important) to indicate the rate of importance of the suggested alternatives. The questionnaire consists of questions with open space for additional thoughts and opinions regarding communication and promotion channels that might help the author to deliver a more purposeful thesis research.

### 3.3 Validity and reliability

Questionnaires are considered popular and functional tools for acquiring and collecting data in quantitative researches. Samples and questionnaires should be elaborated and generalized to the population of interest, thus the researcher becomes confident that the received data are representative of the population of interest and that the data are valid and relevant to the research subject and the theoretical framework (Adams & Brace 2006, 48).

Moreover, the results of a research questionnaire should be consistent and reliable in terms of delivering similar results in case of data collection repetition, as long as the conditions of data collection are the same. Nevertheless, assuming the size of the sample, the number of responses collected and the presence of multiple response questions the reliability of the results is rather challenged. However, considering the communication and promotional challenges of the Quicker Steps project and the requirement of developing effective social media communication and promotion approaches as well as acquiring knowledge of the level of awareness of the audience, the results are deemed valuable for the promoters of the Quicker Steps project (Adams & Brace 2006, 48).

## 4 Empirical research

The empirical research of this thesis is conducted for the Quicker Steps project in cooperation with the coordinators of the project. The current social media websites of Facebook and LinkedIn are being leveraged for increasing awareness of the purpose and current issues of the Quicker Steps project. The purpose of the empirical research is to assess improvement opinions and suggestions regarding possible social media communication and promotion approaches for the Quicker Steps project, current level of awareness of the project and the need for developing a social media communication plan for the project to manage a more effective leverage of social media websites.

### 4.1 Presentation of Quicker Steps

The purpose of the Quicker Steps project is to disseminate knowledge and best practices of the diverse cooperation and partnership solutions between higher education institutions and working life in Finland, Luxemburg, Austria and the United Kingdom. However, the primary focus of this thesis is on the developing a social media communication and promotion plan for the Quicker Steps project in Finland (The Quicker Steps project website).

#### 4.1.1 The purpose of the Quicker Steps project

The aging population in Finland is growing and the proportion of working age population is quite small, therefore young professionals are expected to start their working careers earlier. Nevertheless, the country is experiencing a labor shortage when simultaneously the number of people unemployed is quite high. There is a need for managing projects with the objective of promoting ways to quicker involve the young professionals in working life (Project presentation, 2011).

With the management of the Quicker Steps project, the objective is to disseminate information of best practices and action models that lead to the quick employment of students of higher education. Nevertheless, the purpose is to respond to the labor shortage in certain fields and the employment challenges of the current labor force reserve as well as increase young people's attachment and attention to working life already during their studies. Moreover, the improvement of employment possibilities for the immigrants is also sought by considering their special needs. These challenges are expected to be managed by organizing new forms of education and employment (The Quicker Steps project website).

#### 4.1.2 Target groups of the Quicker Steps project

The target audiences of the Quicker Steps project consist of teaching staff of secondary schools, universities of applied sciences and universities, organizations, associations as well as different working life companies. Nevertheless, in addition to the aforementioned primary target groups, other indirect target audience of the Quicker Steps project are education planners, students, district authorities as well as immigrant organizations and immigrants (Materials of the Quicker Steps project).

#### 4.1.3 Partners of the Quicker Steps project

The partners of the Quicker Steps project are JAMK university of Applied Sciences (Finland, coordinators of the project), HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences (Finland), Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Finland), University of Luxembourg (Luxembourg), University of Education-Upper Austria (Austria) and Coventry University (UK).

#### 4.1.4 Composition of the Quicker Step project's Finnish supervisory group

- JAMK University of Applied Sciences
- HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences
- Laurea University of Applied Sciences
- The Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (SAMOK)
- Immigration organization
- The central organization of employees
- The central organization employers
- Companies and working life organizations
- Investors and funders

## 4.2 Results and analysis

The results of the research are processed with the SPSS statistics software and presented in forms of tables and figures, the analysis is based on a total of 45 responses that were considered valid to be analyzed. However, the questionnaire was designed with multiple response questions in which in certain cases the frequent occurrence of the responses has resulted in an imbalance with the total of the responses of the questionnaire and therefore causing unclarity in the frequency tables. The analysis consists of discussions of key elements of the questionnaire to provide a consistent reference to the objective and the purpose of this thesis research. Nevertheless, the author attempts to evaluate the responses of the selected questions under separate headings to maintain clarity and organization of the thesis report.

### 4.2.1 Audience awareness of the Quicker Steps project

As shown in (Table 1), the majority of the audience of the Quicker Steps project has acquired awareness of the project through Facebook which is accounting for 27,3 percent of the responses. However, as this result is based on a multiple response question, the frequency of the responses has occurred more often therefore leading to an imbalance in the total of frequencies and the total of the responses of the questionnaire. Nevertheless, as shown in (Figure 12), the second most popular channel of gaining knowledge and awareness appears to be friends with 24, 2 percent followed by seminar which is 19, 7 percent.

Multiple response question		Frequency of responses	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	18	5,8	27,3	27,3
	LinkedIn	4	1,3	6,1	33,3
	Internet	3	1,0	4,5	37,9
	Friend	16	5,2	24,2	62,1
	Seminar	13	4,2	19,7	81,8
	Email	6	1,9	9,1	90,9
	Colleague	3	1,0	4,5	95,5
	Metropolian tuubi	1	,3	1,5	97,0
	Member of a project team	2	,6	3,0	100,0
	Total	66	21,3	100,0	

Table 1: Channels of acquiring awareness of the Quicker Steps project

Moreover, other popular channels of project awareness are presented as Emails 9, 1 percent, the social media website of LinkedIn 6, 1 percent, the Internet and Colleague each 4, 5 percent, Project team members 3, 0 percent and the Metropolian tuubi 1,5 percent.

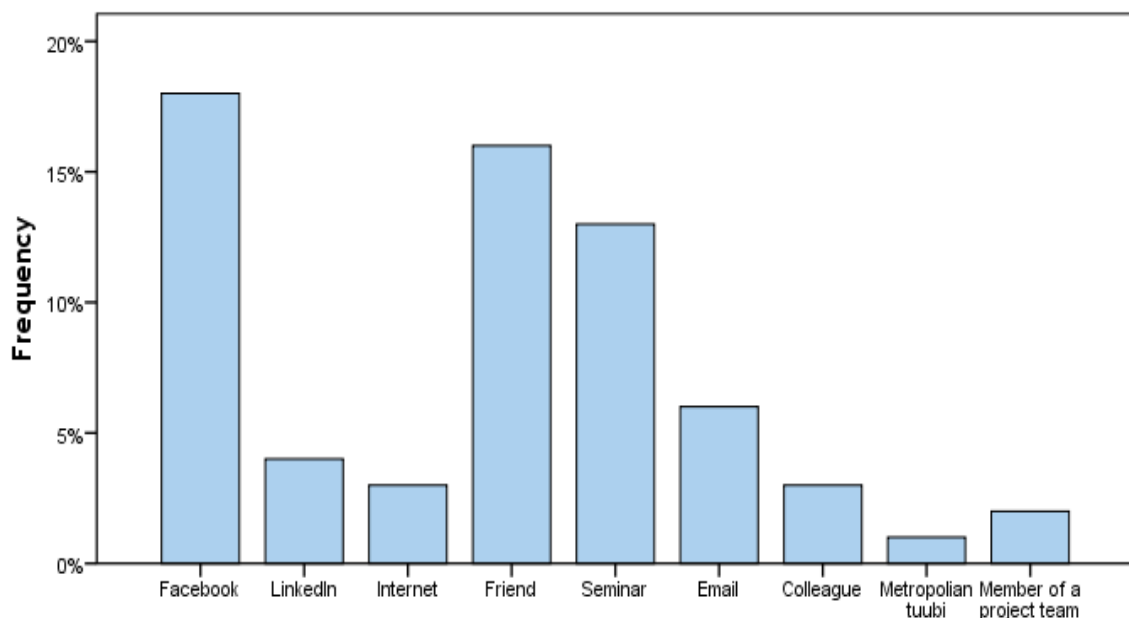


Figure 12: Channels of acquiring awareness of the Quicker Steps project

Furthermore, as the questionnaire was designed with open-ended questions for submission of suggestions, as shown in (Figure 12) the audience has expressed opinions of acquiring information regarding the Quicker Steps project through colleagues, members of project teams and last but not least the Metropolian tuubi which is an information announcement portal of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Figure 12 and Table 1 indicate that Facebook is considered as an effective medium for communication and promotion of current issues of the Quicker Steps project.

#### 4.2.2 Popular social media websites among the audience

In terms of popularity of using social media websites as shown in (Table 2), Facebook is quite popular among the audience comprising of 69, 1 percent followed by 18, 2 percent of the audience using LinkedIn which is significant. As the result is acquired through multiple response question, the frequency of responses has occurred more often due to the fact that the respondents are using several social media profiles and the possibility of including own suggestions. Nevertheless, the usage of Twitter and blogs is also noticeable among the audience of the Quicker Steps project for communicating and expressing opinions which is depicted as corresponding 1, 8 percent for each.

Multiple response question		Frequency of responses	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	38	12,3	69,1	69,1
	LinkedIn	10	3,2	18,2	87,3
	Twitter	1	,3	1,8	89,1
	Not an active social media user	3	1,0	5,5	94,5
	Not using social media	2	,6	3,6	98,2
	Blog	1	,3	1,8	100,0
	Total	55	17,7	100,0	

Table 2: Usage of different social media accounts

However, referring to (Figure 13), 5, 5 percent of the audience has announced that they are not active social media users, suggesting preference to other media alternatives e.g. emails for connectivity and interaction. Moreover, 3, 6 percent of the audience has suggested that they are not using social media accounts which stresses on the need of providing and maintaining alternative media for communicating and promoting the purpose of the Quicker Steps project.

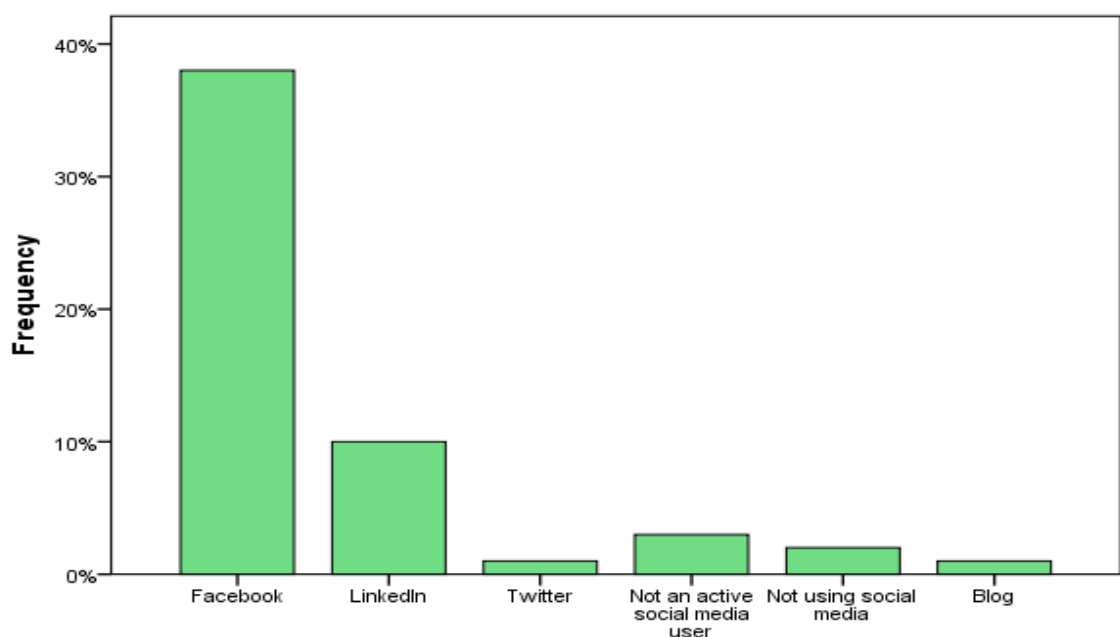


Figure 13: Popularity of different social media accounts



#### 4.2.3 Members of the Quicker Steps project in Facebook and LinkedIn

In this case as shown in (Table 3), since the respondents appear to be members of the Quicker Steps project on Facebook and LinkedIn, therefore the frequency of responses have occurred more often and has led to an imbalance between the total of frequencies and the total of responses of the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the membership percentage of the audience of the Quicker Steps project in Facebook is quite close to the audience membership in LinkedIn with respective numbers of 26, 4 and 24, 5.

Multiple response question		Frequency of responses	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	14	4,5	26,4	26,4
	LinkedIn	13	4,2	24,5	50,9
	Not a member	26	8,4	49,1	100,0
	Total	53	17,1	100,0	

Table 3: Members of the Quicker Steps project in Facebook and LinkedIn

However, referring to (Table 3), the number of potential audience of the Quicker Steps project not yet acquiring membership of the project's profiles in Facebook and LinkedIn is accounting for 49, 1 percent which is quite significant. As presented in (Table 3), the number of audience who are not members of the Quicker Steps project in Facebook and LinkedIn is rather high which might be indicative of absence of motivation and encouragement of the audience to acquire membership and that in case of providing more diversity and reasons for engagement and communication via the profiles of the Quicker Steps project in Facebook and LinkedIn, the situation might be different.

#### 4.2.4 Attractive communication approaches

In this case as shown in (Table 4), since the respondents were able to select several alternatives, the frequency of responses has occurred more often therefore leading to an imbalance between the total of the frequencies and the responses received through the questionnaire. Furthermore, the majority of the audience has selected "Short informative messages" and "Email messages" as the most attractive approaches which are both indicated as 20, 5 percent. Moreover, "Video and graphical messages" and "Podcasts" are the second most preferred alternatives by the audience with 20, 0 percent for each respective approach, which might be due to the interest and motivation of the audience in observing and listening rather than conversing and writing.

Multiple response question		Frequency of responses	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Short informative messages	44	14,2	20,5	20,5
	Events and seminars	41	13,2	19,1	39,5
	Video and graphical messages	43	13,9	20,0	59,5
	Podcasts	43	13,9	20,0	79,5
	Email messages	44	14,2	20,5	100,0
	Total	215	69,4	100,0	

Table 4: Attractive communication approaches

However, as indicated in (Figure 14), “Events and seminars” are also attractive approaches for spreading knowledge of the purpose of the Quicker Steps project, constituting of 19, 1 percent of the responses. This percentage is suggestive of interest of the audience in events and seminars and a relative preference in becoming aware of current issues in person and in connection with others which is worth managing and maintaining.

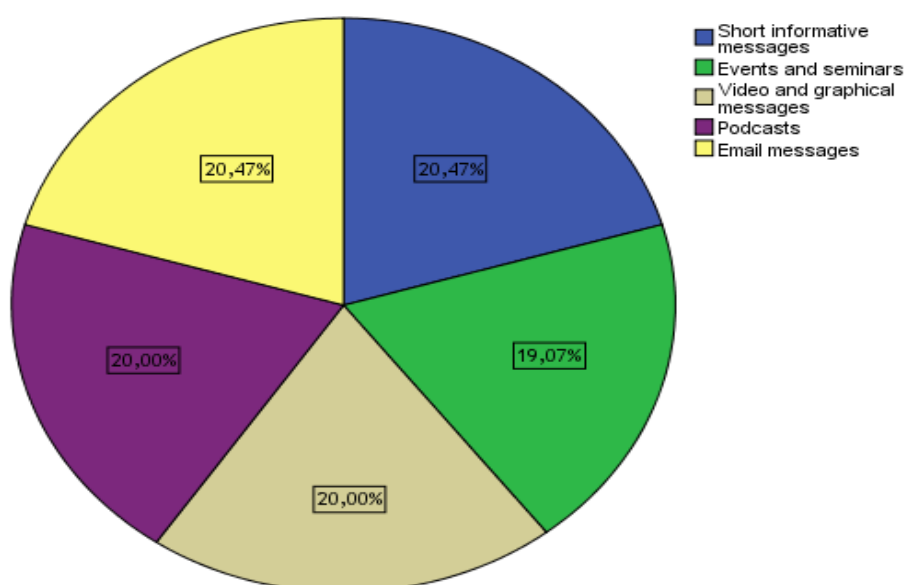


Figure 14: Attractive communication approaches

#### 4.2.5 Attractive content approaches

As in the case of the question regarding attractive content approaches for the Facebook and LinkedIn profiles of the Quicker Steps project, as shown in (Table 5), the respondents were able to select several responses therefore leading to the frequent occurrence of responses and causing an imbalance between the total of the frequencies and the total of the responses received from the questionnaire. Moreover as presented in (Table 5), equal percentages of responses are acquired which might be indicative of competitiveness of the approach alternatives. Nevertheless, the audience suggest that “New cooperation models between working life representatives and education institutions”, “Relevant research articles”, “Expert interview feed” and “Student interviews” are the most attractive and useful content approaches, each accounting for 14, 5 percent of the responses.

Multiple response question		Frequency of responses	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Project-relevant news	43	13,9	14,2	14,2
	New cooperation models between working life representatives and education institutions	44	14,2	14,5	28,7
	Relevant research articles	44	14,2	14,5	43,2
	Relevant political news	41	13,2	13,5	56,8
	Experts' interview feed	44	14,2	14,5	71,3
	Student interviews	44	14,2	14,5	85,8
	Openings for discussion	43	13,9	14,2	100,0
	Total	303	97,7	100,0	

Table 5: Attractive content approaches

In addition to the afore mentioned approaches, as shown in (Figure 15), the audience is also agreeing that “Project-relevant news” and “Openings for discussion”, each constituting of 14, 2 percent of the responses, are important content approaches for motivating and attracting the audience towards developing interest and appreciation for the purpose of the Quicker Steps project and becoming involved in conversations and discussions on the Facebook and LinkedIn pages of the Quicker Steps project. Social media audience consists of influencers who are quick in taking initiative to become involved in discussion openings and express opinions.

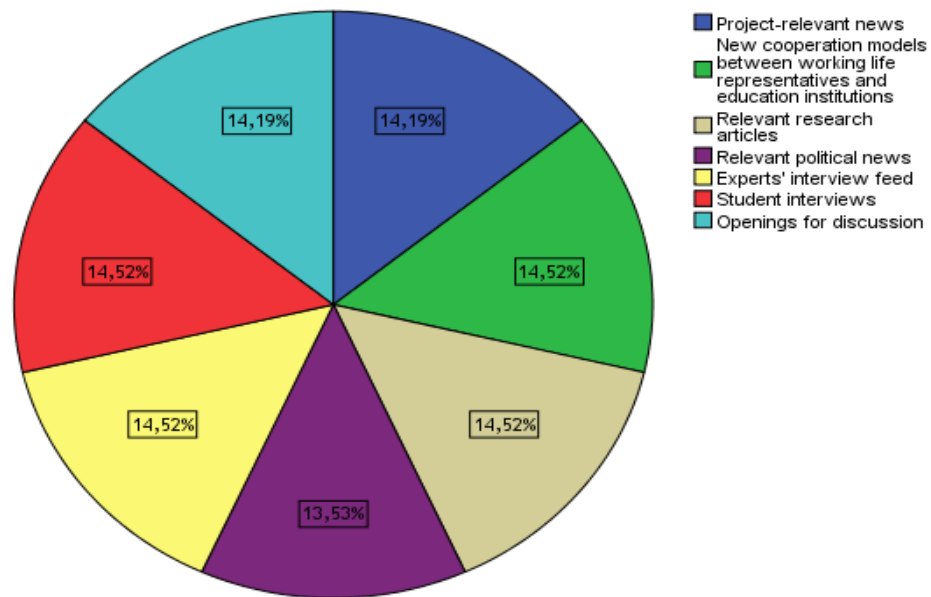


Figure 15: Attractive content approaches

Nevertheless, according to (Figure 15), the audience suggests that the least favorite content approach is “Relevant political news” comprising of 13, 5 percent of the responses which is yet quite approximate to the rest of the percentage numbers. The results represent the interest and confidence of the audience in the effectiveness of these content approaches which are expected to be considered and leveraged in communication and promotional functions.

#### 4.2.6 Other useful social media channels for the Quicker Steps project

The questionnaire was also designed with a question regarding the possibility of using other social media websites for communicating and promoting the purpose of the Quicker Steps project. As shown in (Table 6), a dominant 20, 0 percent of the audience has suggested that the social media microblogging website of Twitter is useful for communicating and promoting the purpose of the Quicker Steps project. This significant percentage could be due to the current usage and popularity of the services of Twitter in Finland and the possibility of posting quick and short messages to large numbers of the audience. Moreover, the second most suggested social media channel is Google+, which is accounting for 4, 4 percent of the responses. The introduction of Google+ might be indicative of the increasing usage of Google+ and the impact of Google as world’s largest search engine.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Twitter	9	2,9	20,0	20,0
	Google+	2	,6	4,4	24,4
	Blog	1	,3	2,2	26,7
	YouTube	1	,3	2,2	28,9
	Live Journal	1	,3	2,2	31,1
	Not sure	31	10,0	68,9	100,0
	Total	45	14,5	100,0	

Table 6: Other useful social media channels for the Quicker Steps project

As shown in (Table 5) and (Figure 16), the results are also indicative of the possibility of using other social media channel alternatives of Blog, YouTube and Live Journal, each comprising of 2, 2 percent of the responses. The audience might be considering the significant usage and popularity of YouTube and blogs as well as the increasing public awareness of Live Journal.

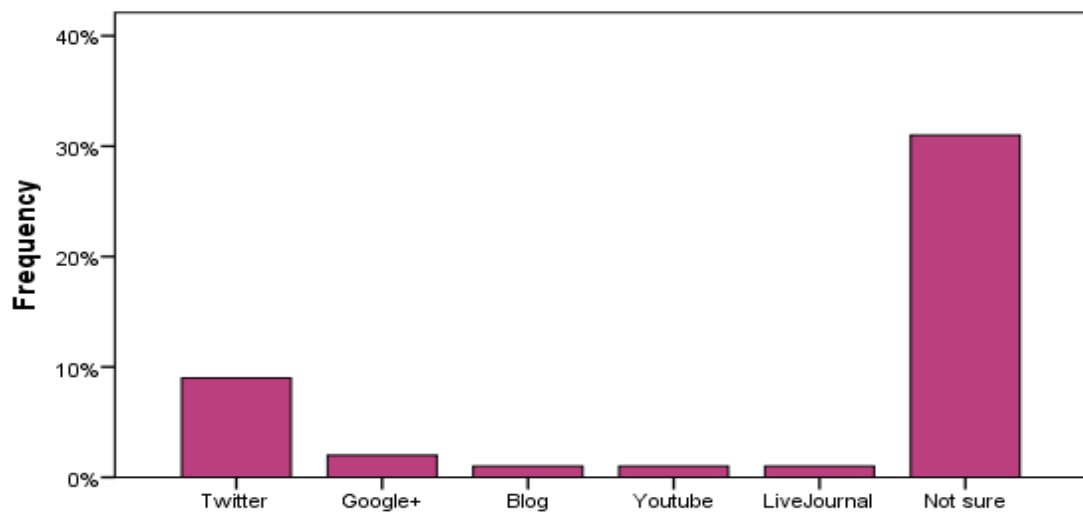


Figure 16: Other useful social media channels for the Quicker Steps project

However, as shown in (Figure 16), the majority of the audience suggests that they are “Not sure” which other social media channel alternatives would be useful for communicating and promoting the purpose of the Quicker Steps project. This conclusion might be due to the availability of numerous unfamiliar social media channels and uncertainty towards social media capabilities and applications.

#### 4.2.7 Development of a social media communication plan

Regarding the need for developing a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project, as shown in (Table 7) and (Figure 17), the majority of the audience agrees that there is a need for developing a communication plan for the Quicker Steps project to manage a more active social media profile which is consisting of 66, 7 percent of the responses. This substantial percentage is suggestive of the consistent recommendation of the audience for developing a communication plan.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	30	9,7	66,7	66,7
	Not sure	15	4,8	33,3	100,0
	Total	45	14,5	100,0	

Table 7: Development of a social media communication plan

However, as shown in (Figure 17), 33,3 percent of the respondents are not sure whether the development of a social media communication plan would assist the promoters of the Quicker Steps project to better manage communication and promotional tasks.

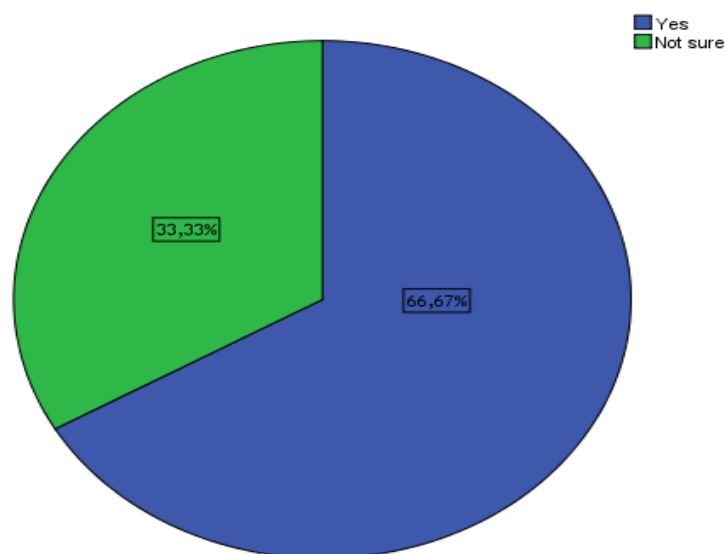


Figure 17: Development of a social media communication plan

Furthermore, referring to “Table 7” and Figure 17”, the research question was designed with three alternative answering possibilities of “Yes”, “No” and “Not sure” from which the “No” was not selected and is not included in the tables and figures of the results. This conclusion might be linked to the assumption that the audience prefers to be more optimistic towards the development of a communication plan by rather selecting the “Yes” and “Not sure” alternatives than selecting a definite “No” alternative.

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

Based on reviewing the results of the research, the author attempts to conclude on the primary aspects of the aforementioned results of developing communication and content approaches, audience awareness as well as discussing possible recommendations.

### 5.1 Conclusions

The results of the research indicate that the current level of audience awareness of the Quicker Steps project is yet moderate considering the consistent efforts of communicating and promoting of the purpose and current issues of the project. The social media websites of Facebook and LinkedIn are considered as effective channels for increasing awareness and interest of the audience in the values of the Quicker Steps project; however the audience still appears to be careful and uncertain towards supporting the cause of the project.

As discussed in the results analysis section, the questionnaire was designed with multiple response questions in which the frequency of the responses has occurred more often therefore leading to unclarity in the total of frequencies and the total of responses of the questionnaire. Moreover, the results suggest that the majority of the audience has acquired awareness of the Quicker Steps project through Facebook, friends and the seminar meaning that the Facebook profile is quite useful for the project and that word of mouth as well as inviting potential audience to seminars and gatherings are also effective methods of maximizing awareness of the project. As presented in the results analysis, a significant number of the respondents are members of the Quicker Steps project on Facebook and LinkedIn which is indicative of the willingness of the audience to support the project and participate more in interactions and conversations relevant to the project. However, the number of non-members of the Quicker Steps project in Facebook and LinkedIn is exceeding the number of members which might be speculated to be due to lack of familiarity and motivation of the audience towards the project as well as due to the high communication, promotion and motivation expectations of the audience from the promoting team of the Quicker Steps project.

In terms of the researched results of communication approaches, the audience appears to prefer approaching different communication approaches e.g. short, informative, graphical and email messages which are assumed to maintain diversity and interest. Furthermore, regarding the selected content approaches, the audience is supporting facilitation of contents relevant to research, cooperation models, experts' and students' interviews that might reinforce the value and awareness of the purpose of the Quicker Steps project.

In terms of suggestions of suitability and functionality of other social media channels for communicating and promoting the purpose of the Quicker Steps project, the audience seems to be in accordance with launching e.g. Twitter, Google, YouTube, Live Journal and Blog profiles. However, the majority of the audience is expressing uncertainty regarding the suitability of other social media channels which might be connected to the level of popularity and application features of the social media channels in question.

Nevertheless, regarding the need for developing a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project, 66, 7 percent of the audience favors acquiring of a social media communication plan for the project. The results are indicative of the suggestions and agreement of the audience towards proceeding with a communication plan to manage more active and interesting social media profiles for the Quicker Steps project.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Considering the earlier stated conclusions, there is a need for focusing more on increasing awareness and strengthening of the purpose of the Quicker Steps project. The audience of the Quicker Steps project is expecting more communication and promotional initiatives to become encouraged and willing to be a part of the process of acknowledging the purpose of the project. The social media websites of Facebook and LinkedIn are effective channels for communicating and promoting the purpose of the Quicker Steps project; however as suggested during the research, other social media channels should also be studied and leveraged for maximizing audience reach and awareness as well as acquiring access to different channel alternatives.

The social media channels of Facebook and LinkedIn are leveraged for various communication and promotional purposes by small, medium and large projects, thus generating a situation in which motivating the audience to be interactive and interested in particular project profiles becomes a struggle.



Therefore, the Facebook and LinkedIn profiles of the Quicker Steps project should be designed with innovative communication approaches and elaborated and inspiring content approaches as well as attractive features that enable the audience to differentiate the profile of the Quicker Steps project from other similar profiles. Nevertheless, promotional activities e.g. interesting applications and debative discussions could be also regarded as motivating and interesting for the audience to join the community of the Quicker Steps project and become interactive.

Furthermore, adapting to a social media communication plan might enable the promoting team of the Quicker Steps project to execute communication and promotional strategies in more consistent and continuous ways. Applying strategies of a social media communication plan facilitate more tailored and elaborated communication and content approaches which might better meet the needs of the audience. New methods of increasing awareness and interest regarding the purpose of the Quicker Steps project should be developed by holding seminars and launching new channels of delivering information as well as promotional campaigns.

Nevertheless, the current popularity of social media channels is inciting organizations to instate professional hosts to manage their social media profiles, a task which is also recommendable for the Quicker Steps project. Social media professionals are aware of the current popular websites, trends, features, new applications and methods of locating audience and motivating them towards activity and interaction.

## 6 Theoretical linkage

The theoretical section comprises of discussions regarding the theory of communications, social media websites as communication channels and elements of a social media communication plan. Nevertheless, in the theoretical section, there is also a focus on communication and content approaches as well as the channels and methods of maximizing awareness and motivation of the audience regarding the Quicker Steps project. Furthermore, the objective of the research is relevant to collecting data regarding level of awareness of the Quicker Steps project, suggested alternative channels of communication and awareness, attractive methods and approaches of communication and content in social media as well as acquiring the opinions of the audience in relation to the development of a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project. Therefore, considering the theoretical section and the objective of the research, there is a correlation and information linkage between the theoretical chapter and the results of the empirical research.

## 7 Summary

The usage and leverage of the unique communication and promotion possibilities of social media websites are increasing, social media being a large medium is used by millions of people and numerous organizations for communication, interaction and promotional purposes. However, managing interesting and differentiated social media profiles in the long run might prove demanding in the presence of diverse social media websites and different approaches to become distracted and engaged in multiple conversations. Therefore, project promoters need to focus on designing profiles with interesting communication approaches; search optimization and inspiring discussion topics to obtain large audience reach, maintain profile traffic and maximize awareness.

The Quicker Steps project is a project with the purpose of disseminating knowledge and best practices of the diverse cooperation and partnership solutions between higher education institutions and working life in Finland to develop possibilities for the students to become quickly employed from higher education. The promoting team of the Quicker Steps project is utilizing different channels to communicate and promote the current issues of the Quicker Steps project to the audience, which consist also of the social media websites of Facebook and LinkedIn (The Quicker Steps project website).

The theoretical section was structured to include theories of communication, social media websites as communication and promotional channels with emphasis on the capabilities of Facebook and LinkedIn websites as well as the elements of a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project. Nevertheless, the theoretical section was supported by the empirical research which was based on assessment of the opinion and perception of the target audience regarding public awareness of the Quicker Steps project, social media channels of awareness, communication and promotion, content approaches for the Facebook and LinkedIn websites of the project and the development of a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project.

Communication models are based on two types of one-way communication and two-way communication, in which the one-way communication model as shown in (Figure 3) the sender is demonstrated as the sole communicator assuming that the message sent is received, while in the two-way communication as shown in (Figure 4) the role of the receiver as a communicator is recognized through the feedback; which is considered as a simple example of the current interactive communication in which the sender communicates with the receiver through feedback.

However, the current web communication models which are centered on interaction and connectivity, the primary method of communicating with the audience is being engaged in conversations and discussions. The existence of social networking websites and the facilitation of unique communication and promotion possibilities are considered ideal channels for spreading awareness and information. Nevertheless, through the social web communities, an audience becomes interactive and reactive to different topics being discussed and thus the flow of communication transforms into a web of communications between the target audience, the promoting teams and the opinion leaders.

Social media websites e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are popular and effective media for managing interactive communication, conducting promotional activities and reaching large numbers of the audience. Social media websites are extensive media which are used and leveraged for different communication and promotional purposes by different organizations. However, certain tasks e.g. locating the target audience, maintaining an attractive, active and updated profile in the long run might challenge the promoting team of the Quicker Steps project. Thus, acquiring active and interesting social media profiles e.g. the profiles of the Quicker Steps project in Facebook and LinkedIn, the promoting team needs to implement new communication and content strategies to better target the audience, increase awareness and provide motivational and valuable conversation topics for the audience to become interested and join the community of the Quicker Steps project. Furthermore, considering the availability of other social media websites e.g. Twitter, Google + and Live Journal for communication and promotional purposes of the Quicker Steps project lead to broader access to communication and promotion channel alternatives which is essential in the maximization of audience reach and awareness of the project.

Nevertheless, the results of the research indicate that the audience is rather aware of the purpose of the Quicker Steps project even though the project is yet new and the communication and promotion activities are managed with limited resources. However, based on the assumptions of the audience, the level of awareness of the Quicker Steps project might be increased by approaching other channels of communication and promotion including social media channels. A significant number of the audience of the Quicker Steps project has not yet joined the community of the Quicker Steps project in Facebook and LinkedIn which needs to be managed through continuous and active hosting. Nevertheless, the audience agrees that achieving broader audience awareness of the Quicker Steps project and more audience interaction with the profiles of the project in Facebook and LinkedIn require a more effective social media communication plan.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire



The research survey is conducted by Ahdia Nazari a Business Management student from Laurea University of Applied Sciences in cooperation with the coordinators of the Quicker Steps project. The purpose of the research survey is to collect data for the thesis "Developing a social media communication plan: Case study the Quicker Steps project".

The Quicker Steps project is a project with the purpose of disseminating knowledge and best practices of the diverse cooperation and partnership solutions between higher education institutions and working life in Finland, Luxembourg, Austria and the United Kingdom in order to develop students' possibilities to quicker become employed from higher education.

The data collected will be only used for the thesis research.

Thank you for your cooperation!

## Appendix 1

1. Where did you hear about the Quicker Steps project? (select all that apply)

- |                                   |                                   |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook | <input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend   | <input type="checkbox"/> Seminar  | <input type="checkbox"/> Email    |

Others, what?

2. Which one of the following social media accounts do you mostly use?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Twitter

Others, what?

3. How many friends do you have in Facebook?

- ☐ 1-100
- ☐ 101-200
- ☐ 201-300
- ☐ 301-400
- ☐ 401-500
- ☐ 501+

4. How many friends do you have in LinkedIn?

- ☐ 1-100
- ☐ 101-200
- ☐ 201-300
- ☐ 301-400
- ☐ 401-500
- ☐ 501+

5. I am a member of the Quicker Steps project on (select all that apply)

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ I am not a member

## Appendix 1

6. What type of communication approach would attract you to the Quicker Steps project's social media websites? (1=not important, 5=very important)

Short informative messages	1	2	3	4	5
Events and seminars	1	2	3	4	5
Video and graphical messages	1	2	3	4	5
Podcasts	1	2	3	4	5
E-mail messages	1	2	3	4	5

Others, what?

7. What type of content would attract you to follow the Quicker Steps project in social media? (1=not important, 5=very important)

Project-relevant news	1	2	3	4	5
New cooperation models between working life representatives and education institutions identified in the project	1	2	3	4	5
Relevant research articles	1	2	3	4	5
Relevant political news	1	2	3	4	5
Experts' interview feed	1	2	3	4	5
Student interviews	1	2	3	4	5
Openings for discussion	1	2	3	4	5

Others, what?

## Appendix 1

8. The Quicker Steps project has chosen to use Facebook and LinkedIn to communicate current issues. What other social media channels would be useful to promote the purpose of Quicker Steps?



9. Do you think that an active social media profile for the Quicker Steps project requires a more effective communication plan?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

10. Do you have some news related to the Quicker Steps project which could be published on the project's pages? Please add your contact information here and it will be delivered to the secretary of the project. If you have other comments, please feel free to use the comment field available.



The data collected will be only used for the thesis research.

Thank you for your cooperation!