

Successful brand development ideas for a start-up company in a tourism industry.

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<p>This thesis has been conducted in the category of an analytical product-oriented thesis and researches brands, brand development, and social media marketing in the context of the tourism industry. The main objective is to answer the "What are the most successful branding strategies for a tech tourism start-up?" question. With the use of the theoretical concepts, analysis of the market and professional input, a set of branding and marketing recommendation for a local start-up company Wowanders was made.</p> <p>The case company is a tourism oriented start-up, trying to push through to the market with their travel diary application. The guiding research question is how to build a strong, easily recognizable brand for such product. The objective of this study is to create a set of guidelines for their branding and marketing efforts. The theoretical part is the fundament of the further reasearch and discusses brands having its own identity, as well as being a part of a marketing plan.</p> <p>The research approach of this thesis is a case study. Literature review is used as a base in the theoretical framework. The empirical part develops the thesis product by analyzing and evaluating external and internal secondary information, benchmarking use of social media by different startup companies, four semi-structured interviews with industry professionals, and a workshop with potential product users.</p> <p>The outcome of this thesis is presented to the commissioner in a form of guidelines and ideas to develop their branding and marketing strategies. The presentation focuses on the branding through social media with selected channels being Facebook and Instagram.</p>	
Keywords	
Branding, marketing, start-up, tourism, travel, social media	

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1 Introduction

This thesis presents Wowanders' current branding and marketing strategy and focuses on new possibilities to improve it. The data for this thesis was gathered as a side project commissioned by the company.

I started to work on this project in August 2019 and finished it up by May 2020. By dividing the work into 4 different subprojects – theoretical, benchmarking, interviews, and workshop, I've managed to conduct the research in less than a year.

1.1 Research background

Even before the first commercial flight in 1914 travelling was one of the biggest excitements in the human population. With travel becoming more and more popular, and commonly available option, lower and middle classes gained access to the possibility of long-distance travel as well. According to the World Tourism Organization, as of July 2019, we've seen over 1450 million international tourist arrivals. As seen in Figure 1 the numbers have been growing almost constantly for the past years and are expected to grow in the future as well.

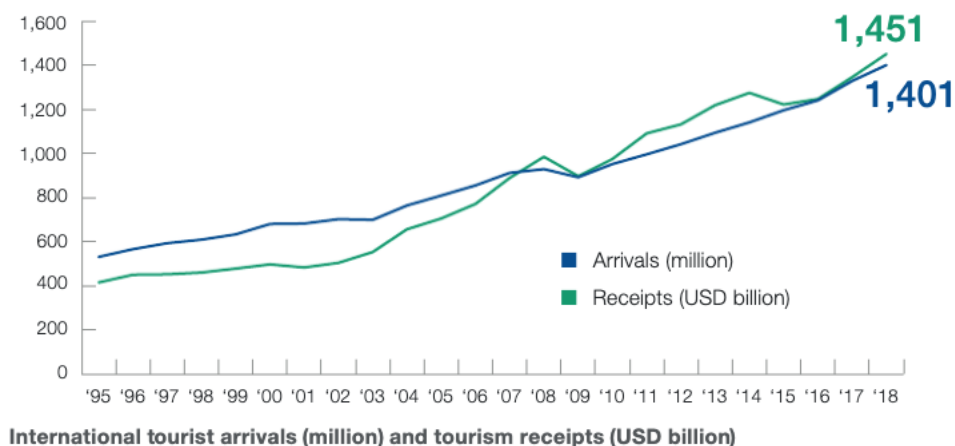


Figure 1- International Tourist Arrivals (UNWTO, 2019)

It is only natural that with this growing travellers' numbers comes more demand for the travel-related products and services, especially when taking into consideration that one of the most popular travel trends in the recent years such was travelling to show the 'instagramable' moment. Therefore, improving said products is as much necessary. This de-mand inspired the author to choose this research topic, as well as the desire to help the commissioner.

1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations

This thesis aims to provide a deeper understanding of the development of a brand for a small start-up and presents its potential development, as well as to research the marketing strategies of similar companies on different stages of development as benchmarking. As its core focus this thesis has a travelling customer and his needs. Therefore, as an ultimate goal, this work tries to answer the final question:

“What are the most successful branding ideas for a tech tourism start-up?”

In order to resolve the said question, this thesis will answer the following sub-questions consecutively:

- i. Who are Wowanders' main competitors and what is their marketing strategy?
- ii. What is the current Wowanders' strategy?
- iii. What is the potential user opinion about the app itself and its branding strategy?
- iv. What advice comes from the industry professionals?
- v. How can Wowanders improve their practices?

The commissioner of this thesis wants to find out which branding and marketing strategies and practices are considered the most useful. Through this research the company want to learn what kind of content their direct competitors and similar start-ups are posting on social media and how much buzz it gains in return.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the potential gains and risks of different social media channels and content types and help the commissioner to find best future implementation of the information share and communication with its customers. This research is also aimed to explore the ideal brand development strategy for the travel related start-ups by investigating different existing options. In the end the commissioner will be presented with the compilation of the most important findings and improvement suggestions in a separate PowerPoint presentation (Appendix 4).

One limitation to this work is that the travel industry and the social media are both a constantly and fast changing environments. This is due to the fact that more and more people are gaining the access to the social media, as well as the growing numbers of travellers and their demands. The changing tourism industry also results in higher numbers of travellers worldwide.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis incorporates the theoretical foundation and the empirical section. In order to improve the readability of this document the paper is divided into seven chapters. The figure below (figure 2) exemplify the overall structure of the thesis and is followed by detailed explanation of each chapter.

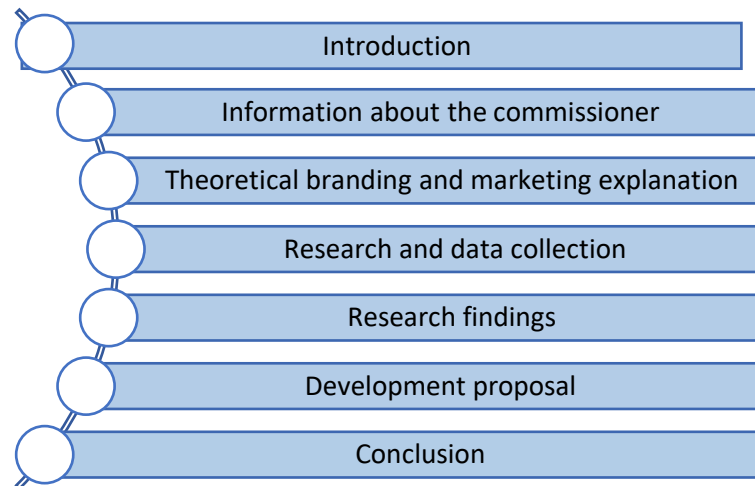


Figure 2 - Thesis structure

The first chapter opens up the research background, in which a short introduction of the market need is given; the research objectives of finding the best branding and marketing practices for small companies; the theoretical framework; as well as the research limitations are mentioned.

Chapter two introduces the commissioner case and history as well as it presents its main customer base. The second part of the chapter introduces also two main competitors and compares their situation and strategy with the commissioner's.

Following that, chapter three presents the theoretical work of the thesis. Explaining the need and importance of branding and marketing in the fast-developing world of social media. Author focuses on two main social media channels – Facebook and Instagram, as well as the use

In the following chapter four author explains the research aim and data collection methods. This chapter is divided into three main parts that were at the same time the collection methods: benchmarking, workshop with the students and semi-structured interviews with the professionals.

Chapter five follows the previous one presenting the findings from the said data collection methods. The findings of each are then presented in an easily readable table at the end of each subchapter.

Chapter six opens up with a description of a current situation of the commissioner followed by a SOSTAC plan. Then, the author presents all the findings in a form of a development proposal for the commissioner. It also shortly answers the five sub-questions presented in the beginning of the study.

Last chapter summarizes all of the previous information and gives the general conclusion for the thesis.

2 Wowanders - about the commissioner

In this chapter, I'll introduce different aspects of the commissioner's operations: its history and main goals, the product itself, the customers, and its competitors. Wowanders is a brand-new approach to travel apps, merging the old-fashioned diary with social media. On 10.09.2019 I've had a pleasure of interviewing one of the company's founders Maija Kaukonen and Taru Aalto, who had shared some information about the app and its users.

2.1 History and vision of the company

The company's history is not that long, as it was founded in August 2017, but it already managed to become visible on the market. The idea behind the app is the result of a long research of the two founders Taru Aalto and Maija Kaukonen, both engineers and travel enthusiasts themselves. They've researched traveling patterns of multiple people, their needs and currently available tools. Based on the results they've noticed two major universal facts: people are getting frustrated when having to plan a trip, and that they're more likely to believe a review from a friend than a random internet opinion. Wowanders app is the answer to those needs, using the help of AI and location API's, the app allows users to search and book hotels, restaurants, and things to do, with the help of their friends' list. (Wowanders 2019.)

2.2 Mobile app business model

The app (Figure 3) is an AI-powered diary app that automatically creates the travel note based on user location and photos taken. The app recognizes the place where the pictures were taken so it can be added at any given time after the trip. The company uses user's input on the hotels they recommend as a material for their affiliate cooperation with service provider booking.com. For every reservation made on booking.com that can be traced down to the app, the company receives a small compensation. That way the product is expected to bring income already with only 2000 active users per month. (Kaukonen & Aalto 10.09.2019)

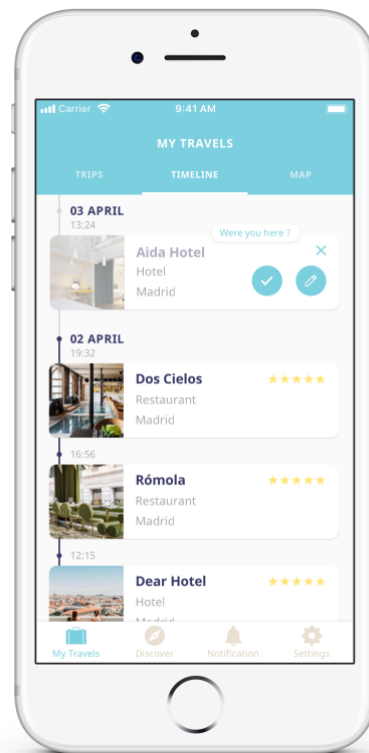


Figure 3 - Wowanders App (Wowanders 2019)

2.3 Customers

Even though the app is free for everyone the company aims its product at a certain profiled customer. The persona of the ideal user is 25-50-year-old woman, traveling at least two to three times per year. The company targets leisure travellers that are active on social media and are openly sharing their stories to the public. This type of audience was selected after conducting a survey on the existing users. (Kaukonen & Aalto 10.09.2019) The majority of the users are currently Finnish. According to the founders, the app has great potential in international markets. They are currently trying to expand on European and American markets, as the application grows. The biggest challenge in attracting new customers is, according to Taru Aalto, the stalled Nordic market that doesn't scale fast enough for the company to generate profit. (Kaukonen, M. & Aalto, T. 10.09.2019.)

2.4 Competitors

As the idea of the travel diary is not exactly the newest under the sun there are multiple competitors for the Wowanders app, although, none of them is directly similar. In this chapter, I'll focus on the two most popular traveller supporting applications – Polarsteps and Mapify, that can be seen as direct competitors.

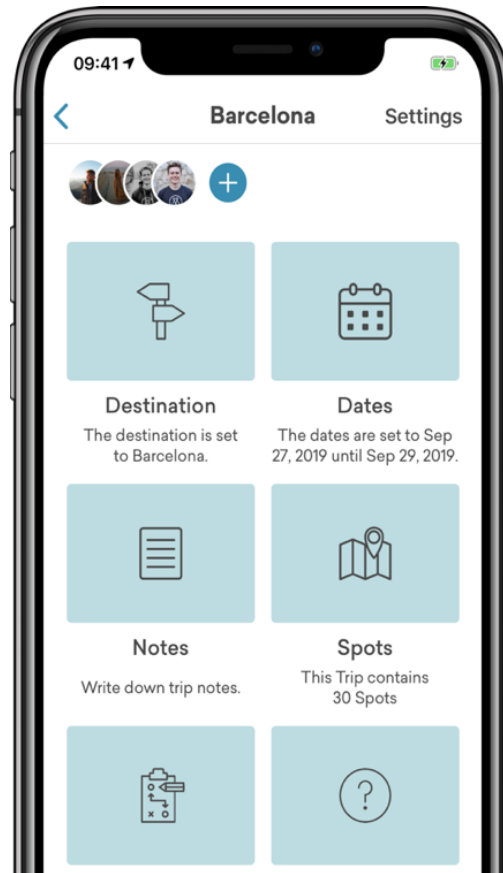


Figure 4 - Mapify App (Mapify 2019)

Polarsteps is one of the most popular travel applications in today's market. The idea for the app comes from one of the founders who wanted to keep his friends and family up to date while traveling without the need of contacting each one individually. Polarsteps concept is similar to Wowanders, however, there are few differences. Polarsteps automatically recognizes the location (Figure 5) by the GPS tracker, while in the Wowanders app location is recognized from the added photos. Also, the business model is very different. Polarsteps makes its income by offering the printed version of the done trips in the form of the book. The book includes statistics, comments, and photos collected from the data logged during the trip. (Polarsteps 2019)



Figure 5 -Polarsteps App (Polarsteps 2019)

Mapify is a European start-up, based in Berlin. Although being only 3 years old company (founded in 2017) it gained users from over 190 countries to share their travel experience. The interface is clean and easy to read (Figure 4). Therefore, it definitely can be portrayed as Wowanders main competitor. There are certain similarities between the two, but the main difference is the overall purpose of the app. The Mapify app allows user to plan, document and share their travel experience, while Wowanders focuses mostly on sharing past trips and experiences. Two companies are similar also in their monetization model as Mapify currently generates revenue through in-depth partnerships with travel companies such as Airbnb. (Mapify 2019)

2.4.1 Comparison

In the table (Table 1), I've presented the main differences between Wowanders and its main competitors. The main categories that I believe they differentiate the most: the service offerings, business model and monetization plan, user personas and main interest group, and branding and marketing strategy. As it is shown in the table Wowanders app is slightly different from its competitors in almost every category.

In their base core, all the app offers similar services - a platform where travellers can share their adventures with their friends and public. The service offering differs slightly on how they are sharing it. Mapify focuses more on planning the trips rather than adding it later as memories. Polarsteps offers more complex opportunities as it at the same time tracks the user and his location to create a timeline of the trips. Wowanders' app is, therefore, a unique in its idea, as it works more as a diary for past trips than the future ones.

All three apps are operating on completely different monetizing ideas. As stated before, Polarsteps offers to sell a printed picture book for its users after their trip as a souvenir. At the price range from 30€ to 80€, travel book is a popular reminder of the trip in the analogue form. Wowanders, on the other hand, similarly to Mapify offers its users an easy hotel booking reference.

Polarsteps focuses their marketing activities mostly on Instagram, where they post a wide range of pictures from their users. They're also actively collaborating with various influencers. Mapify, similarly is also present on Instagram, however, on top of that they took also more traditional approach and got visible on TV series and magazines in their home country. Wowanders follows same path of being active online as well as being visible on various travel related trade shows and exhibitions.

Table 1- Comparison of competitors

	Wowanders	Polarsteps	Mapify
Service offering	AI-backed travel diary that can be shared among friends and public	Travel log with automatic GPS tracking of visited places.	Travel log and planning with auto location services
Business model	Affiliate partnership with booking.com website. For every booking made on the website that can be traced back to the app, the company gets small percent of the booking cost in return.	Offering of the printed photo book after the trip. The book includes all the pictures gathered throughout the trip. Comes in different sizes, from 24 to 300 pages, in the price range from 30€ to 80€.	Mapify currently generates revenue through in-depth partnerships with travel companies such as Airbnb.
Branding and Marketing approach	Social media presence, tourism-related fairs and exhibitions, collaboration with bloggers and influencers	Social media marketing- mostly on Instagram, collaboration with users and influencers	Social media marketing – mostly Instagram, features in German tv series and press

3 Branding and Marketing

In this chapter, I'm going to bring forward the theoretical part of the branding process. Starting from different definitions of branding, branding as a part of the marketing process up to the short analysis of current strategy of the commissioner.

3.1 Definitions

The word "brand" itself has emerged from the proto-German "*brandr*", which can be directly translated as "to burn a mark or stigmatize". Its original meaning was usually referring to marking ownership of enslaved people or animals, although this meaning has been nowadays mostly forgotten. However, the benefits of understanding the brand as such still are quite big. Firstly, branding is identifying the wearer - as much as animal mark states its owner, nowadays brands often give people a sense of belonging to some bigger community and signal membership. (Beverland 2018, 5.)

A brand can be described as a feeling that a group of people shares about the product, service or company. Despite the misconceptions, a brand is not a logo or trademark, nor a product itself. A brand is an emotional response of an individual, and each person has their own interpretation of it. But only when this ideal concept is shared in the public, it can be recognized as a specific class of things. A brand, therefore, is an approximate and shared feeling about the product. Even though companies cannot control this process, they can interfere with it and manage it by sharing the qualities that make their product different. Brand management can be summarized as the management of differences in the opinions of people. (Neumeier 2005, 1-19.)

There are countless definitions that the author could present here, however they all vary from one perspective to the other. The key takeaway from this part is to understand that a brand is not just a product, or a logo printed on its side. Instead, a brand is a collection of tangible and intangible elements that are intended to influence consumers' perceptions and behaviours. The material part is for example a product or a service with a visible brand elements. The intangible dimension is demonstrated by the brand name and its values. This collection creates a unique character for the brand and sets it apart from its competitors. (Kapferer 2008, 9-13.)

3.2 Brand identity, image and personality

An established brand can be also named as the reputation. It needs to have a clear identity, image, and a unique personality to be spread around the marketplace. Therefore,

the brand development process can be compared to a person - it is born small and weak, and then in time it may mature to make itself a well-known name, thus, anything that has a name can be a brand. Firms that take the time and effort to work and build their unique and strong brands can gain a lot from those investments. Increasing consumer preference and loyalty, and therefore, allowing the firm pricing on the products, is only one of the few advantages that the brands do for its companies. (Johansson & Carlson 2015, 1-20)

EVOLUTION OF A STRONG BRAND

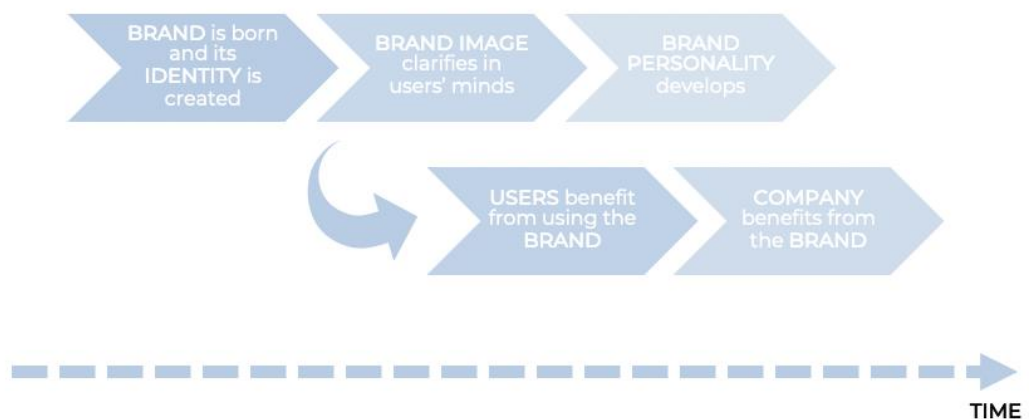


Figure 6 - Evolution of a strong Brand (Johansson & Carlson 2015)

The brand identity for a company should be an easy answer for a question “Who are you?”. It can be described as a passport of the brand - its name, a picture of the logo, how old the brand is, its nationality and a category of the service or product it provides. A strong brand needs to have a unique and easily distinguishable identity for the customers to know what the company behind it stands for. The brand can be therefore easily credited for all the products fitting the expectations that the brand identity creates. (Johansson & Carlson 2015, 6-7)

According to Kapferer (2008) on the other hand, a brand identity is a complex prism (Figure 7) that distinguishes six different dimensions – personality, culture, self-image, reflection, relationship, and physique. In addition, the prism distinguishes between the perspective of the sender, the recipient, the brand owner, and the consumer.

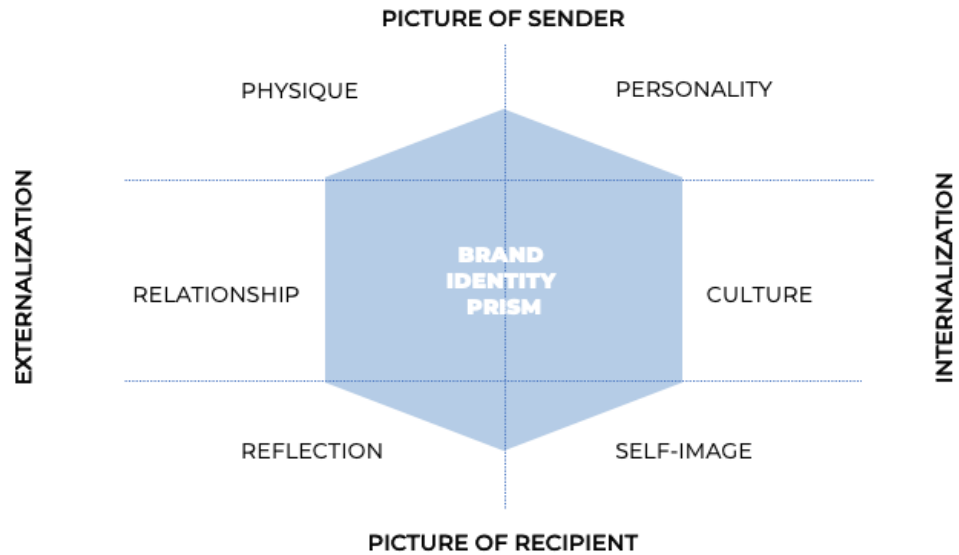


Figure 7 - Brand identity prism (Kapferer, 2008)

In addition to the external appearances or physique as named by Kapferer, physical characteristics of a brand can tell us what the brand is doing. This is a very practical function as it tells the consumer immediately what he can expect. All brands should offer some sort of image or concrete benefit that is also physically perceivable. Brand personality is formed as a result of the communication processes and the way it is conducted. It defines the style of the marketing communications and develops a character that should be easily identified by the consumer in the end. A strong brand is also built around its own culture and ideology. Culture distinguishes similar brands from the same industry and brings a group of like-minded consumers together. That is one of the brand's most competitive parts. (Kapferer 2008, 182-185.)

The fourth aspect of identity comprises the relationship between the brand and the consumer, but also the brand in the relation to the values it represents. Self-image describes how the brand works in its own relationships, which is especially important for the service brands. The consumers' perception of the brand and its representatives is in big part similar to the later discussed brand identity and personality, however Kapferer doesn't recognize them as separate elements. Over time products or services, as well as brand communication builds a picture of what kind of customer it'd like to serve and for whom it exists. On the last level, the consumer's own perception is reflected and shapes the brand perception and attitude. It is one of the most important reasons to create a brand – to make the consumer feel like they belong to a certain group or type when using the product. (Kapferer, 2008. 185-187)

Distinguishing the brand image from the brand's identity can be useful for a better understanding of what a brand does. As much as the identity always stays the same and can be easily controlled, the brand image is the perception about the brand in consumers' opinion. It cannot be easily controlled by anyone, although it can be influenced by the marketers emphasizing brand's strengths. As consumers use the product more the word of mouth gets spread around and a clear brand image emerges. The company's logo and image will start to be more recognizable in the process as well. (Johansson & Carlson 2015, 8-9)

Brand personality is basically the extension of brand identity and image. It emerges gradually from all interactions the company has with its consumers, and in the end creates the typical user persona. Brand personality, often called also a brand style, is more than just the product or a service and it consists of more general traits, it is the way the brand behaves in the open space. Once established it is used by the users to promote their own, matching style and personality. Although it is beneficial, not all of the companies develop their distinctive personalities. The reasons for that might be either that the customers don't want to interact with the brand to a certain level, or the brand itself doesn't want to get narrowed to one profile. The latter is especially true for the companies that want to be attractive for the masses. (Johansson & Carlson 2015, 9-10)

3.3 Branding as a part of Marketing

Marketing in its very basic form can be described as finding and addressing customer needs while making it profitable for the company. In the challenging and overcrowded market environment users are bombarded with options to choose from. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to create value for the customers and communicate it to the masses. Creating a strong brand value gives companies the advantage and helps customers to differentiate one brand from the other. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 25-31.)

As the economy has moved from a one size fits all to a mass-customization, marketing has shifted from attributes to profits, to experience, to personal identification. This change shows clearly that while features and profits are still a major part and play an important role in the buying process, tribal identification has become even bigger. A brand should create a kind of a tribe that users can join and feel being a part of something bigger. Brands have become like little deities of modern life, each controlling a different need, mood or situation. (Neumeier 2005, 23-26.)

According to Aaker (2014), brand equity can be defined as a group of resources and liabilities connected with the brand's name and logo and is adding value to a company and/or its customers. Therefore, managing those involves investment to create and enhance brand awareness. Brand awareness is a strength of the brand's image in the customer's perception. (Aaker 2014, 7-21.)

A strong brand has a few clear characteristics. It is easy to identify and distinguish it from its competitors because of the uniqueness that then leads to differentiation. A good brand needs its unique selling point, something that is an ace in their selling card deck - like safe-ty for Volvo cars, for example. Strong brands are also rich with meaning and value, delivering their promises to users. Brand meaning needs to be built from the inside out, allowing its users to project their identity to a broader audience. (Beverland 2018, 9-11.)

3.4 Brand development

Trust creation is the bedrock of brand design. If a customer can trust the brand, the buying decision comes easier, a person can buy it now and worry later. Trust is the fastest way to convincing an indecisive buyer and a base for modern branding. (Neumeier 2005, 51-53.) Building a profitable brand is not a race and not something that happens immediately. The joint creation lies in the cooperation of the company and the customers (Figure 8).

Allowing the user to co-construct the service experience to match their needs is nowadays the heart of marketing innovation. Different authors can create a meaning for the brand, allowing it to be its own entity. (Beverland 2018,11-12.)

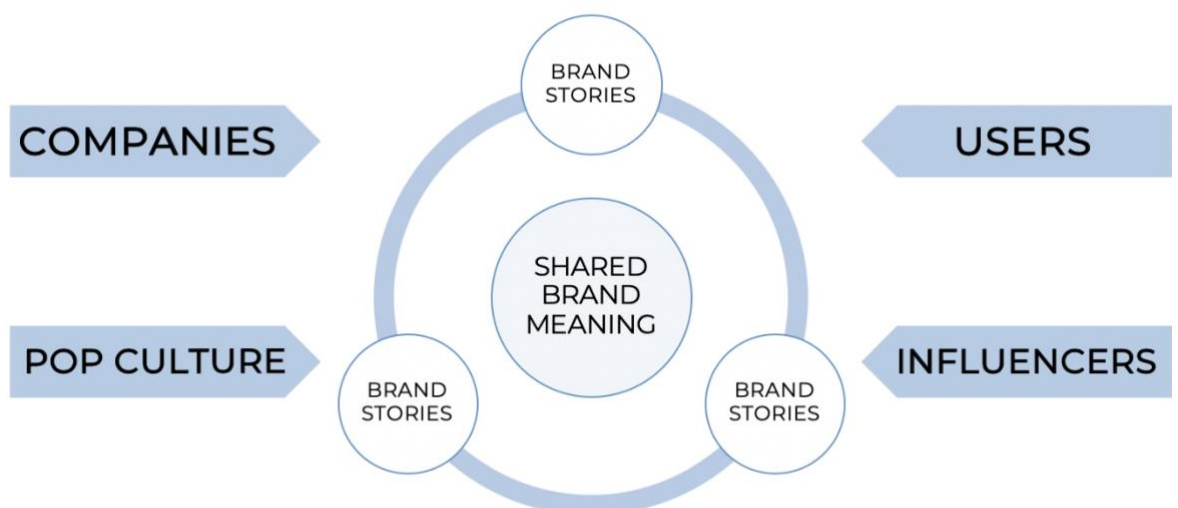


Figure 8 - Authors shaping brand meaning (Beverland 2018.)

In his book, Beverland (2018) recognizes 3 phases of successful brand building. In the first one, building internal support, it is necessary to understand brand equity and justify the branding program to begin with. Without those, it won't be possible to build a team of people with influence, obtain the necessary funding, or ensure the integrity of the brand. In the second phase, the company needs to answer three questions: -Who are you? What do you do? Why does it matter? Until the answers to those questions are compelling, making the buyers find the product irresistible, there's no brand. (Beverland 2018, 131-136) That is the right way to research the users' needs and position brands on the market. In the last phase, the brand is being launched, assessed and adjusted if necessary. The author put a strong emphasis on releasing the brand in two launches - internally and externally. What's interesting, it's the internal launch that should come first as the understanding within the organization leads directly to brand authenticity. Also, tracking the brand's results - following user's feedback and adjusting the program is crucial in order to build a long-lasting brand. (Neumeier 2018, 50-53.)

In the digital era of the modern world, companies need to make a good strategy on how to gain an advantage from brands that creates meaning for the customers based on the data they gather about the users. That approach called a two-way brand or branded relationship can be easily described as a constant dialogue between the provider and the end-user. This means a constantly changing environment that is aware of the customer and his demands and is ready to adapt to reach those needs. (Peppers, Rogers & Kotler 2016, 5.)

3.5 Customer expectations

As modern society drifts further away from the traditional economy scheme, the expectations of the buyers have changed as well. Nowadays, people are more customization oriented, rich in information but time poor. As a result, the traditional system for comparing products no longer works. Modern customers base their selection on more symbolic and emotional attributes. The looks, production process, which "tribe" will it put them into, other people's opinions and the brand itself are often more important factors than features or price. (Neumeier 2005, 1-15.)

Nowadays, successful marketing companies decided to turn away from the traditional organization chart that puts the customer as the company's only true profit centre. Instead, they move towards the customer-oriented chart (Figure 9) that puts the customers on top and highlights the importance of the frontline employees - the ones that meet, serve and satisfy customer's needs. It is a necessary step to invert the chart that

way because the modern rise of the digital technologies created a wave of increasingly informed customers. Those customers expect the companies to go the extra mile to communicate with them and do even more to satisfy them. The majority of the population became better educated and better informed than ever before in our history. They are also armed with the tools to verify companies' promises and seek better options if they become unsatisfied. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 148 -152)

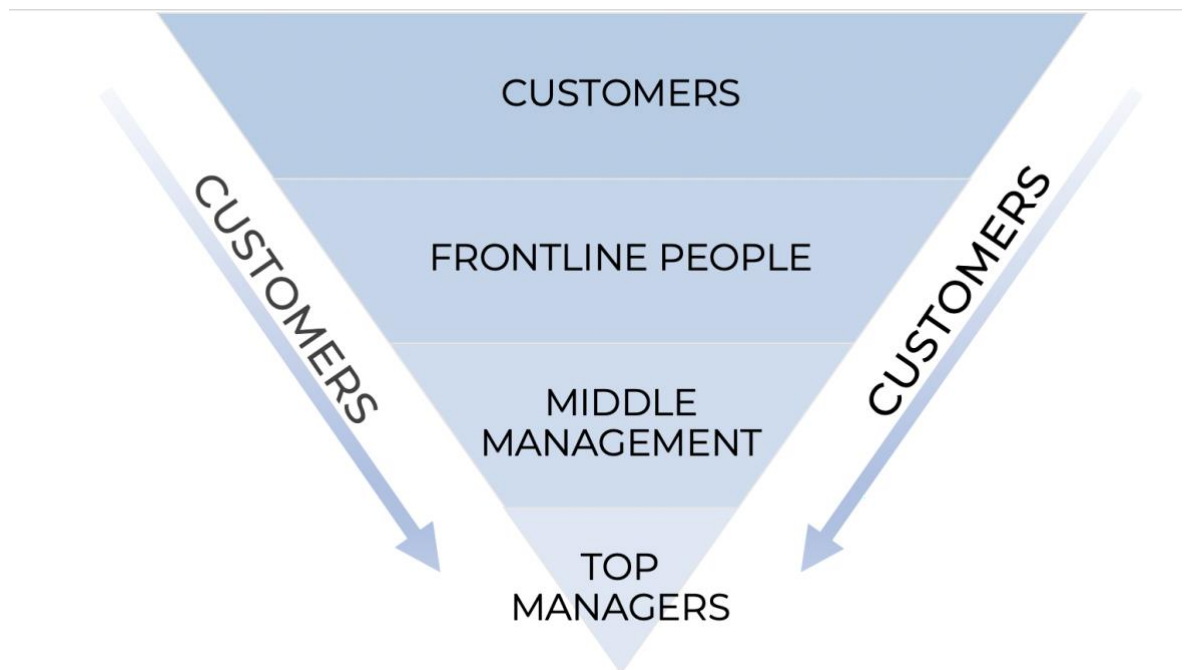


Figure 9 - New Marketing pyramid (Kotler & Keller 2016)

3.6 Branding through social media

In the last decade the boom on the social media is something that is hard to just walk by the marketers. It turned out to be one of the most effective tools to promote your brand to the big audience. It can bring enormous gains for the companies to advertise themselves through different social media channels but only if it's done correctly.

The audience available on the other side of the computer or mobile phone is enormous and constantly growing. The report published by Hootsuite in January 2020 presents the comprehensive look at the state of the internet, mobile devices, social media and ecommerce. According to the report the overall internet user numbers have grown by 7% and active social media users by over 9% compared to the same time last year. (Figure 10)

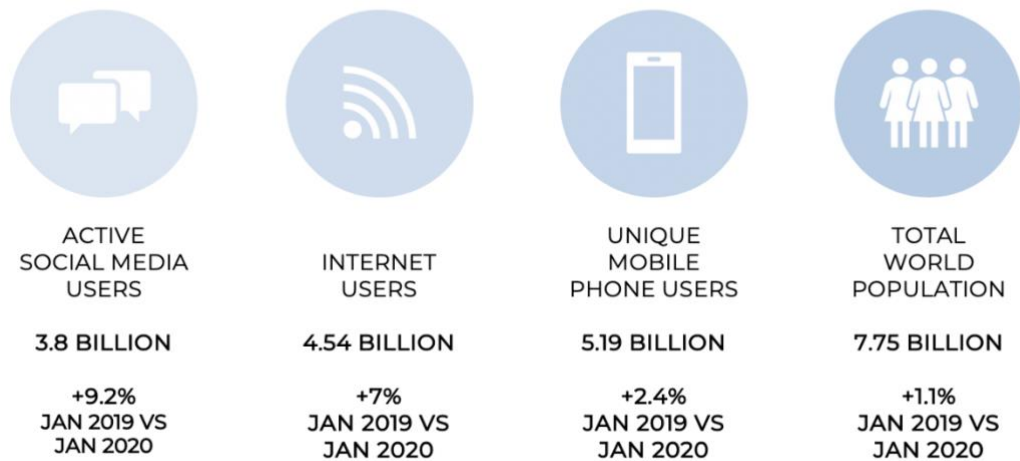


Figure 10 - Global Digital Growth (Hootsuite 2020.)

Social media brings together people who would have not meet in any other circumstances. People from different parts of the world, different cultures, social statuses are now all mixed together and connected to the same network. Today you can find that masses gathering together around different topics, discussing new ideas together and reshaping the meaning of the entertainment. (Holt 2016.)

While big brands have put a lot of their resources to development of the branded content it rarely pays off. In YouTube or Instagram, which are one of the most popular channels, you won't find many corporate brands. In the published in 2016 ranking, only 3 made it to top 500. Instead the list is full of entertainers that seems to appear out of nowhere. (Holt 2016.)

Nowadays, media advertising can be divided into 3 main categories: paid, owned and earned media. Paid media, also known as traditional connects the biggest mass audience via for example printed banners, television ads and will not be discussed in this paper. Owned media is all of the branded content that can be controlled by the company, such as website, blog, email newsletter, but also social media channels. Even if often they can be described as free, it involves a lot of labour to create content. And in the world where time is money, nothing is really free. Earned media is the natural outcome of the well managed marketing efforts. Everything from word of mouth, retweets, online communities' discussions, all the way up to influencers reviews is what can be earned. Nowadays it is necessity to integrate at least two of these channels into one campaign to gain enough visibility and break through to the masses. (Brito 2013.)

No matter which strategy company choose, there is certain rules to follow, and the most important one is to first let the users to know the brand, and social media are one of the best ways to do so. Choosing the right channels to support the brand's image is one of the first steps of the successful brands to connect with the right audiences. Facebook, as one of the most popular channels is the right place to promote brand awareness to the bigger crowd due to its heterogenous user base. Instagram and Pinterest are great for reaching especially women, as they set the majority of users. Twitter is a great place for engaging new audiences thanks to the use of hashtags. (Agius 2015.)

Choosing the right channel for the business is already half of the success. After that the company can focus on creating interesting, valuable, and easily shareable content. With every piece supporting the brand image, companies have a bigger chance for it to be liked, shared and therefore be more visible. It is also important to remember that visual content attracts more views than just a plain text. (Agius 2015.)

3.6.1 Facebook

Facebook has been by far one of the most popular social media platforms for many years now. With over 2400 million active users as of January 2020 it holds a first place as a most popular social media network worldwide. (Statista, 2020.) It is therefore one of the best marketing and branding places in the internet.

Unfortunately, Facebook algorithm is not a friend of the small companies as it prioritizes posts with a lot of buzz first. Posts with many likes, comments and shares, especially if the engagement comes in a short time, will be prioritized on users feed pages. It means that even though a user is following a certain page, he or she might not see all of the posted content if it doesn't spark any attention. Algorithm doesn't tolerate any junk either. Spam, click baits, likebaits, repetitiveness, text-only post and content that is too promotional won't get visibility and will be rapidly banned. (Social Media Examiner, 2017)

Facebook is also equipped with plenty of handy tools to help marketers to better reach their targets. Insights and Analytics pages are presenting an up-to-date data and its analysis. The reports include the information on how the audience responds to the marketing efforts. For example, one can see a user interaction with advanced goal paths. (Social Media Examiner, 2017)

3.6.2 Instagram

Since its launch in 2010, Instagram became a global leader in social media platform world. With 1 billion of active users sharing their pictures and videos it is a great place for a tourism business. With each passing year, Instagram developers are presenting more and more extensive list of features and analytics tools to help marketers to attract followers and build engagement. (Social Media Examiner, 2017)

Instagram Stories is a best place for driving a product and brand awareness. Those short few second-long ads appear on top of the users feed and are viewable for 24 hours from the publishing, which makes the post timing crucial. This is the best use of ads on Instagram especially when calling for user-generated content and announcements. (Social Media Examiner, 2017)

Instagram offers also a handy option to easily share the posts across other social media channels. Cross-promoting on Facebook, Twitter or Tumblr can drastically raise the numbers of followers across the channels. It is important to have followers on many different social media profiles as not everyone is active on each one. It is also important to keep an active interactions and creative connection with the followers. (Long, 2016)

3.6.3 Hashtags

One can't talk about marketing on social media without mentioning hashtags. Hashtag is a social media tagging system, used across platforms, that categorizes content and helps user to find what they need. As seen in Figure 11, a small hash sign provides 2 main values – it allows the posted content to be viewable by anyone with the interest of that hashtag; and expands the reach of the selected phrase or keyword. Depending on the platform the use of hashtags varies slightly. For example, on Instagram posts with over 11 hashtags presents the biggest reach, while on Facebook 1-2 hashtags brings the most interactions. (Shandrow, 2015)

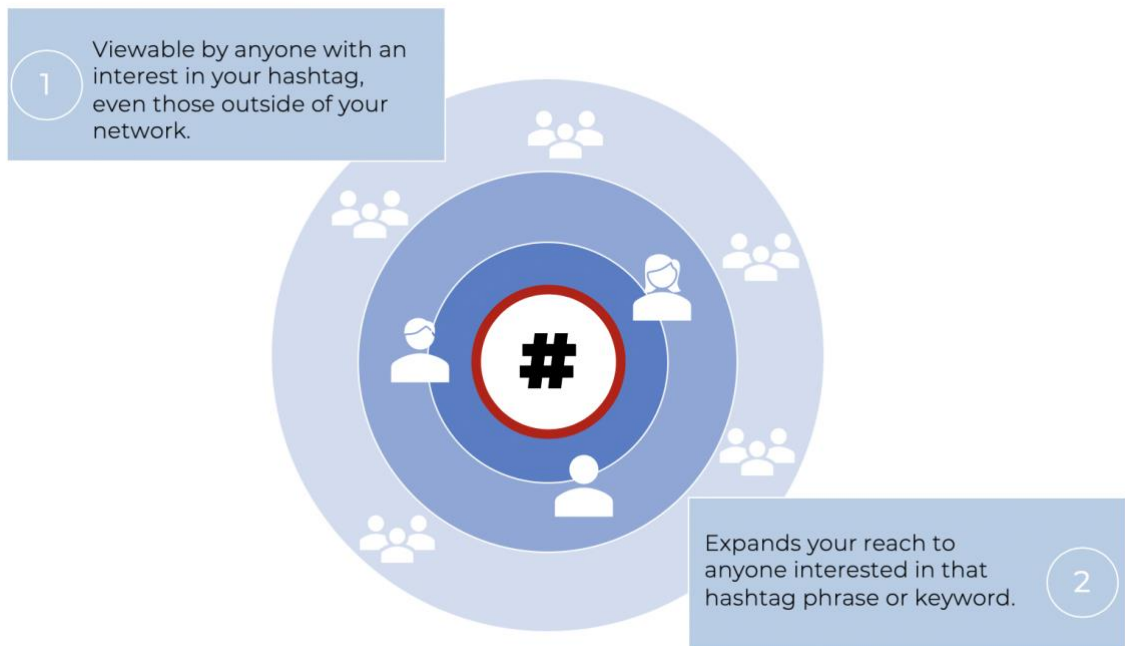


Figure 11 - Values of hashtag (Shandrow, 2015)

Even though the most popular hashtags throughout social media are the most common words those are the ones that don't drive any engagement or quality traffic. It is important to stay specific and at the same time to stay in touch with the audience. It is a good idea to test different hashtag combinations to see which brings best results. (Phillips, 2017)

3.7 The role of influencers

Influencer marketing has become very popular in the last few years on social media. What it is in the bare core is essentially just a word of mouth spread through the social media. Influencer is therefore just an individual who acts as a mediator between the brands and the public. It is important to note that these people are not simply marketing tools, but rather social relationship experts with whom brands can collaborate to achieve their marketing goals.

However, getting any social media persona with a big popularity is not enough. Companies when choosing an influencer to promote their brand need to make sure they are a good fit to advertise their products. A good fit is a profile that has an audience that aligns with the firm's target market, are in the right region and typically promote things or ideas that can be related to the product. Another challenge when choosing an influencer channel might occur if their creative view is different from what a company is trying to

present. It is important to agree upfront on the details of the posts to avoid misunderstandings later on. (Elsbury 2019.)

We can categorise influencer into 4 groups: celebrities, experts, bloggers and content creators, and micro influencers. Even if celebrities are usually the group with the highest number of followers, they are often seen as fake. Most of their promotional content is paid and only the brands with the big budgets can afford that cost. Not only they lack credibility but also it is debatable how much influence they really hold over their followers. Industry experts and thought leaders are seen as more respectable due to their knowledge and experience in the topic. They blur the line between the traditional and social media as they're often featuring one another. Bloggers and content creators are one of the biggest and most recognizable group when talking about influencing. They often gather large amounts of followers around their posts or videos. (Influencer Marketing Hub 2019.)

3.8 The importance of the word of mouth

The word of mouth is one of the most effective marketing forms with three out of four customers admitting that it affects their choices. In XXI century that form of marketing has, just as many other aspects of human lives, migrated to the internet. Nowadays over 70% of consumers is following the brands via different social media channels. This shift of consumer interactions allowed companies to reach bigger amounts of people at the same time making it more personal. Figure 12 shows how to capitalize the word of mouth in form of customers comments and reviews. It is important for the companies to use this strategy especially when nine out of ten users put the same amount of trust into those as they would into a friend's recommendation. (Yeager 2020)

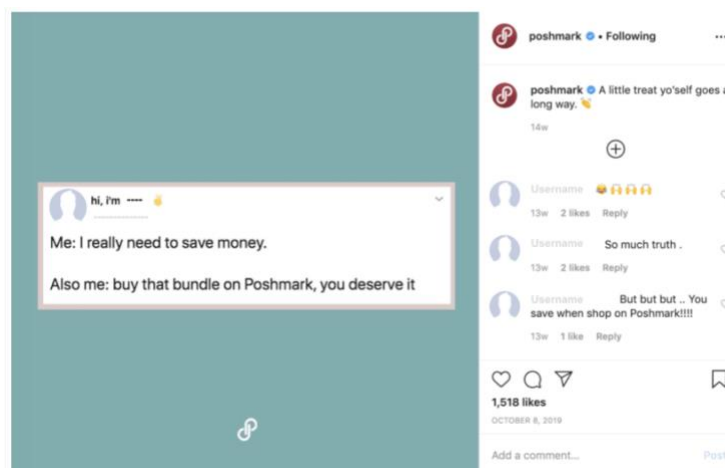


Figure 12 - Example of utilizing the word of mouth (Brandbastion 2019)

4 Research and data collection methods

This chapter will focus on the objectives and aims for the chosen research and data collection methods. The goal of this research is to find realistic ideas for the development of Wowanders brand in the current state of the company and therefore raise the awareness and user engagement. The chosen approach will be based on a case study using methods such as benchmarking, semi-structured interviews with the selected business professionals, and workshop with the students of Haaga-Helia.

4.1 Research approach, validity, and reliability

Case study research is a deep, detailed study that allows the understanding of complex issues. It is usually used to answer questions such as how or why. Case Study data collection methods consists of using interviews, questionnaires, as well as observations, reports, documents and so forth. Also, a big amount of theory research is necessary for a good understanding of the issue. Therefore, it is important that multiple sources of different types of data are gathered and analysed. (Hamel, Dufor & Fortin, 1993. 40-47)

According to O'Leary the researcher needs to ensure the authenticity of data. One of the methods to achieve it is to triangulate the data and findings. What it means in practice is to use more than one data collection method. Furthermore, a drawback of one method might likely be an advantage of the other. (O'Leary 2004, 51) Triangulation can thus be described as application, combination, and analysis of information from two or more sources. By combining different observers, methods and materials, researcher aims to overcome the biases limitations of the study to get more balanced picture of the situation. (Atkins & Wallace 2012, 111-112)

The author needs to also ensure the validity and reliability of the research. In order to do that the used methods and techniques, and their selection matching the aims of the thesis are needed to be assessed. Despite two terms being closely related they mean different things. According to the definitions, the research is valid if it brings the results on the topic, or in other words, measures what was needed to be measured. The research can be described as reliable if the same or similar results can be reproduced. Even though the research can be reliable without being valid, the valid research can be usually considered reliable. (Middleton 2019.)

The author believes that this thesis is both valid and reliable. The research was done in close collaboration with the commissioner and all of their requests were taken into the

consideration. Valuable feedback was given from day one on each of the research steps and made necessary changes to the feedback forms and interview questions accordingly. All of the asked questions are based on the main goal question and focus on the areas important to the commissioner and their case. Author believes also, that similar results would have been possible to achieve again. To ensure the reliability author also made it possible for the interviewees and workshop attendees to give their opinions anonymously. This way some of the biases and fears of the respondents have been avoided.

4.2 Data collection and analysis

In their work, Sanders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009, 139) have developed a research "onion" (Figure 13) to better illustrate the research methodology process and describe the aspects of each on separate levels.

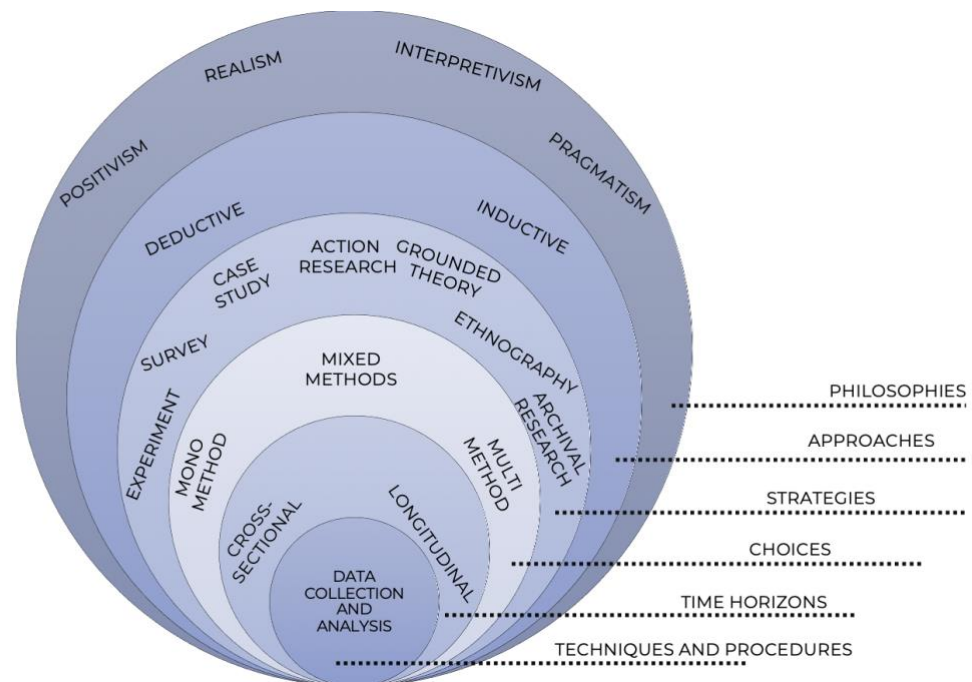


Figure 13 - Research onion (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 108)

In the very middle of the onion, they've decided to put data collection and analysis, as they understood that it is the key to a good research. The data collection methods in the case study research may vary, may come from multiple different sources and most likely to be put in combination with each other. The most suitable data collection methods for the case study are said to be interviews, documentary analysis, observation, archival records, questionnaires and physical artefacts. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 146)

In this particular case study, the author collected both primary and secondary data. Secondary data, which can be understood as reanalyzing the already existing data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 256), includes:

- basic information about the competitors from the internal commissioner's knowledge and information available in companies' websites;
- existing publications on branding and marketing
- various reports and other data gathered from the internet.

The primary data, or in other words data collected by the researcher, is collected from 3 different sources:

- by benchmarking other companies;
- by organizing the workshop with potential users;
- and by conducting semi-structured interviews with industry professionals.

All of the sources are described in detail in following sub-chapters.

As the qualitative data comes in different forms the author will first prepare the data for the analysis by audio-recording the workshop and interviews to then reproduce it in the written form. After that the data will be analyzed using the thematic analysis. This form of analyzing the data is one of the most common ones, as it can answer different kinds of research questions using different frameworks. This approach is especially recommended for the questions which are expecting the answers based on interviewed person's experiences. (University of Auckland 2016). For the data collected via benchmarking the author decided to take a comparison approach. More precisely the gathered data was compared against each other and then analyzed what concrete and exact ways are used to increase brand awareness, customer engagement, and stimulate word-of-mouth on selected platforms.

4.2.1 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is one of the research data collection methods in this thesis. The idea behind this path is to gain a broader view of the social media branding and marketing practices in the current market.

Benchmarking is a great tool to improve performance by comparing different sales and marketing practices. The main objective of benchmarking is to identify the best examples of operations from competitors and improve own by incorporating them in the tailored way. It's often misunderstood that benchmarking is copying and imitating the rivals. In fact, it is

the opposite, by gained knowledge from the competitor's operations, companies can adapt and avoid similar mistakes. (Bain 2018.)

Benchmarking is usually done in quantitative way by comparing own ways and practices to a number of comparable companies. Best practices can therefore mean behaviours, methods or systems used in some area that others use less, or not at all. That knowledge can be used as a wake-up call when the distance between company's own and found "best practices" is large. (Kotter 2020.)

Also choosing the companies to benchmark is an extremely important part of the process. In this particular case the brands to be analysed are in few ways comparable to Wowanders – either by being a tech app company or by being related to the travel industry. It is decided that two direct competitors will be chosen along two bigger start-up companies who already got successful as a comparison. The accounts selected and the criteria for their selection are presented in Figure 14.



Figure 14 - Benchmarking companies

4.2.2 Workshop with the students

Workshop by the modern definition means an arrangement where a group of people learn, share their opinions, perform creative problem-solving or innovate. (Ørngreen & Levinsen 2017) Therefore, in author's opinion it's an ideal method to test and gain a general opinion about the product.

Workshops are gaining popularity in the recent years as a qualitative method because it reflects how the real world sees the product or the idea as a form of a social experience. It also allows the researcher to gain the deeper understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and views of the informants as they provide a detailed answer on their experience. Workshops are also a great way of developing a critical thinking among the participants as they're encouraged to test themselves rather than just believe. (Ahmed & Asraf 2018)

Workshops can also provide a platform that can help the researcher to acknowledge and find relevant factors that are not obvious before the research was conducted. The data generated in the workshops is usually different from for example interviews which is a great opportunity to identify new factors at play and all the connections between them. The researcher needs to be aware and thoughtful about how people during the workshop as well as try to act and be active throughout the process. (Ørngreen & Levinsen 2017)

The workshop with the potential Wowanders users consisting of 13 Haaga-Helia students was organized on 9th of March 2020. The workshop plan (Appendix 1) and questionnaire (Appendix 2) were prepared in advance in cooperation with the commissioner.

4.2.3 Interviews with professionals

Interview can be defined as simply as a method of data collection that involves researcher asking respondents basically open-ended questions. (O'Leary 2004, 162-163) Interviews are often seen as a key qualitative data collection method due to their ability to gain insight and context into the topic. They are often used in situation where there's a need to acquire a highly personalized data as well as when there's a limited number of respondents. Thanks to the high return rate the collected data presents a complete description and analysis of the subject. (Madziwa 2016)

Selection of a suitable interviewee is therefore critical. The correct respondent gives a deep, accurate and reliable answers in the topic that he or she is a familiar with. Also, the interviewer himself is an important figure as he keeps the screening in focus on the topic and on track to completion. (Madziwa 2016)

It is worth mentioning that despite its advantages, interviewing is a method very susceptible to bias. Interviewee's own opinions and views can in the in-depth questions affect the validity of the results. At the same time, the Interviewer's perception of the answer may hinder the interpretation. (O'Leary 2004, 162-177)

To achieve best coherent and relevant results the author decided to conduct 4 interviews. The aim of this qualitative research was to receive professional input on how to guide the brand development in the future. The selected interviewees presented in figure 19 are either travel or marketing professionals with years of experience in their fields. The chosen professionals have been selected from different fields and with different background in order to give a comprehensive view on the topic. The interviewees were chosen partially with expert and snowball sampling methods. The interview questions were prepared with cooperation with the commissioner and are presented in Appendix 3.

5 Findings and discussion

This chapter will present all of the findings from different data collection methods in detail. The most important findings are presented in the Appendix 4 that will be later offered to the commissioner as the final product of the thesis.

5.1 Benchmarking

This chapter will evaluate the social media strategies of two main competitors of Wowanders: Mapify and Polarsteps. Additionally, I've chosen two non-related apps that have been recently successful to compare approaches from different perspective as well. Calm and AirBnB both have been a small start-up before reaching millions of downloads. Benchmarking is a well-known practice used by the companies to improve their operations by analysing different approaches. The main objective was to identify the best practices of the selected firms on social media. I focused on evaluating and comparing the social media practices of the companies to define which posts gain most response from the followers.

All of the followed companies are active on Facebook and Instagram and that's the main channels I'm going to focus on. After following the pages for the time of three months from October to December 2019 I've compared the results from the chosen profiles in the table (Table 2). The gathered data from the benchmark was segmented into following categories: Number of posts, Timings, Type of content (Facebook), Type of content (Instagram), Reactions, and number of followers at the end of the benchmarking period.

Table 2 - Comparison of Social Media Channels (Instagram 2019, Facebook 2019)

11 -12-2019; Facebook and Instagram	Mapify	Polarsteps	Calm	AirBnB
Amount of posts	Facebook: 11 Instagram: 52	Facebook: 5 Instagram: 22	Facebook: over 200 Instagram: over 200	Facebook: 12 Instagram: 86
Timings	Average: afternoon 2-5PM	Average: afternoon 3-8PM	Average: Multiple times a day	Average: afternoon 12-7PM
Engagement reached per post	Max 30 likes on Facebook, no to minimal comments Up to 600 likes on Instagram	Max: 274 likes on Facebook, no to minimal comments Up to 300 likes on Instagram	Max: 2k likes on Facebook, 10-300 comments per each post Up to 16k likes on Instagram	Max 360 likes and 16- 500 comments Up to 100k likes on Instagram
Content type	Instagram: Beautiful pictures from different parts of the world, often featuring the users. Facebook: Introduction of team members and job openings.	Instagram: Pictures from around the world taken by the app users, store discounts. Facebook: Videos about upcoming upgrades, trips and store discounts.	Instagram: Calm nature related pictures, motivational quotes, breathing exercises, introduction of partners. Facebook: Breathing exercises, open questions for the audience, quotes, calming nature pictures and videos.	Instagram: Pictures of different hosts and their houses from all-over the world. Facebook: Experiences, hosts and places promotion, unique offers for inclusive places.

Page likes and followers' number (29.12.2019)	Facebook: Likes- 1,336 Followers- 1,386 Instagram: Followers-11,6k	Facebook: Likes- 10,425 Followers- 11,916 Instagram: Followers-11,3k	Facebook: Likes- 1,122,861 Followers- 1,173,569 Instagram: Followers-1,5m	Facebook: Likes- 16,147,377 Followers- 16,169,739 Instagram: Followers- 4,6m
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Mapify is a major competitor for Wowanders. It offers a travel planning and documenting app for its user, that can be done collaboratively. The company is run by a small group of under 20 professionals, but the app has already reached over 10,000 downloads from Google Play Store. Mapify is active on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. On its Home Facebook Page, the main emphasis is on different travel destinations followed by the images. The posts vary from sharing other press releases about the company, open hiring positions and short bios presenting the existing team members. Every post includes a picture, which increases the visibility.

On its Instagram page, Mapify presents pictures from different destinations either posted by themselves or linked from its users. On top of that they post a new Instagram story focusing on a different topic each day (Figure 15). It varies from day to day from featuring favourite users, tips how to use the app, to interviews with the travellers.

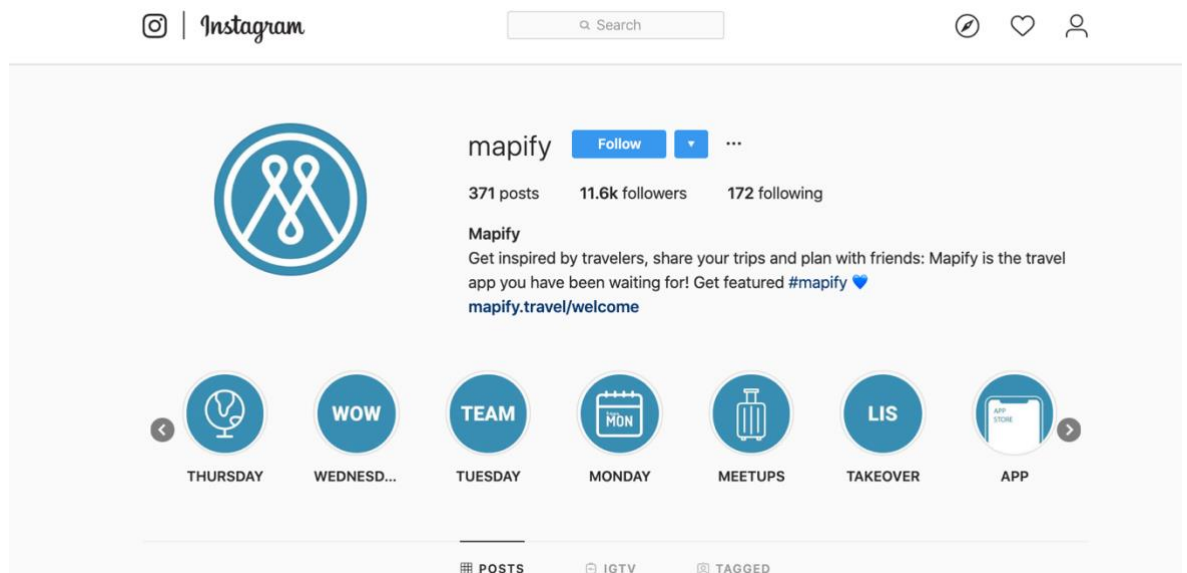


Figure 15 - Mapify Instagram (Instagram 2019.)

Polarsteps is another direct competitor which quickly became one of the most popular travel diary app. Founded in 2015 by a small team of travel enthusiasts the company has announced in early 2019 to reach over 1 million users mark. The company's Facebook

home page welcomes visitors with a “Explore. Dream. Discover.” slogan. There’re only a few posts on Facebook, however they all focus on providing user with some important piece of information such as new app features or discounts.

On Instagram, Polarsteps focuses more on showing beautiful pictures from around the world (Figure 16). The photos are often taken by the social media influencers who used the app during their trips. On their Instagram stories Polarsteps presents its team members and the company itself.

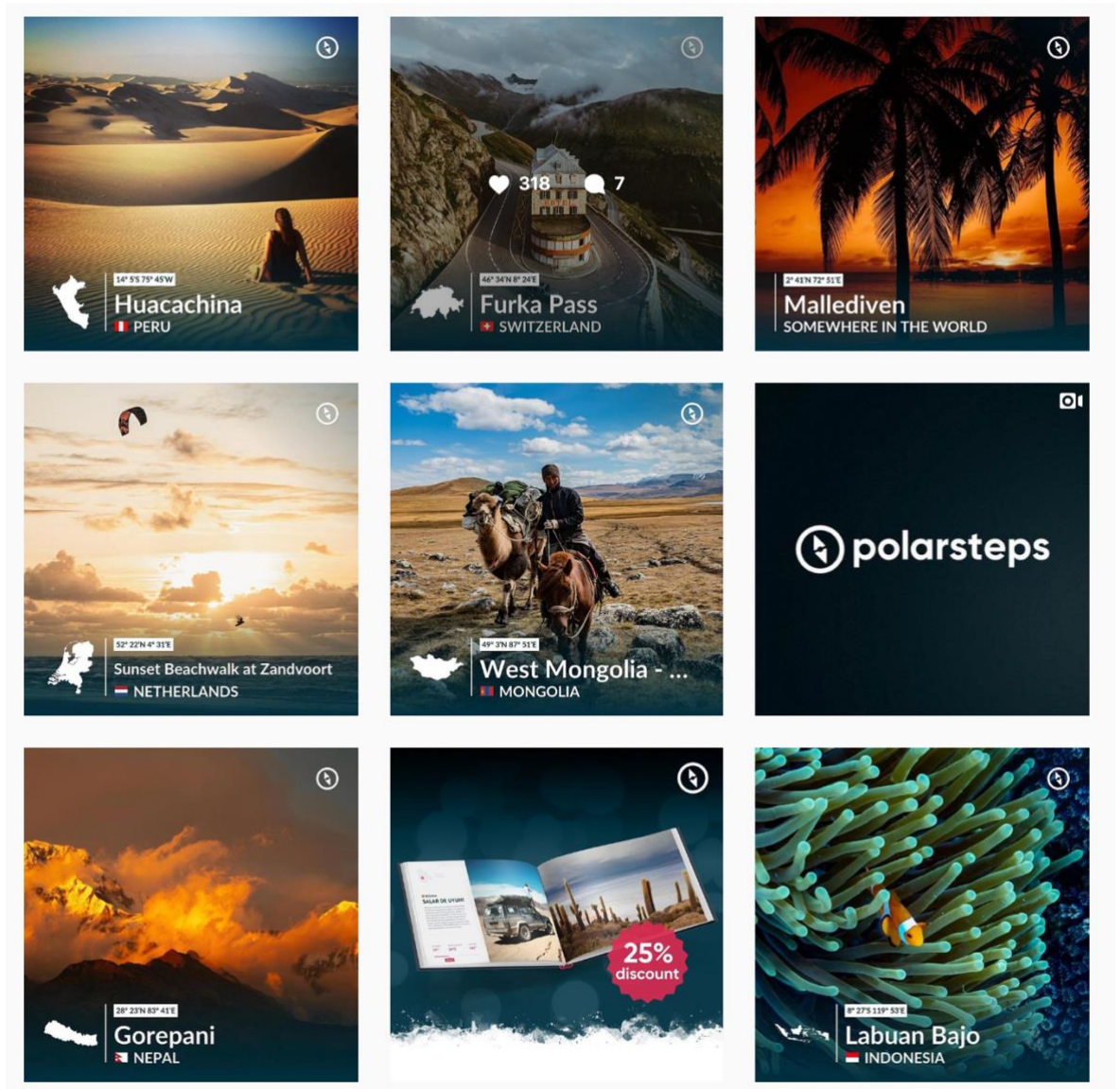


Figure 16 - Polarsteps Instagram (Instagram 2019.)

Calm is a more developed tech app start-up, founded in 2012 in San Francisco. The app which is a meditation and relaxation help is now worth approximately 250 million dollars, according to CNBC. The app is targeting the growing numbers of overstimulated and tired

group of working population. It is free to download but after a 7day free trial it costs 60\$ per year. On its Facebook page Calm is focusing on promoting healthy lifestyle. Posting mostly inspiring pictures and quotes – as seen in Figure 17, helps to encourage people to focus on their wellbeing. The company also engages users to share their own stories in the comments. It also includes collaboration posts with wellbeing professionals and celebrities.

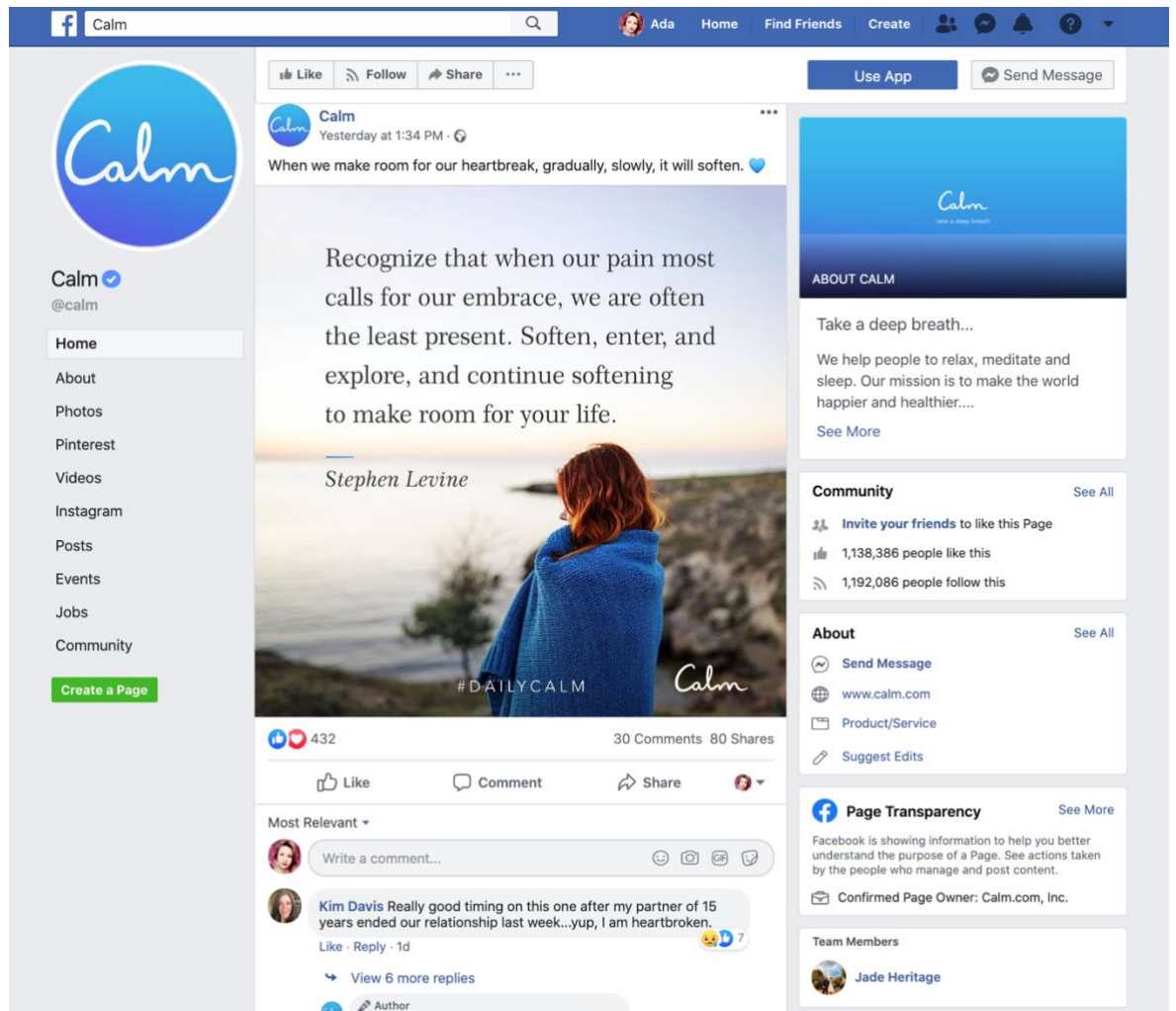


Figure 17 - Calm Facebook page (Facebook 2019.)

Its Instagram page is very similar to the Facebook one. The posts also vary from inspirational quotes to good meditation and relaxation practices. The Instagram Stories are categorized into the same fields that can be found in the app – meditate, sleep, body, etc. This allows to find needed features in the app easily.

AirBnB is a well-known start-up that forever changed the tourism industry. Founded in 2008 as an original idea to fight high rental prices in San Francisco in just a few years turned into a profitable company, hiring over 12 thousand employees and over 2 million

people staying with AirBnB each night. (AirBnB) The Facebook page of the company consists of the posts promoting different popular destinations and experiences, its most popular hosts and unique places to stay. Every post includes a photo or a video. Additionally, each post is encouraging users to share their experiences and opinions in the comment section.

On its Instagram page Airbnb posts similarly to its Facebook page pictures of the most favourable hosts, destinations and experiences around the world. More innovation comes in the form of the InstaStories in which company shares tips for both travellers and hosts, so that both can get most benefits from using the app. Company focuses strongly on emphasising its community by sharing pictures and stories about its hosts as it can be seen on Figure 18.

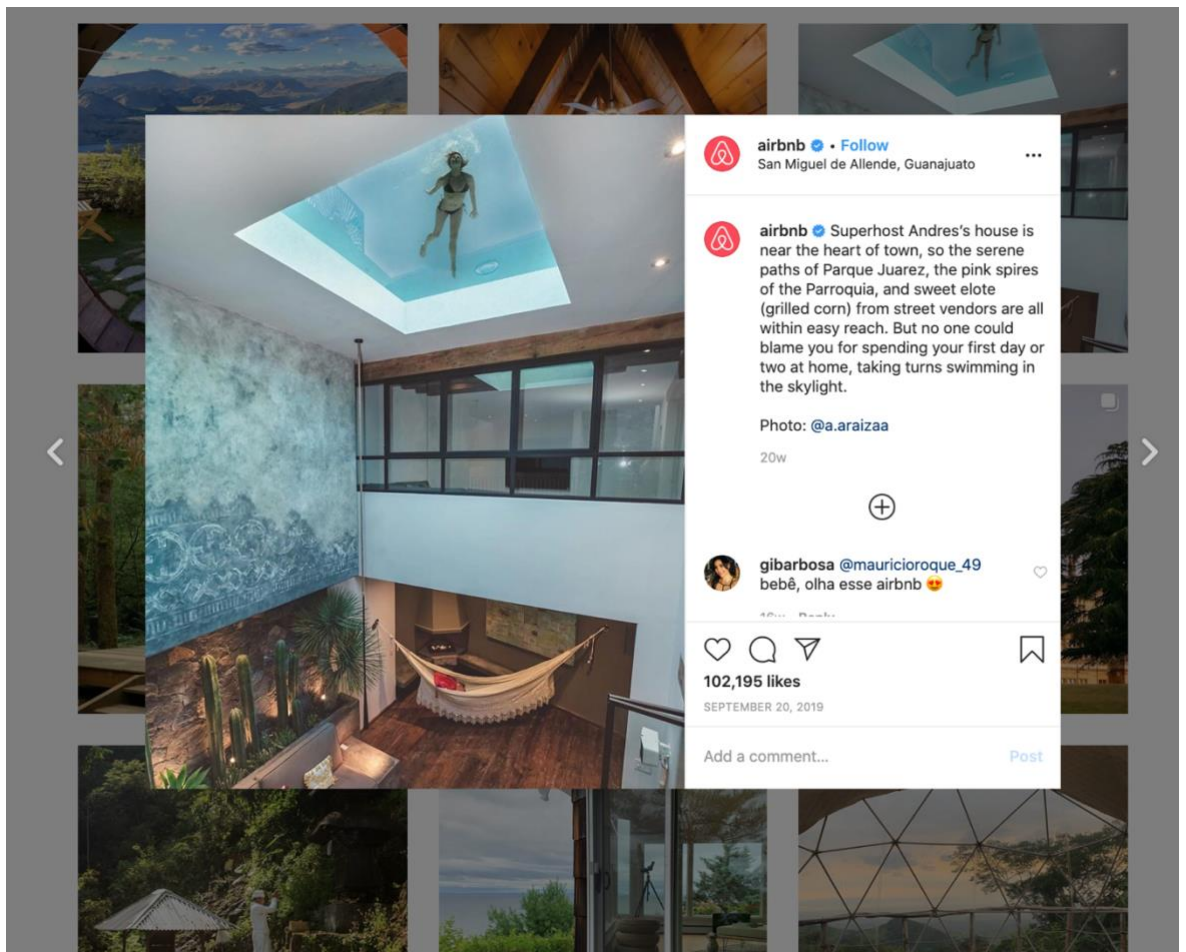


Figure 18- AirBnB Instagram post (Instagram 2019.)

5.2 Workshop

On 9th of March 2020 the author conducted a research workshop with students of Haaga-Helia University of Applied science. During an hour-long workshop thirteen students got a chance to learn about and test the Wowanders app.

5.2.1 Workshop planning

Planning of the workshop consisted of gaining the theoretical knowledge about this research method as well as consultation with the commissioner and the teacher. The workshop duration has been discussed to be 45 to 60 minutes. After the consultation the plan has been created (Appendix 1).

The students were supposed to give their opinion about the product itself and their possible marketing and branding ideas. Therefore, a feedback form consisting of 7 questions was made (Appendix 2).

5.2.2 Workshop process and results

After an initial question on how many of them have travelled in the past year it turned out that everyone in the group had done so. Therefore, all of them had been identified as the potential users of the app. At first the students were given a short introduction on the aim of this thesis and the commissioner.

The students were then asked to download the app, create the account and to get familiar with the features. Despite the initial issues few students had with the account creation all of them managed to do so.

Afterwards students were presented with the feedback forms to put down their opinions about the product. Participants were asked to put on a scale from 1 to 10 answers to questions: "How likely are you to continue using the app?", as well as "How easy they've found to use the app?". For the first question the answers varied from 2 to 8, giving the final average of 4,6. On the second question the score was a bit higher, with the average of 6,2, and the grades varying from 2 to 9. (Figure 19) Students were also asked to share their opinion on the things they've liked and disliked about the app. Table 3 shows the most common answers to those and following questions.

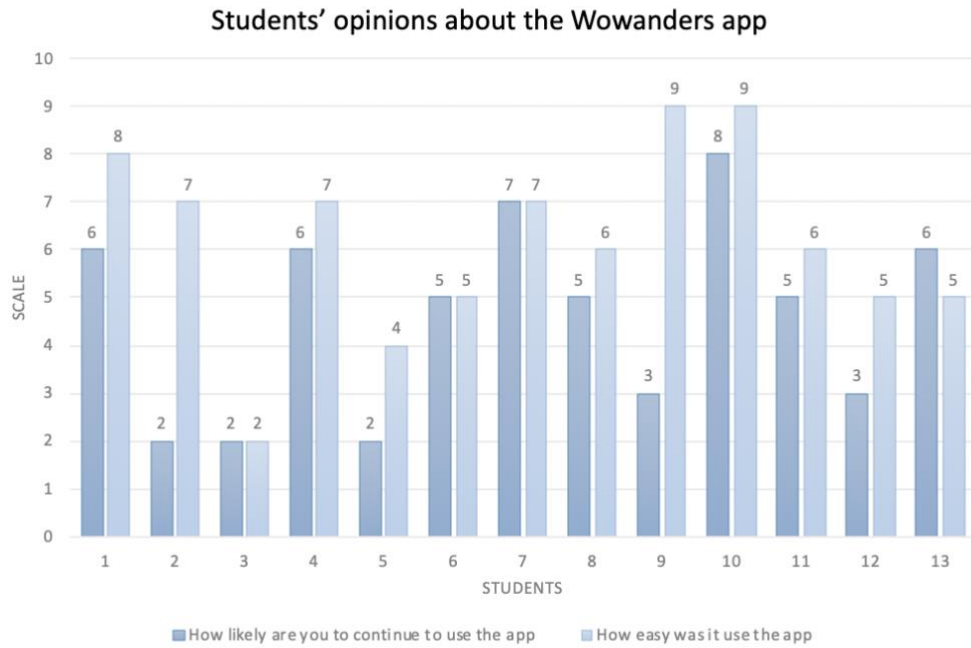


Figure 19 - Chart of students' grades

Afterwards participants were asked to create a trip log from their own past trips and experiences to better understand how it works and the abilities of the app. The author believed it would help them to better answer the following questions about promoting the app. The students were asked sequentially about the best viral ideas to generate the growth for the company, their view on sharable content, and other ideas to promote the app and gain more users. Most common and standing out ideas have been collected in the Table 3 be-low.

Table 3 – Most valuable feedback from the workshop

THINGS TO LIKE	THINGS TO DISSLIKE	HOW TO GENERATE GROWTH	SHARABLE CONTENT IDEAS	OTHER IDEAS
ease of use	limited to another users' experience	integration with more partners and travel sites	photos	travel vlogs
suggestions	account creation and cancelation	cooperation with influencers	useful travel tips	travel sites, blogs and ticketing sites cooperation
idea of storing trips in one place	slow to work	YouTube video add	InstaStory on how to use it	find a sponsor to travel around and generate more users
privacy	map feature		check-ins	better integration with other apps
wish list	no possibility to add videos		restaurant pictures	

After collecting the feedback forms author discussed answers with the participants. Understandably due to the initial issues with the account creation students were feeling a bit disappointed and therefore, the trust for the app has fallen drastically. Many commented also that Wowanders should work on improving their app quality before trying to make it go viral. One of the students suggested creating a printable version of the trips as a form of souvenir or a memoir, while another emphasized the commercial media and public relations such as newspapers' articles as a good form of alternative advertisement.

5.3 Interviews

The first professionals were contacted in February 2020 and the first interview was conducted in April same year. There was a total of 4 interviews conducted using different medias – Skype, WhatsApp and Google Meets. In the beginning of the project author was hoping to conduct at least part of the interviews as a face-to-face encounter, however due to the COVID-19 lockdown at the intended time, the discussions had to be conducted online. Each interview took roughly 30 minutes to complete. All of the meetings were

recorded to ensure the best results. All of the conversations provided answers to all of the prepared questions, and also for the few extra additional ones that emerged during the conversations. All of the Interviewees that agreed to participate in the research are presented in Figure 20.

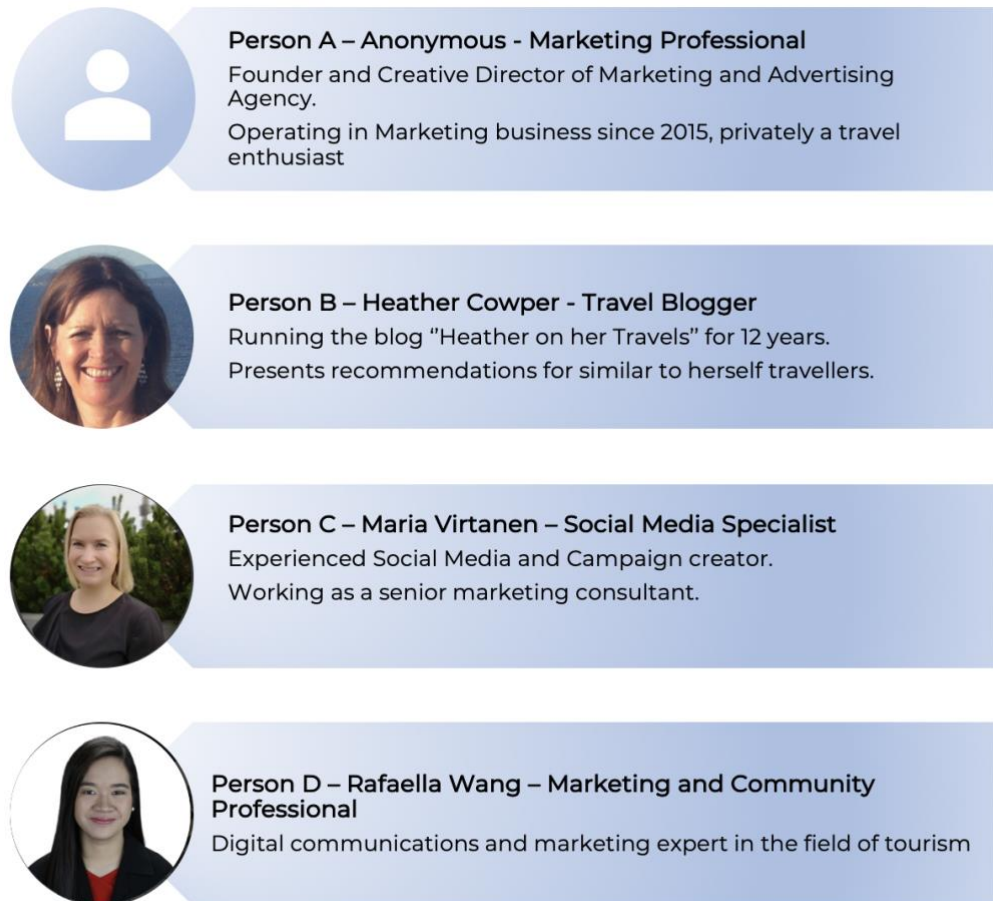


Figure 20 - Interviewed Professionals

To get as much information about digital branding and marketing strategies as possible from different angles and experiences, the author chose the interviewees from different environments. Two tourism involved specialists easily accepted the invitation to share their thoughts on trends in the travel industry. All marketing professionals provided more hand-on experience on the actual branding strategies.

The interviews were conducted as a semi-structured conversation with all questions' compiled to fit all of the interviewees. The author tried to make the interview process as

friendly and relaxed as possible, with questions serving more as guidelines to which direction the discussion should go.

5.3.1 Interview no.1

The first conducted interview was with the marketing professional that wished to remain anonymous. She is a founder of a Marketing Agency focusing on the sustainable development. She believes that brands should take more action into connecting with their communities, putting socially responsible actions and marketing in the front line. Privately she's a travel enthusiast, going on regular trips with friends and family.

In her interview she emphasised the sustainable use of the social media. She tries to limit her consumption personally but uses social media a lot as a way to promote her company. Some of her favourite channels are Instagram and YouTube for the private use as she's also a photography and video fan. She doesn't use Facebook at all, due to the fact that is as she's stated too commercialised. For the professional use she's using mostly LinkedIn. She'd also focus on promoting sustainable travel and destinations which are not harming the local nature or communities.

Branding on social media is very important in her opinion as it can easily create an organic growth. Word of mouth and public opinion are one of the most important factors of successful brands. She's also a strong believer in building a community of like-minded people around brands. If a brand represents a value, there will be a group of people who will identify with that.

For travel industry she'd recommend a visual content – photos, videos and infographics. She believes in sharing experiences via pictures and videos by engaging the community. She'd suggest for the Wowanders to use their community for a user-generated content. Asking from the followers for a content that can be then transformed into a collage or a combined video. That way they can have easily shareable pictures or videos with a minimal cost.

She's never used any of the travel assistant apps before, but she was very interested in the idea. She's then tested Wowanders app and one from their competitor. Unfortunately, she had to say that Wowanders still have some room for improvement to reach the expectations she had in the beginning. The competitor's app came out much better in the comparison. She's experienced difficulties in creating the account and said that the app was too slow. She's suggesting for the company to focus on the further development of

the app to make it more user friendly and faster. She was also not entirely happy with the design, saying it is not memorable at all.

As for the social media channels she'd strongly recommend YouTube, Instagram and, despite not being her favourite, Facebook. She believes that Wowanders should be bolder and more expressive in their marketing efforts. Sharing more videos and involving a community in the process is her advice.

In her opinion the company cannot build a brand by itself. It requires a community, even if small at the beginning to be involved and create a buzz. Then the brand will basically build itself. Therefore, her suggestion for allocating resources is to put more effort into creating a community. Using influencers, even paid, is in her opinion one of the best ways to make a bigger impact.

5.3.2 Interview no.2

Second conducted interview was with a travel blogger and professional Heather Cowper. Heather turned her passion for travel into a profession and for 12 years is successfully running her blog "Heather on her travels". She recommends travel destinations and tips for other travellers, who're looking for similar experiences. She is travelling at least once a month to various close and far locations.

Alongside her website where she hosts her blog, Heather is an active social media user. Most of her activities focus around her travels and blog so she couldn't clearly separate which channels she's using more for professional and which for private use. She tries to keep some activity throughout all of the channels, focusing mostly on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. She's always curious about the rising trends and checks all of the new channels as well.

She's actively posting content on her social media, focusing on the articles promoting her blog, and pictures and videos from her travel. She's also being a fan of Insta Stories as an easy way of sharing content on-the-go. For the tourism related companies, Heather would suggest from her own preference a mixture of content type. She'd stated that best balance in her opinion would be a 1/3 articles, 1/3 social media promotional posts, and 1/3 video content of different length.

From her experience branding on social media is only successful if it is targeted correctly. Heather spent years on defining her target group and posting content fitting mostly for her

audience. Her main focus, similarly to Wowanders, is on reaching middle aged female travellers looking for an authentic yet luxurious experience. Therefore, in her posts she'll avoid using words such as "budget" or family-friendly", instead choosing her wordings as "high class" and "luxurious".

She's not using any travel related apps as her blog is acting as her diary. On top of that she's creating photo albums from her trips which act as a form of diary as well. Being a popular travel blogger, she's often approached by similar start-ups asking for help to promote themselves, thus she's very familiar with the idea. Heather sees a lot of competition for the Wowanders from such apps, however, in her opinion none of them have yet reached the critical mass of becoming the next global phenomenon. She also wouldn't recommend focusing on gaining only travel bloggers and influencers approval, as many of them already have their own existing platforms and they won't be keen on promoting another, competitive one.

Instagram is in her opinion the most important social media platform that Wowanders should focus. Contacting influencers on social media is in her opinion another good idea, but the company needs to prepare a budget for that, as she wouldn't see anyone wanting to put their time and effort on promoting the app for free. On the bright side, she's sure that even with the small budget Wowanders would find many Instagrammers willing to participate in promotion. It is also a way for the Wowanders to save other resources, where in-stead spending time and effort to try to persuade the influencer to cooperate they can just offer something to begin with.

5.3.3 Interview no.3

The third interviewee was an experienced marketing professional, Maria Virtanen. Maria has work for many years in the marketing industry and currently is holding a role of Senior Marketing consultant in a local marketing agency. Her main area of expertise is creating Google Ad campaigns, search engine optimization and social media. Despite not being an expert in the tourism industry she's privately a travel enthusiast.

Maria is using social media for both private and professional reasons, with her favourite channels being Facebook and Instagram. She's actively posting pictures and stories on Instagram, where she also follows mainly friends and influencers. On Facebook she's being less active herself, using the network to follow up with her friends and chat. She's also using LinkedIn for professional networking and in-dept work related information.

In her opinion branding is very important across social media platforms, with great results for both B2B and B2C approaches. The main focus in her opinion should be put on connecting people with similar ideas around brands to create a community. Social media is therefore an ideal place to get to know your customers. It is especially important as it allows the company to target their resources better.

Maria strongly suggested Wowanders to use more video content type. In her experience videos are a best way to trigger the emotional response from the followers and gain engagement. As she stated, travelling always leaves some memories behind and Wowanders should target those memories. The thematic of the videos can vary depending on the need. But some of the ideas from her were the reasons to travel or real-life stories from the travellers. She also pointed idea of creating a blog on Wowanders website. With correct SEO it could bring company some organic users.

Despite the fact that she's never used a similar app before, Maria was very impressed with Wowanders. She used several separated services for marking and planning her trips before and she liked the idea of having it all in one place. In her opinion the app was easy to navigate and user friendly. She also liked the design and the selection of colours. She would improve only the "Friends" selection.

As a marketing professional, Maria in the first place suggested the use of YouTube, as a main promotional channel. As she stated, nowadays, movie production is relatively cheap and easy. There's in her opinion the unlimited amount of topics that Wowanders could easily out in a video – from how to use the app to full time vlogging. Wowanders could use the videos on other social medias as well to increase the organic reach. She's also strongly recommended reaching out to well-being and lifestyle influencers. As travelling is a very universal and common thing it might be a good idea to have a broader audience know about the app this way. Focusing on only travel bloggers and influencers is in her opinion not enough. Her another suggestion was mentioned before website blog with tips and tricks related to travel.

Maria believes that the first impression about the brand comes from the website, as it's the first place anyone will go to gain more information about the company, service or product. She pointed out the importance of the quality as a base for any advertising – company should put more attention to detail before even thinking of marketing. As a marketing professional she'd suggest Wowanders to put more effort into the product development before going full steam on branding. When that is done, however, she'd advise to test different advertisement options and versions with a small budget to see

what will work best for them. As a professional working a lot with Google Adds servicers, that'd be her no. 1 recommendation. She'd also boost the visibility of the app itself on the App- and Play Store.

5.3.4 Interview no.4

The last conducted interview was conducted with a tourism industry professional working also in a field of marketing – Rafaella Wang. Rafaella is currently developing marketing strategies for a Bangkok based company organizing educational travel trips for studies around the world. She's traveling herself mostly for business but even then, she tries to enjoy the place she is at in her spare time.

She's stated herself to be a social media addict using many different channels for both personal and professional reasons. She's posting a lot of content on her personal profiles on Facebook and Instagram. She's also recently fallen in love with the new emerging network – TikTok. As an Asia resident she's also using WeChat a lot. For promoting her company she's using mainly LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

Branding on social media is, according to Rafaella, a necessity in the modern world. If something doesn't have a presence on the network, it might as well be non-existent. She believes in brands connecting people around similar products or activities they all enjoy, and as social media are all about connecting people it is a perfect match. On her opinion it is also hard for new companies to create a brand that's not completely unique, as all of the followers focus around the bigger competitors. Brands must nowadays offer something more, for example promote new trends, to attract users. She sees sustainability and nature conservation as possible "wow" trends for Wowanders.

She also finds pictures and videos to be the most suitable for the travel industry. She's also suggesting the use of different interesting cultures and traditions around the world, either in a form of an article, infographics and comparisons. As she stated, people are always interested in something that's different from what they know and can be even described as weird. And in her opinion the world is full of such traditions, no matter where you go.

Rafaella's never used a travel diary before, she rather goes and post her experiences straight on social media. For remembering the visited places she's using a TripAdvisor account to mark all of her favourite spots. After testing briefly the Wowanders app, she was impressed with the design. She liked the colours and the layout of the app, saying

that it is very intuitive and easy to use. She was also not happy about the speed of the uploads and loading screens, and also suggested more focus on the quality of the app.

In her opinion Wowanders should focus their efforts mostly on Facebook and Instagram, as those are two most visual social media channels. Despite TikTok being more popular with the younger generations, she'd recommend using it as well. In her opinion the company should also focus on being present on various travel-related trade shows and use that as content for their social media as well. She'd also recommend for the Wowanders to be more active in doing collaborations with various influencers and media persons. In her opinion tourism is universal in the society and majority of the world population is traveling for various reasons all the time. That's why she'd discourage the focus on the industry related people and have a broader approach.

5.3.5 Key outcomes

In all of the interviews the professionals agreed that the company should focus more on promoting themselves on Facebook and Instagram. All of the respondents suggested those to be the best network platforms for the company operating in the travel industry. Also, all suggested to post visually attractive and valuable content.

Cooperation with influencers was also a commonly mentioned form of promotion. All of the interviewees agreed that Wowanders should put their budget and effort into this type of branding. Although being a travel related product they can be advertised by many different types of bloggers and influencers, not only travellers, but also those creating well-being and lifestyle content as well. Despite being a possibly costly undertaking, professionals are highly positive it is worth it.

Another common outcome throughout the interviews is the necessity of providing the highest quality product before pushing it out to the bigger crowd. Trying to get visibility before that might only backfire badly. Thus, Wowanders, although being on a good way, should still focus more on improving the app, making it faster and fixing the bugs. Although some responders suggested also choosing another design to make it more user-friendly majority liked the choice of colours and the looks of the app.

According to the interviews, a product serving as a traveller's assistant should focus also on providing value to the user on their social media. Thus, recommended form of content were also articles or short notes with tips and tricks for a traveller. That way Wowanders could keep the user interest high also on the times when not using the app. Some of the

interviewees were suggesting focusing more on the video content as a relatively cheap and easy to create form of content. Recommended types of videos were depending of personal preferences of the responded and varied from the explanatory videos on how to use the app to the use of user-created content from their trips.

6 Development proposal

In this chapter, author will start by presenting the current situation of the commissioner and comparing it with the proposed brand development strategy.

6.1 Current Wowanders Marketing and Branding situation

As Wowanders is still in its early stages of development, the resources are scarce. That's why the founders focus mostly on cheap marketing and branding alternatives. Use of internet influencers and bloggers, as well as social media marketing are therefore the main channels. In this part I'll try to analyse the company's marketing strategy.

Target group given by the company's founders in the beginning is a middle-aged, upper middle-class female, travelling for leisure at least three times per year. It is unknown for the author with which criteria such profile was created.

6.1.1 SOSTAC plan

SOSTAC is acronym for situation, objectives, strategy, tactics, action and control. In case of the Wowanders where the company is still in its starting phase it must be taken into the consideration that the resources are scarce, and the marketing is run in very low budget.

Company's situation is stable, focusing on the growing the visibility through the social media and collaboration with some bloggers and influencers. Although not being lucrative at the moment Wowanders managed to gather foundlings from various investors. The main objective is therefore to gain visibility and attract more valuable and active users to be-come profitable. Profitability for the company comes from the bookings done through recommendations – therefore Wowanders is in this case an affiliate for a bigger booking company. Due to the small amount of money being gain with each booking to reach profitability there is a need for active users.

To achieve that with the low budget the company operates on, Wowanders might use mutual collaboration with influencers or bloggers that want just visibility in return, Facebook & Instagram campaigns, email marketing and other social media that brings presence. Word of mouth both in the real life and on the Internet is their biggest opportunity. The actions that should be taken into consideration include making marketing more centralized and be the responsibility of one professional. Author believes that investing in marketing should be as important as the development of the product. Having a permanent marketing professional would in the author opinion bring much needed

consistency and better strategy. The company should also be able to control and overlook their strategies. Implementing a regular user satisfaction surveys, tracking the KPI's such as growing number of users or bookings done should definitely be done.

SOSTAC planning is not a closed circle, so it is important to remember to adjust it on the go. Findings from customer surveys, KPI's changes and any other relevant new piece of information should result in refactoring and changing the plan. It should affect especially the objectives, strategy and tactics parts of the plan, which should be revised as often as necessary.

6.2 Brand development proposal

In this part the author will present best ideas for the development of the Wowanders brand. All of the ideas are backed by the previously discussed theoretical research, benchmarking, workshop and interviews.

Before going into detailed proposal author must point out the product quality issues. As several issues came up during the workshop as well as later during interviews, the strongest suggestion will be to put more effort into the quality of the application itself. As the travel diary is the only product the company has to offer it should bring a maximum value for the user. Wowanders should first of all focus on fixing the existing problems and further development of the app before gaining more customers, as the bad quality might scare users away and provide negative reviews. After the product can be described as a top-notch, the company can think of developing a brand identity.

6.2.1 Brand idea

First step that the company should take is to define a brand idea and commit to not only sticking up to it, but also to be a living representation of it. Defining an idea out of a thin air is a hard task, that can also lead to further misconceptions and need to change the brand along the way. Therefore, the author suggests to defining the idea according to 4 criteria described below.

Firstly, taking feedback from everyone involved along the way of the product creation allows to gain a perspective that the creators might not have. Asking the team why do they think the company exist in the first place and which values they appreciate is a good place to start. Secondly, listen to the customers. Users have a fresh view on the features and details, and after all, the product is made for them. At the same time, one needs to

remember that not everyone can be pleased at the same time. Finding a golden balance is the suggested approach here.

After gathering all that data, it is the time to point out the most important insights. That's when comes the time for the creativity as the third step is to combine all that information into a short but meaningful message that can inspire all of the involved people. Finally, it needs to be put into test before it can be shared with the wide public. Once developed a brand strategy it is necessary to test it on a small group of the audience. They should be asked how relevant they see it? Does it capture the purpose of the company? Will it sound true to them when they hear it?

Once the strategy is developed and tested the company needs to remember to take only the actions that support it. Engaging the current and future employees in the brand strategy will pay off by encouraging the right kind of behaviours. They will in return help the company by delivering a consistent and authentic brand experience. That also adds up to providing a top-notch customer service, which is crucial to branding. Neither of these steps is a fast or easy fix. It's a long-term investment that is needed if the company want to gain from the branding.

6.2.2 General social media strategy

With the limited resources the Wowanders have it is necessary to limit the social media presence to two main channels and focus on the posts' quality rather than the quantity. According to the research the best choice for the company would be previously discussed Facebook and Instagram.

Before going into specific social media channels author will suggest a general strategy that Wowanders should follow in their brand promotion. Author believes that hiring a Marketing Manager who would create and follow a detailed plan of content marketing is a must. Otherwise all of the actions will be inconsistent and futile. According to the research a clear goal in content marketing should be to engage the users to share their trips and stories from the app on their social media profiles. In-app content created by users and collaborators makes it really low-cost to maintain, but also hard to find and control.

In the interview, the founders stated that the target group for their app are middle aged, upper middle-class women. During the research author noticed that given persona is possibly too narrowly described and should be redesigned. According to the test group in the workshop and well as some of the interviewed experts the app would be more suitable

for a younger generation. Another suggestion that would be more suitable for the original target group was to use the app as a personal diary without posting it online.

Company should also set goals for its social media efforts, matching the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based) criteria. An few of such suitable goals could be for example to:

1. Increase brand and product awareness
2. Share news and knowledge about the industry
3. Promote sustainable travel
4. Engage travellers' community

By tracking the user activity company should be able to achieve the presented goals. Once a month a marketing manager should pay close attention to the following aspects: follower count, follower engagement, and audience reach.

6.2.3 Facebook strategy

Facebook is a biggest social media network in the world and can bring enormous gains if used correctly. First step to make it work is, according to the interviews, setting up a posting plan. The example of such plan in a form of social media calendar is easy to follow and alternate if necessary. It is a universal idea commonly used by social media marketers. Author created one month of a plan as a sample and it is presented in figure 21 below. The calendar can and should be applied to all platforms and channels, not solely to Facebook.

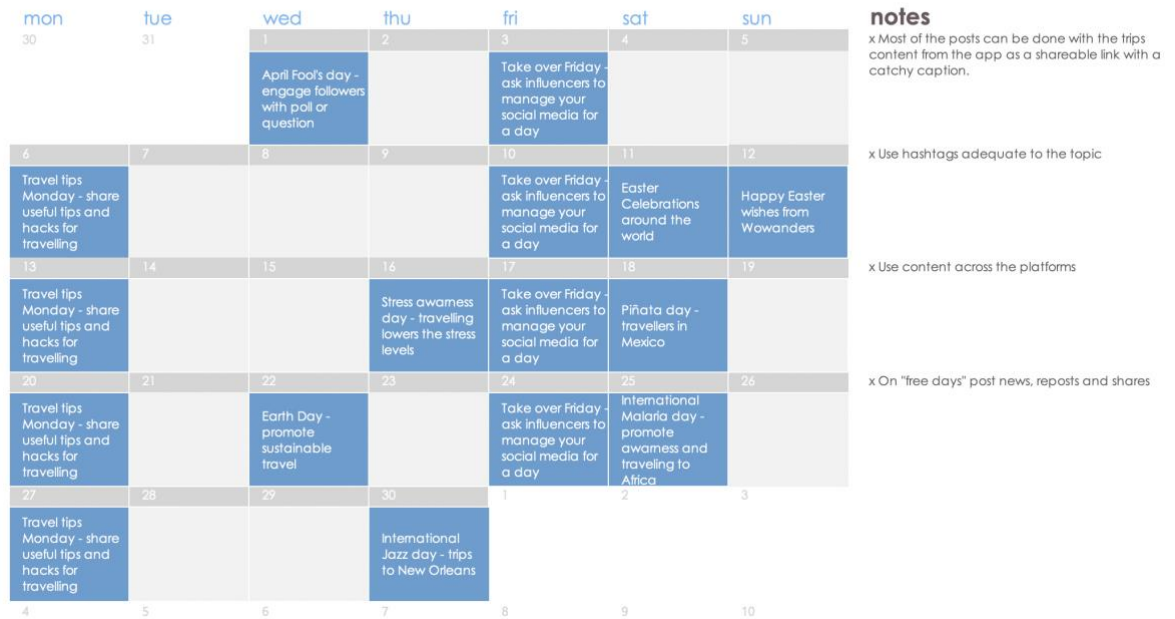


Figure 21- Social media calendar example

It is required that for every posting on Facebook Wowanders create a unique and catchy caption. According to the recent studies the attention span of the average user is decreasing rapidly in the past years. In this task, one has usually around 8 seconds to gain reader’s recognition. Therefore, it is suggested to keep the captions short, with the first 3 to 4 words being crucial. (Ganguly, 2015)

Facebook is also a great source of information on demographics of the majority of followers. Equipped in the detailed analytics tool, the platform can provide much needed data on what target group there is, what kind of posts they like, but also how and when it is best to reach them. Using that data in planning the posts is a must. Scheduling the post to reach the peak of the followers’ activity is the best way to gain visibility and engagement. According to Hubspot, a well-known marketing software and knowledge company, the best times in general to post on Facebook are happening at the end of the week, from Thursdays to Sundays around 9 A.M. Depending on the post type the timing varies with early afternoon lunch breaks bringing most shares, most link clicks happening around 3pm, and broader suggestions having it’s best times throughout the whole day. (Kolowich, 2019)

To gain a lot of the engagement it is suggested to use and share only relevant information and industry news. At the same time asking followers opinion about said news in a form of polls can maximize the gains. Marketer just need to remember to be active himself and

answer to each of the comments personally. Every comment and opinion are valuable, even if it's negative, it creates a much-needed buzz around the post.

Cooperation with other brands is another idea for low-cost content. Sharing other industry related pages when there's synergy and share audience can result in bringing new followers. Asking said brands to do same in return is also a common and suggested practice. This is a mutually beneficial boost in organic engagement as both sides are gaining visibility to wider audience.

6.2.4 Instagram strategy

Instagram is a highly visual medium, focusing mostly on pictures and videos. Because so, it is highly recommended to use high-resolution and good quality images only. Person responsible for posting on Instagram doesn't need to be a professional photographer but needs to pay a close attention to detail. Taking pictures in good lighting and with the right focus is a minimum. If those criteria are met, then experimenting with different angles and filters might bring more attention to the posts.

Even though the picture itself is the most important thing on Instagram, posts should also include a captivating and relevant caption. It is an easy way for engaging the audience either by asking their opinion or thoughts. It might also be a good idea to use inspirational quotes or infographics to gain attention and promote sustainable behaviours for tourists online. Also, as it's hard to show emotions in the form of short texts, post author should consider using the emojis. Not only it brings more emotional value, it brings better discoverability as well.

Partnering with influencers is a double-edged sword that brings value to both sides of the agreement. Even though it brings more visibility also for the promoters, unfortunately the ones with the most visible profiles are often not willing to help companies just to gain visibility, and they often want some material gains in return. Finding the popular Instagrammer within the tourism industry who'll be willing to promote the product on their profile might not come cheap, but it might be worth it as it will spread the visibility to the bigger audience and often show products in a new, innovative way. This approach would also promote more human side of the company, not just pretty pictures of the remote destinations.

Instagram, similarly to previously discussed Facebook, offers a wide range of analytic tools that can help the marketer to track the audience preferences. By regularly checking which posts bring best results, both content type and post-time wise, one can easily up the statistics. In general, it is advised to post on Instagram on Fridays, and off-work hours around 1 and 5 p.m., during lunch hours and at the end of the typical workday. Those times are said to bring the most engagement. However, it is also advised to tailor the times to the specific needs of the company. (Kolowich, 2019)

6.2.5 Use of hashtags

Hashtags are a keyway to increase the visibility and discoverability on social media. Thanks to them our posts are easily traceable and discoverable for anyone. Even if the most popular hashtags are the most common ones, company should avoid those. It is recommended to use between five and nine hashtags per post. More than that can look like a spam. Marketers need to make sure to use hashtags that are relevant, specific to the niche and brand related.

Author prepared an example of recommended hashtags that Wowanders could use throughout their social media:

Company related:

- #Wow
- #Wowanders
- #traveldiary

Industry specific:

- #travel
- #tourism
- #(name of the place)

6.2.6 Content types and topics to cover

As it is really important to keep the unity and a sense of harmony throughout their social media, author advices to use content and topic from similar, travel related groups. Such topics should be for example industry specific news and reposts from airlines and other travel companies. Another idea is to transform common topics to match company's genre. Happenings such as holidays and national days can be a spark to conversation about similar celebrations around the world.

Good idea to keep the audience engaged is to hold regular giveaways or contests. The prizes can be something small to not put pressure on company's budget. The contests can be even organized as a poll for the rest of the audience to decide the winner. Polls for best photo in a certain topic or best travel tips are easy to handle and low-cost.

Wowanders should definitely partner more with the influencers, as it has been already discussed before. That way the content production can be in a small way delegated to the partners. Content can come either from the influencer's review's as a reposts or the company can even give out the wheel to them directly. Many companies decide for similar campaigns with partners or their own employees and it is proven to be a successful strategy.

To best achieve the set goals and reach the audience, Wowanders should follow the 80-20 rule. The concept of the 80-20 rule is to provide the audience mostly with something that bring them value. The goal is to put 80% of the effort into post that educate, inform or entertain the reader. The left 20% can be used for promoting the brand and the product. The importance of such rule is simple, no one likes to be bombarded with advertisements. Majority of people use social media to be social, and they don't want to be a subject of any-one's sales pitch. Therefore, when following the 80-20 rule, company focuses on building positive relationships with the customers and avoids turning the audience off. The goal is to provide more than just promotional material to keep the followers engaged. (De Beule, 2013)

6.2.7 Communication strategy

As social medias are mostly about socializing, Wowanders need to keep an active communication with their followers. Actively posting is a good way to be visible but the company needs to also engage in the active communication with their followers. Each and every comment and share on social media should be commented back individually in order to gain more buzz as well as happier users. Followers that engage in the active discussions are more likely to give less negative feedback.

Word of mouth should be considered as a main way of acquiring new users. A word of mouth is proven to be useful tool in gaining new engagement and according to data 1000 customers can generate around 500000 conversations about the brand. Additionally, in general over half of brand mentions are positive in nature and over 80% of social media users are influenced by their friends' posts. (Mosley, 2018).

Wowanders should also remember to regularly send the customer satisfaction surveys to gain a first-hand user experience. Satisfaction surveys can bring input from the real life experiences the user had with their product. If it's a positive feedback it can be used for further marketing purposes. If it is negative, they should do their best to improve.

7 Conclusions

Small companies often struggle with having their brand and marketing management started up. The reason for this could be they lack the established base of followers and the budget to achieve one can be really small. The case company, Wowanders, is lacking both of those. But the author believes that with correct strategies and resources in right places they can achieve good results.

The aim of this thesis was to find out what are the best practices for developing a brand for a start-up company and presenting those for the commissioner. To best achieve that the author combined, and therefore split this thesis into three parts: theoretical framework, workshop with Haaga-Helia students, and interviews with field professionals. The objective was to determine through which marketing strategies commissioner can improve their brand, gain more visibility and attract more users. This purpose can be considered accomplished as the company was in the end gifted with a presentation (Appendix 4) on how to achieve said goals, including easy to follow steps and strategies. Overall strategy that the company should follow includes focusing further on product development, hiring a marketing professional to unify their branding efforts and keep up with the deadlines.

Thematic research showed that the social media is nowadays one of the best ways to gain brand visibility and recognition. Growing numbers of people connected to social networks throughout the years, have moved the traditionally known world of moth online. With regular people put their opinions on the internet constantly and with the growing numbers of celebrities influencing consumer's choices, companies must put a lot of effort into not only monitoring but also engaging with the users more than ever before.

According to the theoretical research, branding is a complex and long-lasting process that takes years to be completed. As stated before, a brand is more than just a product with a logo on its side, it is rather an emotional response from its users and followers. Keeping that in mind companies must focus mostly on the right communication practices and reaching out to said followers and satisfying their needs. Especially in the modern society, where finding a replacement is too easy, creating a base of loyal customers is a must.

According to the study, Facebook and Instagram are best social media platform for reaching big crowds. Especially for the app such as Wowanders where, despite having a narrow target group, the usability of the product is broad and touches the interest of almost each individual, said platforms have been pointed out as best options. Additionally, focusing on the quality rather than quantity is recommended mainly for the cost-effective

reasons. Thus, Wowanders are recommended to focus their marketing and branding activities on said two platforms. Additionally, a suggestion on changing the target group has been made to the commissioner, as according to the interviews and workshop, the product reaches broader spectrum.

The main use of social media for Wowanders should always aim at increasing the brand and product awareness. The most optimal way to keep the followers engaged is to keep content interesting enough for them to keep coming back. A mixture of educational, informative and entertaining posts should provide more value than just a promotional material to keep the followers engaged.

As an author I am pleased on how smoothly the thesis project moved forward, despite being more time consuming than initially assumed. Although the project was firstly hoped to be finished by the end of 2019, it took me an additional half a year for its completion. Progress was facilitated by face-to-face meeting and phone calls with the supervisor, who gave me additional needed support and motivation.

The biggest challenge arouses around my own motivation and scheduling of the process. The selection of the benchmarking companies was also not the easiest, as I tried to match the needs of the commissioner. As I already had a previous experience with the benchmarking from the previous project conducted as a part of my studies at Haaga-Helia, I had no issues with presenting the results. In the analysis of the results I aimed to focus on the most important details having an overall goal in my mind.

Although in the beginning of the project I was hoping of conducting more interviews, finding the suitable candidates who'd be willing to participate turned out to be extremely difficult. The world crisis caused by the outbreak of the deadly COVID-19 virus caused most of the conducted professionals to decline my interview invitation. However, thanks to established connections I've managed to convince four individuals to help me out.

The finalized thesis is as I believe, clear in its form, with a strong theoretical foundation and accurate analysis of the current situation. It is my hope that this work will help not only the commissioners' company, but also other ones in similar situation, to up their efforts in marketing and creating strong brands.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Workshop plan



Introduction



WORKSHOP Part 1

In small groups download the Wowanders app and create an account– 5-10min
Check the existing trip logs -5min
Create a trip log - 5min

Will you use this app in your life? Was it easy to use?

Name 3 best and 3 worst thing about the app.

Write it down on given paper piece.

WORKSHOP Part 2

How would you advertise an app like that?

In 10 min try to think of different ways to create the buzz about this app. Write down your ideas.

Do you have any other branding and marketing ways of promoting Wowanders' app?

Present your ideas – 10min



QUESTIONS?

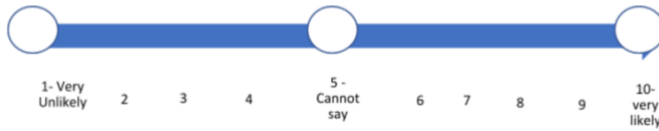
THANK YOU!



Appendix 2. Workshop feedback form

Thesis workshop – 9th of March
Group:

How likely are you to use this app?



How easy was it to use the app?



3 THINGS I LIKED ABOUT THE APP

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T LIKE AND HOW TO IMPROVE THEM

- Think about crazy viral (ideally non-paid) ideas to generate growth of this company?
- What kind of content from the app would you post on social media?
- Any other ideas for branding and marketing strategy than social media?

Appendix 3. Interview questionnaire

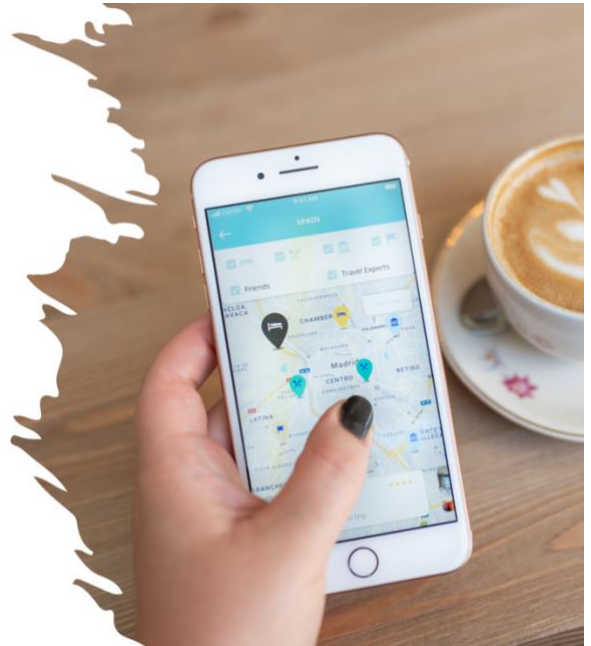
Questionnaire:

1. Could you please explain what is your occupation and how does it relate to the travel industry and/or marketing?
2. How do you use social media – personally and at work?
3. How do you see branding through social media?
4. Describe what kind of content you'd find the most suitable for travel industry?
5. Do you use any travel diary apps? Would you like to take a look at Wowanders app and test it? – Can be downloaded from GooglePlay and AppStore.
6. What is good and what could be improved?
7. Which social media channels would you recommend for the app like that and why?
8. How a start-up like that can build a brand?
9. How to allocate the resources to achieve success?

Branding and Marketing development

CASE: WOWANDERS

Adrianna Janusz
Travel and Aviation Business Management Program
Haaga-Helia UAS, 2020



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INTRODUCTION

- This presentation is created as a final product of a Master Thesis commissioned by Wowanders OY.
- The aim of this presentation is to advise Wowanders how to develop and maintain their brand and marketing practices.
- All of the advices and presented examples are based on the broad research conducted and further explained in the main part of the thesis.

BRAND IDEA

- Company needs to define a brand idea and commit to living up to it
- Creating a brand strategy by:
 - Taking feedback from everyone involved with the product
 - Customer feedback and development ideas
 - Creating a short but meaningful message
 - Testing the idea on a small group of key users
- Take actions supporting the idea and invest in employee branding and customer service



OVERALL STRATEGY



The company should focus on further developing and raising the quality of their product. The quality issues will otherwise fast scare new users away.



The company should consider hiring a professional marketing manager to develop and keep up with the strategies.



The target persona should be changed or at least considered in a broader spectrum.



The purpose of the communications throughout social media should be to promote the brand identity.

SOCIAL MEDIA GOALS

Main goals Wowanders should try to achieve on its social media pages are highlighted below.

By tracking the user activity company should be able to achieve the presented goals. Once a month a marketing manager should pay close attention to the following aspects: follower count, follower engagement, and audience reach.

01

INCREASE
BRAND
AWARENESS

02

SHARE NEWS
AND
KNOWLEDGE

03

PROMOTE
SUSTAINABLE
TRAVEL

04

ENGAGE
TRAVELLERS
COMMUNITY

FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

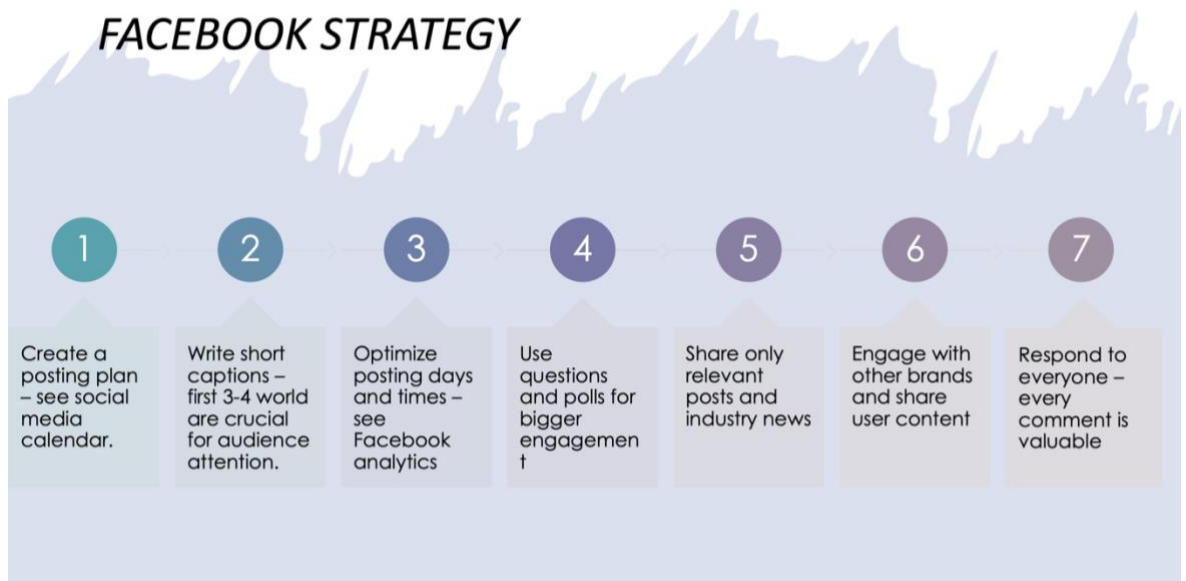
FACEBOOK

- Most popular network worldwide
- 2400 mln active users
- Promotes posts with a lot of buzz

INSTAGRAM

- 1 bln active users
- Offers cross-posting with Facebook
- Stories is a best place for product and brand awareness

FACEBOOK STRATEGY

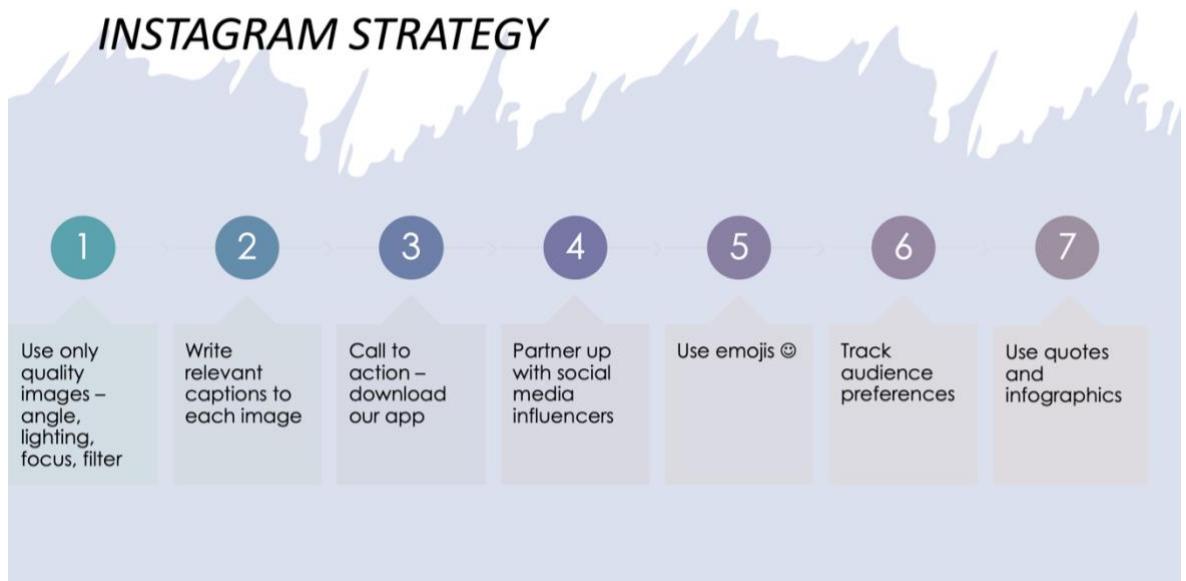


FACEBOOK STRATEGY

- Use Facebook analytics tool to define the key target groups, best posting times and content that brings the most engagement.
- Specific post times should be tailored to the audience.
- Use holidays and International days for content creation.



INSTAGRAM STRATEGY



INSTAGRAM STRATEGY

- Wowanders should focus on presenting the "human" side of travelling – showing the people involved in making the company roll, involved influencers, travellers.
- Using macros and infographics, company can promote sustainable behaviors online.
- User-generated content can be used as well in form of reviews, reposts and Insta-Stories.
- Best times to post on Instagram are in the afternoon when people are finishing work



USE OF #HASHTAGS

Recommended hashtags

Company related:

#Wow
#Wowanders
#traveldiary

Industry specific:

#travel
#tourism
#(name of the place)

Hashtags are a keyway to increase the visibility and discoverability. It is recommended to use between five and nine hashtags per post. More than that can look like a spam.

Make sure to use hashtags that are relevant, specific to the niche and brand related.

CONTENT TYPES AND TOPICS TO COVER

Use holidays and national days as a content

Contests and giveaways to engage followers

Follow industry specific news and repost

Partner with Influencers

Follow which posts bring most engagement and repost occasionally

CONTENT MIX PLAN



To achieve the set goals and reach the audience, Wowanders should follow the 80-20 rule.

80% of the posts should educate, inform, and entertain

20% can be used to promote the brand and product



The goal is to provide more value than just a promotional material to keep the followers engaged.



Posts should vary in type:

Photos and videos
Polls

Links to other pages
Stories – recommended for events

COMMUNICATION WITH THE USERS



Regular customer satisfaction surveys is a good way of gaining first-hand user experiences.



Word of mouth should be considered as a main way of acquiring new users



Actively posting on social media and getting into discussion with the followers



Answering to each comment individually

APRIL

2020

mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat	sun	notes
30	31	1 April Fool's day - engage followers with poll or question	2	3 Take over Friday - ask influencers to manage your social media for a day	4	5	x Most of the posts can be done with the trips content from the app as a shareable link with a catchy caption.
6 Travel tips Monday - share useful tips and hacks for travelling	7	8	9	10 Take over Friday - ask influencers to manage your social media for a day	11 Easter Celebrations around the World	12 Happy Easter wishes from Wowander	x Use hashtags adequate to the topic
13 Travel tips Monday - share useful tips and hacks for travelling	14	15	16 Stress awarness day - travelling lowers the stress levels	17 Take over Friday - ask influencers to manage your social media for a day	18 Piñata day - travellers in Mexico	19	x Use content across the platforms
20 Travel tips Monday - share useful tips and hacks for travelling	21	22 Earth Day - promote sustainable travel	23	24 Take over Friday - ask influencers to manage your social media for a day	25 International Malawi day - promote awarness and traveling to Africa	26	x On "free days" post news, reposts and shares
27 Travel tips Monday - share useful tips and hacks for travelling	28	29	30 International Jazz day - trips to New Orleans	1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

SOCIAL MEDIA CALENDAR - example

CHECKLIST

Proofread	Quality	Location	Author
Proofread before posting – check spelling, grammar and the actual sense of the topic	Check quality of the content – make sure it matches to the profile	Add location information	Check the Intellectual Property rights – don't post anything without consent of the author

OTHER PRACTICES

Use boost option to create more engagement and increase post visibility

Grow followers base –organically and with paid ads.

Quality over quantity – applies to both social media branding and the product itself.

Don't use slang or jargon

Monitor analytics regularly