KARELIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Degree Programme in International Business

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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION: CASE
VIRKKUKOUKKUNEN

Thesis
May 2021

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Title
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Commissioned by Virkkukoukkunen

Abstract

This thesis is commissioned by Virkkukoukkunen, a small gifts and handcrafts company located in Imatra, Finland. The case company has expressed interest in internationalization as they currently only operate locally. The thesis introduces and analyzes different means for small B2C companies to pursue internationalization through social media.

Instagram was used as the platform of choice because of the platform's highly visual-reliant content structure and increasing popularity among social media users. The thesis discusses paid and organic promotion, search engine related marketing, and influencer marketing from the point of view of a business hoping to reach foreign audiences online.

The thesis introduces Germany as the targeted market to better display the discussed topics. The German market itself enjoys high internet volume, E-commerce, and social media use, and is therefore a desirable target for the case company. The thesis explores and identifies the key attributes of the case company and reflects them on the discovered approaches and opportunities provided by social media and Instagram.

The thesis found that the German fashion and apparel market online is dominated by large corporations, i.e., Amazon and Zalando. This therefore makes individual brands less visible. However, by focusing on raising brand awareness through meaningful communication, social media presence and enhanced web store customer experience, the case company could gain an audience.

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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Case Company Background

This thesis is commissioned by Virkkukoukkunen, a gifts and handcrafts company located in the heart of Imatra, Finland. Founded in 1993, Virkkukoukkunen has kept true to the style and the feel of their products for nearly three decades.

Virkkukoukkunen offers a selection of colorful clothing and apparel pieces, small items, and fabrics. The reoccurring patterns, color schemes, and slogans follow a similar style across the product lines and make the brand highly recognizable. The same style and feel are conveyed through all of the marketing efforts as well as the online and offline presence of the company.

The paper will use their newly released earring catalogue as the product line that will be the first to be introduced for the new target market. Wooden earrings were chosen as the market entry product line because of their price level, ease of shipping, and gift-worthiness. The catalogue features over 40 different earrings, most of which with patterns that repeat across all of Virkkukoukkunen's products.

Displaying and introducing the earrings for the new target market will not only help Virkkukoukkunen showcase those specific products, but rather the brand's entire identity. As the earrings feature similar designs and outlook as everything else in the Virkkukoukkunen product catalogue, the new audiences will be able to associate the products introduced later on with the ones that were used in the initial entry. Having recognizable attributes embedded in the brand identity will ultimately result in creating brand awareness and recognition, as well as establishing trust and loyalty among consumers that enjoy the brand.

Virkkukoukkunen has been actively using social media in its daily business life, but so far has concentrated solely on the local markets. Its Instagram, with 9,000 followers (Instagram 2021a) and Facebook with 31,700 likes (Facebook 2021) shows nearly daily posts, all of which are in Finnish. The average number of interactions Virkkukoukkunen receives on Instagram is around 2.5% (200 likes per post) and on Facebook around

0.0015% (50 likes per post). Virkkukoukkunen has recently found success from its Facebook and Instagram advertisement campaigns that have been done with the help of a third-party advertising company called Unfair. This paper does not go into detail with any current activities but rather concentrates on the opportunities and the ways Virkkukoukkunen can benefit from them.

1.2 Aim and Objective

This study is constructed with the purpose of outlining the possibilities social media, and especially Instagram, provide to small enterprises seeking internationalization. The research is carried out focusing on the point of view of a small business-to-consumer (B2C) company operating in a highly visually reliant industry, for example fashion. The nature of such industries provides more opportunities to use social media platforms where visual aspects are the core content to showcase and sell products, as well as to reach a global audience and create brand awareness.

The objective of this paper is to provide the case company, Virkkukoukkunen, the means to pursue the international markets online, and to create an exemplary plan of action to be utilized in its internationalization efforts concerning brand and product lines. For the purpose of better displaying the elements and considerations discussed in this thesis, the German market is chosen as the initial target market for Virkkukoukkunen's internationalization efforts, and therefore focused on in regards of data selection. However, by adjusting the region-specific data and approach methodologies, Virkkukoukkunen will be able to utilize this document in approaching any desired target market.

1.3   Methods

This paper utilizes social media statistics and social media marketing tools to determine which actions could yield the most desirable outcomes for small B2C businesses seeking internationalization. The main approaches discussed for creating brand recognition online in a market where a brand is not yet operating in are grouped into paid and organic advertisements, search engine -related marketing, and influencer marketing. These approaches are studied to display an overview of how to utilize them in the internationalization efforts, and what to take into consideration when creating a market entry plan. The use of the approaches is justified and backed up with relevant data and statistics to highlight the importance of each method in the process of internationalization.

The paper concentrates on Instagram as the platform of choice for the case company, Virkkukoukkunen. The methods discussed form an online marketing structure that can be utilized in any chosen social media platform. Therefore, the approaches are not discussed strictly in relation to Instagram and Instagram only, but rather as concepts that can be utilized in a number of ways according to the needs of the company.

1.4   Outline

First and foremost, this document introduces the brand of Virkkukoukkunen and its current social media presence. Afterwards, the facts and statistics related to social media use and online marketing, the impact of electronic commerce in traditional commerce, and the opportunities social media provide for businesses are discussed. All of the aforementioned topics can be found from the second chapter of this paper.

Following the introduction of the opportunities in Chapter two, the paper discusses how to utilize them in Chapter three. Chapter three describes the use of the main marketing approaches: paid and organic advertising, search engine- related marketing, and influencer marketing. In addition, the chapter includes information on the opportunities related to segmentation and measuring success, the importance of online presence and communication, and choosing the right platform to reach the company objectives.

Chapter four describes the market environment of the German fashion and handicrafts - markets, specifically online. As Virkkukoukkunen is a brand that is difficult to categorize into a clear segment, Chapter four will discuss competition through different brand attributes to showcase different potential competitors. The chapter features an overview of the business environment, market and consumer trends, and a brief competitive analysis on brands that share similar attributes as the case company and operate online and on Instagram.

After discussing the different approaches and opportunities, how to utilize them, and the target market environment, Chapter five will include an exemplary market entry plan for the case company. In this chapter, buyer personas are created and used to reflect on how the different approaches and opportunities could be utilized by the case company. In addition to the target audiences, this chapter will feature a discussion related to adding the internationalization efforts to existing domestic marketing, the required resources, and the schedule planning.

Lastly, the document will describe how the case company can utilize the data collected from its initial internationalization efforts to improve and adjust the future endeavors in Chapter six. Success metrics and adjustment possibilities are introduced before moving into the final chapter, which concludes the document. The conclusions of the paper will point out the possibilities for future research regarding other social media platforms as channels for internationalization, as well as the different approaches they provide, that could be utilized in the process. The thesis will be wrapped up and concluded with the author's considerations at the end of the last chapter.

2   SOCIAL MEDIA IN BUSINESS

Social media today can be described as any online platform that allows communication, content creating, and content sharing between its users. Social media platforms share the objective of connecting users through various means. Some rely on commentary, some on personality, and some on audiovisuals. No matter the functions social media provide, users are free to choose which platform(s) to use, and how.

Social media presence is nowadays a prominent part of one's identity. Sharing ideologies, pictures, and connecting with loved ones is effortless and allows social interactions regardless of time or geographical location. One's social media presence creates an image of said person for all of the users viewing their content; therefore, the content one is publishing and interacting with is like a constant 'first impression' to new users stumbling upon their feeds.

A New York Times article from 2019 discusses the changes social media and digital advertising is bringing to the table for advertisers. The author, Tiffany Hsu, states that "nearly every piece of that [how advertising was in the pre-digital era] has changed." Companies are collecting more and more relevant data about their consumers, but especially the young and affluent consumers still hate ads, which is forcing marketers to apply different approaches to reach their audiences in ways that they will respond to (Hsu 2019).

2.1   The Virkkukoukkunen Brand and Social Media Presence

Virkkukoukkunen relies on its colorful and distinctive style. Having built an identity and a reputation locally, the line of timeless patterns and slogans used in nearly all of their products have reached almost an iconic status and are widely recognized within the local community.

Virkkukoukkunen has created an easy to love -concept with a relatable fun-loving and care-free attitude balancing everyday life with a spark of color. Virkkukoukkunen utilizes

the image it has built in everything done, online and offline. The design of their brick-and-mortar store as well as the social media profiles and webstore all display and convey the same story, values, and feel.

Picture 1. Virkkukoukkunen brick-and-mortar store (source: author)

A brand that has established a strong identity with distinctive features has an organic edge in any given market. Results found by Ipsos on a survey commissioned by Facebook state that the most valued attributes of brand content are entertaining/fun (55%), real/authentic (53%), and creative (53%) (Ipsos "Project Instagram" 2018, cited by Facebook Business). These attributes are already embedded in the everyday online actions of Virkkukoukkunen, and undoubtably one of the key factors to their above average engagement ratio. According to the Digital 2021 Report, an average Instagram business account with less than 10,000 followers receives a 1.29% engagement ratio (We Are Social 2021a, 137), whereas Virkkukoukkunen with its 9000 followers enjoys an engagement rate of 1.84%, which is based on the average interactions a business account has received with its past twenty posts (SocialBlade 2021a).

Virkkukoukkunen has an active social media presence on both Facebook and Instagram. The published content on both of the platforms reflects the style and feel of the brand, and often features employees and/or products to add visualization and create relatability. Virkkukoukkunen uses the social media platforms effectively to communicate updates and product information, and to engage with followers. Responding to comments, sharing

follower's posts that feature their brand, and delivering genuine messages have helped the brand to gain the status it enjoys today.

Virkkukoukkunen uses Instagram Stories on a daily basis to promote and showcase products to followers. The constant flow of content ensures that all the followers of the brand are familiar with the product categories and the styles that are available or upcoming. Moreover, Virkkukoukkunen restrains from overselling and swarming the followers with calls-to-action and rather uses a more humane approach by making the display and the message the main focus of the content. Most of the brand's main feed posts on both platforms are a combination of a visual, where the brand's distinct style is visible, and a personalized message in the form of a description.

Picture(s) 2 & 3. Virkkukoukkunen Instagram posts (March 28th & April 7th, 2021)

The posts shown in pictures 2 and 3 do not contain any direct product placements or calls-to-action, but still display the distinctive visual and communicative style of the brand. The main objective of the post in picture 2 is to highlight the brand's support for the local community and the city of Imatra. On the same day this photo was posted, the city of Imatra bought the front page of Helsingin Sanomat, the largest newspaper in Finland with a reach of 1.84 million readers per issue (KMT 2020, 1), to attract potential residents to consider Imatra as an option. Virkkukoukkunen follows the photo of the newspaper with a description welcoming followers to the city and to the store.

The post in picture 2 is simply an announcement communicating the gratitude the brand has for its customers as Virkkukoukkunen is turning 28 years old. Communicating these milestones and displaying the story behind reaching them is a great way to increase engagement and relatability, as storytelling naturally creates a special kind of emotional response in the human mind (Clarke 2019). Both of the posts have received a number of likes way above the average of 161 likes per post received in the 2,573 posts made on the account (Socialblade 2021a).

Content related to the local community and the descriptions to go with it have proven to drive engagement among followers. In a small city like Imatra (26,000 inhabitants as of July 2020) with a limited number of target audience members it is important to display the brand's identity and humanity to correlate with the audience's interests. Brands displaying qualities that are admirable in people will help consumers to connect, relate, and be loyal (Weber 2019, 215).

2.2 The Impact of Social Media in E-commerce

The constant expansion of internet connectivity and social media usage benefits the businesses operating in the online landscape as their potential customer base expands simultaneously. Businesses taking part in electronic commerce (E-commerce), in other words making business online, have an advantage over the traditional brick-and-mortar-only companies, especially during the times of the Covid-19 pandemic. E-commerce has reached a state where nearly everything to be found offline can also be found online (Bloomenthal 2020).

E-commerce has grown over the years providing more opportunities for both consumers and businesses. The share of E-commerce sales in all of retail in Europe has climbed from 7% in 2015 to 12% in 2019 (Coppola 2020). Two of the largest market shares that E-commerce holds in Europe are in the United Kingdom (19%) and in Germany (16%) with an average annual online spending of 921 and 784 euros respectively per capita. (Statista Research Department 2020).

As the internet reach increases, the number of reachable customers does too. In October of 2020, 66.6% of the world's population (5.22 billion) owned a mobile phone and 59.5% (4.66 billion) had access to the internet. Of these 4.66 billion internet users, 4.20 billion use social media, which is 53.6% of the global population. (We Are Social 2021a, 8.)

The increasing number of consumers using social media in day-to-day lives is turning the retail world more digital in all industries. With lower operating costs and almost unlimited opportunities, companies are inventing new ways to engage with their audiences. Social media platforms offer the freedom of displaying and delivering a message in a way that is the most suitable and effective for each brand or product. Recent data shows that 46.4% of all internet users between the ages of 16 and 64 name product and brand research as a primary reason to use the web (We Are Social 2021a, 48). These statistics highlight the importance of simply having an active online presence.

Social media users use their voices to express their views on a brand or a product, taking the brand messaging control partially out of the hands of brand managers. (Powell, Groves & Dimos 2011, 22). Digital word-of-mouth has significant potential to influence the user's social network and alter their views on said brands or products. Therefore, it is crucial for brand managers and marketers to listen to the feedback they are receiving from individuals and to use the information to improve and adjust content creation efforts to match with the needs, wants, and passions of their consumers (Weber 2019, 27). When users are looking for information within an industry or a product category, they will be presented with results that have been validated by other users. Ratings, reviews, or other published content related to the search query are powerful indicators of how well a brand is performing, and they paint a picture of what the brand is all about, as well as affect the impressions of the users that view them (Powell et al. 2011, 57).

2.3 Opportunities Provided by Social Media

The social media landscape consists of countless different platforms with varying audiences and functions, making it a powerful tool for marketing. In the following segment, high-value opportunities provided by social media platforms regarding the brand's online presence, communication, advertising and promotion, and content creation, are introduced and discussed.

Opportunities offered by social media platforms are widely used in marketing, both corporate and individual. Social media allow users to find fitting content according to their interests, and to connect with like-minded platform users. Businesses can use these features to create specific target segments. Facebook groups, YouTube channels and Instagram hashtags are just a few ways of how users within social media platforms search for content, simultaneously and unconsciously creating target audiences for marketers to utilize. Marketers are able to shape their target audiences by the set criteria not limited by physical location of either the business or the customer (Lyden 2020).

An increasing number of social media users have managed to create a career for themselves just by creating content online. Starting with bloggers and Youtubers from over a decade ago, nearly all social media platforms have their own celebrities now (Suciu 2020). Influencers, as they are called, are essentially independent businesses that have been built around an audience that follows and enjoys the content being published (Roose 2019). Businesses of all sizes can take advantage of the authority and position of these individuals by collaborating with them and funneling their brand messages through them, straight to their like-minded audiences.

Social media allows easily accessible and creative content. Displaying desirable values, connections, or contributions to society has increased in value because of the ongoing era of social consciousness (Weber 2019, 27). Social media platforms allow genuine, transparent, and swift communication that helps any brand highlight the expected socially conscious attributes of its business that might otherwise stay unknown to the general public. With the help of the visual marketing opportunities provided by social media platforms, the target audiences get to experience these displayed attributes organically as a part of their personal social media feeds.

According to a study commissioned by Facebook in 2018 where 21,000 Instagram users were surveyed across 13 major markets, over half of the responders stated that they want to see entertaining, fun, authentic, creative, and informative content from brands that they are interested in. In the same study it was found that 68% of the surveyed users turn to photos posted by the brands they like or follow, when asked what they do to fuel their inspiration on Instagram. (Ipsos "Project Instagram" 2018, cited by Facebook for Business 2019.)

Businesses can use social media channels as paid advertising platforms and gain visibility through ads that appear on the users' social media feeds. These advertisements often provide an immediate call-to-action with the opportunity to interact by engaging with the post, visiting the web store, or even purchasing the good or service straight away.

These services are provided by the platforms themselves, as advertisements are often the main source of income for their operations. Facebook, for example, received nearly 98% of its revenue from advertising in 2020 (Tankovska H. 2021a). As these advertisements are widely used in all of social media, users have grown to expect and to filter them out to a certain degree. With constant noise around the more meaningful content on different platforms, the average user can effectively ignore promoted content without giving it a second thought. According to a recent study, about 75% of the respondents have received irrelevant ads. Nearly 66% of them opted to simply ignore them, and over 25% chose to act by either giving feedback or reporting the ad (Raymond 2019). Therefore, to gain the attention of the public, brands must have something different, valuable, and intriguing in their promotional content to give the users a reason not to scroll past their ads immediately.

In the context of a visual social media platform, the published content, usually photos and videos, are used to deliver the messages. The way the messages are conveyed is the key to gaining and retaining the consumer's attention (Zell 2020). Users are generally drawn in by high-quality content, whether it be aesthetically pleasing, informative, or entertaining, the brands need to find their "true selves" to find an approach that matches with their audience's preferences. With consistent and high-quality content, that does not drown the follower's social media feeds with an abundance of corporate content; the brands can start to build an image and a reputation for themselves in the social media landscape (Boachie 2017).

Building a reputation helps to shape a brand's identity, which can then translate into reliability and desirability among consumers. However, there is no cutting corners with authenticity. The brand needs to uphold its earned reputation as it can be stripped away in a heartbeat (Liarokapi 2020). According to the 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer, 76% of those surveyed stated that they are worried about media channels using false information or fake news as a weapon (Edelman Trust Barometer 2020, 16). Because of this general distrust in media, brands need to practice transparency and work to gain the trust of their audiences. According to a 2016 study, 94% of consumers are likely to be loyal to companies that practice complete transparency (Label Insight 2016, cited by Weber 2019, 104).

With authenticity and genuinely desirable practices, companies can build their images around the interests of their target audiences. The public's increased concern about social issues has forced companies to evaluate and adjust their actions to meet the new requirements of social responsibility. By doing so, the instinctive, emotional responses in the brain, which make people connect to a brand and increase their willingness to share the knowledge to other members of the community, are triggered. (Weber 2019, 148.) In a 2017 corporate social responsibility (CSR) study by Cone Communications, American consumers were interviewed about the importance of CSR. The study found that 87% of American consumers would purchase a product because the company stood up for an issue they care about, and that 76% of the consumers would refuse to buy a product upon learning the company's view contradicted their own (Cone Communications 2017).

Setting measurable goals is important to determine whether an action is profitable or not. When it comes to publishing content, measuring the results of a post or a campaign is relatively simple. Engagement and interaction metrics such as likes, comments, and follows can be used to track how well a post is performing and if it is reaching the set goals. If the objective is to simply create traffic and general interest in the brand, website and search engine statistics provide the number of visitors and searches a company or their goods have received. (Digitaldot 2020.)

Consistently storing and mapping the data that is accumulated by content uploads helps a brand to understand what is working and what is not, allowing adjustments whenever there is a need. With traditional marketing, the published content cannot be as easily modified. After printing and distributing a newspaper, the ads displayed are not going anywhere no matter the response. Online marketing allows companies to analyze the

response a certain post is achieving and reflect it on the objectives in little to no delay. The communication has shifted from the traditional one-way communication between brands and consumers to a dialogue, which allows companies to react in real time (Weber 2019, 56). If an ad is underperforming it can be taken down or replaced, making it possible to cut unnecessary costs and to reallocate parts of the advertising budget.

Running multiple ad campaigns and creating organic content for different target audiences and collecting data over time will help the company to learn more about its own customers and their interests, needs, and passions. With the data collected, ad designers and social media personnel can deliver the content that provides the highest potential to reach the set goals in each campaign.

3 HOW TO UTILIZE SOCIAL MEDIA IN INTERNATIONALIZATION

Companies hoping to stand out in social media need to familiarize the platforms and how the audiences operate in them. Not only does this help with pinpointing the exact target segment, but also with finding the most suitable design and description when promoting goods and delivering messages. Social media platforms provide the possibility to promote, interact, and communicate, all at once. Brands must consider these aspects to create a consistent and comprehendible identity that provides the individual users with all the tools they need when interacting with the brand. From the author's point of view, in an ideal situation, upon finding a brand a user can find information and updates about the brand, its values, and its products, view the response of other users to particular content, purchase and review the products themselves, and communicate and engage with the brand and other members of the community.

With the opportunities social media platforms provide, brands can craft a suitable design of content and communication to optimize online presence and to reach the best possible outcomes from its efforts.

In this chapter the author introduces "The How's" of social media activities. The following sub-segments discuss topics around online marketing, segmentation, promotion, and business presence. The aim of the chapter is to justify the importance of the discussed topics and to allow the reader to adjust the use of the mentioned methodologies according to their needs.

3.1 Methods of Online- and Social Media Marketing

As the online market and E-commerce continue to grow in both reach and popularity, businesses are presented with opportunities to promote themselves. With knowledge of different platforms and how to use them effectively, a cost-efficient and creative addition for traditional advertising is presented. In the coming sub-segments, three approaches are considered: paid social media advertising, search engine -related marketing, and influencer marketing. Each of the approaches can be utilized either together or separately. To build a strong social media identity, brands must balance the use of the approaches according to how well they perform in given times, locations, and objectives.

3.1.1 Paid Advertisements

Most social media platforms provide their own advertising services through which companies can display their ads for the platform's user base. These advertisements can pop up in the social media feeds of users that have never even heard of the brand but are interested in the general topic or product category. Google, the most widely used search engine, uses cookies to track user behavior to provide more engaging ads to users and to bring more value to the advertisers who paid for the exposure (Google 2021). When a user utilizes search engines regularly, it results in a selection of ads popping up that are related to the previous queries the user has made. Social media users are also able to visit and use platforms by using a single sign-on function, which allows platforms to utilize the same personal data the user has previously given for the use of another platform. For

example, Facebook and Instagram have different audiences, but by being a part of the same corporation, Facebook users can start their journey on Instagram by creating a profile with their Facebook account. These single sign-on options have improved the cross-platform marketing opportunities for brands and given marketers the access to pre-authorized data and published content on all platforms that the user is using with the integrated login without subsequent permission (Powell et al. 2011, 66).

Social media platforms provide companies and individuals the possibility to set up business accounts. A business account provides additional functions that help in advertising and promotion, as well as metrics to track the performance of the published content. Facebook and Instagram, both being owned by Facebook Inc., provide similar functions on their platforms. Users can target their audiences with a variety of ad placements within the platforms including, for example, Stories on Instagram or main feed on Facebook. With ad campaigns, Facebook provides an option for cross-platform marketing on Facebook and Instagram, and even on their messaging platforms Messenger and Whatsapp.

3.1.2 Search Engine Marketing

When a search engine is used to fill users' queries, all of the relevant results are displayed on a search engine result page (SERP). The results are ranked from the most relevant to the least relevant starting from the most visible spot, top of the first page.

Search engines have three primary functions: crawling, indexing, and ranking. The engines send out bots (crawlers) to find new and updated content through links on already indexed content. The new content will be stored and organized, and available to show up on the search engine's result pages upon a relevant query. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to make sure all of the web pages they wish to display are crawlable and showing up on SERPs, as otherwise users will not be able to find them through search engines. (Muller & Moz Staff 2020, ch. 2.)

Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to actions that aim to list a search result higher than where it currently stands. Search engines, such as Google, use different metrics to determine the relevance of websites it displays on SERPs after any user query. Most

influential metrics are links to a webpage, relevance, and RankBrain, which is Google's machine learning component in its core algorithm. Google does not fully disclose the different factors that set the final ranking but has clearly stated that links and content are the two most important factors (Schwartz 2016). Knowing the metrics that the search engines use to rank webpages presents an opportunity for improvement. Searching by relevant keywords creates an idea of what the online competitive landscape is for each keyword. Companies can utilize SERPs by visiting the websites of the competitors and analyzing which aspects of the pages are better or worse than what they currently have. Not only can this help improve their own webpages but also to take advantage of the aspects that the competitors are overlooking. (Muller & Moz Staff 2020, ch. 2.)

Search engines provide paid ad space for relevant advertisements on the top of the SERPs. All relevant ads are entered into an auction, from which the displayed ads are chosen from, based on the bids their advertisers are willing to pay per click (PPC) and the relevance to the user's query (WordStream 2016).

In paid content, just as with organic content, keywords are the way content is displayed for the users. Keywords are crucial, and creating a keyword list can be used to help direct searchers into the precise result that they are searching for. Knowing the audience and what they want to find allows companies to create keyword groups that direct the user to different parts of the company's webpage(s). Splitting up keywords and ads into smaller, more specific segments can improve the organic ranking of each separate landing page, as well as receive a more positive response from the searchers, as the results are more relevant to their query. (WordStream 2016.)

Search engines are designed to fill user queries in the best possible way. Therefore, the main objective for companies hoping to optimize their presence in that landscape is to help the search engines understand that the content provided by them is the best possible answer for the queries made by their customers and prospects (Odden 2012, 40).

3.1.3 Influencer Marketing

Most social media platforms have a wide variety of content creators that all have one thing in common – an audience. This audience is interested in the content each creator is providing and based on that, share a common interest in topics such as gaming, lifestyle, or fashion. Finding a suitable content creator, a so-called influencer, can be difficult and costly at times, but can prove beneficial for the company in the long run. For example, Bigelow Tea, a well-established tea brand, experienced a 18.5% increase in sales after utilizing bloggers in 2013, proving the immense potential of influencer marketing (Patel 2020).

Influencers are the celebrities of social media. Ranging from micro-influencers to widely known superstars, they provide businesses of all sizes the opportunity to relay a promotional message through them to their audiences. Influencers operate in a similar way to the "real world" celebrities in that they too will endorse and promote a brand, just like Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods did for Nike decades ago. As mentioned, the scale varies greatly. Where superstars can charge millions of dollars for an endorsement contract and still be difficult to reach, smaller influencers are more approachable and expect much more realistic amounts of pay, if any (Influencer Marketing Hub 2021a).

Influencers of all sizes can be found from any social media platform, and anyone can become one. Therefore, the number of small influencers has sky-rocketed over time. According to Socialbakers 2019 report on influencers, the use of the hashtag *#ad* among influencers has increased 113% from Q1 2018 to Q1 2019, indicating that companies are more actively seeking endorsers in the social media (Socialbakers 2019, 9). Influencer Marketing Hub released a report on the state of influencer marketing in 2020 and found that large businesses have used micro-influencers 300% more compared to 2016, and activated nearly double the number of creators for a specific campaign in the past two years (Influencer Marketing Hub 2021b). This shift shows that companies are aiming to rather have multiple small audiences that are closer to the creators than a single creator with a massive audience but less of an impact on their spending. The reason behind the shift is that consumers, in general, trust micro-influencers that they follow to be more honest with product reviews than major influencers or corporations (Bird 2020).

For smaller businesses this shift towards influencers with more tightly connected communities and higher levels of trust and influence is beneficial. Utilizing multiple fitting influencers, and even creating a campaign focusing on raising awareness through them, could potentially provide a kickstart for a brand attempting to enter any given market. However, the smaller influencers might not be influential enough to introduce the brand and excite more than a handful of their followers, which could in return nullify the efforts put into the campaign. As it is with all marketing, weighing the options and carefully choosing the fitting approaches will go a long way with influencer marketing.

3.2   Organic and Paid Segmentation

Social media platforms in general provide countless opportunities to identify customers segments, and these opportunities are available for everyone to use. Social media users can find the information they seek within any platform with ease – just type the keywords into the search bar. Countless pieces of relevant content are displayed within seconds, from which the user can pick and choose whatever fills their needs.

One of the main keyword functions used on social media platforms are hashtags. Hashtags are ultimately words or phrases that group content from different creators under a certain category or topic, which can then be utilized by marketers in targeting those audiences. These categories are also utilized by the users that are looking for specific content and who are in the mindset to discover something new – an opinion, a visual, a story, or a product.

The way users utilize hashtags determines how others can find their content. When a piece of content is published, the creator can primarily target certain segments by matching the keywords they use to the keywords their audiences are interested in. On Instagram, utilizing generic hashtags such as #fashion (944 million posts) and #nature (618 million posts), can be difficult. Content is likely to get lost in the noise as new content is created continuously (Instagram 2021b). However, users are able to add up to 30 hashtags under any piece of their main feed published content, which means that a single publication can be presented to a set of different segments through the use of multiple hashtags. For example, a picture of a Finnish handmade necklace can be simultaneously presented for

the audiences in #fashion (944 million posts), #necklace (32.8 million posts), #handcrafted (22.6 million posts), and *#suomalaistakäsityötä* ("Finnish handcrafts", 42.7 thousand posts), making the same piece of content visible under each hashtag (Instagram 2021b).

Just like in regular search engines, the long-tail keywords (in this case hashtags) are the most effective way to gain a specific audience that has a genuine interest in what they search. Finding the right hashtag can be a challenge - make it too general and it drowns, make it too specific and no one will search for it (Kim 2020).

As presented earlier, hashtags can be used to target audiences within certain language groups. If one adds a hashtag in Finnish, Finnish users will likely be the only ones that find it. If a company hopes to expand the target audience to foreign users, it needs to consider how the new target audience acquires the content that they are seeking.

It is important to note that companies will not benefit from descriptions with a single keyword translated to all possible languages. Users that search for content in their own language are expecting to find content that is available in the same language. If a company adds an additional hashtag such as *#handgemacht* (1.5 million posts) (Instagram 2021b), handmade in German, to a post with no other information available in German, it may attract users to view the content but leave them confused and unable to take any meaningful action. If a language is added in the hopes of reaching new target audiences, an effort should be made to make the entire social media presence accessible and understandable to the targeted audience (Sehl 2019).

On top of hashtags, which can create exposure for the organic content posted, platforms provide paid promotional opportunities. As mentioned earlier, companies can set up business accounts to target their marketing to certain demographics with certain interests in certain geographic locations. Business accounts allow brands to view hashtag impressions to evaluate how well certain keywords are performing. With the number of impressions created by hashtags, the brands can assess the reach they have obtained with the use of said hashtags (Newberry 2020). This co-existence of users and businesses on social media platforms has provided value to all parties and therefore is constantly being improved to better serve the needs and wants of both consumers and advertisers. The businesses advertising and utilizing the targeting and segmentation functions of the platforms are therefore forced to constantly evolve to stay on top of their competition in trends, visibility, and relevance.

3.3 Choosing Where to Promote

The era of social media has made campaigning more accessible for smaller businesses, as the cost of running a campaign can be anything starting from zero. The very core of social media, content creation, is free. Using "regular" content to promote soon to be discontinued products with the help of phrases such as "Get yours before they run out" or for new releases with "Pre-order now to make sure you get it by Valentine's Day" is a common practice and often used as the baseline of marketing within a business' social media presence. Ninety percent of Instagram users follow business accounts (Instagram Business 2019), and two-thirds of users who took part in a survey constructed by Facebook say that Instagram helps them to connect with brands (Ipsos "Project Instagram" 2018, cited by Facebook Business 2019). The statistics prove that users are used to and even seeking promotional material from the fields and brands that they are interested in. For companies this highlights the receptive nature of their followers and encourages organic promotional practices to be implemented in the everyday social media presence.

On top of the baseline of organic marketing, businesses can attempt to increase brand visibility and potentially sales by running social media ad campaigns. Facebook, for example, provides fitting options in regard to the objective of the campaign, whether it be awareness, engagement, or conversions. Carrying out social media campaigns allows the brands to have a dialogue with the consumers and to monitor their response while the campaign is ongoing. Compared to traditional media, the era of digital media highlights the importance of the consumers and the value of their voices, and helps the brands optimize messages to meet the current standards of communication (Weber 2019, 27).

Recent statistics highlighted in the Socialbakers 2020 Q3 Trends Report show the key differences between marketing on Facebook and on Instagram for companies that wish to concentrate and optimize their efforts on a single platform. When comparing branded content from the fifty largest brands on both platforms, content published on Facebook has decreased its share from 70.1% in Q2 to 61.9% in Q3, giving up a share of nearly 10% to the branded content on Instagram over the studied quarter. Even though Facebook still enjoys a much larger user base, Instagram's top brands receive an audience that is 34.7% larger than the comparable Facebook brands, when the two platforms had similarly

sized audiences just a year prior in Q3 2019, Facebook being on top. In addition to having a larger audience, Instagram brands receive 22 times more engagement than their Facebook counterparts, with the gap further expanding from the previous quarter when the engagement rate was 18.1 times higher. (Socialbakers 2020a, 18.)

Of course, ad campaign performance is highly dependent on the target audience, platform, and the communication means, but statistics show the decrease of Facebook popularity in terms of engagement. In a 2018 study by Buffer.com, where the authors analyzed over 43 million posts from the top 21,000 brand accounts on Facebook, the engagement rate has been in constant decline. The study shows that an additional nearly 20,000 posts were made per day at the end of the study period compared to the beginning, oversaturating the platform in corporate content. The scale of the decline in engagement can be difficult to understand, but during the study period (Q1 2017-Q2 2018) the number of engagements decreased from 29 billion to less than 13 billion, and the average interaction count dropped a whopping 65%, from nearly 4,500 interactions down to less than 1,600 interactions. (Peters 2018.)

The current trend of shifting away from Facebook seems to be only accelerating. Users that had previously only been in Facebook are now experimenting with other platforms. Notably, 98.7% of Facebook users state that they use at least one other social media platform in addition to Facebook. Statistics show the percentage of Facebook users also active in other growing social medias: Instagram (74.8%), TikTok (35.8%), and Snapchat (29.6%) (We Are Social 2021a, 96). Facebook continues to lead the market in users and will do so for the foreseeable future, as the platform, with its established position, is still gaining new social media users from emerging markets (We Are Social 2021a, 84).

3.4   Measuring Success

Measuring the results of a campaign or a single piece of published content is, as stated earlier, fairly simple. Nearly everything a user does online leaves a digital footprint that is stored in the databases and indexes of the web. Some of the information is unreachable for the Average Joe, but most of the general statistics can be found by whomever is seeking for that information.

The most useful metrics for brands and businesses online are related to the performance of their marketing and social media efforts. Statistics about follower counts, comments, likes, ad performance, or website traffic are easily accessible and utilizable in determining the overall success of a certain action.
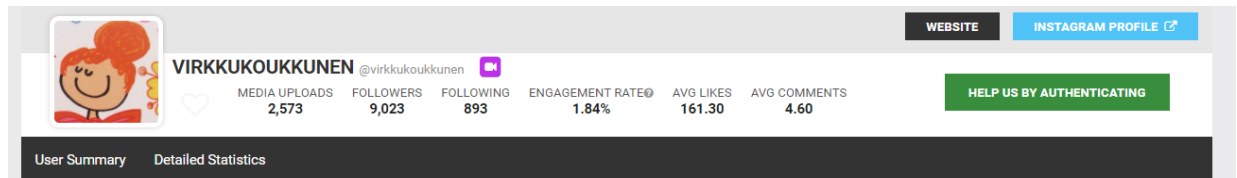
Picture 4. Tracking and following metrics using tools such as SocialBlade is beneficial for determining the current performance of a social media business account, source: SocialBlade 2021a.

Measurements such as the engagement ratio, which displays the likes-to-followers ratio, are a great tool to use when a brand is testing something new - a product, a market, an audience, or even a style. Before the brand goes on to introduce a new narrative, the current social media metrics should already be stored and analyzed because only then, the performance of the new content can be reflected in the previous results. It is important to note that all brands with social media presences have a certain level of baseline communication regardless of what they are or are not publishing. Whether that is mentions or organic posting, it should be considered when determining the actual value of the new content (Powell et al. 2011, 32).

Metrics related to website traffic and search volumes are provided by, for example Google Analytics; a tool that helps website owners measure their success with search engine - related statistics. In addition to measuring simple clicks or audience engagement, more in-depth measurements regarding bounce rate, or percentage of new sessions, for example, can be found and used to provide a better understanding of how consumers are operating online (Bonini 2021).

The world wide web provides countless data sources for brands and businesses to utilize, and it is important to choose the metrics and the data categories that relate to the objectives at hand. Using less relevant metrics to track the success of an action can undermine the potential that gathering data provides in the first place.

3.5   Communication and Presence

The content a business posts on its social media accounts can be described as organic communication. Updates, PSAs, or product displays are published to deliver a message to the followers and the customers of the brand. What social media allows is a two-way conversation between the business and its consumers.

Social media sites such as Instagram, allow businesses to have a personality. The identity of the brand is a combination of the content they publish and the communication they deliver through the platform. Especially for smaller brands this identity is crucial in order to stand out, and communication is a key factor in how the online audience views the entire brand. (West 2020.)

When it comes to internationalization and entering new markets, the first impression that a member of the new audience receives comes from them viewing a promotional or an organic post, an ad, or simply an interaction where the brand is mentioned. When a user publishes a post that discusses or displays a product, whether it be paid or not, the followers of said user will be exposed to that content. Instagram users have grown accustomed to advertisements and product placements within their usual social media feed; therefore, just presenting the content does not directly correlate with the number of users that have actually viewed it. However, according to a Blue Fountain Media survey, of 1000 surveyed social media users in the United States, 48% said that the content of an ad is more important than knowing the brand beforehand, and that they will click on the ad to learn more about it. When it comes to actually generating sales, over 20% of those surveyed said they never buy anything based on a social media ad (Blue Fountain Media 2019). This data shows the common response of the users: they might be intrigued but are still hesitant to act.

Often times users react more positively to a brand that has an active social media presence. According to a Sprout Social survey conducted between Q1 2016 and Q1 2017, 48% of the nearly 300,000 surveyed users stated that brands which respond to the customers online increase their purchase intentions, whereas 46% are more intrigued by promotions and contents (Sprout Social 2017, Section 4). By interacting, communicating deals, and showing the brand's identity, companies appear more genuine and trustworthy, and therefore more desirable by nature.

Communication is key in all of business, but social media platforms make it a tad bit simpler. Brands can receive direct messages or comments under published content and be able to respond immediately after the notification pops up. Fast interactions are a way of creating a more pleasant customer experience, as well as showing that a brand values its customers. Naturally, a pleasant experience and the established connection between the consumer and the brand drive forth a positive brand image, which in the long run can evolve into a customer relationship and even repeated sales (Barnhart 2020).

A Sprout Social Index 2020 Report found that 61% of the surveyed 1000 US social media users rank engagement with the audience as the number one factor that differentiates brands from others (Sprout Social 2020, 43). Brands that are actively and swiftly responding to customers' direct messages or comments under published content show a level of gratitude and respect for the customers interest in the brand.

As a part of successful communication, all of the content is published for the consumers to find with ease. Updates, news, promotions, offers, and so on, can be posted using the same format and location – for example Instagram Stories. When brands use their social media feeds for all types of communication, the followers of the brand will be kept up to date with everything that is going on by simply following one of their social media accounts. In addition to essential communication, brands are able to organically deliver messages that might have otherwise gone unnoticed by the majority of their customers. The organic posts delivering said messages could be an update about a charitable event or that a certain member of the community has won a raffle, anything that the brand desires to communicate to its followers. The fact that the posts end up in the same format and in the same location creates an opportunity for brands to paint a picture of what the brand values are and what they stand for, and still be assured that it will reach the same set of followers as all of the other published organic content.

4   THE GERMAN FASHION AND HANDCRAFTS MARKET

A business environment is a combination of internal and external forces. The internal forces are business-specific and often adjustable. The external forces, however, are the attributes of the market in which a company operates or hopes to operate in. These external forces are discussed further in the coming sub-segments.

The generic German online shopper is price-sensitive, reliant on reviews and ratings, and uses electronic methods or invoices in their payments (Business Finland 2020, 32). Regardless of the ongoing pandemic, the German fashion and apparel market is expected to grow with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4% until 2025 with consumer trends shifting towards sustainability and social responsibility (Business Finland 2020, 42). Because of the desirable attributes and the expected growth, the German market provides Virkkukoukkunen the opportunity to explore internationalization through the means most suitable for them – social media and a web store.

Fashion, under which Virkkukoukkunen falls in the grand scheme of things, is the most engaged industry amongst users in the DACH countries on Instagram. According to Socialbaker's report, the fashion industry receives nearly 25% of all brand interactions on Instagram, followed by E-commerce (23%) and beauty (11%) (Socialbakers 2020b, 6). In addition to engagement rates, in the survey commissioned by Facebook on Instagram usage in 2018, 42% of the surveyed users state that they pursue their interests in fashion and fashion brands by using Instagram. (Ipsos "Project Instagram 2018, cited by Facebook Business 2019.)

Virkkukoukkunen is known in its local community as being the authentic and fun apparel provider staying true to its style for the past nearly three decades. Virkkukoukkunen has experienced success in the local and domestic markets over the years and has now expressed interest in seeing if their products could spark interest in the German market. The new audiences will be sought after through social media, and purchases made through the Virkkukoukkunen -webstore. As Virkkukoukkunen offers a wide variety of different products featuring similar patterns and styles, market testing will be done by using the product line of wooden earrings, which as a category enjoys fairly low entry barriers.

Picture(s) 5 & 6. "Pampula" earrings and "Pampula" fabric (Source: Virkkukoukkunen website 2021).

The following segments discuss the competition and opportunities provided by the German market, as well as the market and consumer trends that should be considered when crafting a market entry plan.

4.1 Market and Consumer Trends in Germany

Germany had the second largest E-commerce share in Europe in 2019. Of all retail, 16% is done online, only second to the United Kingdom's 19% (Statista Research Department 2020). Germany had an internet penetration rate of 93% in 2018, with 82% of the internet users having bought something online within the past year. The German consumer prefers PayPal as the online payment method with the majority (52%) of the online consumers opting for it in 2018. Germany is also ranked first in logistics performance in Europe with 77% of the consumers choosing the local postal services (Deutsche Post DHL) as the preferred delivery method. (European Ecommerce Report 2019, 40.)

Thomas Berger, the chief E-commerce, and marketing officer of Asendia, an international delivery company, described flexible delivery methods as "the essential success factor for retailers and e-tailers". Berger, who was a part of a panel discussing the results found by RetailX in their E-commerce World Review, noted the effects Covid-19 has had on E-commerce in general, and how companies had to focus on delivering their goods to new customer segments that might prefer different methods than their usual target groups. Berger highlighted the importance of knowing one's products when delivering goods

across borders. Having the product information on hand speeds up the process of delivery, should there be issues or concerns regarding the parcel. Following Berger's point, another panelist, Eloise Shuttleworth, the senior director of customer success at Iterable, a cross-channel marketing platform, mentioned the importance of an effective return policy on the overall customer experience. Shuttleworth pointed out the increased need for returns, as more and more consumers are ordering goods online. (Berger & Shuttleworth 2021.)

According to a 2020 PostNord survey, 56% of German consumers had returned a good they ordered online during the past year. In the same study, 42% of German consumers stated that they are willing to pay more for a sustainable delivery method. Both of the statistics mentioned are the highest in Europe and must be accounted for when entering and selling goods to the German market. (PostNord 2020, 57.)

German consumers rely heavily on search engines when doing brand research. 70.5% of German consumers state that they use search engines as a primary source of information, compared to only 26.2% of the consumers opting to do primary research on social networks (We Are Social 2021b, 85). The global averages for search engines (53.1%) and social networks (44.8%) as primary sources of information and brand research differ greatly from the German habits (We Are Social 2021a, 267). Taking these attributes into consideration will help businesses to understand and cater to the mindset of their German target market, and how they discover new products and information.

Recently some influencers and brands have been called out and taken to court for improper labeling of advertisements, as Germany holds strict regulations regarding ad disclosure. Because of the inconsistent approach by the German courts, many influencers have started labeling every post as an ad regardless of the contents. For brands that provide their influencers with the complete scripts to paste into the description, it is important to note that the post should start with at least either *werbung* or *anzeige*, which refer to "advertising" and "advertisement" in German. (Feldman, Breen, Hardinghaus & Kimmich 2020.)

Regarding the social media market size in Germany, there were 66 million Germans in 2020 that actively used social media, which is an increase of 7.7 million users (13.2%) from the previous year (We Are Social 2021b, 17-18). As of February 2021, there were over 28 million Instagram users in Germany, nearly a third of whom were between the ages of 25 and 34 (Tankovska 2021b).

4.2   Online Competition in Germany

Social media use is on the rise in Germany. With a year-on-year growth of nearly 8 million users, the social media platforms are attracting new users. The German social media user has six social media accounts on average, and while this might sound like a lot, it is amongst the lowest in the world. The global average sits at 8.4 accounts per user, and the leading averages go up to 11.4 accounts in India. Nevertheless, the German market is well equipped for social media use, as overall internet penetration and mobile connection speeds are aligned, if not exceeding, the standards set by the rest of the world (We Are Social 2021a, 28, 40, 42, 95).

Competition in the German social media market is by default as tough as it is anywhere else. Globally established businesses have integrated Instagram in their daily routines as social media grows in popularity. According to the State of Social 2019 report by Buffer.com, 73% of the marketers say that social media has been either very effective or somewhat effective for their business. It is safe to say that the numbers have only increased since and made the social media platforms even more competitive (Buffer.com 2019).

Online consumers find products in different ways in relation to their interests and online behavior. Word-of-mouth information from influencers, spotting ads, or typing queries into search engines are just some of the ways an everyday user might come across something that interests them. The first two mentioned are tightly connected with the interests of the consumers – they already follow the influencers or have made the searches that result in the ads showing up.

Typing generic keywords into search engines, for example *handgemachte schmuck* (German for handmade jewelry), fills the result pages with large online marketplaces rather than individual businesses. The top results show the most relevant hits according to the searches, and therefore push the smaller and/or newer companies further down the list. Well established marketplaces, such as Amazon or eBay, display a large number of hits for the products that are searched for. However, while providing the consumer with more options, the marketplaces limit the value of individual brands. Even though the

marketplaces provide a platform for independent crafters and small businesses, it is easy to get swamped in the competition.

Online competition is not limited to direct business competition but rather content competition, as the search engine result pages display a variety of content per each query (Odden 2012, 86). By using the exemplary keywords, *"handmade earrings"*, which Virkkukoukkunen could utilize in its website optimization efforts, the competing content ranges from the major marketplaces mentioned before to search engine panels with maps, ads, and FAQs.

For the purpose of representing the competition Virkkukoukkunen could be facing on the German market on Instagram, the paper will showcase selected competitors with related business activities. The brands are chosen by the author based on the overlapping aspects that would classify them as a competitor for Virkkukoukkunen: business size, social media presence, or product style.

@jackelina.shop – 13,300 followers (Instagram 2021c). This brand offers handmade jewelry with a low-end price tag. The products mainly feature earrings made from wood or glass, and display patterns and designs of varying colors. The prices range from 5 to 10 euros per pair, and the product descriptions and the entire webpage are only available in German. The Instagram account for the brand has a high number of inactive followers, as the engagement rate is only 0.18% (Socialblade 2021b). The account is almost exclusively used for displaying products. This brand can be found from the second page of Google with the keyword *"handgemachte ohrringe"* (German for handmade earrings). The brand would compete with Virkkukoukkunen based on similarities in the products and the size of the business.

@fejnjewelry – 4000 followers (Instagram 2021d). Offering jewelry made from recycled metals, this brand concentrates on minimalistic fine pieces. The prices range from 20 to 70 euros, and mainly all of the products towards the higher end of the spectrum are made out of gold. The brand's Instagram page is similar to the one described earlier, focusing on product displays but having a higher level of communication in the form of descriptions. The website is available in both German and English, and the Instagram page is entirely in English, receiving an engagement rate of 2.07% (Socialblade 2021c). Both of the company sites, the webpage and Instagram page, feel professional, and the new brand, which started its operations in 2019, seems to still be in the midst of growth and establishing itself. This brand was found on the first page on a Google search with

the keyword *eco-friendly ohrringe* (English-German mix for eco-friendly earrings). The brand would compete with Virkkukoukkunen based on the similarities in social media presence and product category.

@bavarian_couture – 81,500 followers (Instagram 2021e). This brand offers fashion that is, according to the website, made of organic cotton, printed in Bayern, and shipped using plastic-free packaging via a green delivery provided by DHL. The products feature only a few print options at the moment, and both the website and Instagram account are in German. The brand has a well-established moral mission of operation - being green. The values are shown across the website with transparent information of the manufacturing process, and the brand takes pride in it. The products include headwear, small items like phone cases and enamel mugs, as well as different types of shirts. The hoodies cost 80 euros and the T-shirts around 40 euros, making the price relatively premium. The engagement rate of the Instagram page is 2.58% (Socialblade 2021d). The brand would compete with Virkkukoukkunen based on the use of a personalized moral mission in marketing and the use of colorful prints in the pieces, especially in the headbands.

Virkkukoukkunen offers products that are difficult to find from other manufacturers making competitive analysis challenging. Assessing different potential competitors online, however, can be fairly simple. Following a set of assessment criteria to evaluate the competition that shows up in search engines when using relevant keywords can help brands like Virkkukoukkunen settle into a niche market and observe what the local brands are doing that could be implemented in its own online presence.

4.3   Opportunities Provided by the German Market

Virkkukoukkunen has the distinctive brand identity needed to differentiate itself from the rest of the crowd. The entry barrier to a market like the German market might be difficult to overcome, but when entered successfully, it holds great potential.

Colorful clothes and apparel represent freedom of choice. Every individual can choose whatever they feel like wearing and embrace their true self. With social media, these individuals are able to use the visual aspects to amplify the message - "This is who I am!" Takes on relevant topics such as female empowerment and gender equality are often

shared online, and rightfully so. A company like Virkkukoukkunen, with a focus on catering the female audience with a strong female CEO and employees, is a perfect fit for the global political climate that is shaping around these important topics.

Virkkukoukkunen is locally known for its inspiring and empowering slogans, such as *"Mie en ookkaa mikää normipirkko"* (translated to "I am not some Average Jane"), which deliver a feel-good and fun, yet important message. Even though Virkkukoukkunen is not entering the market with said slogans on the forefront, the identity of the entire company is built around the same principles. The colorful Instagram updates displaying products and patterns deliver the same message as the slogans - "This is who I am!"

Picture(s) 7 & 8. The mentioned slogan in both Finnish (wallet) and English (postcard), source: Virkkukoukkunen webstore 2021

Approaching internationalization with the wooden earring catalogue, the ease of displaying the product, delivering the message, and distributing the products creates a relatively low risk approach for Virkkukoukkunen. For example, the content currently displayed in the Instagram Stories can be understood globally, as it rarely contains any written communication. With an additional "Swipe up" -link that directs the followers to the webpage, this same material could be used for both domestic and foreign customers. Although shipping will increase the products' prices, the products themselves are fairly small, light, and durable. Sending the products in a parcel to mainland Europe is both relatively quick, taking only a business week, and affordable, adding approximately 30% to a pair of earrings (Posti 2021). Keeping in mind that the earrings cost around 30 to 35 euros per pair with at least an additional 20% for postage on domestic deliveries as well, the increase in postage fees paid by the customer is not overly drastic. Moreover, if a customer is ordering multiple items at once, the postage per product decreases, as the small size and light weight often allow delivery within a single parcel.

Virkkukoukkunen enjoys the position of already having a strong online presence and identity. With added language options and foreign audience targeting the company will be able to gain visibility on the German market. The issues to overcome include the crowded online market and the popularity of certain online marketplaces that make raising awareness trickier for independent brands. However, with a clear objective, means, and measures Virkkukoukkunen can find success abroad. The brand's style is the representation of a universal mindset.

5 ENTERING THE GERMAN MARKET THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

In this chapter, the author will provide the case company a comprehendible exemplary plan for internationalization utilizing the methods and approaches, and considering the aspects introduced in the previous chapters. Virkkukoukkunen will be able to utilize the following plan when entering a desired foreign market, as well as to adjust, modify, and build on the topics, approaches, and suggestions introduced by the author.

5.1 Objectives

The main objective for Virkkukoukkunen is to gain visibility in foreign markets, namely in Germany, and to observe the market's reaction upon exposure to its products. Virkkukoukkunen will be working with limited resources and continuing domestic operations as usual during the internationalization endeavors. The market's response and the data regarding the success of the market entry will be measured by using a set of relevant metrics that can be grouped into two categories: interest and traffic. Specific metrics for both categories will be presented further on in the paper.

The secondary objectives are to: (1) provide a document that Virkkukoukkunen is able to reference whenever internationalization related topics are in play, and (2) to provide a realistic overview of what actions, resources, and efforts internationalization could require from the company. Table 1 represents the key business objectives, the corresponding social media goals, and the suggested measurements to determine success.

Table 1. Business and social media objectives and related metrics for Virkkukoukkunen, based on the model used by Newberry & LePage (2020).

Business Objective	Social Media Goal	Measurement
Internationalize the brand (primary)	Create awareness, gain a following in Germany	Followers gained, engagement, shares, and mentions
Monitor the response to the international exposure (secondary)	Interact with customers, enhance customer experience	Website traffic, communication, customer feedback and reviews
Determine the resources needed for the future (secondary)	Planning and executing an Instagram campaign on the German market	Return on Investment, follower and engagement growth/decline, new/existing audience response

5.2 Target Audiences

Virkkukoukkunen provides distinctive and colorful clothing and apparel, which reflects the mindset of the customers. Wooden earrings, because of their size and price, provide an easy introduction for the Virkkukoukkunen -brand. Target market potential consumers will at first glance be exposed to the style and identity of the brand. Virkkukoukkunen keeps its social media account contents consistent in terms of visualization and personalization, which in return will help the brand's image and authenticity, as well as help the consumers to familiarize with the brand and what it stands for (Weber 2019, 149).

The main audience for Virkkukoukkunen's products is females over the age of forty. Because of the colorful and eye-catching design the brand displays, the products are often used as leisurewear during weekends, holidays, or days off, rather than in the hectic everyday life. Using a concept by Angus Jenkins developed in the mid-1990s, a buyer persona describes the generic prospect and buyer characteristics for a certain product or brand (Odden 2012, 66). Buyer personas are created to help brands build the image of the most common attributes, interests, and behaviors of their target consumers. For Virkkukoukkunen the two major buyer personas created by the author are "The Gifter" and "The User". By creating a persona to represent the mindset of both of the major target audiences, Virkkukoukkunen will be able to optimize marketing efforts accordingly. Figure 1 showcases the mindsets of the two major buyer personas and how they could be used to adjust the market entry of Virkkukoukkunen.
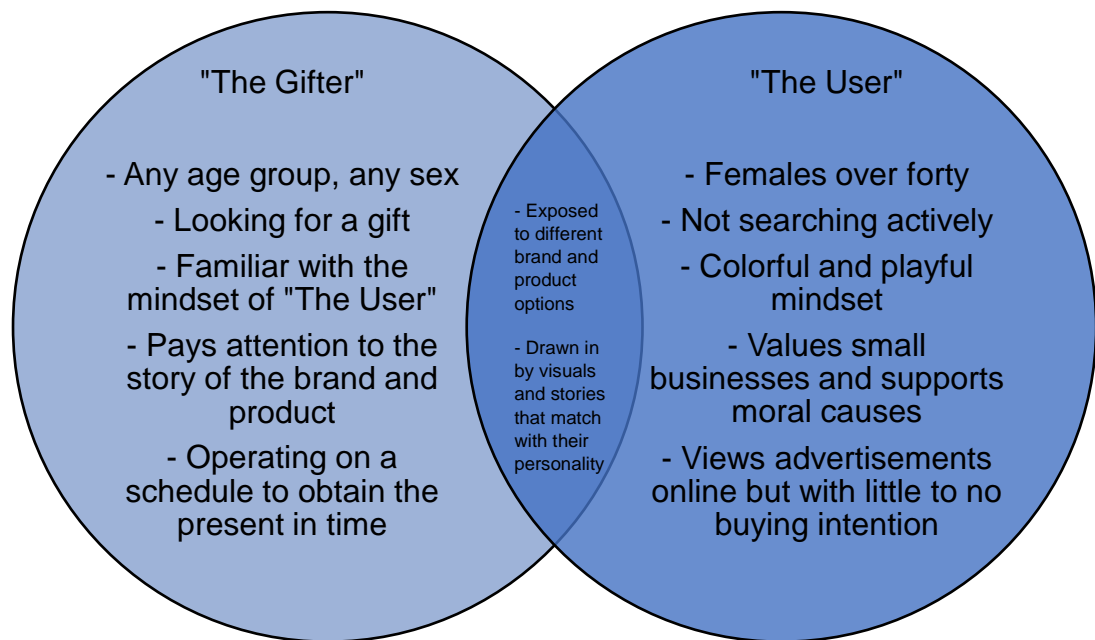

Figure 1. Representation of the two buyer personas and the overlap in their mindsets and advertisement responses.

"The Users" are often females over forty. Mothers, grandmothers, partners, or friends who do not take themselves too seriously. They enjoy colorful and fun products and are not afraid to show their true nature and confidence in their day-to-day life. They are somewhat skeptical about online marketing, and mostly use social media platforms to connect and communicate with their loved ones. Because of Covid-19, they have been forced to learn more about the possibilities that E-commerce provides and are likely to

continue using their new-found skills after the pandemic (UNCTAD 2020, 22, 34). "The Users" are not necessarily actively searching for products to purchase, but with content that resonates with their values, brands can grab their attention.

"The Gifter" is a combination of the end user's relatives and loved ones – a son, a daughter, a partner, or a friend. They know "The User" well and can identify the correlation in style and message between the Virkkukoukkunen brand and "The User". "The Gifter" concentrates their buying around major dates such as Mother's Day, Christmas, or birthdays, and is actively searching for potential gifts a few weeks prior to stated dates. "The Gifter" uses search engines and social media to find products that might fit their requirements and are bound to find promotional posts and advertisements along the way. Therefore, Virkkukoukkunen should consider direct communication towards "The Gifters" in their market entry strategy and content publishing.

"The Users" are statistically not as reachable in social media as the younger consumers. The advertising audience that marketers can reach on social media in Germany, divided into age groups, show an indication of why a gift-worthy brand such as Virkkukoukkunen should consider targeting a younger audience in addition to their end-users. Of the 25–34-year-olds, the audience reach is 13.7% (female) and 14.8% (male). When compared to the age group of 35-44 (9.6% male and female) or the age group of 45-54 (6.9% female, 6.7% male), the advertising reach is nearly cut in half (We Are Social 2021b, 45). With a 17.6% year-on-year increase in fashion E-commerce from 2019 to 2020, and a relatively steady E-commerce activity rate among different age groups, between 75% and 85%, the German market shows potential in the social media marketing front (We Are Social 2021b, 74, 76).

Virkkukoukkunen should, therefore, craft an online marketing campaign that highlights the products' value as gifts, as well as the overall brand image and identity. In comparison to its current promotional content on social media, this new focus audience would require more storytelling to display the identity of the brand, and more focus on displaying and introducing the products as potential gifts to be considered by potential buyers.

5.3 Tactics

In the following sub-segments, three major online marketing tactics will be discussed from the point of view of Virkkukoukkunen – How the company could utilize different aspects of online marketing and what the described approaches could yield result-wise with the help of the buyer personas.

5.3.1 Paid Advertisements in Social Media

As discussed earlier, social media platforms are aiming to create the best possible environment for businesses and consumers to operate in. This co-existence provides marketers and companies the opportunity to target specific audiences that fill certain requirements regarding the demographic, geographic, or interest-related factors.

Facebook, Inc. is the parent company for multiple social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Oculus VR, as well as the messaging platforms Messenger and Whatsapp. Facebook offers cross-platform paid marketing options for businesses that wish to attract audiences on multiple locations with one campaign. For the purpose of this thesis, the paid advertising strategy will be assessed from the point of view of Virkkukoukkunen, and the channels that they actively use – Facebook and Instagram.

Most of the paid advertisements are equipped with calls-to-action, either to purchase the good straight away or to visit the website to learn more about the brand. Virkkukoukkunen utilizes these options in its domestic marketing effectively but would be required to modify the message and delivery of the ads according to the new target audiences, "The Users" and "The Gifters". While the social media ad spending increased 9.2% from 2019 to 2020 indicating that the advertisers are gaining confidence in the potential of the German social media market, search engines were still the dominating brand discovery and brand research channel for the consumers (We Are Social 2021b, 84, 85, 87). To attract the new audiences, Virkkukoukkunen must create informative and eye-catching advertisements that are not pushing direct sales but rather brand awareness. Making an intriguing first impression and accessing the minds of the potential customers with vibrant visuals and powerful brand messages will increase the odds of Virkkukoukkunen being researched by the consumer either immediately or at some point in the future. By grabbing

the attention of both or either of the buyer personas, Virkkukoukkunen as a brand will enter the initial consideration set of the persona. The gained attention can result in brand awareness, brand knowledge, and ultimately sales.

The German consumer, who is more likely to rely on search engines in brand research than the global average, proves the importance of incorporating search engine marketing to the online marketing strategy. After being exposed to an ad, the natural response is either to ignore it or to act upon it. If a consumer decides to act, the process very rarely skips all the steps of the consumer buying cycle and goes straight to a purchase and immediate brand loyalty. The initial introduction of a brand or a product triggers a need to know more. With reviews and product comparisons available in a few clicks, consumers are often researching the brands before forming their final opinions or advancing in their buying cycle (Shahid, Hussain & Azafar 2017, 4). The consumer's desire to know provides an opportunity for small brands like Virkkukoukkunen to respond.

Analyzing the advertising campaign contents from the point of view of the two established buyer personas before running it allows the brand to identify potential questions that might arise or additional information that might be needed. Questions such as "Where are the products made?", "How long will it take to get the product?", or "Do they offer other similar products?" might be presented by an intrigued ad viewer after the initial exposure. Responding to these questions not yet asked can be done beforehand by making sure that the company website provides all of the information that could be searched for by a future consumer in a language and format that they will respond to (Odden 2012, 9).

Entering the market with the objective of raising brand awareness and gaining additional first-hand data on how the social media environment operates in Germany will help Virkkukoukkunen to adjust advertisements and promotional material to better cater to the established buyer personas. Virkkukoukkunen can observe the responses received during and after the initial campaign and base future actions on the results, whether it be pursuing the German market more aggressively or researching another market for potential.

5.3.2 Organic Content Marketing

One of Virkkukoukkunen's greatest strengths and differentiating factors among the competition is the brand's authenticity. Virkkukoukkunen has managed to build a reputation within the local community, and the company continuously creates and displays content that matches the follower's pre-existing expectations and images of the company. Translating the reputation to a foreign market and an audience with no existing knowledge about the brand will require efforts that are not present in the currently established content strategy.

Organic marketing refers to all social media communication, which is more often than not authentic and two-way. Organic marketing is used by Virkkukoukkunen to communicate updates and valuable information about the business, its products, or the community – content that is overall important for the brand and its followers. The value brought in by the organic content will be appreciated by the established buyer personas, as both of the audiences are drawn in by the identity and the story of a brand. Organic content provides a base line of content that can be expected to be published every once in a while, alongside the paid and promotional content. With organic content, Virkkukoukkunen can authentically tell their brand's story, values, and missions to drive engagement with the new target audience abroad. Establishing a relationship with authentic and dialogue-style content will help the new audience feel more strongly about the brand, which in turn establishes a certain trust and deeper levels of engagement between Virkkukoukkunen and new followers (Weber 2019, 56).

The format of organic content should reflect, once again, the interests of the buyer personas. Globally the social, political, and economical environment has changed, and in general, the loud voices of the active consumers turn to businesses to take initiative. The increased awareness of the consumers and need for social justice has driven businesses to act more responsibly, and those that do are way ahead in the race (Weber 2019, 39). Millennials and young adults, who are also a part of "The Gifter" -persona, are the most likely group to push companies towards doing good and acting against injustice (Peretz 2017). For Virkkukoukkunen, a brand with eco-friendly products, a strong female CEO and workforce, and an authentic, easy-to-love identity, the opportunities present themselves. Forcing or faking any of the before-mentioned aspects could lead to a

devastating backlash, but in the case of Virkkukoukkunen, all of these aspects are well and truly a reality.

Utilizing and highlighting the strong nature and image of the brand in the organic content during the initial campaign could help Virkkukoukkunen create a powerful first impression among their new target audience and encourage them to engage with the published contents and with other audience members, or to further research the topic and the brand. Introducing the brand, its products, and its values bit by bit can incentivize new audience members to follow the story over time and to ultimately establish trust and a connection with the brand.

5.3.3 Utilizing Influencer Marketing

Virkkukoukkunen has attempted influencer marketing with a domestic influencer, a blogger, whose style and reach matched Virkkukoukkunen's needs. However, the endorsement results did not turn out satisfactory due to unknown reasons. Despite the fact that the influencer displayed the products as discussed and Virkkukoukkunen handed out a 20% discount code to go with it, the endorsement did not bear fruit, as the code was only used by two customers. (CEO Kärkäs-Sund 2020).

Even if the previous experience of influencer marketing fell somewhat flat, new influencers emerge constantly. Influencers are popping up left, right, and center, with interests and expertise that will meet the requirements of any brand looking for endorsement and social media visibility. The difficulties arise when a brand is trying to find the right fit for them. "Fashion and Beauty" is by far the largest category globally in which influencers operate in on Instagram. Over 19% of all influencers are a part of this group, and the next closest category is "Fitness and Yoga" with less than a 9% share (Statista Research Department 2021).

Virkkukoukkunen could use influencer marketing as a part of its internationalization efforts by collaborating with a few small influencers from the region in an attempt to create additional exposure and visibility for the brand. "The Gifter" persona partly represents the younger generation as it includes the children, the grandchildren, the nieces, and the nephews of "The User". This segment of the audience uses social media

more actively and therefore is more likely follow an influencer. If Virkkukoukkunen utilizes these influencers successfully, the brand messages will be delivered directly to the members of "The Gifter" -persona and be displayed in a more meaningful and personal way compared to a regular paid advertisement.

The ideal influencer could for example be a fashion enthusiast with between 10,000 and 20,000 followers and an interest in eco-friendliness and gender equality, or a micro-influencer with 5,000 followers and a specific interest in handmade jewelry or colorful clothing and lifestyle. Finding these influencers, however, is another ball game. With an ocean of potential influencers on the platform, finding the right fit can be extremely time consuming.

For the purpose of this paper, three Instagram influencers of varying sizes and interests will be briefly introduced to help Virkkukoukkunen assess the different aspects to consider when choosing influencers for its needs.

@juli.bmm – 6,600 followers (Instagram 2021f). The content is colorful, and the overall Instagram page is welcoming. The creator mainly concentrates on showing their life and lifestyle the way a regular user would. The engagement rate of 16.62% (Socialblade 2021e) proves close connectedness between the creator and their audience. The creator posts on a weekly level and therefore does not overload the feeds of their followers. They do not post promotional content often, and it seems that they have just started accepting collaborations. The two promoted posts that can be found have received less engagement than the organic posts, with a little under 600 likes each, but it still sets the engagement rate above 9%.

@alexavonheyden – 25,200 followers (Instagram 2021g). The creator is verified by Instagram and posts multiple times a day on Stories or in the main feed. Family, the outdoors, and design are the main focus of most of the posted content. The engagement rate is 1.57% (Socialblade 2021f), which is a little less than the 2.1% average engagement rate suggested for influencers with 10,000 to 100,000 followers (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). The creator is a blogger and hosts a podcast, and they create quite a bit of promotional content. They have amassed a decent audience, but their followers seem to be less influenced by them than the followers of the aforementioned smaller influencer.

@ferntastisch – 108,000 followers (Instagram 2021h). The content is high-quality, colorful, and vibrant, and the creator has a personal travel and lifestyle blog. The creator

posts nearly exclusively ads and promotions, but the content itself is personal and showcases the lifestyle and travels of the creator. The engagement rate is 2.33% (Socialblade 2021g), which is a respectable rate for a creator with such large following. The creator's Instagram page is filled with promotions, and they post new ones almost daily. However, the posts seem to receive a positive response from their audience, which presents a level of potential for collaboration.

The exemplary influencers above are described and assessed by the author and therefore portray only an individual's impression which may or may not align with the impressions of others. It is also important to note that with influencer marketing, the audiences might be scattered across the globe. With social media's reach, the influencers will often times attract foreign followers in addition to domestic ones, which will make geographical segmentation and product delivery more difficult from the point of view of the brands. The compensations that these mentioned influencers would take for a promotional post are not considered or studied and can vary greatly between different influencers based on their follower count, relevance, expertise, or interest.

5.4 Adding Global Marketing to the Existing Domestic Marketing

Virkkukoukkunen has established a strong social media presence within the local community, and the company publishes quality visual content consistently. Adding internationalization efforts in the equation will require some adjustments to the social media marketing strategy and an additional focus on the foreign audience. As of now, Virkkukoukkunen operates fully in Finnish. To keep the sought-after foreign consumers interested, descriptions, photos, and stories need to be modified to be understood by all consumers. A common practice for businesses is to include multiple languages in the description of the posts, Finnish and English, for example. For existing customers this does not affect the experience, because the same message is still being delivered, but for foreign audiences it provides the possibility to be a part of the community.

The consumers will expect to be served in the language the communication is posted in. Therefore, brands are required to have an employee with sufficient language skills to take care of the customer relations. Even if the German social media market is mainly in

German, the population is well equipped with sufficient English skills. Germany is ranked eighth on the 2020 English Proficiency Index, in which Finland holds the third spot (EF 2021). The advanced level of language skills in both Finland and Germany allow business in English, making it possible for small businesses to connect and operate with the target market effectively and directly.

5.4.1 Scheduling

Scheduling the content posting is crucial when the aim is to create quality content that drives brand awareness. Posting at a steady pace and in an engaging way will help the new audiences gain brand knowledge and form opinions, which in turn will create conversations and interactions both with the brand and with other consumers (Simpson 2019).

Virkkukoukkunen should evaluate the different styles of content that are used in the internationalization campaign. These include paid advertisements, organic and promotional content in both the main feed and Stories, and potentially content posted by influencers. The content should be published daily to keep the new followers engaged and interested in the brand, and the communication alongside the visuals should reflect the values, story, and identity of Virkkukoukkunen. As mentioned in the previous chapter, telling the story of the brand will bring the new audiences up to date with existing customers on knowing what Virkkukoukkunen offers and stands for.

Organic marketing can be used as an effective way to tell a story. Posting short introductory videos to Stories or adding a carousel post to the main feed highlighting the most important values of the brand can help new audiences relate and learn more about Virkkukoukkunen. Together with targeted ads popping up and catching the eyes of potential consumers, the organic posts that appear as the newest uploads in the account will encourage the already interested potential consumers to consume more information and gain more knowledge of the brand. If they happen to show their interest in the form of a follow, a like, or a comment, their interest will likely carry over, and the user will be engaged again the next day when the new "chapter" of organic posts is published by Virkkukoukkunen.

If influencers are introduced into the campaign, the initial awareness and interest creation will be increased by promotional posts. The effectiveness and engagement rate are undoubtedly higher with influencers compared to regular ads, but there is no real way to predict the effectiveness of a specific brand being introduced by an individual influencer. However, the potential to attract and reach a wider audience of genuinely interested consumers might be convincing enough for a small brand like Virkkukoukkunen, if the costs remain fairly in line with the established budget.

If the campaign were to start in the beginning of April 2021, a sufficient timeframe for the campaign could be from April to June. Mother's Day in Germany is on the 9th of May, making it the perfect occasion to leverage in the initial introduction. Concentrating the organic posting mainly on establishing the brand's identity for the foreign audience together with a more direct call-to-action in paid advertising and/or influencer marketing, highlighting the products as potential gifts could be a successful combination of both introduction and driving sales. Table 2 provides an exemplary schedule for a marketing campaign that could be used to enter a new market. The table features the author's suggestions for the type and style of the organic and paid content, as well as considerations that should be taken into account at various stages of the campaign.

Table 2. Exemplary schedule including contents, goals, and considerations

	Organic	Paid	Other Considerations
April	Introducing the brand with daily communication (Knowledge, Trust, Awareness)	Introducing earrings as great gifts (Awareness, Consideration, Sales)	Utilizing influencers (Extended reach, Awareness), Actively engage with new audiences
May	Storytelling until Mother's Day, follow with traditional organic communication (In line with current)	Introducing other product lines and general style of brand (Familiarity, Sales)	Customer service and communication before and after sales (Reliability, Customer experience)
June	Returning back to regular content with occasional promotions (Baseline communication)	Focus on seasonal products and new releases (Knowledge, Driving additional sales)	Product returns (Customer service and experience) and feedback (Improvement, Adjustments)

5.4.2 Required Resources

The internationalization process can require a fair bit of time and money. Therefore, Virkkukoukkunen has to balance the costs with the expected outcomes before attempting to enter the German market.

First and foremost, Virkkukoukkunen would need to plan how to translate all of their web store and social media content into English or German, which will play a crucial part in the customer experience. Even if the products were to attract foreign consumers, without translations they would be unable to advance without knowing Finnish.

After the brand's online presence has been successfully made approachable for the foreign audiences, Virkkukoukkunen must appoint an employee or employees to be responsible for the planning, executing, and tracking of the internationalization campaign. These employees must be equipped with sufficient language, social media, and marketing skills to assure all of the aspects from the content to communication are covered. The process would most likely occupy the said employee(s) full-time for at least the beginning of the campaigning period, which might be an issue for a small business operating with a limited workforce.

Having employees running the campaign exclusively will help the brand stay active in social media when the internationalization efforts are at the very beginning. Providing content and communication for the new audience consistently throughout the campaign will help Virkkukoukkunen establish its image, values, and brand in English.

The current core content, the photos and videos related to communication and product displays are fit for any desired market, reducing the resources needed for content creation. The visuals are appealing, and the messages are often times light-hearted and laid-back. Even though most of the content in Stories includes very little text, the contents on the main feed are filled with meaningful descriptions. These descriptions are a part of Virkkukoukkunen's identity and authenticity, and therefore an important mean to connect with the audience. To deliver the same feel and to establish a similar relationship with the foreign market audience in another language in addition to Finnish will require significantly more time, and therefore, resources.

Most of all, the internationalization process will require a genuine desire to reach a foreign market. This statement includes prioritizing the efforts related to the German market, as

well as actively pursuing new ways to optimize and utilize the social media. Monitoring follower counts, website traffic, and responses by the audience will provide valuable insight into how accurately the reality corresponds with the expectations set beforehand. Swift responses and actions are possible and even expected by the target audience in social media. Therefore, this should drive Virkkukoukkunen to deliver relevant information, communication, and content in a timely manner. Dedicating time and other resources to accomplish the objective and persisting with possible setbacks will be key for Virkkukoukkunen to succeed.

6   EVALUATING THE OUTCOMES

Social media and the online landscape allow Virkkukoukkunen to monitor their success during and after a marketing initiative. Even if the main objective is not to drive direct sales, countless pieces of useful data will be available to indicate whether an action is something the brand should try to replicate or capitalize on in the future or not. Identifying the key performance indicators (KPIs) according to the objectives, in this case brand awareness and market response, will provide the brand the possibility to track progress against the desired outcomes set beforehand.

6.1   Metrics

Having brand awareness and market response as the main objectives for the initial market exposure requires KPIs that provide data on how well the marketing efforts are performing in the two broad categories set for the campaign: interest and traffic.

Throughout the campaign Virkkukoukkunen can observe how the market is responding to the marketing efforts in both paid and organic content. The most important KPIs to

measure traffic are naturally website visits. On top of measuring the sheer volume of unique visitors, additional metrics should be considered to get a better understanding of how the consumers are operating. Average time spent on the page or number of pages viewed per visitor are great metrics to showcase how much time the visitors are willing to invest to find out more about the brand, which can be an indicator for both traffic and consumer interest (Abbamonte 2019).

Determining whether the traffic is created by the ongoing marketing efforts or not can be difficult when a brand is established within its market (Powell et al. 2011, 32). For Virkkukoukkunen, a brand with no initial traffic coming from the German market, tracking the traffic created achieved by the campaign is fairly straight forward. Most, if not all, traffic can be accounted for the ongoing marketing efforts, shifting the focus into from where the internet the traffic is coming.

Virkkukoukkunen will be able to determine the shares of both paid and organic traffic as well as the source of the traffic with the help of Google Analytics. Studying where the traffic is coming from will provide valuable insight on how the visitors are finding the webpage. As this particular campaign is the first in the new market, most of the traffic will likely be initially from social media. Because the brand has just been introduced to the market, the lack of brand awareness in the region will most likely result in lower organic search traffic. As the brand is gaining more visibility throughout the campaign, more organic traffic can be expected. The search terms through which the users are finding the webpage can then be used to create a completely new set of KPIs for future use regarding, for example, competitive analysis or search engine optimization.

The other major category, interest, can be measured with the help of social media KPIs. Virkkukoukkunen will be able to monitor the response the new audience members have for their brand after publishing each piece of campaign content. Keeping in mind that the Instagram account of Virkkukoukkunen has an existing follower base, not all engagement can be counted as the success of the campaign. Geographically targeted paid promotions naturally provide relevant statistics to showcase the clicks and views of ads displayed only for the new audience, but the organic content is published for the entire follower base. The engagement metrics, follows, likes, comments, and mentions, can come from either the existing audience or the new audience. Therefore, it is crucial for Virkkukoukkunen to be weary of the growth generated with other content on a regular basis.

According to Socialblade, Virkkukoukkunen has received 150 new followers within the last 30 days (Socialblade 2021a). This number can be used to reflect on the performance of major marketing efforts, as with this baseline growth of five new followers per day, Virkkukoukkunen can determine whether the efforts regarding brand awareness and interest are paying off. Comments and mentions are a simpler yet equally important metric to monitor. The new audience members are likely to engage in the comment sections or in private messages using English or German, as opposed to the existing followers, who are using Finnish.

Following the new audiences' communication regarding the brand will allow Virkkukoukkunen to address questions, concerns, or issues brought up by the consumers. This will help the brand to connect to its audience, as well as to adjust the communication to better match the expectations and interests of the new audiences.

Checking the KPIs regarding both objectives on a daily basis will create a picture of the performance from the beginning all the way through to the end of the campaign. Different content can yield different responses, and taking a note on the better performing aspects will be an investment in the future. Knowing what kind of content the audience responds to and how can shape the way the next campaign, ad, or organic post should be presented. Further market- and consumer behavior knowledge will also allow Virkkukoukkunen to improve the market entry strategy when considering other potential target market regions.

6.2   Determining Success

One of the most common ways to determine the success of an action is to calculate the return on investment (ROI). Calculating ROI has three main purposes: improving the marketing investment decisions, diagnosing and improving the response a certain marketing channel is receiving, and communicating the results of an action for the rest of the company to see (Powell 2012, 208).

After a campaign is completed, the real costs can be calculated and reflected on the performance. As the main objective for this particular campaign is to create awareness and drive traffic, the expected results are not monetary, and therefore cannot be measured with a traditional ROI formula.

Considering the outcomes of the campaign regarding visibility, follower counts, and traffic gained, Virkkukoukkunen can reflect on the results in light of the set expectations. As the internationalization efforts are the first time for the brand to actively seek exposure on a foreign market, the expectations can be difficult to realistically set. However, based on the current advertising results from the domestic market, Virkkukoukkunen has an idea of what advertising in social media can achieve profit- and exposure-wise. The internationalization process will be run simultaneously with existing domestic marketing. The results of the joint efforts, internationalization campaign and domestic marketing can be reflected on the past results to isolate the approximate effect of the internationalization efforts alone.

For Virkkukoukkunen, calculating and projecting the effectiveness of exposure-related objectives will ultimately depend on the marketing budget invested into the Instagram advertisements and the potential influencers. To get an understanding of how the Instagram ads are expected to perform with a given budget, reflecting the success of past marketing campaigns with Unfair from the point of view of exposure will help Virkkukoukkunen estimate the number of target market audience members similar ads could reach on another market.

If Virkkukoukkunen decides to utilize influencers, a solid measure to indicate exposure are the followers each influencer has. Most of the followers will be exposed to the promotional content the creator is publishing, but the more relevant metric to keep in mind is the engagement their follower bases have previously shown towards promotional material. Virkkukoukkunen can observe the price of collaboration in regards to the expected response from the influencers follower base – if the influencer receives extremely low engagement rates for promotional posts, a major investment is likely to underperform. If, however, the content creator manages to reach their regular engagement rate with both personal and promotional content, it is likely that they have a higher influence over their follower base and therefore are more beneficial to use in a campaign such as this.

Monitoring the exposure regarding follower counts, likes, comments, and views daily will be beneficial for Virkkukoukkunen in the long run. After the campaign is completed, the data can be compiled into a report showcasing the complete results of the marketing efforts, and knowing the actual cost of them can help to determine whether the results are satisfactory.

6.3   Adjusting the Strategy

Keeping the narrative and approach consistent throughout the campaign will be the key to successfully display the brand and inform the new audience. However, Virkkukoukkunen can make minor adjustments to their communication or content style based on the response and feedback the new audience is giving. Providing additional information because the audience seems to have questions about a certain thing or concentrating more on carousel posts than regular photos are slight tweaks that Virkkukoukkunen will be able to adjust on the fly to better cater to the new audience's preferences.

By collecting all the relevant data after the campaign, Virkkukoukkunen will understand how the overall efforts have performed. This data can be used to highlight the aspects that proved to be valuable for the campaign, as well as the ones that left room for improvement or require re-evaluation. Listening to the consumers and analyzing their responses will increase both the performance and relevance of the Virkkukoukkunen brand. Knowing more about the target market audience and aiming to provide content that resonates with them will drive Virkkukoukkunen towards making better and more relevant marketing strategies in the future, ultimately resulting in a more profitable and desirable response from the audience (Weber 2019, 43).

7   CONCLUSIONS

Virkkukoukkunen has a unique place in the hearts of the locals in Imatra, and the company hopes to reach the same results with foreign audiences. The company has created a brand that not only stands out, but also accurately displays the mindset of audiences through the brand's style. The genuinely warm and welcoming presence Virkkukoukkunen has established across all of the platforms it operates and communicates in has and will continue to put the brand ahead of the competition.

The future, as it stands during the spring of 2021, is uncertain. Covid-19 has forced businesses to either adapt or close down for over a year now, and no one can tell for sure when the pandemic will be over, or how society will operate when the restrictions are lifted again. E-commerce has proven itself as a viable option for purchasing goods even for the consumers who were previously hesitant to use it, but only time will tell if these consumers continue to utilize the world wide web in the post-pandemic world.

Virkkukoukkunen has managed to stay in business with the help of its web store, social media presence, and online marketing efforts. Virkkukoukkunen has performed well online and therefore should capitalize on the success by expanding and exposing its brand to international consumers.

The author suggests that Virkkukoukkunen would utilize the brand's unique aspects, regarding not only the products, but also the company's values and presence in its internationalization efforts. Table 3 highlights the key objectives that should be pursued by Virkkukoukkunen during the internationalization process. In addition, the table provides the author's view of how those objectives could be tackled and reached successfully with the help of a specific set of actions related to social media marketing, presence, and communication.

Table 3. Key actions according to the author and how to utilize them

WHAT	HOW
Create brand awareness, interest, and knowledge	Delivering a compelling story highlighting the values and virtues of the brand
Get noticed, gain and retain the interest of the new audience, and be talked about	Using consistent and intriguing visuals and language in product promotions and brand communication
Form relationships, create trust and loyalty, and set the scene for further endeavors	Actively engaging with the consumers over social media platforms in public and one-on-one, track success

Virkkukoukkunen should consider what it would take to simultaneously run major internationalization efforts and existing domestic business, how it could be done in reality, and whether or not the risks are worth taking at this very moment. The document

provides Virkkukoukkunen with methods that are going to only increase in value as the globe continues to get more connected and involved through social media and the internet. Utilizing these methods and embedding them into the company culture and operations will take time and adjustments along the way. However, only by taking the first step can the journey towards internationalization start.

Introducing a brand to a foreign market with no existing brand awareness will provide invaluable information on how the brand is perceived through the communication efforts taken. Monitoring the responses of the new audience will help Virkkukoukkunen improve the approach, content, and communication, which will lead to better performance and more desirable outcomes in the long run.

The approaches discussed in this document are in relation to utilizing Instagram as the main channel for internationalization efforts, and Virkkukoukkunen should consider if the company could further utilize other social media platforms to enforce the reach and the value of their messages. Viral trend marketing on TikTok, YouTube collaborations, or even utilizing Snapchat in personalized communication with the consumers are all valid approaches and opportunities for a visual brand such as Virkkukoukkunen. The platforms that pique the interest of Virkkukoukkunen should be studied and evaluated in a similar manner as Instagram is in this document in order to unveil the true potential they possess.

Local consumers are well aware of what Virkkukoukkunen is all about, and the main missions should be to invite and include the like-minded foreign individuals into the community and to allow them to enjoy the brand and products of Virkkukoukkunen. After all, the mindset is global – why should the brand not be?

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