
MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS OF A HOTEL IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Case: Hotelli Emilia



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ABSTRACT

In today's globalized world, social media marketing of companies is a timely topic to be researched. The background of this research lies in the thesis writer's interest in examining the ever-evolving social media channels and their potential for marketing communications.

The aim of this thesis is to find out how the commissioning company, Hotelli Emilia, could utilize social media for its marketing purposes. The set thesis objectives state that the advisable marketing strategy should be generated by gaining a sufficient theoretical knowledge, conducting an empirical research for understanding explicit customer opinions and analyzing the gathered information.

In addition to creating the theoretical framework concerning marketing communications, social media and hotel business, the thesis writer conducted practical research. For surveying people's opinions regarding social media presence of hotels, a questionnaire was created. The quantitative research was complimented by interviewing the customers of the hotel as a qualitative research method.

Based on the theoretical and practical findings, utilizing social media generates multiple benefits for the commissioning company. This thesis presents a social media marketing strategy, which brings benefits and opportunities to the company. Triangulation was applied to increase the validity of the results.

In order to reach the objectives of marketing communications, Hotelli Emilia should change and develop its social media actions according to the recommendations presented.

Keywords Social Media, Marketing Communications, Hotel Marketing

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Nykypäivän globaalissa maailmassa yritysten sosiaalisen median markkinointi on ajankohtainen tutkimusaihe. Tutkimuksen taustalla oli opinnäytetyön kirjoittajan kiinnostus alati kehittyvien sosiaalisen median kanavien ja niiden tarjoamien mahdollisuuksien tarkasteluun markkinointiviestinnässä.

Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli selvittää, miten toimeksiantajayritys, Hotelli Emilia, voisi käyttää sosiaalista mediaa markkinointitarkoituksiin. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oleva suositus markkinointistrategiaksi luodaan keräämällä riittävä teoreettinen tietämys ja suorittamalla empiirinen tutkimus asiakkaiden täsmällisten mielipiteiden ymmärtämiseksi sekä analysoimalla kerättyä tietoa.

Markkinointiviestintää, sosiaalista mediaa ja hotellialaa koskevan teoreettisen viitekehyksen muodostamisen lisäksi toteutettiin käytännön tutkimus. Kyselytutkimuksella pyrittiin kartoittamaan ihmisten mielipiteitä hotellien läsnäolosta sosiaalisessa mediassa. Kvantitatiivista tutkimusta täydennettiin kvalitatiivisella tutkimusmenetelmällä haastatteleamalla hotellin asiakkaita.

Teoreettiseen tietoon ja käytännön havaintoihin perustuen sosiaalisen median käyttö luo monia hyötyjä toimeksiantajayritykselle. Opinnäytetyössä esitellään sosiaalista mediaa tehokkaasti hyödyntävä markkinointistrategia, joka tuo monia uusia mahdollisuuksia yritykselle. Triangulaatiota hyödynnettiin tulosten oikeellisuuden lisäämisessä.

Markkinointiviestinnän tavoitteiden saavuttamiseksi Hotelli Emilian pitäisi muuttaa ja kehittää sosiaalisen median toimintojaan esitettyjen suositusten mukaisesti.

Avainsanat Sosiaalinen media, markkinointiviestintä, hotellimarkkinointi

Sivut 55 s. + liitteet 6 s.

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1 INTRODUCTION

During the past years, digitalization has had major impacts on the everyday business actions in a globalized world, thus digital marketing has increased its relevance. Because of globalization and internationalization, the needs and expectations of consumers have changed. Therefore, companies are required to rethink their business concepts and marketing actions to fulfil the customer requirements. Even globally known IKEA is facing problems due to the new forms of competition in the digital world. The business concept of IKEA has been successful for the past 70 years; however, it is based on customers' visits to the stores and not making purchases online. As a result, the company needs to carefully rethink their business concept, which should be suitable for the current digitalized world. (Ylönen 2016, Hämeen Sanomat 16.4.2016, A20-A21.)

Furthermore, in today's ever changing business world the concept of social media is the top agenda for marketers. Hence, companies are aiming to identify and examine ways to utilize the opportunities of social media applications. Even though the interest exists, the knowledge concerning the term social media is weak. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010.)

1.1 Research Background

The development of the Internet has created multiple possibilities for marketers because every fourth user of social networking sites is following companies and their products on these sites. Furthermore, on social media people cannot be viewed as passive marketing targets, instead it requires interaction, also massive effects can be experienced by word of mouth. Social media creates special settings for marketing, because people are affecting it through their status updates and comments. Moreover, in Finland one out of five is keen on taking part to different campaigns on social networks. (Tilastokeskus 2013.)

Social media can be viewed as a new phenomenon for marketers, which should be utilized by companies across different business fields. In Finland, the majority of companies offering tourism related services are not exploiting the benefits and opportunities of social media. Clear interest in social media exists; however, companies are often too ignorant and incompetent to utilize its full power. This perspective is supported by the tourism development project of Hyrynsalmi and Suomussalmi, Finland. The project lasted for a year (2014-2015) with the goal of inventing combined online marketing materials for all of the 30 companies involved and creating beneficial networks. During the project, it became clear that digital marketing is more demanding for smaller companies with an older customer base. Even though companies started to use the created material on their websites and social networks, they were still unsure how to utilize them and what benefits they could bring. As a result, there is room for development and improvement. (Kähkönen 2015.)

Furthermore, digitalization has been rapid in a global setting; however, Finland has fallen behind compared to other countries according to the 2015 Digibarometri. Even though Finnish companies have the knowledge of the possibilities of social media, they are not utilizing them. It is stated that Finnish companies are viewed as passive when it comes to social media usage and are only paying attention to the development of social media rather than experiencing the development. (Puolakka 2015.)

The significance of social media for individuals and enterprises is a globally intriguing topic in today's world. Social media marketing is perceived as a timely and interesting topic due to the internationalization of companies and rapid development of social media. Clearly, many new opportunities of social media have been introduced and will be exposed to companies in the future. Moreover, there is a clear need for improving and enhancing social media marketing actions of companies in the tourism field in Finland. For these reasons, the commissioning company for this thesis is Hotelli Emilia, which social media marketing actions require development and improvement.

1.2 Company Introduction

Hotelli Emilia is a privately owned hotel located in the centre of Hämeenlinna, which is a town approximately 100 kilometres from Helsinki, the capital of Finland. The history of the hotel dates back to the 1970s when the building was built. During the past years, hotels with different names and ownership have functioned in the same premises; however, the current owner, Tawastia Group, purchased the hotel in July 2006. (Ryöppy, e-mail 10.3.2016)

Pia Ryöppy is the manager of Hotelli Emilia and the company contact person for the thesis writer. Currently (2016), the company has nine employees, who work all year round. Tourists are more active during summers, when there is also more to see in Hämeenlinna, hence the company increases the amount of employees to 15-20 during the hectic seasons. (Ryöppy, e-mail 10.3.2016)

What does the hotel offer to its customers? Hotelli Emilia is a pleasant hotel with 41 cosy rooms, which all contain individually controlled air conditioning, common comforts and wireless Internet access. The rooms are designed to be unique and highlight the Scandinavian atmosphere through Marimekko fabrics. On top of the regular rooms, there is also a balcony suite with its own small sauna. Special arrangements are also possible for physically disabled people and customers with pets. In addition, the hotel has a terrace area on the pedestrian zone outside of the hotel, where people can stop for a coffee or a drink. As a result, over-night customers are not the only customer group the hotel is serving. (Hotelli Emilia N.d.)

The customers of the hotel are clearly divided into two categories; company (70 %) and private customers (30 %). The larger proportion of all the customers is males, approximately 30 to 50 years of age. Elderly and retired people create a customer group that is highly valuable for Hotelli

Emilia. International customers of the hotel are also welcomed, thus 20 % of the customer base consists of people of 15-20 nationalities. For these different customer groups, the hotel is offering accommodation, meeting facilities and restaurant services. (Ryöppy, e-mail 10.3.2016)

1.2.1 Current Marketing Actions

Hotelli Emilia is utilizing regular marketing channels, mainly focusing on printed advertisements that are created in co-operation with company partners. Locally, the hotel is marketed through restaurant service advertisements. Most of the digital marketing is conducted on the company website and on the following websites enabling booking of the hotel: Booking.com and Trivago.fi. Hotelli Emilia is also present on TripAdvisor and has its own Facebook-page. (Ryöppy, e-mail 10.3.2016)

Therefore, the thesis aims to introduce and recommend ways how Hotelli Emilia could enhance its presence on Facebook and expand its social media marketing. In order to further focus the study, only nonmonetary marketing actions and earned media on social media channels are taken into account. Nonetheless, necessary resources including employee dedication and digital equipment are kept in mind throughout the study.

1.3 Research Question

The accommodation business field is facing increasing competition around the world due to the appearance of more affordable and experiential options to the regular hotels and hostels. Thus, accommodation companies are required to stand out from the crowd by offering interesting services, creating a memorable image and succeeding in the marketing competition in the digitalized world. Hotelli Emilia has realized the need for improvement on their digital marketing, especially concentrating on the social media marketing aspect. Therefore, this thesis is focused on creating a social media marketing strategy by answering to the following research question:

How can the hotel increase customer awareness through social media?

For the thesis writer the aim is to understand the development of social media and highlight its importance to all enterprises despite of the business field and provided products. The thesis writer considers the growth and importance of social media being major, thus making it a globally known phenomenon. As hotels are conducting business globally, the possibilities and effects of social media should be urgently examined. As Hotelli Emilia lacks a social media plan, the thesis writer is able to study the social media phenomenon and provide valuable information to the hotel by answering the research question.

1.4 Research Methods

By creating a theoretical framework, one is only able to theorize how marketing should be successfully implemented on the hotel service field

without exceeding the resources and other constraints. It is clear that there is no single best approach to marketing due to the different opinions of the customers. However, there is a wide range of tools to be used for conducting the research, each with obvious pros and cons. The most suitable tools utilized are chosen based on their positive aspects in reaching the research objectives and answering to the research question.

1.4.1 Secondary Data

After extensive literature research related to hotel business, marketing of services and social media marketing, one has gathered a deep and broad knowledge base about the topic, which is required for deeper and more practical research. Gaining valuable insights of the company, Hotelli Emilia, is crucial when focusing the research on the most important topic area. This thesis comprises a detailed analysis of the current situation of the hotel in connection to the theoretical information and recommendations based on these findings.

1.4.2 Practical Research

Complementing the research with primary data is an extremely important step after collecting secondary data. After abundant and sufficient theoretical framework has been created, an explanatory research is conducted. For that, a questionnaire is created for gaining explicit opinions and insights to social media presence of hotels. Moreover, semi structured interviews are held in order to gain meaningful customer opinions concerning the issue researched.

1.5 Objectives of the Research

1. To gain deep knowledge about efficient and suitable social media marketing strategies for companies offering hotel services.
2. To examine and understand customer needs concerning current and potential social media marketing actions of the company.
3. To compare the marketing situation of the company and the expectations of the customers in connection to the theory.
4. To create a manageable social media marketing plan, which would benefit the company to increase customer awareness and gain new customers.

The final thesis aims to provide useful and valuable information concerning the certain topic to different readers by reaching the above-mentioned objectives. The covered information and created recommendations are required to be beneficial for Hotelli Emilia, which functions as the base for the whole research. Other beneficiaries consist of different groups, which are explained as follows.

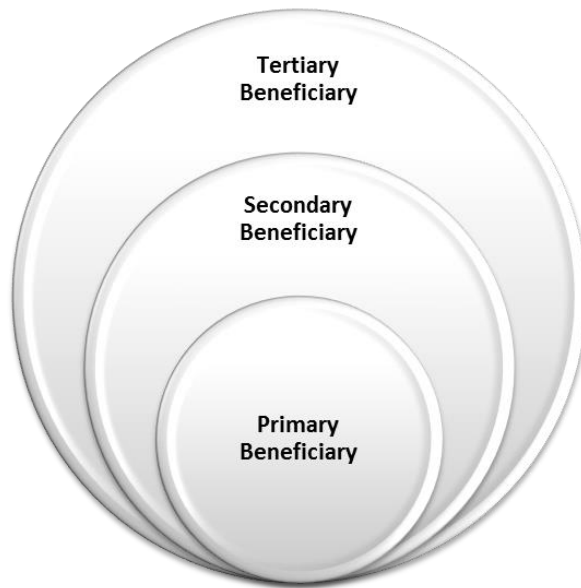


Figure 1. Beneficiaries of the Thesis

In the figure 1, the primary beneficiary is Hotelli Emilia, because aside from the social media phenomenon, the hotel acts as the core foundation for this thesis. Different requirements and needs of the hotel are taken into consideration throughout the research; hence, the recommendations are generated solely for Hotelli Emilia. The secondary beneficiary group consists of other hotels and possibly small private companies on the service sector that are interested in beginning or enhancing their social media functions. In such cases, this thesis may present itself as a helpful material before conducting research that is more thorough. University students and other people simply interested in the topic belong to the group of tertiary beneficiary.

1.6 Limitations

The thesis writer faced some limitations, which need to be taken into account, when examining the results of the research. Most of the limitations were focused on the authenticity of the practical research and the overall environment for conducting the research. The limitations will be introduced more thoroughly in the analysis chapter.

In order to decrease the amount of limitations and increase the validity of the results triangulation is applied. Some perceive triangulation as a tool to corroborate findings; however, researchers utilize it mainly for ensuring extensive and broad outcomes. Triangulation is beneficial and widely used because research cannot be based on a single method. Denzin (1978) identified the following types of triangulation: Methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation and perspective triangulation. The thesis writer applied methods triangulation to check the consistency of different findings and triangulation of sources to examine the consistency of different data sources. (Cohen & Crabtree 2006.)

2 MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

In the past mass marketing was valued, however the focus has been shifting towards more narrowly specified micro-markets, where the goal lies in building and maintaining customer relationships (Kotler, Armstrong, Wong & Saunders 2008, 692). Therefore, these marketing actions can be seen as a planning process, which aims towards ensuring the brand encountering of a current or future customer being relevant and beneficial. Marketing communications is about utilizing suitable, customer-oriented tools for creating synergies between communication and the sales. Through successful integration of marketing communications, a company is able to create messages precisely for the recipient and offer coherent brand image. Marketing communications can be considered as promotion, which focuses on educating the customers about the goods and services provided by the company. (Karjaluo 2010, 10-11.)

The shift in marketing communications has made it crucial for all marketers to rethink their marketing strategies. The change in marketing can be explained with global phenomena, such as political uncertainties, globalization, digitization, global warming, aging of the Western people and the growth of income inequalities. Marketing actions required change also due to the enlargement of the media field, change in consumption behaviour and the digital world being highly interactive. (Salmenkivi & Nyman 2008, 60-63.)

According to Kotler et al. (2008, 693), when the previously beneficial marketing tactics began to decrease their efficiency, marketers were required to rethink tools to be utilized in the new marketing environment in order to succeed in communicating customer value. Simultaneously, the media consumption of the customers shifted from watching TV to surfing through the Internet. This change provides a huge opportunity for marketers to create dynamic interactive consumer-generated communications.

Continuingly, Digital Marketing Communications (DMC) has increased its relevance especially due to the expanded usage of digital devices around the world. Generally, DMC is referred to all marketing communications that take place in the digital media. In other words, DMC can be viewed as the utilization of the newer digital tools for marketing communications, where interaction between the customers and the company is necessary. Digital marketing is a wide concept including multiple forms of marketing opportunities. Moreover, traditional forms of marketing, such as magazines, TV and radio, can be found in the digital form on the Internet. Hence, DMC becomes more and more connected with the traditional forms of marketing, which makes it close to impossible to define. Further, the most commonly known forms of digital marketing are electronic direct marketing and Internet marketing. Games that function with profit from marketing, mobile advertising, social media, interactive television and competitions are examples of developing forms of digital marketing. Even though digital marketing channels are increasing their popularity in marketing communications, they are not displacing traditional marketing channels. Digitalization makes the marketing actions more focused on

specific audience and the interaction with the customers make it crucial for companies to exploit. (Karjaluo 2010, 13-14, 127.)

The necessity of technological marketing communications should not be taken too seriously; however, it still requires a fair amount of consideration. Even though the digitalization has made reaching the customers easier to some extent, marketers should avoid intruding in the lives of the customers. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 580-581.)

Due to the development requirements of the commissioning company, this thesis is focused on the social media aspect of digital marketing communications. Furthermore, social media is examined from the point of view of services marketing as the company is offering mainly services.

2.1 Relevant Concepts

In order to plan and recommend suitable social media marketing tactics for a company conducting business on the accommodation field, it is crucial to understand the profound meanings of social media and services marketing, especially focusing on the hotel business perspective.

2.1.1 Social Media

Because of the development of the Internet and creation of social media, Evans and Bratton (2012, 1) identified the foundation of social media relying on personal empowerment and liberation. Through social media, consumers can actively discuss about everything from technological devices and sports to health and traveling. Simultaneously, they are marketing via word of mouth or beating marketers at their own profession.

Therefore, Safko (2012, 3-4) highlights social media meaning to be social online. Companies can reach this by utilizing hundreds of tools that enable them to connect with their customers. When defining the term social media, social is referring to humans' instinctual need for socializing one way or the other. In the Hierarchy of Needs (Juslén 2009, 116) introduced by Maslow (1943), socializing with other humans is on the third place after physiological and security needs. Continuingly, media is referring to the ways we create connections with other humans.

Tuten (2008, 20) identifies social media as "an umbrella phrase for social-networking sites, virtual worlds, social news and book-marking sites, wikis, and forums and opinion sites." Social media includes multiple communities, which enable participants to create, publish, control, comment and interact with various people and contents.

According to Juslén (2010), social media has been increasing its popularity ever since it was created. In the past companies were wondering whether social media would remain and become used worldwide. As with every innovation, there are no guarantees whether or not and how slowly or quickly people will adopt it, which arises some concerns on the company

level (Juslén 2009, 27). The previous change was connected with the arise of ecommerce, however it meant adding one way to the marketing channels, which was not as major change as social media is (Smith, Wollan & Zhou 2011, 4). Clearly, people around the world are committed to the life style created by Facebook and other similar platforms, thus social media is an integral part of human life and plays a vital role in communication of companies.

Globally, people are using social media more and more on an increasing speed due to the three groups of people, which are leading the way. The initial adopters of social media have had the largest impact on the opinions and perceptions of other people. Currently, the baby boomers, often referred to senior citizens, are adopting social media to their lives. The third group consists of first-time users, who are eager to connect with the rest of the world rapidly. (Smith et al. 2011, 4.)

Furthermore, Evans and Bratton (2012, 34) describe social media as something that keeps on changing over time. The common understanding and acceptance of what social media is, is evolving constantly. However, the participative aspect is expected to remain, because people are the ones creating the contents and developing social media in general.

Social media was created and development due to the Internet revolution and for marketers it is a beneficial way to generate personal dialogue between the company and its customers. In today's digitalized world, companies cannot only think about how to reach the customers, because deep considerations need to be provided for the ways in which customers can contact the company and each other. To sum up, social media is crucially about two-way communications, which need to be valued and developed. For companies it provides the means of interaction and individualization. Furthermore, current marketing strategies cannot be considered complete without a purposeful digital component. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 637.)

2.1.2 Service Marketing

Service marketing cannot be defined separately from traditional marketing without understanding the profound meaning of a service. Consequently, a service is something essentially intangible a company can offer to its customers with or without a physical product while not transferring ownership of the service to the customer (Kotler et al. 2008, 597). Moreover, hospitality-related services should be echoing enjoyment when greeting old customers and meeting new ones. Accommodation business is about treating customers as guests and making them feel as comfortable and cared for as possible. This is especially crucial for service providers, where the customer cannot easily leave the business premises. (Lovelock, Wirtz & Chew 2009, 12-13, 93.)

Further specified by Blythe (2012, 264) the emphasis of services should always be on people, process and physical evidence. In general services require direct contact between the customers and the service providers, thus the behaviour and personalities of people have great impacts. As ser-

vices tend to last for a longer period, the actual process has increased relevance to the customers. Physical evidence is also important in some cases even though the service itself is intangible.

The customer demand for services has been increasing rapidly due to multiple factors: rise of affluence, rise of incomes and increased consumption. When examining the issue from the angle of tourism companies, the main contributor for the current situation is the increase of leisure time and income of potential customers. (Kotler et al. 2008, 597.)

Today's world can be considered as service-driven, because services have the dominating position in the economy of most countries. In addition, the service sector is constantly developing and becoming larger. Due to the quick development of the service sector, marketers are required to create new innovative solutions to market the provided services. (Lovelock et al. 2009, 6-7, 20.)

Moreover, marketing communications of services is challenging due to the difference between tangible objects and performances. As a result, marketers are required to overcome four main problems: generality, non-searchability, abstractness and mental impalpability, which are related to intangibility of the product. Generality refers to differentiating the specific service from the offering of competitors and non-searchability states the problem of people not being able to inspect the product before purchasing it. Abstractness refers to the absence of physical elements and mental impalpability is focused on the question how to communicate the experience and benefits delivered by the specific service. Moreover, services are inseparable from their providers, variability issues occur due to the quality depending on the provider and perishability may create problems as services are always time and space specific. (Lovelock et al. 2009, 172-173; Kotler & Keller 2016, 424-426.)

On the contrary, Blythe (2012, 264) argues that marketing of services does not extremely differ from the marketing of tangible goods. The demarcation between goods and services does not tend to be major, thus similar marketing tactics can be applied while taking into account the special characteristics of the specific product.

Despite the different opinions concerning services marketing, Kotler and Keller (2016, 431-432) describe three crucial aspects: external, internal and interactive marketing, which all require excellence to be successful. External marketing can be defined as the common marketing actions including preparations, pricing, distribution and promotion. Internal marketing refers to the employees' training and motivation level to do the tasks well. Lastly, interactive marketing is focused on the actual service level of the employees.

2.1.3 Hotel Marketing

A hotel can be perceived as a home away from home, which is a chargeable service with all conveniences and facilities. As stated earlier, service

business with all of its aspects is extremely important in today's world. Clearly, hotel business has benefited from globalization while creating increasing the need for different industries, such as airlines, railroads and travel agencies. Due to the fast development of the industry, hotel business has become increasingly competitive and capricious. Consequently, innovative and modern marketing strategies are required in order to survive the competition, satisfy the customers and generate profits. (Jha 2010, 3.)

Hotel marketing differs from the traditional marketing eminently, because by purchasing the service, the customers do not get anything tangible. What applies to all services is that the conducted marketing actions need to be effective and dynamic, because unsold service means the income being lost forever. Undoubtedly, efficient marketing is necessary for all hotels, big and small, and the top management should recognize its essentiality. When considering the global tourism industry, marketing planning is crucial for communicating suitable messages to the specific customers. (Jha 2010, 7-8, 12)

Furthermore, customers are more careful when purchasing a service compared to a tangible product. They are spending increased amount of time on information gathering and relying heavily on word of mouth. As a result, before booking a hotel people will search for recommendations and opinions about the hotel, friendliness of the staff, cleanliness of the premises, tastiness of the food and quality of the service. Customers are buying a promise, which they can evaluate based on the indirect measures of quality versus price. (Blythe 2012, 261-263, 271.)

As customer expectations versus perceptions are what define the service quality, it is crucial to aim towards communicating as truthful information as possible. The effects of word of mouth are extremely important when it comes to the hotel business, because most of the people rely on the experiences of other people. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 440.)

2.2 Social Media Marketing

For companies the escalation of social media usage brings an opportunity to reach potential and current customers, where they are spending increasing amount of their daily time (Brooks 2014). In the early stages of social media, companies had a tendency of dismissing social media, because their businesses could not be compared to online stores, their customers were not using social media and they had difficulties connecting it to the utilized business models. In today's world, social media is considered mainstream and has dramatic impacts on traditional business-to-customers marketing models. (Smith et al. 2011, 3-4.)

The increased usage of social media around the world has brought multiple benefits, new channels and interesting tools to be applied for marketing communications. Social media has become a crucial tool for increasing the sales and building a brand image. Moreover, it enables companies to communicate and interact with people constantly and learn about rising trends of goods and services, which have a positive impact on customer

awareness and customer relationships. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 377-379.)

Despite the obvious benefits of social media, there are companies that are reluctant to utilize it as a marketing channel. Their opinion is based on the lack of concrete actions, which have been proven to be beneficial, resistance to change and mass media still performing strong. What troubles marketers is the fact that customers can consciously avoid the advertisements, thus make marketing more challenging. However, it cannot be seen as a valid reason, because people have always separated what they need to know from what is pointless to know. Moreover, it is impossible to delete ad avoidance altogether. (Evans & Bratton 2012, 15-17.)

Safko (2012, 7) states that the distribution of information and opinions in social media happens at the speed of light, thus an unsatisfied customer can share the bad experience with 20,000 people or even more online compared to telling to only 20 people, when communicating face-to-face. This can be considered as an enhanced form of word of mouth (WOM) influence, because people have a tendency to trust opinions and recommendations of other people rather than advertisements (Kotler et al. 2008, 708).

WOM marketing can be considered as one of the most valuable forms of marketing, because the most powerful messages about the company and its products tend to arise outside the organization. Furthermore, WOM is especially crucial, when talking about purchasing a service, which includes taking a high risk. Monitoring WOM marketing conducted by the customers is crucial as it acts as an essential predictor of top-line growth. (Blythe 2012, 219; Lovelock et al. 2009, 186.)

“Social media puts word of mouth on steroids” (Smith et al. 2011, 210). Due to the power of WOM, marketers have come up with strategies to encourage positive feedback. The most important aspect is to have satisfied customers, who can spread positive word about the company and its products and be used as an example of satisfied customers. Other tactics include creating exciting campaigns, making affordable offers and developing referral incentive arrangements. In other words, it can be perceived as word of mouse or WOM of the Internet, which is crucial to bear in mind. (Lovelock et al. 2009, 186-187; Kotler & Keller 2016, 646-647.)

In the case of Hotelli Emilia, opinions of former customers can be found through TripAdvisor, which illustrates the importance of meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Hence, the following comments will affect the purchase decisions of future customers even though the comments were posted long ago in the past.

On May 4th, 2015 Wanderlustbuddy from Australia wrote: “The hotel is very centrally located and only minutes from the bus station. The street in front of the hotel is only for pedestrians so no traffic noise. But there is a bar belonging to the Hotel right in front of it and you can hear the music and people. Windows are doing a good job and the noise is muffled pretty

good. Cleanliness is ok, but less used areas of the room and bathroom were very dusty. Service is nice and helpful. Breakfast menu is plenty and good. When the hotel is full it can get a bit noisy from the corridors and adjoining rooms.” (TridAdvisor 2016.)

A Finnish Lumihutale experienced the hotel in a more negative sense and on March 24th, 2013, the following comment was published. “My review is really between 2 and 3 stars and I think it would be too nice to give 3/Average rating here now. I have visited other hotels in Hämeenlinna area and this one is clearly below them, and I would also say Emilia is below quality compared to major chain hotels in Finland. I understand all reviews are based on expectations, but if you are an experienced traveller who typically uses 3* or above hotels, I would look for something else. Overall impression from the hotel appearance was something original from back 70s (or perhaps 80s).” (TridAdvisor 2016.)

Further explained by Salmenkivi and Nyman (2007, 234-235), viral marketing has always played a major role among customers, and marketers have been intrigued to influence WOM of the customers. As stated earlier, social media has made viral marketing more powerful and influential. The problem of viral marketing is the creation of something new and unique, because people do not want to share anything that they have already experienced. On a positive side, social media has provided the means for the messages to be viewable after the original campaigns have ended.

To sum up, social media as a marketing tool shares the same characteristics with the Internet as a whole. Both of them contain interactive and often-synchronous communication, thus the social presence rate is high and the communication is perceived to happen on a personal level. Moreover, the participation of the customers is higher, because they have the power to decide when the information is viewed and can control the content to some extent. (Blythe 2012, 295.)

2.2.1 Challenges of Social Media

As there are approximately two billion people using social media regularly around the world, it generates massive opportunities for companies (Garst 2015). Marketing does not become any easier by having such an amount of social media users, because addressing the social media enigma forms a significant challenge. As social media is a relatively new phenomenon, there are multiple matters, which can go wrong due to the lack of rules and proven best practices. Moreover, social media has its own characteristics, which need to be recognized in order to be able to plan, implement and succeed in social media marketing. (Smith et al. 2011, 4-5.)

Moreover, new ways of thinking are required for using social media successfully; however, the probable gains are worth the effort (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Companies may face many problems related to the content in social media marketing, because followers are able to see through the messages and notice if something is not right. When communicating through social media many companies aim to be attractive in the eyes of

the followers by generating crazy and noticeable messages. Social media is about "pull" marketing, thus the shared materials need to be unique, interesting and appealing for the followers. Another crucial element of social media marketing is that the messages should be useful and informative; therefore, the goal should not lie on immediately increased sales. This is highlighted by pressuring the importance of authenticity. (Garst 2015.)

In accordance with Bergström and Leppänen (2009, 380) authenticity is something that every company should aim towards in their marketing communications through social media. Transparency and integrity are highly valued in social media, thus a company should always appear with the factual name and mention only accurate information concerning the offered goods and services. Furthermore, it is highly unethical to hire someone to spread positive word about the company and its offerings.

Companies can perceive social media as difficult and time-consuming, thus the whole company and all of its employees should commit to utilizing the opportunities derived from social media. Beginning to examine and use the potential brought by social media means that a certain change is required to happen on a business culture level. To succeed in social media marketing, someone is required to be present and committed to long-term communication with the customers. Therefore, at least one of the company employees needs to have this as his responsibility area. Moreover, time needs to be reserved for conducting social media activities in order for it to function and for the goals to be reached. The results of using social media will be minor and insignificant if there is nobody to conduct the necessary actions regularly. (Juslén 2010.)

According to Juslén (2009, 90-91) the world around the marketers is often changing more rapidly than the conducted marketing actions. As mentioned earlier, starting to utilize social media for marketing will most likely bring a change to the organization. Every change usually comes with a certain amount of resistance, because it is a natural part of human behaviour. Learning something new and utilizing new opportunities equals to stepping out from one's comfort zone, which can be perceived as scary and demanding. Nevertheless, nothing changes unless someone makes a decision, creates a plan and implements it.

Social media can be viewed as a powerful venue for customers to express their opinions and spread the information across the world, which means the discussions being let by the customers (Smith et al. 2011, 6). Through social media, companies receive negative feedback and comments about them and their products; however, the companies should always aim towards answering the comments in a polite and corrective way unless the comment is inappropriate (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 380).

It is stated that as its best, social media is a "two-way" communication tool between the company and its customers. Moreover, customers can initiate discussions with the company or vice versa, which enables more integration. Currently, social media marketing is everywhere, thus people are un-

able to avoid it and may become annoyed by it. This can be noticed by people's behaviour, as people may consciously unfollow a company or quickly scroll past the messages. This possesses serious questions to companies: where, when and how to create messages to social media channels. (Gleeson & Gardner 2015, 2).

2.2.2 Opportunities of Social Media

The opportunities of social media are highly bound together with the risks it carries, however the significant benefits in strengthening customer relationships and driving revenues from current customers surpasses the risks. Through successful social media management, companies can reach competitive advantage. (Smith et al. 2011, 9-10.)

For companies, social media provides the means of establishing a public voice and online presence (Kotler & Keller 2016, 642). However, the main advantage of social media marketing is the interaction between the customers and the company, which every single company is required to understand and be a part of (Safko 2012, 27).

The interaction is happening constantly, thus the companies are able to receive instant feedback, which is one of the positive sides of the worldwide Internet usage. For companies this interaction informs about customer opinions, because customers are voluntarily taking a part to the marketing actions of the company. (Salmenkivi & Nyman 2008, 66-67.)

According to Brooks (2014), social media provides companies the means to show their interest and care for the customers by listening to what they have to say. Taking the opinions of customers seriously and responding to arising questions is crucial for successful interaction with the customers. Moreover, customers perceive social media as a beneficial tool for learning about different companies and communicating through multiple channels, thus two-way communication should be emphasized. The company reputation and credibility will be lost in the eyes of the customers if the company uses social media only for information sharing and marketing purposes without interacting with the customers. However, answering to customer feedback and questions is not enough; therefore, companies should also be proactively engaging with the customers by asking questions and enabling conversations (Gleeson & Gardner 2015, 2).

Through successful interaction with the customers, marketers can reach a powerful and tenable market position, which is solely based on social acceptance. Hence, interaction is crucial, because it determines how willing the company supporters are to help grow the business. While interacting in social media, it is still necessary to allocate enough resources for other marketing channels. (Evans & Bratton 2012, 38.)

Moreover, Juslén (2009, 33) describes the Internet equalizing differences in company size, when it comes to marketing. The current marketing opportunities in virtual environment enable small companies to compete with larger ones in an efficient way. The expenditure of social media marketing

is minimal; hence, every marketer has equal chances of creating something unique and appealing, which can attract the customers.

The previous thought is supported by Kotler and Keller (2016, 642), because they highlight the day-to-day immediacy of social media, which might encourage companies to aim towards more innovative implementations and increased relevancy concerning the provided information. Social media further enables companies to create a long-term marketing asset.

To conclude, social media enables companies to interact with their potential customers while following the created social media marketing plans. It is crucial to understand all aspects of social media before joining it. Moreover, companies should truly understand that compared to traditional marketing campaigns, which have a beginning and an end, social media marketing and communication is constantly happening (Juslén 2009, 61).

Therefore, companies should create a strategy to be implemented in case of troubles arising from the original plan before beginning to utilize social media (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 379-380).

2.3 Social Media Usage

The rise of social media is a global phenomenon, which affects people across the world. The amount of social media usage is highly dependable on the country and people's access to the Internet. However, it is inevitable that the usage of social media will continue to increase.

2.3.1 Social Media Usage in a Global Setting

When looking at the global Internet and social media usage, it is obvious that the usage rate has been growing on an increasing speed. The global social media research summarized that there are 3.419 billion Internet users, constituting 46 % of the global population, of which 2.307 billion are active on social media and 1.968 billion are active mobile social users. Surprisingly, Western countries are behind in social media adoption rates while the increase of usage is major in Asia-Pacific. The highest Internet usage rates are currently in East and South Asia. (Chaffey 2016.)

As with everything – culture has a crucial role in people's social media adoption, thus affecting marketing strategies. Global Web Index summary of January 2015 stated the most popular social networks based on the number of active users worldwide. They were Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Tumblr. Interestingly, young people tend to use other platforms more compared to elderly people; however, elderly people seem to use Facebook more than ever before. (Chaffey 2016.)

2.3.2 Review of Social Media Usage in Finland

As stated by Tilastokeskus, 87 % of the Finns aged 16 to 89 are using the Internet. Currently, the Internet usage is increasing only within the elder population, as it is safe to say nearly everyone under the age of 55 is using it. Moreover, the Finns are using the Internet more regularly, as 68 % are using it multiple times each day, and the amount of daily Internet users of the elder population is increasing. Most of the people are utilizing it for communication, handling of necessary issues and following various media. 53 % of the Finns aged 16 to 89 are following at least one social media channel, however the results have a high correlation to age. Younger generations are active on social media, but elder people are not keen on using them. Nevertheless, the amount of social media users is increasing also in the elder population groups. (Suomen virallinen tilasto [SVT]: Väestön tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käyttö 2015.)

In 2015, the most popular social media channels used by the Finns were YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. YouTube is used more compared to the other popular channels; however, the popularity of Facebook has remained steady. Young people, less than 25 of age, tend to use Twitter and Instagram more, while LinkedIn is perceived as a professional social media channel. (STT 2015.)

Moreover, Finnish people aged 13-17 are using social media channels on their mobile devices, which means computers are no longer the mostly used electronic devices. Young people have a tendency to use social media channels for discussions with people, who they know, thus one could say social media has become less social. On the contrary, adults are acting traditionally on social media. However, adults tend to follow younger people, when it comes to issues related to technology and the Internet, which explains why Facebook is more popular among older generations now, while younger people are already shifting towards other social media channels. The "SoMe ja nuoret 2015" study by Ebrand Suomi Oy states that the mostly used social media channels by Finnish teenagers are YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Spotify and Snapchat. (Miettunen 2016, Hämeen Sanomat 6.9.2016, B10-B11.)

In the case of hospitality industry, the Internet has brought wide range of benefits to the companies offering these services. In Finland the most popular purchases online are hospitality services, traveling tickets and other services closely connected with traveling. For customers it is more convenient to make these purchases online, because offers can be found easily and people do not need to leave their home. (Suomen virallinen tilasto [SVT]: Väestön tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käyttö 2015.)

When considering the corporate perspective, it is clear that almost every Finnish company is utilizing the Internet for conducting business. 95 % of companies that are employing at least ten people have their own homepages. On the contrary, only half of the companies with at least ten employees were participating to social media. However, there are differences in the usage between business fields, e.g. 89 % of information and communication companies are utilizing social media, while only 26 % of the com-

panies on the logistics field are using it. Companies providing accommodation and restaurants services ranked second with 82 % in Finland. For 85 % of Finnish companies utilizing social media, the main purpose is to strengthen the brands and market the products. 57 % of those companies are also eager to hear customer comments and receive feedback. Minor percentage of the companies is using social media also for recruiting, cooperating with other companies, external information sharing and involving customers to the innovative development processes. (Suomen virallinen tilasto [SVT]: Tietotekniikan käyttö yrityksissä 2015.)

As was stated in the beginning of the thesis, Finnish companies have a tendency to monitor the development of social media rather than experiment with it by themselves. The thinking process is often followed by quick decisions, which may not lead to successful outcomes. However, it is always better to experiment and take small steps towards becoming an active company on social media rather than fall behind from the commonly used practices around the globe. (Salmenkivi & Nyman 2007, 289-290.)

2.4 Social Media Channels

According to Tuten (2008, 33) social media enables communication between customers and companies throughout all of the forms of online social communities. Defining what is included in social media is challenging, however, usually it is interpreted to consist of forums, virtual worlds, social opinion sharing sites, social news organizations and social networks.

Moreover, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that there is no systematic way for categorizing social media applications, because all applications have distinguished features and new sites are appearing to cyberspace daily. Hence, currently popular social media applications are introduced without taking into account forthcoming applications. The focus is especially on the social media channels used in Finland while taking into account the global usage, as hotels are conducting business worldwide.

2.4.1 Facebook

Facebook was founded in 2004 and currently, it is one of the most popular social networking sites. During December 2015, Facebook had approximately 1.04 billion daily active users globally. The main idea and goal of Facebook can be explained through its mission, which is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.” (Newsroom 2016.)

Globally, the amount of daily Facebook users is massive, which means Facebook offering major opportunities for companies. Creating a company profile is easy and does not require monetary resources, yet it is a simple way for customers to learn about the company and its offerings. People

who have liked the company page will automatically see the updates in their newsfeed. Facebook is ideal for creating a brand image, informing people about the opening times, creating campaigns, interacting with the customers, receiving feedback, showcasing the company's visual appeal and reinforcing customers into taking action. (Facebook 2016.)

2.4.2 LinkedIn

LinkedIn was established in 2003 and is considered the largest professional network in the entire world with more than 400 million users in 200 countries. The core idea of LinkedIn is to help companies to grow and become more successful by connecting the world's professionals. For companies LinkedIn is an ideal way to raise brand awareness, search for employees and communicate the offerings to potential customers. What matters is the shared content being interesting to the viewers, thus generating more followers. It acts as a beneficial channel for creating customer relationships, especially with business-to-business customers. LinkedIn should be considered as the most professional social media channel and therefore the shared content should correlate with the professionalism required. A company can be perceived more trustworthy, when it has a profile page on LinkedIn, because of the reputation carried by the specific social media channel. (LinkedIn 2016.)

2.4.3 Twitter

According to Twitter (2016), hundreds of millions of people use Twitter and send over 500 million Tweets, which are messages containing text, photos, links and videos daily. Enthusiastic users are keen on sharing information instantaneously and discovering what is happening all around the world. However, the main interest comes from connecting with people and companies in a global setting. This provides considerable benefits to companies, because Twitter enables them to reach a global audience and have beneficial connections.

Multiple ways exist for companies to leverage from Twitter. For every business it is crucial to know what is happening in the world around you, thus one of the main attributes of Twitter is the knowledge it provides about specific industries, communities and interests of potential customers. Through regular communication and marketing, a company is able to increase brand and customer awareness, frankly by being active on Twitter. Customers are generally discussing about specific goods and services on Twitter, therefore it is extremely important for companies to interact with these customers, because it is about building networks from current to future customers, and from brand advocates to influencers. Moreover, creating connections and examining the world around us is not adequate, because companies are required to grasp the main functions of Twitter. One of the key issues is to understand how to use hashtags beneficially. Hashtag is any word or sentence without spaces, beginning with the # symbol, which is used for organizing conversations to specified topic

groups. Utilizing hashtags, which are popular, will most likely bring more readers to your Tweets. (Twitter 2016.)

2.4.4 YouTube

YouTube is a platform with a billion users, launched in 2005. Moreover, it is localized in 88 countries and can be used in 76 languages, thus it can be viewed to cover 95 % of the world's Internet population. It is dedicated for discovering, watching and sharing originally created videos. Through YouTube, people and companies can connect, inform and inspire others. It also acts as a profitable marketing channel for original videos created by large and small advertisers. (YouTube 2016.)

According to YouTube (2016), businesses can start and manage their own channels the same way as individuals would. For companies, it is crucial to start by introducing the company and be passionate about creating appealing content, which would gain subscribers to the channel. The main point is to produce content, which would be interesting and have meaning to the potential customers.

2.4.5 Instagram

Instagram can be considered as a global community, which has over 400 million active users. As a result, it is one of the world's largest mobile ads platforms. People are eager to see visual inspiration; thus, companies may be perceived differently after they are exposed to customers on Instagram. Companies can benefit from Instagram by sharing stories with interested audiences, driving actions with their ads and utilizing the high-quality environment. The main idea of Instagram is to create visual stories that are connected to the company, the brand and the products offered. It is crucial to bear in mind that one should always aim towards reaching the set objectives and remaining loyal to the brand. Successful companies on Instagram have created distinctive images of their brands, which make them noticeable and memorable. Hashtags are a crucial part of Instagram; thus, their usage needs to be taken into account. (Instagram 2016.)

2.4.6 Common Characteristics of Social Media Channels

When examining the most popular social media channels in Finland and in a global setting, it is obvious that the expected contents are similar to each other while the way of communication is different. As a whole, social media is about networking, thus interaction between individuals and companies is unavoidable. Moreover, one failing to communicate and interact with the customers is worsening the company image on social media. (Karjaluoto 2010, 127-129.)

Furthermore, Juslén (2009, 118-121) states that companies can create profiles and reach customers through multiple social media channels, however, what matters is the company's true desire in conducting these actions. The content itself requires profound thinking processes, because it should

be interesting and enhance company's online reputation, while being meaningful to the viewers. In other words, the visual aspects have great impacts on social media, thus the old saying "one picture is worth a thousand words" is applicable.

According to Safko (2012, 190, 293) the quality of the shared photos, videos and messages is extremely important throughout the different social media channels. Therefore, companies should reserve time for high quality implementation of marketing strategies while considering the location.

To conclude, even though social media channels have similarities, strategies for company presence and actions need to be well organized based on the chosen channels and set objectives. As social media is highly about interaction, marketing communications must be planned and implemented accordingly.

2.5 Marketing Communications in Social Media

According to Kotler and Keller (2016, 583) marketing communication activities can enhance brand awareness, create brand image, generate positive company opinions, strengthen customer loyalty and increase the amount of customer awareness.

Developing effective communications should always start by identifying the target audience. A company is determined to fail if the communication is aimed towards everyone, because the audience is the reason for deciding what to say, how, when, where and to whom. The target audience selection should be followed by objectives setting. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 586-567.)

One cannot succeed in social media marketing – not in any marketing – without setting suitable objectives for the specific occasion and channel. Therefore, it is critical to create a social media marketing plan including all the necessary steps and objectives to reach. One of the always-present objectives for social media usage should be to interact with potential customers; however, diverse objectives must be set depending on the business and its goals. (Tuten 2008, 28-29.)

After generating suitable objectives for the marketing communications, the messages should be deeply considered. Firstly, it is necessary to create a message strategy, which should be focused around a specific theme related to the company and its products. Secondly, creative strategy needs to be considered, because the means of communicating the message determine the interest of the viewers. Creative strategy can be divided into two subsections: informational and transformational appeals. The informal appeal is focused on introducing the benefits and attributes of a given service. While as, a transformational appeal tackles with non-service related topics aiming to enhance the brand image. Thirdly, the message source is a crucial aspect for succeeding in social media marketing. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 588-590.)

Further, the benefits of social media marketing can be reached only by choosing the channels carefully after profound thinking process. Before participating in a specific social media channel, it is recommended to discover and learn about its main functions and basic rules. Being active is mandatory on social media and as most of the company resources are put into running the core business, deep considerations are in order for selecting, which applications to participate in. The target audience and messages communicated need to be the base for choosing the right medium for the business. Knowing the current customers and target customers make it straightforward to decide, which channels are most beneficial; however, it is not enough to simply apply the same channels as the customers are using, because consistent and meaningful content is what matters (Garst 2015; Smith et al. 2011, 227). On the other hand, deep consideration is necessary for examining whether or not specific applications are suitable for effective communication. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010.)

Moreover, relying on various social media applications can be beneficial for having the largest possible reach. Such a strategy can be profitable and worthwhile; however, it contains some noticeable risks. It is highlighted that social media actions of a company should be aligned with each other, to avoid spreading incoherent messages. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010.)

However, marketing messages should always be platform specific, meaning that there is no auto-posting of content between different channels the company is utilizing. To succeed it is critical and necessary to understand that the requirements are unique for every social media channel and the audiences are generally slightly different depending on the used channel. (Gleeson & Gardner 2015, 1.)

What needs to be memorized is that “one goal of communication is the resolution of ambiguity and reduction of uncertainty, and nothing is more confusing than contradicting messages across different channels” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

To succeed, integration between different social media channels and traditional media is crucial. People connect everything to the company image even though in the eyes of the company they might seem like two separate matters. More crucially, it is necessary to socialize with others on social media. The importance of being active is highlighted as social media is all about interactions and sharing of content. As social media is always developing and information travels in the speed of light, it serves a purpose to always have fresh content and engage in discussions. Social media marketing is not only about responding to negative comments and introducing products, it is about engaging in active conversations. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010.)

As social media is about interaction and constant presence, companies need to carefully plan, how to organize everything to avoid experiencing the loose of followers and negative online image. Consequently, continuing commitment of human resources is necessary for rewarding social media marketing. (Tuten 2008, 30-31.)

Social media opposes challenges to elder employees, therefore Smith et al. (2011, 226) suggest younger employees being better suited for handling the social media marketing, however the work team should be multigenerational and strongly co-operational.

As stated, interaction is necessary; however, the content is what brings the potential customers to the company. Therefore, companies should always aim towards being interesting and generating discussion beyond complementing a specific company feature. For this listening to customer opinions and expectations is valuable in order to create suitable content. In social media, companies should not be overly professional, because people are likely to view such pages as boring or might skip them altogether. Most importantly, be honest. Followers and potential customers are quickly away if the company is caught on a lie and reputation is something difficult to be built up again. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010.)

According to Evans and Bratton (2012, 160) social media marketing will not be successful from the minute one starts to utilize it as a marketing channel. It takes time and conscious effort to build up an online reputation.

Furthermore, it is not enough to pay attention to various social media channels if one is not considering the website. As stated earlier, cross marketing is a crucial factor of social media, thus the website should have direct links to social media channels and vice versa. Globally, good websites tend to contain the following information: company history, mission and vision statements, profiles of management, sponsorship or charitable activities conducted by the company and contact information. The information should be provided, because it helps the customers to figure out how trustworthy the company is, what the company is all about, which corporate responsibility actions are undertaken and how the company can be contacted. Moreover, the websites should contain information about the provided services and sections that are aimed at increasing business. (Blythe 2012, 216.)

3 RESEARCH

This chapter is dedicated for introducing the research, which was conducted in order to answer the research question and reach the set objectives. The focus lied in planning and implementing a research, which would generate relevant and in-depth information about people's opinions concerning the social media presence of hotels.

After agreeing on the thesis topic and other relevant issues with the commissioning company, the secondary data search could begin. Most of the secondary data was gathered from books and online sources; however, relevant information of the commissioning company was reached through email correspondence between the hotel manager and the thesis writer. By obtaining valid information from multiple sources, planning and focusing the practical research was easier to manage. Hence, the created theoretical framework and information received from Hotelli Emilia acted as the base

for choosing the most suitable research methods and planning the research further. Before conducting the practical research, the next steps were discussed with Pia Ryöppy, the hotel manager. Moreover, the research design was kept in mind throughout the process of finding valid secondary data and planning the research accordingly.

The means of collecting data for any research is crucial to be thought broadly before beginning the actual research. This thesis is widely based on secondary data; however, case-specific information can be only obtained by conducting research generating primary data. The research can be quantitative, qualitative or a combination of them both, which must be decided on based on the research objectives at hand. Quantitative research often generates numerical data, while qualitative research is focused on in-depth, non-numerical data. When combining both of the methods, profound information is often obtained. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 126, 161.)

3.1 Quantitative Research

One of the mostly used methods for collecting primary data, when conducting explanatory research, is the use of questionnaires, which enables acquiring quantitative information. As the thesis topic is related to the use of the Internet, self-completed questionnaires present a suitable questionnaire type. The aim of the questionnaire usage is to obtain generalized and quantitative opinions concerning a specific topic, which can be further explored by conducting qualitative interviews. (Saunders et al. 2012, 419, 424.)

In order to understand opinions of public, a questionnaire (Appendix 1) was chosen as a quantitative research method. The focus of the questionnaire was in finding out how people perceive hotels in social media and what kind of content is expected to be published by the hotels. The questions were planned without mentioning the commissioning company or indicating the questions towards a specific target group. Moreover, the questions were planned to provide information concerning, which social media channels are the most popular ones among the potential customers and what would be the most suitable publishing frequency. The content of the social media channels also acted as one of the most important issues examined.

The thesis writer did not use specific sampling for choosing the respondents for the questionnaire. It was created on Webropol and conducted online. The questionnaire was made public on May 13th, 2016 and shared on the thesis writer's Facebook page. By doing so, the aim was to have respondents with multiple nationalities and backgrounds. One week after the publication, there were not enough responses for a quantitative research, therefore personal Facebook messages were sent to the friends of the thesis writer. In other words, the questionnaire was first seen on the thesis writer's Facebook page and later people were contacted personally in order to gain a higher response rate. The questionnaire was open until May 30th, 2016, when it reached its 75th respondent.

As stated above, 75 people answered the questionnaire, of which 57 were female and 18 were male. Due to 88 % of the respondents being less than 25 of age, the results represent the opinions of younger generations. Moreover, the respondents were divided between different nationality groups for noticing if there are diverse expectations for social media presence of hotels. Out of the respondents, 30 represented the Finns and others were from various countries.

3.2 Qualitative Research

The conducted quantitative research gave an overall picture of people's expectations of a hotel in social media, however, the focus was among younger generations and the respondents were from all around the world. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were chosen in order to further explore and reveal themes appeared in the questionnaire responses (Saunders et al. 2012, 377). Thus, the thesis writer decided to co-operate with the commissioning company and conduct interviews (Appendix 2) at their premises. The main objective of the interviews was to get a deep insight to the opinions of the existing customers concerning the hotel's competitiveness and social media possibilities. Further, the customers' reasons for choosing the specific hotel were tackled.

The thesis writer used semi-structured interviews as a qualitative research method, because it enables deeper conversation between the interviewer and the interviewees. Moreover, this type of an interview is suitable for an explanatory study as it aims to understand the relationship between variables relevant to the research topic. For semi-structured interviews, themes and key questions are planned beforehand, however the structure and the flow of the conversation is highly dependable on the individuals interviewed. The information obtained through semi-structured interviews is analysed qualitatively, thus providing a deeper insight to the issue research. (Saunders et al. 2012, 374-377.)

The interviews were conducted on June 16th, 2016 in the reception area of Hotelli Emilia. The thesis writer stayed at Hotelli Emilia from 6pm to 7:45pm and interviewed the customers of the hotel. Deciding on the interviewees happened without deep planning, thus the interviewees were selected arbitrary, by asking customers in the lounge if they had time for an interview. Finding suitable interviewees opposed a challenge, because even though there were people walking through the lobby, they were not interested in participating to the interview. However, total of six people; four females and two males agreed to be interviewed during the specific period. Three of the interviewees were Finnish travellers combining free time activities with their business travels, two were Americans visiting their relatives in Finland, however stopping by on the way to the airport, and one was a Belgian on a journey.

All of the interviewees wished to remain anonymous; however, the interviews were audio-recorded in order to grasp all information and the opinions provided. A recording permission was asked from all of the inter-

viewees before starting the actual interviews. The length of the interviews varied, because some people were more talkative and interested in participating to this thesis project. On the other hand, some people were not so keen on the social media aspect of the interview or did not want to spend too much time for the interview. As a result, the interviews were different in nature, because some included only questions and answers while the rest flowed more as two-way conversations.

After completing the practical research, profound knowledge over the researched topic was gained. Conducting the qualitative research in the form of interviews gave a deeper understanding of the issues, which surface was only scratched in the questionnaires. Hence, quantitative and qualitative research act as compliments to each other, which further deepens the knowledge obtained through examining the already existing secondary data.

4 ANALYSIS

When conducting a research, analysing the collected data is crucial to be handled with precise consideration and focus. Furthermore, the results are required to be provided as they are in order to reach the highest possible research authenticity. Hence, this chapter is dedicated for introducing the results of the conducted questionnaire, followed by the complimenting interview answers. The similarities of the research findings are also examined in order to create the most suitable social media strategy for Hotelli Emilia.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, ‘Hotels in Social Media’ questionnaire (Appendix 1) was open from May 13th to May 30th, 2016. Since sampling of the respondents was not applied, the thesis writer’s Facebook friends answered the questionnaire. As the 75 respondents consisted of people from various countries, the results were divided based on the nationalities. By using nationality as a result divider, significant differences were not discovered in the responses, hence the main findings are analysed as thoughts of majority respondents. One could say hotel business being conducted globally, which explains the lack of difference between the opinions of people from various countries even though culture has a tendency to have an impact on the opinions of people.

The conducted questionnaire reveals that nearly everyone uses social media multiple times a day and one third of the respondents pointed out most of the usage happening between 6 pm and 12 pm, which indicates the most suitable publishing time for reaching a highest possible audience. However, it is necessary to bear in mind the trouble arising from the time zones, because it affects which target group is most likely to see the content first. Only 19 % of the respondents were following hotels on social media, however, 87 % would use social media to discover information about a certain hotel. Hence, it is a clear indicator for hotels to begin utilizing social media more broadly, because people view it as a suitable channel for checking information before traveling.

The questionnaire was published on Facebook and it was viewed as the mostly used social media channel among the respondents. Over half of the respondents had accounts in YouTube and Instagram, and one third was using Twitter. Less interest was noticed for Google+, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Snapchat and VKontakte. Continuingly, the respondents would wish hotels to utilize the same social media channels in their marketing communications as they are using themselves. Three mostly wished for were Facebook with 92 %, Instagram with 47 % and YouTube with 36 % interest. As a result, hotels should follow their potential customers to the mostly used social media channels in order to gain the highest possible visibility and possibility for gaining followers.

4.1 Social Media Content

Through the research, it is obvious that the social media content has major effects on people's perceptions of a certain hotel. 87 % of the respondents agreed that the information reached through social media would affect the booking decision. For this question, the respondents were asked to rationalize their answers. Most of the people highlighted the importance of word of mouth, because through it, it is easier to generate suitable expectations and avoid disappointments. This information could be created by allowing hotel guests to publish comments and pictures on the hotel's social media channels. Moreover, the respondents perceived the information provided by other hotel guests to be sincere and more trustworthy, especially as on the Internet being honest requires less courage than in face-to-face encounters.

Furthermore, a few respondents mentioned it being convenient to be able to check only Facebook for gaining enough information about a certain hotel. All companies should bear in mind that according to the potential customers, information gained through social media is sometimes perceived equalling to reviews of the professionals. It was also stated that in today's world social media is likely to have a conscious or unconscious effect on people's decisions, which cannot be avoided to happen. The respondents were aware of the need for checking information on the social media for reliability and not believing everything. Hence, the potential customers are careful, when surfing on the Internet. On the other hand, it was widely believed that on social media information can be retrieved, which cannot be found otherwise. Therefore, every hotel should be examining the Internet for information that might affect their future sales even though they themselves would not be participating to social media. People are already part of the social media community, which explains the situation, hence they are likely to discuss about the hotel in platforms, which the hotel is unaware of.

On the other hand, people are interested in seeing apparent marketing material focused on the hotel and its surroundings, which might create the need for traveling. One of the respondents spelled it as follows: "Since the social media could "sell in" their hotel to the customer, thus creating a sense of "desire" to visit that specific hotel." Moreover, on social media everyone is expected to aim towards the best possible outcomes, because

reputation can be quickly lost and it requires resources and constant effort to be built up again. The 13 % of the respondents, who marked that social media would not affect the booking decision, mentioned the reliability of the information reached through social media not being as high as on the official sites. Furthermore, the reliability is highly dependable on the person, who posts a specific comment or advertisement. Moreover, some people are only interested in seeing offers and taking part to competitions. As a result, the factors affecting people’s perception of the reliability of the social media content should be deeply considered.

The table 1. shows how important certain information is to be published by the hotel in social media, which would result in more followers and increased communication between the hotel and its potential customers. The scale is from one to five, where five equals to the greatest importance.

Table 1. The Important Contents of Social Media Channels

	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Average
Contact Information	1	3	9	12	50	75	4.43
News updates	3	11	18	27	16	75	3.56
Pictures	1	2	2	12	58	75	4.65
Videos	3	11	24	18	19	75	3.52
Descriptions about the personnel	2	14	23	29	7	75	3.33
Discounts	1	3	7	29	35	75	4.25
Competitions	11	14	22	19	9	75	3.01
Information about nearby events	3	8	19	30	15	75	3.61
Restaurant and activity tips in the area	2	4	12	33	24	75	3.97
Co-operative actions with other tourism companies	8	5	28	27	7	75	3.27
Feedback possibilities	2	6	21	23	23	75	3.79
Customer service	1	4	15	14	41	75	4.2

The table 1. reveals that people perceive pictures, contact information, discounts and customer service as the most important issues present on hotel’s social media channels. Pictures were mostly appreciated, because people are intrigued to see the premises and what they can expect before making a booking decision. Through pictures people are often able to see more than text could ever tell, thus allocating resources for interesting pictures is necessary. Contact information is crucial to be mentioned everywhere and social media is not an exception. However, on social media

linking the different channels utilized, is necessary to bear in mind. On the Internet surfing between different websites and social media channels is quick and easy, thus linking the utilized channels is important. Social media opposes suitable location for introducing discounts, especially when viewing the issue from the customers' point of view. For them, discounts are effortless and quick to be noticed on social media, because they are using it on a daily basis. Furthermore, people are increasingly interested in seeing and hearing about customer service before deciding on an accommodation, because it is an essential element of the hotel business. By demonstrating the service quality, it is also possible to highlight the personalization of the provided service and the hotel with its offerings.

In addition, restaurant and activity tips in the area, feedback possibilities, information about nearby events, news updates and videos were appreciated according to the table 1. Before booking a hotel, people are searching for information concerning the town and its offerings. Hence, restaurant and activity tips are valued, especially if the hotel has co-operation with other companies offering these services, which would result in discounts for the hotel guests. Customers are always keen on knowing what is going on and if there are any events that might affect their stay, thus regular news updates should be included to social media channels. In connection to the shared pictures, people would like to see videos, as through them it is possible to be more connected with the place even before arrival. Customers, who are staying at the hotel for a short period would prefer to plan their time wisely, hence knowing as much as possible about the hotel and the city serves a purpose. Moreover, social media is all about interaction, thus allowing comments on the company's social media channels is crucial, because people will always find a channel for feedback. By doing so, the hotel can be aware of the current discussion concerning them and has a possibility to influence the opinions of the public.

As seen on the table 1, some of the respondents would like to discover information about the personnel, for example descriptions and introduction videos. By introducing the staff members online, the customers can create a better understanding of the personalized touch that is present in the service and seen at the hotel. Co-operative actions with other companies were also appreciated to some extent, however, people are only interested in information, which might benefit them and create more positive aspects to their journeys. In other words, if the co-operative actions generate discounts to restaurants, museums or other tourism places, people would like to acknowledge the information prior to traveling. Further, competitions interested the respondents the least; however, the prize of the competition is likely to affect the participation rates.

As pictures and videos are crucial factors, when deciding on a certain hotel, one of the questionnaire's questions dealt with the content of the pictures and videos published on social media. What gained the highest interest was seeing how the hotel rooms look like (22 %) and what kind of experience is expected in provided restaurant services (19 %). Moreover, places worth visiting (16 %) and available drinks (15 %) are good elements to be shown through pictures and videos. Service gained 13 % in-

terest, however it is closely connected with room and restaurant service videos and is a crucial factor for companies conducting business on the service field. Less importance was met for meetings facilities (7 %) and personnel (6%); however, this can be expected due to the sampling decision of the thesis writer. The last two percentages pointed out some ideas of the respondents, which they would be keen on seeing in the videos and pictures of a hotel. Three respondents would be eager to see the route to the hotel from the railway and bus stations or when using other means of transportation. Interest was also shown for making it possible to see the exact room one is booking and not a misleading picture of the best room the hotel can offer. To sum up, the hotel can be extremely innovative, when it comes to the pictures and videos, because an interested audience is likely to exist for every possible topic. Yet, it is crucial to bear in mind that the execution quality of the content affects the viewing rates the most.

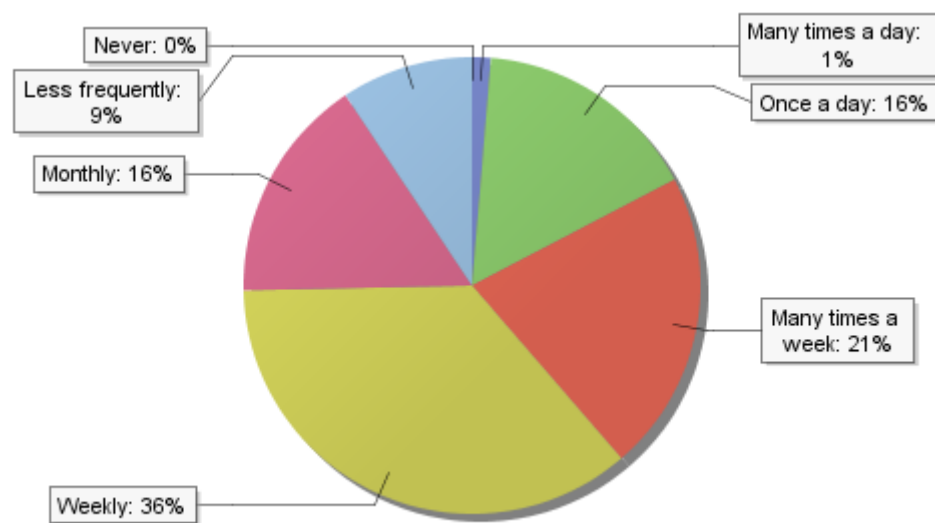


Figure 2. The Updating Frequency

The 13th question concerning the publication frequency was the one dividing the respondents. As seen on the figure 2, the majority of the respondents would like to see updates on a weekly basis and 21 % many times a week, which amounts to over half of the respondents. On the other hand, equal amount of interest (16 %) was noticed towards updating once a day and on a monthly basis. As a result, a suitable medium might be to publish once or twice a week depending on the amount of resources allocated for the social media activities.

The last question of the questionnaire was open-ended, where respondents were asked to write down, what they expect from a hotel on social media. 34 out of 75 respondents answered the question, as it was not compulsory for submitting the questionnaire. Next, few of the responses are listed down.

- ‘I would expect it to be low-key but upbeat and enthusiastic. I’d want to see why I would have a great time staying there. Pictures of the lo-

cal scenery, unique aspects of the hotel, and some humorous staff pictures would interest me.”

- “To show how the hotel really is, to answer comments (to have a very active community manager) and in general to be open to relate with the people on that network.”
- “be polite in answering questions, no advertising, be transparent in giving feedback (meaning if I commented something bad for example - they won't ask me to write a mail or make a call to the manager, but answer straight away there in the comment so other people can see too), also have info in ENGLISH, beside their own language”
- “To create a customer relationship and through that, offer special prizes and other special offerings that are solely for the ones following them in social media.”
- “I would expect very annoying advertising about quality and low prices. What I would like to expect is rather neutral information, customer reviews, videos of facilities and pictures of some special events at the hotel (even if just a photo of a drink the hotel bar created to be enjoyed on an especially sunny day)”

To summarize, in general people are expecting hotels to sell themselves to the potential customers without including too much advertising on their social media. However, this requires the ability to attract people to the hotel by generating interesting content. The content should include the issues already mentioned in this chapter; nevertheless, all provided information should always be updated no matter how minor the change might be. Undoubtedly, people are mainly keen on seeing interesting content; however, it is also crucial to show relevant aspects, such as contact information and safety factors. Moreover, if the hotel is involved in environmental causes or conducting charity actions, updates concerning them could be posted on social media. Hotels are expected to be professional, yet friendly and reliable; hence answering to customer feedback should happen in a timely manner and in the social media channel that was chosen by the customer. The constant interaction is an essence of social media, thus any company taking part to social media, should allocate resources for meeting the commonly known unwritten rules of social media. Moreover, when organizing competitions or having discounts, it is necessary to mention all relevant information and make sure the original prices are available to be viewed in all cases.

In addition, the social media channels are expected to be clear, cohesive and linked together. Even though the same information should be found in all of the channels, the same posts cannot be shared across the social media applications utilized by the hotel. When dealing with social media, the actual webpage of the company is equally important. It should be linked to all social media channels used and vice versa, in order to make information search as easy as it can be for the potential customers. One should not forget the appearance of the webpage, because it is one of the indica-

tors for how the company is seen on the Internet. Hence, when signing on to social media usage, keeping up the webpage is equally important. Moreover, as the hotel business happens in a global environment, everything posted by the hotel should be delivered in the native language as well as English. It is crucial to have the content also in English, because that makes the customers feel more equal and appreciated as the same information is communicated to everyone.

4.2 Customer Perception

As stated in the previous chapter, after obtaining the publics' perception about hotel's social media presence, customers of Hotelli Emilia were interviewed for gaining explicit opinions and insights of the hotel. The aim of the interviews was to discover why and how people had found the specific hotel and how they would prefer to see Hotelli Emilia utilizing social media in the future. The interviews were semi structured, following the questions in the Appendix 2. However, the answers to the questions and the general flow of the conversations affected the questions asked.

The following interview answers are divided between private and company customer analyses in order to notice any significant difference between the expectations concerning the social media presence of Hotelli Emilia. The division was also conducted to point out a potential need for future research, which would be solely focused on a specific customer segment.

4.2.1 Private Customers

Hotelli Emilia has private people as its customers, which is truly a different customer group compared to company customers. The following paragraphs are introducing the opinions of private customers, which were interviewed by the thesis writer.

Firstly, the reason for traveling to Hämeenlinna, Finland and staying at Hotelli Emilia is tackled. The main purpose for visiting Hämeenlinna seemed to be it locating between Helsinki and Tampere. The customers were interested in visiting the Häme castle and other sights, such as Iittala Glass Capital and the Aulanko area. One of the customers mentioned discovering the hotel from a tourist guidebook, after which searching for it on the Internet. Other private customers came across the hotel through Booking.com. For private customers, the main reason for booking the hotel was the competitive price, safe parking and the location. Furthermore, the appealing rooms and comments posted on the booking sites affected the accommodation decision. In other words, the word of mouth information retrieved from the Internet was already playing a vital role in the booking decision of these customers.

Interestingly, all of the private customers would have wanted to gain more knowledge about the hotel and Hämeenlinna before traveling, and thought social media could be a suitable channel for communicating the needed information. Social media was perceived as a helpful channel especially

when comparing few hotels, which webpages do not deliver enough information for making a booking decision. Commonly, people were interested in seeing the hotel rooms through pictures and videos in connection to the staff performance. Moreover, the customers thought the hotel could post pictures about personalized drinks and served breakfast, and videos about the potential traveling destinations. Furthermore, maps and transportation directions were wished for. The common feature was that the interviewees wished to see the personal characteristics of the hotel in social media, which would differentiate it from its competitors.

Moreover, sharing material concerning events held in Hämeenlinna and co-operative actions with other companies, such as restaurants, would be appreciated; however, hearing about former customers' experiences would be the most intriguing. The customers perceive former customers' opinions more trustworthy than information communicated only by the hotel itself. The updating frequency divided the respondents, because one would wish hotels to make posts weekly and for others updating only, when information changes is enough. However, it was also stated that if the updates are not frequent enough, then it is a reason to believe the hotel has something to hide.

When it comes to the social media channel selection, the private customers considered Facebook and Instagram as the most suitable social media channels for the hotel. Facebook was mentioned, because it enables sharing texts, pictures and news updates, as well as commenting of former and future customers. Customers perceived Instagram as ideal for hotels, because pictures can be shared quickly through it and something is easier to be communicated to the customers through pictures rather than in the text format. Moreover, the interviewees pointed out that lying in pictures is more challenging than in written messages. A dinner of co-operative restaurant, a drink created by the hotel for a hot summer day and breakfast room's atmosphere were some of the ideas for Instagram pictures mentioned by the interviewees. Furthermore, the interviewees mentioned some of their hotel decisions being made only by the pictures viewed in case of comparing two or more hotels. Hence, the quality of the pictures and videos should be kept in mind throughout the process of planning and executing social media communications.

4.2.2 Business Travelers

After analysing the opinions of the private customers, the interview answers of the company customers are tackled. The purpose is to notice if different expectations for Hotelli Emilia's social media presence are noticed depending on the customer segment examined.

The business traveller perspective is always different in multiple ways; however, the main reason is that companies tend to have partnerships with specific hotels, which are reviewed regularly. For this reason, companies can utilize the services of the same hotel multiple times, presuming that the offers remain as affordable as they were time after time. Coming to the interview, one of the business travellers mentioned the mostly required as-

pects being a quiet room to sleep in, a suitable parking and a filling breakfast. In this case, the management had made the accommodation decision; however, the employee was able to say that social media communications would not affect the decision.

Fortunately, two of the interviewees, who combined business and leisure, tend to be involved in their companies' hotel booking decision-making, thus giving a different perspective on the social media usage of the hotels. Both of them decided to book Hotelli Emilia, because it beats the competition by standing out as a smaller, non-chain hotel and is located in the centre of Hämeenlinna. In other words, the company customers were able to notice the personal vibes of the hotel even before booking the rooms and arriving to the premises. They had found Hotelli Emilia by the companies' travel portals and through Google search, after which checking the hotel's webpage and its presence on the Booking.com. The interviewees believed that existing on social media is beneficial for a hotel as long as the updates are of high quality and well thought upon, and the updating frequency is suitable, when it happens every other week. According to the interviewees, Hotelli Emilia could post 360° videos of the premises, show maps of the room locations and share pictures about the breakfast, as those are major factors for business travellers, yet they interest private customers as well. Moreover, monitoring the former customers' experiences affects the business booking decisions the same as private booking. When considering the hotel's social media presence from the company perspective, the most suitable social media channel is Facebook, because companies do not have enough time for checking multiple channels and Facebook is the mostly known channel out of all possible ones.

Further, one of the interviewees mentioned social media giving additional value to the hotel, because it enables seeing more of the hotel before actually arriving to the premises. As a result, one can say that the social media presence of a hotel is a beneficial marketing tool as private and company customers are interested in seeing the content reached through social media.

To sum up, the practical research indicates the reasons for why Hotelli Emilia should begin to be more active on social media communications and allocate resources for the certain activity.

4.3 SWOT Analysis

Furthermore, the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Hotelli Emilia are analysed in connection to the potential social media marketing communications. These aspects are mentioned in Table 2., after which the points are examined individually.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of Hotelli Emilia’s Social Media Presence

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Privately owned hotel - Agile company with unique features - Existing Facebook profile 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small hotel in Hämeenlinna - Unfamiliarity of social media marketing - Uncertainty of social media
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customer engagement - Building a brand image - Connections with influential travellers and hotel visitors 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient resources - Resistance to change of personnel - Social media presence of competitors

Strengths

As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, Hotelli Emilia is a privately owned small hotel, which makes it more agile compared to its larger competitors in the area. Hence, social media marketing decisions can be made and adjusted quicker as there is less hierarchy to be dealt with. By instantaneously being able to grasp new trends of social media, especially related to the accommodation business, a possibility for reaching competitive edge is reached. Similarly, larger companies will aim to benefit from these possibilities; however, their planning period is longer. Moreover, hotel chains tend to create marketing strategies for all of the hotels affected even though sometimes it could be more beneficial to conduct location specific marketing. While larger companies are planning their social media actions, Hotelli Emilia can already be utilizing the provided possibilities. Further, Hotelli Emilia should strengthen its hold on the reached competitive edge while larger hotel chains are conducting their social media marketing actions.

Due to the hotel being privately owned, it carries unique features, which are noticeable by the customers. The customers can experience hotel rooms with Finnish design, specifically planned breakfast, drink selection and highly valued location. While conducting the interviews at the hotel’s premises, the above mentioned aspects were clear to be noticed. They were the reasons for why the customers had decided to stay in Hotelli Emilia rather than in other hotels located in Hämeenlinna. The hotel also co-operates with multiple companies in the area, which enables customers to benefit from discounts and unique offers. It can be viewed as a strength even though the customers were not widely aware of the opportunities the co-operation brings to them. Therefore, it acts as a suitable element to be included to the future social media content, because there is a clear need for communicating precise information to people, who are planning their journeys.

In addition, Hotelli Emilia has experienced with social media via Facebook, meaning that there is already existing social media audience. It can be viewed as a suitable foundation for enhancing the Facebook presence and broadening the social media presence in general. In other words, Ho-

telli Emilia is not a total newbie to social media, which will benefit the hotel, when allocating more energy towards it.

Weaknesses

As every company, Hotelli Emilia also has its own weaknesses; however, realizing them is the key for avoiding their major negative impacts on the core business actions. As stated earlier, the company is a small hotel in Hämeenlinna, which is a town dominated by larger hotel chains. Therefore, the hotel should constantly be searching for ways to utilize the size and unique features to stand against the competition. Due to the smaller size, the hotel has less human and monetary resources to be spent for marketing communications in social media, which makes the planning process even more crucial. Therefore, the personnel should not be stretched very thin, because the quality of social media presence may become neglected, which affects the social media image of the hotel. Every company should always aim towards the best possible social media reputation, because especially in social media, the reputation is what makes the company popular among the viewers. Similar problem is unlikely to occur in larger companies due to them having people hired solely for marketing purposes.

As stated earlier, the existing Facebook profile of the hotel can be perceived as strength, however, the company is still a beginner at social media marketing. Expanding the range of social media channels used can be challenging for a company that is unexperienced with social media and has limited resources. Furthermore, every social media has its unique features even though similarities also exist. However, by understanding the functions of one social media channel is not enough to understand all of them, especially as the audiences tend to be different depending on the channel.

Naturally, the benefits of marketing communications in social media can be reached, however it requires precise planning and execution. Undoubtedly, social media is uncertain and changes rapidly, which belongs to the core foundation of social media. It affects everyone using social media; however, for companies with less experience, the uncertainty may be faced as a larger challenge. Moreover, it is a weakness rather than a threat, because every company has to face it, but for companies with lower profit margins the impacts of failure tend to be larger.

Opportunities

As social media is considered globally beneficial and actively used, it provides multiple benefits for companies. The main opportunity provided for Hotelli Emilia is customer engagement, which is highly valued in today's world. By utilizing social media channels, the company is able to communicate with its customers. The communication should always be two-way communication and if Hotelli Emilia succeeds in it, the customers are likely to tell others about it. In one hand, the pre-travel communication is crucial, because the future customers can reach the needed information and already feel the personalized service that the hotel can offer. On the

other hand, the communication after the journey is equally important, because it enables potential customers to hear positive word of mouth marketing and the hotel stays aware of the customer opinions. Hence, one can say it is a straightforward way for the customers to search information and connect with the hotel before making a booking decision, which benefits both of the parties involved.

Therefore, Hotelli Emilia should aim towards building a unique brand in social media, which correlates with the service, it provides to the customers. Brand image is a highly important aspect, because none is interested in staying at a hotel, which is inactive on social media channels and does not deliver what is expected from it. Building a brand in social media is challenging and time consuming, however, when succeeding the benefits are considerable.

In addition, by being active on social media and searching for the latest trends, Hotelli Emilia could make connections with influential travelers and other hotel visitors. Today, it is popular to write blogs and keep YouTube channels, which can be viewed as word of mouth or viral marketing. Hence, connecting and co-operating with these people could result in reaching potential customers. Moreover, people tend to believe popular YouTubers and consider their opinions, when making traveling plans, hence, they could be suitable influencers spreading information about the hotel.

Threats

Even though the social media channels, rather their usage, considered in this thesis are free, sufficient resources are required for reaching the provided benefits. Allocating enough resources, mainly human, is crucial and by not doing so, the content may lack in quality. Someone might perceive social media as an easy way to be found, however, companies are required to generate interesting content for reaching potential customers and gaining followers. It is impossible to succeed without enough imagination and possibilities for implementing the ideas into actual content on social media channels. For reaching it, Hotelli Emilia should name suitable employees for this task and grant them with enough time to conduct the necessary actions. Furthermore, before planning and implementing any social media actions, it is crucial to count that enough resources are available for reaching successful outcomes. There is no point in beginning to utilize social media if one cannot contribute enough for managing the never-ending process.

Moreover, being more active on social media affects all of the employees in one way or the other, therefore resistance to change may occur. Resistance to change can be expected, because it is an instinctual act of humans. However, the importance of minimalizing the effects of resistance, need to be remembered. The employees of Hotelli Emilia may not feel comfortable using social media in that extent or the company lacks personnel willing to generate social media content. The employees may also feel that they are lacking required skills for the new tasks given, which in-

creases the amount of uncertainty. It is crucial for the hotel management to investigate the actual opinions and potential problems together with the personnel in order to create an action plan. The management could also rely on change management theories, which might help managing the change process and better understanding the concerns of the employees.

Naturally, one of the biggest threats is the social media presence of competitors, because hotels are competing for the same audience in social media. Furthermore, Hotelli Emilia might face tough competition due to its limited resources compared to its larger competitors. As mentioned earlier, Hotelli Emilia also has multiple strengths and opportunities in social media; hence, it is possible to overcome the concerns arising from the competitive situation. Lastly, information travels fast in social media, thus something fabulous today may not be popular tomorrow, which equalizes the possibilities of all companies.

4.4 Reliability of the Research

The highest possible research reliability is something that every researcher aims towards; however, it is complicated to reach. This is mainly due to the human factor, which influences the whole process of conducting the research from the idea to the result. Thus, the reliability of this thesis is examined by introducing the limitations faced by the thesis writer. After indicating the faced limitations, the conducted actions for enhancing the situation are introduced.

This research – as every research – contains some limitations even though the aim has been to minimize their amount and effects on the research authenticity. The research findings are based on information gathered from secondary data sources and conducted practical research. The first limitation deals with secondary data being adequate and trustworthy. Secondly, some limitations were faced while planning and conducting the practical research. Furthermore, the focus of the research limited the width of the results achieved.

Collecting sufficient secondary data creates the base for this research; hence, reaching credible and authentic information is crucial. Even though the thesis writer searched and examined multiple information sources before combining the selected information in the theory section, the theory may not be up to date. The marketing basics remain the same over time; however, do develop and become more focused. Especially, social media is something that is always evolving and changing, therefore, the information might not be same tomorrow compared to what it is today. For finding applicable information, printed and electronic books were looked for. In order to gain recent information on marketing communications in social media, electronic sources including a journal and several articles were searched. By collecting adequate information from multiple sources, the thesis writer aimed towards the highest possible authenticity.

What affects the given recommendations the most is the practical research, which contains noticeable and potentially hidden limitations. As a decision

was made to create an online questionnaire towards the Facebook friends of the thesis writer, no particular sampling was planned. Due to this, the questionnaire responses represent the opinions of younger generations, who are more into social media and internationalization. In one hand, Hotelli Emilia can truly benefit from the opinions given by young people, because they are the users of social media and represent the potential new customer group of the hotel. On the other hand, the responses do not indicate the opinions of people from Hotelli Emilia's already existing customer segments.

As pointed out earlier, the conducted questionnaires did not deliver precise enough information even though a clear outlook of the situation was achieved. Further, the reached information was shallow to some extent and not about a certain hotel, hence semi structured interviews were held at the premises of Hotelli Emilia. The aim was to interview people from different age groups in order to gain balanced opinions of the hotel and its social media presence. One of the goals was to compliment the responses given through the questionnaires and make the research more about the certain company rather than an overall perception of the situation.

Both of the practical research methods include dealing with people and planning suitable questions. When it comes to the questionnaire, one cannot truly know how seriously the answers were given. Conducting interviews is also a challenge, because the interviewer should not contribute too much to the discussion, yet still lead the conversation forward. In other words, the interviewer bias may occur even though its effects were minimised. However, both of the methods require precise planning of the questions. As people are not interested in answering long online questionnaires, it was planned to be brief, which meant the questions had to be focused. The same issue was faced when planning the interviews, because the aim was to disturb the hotel guests as little as possible. On the other hand, fewer limitations were faced with the interviews, because one can always add questions and readjust them based on the answers received.

Focusing a research is necessary, however, while conducting the practical research it appeared to be also a limitation. The aim of the research was to find out how Hotelli Emilia should utilize social media in its marketing communications towards private customers, which is its minor customer group. However, some of the interviewees represented company travellers, thus giving answers from the business point of view. It cannot be considered as a true limitation, because it revealed that private and business travellers can appreciate similar social media content from the hotel. Simultaneously, future research topics were detected, which have potential for further enhancement of Hotelli Emilia's social media strategy.

The amount and effects of the limitations were broad to the minimum by applying triangulation. As was pointed out earlier, the thesis writer mainly utilized methods triangulation to corroborate findings and increase the validity of the results. Triangulation of sources was applied to check the consistency of information retrieved from different data sources. Such a situation was reached by obtaining meaningful information concerning the

necessary topics for this research from multiple secondary data sources. The reliability of the results was further improved by conducting the practical research carefully. It was conducted by taking into consideration all of the effects an interview or a questionnaire may bring, which were mentioned above, when examining the limitations of this research.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The main purpose of the thesis was to discover suitable ways for Hotelli Emilia to utilize social media channels for increasing customer awareness of the services and other possibilities offered by the company. Hence, this chapter is solely dedicated for the recommendations, which the thesis writer suggests the hotel to deeply examine and follow if the goal is to be a trendsetter on the specific business field.

According to the acquired theoretical knowledge and empirical research findings, Hotelli Emilia could benefit from social media marketing if conducted with precise planning and execution. The results show social media being mainly used among younger generations; however, there are indications for interest of older people towards social media. Even though, the research is focused on the private customers, the results show companies' care and interest towards social media usage and the content of the hotels.

Based on the practical research, including the results of the questionnaire and the interviews, a chronological plan with multiple steps is created for Hotelli Emilia. The plan includes several steps taking into consideration the different aspects of beginning to utilize social media channels for marketing communications. Moreover, the theoretical framework introduced in the second chapter is acknowledged throughout describing the steps Hotelli Emilia should follow in order to reach the set social media marketing goals.

5.1 The Social Media Strategy

Companies should not begin to utilize any social media channels before a clear action plan is created, which should correlate with the needs of the target customers, the objectives of the company and the resources available for these marketing purposes. Hence, Hotelli Emilia should have clear objectives for its social media presence and be widely aware of which channels are used by the target customers. The needs of the customer groups and the users of the social media channels tend to be different, which is crucial to understand and plan the actions accordingly. As the research pointed out, younger generations are using social media extensively; however, older people are becoming more active on social media, especially on Facebook. Therefore, it is advisable to generate content, which intrigues younger people without forgetting the older customer groups and potential company viewers.

Based on the theory researched and practical research findings analysed, the thesis writer suggests the following marketing communications' objec-

tives in social media for Hotelli Emilia. The objectives are meant to be the main ones, which should be reachable by allocating consistent efforts towards social media communications. They do not rule out any other possible advantages, such as increased booking rates, which can be reached by being present on social media. Moreover, every social media campaign or certain content patterns should have their own objectives on top of the general ones. For example, Hotelli Emilia might want to introduce their breakfast selection through Instagram during a specific time for which the objective could be to excite people with pictures that make them crave for the dishes introduced.

Table 3. Objectives of Hotelli Emilia in Social Media

1. Aim at building an online reputation	→	Reach increased customer awareness
2. Aim towards enhanced communication with past, current and future customers	→	Appreciate the essence of social media by understanding the required interactivity
3. Be active and aim towards innovation	→	Generate possibilities for co-operation with social media users and the hotel

The main idea of the objectives presented in the table 3. and conducted social media marketing in general should not be to increase the sales immediately even though it may be one of the long-term goals. Hence, the objectives mentioned above are created for a beginner in social media, which can be adjusted to the shifting needs of Hotelli Emilia in the future.

Firstly, building an online reputation does not happen overnight, it is a long project, which requires conscious effort. The more active and successful company is in social media, the more followers it gains, which will eventually result in increased customer awareness. Based on the research, customers are interested in knowing more about the accommodation and location before the journey, thus providing information through social media would benefit the customers. Moreover, spreading knowledge about the hotel and possible activities in Hämeenlinna could lead to increased amount of customers. It is essential to understand the complexity of building an online reputation and the minor actions, which may ruin it for a long time, hence creating a plan and adjusting it, when needed is of great importance.

Secondly, social media is about interaction, thus, Hotelli Emilia should aim towards creating connections with its customers online. Different social media channels are ideal platforms for feedback, questions and discussions. It is crucial to comprehend the importance of responding to the

comments of past, current and potential customers, because the actions taken will be noticeable through word of mouth marketing. By being active on responding to customer comments and other reasons for contacting, the hotel is able to give a loyal social media impression of itself. Further, by managing the chosen social media channels with care and thought, the reputation may be build up easier, which also affects the customer awareness rates.

The third objective deals with suitable co-operation possibilities being detected by being active and aiming towards the role of a trendsetter. Co-operating with customers is important, because it generates friendly and trustworthy atmosphere. Such actions can also create word of mouth marketing, when people involved share the news on their social networks. Moreover, people may participate to the hotel's social media presence unconsciously by using suitable hashtags, for example, the name of the hotel or the town. The hashtag usage may also occur, when organizing competitions solely for the followers in the specific social media channel. Co-operation can also be major, for example, Hotelli Emilia could come to an agreement with a YouTuber, whose viewers would represent a suitable target audience.

After the objectives have been set, tackling the question of what kind of a strategy to utilize for social media marketing is necessary. The thesis writer proposes using creative strategy, which is divided into informational and transformational appeals. Combining these two is suitable, because the customers are interested in learning about the facts concerning the hotel, its surroundings and public transportation. However, in social media the required information can be delivered in an intriguing way. By passing on the information about the issues pointed out in the practical research in the form of pictures and videos, the hotel is able to present proper information in an interesting form. Hence, the transformational creative strategy is the best option for a company in a hotel business, because traveling is all about experiences.

5.2 The Channel Selection and Content

After setting the objectives, the following crucial step is to decide on the most suitable social media channels, which requires deep consideration. The research shed light on the advisable continuance of developing the Facebook presence of the hotel. However, expanding to other social media channels would provide new opportunities and potential customers to the hotel. According to the public and customer opinions, Instagram could be a beneficial platform to be explored. In addition, YouTube should be considered given that enough resources are available for the process of creating appealing videos. If Hotelli Emilia wished to create social media content for the Russian audience, VKontakte would present itself as a good channel choice. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that utilizing multiple social media channels is a strength only if the social media actions are aligned with each other and enough monetary and human resources are available for them.

Furthermore, the channel decision should be made in accordance with the planned future messages. As was stated, the social media actions should be aligned with each other, however, auto-posting between the used channels should be avoided. Moreover, the social media channels are different in nature, thus the requirements of the audiences are different. When planning the messages, contradiction should be kept in absolute minimum as it creates uncertainty in the potential customers. Due to these reasons, the thesis writer suggests the following types of messages for different social media channels that Hotelli Emilia should explore.

Table 4. The Channels and Crucial Factors

Communicate the Personalization of the Hotel		
	Facebook	Instagram
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informative content to the target customers - Professional touch - Customer initiated content - Constant interaction - Co-operative actions - Updates once a week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inspiring content - Expressing uniqueness - Timely issues - Hashtag knowledge - Constant interaction - Updates at least twice a week
<p>YouTube: social media marketing could be enhanced by narrative and intriguing videos.</p>		

Facebook

Based on the research, most of the current customers and younger questionnaire respondents viewed Facebook as the most optimal social media channel for the hotel. As Hotelli Emilia is already active on Facebook, the current activities can only be improved, which means the core foundation has already been created. One of the interviewees, who is involved in the accommodation booking process for business travellers, considered Hotelli Emilia being successful on Facebook, however, stating that more followers should be gathered in order to become better known. The thesis writer agrees with the interviewee, because customer awareness cannot be improved if social media reputation has not been built. Hence, it is advisable to continue utilizing Facebook, however, paying more attention to customer feedback and the shared content. Moreover, the customers of Hotelli Emilia tend to be from the older generations and as Facebook is becoming the mostly used channel for this group, it is obvious that the channel should be also used by the hotel.

Facebook is a suitable platform for delivering important information to the customers concerning their stay at the hotel and other relevant issues, which might affect their travel. The customers were interested in hearing more about the public transportation and parking, maps of Hämeenlinna and of near-by places, dining possibilities, breakfast options and activities

on the area, which are all suitable ideas for social media content and by mind storming they can become intriguing for the viewers to see. Through Facebook, it is possible to share information in picture, text and video formats, which should be utilized for creating diversity. Hotelli Emilia has been sharing event posters and co-operative offers with other companies in the area, which should be continued.

However, the Facebook page lacks content, which is initiated by the customers. By allowing customers to add pictures and videos to a certain album, by generating content that intrigues customers to comment or by organizing competitions, the connection between the hotel and its customers can be improved. More useful and interesting content should also be shared, which is not directly connected with marketing or increasing the booking rate of the hotel rooms. Furthermore, if Hotelli Emilia is taking part in charity or development projects of some kind, status updates could be shared through Facebook. By creating updates that are not precisely linked to the sales, the hotel can enhance its reputation and gain new followers. These people may not become customers of the hotel; however, they can spread positivity through word of mouth.

Continuingly, it is important to keep in mind the target customer group, when talking about the Facebook presence of the hotel. As was stated earlier, Facebook is becoming a channel for older people and can be viewed as a channel for business to business marketing as well. Therefore, the execution of the content ideas should be professional, informative and interesting. By creating a professional and interactive online reputation, older people are more likely to have trust in the hotel and the provided services. The informative content benefits regular and business customers simultaneously, which is a clear trump of Facebook. One could say that timely issues that are usually expressed in the webpage of the hotel could be broad to the knowledge of the public in Facebook.

Furthermore, as the hotel was interested in communicating the information about the potential extra services offered, for example, booking of the theatre tickets, such information could be delivered through Facebook. According to the research, people had found the hotel through different hotel booking sites, which is an indicator that people would be able to learn more about the hotel before booking if links between the social media channels used were shared across the different channels. Moreover, Hotelli Emilia tends to send emails to the people, who have made a booking. Hence, the thesis writer suggests to include information about the used social media channels, especially Facebook, where the hotel can communicate the information about the booking of the theatre tickets and other relevant information.

Instagram

Hotelli Emilia already exists on Facebook; however, Instagram presents itself as a suitable new channel to be explored. The core of Instagram is different in nature; hence, it contains multiple benefits, which one cannot reach through other social media channels. As Instagram is mainly used by

younger generations, the hotel has a possibility to reach people, who would not notice the messages in other platforms.

The research showed that Instagram is the second channel wished for, thus Hotelli Emilia could benefit from it. Instagram is about sharing pictures and short videos and spreading them by utilizing suitable hashtags. It should be viewed as a channel for delivering information that does not require too much energy, yet is interesting for the followers and other crossers-by. Instagram is a suitable channel for little details, which make the hotel unique, such as pictures about current weather, beautiful sunrise, Hämeenlinna views, hotel rooms, artwork at the hotel, staff members, unique drinks and breakfast selection. One could say it is a channel for daily updates, which keep the viewers on their toes for further excitement. For a hotel, Instagram can be considered as a channel to visually inspire and excite people to travel and see more of the world.

The importance of using hashtags, especially in Instagram, cannot be expressed high enough. Creating own hashtags and utilizing them for each post will increase visibility. Catchy hashtags are more likely to start spreading across the users, thus, a community can be created around the specific hashtags. Monitoring the hashtags' usage and interacting with these Instagram users is the base for marketing communications of Instagram. For Hotelli Emilia suitable hashtags could be brainstormed out of the hotel's name, co-operative actions and the location. Already existing hashtags should also be utilized, because through them Instagram users all over the world can view the posts of Hotelli Emilia. However, it is crucial to remember that some trendy hashtags are used only for a short period, thus examining the popular ones should happen frequently. On the other hand, if the hotel succeeds in creating own hashtags, which become popular, it is advisable to stick with them and only increase the amount of hashtags used.

The thesis writer suggests to begin with simple hashtags that are already being used, such as #HotelliEmilia and #VisitHämeenlinna. To be more innovative, Hotelli Emilia could create an online person, who would be on a journey through the hotel and share the interesting moments on Instagram. It would enable sharing visual content, which would be professional and funny simultaneously, however, most importantly it would be something rather unique. As Instagram is a channel of younger generations, such content could be viewed as engrossing and inspiring for the future travels.

Furthermore, the thesis writer described Facebook as a channel for informative content about issues that might affect the journey and potential activities to be done during the travel. One could say it is more about important factors while on Instagram the same topics could be innovatively visualized and expressed. However, communicating the personalized hotel and the service should be included to all of the messages in an oral, written or some other innovative form, because that is what makes the hotel stand out from the competitors. The thesis writer does not recommend focusing too much on the service quality of Hotelli Emilia, because people

can express that through word of mouth and it is advisable to utilize personalization, when creating an online reputation.

YouTube

In addition to Facebook and Instagram, YouTube is the next optimal channel for Hotelli Emilia, however, it is something more challenging to master and it requires higher amount of resources. YouTube provides benefits for wider visual marketing, because through videos customers can experience more than only a picture could tell. As was stated earlier, Hotelli Emilia can share short videos on Instagram and Facebook; however, on YouTube the videos should be longer and narrative.

Naturally, creating exciting videos is time-consuming and requires imagination and knowledge of the customers. However, videos may increase the amount of potential future customers, because truly successful videos can go viral and the amount of viewers may grow extremely fast. Generating successful videos is a challenge and requires multiple resources, thus, the thesis writer suggests Hotelli Emilia to start broadening its social media presence with the channels mentioned above. If they are perceived beneficial after a trial period, their usage should be continued and connected with videos, which would give a better perception of the hotel and traveling possibilities of the area for the customers.

In addition to the content of the messages delivered via Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, the publication frequency is another concern. Based on the research, people have differing opinions concerning the posting frequency. The majority of people would prefer to see updates on a weekly basis, which is advisable on the Facebook page of Hotelli Emilia. Given the nature of Instagram, the same publication frequency may not be suitable for this channel, because it is about quick and more time-specific messages delivered in the form of pictures. As a result, the thesis writer proposes updating Facebook once a week and Instagram at least twice a week. However, the updating times should not be too strict, because the content will lack in quality if it is created by force. If Hotelli Emilia decides to utilize YouTube, the publication frequency of the videos can be less dense. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that the chosen frequency should be maintained in order to sustain the interest of the followers. On the contrary, the updates should not be forced, thus deciding on a suitable publication frequency is crucial.

Even if a YouTube channel was not created, Hotelli Emilia could be present in the videos of other YouTubers. Co-operating with popular YouTubers can be beneficial, because they can have an effect on their channel's subscribers. Hence, these YouTubers can be considered as influencers, who have great importance in the world of social media. Examining the effects of such a co-operation was too broad for the scale of this thesis, however, based on the research the thesis writer notices potential in it. Therefore, it is something that Hotelli Emilia should consider after executing and evaluating the social media strategy focusing on Facebook and Instagram.

5.3 Additional Crucial Details

Social media is all about being social online and in other words, it means that a company employee must engage with the customers and other followers in a virtual environment. The engagement must happen regularly and as quickly as possible. Consequently, for succeeding in marketing communications of social media, a specific employee or multiple must be named to handle these actions. Continuing human commitment is necessary for planning new updates and conducting them in all of the social media channels as well as for replying to customer feedback.

Therefore, a social media or marketing oriented person should be looked for within the current employees of Hotelli Emilia. If there are not suitable people available and no resources for increasing the amount of employees, the thesis writer suggests examining if any of the employees has genuine interest towards this task and motivation for further enhancement of the skills required. After finding the most suitable employee for handling the social media channels of Hotelli Emilia, the person should be granted with enough time and possibilities for becoming better known with social media, its potential and the risks it carries. Even if the hotel has one social media marketer, it does not mean that this person should be solely responsible for all of the required actions. The whole team should agree on the social media strategy and discuss about the content, because it will have a positive effect on the innovativeness of the shared posts. On the other hand, the person responsible should be allocated with enough freedom, because otherwise the person may feel like the creativity is limited, which has a negative impact on the content to be shared. Furthermore, team meetings and common discussions will help to decrease the amount of resistance to change, which may occur when accustomed habits are changed.

In addition, it is important to agree on under which name the posts are to be shared on social media. Through the research, it is clear that people will trust the information posted under professional names or the company name more compared to posts published by random profiles of the company employees. Hence, the thesis writer suggests the used social media channels to be named as Hotelli Emilia, because it is professional and does not create any misunderstandings. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that in Facebook the information shared by the hotel should be precise and trustworthy. If the hotel wished to publish something more humoristic and innovative, it should have another profile on Facebook for such occasions unless the posts meet the professionalism criteria, which the hotel wants to reach. On the other hand, the hotel employees could use their professional profiles for sharing content on Facebook, which would create diversity to the Facebook wall of the hotel. That being said the customer comments should always be replied with the professional account. It is also crucial to allow the customers to add pictures to the albums of the hotel in Facebook, because it acts as word of mouth marketing and increases the amount of diversity. The same advice cannot be applied to Instagram, because the nature of the social media channel and the potentially shared content is different. There every post should be shared by the company account; however, the employees and hotel guests can also use the hashtags utilized by the hotel.

Further, language is the common issue in all of the social media channels. As the majority of the current customers are Finns, the language used is naturally Finnish. However, it does not serve the entire purpose, because through social media it is possible to reach a global audience, thus English should be used across the board. The interviewees answering the research questions were wishing for more English information to be found related to Hotelli Emilia, which indicates a clear need for doing so. The quantitative research also shed light on the usage of English, which importance was expressed almost aggressively. For the same reason, the thesis writer proposes Hotelli Emilia to improve its Internet page by having all of the information available in the chosen languages. It is not enough to have everything in Finnish and only a fraction in English, Swedish and Russian, because it does not give a good expression of the hotel. By using more languages, the hotel has better chances of broadening the customer base and having more foreign visitors, because it is showing the knowledge of languages. By having everything in English, the hotel is reinforcing the equal treatment of people.

Moreover, the style of the Internet page should be changed after starting to utilize social media opportunities more broadly. By making the change, the hotel will have better chances of succeeding in social media, because people tend to create their opinions and expectations based on multiple factors. Hence, direct links should be established between the social media channels and the Internet page and vice versa. Naturally, the Internet page should generate similar vibes as the chosen social media channels, because delivering contradicting messages is disadvantageous. Furthermore, it is notable to bear in mind that social media is often used with mobile devices, thus making sure the Internet page is mobile friendly is beneficial.

In spite of this thesis focusing on the customers, who have or potentially will book a room at Hotelli Emilia, the social media marketing strategy may bring further benefits. The hotel has other services, especially for the passers-by during the summer time, which means local people may be inspired to stop at the hotel's outdoor area for a coffee or a beer. To increase the amount of people in this customer group, especially Instagram could be beneficial. As stated earlier, Instagram is more for short and timely information, thus, instant offers could be shared through this channel.

To sum up, using social media is not as simple as it may sound and it should not be taken slightly. It does not serve the purpose to use social media only, because others are using it – one should always have a plan and aim towards greatness. If Hotelli Emilia has true desire to utilize, invest and succeed in social media marketing communications, the issues discussed in this thesis should be carefully cogitated. Comprehensive planning and extensive execution are the keys for success together with intriguing content and employee motivation. Crucially, it is pointless to be present in social media if the company lacks true commitment to interaction. For Hotelli Emilia, effectively communicating the personality should be kept in mind every time the hotel uses online platforms, because it is the way for standing out from the crowd.

6 CONCLUSION

Social media is an essential element of today's world and its impacts on business activities cannot be surpassed. Nowadays business is conducted in a global environment, which means tough competition and high requirements for innovative marketing. Even though social media is a rather new phenomenon, it enables reaching people all around the world simultaneously. As the commissioning company is conducting business on the hospitality field, the core business is already international in nature. Therefore, the aim of this thesis was to create a suitable social media marketing strategy for Hotelli Emilia. The goal was to be reached by following the four objectives set in the beginning phase of the thesis process. The thesis objectives were created honouring the needs of the commissioning company and the interests of the thesis writer, which were crucial to be kept in mind throughout the thesis process.

The first objective was to gain deep knowledge about efficient and suitable social media marketing strategies for companies offering hotel services. Hence, an extensive literature research related to hotel business, social media, marketing of services and marketing communications was conducted. For this purpose, multiple books and electronic sources were examined in order to find the most suitable and recent information. After obtaining a broad and deep knowledge concerning the required topic areas, it was easier to plan the practical research. However, narrowing down the discovered information was necessary in order to create a clear theoretical framework without including excessive information. Furthermore, such a broad knowledge base is not enough unless the business actions of the commissioning company are examined concurrently. By having an email correspondence with the hotel manager, the thesis writer was able to gain valuable insights of the company, which was necessary for reaching an advantageous outcome.

After gaining an abundant and sufficient knowledge base, the practical research was conducted, which meant reaching the second objective of examining and understanding customer needs concerning current and potential social media marketing actions of the company. Only by complementing the collected secondary data with primary data from explanatory research, one is truly able to generate beneficial recommendations. The aim of the planned and executed research was to answer the research question and reach the set objectives of this thesis. By conducting quantitative and qualitative research, the thesis writer aimed towards discovering relevant and in-depth information about people's opinions concerning the social media presence of hotels. The quantitative research was conducted in the form of a questionnaire in order to reach wider opinions. However, the qualitative information was reached by interviewing the hotel guests through which more precise information about Hotelli Emilia and its customers' wishes were reached.

The further important step was to compare the marketing situation of the company and the expectations of the customers in connection to the obtained theoretical knowledge. After gathering broad opinions from the

public and in-depth opinions from the customers of the commissioning company, analysing the results carefully and innovatively was crucial. When the theory chapter was being written the focus lied in finding potentially important information in connection to the following steps of this thesis, which also had an impact on the style of the questionnaire and the interview questions. By analysing the results of both of the practical research individually and together, the opinions of majority were reached, which affected the final recommendations. The analysis was conducted by examining the responses given and keeping the theory in mind.

The above mentioned three thesis objectives were created for reaching the best possible outcome for the last objective, which is about creating a manageable social media marketing plan, which would benefit the company to increase customer awareness and gain new customers. The recommendations chapter is solely dedicated for introducing a social media marketing plan, which Hotelli Emilia should follow in order to increase customer awareness. It is meant to be precise and cohesive including the advisable steps to consider, when beginning to plan and execute new marketing activities in social media. Further, certain activities and important issues are suggested to be thought upon if the commissioning company wishes to utilize social media for marketing communications. The base for the marketing plan lies in the created theoretical framework, conducted explanatory research and thorough analyses of the results.

The thesis writer has reached the set objectives, because information regarding all of the objectives is presented in this thesis. Furthermore, limitations and other issues affecting the reliability of the research are discussed and further research possibilities are introduced. By successfully reaching the set thesis objectives, the thesis writer was able to answer the research question: ‘‘How can the hotel increase customer awareness through social media?’’. The question was to be answered by understanding the development of social media and its benefits for hotels, which are conducting business in a globalized world. Further, the focus was in creating a manageable social media marketing plan for Hotelli Emilia, which would help the company in increasing customer awareness through specific social media channels.

Even though Hotelli Emilia, the commissioning company, acted as the base for the whole thesis focusing on marketing communications in social media, the thesis writer has also considered other readers. By reaching the set objectives and answering the research question, beneficial recommendations were created for the hotel. However, other companies in a similar situation may discover useful information from this thesis and it can also help future students.

To sum up, Hotelli Emilia should strengthen its position in the world of social media, because it is better to be a trendsetter rather than a follower. Moreover, as the hotel has already started by using Facebook, it is a natural step to enhance the presence on this channel and broaden the social media marketing communications to other channels. Planning and executing marketing on Facebook and Instagram is suitable for the hotel, because

of the current situation and lack of experience in the online world. Furthermore, the objectives of building an online reputation, enhancing the communication with former, current and future customers and being active and innovative can be reached through the chosen channels. When becoming more acquainted with social media, it is advisable to plan actions for other channels, starting with YouTube and VKontakte. By acting according to the social media marketing strategy, Hotelli Emilia is able to reach increased customer awareness. Hence, the thesis writer managed to answer the research question by creating the marketing plan and disclosing obstacles, which may have a negative impact on the results.

The commissioning company will succeed in social media if enough resources and commitment are given for this activity. By regularly sharing intriguing content on social media, Hotelli Emilia can increase customer awareness; however, true commitment must exist. It is nonsensical to begin something that you are not willing to continue on a long run, thus it is crucial for the company to be ready for innovative work that will inspire others. After all social media is all about being social, which is why it is urgent to internalize the constant need for interaction. Moreover, personalization must be the key element in every single action conducted on social media, because it can be considered as the trademark of Hotelli Emilia. Without personalized messages and constant interaction, the benefits of social media cannot be reached and the hotel has no chances of reaching a competitive edge, thus they are the keys for success.

“Social media marketing is about identifying
the essence of engagement.”

(EdgeRank Checker 2013.)

6.1 Future Research

The research shed light on multiple significant social media factors, which the thesis writer was not able to disclose as a part of this research. Focusing the research is one of the reasons behind it, because even though the practical research revealed new information, some of it was outside of the centralized topic area. Moreover, by studying relevant theory connected to the topic, the thesis writer noticed the correlation between marketing actions towards individuals and companies through social media. As every research needs to be clearly focused, it is natural to come upon issues, which affect the research yet are not precise enough for the given cause. In a way, these issues may lead the researcher deeper into the topic or give ideas for further or future study connected to the current research.

Consequently, the thesis writer would recommend the following topics as future research. Firstly, after implementing new social media marketing, it would serve a purpose to research the effectiveness of the conducted actions. Thus, researching how Hotelli Emilia's social media presence is viewed after the change is important. Simultaneously, it would be crucial to examine if companies are already noticing the social media marketing actions, when deciding on where their company employees are spending

the nights. By doing so, it would be easier to distinct the line between social media communications towards individuals and companies. As a result, planning and implementing social media marketing strategies could be conducted while taking all of the customer segments of the hotel into consideration. For instance, the hotel has customers, who are there for other purposes than spending the night, thus the effects of social media marketing could be examined from the point of view of this customer segment.

Moreover, this thesis is focused on several potentially beneficial social media channels for Hotelli Emilia, but it fails to deeply examine each of them. Hence, conducting a research focused on a single social media channel in connection to the hotel could result in more precise information and results. In the future, Hotelli Emilia might need to consider widening its social media usage to channels, which are not introduced in this thesis, hence researching more suitable social media channels and their potential to the hotel would be reasonable. For example, through YouTube Hotelli Emilia could reach a truly global audience and if the hotel wished to have more Russian customers, the potential of VKontakte should be researched.

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HOTELS IN SOCIAL MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire is created by a thesis writer at Häme University of Applied Sciences. The purpose of the thesis is to find out how hotels should be seen in different social media channels. Therefore, I would kindly ask you to fill in the following questionnaire, which should take less than five minutes. All of the responses will be confidential and analyzed as a group.

Thank you, Tiia Eerola

1. Gender? *

- Female
- Male

2. Nationality? *

- Finnish
- Other Nordic nationality
- Rest of Europe
- African
- Asian
- North American
- South American
- Other

3. Age? *

- Less than 25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- Over 66

4. How often do you normally use social media channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram & LinkedIn)? *

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- Many times a week
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

5. When are you most active on social media? *

- 6 am - 12 am
- 12 am - 6 pm
- 6 pm - 12 pm
- 12 pm - 6 am

6. In which of the following social networking sites do you have an account? (Check all that apply) *

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Google+
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- Other, please specify

7. Are you following any hotels on social media? *

- Yes
- No



8. Would you use a social networking site to discover information regarding a certain hotel? *

- Yes
- No

9. In which of the following social networking sites would you like hotels to have accounts in? (Check all that apply) *

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Google+
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn

Other, please specify

10. Would any information, be it negative or positive, published on social media influence your decision to book a certain hotel? *

Yes, why?

No, why?



11. How important are the following things to be published by the hotel in order for you to start following and communicating with them? *

The answers should be given on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 equals to the highest importance.

	1	2	3	4	5
Contact Information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
News updates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pictures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Descriptions about the personnel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discounts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competitions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information about nearby events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Restaurant and activity tips in the area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-operative actions with other tourism companies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feedback possibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Customer service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. What would you like to see in the pictures and videos? (Check all that apply) *

- Hotel rooms
- Meeting facilities
- Restaurant
- Food & drinks
- Personnel
- Service
- Places worth visiting
- Other, please specify

13. How often would you like hotels to post something on social media? *

- Many times a day
- Once a day
- Many times a week
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less frequently
- Never

14. What would you expect from a hotel on social media?

Thank you very much!



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the reason for your visit to Hämeenlinna? / Minkä takia matkustitte Hämeenlinnaan?
2. Which sites or services did you use while searching for a hotel? / Mitä sivustoja tai palveluita käytitte hotellin etsimiseen?
3. Why did you decide to stay at Hotelli Emilia? / Miksi valitsitte Hotelli Emilian?
4. Would you have wanted to get more information about the hotel or Hämeenlinna before traveling? / Olisitteko halunneet lisätietoa hotellista tai Hämeenlinnasta ennen matkaa?
5. Do you use social media? / Käytättekö sosiaalista mediaa?
6. Do you normally use social media for searching information about a hotel? / Etsittekö yleensä tietoa hotelleista sosiaalisessa mediassa?
7. Which social media channels are most suitable for a hotel? / Mitkä sosiaalisen median kanavat sopivat parhaiten hotellille?
8. What kind of updates would interest you? / Minkälaiset julkaisut kiinnostaisivat teitä?
9. How often should updates be created? / Kuinka usein julkaisuja tulisi olla?
10. Do you think Hotelli Emilia could benefit from using social media? Olisiko Hotelli Emilialle hyötyä sosiaalisen median käyttämisestä?