

User Engagement in Mobile Apps

Case: Javelo Jewelry App

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<p>The mobile app industry offers a wide variety of mobile applications targeted at different types of users. Despite the type of mobile application, there is a clear amount of competition within each industry, thus making it difficult for companies to build mobile applications that stand out from the rest. However, having a mobile application does not mean instant success, instead each mobile application needs to be able to put a user engagement strategy that responds to users demands and changes.</p> <p>This thesis is commissioned by PrimeSmith Oy (Jevelo Jewelry). Javelo is a mobile application that allows users to design their own jewelry using pictures from their mobile device. The piece of jewelry is crafted by hand using high 3D printing technology and goldsmithing. Javelo's value promise is to empower customers to design their own jewelry and create meaningful designs that will help remember special moments in life, also making Javelo a disruptor in the jewelry industry.</p> <p>The first objective of this thesis is to provide Javelo App with the basic guidelines and suggestions on how to properly engage their customers through mobile. Secondly, in order to give a general understanding of user engagement, topics such as consumer behavior, involvement and relationship marketing are discussed, which aim to help Javelo app through a conscious understanding towards the origins and importance of user engagement.</p> <p>The research was conducted through semi-standardized interviews and done by interviewing three different professionals within the mobile app industry. Each interviewee was given an open ended questionnaire with seven questions that would give answers related to the importance of user engagement, the best user engagement techniques and its measurability. Together with the questionnaire, a benchmarking research was conducted in order to find out the most relevant user engagement techniques for the commissioner.</p> <p>The results of this thesis end with suggestions for the commissioner that include different techniques of how Javelo App can engage users. The most relevant user engagement features each app should have, are related to the value promise of the product and how its value stands, same as with the constant user research that will help app developers and marketers find out which parts of the mobile app need improvement. The results helped the researcher gain a better understanding on how critical user engagement is in mobile apps and that a mobile application is a product that needs constant monitoring.</p>	
Keywords Involvement, User engagement, User Experience, Mobile Application	

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Case company	1
1.2	Background.....	3
1.3	Objectives	4
1.3.1	Research questions	4
1.4	Delimitation	5
1.5	Main concepts.....	6
2	Consumer behaviour	8
2.1	Defining consumer behaviour.....	8
2.1.1	Types of consumers.....	9
2.2	Factors that influence behaviour	9
2.2.1	Social factors	9
2.2.2	Physical factors.....	10
2.3	Consumer involvement and product knowledge	10
2.3.1	Factors that influence involvement	12
3	Relationship marketing.....	13
3.1	Relationship marketing in the future	14
3.1.1	Share of heart	15
3.1.2	Joint venturing with customers	16
4	User engagement.....	17
4.1	User engagement in mobile	17
4.2	Engagement methods for mobile apps.....	18
4.2.1	First impression.....	18
4.2.2	Frictionless on boarding experience	19
4.2.3	In-app /push messages.....	20
4.2.4	Customer feedback and analytics	22
4.2.5	Campaigns and incentives	23
4.2.6	Social networks integration	23
5	Methods	24
5.1	Qualitative research and semi-standardized interview.....	24
5.2	Benchmarking research	24
5.3	Research implementation	25
6	Results.....	26
6.1	Engagement suggestions for Javelo	26
6.2	Qualitative interview	27
6.2.1	Importance of user engagement in mobile apps.....	27
6.2.2	Engagement across platforms.....	27

6.2.3	Top factors in app development	27
6.2.4	Engagement on e-commerce and gaming apps	27
6.2.5	Measuring engagement.....	28
6.2.6	Outlook of an engaged audience.....	28
6.3	Ethics and validity	28
7	Evaluation of learning.....	30
8	References.....	32
	Appendices.....	35
	Appendix 1.....	35

1 Introduction

The world I grew up with did not include smartphones, however it did computers. From a very young age we are constantly interacting with several products and brands trying to get our attention and possibly making us buy their products. Some brands are able to fully engage us in their whole world and make us part of their lives, for example through relationship marketing. A discipline which was first defined in 2002. (Soren Hougaard, 2002)

Companies learned the way we buy through our purchases in store, then they learned of our discontent by writing a bad review on their website. As of now, they have learned that we are different online and offline. It was not until some years ago that mobile technology became a thing and it is now an irrefutable part of our lives. Companies discovered that they can engage their users with a mobile app that lets you play a fun game. They realized they can engage us with an application that lets us buy clothes anywhere in the world, and so on.

When mobile technology came to the market, everything was new. Nowadays, with all the applications available it becomes harder and harder to make an impact to people through their mobile. In this thesis I will go through the base for user engagement, which is understanding the customer (consumer behaviour), engaging the customer (involvement) and marketing to the customer (relationship marketing).

1.1 Case company

Jevelo Jewellery is a start-up company founded in 2010 in Fiskars, Finland, by Goldsmith, Kristian Saarikorpi. He has worked for recognized Finnish Brand "Lumoava". The main idea for Javelo came to him after years of designing other people's jewellery and the rising popularity of mobile applications. Mr. Saarikorpi decided that he wanted a business in which people could be able to design their own jewellery without leaving their homes. (Javelo, 2016)



Figure 1. Main page from javelo jewelry website (Javelo, 2016)

After several years of developing the idea, Javelo Jewellery was born. Currently, the application offers the user the possibility to design unique pieces of jewellery by using previously stored pictures from the user's mobile phones. Within the app, the user is able to choose from many different frames and engraving styles for their jewellery. Once the user has chosen their final design, the piece is manufactured using 3D technology and traditional goldsmith techniques. Finally, the piece is sent by mail to the client. (Javelo, 2016)



Figure 2. Sample of the app in action (Javelo, 2016)

Javelo operates their business from a start-up space in Helsinki. However, the jewellery is handcrafted in Fiskars, Finland. The Javelo Team consists of several passionate employees working in the areas of: Management, Graphic Design, Development and User Experience. The team works together in order to tackle usability downsides within the app and to improve the user experience to keep on satisfying their clients around the world. (Javelo, 2016)

The company has been focusing on providing their customers with a bigger pricing variety in order to increase sales. When I was an intern at Javelo, I had the opportunity to participate in a small feedback session with some of their customers. It consisted in sending them an email and requesting feedback. Which resulted in discovering that their main issue was the high price and little variety in the jewellery materials and styles. Some customers agreed on the app not having enough engaging features such as social media sharing buttons for their designs.

Through my case study, I aim to provide the company with the latest improvements in User Engagement. As User Engagement is a very hot topic at the moment, I decided to conduct my interviews with professionals in the Product Development and User Experience fields. Through the interviews I will get a deeper insight as to what a mobile app should contain in order to establish a customer bond from the start and inputs on how to keep on nourishing that Customer-Business relationship.

1.2 Background

Mobile Applications are already an essential part of our daily lives. In my case, I interact with around two or three mobile apps per day. I might have downloaded more than those, but the truth is that many of them got deleted and were simply not well put together. Some were even annoying, by sending emails and messages frequently. This led me to wonder if there is such a thing as user engagement. People download an application and what can the user expect from it? What is the company doing to keep that customer interacting with the application?

My inspiration for this thesis is the start-up community in Finland. It is a field where I want to be able to give a bit of myself and write about a topic that will be useful, not only for my Case Company but also to other start-ups. While being a Copywriting and Marketing Intern at Javelo Jewellery, I was able to observe and wonder of certain components that make up a mobile application. However this wasn't the initial trigger factor for me, as the company had already expressed their need to improve the user engagement within Javelo App.

The idea for this thesis came out of pure curiosity and eagerness to learn about a topic, companies need to pay attention to. Luckily enough, the company was able to provide me with relevant contacts to be interviewed and gain top notch insights on user engagement. One of them, Juhana Kotilainen who runs his own Virtual Reality business in a company called SilverMile.

Another interviewee is Jason Fallas from Costa Rica, who is an experienced professional in the User Experience field and has helped lots of business launch their digital products. The last interviewee is Jesse Luoto who has a successful background in web/mobile development and whom I met on an internship in a Travel app called CreateTrips. Through this interviews, I will gather more insights on user engagement and recommendations as to what Javelo Jewellery App can put into practice, in order to keep their customers coming back to the app.

1.3 Objectives

The objective of this thesis is to provide Javelo App with the basic guidelines and ideas to engage users effectively within their mobile app. I will also address the base topics for user engagement which are: Customer Behaviour, Involvement, and Relationship Marketing. While the company has knowledge on user engagement, the aim is to guide their next efforts for the improvement of their app.

The purpose of this thesis will be to provide Javelo App with a series of tools and recommendations for optimized user engagement. The thesis should also serve as an informative tool to any other companies that struggle to establish a connection/relationship with their customers via mobile. In addition to the theoretical background, this thesis will discuss the views of my interviewees: Juhana Kotilainen (Silvermile), Jason Fallas (Hangar) and Jesse Luoto (Reaktor).

1.3.1 Research questions

This thesis puts forward the following research question:

“What are the best ways to engage mobile app users towards long-term return business?”

To provide a comprehensive answer, the following sub-questions will be considered:

1. What is user engagement in mobile apps?
2. Which components of user engagement are relevant for the purpose of this study?
3. How can they be measured?
4. How can we identify the factors and the techniques that drive the targeted user engagement?
5. How can we test these techniques and apply?

1.4 Delimitation

This thesis focuses in finding out the best practices currently available in user engagement via mobile. The thesis is conducted for the case company Javelo Jewellery App. The results I will provide will be gathered from the interviews I conducted with three different professionals in the mobile industry and a benchmarking research to discover the best user engagement practices for mobile. Due to the location of my interviewees, the interviews will not be conducted face to face, but by email. The interviews are focused in the interviewees own professional experience.

The first interviewee is Jesse Luoto from Finland. He is a mobile developer which I met at a previous company I interned for. Jesse was chosen for my thesis because he has the “back office” insight on how to build a mobile application. He has several years of experience on his field and during my internship at CreateTrips I saw how important and knowledgeable someone like Jesse was to team.

The second interviewee is Juhana Kotilainen from Finland. He has worked in the gaming and technology industry for over 13 years. Juhana worked for Rovio during their early stages gaining a broad view of the mobile and gaming industry in Finland and abroad. Nowadays he has his own virtual reality game which he developed with his start-up company “Silver-Mile. Juhana was chosen for my thesis because it is important to get an opinion of a person within the gaming industry as it differs to the e-commerce ones. However, I wanted to gather the best practices within the gaming industry and get his opinion on how this practices would work in an e-commerce app.

The third interviewee is Jason Fallas from Costa Rica. He is currently a User Interface/User experience designer for a Digital Agency called Hangar in Costa Rica. Jason has the visual knowledge on how to make a mobile app or any digital product successful. A high percentage of mobile app development is visual and experience oriented.

Regardless of my interviewees, similar but at the same time with different professional background, the same questions will be asked to figure out how their knowledge influences their view on mobile user engagement and what they would implement.

Engagement as such, is a very broad term. However, user engagement for mobile apps is a very new term and therefore the information that can be gathered is mostly from blogs, podcasts, videos, non-academic books and the interviews I conducted.

For the purpose of this research I will discuss the theory on how creating engagement begins: first we must understand how consumers behave, second we figure out how to involve them with our brand and last we find the best ways to build a relationship with them. I will give recommendations from my own benchmarking research and answers I gathered from the interviews.

1.5 Main concepts

User Engagement

User engagement refers to the experience each user has while interacting with a desired product. It can happen offline, online or via mobile. Via mobile it determines the user's likelihood to come back continuously to interact with the application. User experience forms part of the design in mobile applications and is key to their success. (Mounia Lalmas, 2014)

Mobile Experience

A mobile experience are all the interactions that happen between a person and a mobile application. The experience a customer has is based on their interactions and the degree those affect their real life experiences. Companies build these experiences with systems that change the way customers already experience certain activities. (Frank Bentley, 2012)

In-App Messaging

In-App Messaging are messages delivered to the user while he is active within the app in order to help them prolong their sessions. These messages are the most personal type of communication that currently exists for mobile. The reason for this is because this messages are tailored to the customer thus being most relevant for them. (Urban Airship; Adler 2014)

Push Notifications

A Push Notification is a message displayed to a customer that uses "X" app. For this notifications the customer does not need to have the app open. In many cases these notifications are considered intrusive as they can pop out at any time, thus recommended to have an actual plan that takes into consideration: content being sent to customer, the frequency in which it will be sent and at what time of the day. (Digital Marketing Glossary 2013; Adler 2014)

Cohort

A cohort in mobile applications are segments of customers that share similar criteria and are watched through their actions for a certain period of time. A cohort analysis will help app developers to discover which segments of customers that performed certain action are being the most profitable. (Chase 2013; Dogtiev 2017)

2 Consumer behaviour

In this chapter I will explain the basics of consumer behaviour and how it affects the involvement of consumers with different organizations and brands. Once we are able to recognize the consumer's behaviour, organizations can craft better strategies to reach a particular consumer and build long term relationships.

According to Kardes (1999), it is important to avoid intuitions when marketing or developing a new product, but instead managers should rely on scientific research among their potential consumers. However, many companies nowadays have instant access to different customer databases that are facilitated through social media, making it simple to make intuitive guesses on consumers' needs.

As an example, Javelo Jewelry App can access real time customer data from their current customer purchases and key information from potential customers through the different targeted ad campaigns through their social media channels. This can help them understand who their ideal customer is.

2.1 Defining consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour is a dynamic term that involves the thinking, actions and feelings of each individual customer. The American Marketing Association (2013) defines consumer behaviour as: "The dynamic interaction of affect and cognition, behaviour, and the environment by which human beings conduct the exchange aspects of their lives". (J.Paul Peter, 2002).

This would include anything in the environment that would leverage a consumer's thoughts, feelings and actions. It also involves interactions towards other people. As an example, the internet has changed the way people interact with each other's. The opinion of certain product from a person you don't know can be as equally valuable as that from your friend, basically because we trust people's interactions with brands, plus it is very easy to share an opinion online. For that reason marketers must understand all the products and brands consumers purchase, why and when they purchase. (J.Paul Peter, 2002)

It is important to mention that, it is key to any company to research about their own consumers; which products they are buying and when they bought them, in order to launch a more successful product. With the high influence social media has in our lives, we should also start to understand where in social media our customers talk about us and purchase our products. Online interactions are taking over offline ones. (Leon G. Schiffman 2012; ,R.Kardes 2001)

2.1.1 Types of consumers

It is important to understand who your customer is, as the way you reach this customer will differ. The personal consumer or better known as “the end user”, is the one who purchases goods for personal use. This would include anything he buys for himself, as a gift, for a friend, etc. In terms of sales, you would refer to this consumer as: Business to Consumer (B2C). This consumer is often more complex as there are many factors that will influence his final decision on making a purchase. (Leon G. Schiffman, 2012).

The Organisational Consumer can be any company, charities, government institutions, that purchase goods for the well-functioning and development of their own business. Sales wise, you would refer as the selling to this consumer as Business to Business (B2B) (Leon G. Schiffman, 2012)

2.2 Factors that influence behaviour

2.2.1 Social factors

A consumer’s environment is influenced by Social and Physical factors that help them make a buying decision. To understand these factors better, reference groups are used as a way to show marketers as a point of reference between the individual and certain group, which can be work groups, friendship groups, etc. (Leon G. Schiffman, 2012)

A consumer’s social environment is made up of all the social interactions that happen directly or indirectly. It can be said that face to face interactions can have a higher influence on someone’s purchasing decisions as emotions surface. For example, a sales person through positive comments on the customer’s outfit he/she just tried, can have a stronger influence towards the customer into buying the outfit. (J.Paul Peter, 2002)

However, the amount of information and experience a reference group has on certain product can shape differently and individual's purchasing decision. For instance, if we take a reference group such as the individuals work group, depending on the level of information and experience this group has with certain product, it might have little or no influence at all to the individual. In this scenario, the individual might look for advice from some other group. Family, Role and Status are also important social factors to take into consideration. A consumer's behaviour can be easily shaped by his spouse, children, and even modified if his purchasing decisions are meant to satisfy certain status within an individual's circle of friends or family. (Leon G. Schiffman 2012; Shetna 2016).

2.2.2 Physical factors

An individual's physical environment is made up of spatial or non-spatial elements. Spatial elements are the ones that include objects of all types. For example: shops, products, brands, architecture, design, etc. While, non-spatial elements are intangible. For example, time, temperature, season, etc.

Time of the day, weather and even lighting are factors that can influence a customer's buying decision. For example, it is fair to say that people tend to do their shopping on the weekends at the mall, rather than during weekdays. Also, some companies have agreed that weather does influence a consumer's behaviour as people in countries like Finland, need to buy clothes according to the season. Regardless of these factors, marketers always have the option to influence the consumer behaviour through advertising offline and online. (J.Paul Peter, 2002)

2.3 Consumer involvement and product knowledge

"Back in 1985, the Coca Cola Company made the decision of changing the current Coke formula for an "improved version". The current formula had been Coca Cola's success for 99 years. It didn't last long for Coca Cola to realize many of its consumers had an emotional bond with the brand. Many of them had been drinking Coca Cola as kids and then as adults." The above story, shows that consumers do care in an emotional level about the products they purchase. The same way, they don't care much for others.

Consumer involvement is a key factor in consumer behaviour and it can be defined as:

“Consumer’s perceptions of importance or personal relevance for any object, event or activity. Consumers who perceive that a product has personally relevant consequences are said to be involved with the product and to have a personal relationship with it”. (J.Paul Peter, 2002)

Involvement can happen with products and brands, even with advertisements. Marketers need to know what a person considers to be relevant when becoming involved. Also, a marketer often finds the best way to connect products and services to consumer’s goals and values. A means-end chain can help any marketer understand the feelings a consumer has for certain product or brand.

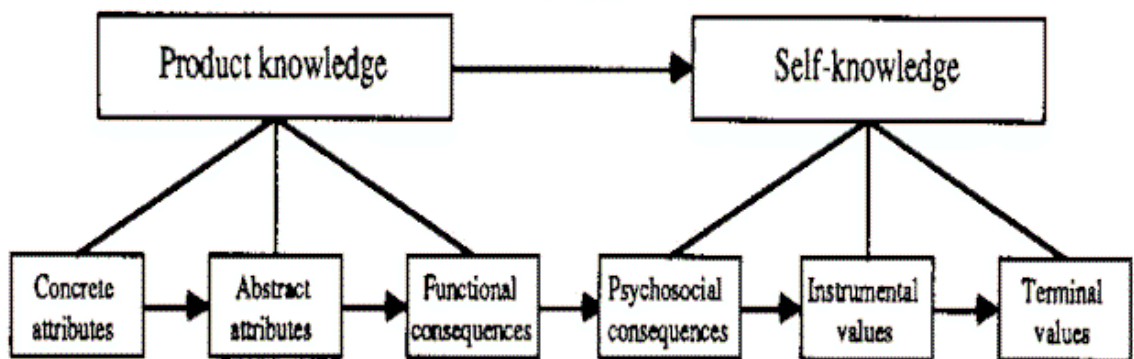


Figure 3. Means end chain (J.Paul Peter, 2002)

A means-end chain is dependent on two aspects: the importance of the ends and the strength of connections between the product knowledge and self-knowledge. A consumer will feel more involved to a product if he believes its attributes are linked to his ends goals or values. However, if a consumer feels that the product attributes are only functional and don’t touch a deeper level, he will feel less involved with the product. Products that only serve an instant function such as soap, bread or socks, might not reach the consumers in a deeper level. With these type of products, consumers have a very low level of involvement in the purchase decision. (J.Paul Peter, 2002)

This would also mean that products or organizations with a higher level of emotionality or that touch people's values might experience a higher level of involvement with the brand. For example, buying a car is a decision that in my opinion requires a high level of involvement with a brand, such as branding, pricing and even the approach of the sales person which is face to face, are factors to consider when buying a car.

2.3.1 Factors that influence involvement

Through involvement, consumer behaviour can be influenced, which helps to target customers more efficiently. Involvement is achieved through self-relevance, which will trigger the means-end chain which then links a consumer's experience into certain product. Involvement factors can be divided into: Intrinsic Self Relevance and Situational Self Relevance.

The Intrinsic Self Relevance Factor reminds consumers of certain experiences they had with a product, whether they are positive or negative. Once the consumer is reminded of "x" experience with a product or service that will aid them into the final purchasing decision, even more so if it touches the consumer's values or goals. For example, first time users of Javelo app might be triggered into buying a necklace for their loved ones because of the level of personalization the app offers. It can instantly remind customers of certain experience they had with a person they love and turning that memory into a gift. They will be reminded that Javelo App is a product where they can make meaningful jewellery pieces for their loved ones. (R.Kardes, 2001)

The Situational Self Relevance factor happens when certain situation changes or remains the same in a customer's purchasing journey. A perfect way to demonstrate this is how shopping with other people can be more relevant and push us towards buying a product at the moment we are in company. Another way is through the weather. We might be more inclined to purchase a bathing suit during summer season than winter. As well, customer's buying decision might be affected by a mix of both intrinsic and self-relevance factors. (R.Kardes, 2001)

3 Relationship marketing

The beginning of Relationship Marketing dates back to the economic recession of 1980's due to the energy crisis of the 1970's. This crisis led several companies get into merger negotiations and the computerization of different services for end users like: airlines, banks, hospitality industry, among other. This provided the opportunity of gathering consumer data and insights to survive the crisis. For example, several airlines started to invest in computerized reservation systems in order to craft and promote the very first loyalty programs based on frequent flyer miles. Other industries went into establishing key account management schemes in order to protect their current customer base – this and the reasons above is what brought Relationship Marketing to the headlines in 1983 by Leonard L. Berry. (Robert M. Morgan, 2015)

There are several factors that can affect the relationship between a customer and a supplier; for example the cultural context of the relationship, management policies within the organization, among other. The buyer will always be influenced by previous relationships with that current supplier. For that reason the highlight in the importance of relationships above exchange. (Soren Hougaard, 2002)

Relationship Marketing can thus be defined as:

“The art of initiating and maintaining profitable relationships, turning prospects into customers and customers into friends” (Soren Hougaard, 2002)

In the long run it is important to determine what is the real cost of acquiring a customer versus the costs of maintaining one and placing the needed priority into those activities. Even though the definition places an important focus in acquiring/initiating relationships, it is the current customers that companies need to look after and continue nourishing the relationship.

Kotler (1999) has paid careful attention to the 4 P's in Marketing (Price, Place, Product and Promotion) and created a contrast between a seller's view of Marketing and a Customer's View of Marketing. While the 4 P framework does not change for a seller it does from the consumer's point of view. It is relevant for Relationship Marketers as to how a customer's perceive their marketing efforts into making them purchase a product and establishing a relationship. (Kotler, 1999)

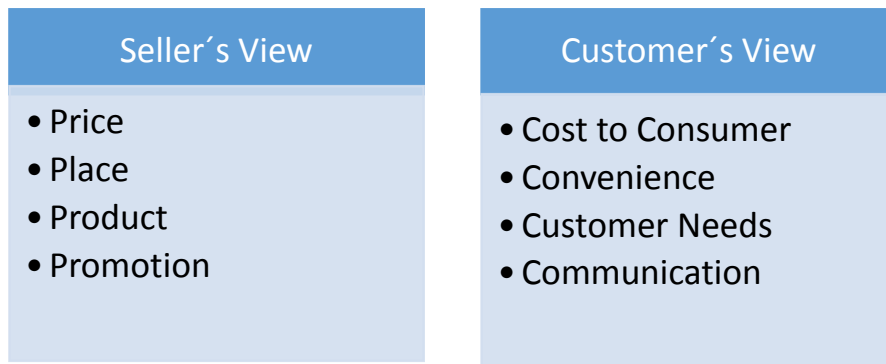


Figure 4. From 4 Ps to 4 Cs. (Kotler, 1999)

3.1 Relationship marketing in the future →

Relationship Marketing is a term that keeps evolving and responds to different market trends and to economic and financial situations around the globe. According to the chart below, we can see what Marketing was and what Marketing currently is. Marketing has changed as a whole and it is no longer profitable to just rely on a marketing mix to advertise a product (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion), because that is exactly what many companies used to rely on – until a few years ago many started to wonder: How do I establish, nourish and consolidate a long term relationship with my customers? (Soren Hougaard, 2002)

MARKETING WAS:
 "Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchange and satisfy individual and organizational goals.

MARKETING IS:
 "Marketing means to establish, maintain, and enhance relations with customers in a profitable way in order to accomplish the objectives of both parties through the reciprocal interchange and keeping of promises.

Figure 5. What business is marketing really in? (Soren Hougaard, 2002)

Robert M. Morgan (2015) agrees that relationship marketing is a dynamically evolving practice. He suggests that relationships marketing will shift in two dimensions: one being more emotionally oriented rather than monetary (Share of wallet to share of heart) and the other one from managing relationships with customers to managing virtual or joint ventures with customers. (Robert M. Morgan, 2015)

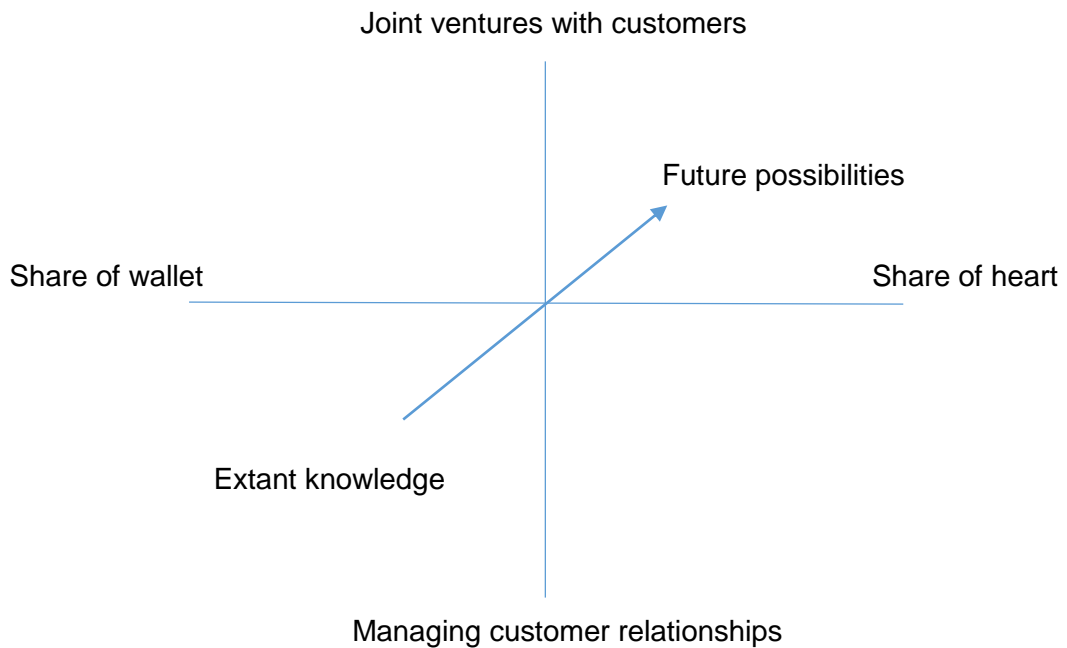


Figure 6. The future evolution of relationship marketing (Robert M. Morgan, 2015)

3.1.1 Share of heart

Share of heart will mean bonding with customers on an emotional level and that won't be solely limited to financial or functional features that the product offers. It will mean to establish trust and friendship with customers. This will bring new research areas into the relationship marketing field because companies will want to know who is the person behind "X" purchasing decision – how, why and what has "X" person taken into account when buying their product. Another important field of research being "Share of Heart" driven is if marketing the brand/product with a higher purpose will have an impact on the customer relationships. By higher purpose, it is meant a product that will make customers feel as if they are serving a higher purpose in life – which may lead to reduced consumption but to more conscious purchases. (Robert M. Morgan, 2015)

3.1.2 Joint venturing with customers

This dimension consists of the co-creation of value between a supplier and a customer. It is a relationship in which both parties invest the same amount of commitment and a shared missions. This can include any activity such as co-branding, co-marketing, co-learning, co sharing – aimed to improve the services of an end user. In fact, this is a practice that is already being explored by big brands such as Dewalt and Lego.

Dewalt currently accepts submission by its users in order to innovate and improve their current product offering. Lego follows the lead by allowing its loyal customer base to make their own creations. Within the online LEGO community those with a certain amount of votes will get to experience having their own design sold worldwide. (Milbrath, 2016).

Another example of joint venturing with customers is through cross-functional collaboration, in which at least two dedicated executives for each company try to narrow down the existing bureaucratic barriers between the two companies in order to guarantee a long term relationship between the two. (Robert M. Morgan, 2015)

4 User engagement

Engagement is a term that has been defined by numerous scholars such as Brodie (2011) that defines it as “a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative experiences with a focal agent object (product, brand) in a focal service relationship. Bowden (2009), defines it as “a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which consumer loyalty forms for new consumers of a service brand, as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase consumers of a service brand. Both definitions focus in the psychological approach of engagement and their offline engagement version. However, they fail to address the changing behaviour online (web, social media, mobile) of customers. A current and more accurate definition on user engagement would acknowledge all these online activities and physical factors.

4.1 User engagement in mobile

The online environment and digital media present a new ecosystem for customers to engage with the companies they buy from. Marketers are also filled with online insights of customer’s behaviour that give hints to improve user engagement. Searching for the right way to engage users has become a key objective for many marketing professionals thus helping them craft integrated strategies that take into consideration the different online media channels available. (Ricadela 2007; Vivek 2012; Garretson 2008)

As Mendoza (2014) suggests ” Your desktop experience is not your mobile experience”, which leaves room to especulate on user engagement not being the same in desktop and mobile due to the differences in size, internet connection, device size and the mindset of the person approaching the site/device.

The need for engaging users on mobile comes from the staggering amount of apps installed in people’s smartphones. According to Sawers (2012), the amount of apps downloaded per user in United States is 41. The number shows the popularity of mobile apps but also the competition different brands and service providers have to try to be one of the apps, their ideal costumer will download and use frequently, hence the increasing importance on user engagement.

Toshniwal (2015) explains that user engagement is the key to a succesful mobile product, regardless of the type of mobile product. The cost of acquisition of a customer is often more expensive than the cost of retention.

The following image illustrates the contrast between acquisition of a customer and engagement:



Figure 7. User acquisition in mobile (Toshniwal, 2015)

4.2 Engagement methods for mobile apps

4.2.1 First impression

From a marketing sales funnel point of view, the amount of users you get to advertise to and convert those into paying customers is rather small (Traynor). However, through the approach of a micro-marketing funnel, suggested by Brutman (2016), instead of blasting with information a big amount of leads, start with a specific set of customers that you believe are willing to buy your product. Through research and identification of their needs and wants, it becomes easier to share targeted content about your brand which is also more relevant to the customer.

Marketing powered - Sales managed "Micro funnels"



Figure 8. Micro-marketing funnel (Brutman, 2016)

A first impression is detrimental to engaging a user for the first time. According to Traynor, your app must answer three questions in the first screen: Explain how the product works, Motivate the user to get started, and let your users know how to get help if they need it. If the app fails to deliver a fantastic first impression, the user will log out and never return. Toshniwal (2015) suggests that users can stay more engaged if they are prompted to create an account and motivating them to do so through different incentives.

4.2.2 Frictionless on boarding experience

According to Kosir (2017) the more difficult it is for a new customer to begin using an app the more the abandonment rate will rise. By a difficult on boarding experience the author refers to, too many steps to sign up, confusing features/functions and too many information fields. Creating a successful onboarding process takes steps such as reducing the steps to login/create an account, offer functionality explanations on the go (when the user gets to those features) and explain interactively how the app works, plus limiting the amount of information the user gets per page. (Floor 2013; Kosir 2017).

In the image below we see an example of a seamless onboarding experience for an e-commerce app:

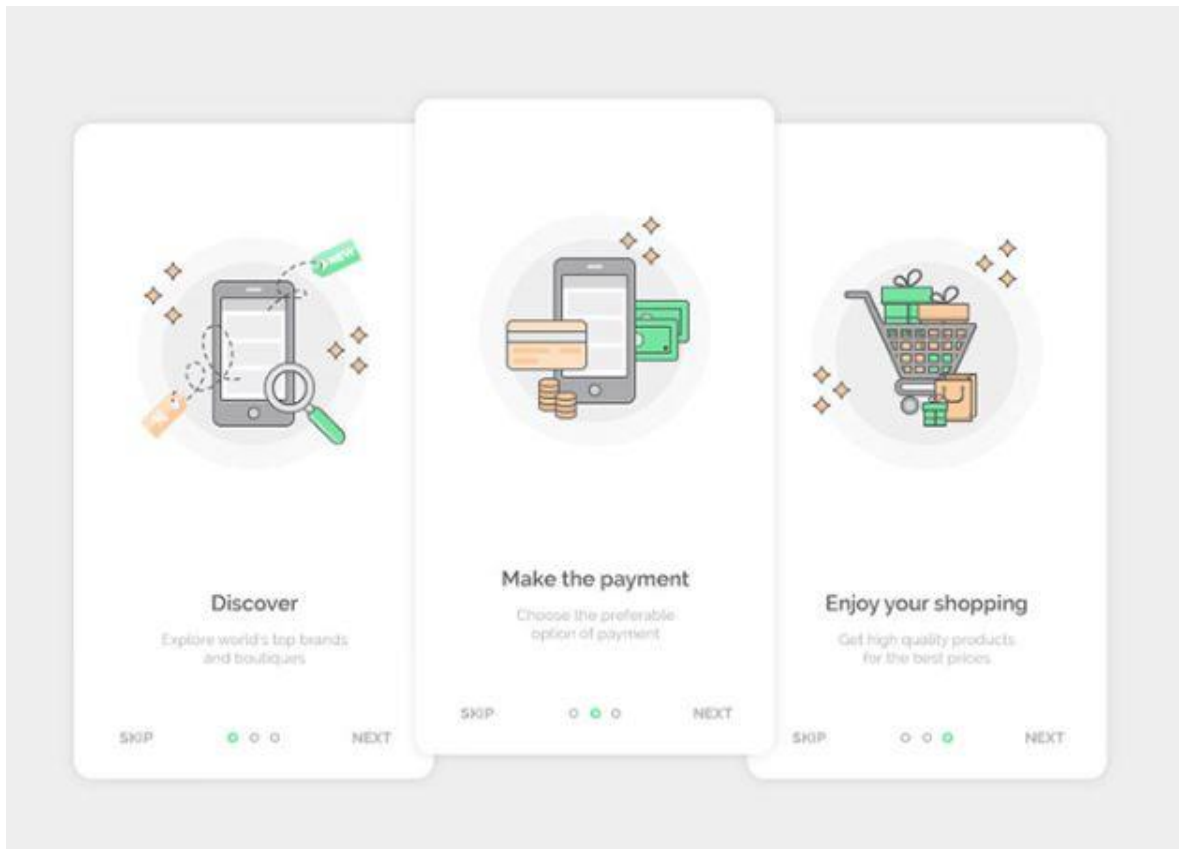
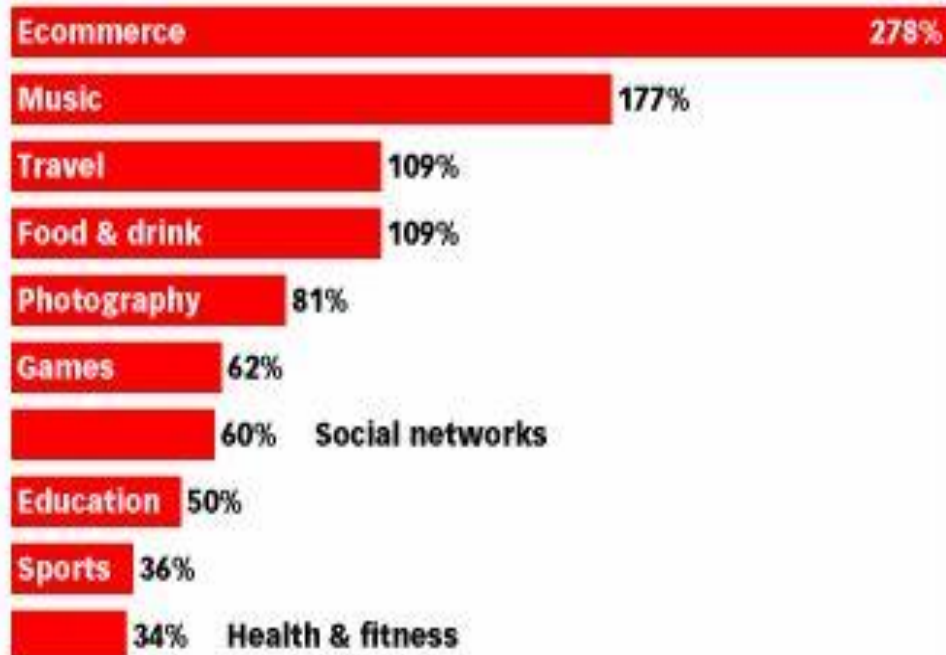


Figure 9. Onboarding sample for e-commerce (Dihich, 2016)

4.2.3 In-app /push messages

A study conducted by Localytics (2014) and reported by Emarketer (2014) says that users that enabled push notifications saw an increased app interaction and engagement, it also lowered the app abandonment rates. The E-commerce sector saw especially an increase in its launches of 278% with users that had enabled push notifications versus those who didn't.

App Launch Growth due to Push Notifications Among Mobile Apps Worldwide, by Category, July 2014
 % change



Note: read as ecommerce apps saw a 278% increase in launches among users with push notifications enabled vs. disabled; represents activity on the Localytics platform, broader industry metrics may vary
 Source: Localytics as cited in company blog, Aug 19, 2014

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www.eMarketer.com

Figure 10. Research: app launch growth due to push notifications (eMarketer, 2014)

Targeted push messages from E-commerce apps such as reduced prices on items of interest could drive much more interaction and increase the app retention numbers. While some authors consider in their top solutions for app engagement the use of push notifications (Toshniwal 2015 ;Grady 2015), Localytics (2017) (US based agency that specializes in mobile app solutions), suggests that in app messages and push notifications should be used together based on where and what the customer is doing, in order to offer the most personalization and relevance.

For example, through segmentation (making groups of users with similar characteristics into marketable groups) of users, a company can release different push notification campaigns that trigger in app purchases such as different sales and coupons which are often time sensitive. In the case of in app messages, a combo of asking feedback from the user who is using the app and encouraging the user to register can be a great way to improve your mobile app and making the user take the next step into interacting with the app.

4.2.4 Customer feedback and analytics

Customer Analytics can be gathered from several actions inside the app that include clicks, shares, installs, purchases. Through a deep analysis of current demographic data, acquisition/retention data and usage data, a mobile app is able to benefit by monitoring the app users and exploring new market opportunities, also through data that comes from the number of clicks, installs and in app purchases the mobile app can thus improve the acquisition costs across channels and maximise "Return of Investment". (Grady, 2015)

Apsalar (2011), suggests that through a cohort (a group of users that completed an action in certain amount of time) analysis and establishing a cohort event, a mobile app is able to track and compare different cohorts and their activities within the app, then comparing the cohorts and creating solutions. (Bhargava, 2015)

Customer Feedback is also very important in mobile app development and should be a daily part of the app's management. Establishing a NPS (Net Promoter Score) can help a mobile app improve the user experience and put attention in the group of customers that are not fully satisfied. (Reichheld, 2006)

The NPS score starts with a basic question: How likely is that you will recommend this app to a friend or colleague (On a scale from 1 to 10). Once the users have answered to that question, you need to prompt them with another questions that would be: What is the reason for you score? (Open answer). The responses should be then divided into user categories: Promoters (users that will recommend your app), Passives (users that are not yet fully engaged) and Detractors (users that are very dissatisfied with the product/user experience). The ideal situation is to have most promoters as those are the gold mine for your app. They will drag others into trying your products and will constantly recommend it to their friends. The NPS is calculated by subtracting detractors minus Promoters according to the image below:

How to Calculate Your Net Promoter Score



Figure 11. How to calculate your net promoter score. (Bhargava, 2015)

4.2.5 Campaigns and incentives

Customers should be rewarded for their good behaviour, especially because they have a number of other apps they can always go to. A mobile app should have a rewards system in place that takes into consideration bonuses, discounts, points, credits, that will allow an increased amount of sales, expand the customer base and establish customer loyalty.

When putting incentives into place, criteria such as the reward being attractive for customers, that it builds customer relationships and it that should still be profitable for the company, should be always kept in mind when setting up rewards. (Zhang 2014; Moser ; Davis 2016)

4.2.6 Social networks integration

With Social Networks being about experiences rather than just websites, the experiences maximize when a marketer is able to fully integrate different factors (reach, engagement, personalization, in the whole company's strategy. (Wyshynski, 2009) For that reason it is important that in mobile a user will have the option of sharing that experience they are having with their family, friends and relatives. Allowing your users to use your mobile app as a platform for sharing information about your app increases engagement and acquisition. (Toshniwal, 2015) However, in a study conducted by Moonweb (2015), only 0.2% of mobile users use any social sharing, mainly because you must be logged in to the social media site in order to share. The engagement was highest on the Facebook platform and for example Pinterest, is a site that relies 64% on mobile browsers, mainly because Pinterest is about sharing. It is important that if a mobile app decides to include social sharing buttons that the content created in it is shareable.

5 Methods

This chapter discusses the methods chosen for the research and how the thesis was constructed from the beginning to the end. I have decided that I will explain the method chosen answering two questions that were fundamental when deciding on the method: Why I chose the method and how it will be implemented.

5.1 Qualitative research and semi-standardized interview

Qualitative Research was born as a way to give additional meaning and choices when studying complex topics that in many cases needed further explanation. For example topics that deal with people's experiences and knowledge on certain topic. (Flick, 2009)

Choosing a qualitative research method is not about what is right or wrong, but more of what seems appropriate, which could be something such as adding the experience of the interviewee, understanding their behaviour and gathering knowledge through their experiences. (Silverman, 2013)

This qualitative research was crafted using a semi-standardized interview, which is based on the term "subjective theory", which refers to the fact that interviewees have an amount of knowledge about the topic being studied. (Flick, 2009)

When deciding upon my research method, I wanted to gather the experience of different professionals within my field of research, thus adding diversity to my sample. Diversity being one of qualitative research features, allowed me to search for professionals in business, design and web/mobile development fields, to interview and gather different insights on the same topic. It also made possible to draw my own interpretations of the information in order to give adequate suggestions/practices to the case company.

The topic was another reason of why I decided, qualitative research had to be the choice, as it was not a topic where you could find enough academic material being quite new and not as extensively researched as other topics.

5.2 Benchmarking research

The aim of a benchmarking research is to discover new practices and measures in order to improve one's current situation. Stroud (2017) suggests that when making a benchmarking

research you should not limit to your own industry nor that it becomes a one time activity, but that it continues through time as situations can change.

The reason to complement my research method with a benchmarking research was to gather the best user engagement practices in the market that can be suitable for Javelo App.

5.3 Research implementation

This thesis started by formulating a subject analysis of the topic I chose. After that I made a plan and timeline that would take me through gathering information for my theoretical bases and analysing different online sites to gather the best practices on user engagement. Finally, crafting my interview based on the research method chosen and thereafter conducting the interviews.

The interviews were conducted using the means available, which was giving the interviewee the chance to fill out the interview when it suited them the most. In all cases, the interviewees filled the interview themselves, which was then sent to me by email. The interviews consisted of 7 open ended questions, in which the interviewee had the chance to give his own opinion based on his experience and his field of work.

I chose the interviewees based on my own observations on how different start-ups get started when building a mobile app, such as with my case company. (Javelo, 2016). Juhana Kotilainen has the knowledge on how to build a product and give insights on the topic according to his experience in directing his current gaming company. Jason Fallas has the knowledge on the design interface of the mobile app, which can be easily explained through the visuals and interactivity in mobile apps. Finally, Jesse Luoto has the insights on the actual building of the mobile app and improving it through measurements gathered from users.

6 Results

This chapter puts forward the result of the Benchmarking Research conducted for the case company. Each subchapter is divided into each type of research: Benchmarking Research and Semi-Structured Interviews results.

6.1 Engagement suggestions for Javelo

Through this benchmarking research I discovered several practices that Javelo app can implement and test. From the overall research, it is clear that what is most important is to have a defined value promise that will make your app stand out from others and make sure to communicate that as much as you can. After that, the overall look and experience your user has with the app are key.

Makin continuous improvements based on customer feedback are sure to give you a successful app and keep your customers engaged. With that being said, putting in place an NPS survey will guarantee that constant feedback is gathered, and will help app developers and marketers within the company put their efforts where is needed, without leaving out of sight their “promoters”.

As Floor (2013) and Kosir (2017) mentioned, making the on boarding process should be as easy as it can be. Making it easy for the customer to understand how your app works and how to sign in can lower the abandonment rate for your app. Also, giving your customer the option of skipping steps on the onboarding process can make it easier for them.

Another recommendation would be to include social media sharing buttons. Javelo app is about “creating content through jewellery”, and it is just natural users would want to share with their friends and families the jewellery designs they have created using the app. With social media being such a powerful advertising tool, using “users” to share their own content on Facebook (where engagement on mobile is highest) can help Javelo reach their networks. (Moonweb, 2015)

The use of push notifications and in app messaging can be of great aid when keeping app users engaged. For example, by using segmentation of users and feedback collection through the NPS survey, Javelo app can be able to craft localized and personalized promotions, news, reminders to users about abandoned carts and even to encourage them to continue to design more jewellery pieces.

Another great tool that Javelo should put in practice is the “Cohort Analysis”. As discussed in chapter four, setting up a group of cohorts will help to figure out which segments perform best according to the type of “action” to be studied. For example Javelo App can have a cohort for existing customers of certain age groups and study their sessions per day, analysing their behaviour and coming to a conclusion of which age group has most sessions thorough a day during a month.

6.2 Qualitative interview

6.2.1 Importance of user engagement in mobile apps

All the respondents seemed to agree on engagement being the key to a successful mobile application, especially because users nowadays have many apps to choose from and it is very important to stand out. A good user engagement can also mean success in terms of revenue, as engaged users can also make use of the in-app purchases, etc. Plus, keeping existing users is much cheaper than gathering new ones. A very interesting way, Fallas (2017), explained the importance of engagement, was through a conversation: If the conversation you are having is boring, you will most likely find someone else to talk to.

6.2.2 Engagement across platforms

Engagement is indeed important and most respondents seemed to agree that engagement can vary through platforms. Especially if the people behind the app have different ways to measure their own “KPI’s” (Key Performance Indicators). For example, a gaming app can measure its engagement with users coming back to the app every day, while an e-commerce app might be focused more into social media sharing or purchases. The key to engagement is finding the metrics that work best for your application.

6.2.3 Top factors in app development

The following answers were given: user research, a fantastic value promise, business strategy, monetization, defined scope/content and requirements and validation. All 3 respondents differed in the factors to consider when building an app. However, the focus was always towards knowing your user and the value you are giving them in return for using your app- which can be translated into the value promise of your product.

6.2.4 Engagement on e-commerce and gaming apps

An e-commerce app should be seen as a tool given to people to realize transactions. According to Luoto (2017) this application should be effortless and simple, in an attempt to

keep the user coming back towards that positive experience. A gaming app focuses more in rewarding users emotionally and empowering them through your game. Both apps do share similarities in terms of promotions/strategies that can be conducted through in app notifications, the web, social media, etc.

6.2.5 Measuring engagement

Engagement can be measured through analytics and any tools that provide data. There are already several ways available to test engagement for your app, for example by looking at reviews left by users, the type of content being shared by users, the time spent in your app per user, including how often they return to your app. The key is always to keep in mind that every application should make their own rules as to what metrics matter and make changes accordingly in order to turn this engagement into revenue and eventually more users.

Most respondents agreed that the best way to measure engagement is through the amount of users coming back to the app and the amount of time they spend on it. It is also important to mention that the value of those user interactions can be tracked by checking the user and its activity outside of the app. For example, if the users are inviting their friends to install the application.

6.2.6 Outlook of an engaged audience

The following answers were given: a good user experience, high tech performance, emotional engagement, interesting core, usability and good graphics. Regardless of the app, the respondents placed a lot of importance in the quality and value promise behind the app.

6.3 Ethics and validity

The information gathered in this thesis is not confidential and all the theory has been gathered from academic articles, books, videos, and different online sites such as blogs. The information exposed from Javelo App, is open to the public and can be seen from their online website. Through the interview process I made sure, to look for respondents that are not connected to the case company to avoid any bias on responses. The interviewees were made aware of the purpose behind this thesis, that their answers will be used for academic purposes and the answers will be summarized together with the other respondents, thus creating a blend of suggestions for the case company.

In terms of validity, the results of this thesis have been gathered from educational theory books, journal articles and websites. The results of the thesis do not include any personal opinions except that the best practices were chosen according to those that were most present in the articles I read and that I considered were most relevant to the case company.

7 Evaluation of learning

Finishing this thesis has been the first thing I have finished in many years. I endured a tough job that required a lot of responsibility plus the daily routines that come with motherhood. It is a cliché to write it here, but I discovered through time that when you write it, your mind internalizes it and you start to believe it.

From the beginning of this thesis, which was choosing the subject, I was already very interested in the topic and would find myself reading about user engagement and user experience. These are still very new topics and there is still plenty of room for research – we still have all the older generations trying to catch up with the internet, so I believe the whole “mobile landscape” will continue to surprise us from time to time, especially if we think of the different type of apps and how many of these are already part of our lives.

Through this research I have learned several and different new approaches on user engagement. I did not know engagement was not a “one size fits all” recipe, but that companies should choose their own ways to measure engagement according to their goals. There was a lot of information available on mobile apps that gave me a more complete understanding that it is not easy to build a mobile app nor to make it successful.

Making this thesis made me think a lot about the outstanding amount of competition app developers have and the need to gain that space in people’s phones. It was clear that having a fantastic value promise and truly solving a problem can be the start of building a great mobile app.

When making the interviews I was very happy to discover the results because they had the impact I was hoping for, which was to have different insights from people that are key when building an app, and then reporting the results as a blend of suggestions. After all in real life that is how an app is made, through team work and having the best professionals in the field. I also learned that one of the key activities to put into practice towards improving engagement when you build an app is collecting feedback thorough the NPS (Net Promoter Score), which was just as simple as adding two feedback questions either through push notifications or in-app messaging.

Amongst all I have been surprised of how some topics are familiar to us through stories people tell us, but we are simply missing the theoretical background of those. For example, the beginning of relationship Marketing through Coca Cola's recipe change. These happenings in history make me look forward to the next development on the topics I am passionate about.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.



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Topic: User Engagement in Mobile Apps

Qualitative Interview Questions

1. Why is user engagement important for Mobile Apps?
2. Is there a different definition of engagement across platforms? If yes, why?
3. If you would start a mobile app, what are the top 3 factors to consider that must be included when building an app?
4. How does an e-commerce app differ to a gaming one in terms of user engagement?
5. What is the most important way to engage a customer through a mobile app? Can that engagement be measured? If yes, how?

6. What is the best way to measure engagement on an e-commerce app?

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7. Mention/Describe your perfect blend of ingredients for a successfully engaged mobile audience.