

Bachelor's thesis

Degree programme in International Business

2022

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HOW TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT RATE ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

– Case study: Laurea University of Applied
Sciences

BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

TURKU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Degree programme in International Business

2022 | 49 pages

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HOW TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT RATE ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

- Case study: Laurea University of Applied Sciences

This thesis researches how to increase engagement rate on Facebook and Instagram from the perspective of case company Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Social media marketing has been experiencing continuous growth and with the increase in its popularity, companies have begun to discover more reliable metrics and ways to analyse the success of their social media strategy. As a result, engagement has become a valued metric and concept that also Laurea aims to improve to strengthen their brand image and connection with future, current and previous students.

The research approach for this paper was qualitative. Eight social media marketing professionals from Finnish marketing agencies were interviewed as a primary source. Other data, such as journals, Laurea's social media insights and literature were utilised as a secondary source.

The study covers theoretical information about social media marketing, customer journey and engagement. Insights about the use and benefits of social media marketing and increasing engagement are provided. In addition, three customer journey frameworks are presented and reflected from Laurea's point of view. The most suitable model is recommended to implement in Laurea's marketing strategy to improve both customer journey and engagement on social media.

To conclude the paper, it is stated that short video content, interaction, real and relevant topics for students as well as student advocacy should be emphasized in the Facebook and Instagram strategy of Laurea to succeed in increasing engagement rate. Google's See-Think-Do-Care framework was applied to Laurea to propose ideas and actions on how to improve customer journey on Facebook and Instagram. Short and fun video content, two-way communication as well as interactive and gamified content are main crucial elements to achieve loyalty and advocacy.

KEYWORDS:

Social media, social media marketing, engagement rate, customer engagement, customer journey

Maria Rautio

MITEN KASVATTA SITOUTUNEISUUSASTETTA FACEBOOKISSA JA INSTAGRAMISSA?

- Case-tutkimus: Laurea ammattikorkeakoulu

Tässä opinnäytetyössä selvitetään, miten sitoutumisastetta voidaan lisätä Facebookissa ja Instagramissa Laurea ammattikorkeakoulun näkökulmasta. Sosiaalisen median markkinointi on kasvanut jatkuvasti, ja sen suosion kasvaessa tarjolla on luotettavampia mittareita ja tapoja analysoida sosiaalisen median strategian onnistumista. Tämän seurauksena sitoutumisesta on tullut arvostettu mittari ja konsepti, jonka avulla myös Laurea pyrkii parantamaan brändi-imagoaan ja yhteyttään tuleviin, nykyisiin ja aiempiin opiskelijoihin.

Opinnäytetyön tutkimus toteutettiin laadullista menetelmää hyödyntäen. Tutkimukseen haastateltiin kahdeksaa sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin ammattilaista suomalaisista markkinointitoimistoista. Muina lähteinä käytettiin artikkeleita, Laurean sosiaalisen median analytiikkaa ja kirjallisuutta.

Tutkimus sisältää teoreettista tietoa sosiaalisen median markkinoinnista, asiakaspolusta ja sitoutumisesta. Opinnäytetyössä esitellään sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin käyttöä ja hyötyjä sekä sitoutumisasteen kasvattamista. Lisäksi esitellään kolme asiakaspolkumallia ja käydään ne läpi Laurean näkökulmasta. Sopivinta asiakaspolkumallia ehdotetaan Laurean markkinointistrategiaan asiakaspolun ja sitoutuneisuuden parantamiseksi sosiaalisessa mediassa.

Lopuksi tuodaan esiin, että Laurean Facebook- ja Instagram -markkinointistrategiassa tulisi käyttää enemmän lyhyitä videosisältöjä, vuorovaikutuksellista viestintää sekä aitoja ja merkityksellisiä aiheita opiskelijoille. Lisäksi, opiskelijoiden lojaliteettia kasvattamalla voidaan lisätä sitoutumisastetta. Googlen See-Think-Do-Care -asiakaspolkumallin mukaisesti ehdotetaan ideoita ja toimia Laurean asiakaspolun parantamiseksi Facebookissa ja Instagramissa. Lyhyt ja hauska videosisältö, vuorovaikutuksellinen viestintä sekä interaktiivinen ja pelillinen sisältö ovat keskeisiä tekijöitä lojaliteetin saavuttamiseksi.

ASIASANAT:

Sosiaalinen media, sosiaalisen median markkinointi, sitoutuneisuusaste, sitoutuneisuus, asiakaspolku

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OR SYMBOLS

SEO Search Engine Optimisation (Oxford Languages)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation and background information

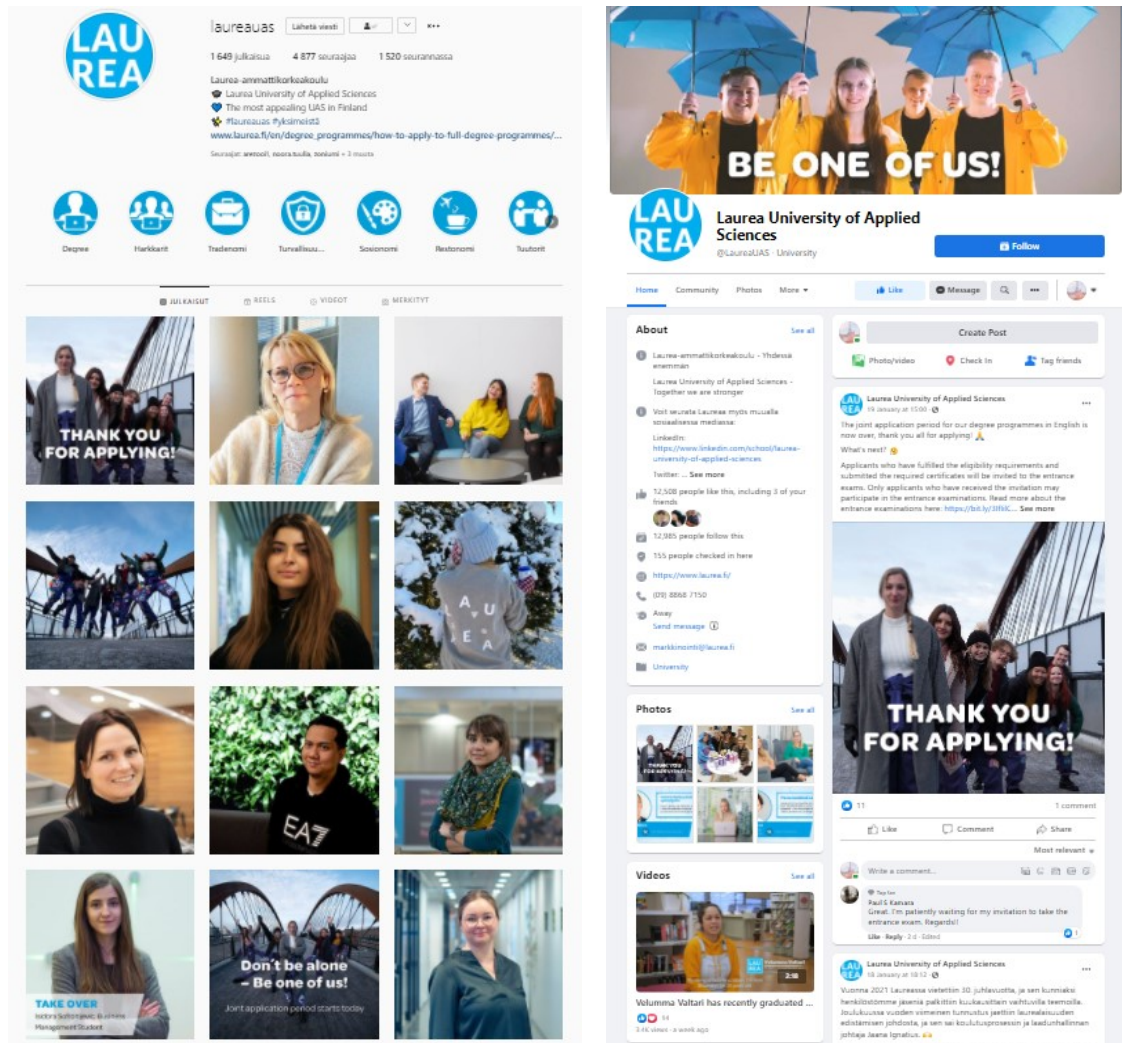
Since social media marketing has strongly established as a crucial part of marketing these days, the importance of knowing how to use it properly and efficiently is increasingly important. Social media marketing is constantly changing, which forces professionals of the industry to continuously develop their skills and knowledge in it and keep up with new trends. In recent years engagement on social media has caused a lot of interest as a way to measure loyalty. Therefore, it has become a high potential metric that many businesses track and analyse in social media marketing nowadays. This is due to its nature of giving a deeper and more reliable look at the success of social media strategy while also boosting the credibility and desirability of a brand.

Therefore, the recent popularity together with personal interest in the topic were the base of motivation for this thesis. The author completed a practical training at Laurea University of Applied Sciences as a social media marketing trainee in spring 2021, which is when the idea for the topic started developing. One of Laurea's objectives for social media marketing was increasing engagement. It is seen as a valuable metric that strengthens Laurea's brand image and connection with future, current and previous students. Both the brand image and connection with students positively affect loyalty and advocacy. Since Laurea is present on all major social media channels, the topic was narrowed down to two most relevant ones for the university of applied sciences, Facebook and Instagram.

1.2 Introduction to case company

The case company of this thesis, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, was established in 1991, being one of the first universities of applied sciences to receive an experimental licence in Finland. It operated with the name Vantaa University of Applied Sciences until 1997 when the name was changed to Espoo-Vantaa University of Applied Sciences due to the expansion of the licence and the addition to the operating area of 20 educational institutions in Uusimaa. Laurea was granted a permanent licence in 2000, and finally, the name was changed to its present-day name, Laurea University of Applied Sciences,

in 2001. Nowadays Laurea has six campuses in Hyvinkää, Leppävaara, Lohja, Otaniemi, Porvoo and Tikkurila. The fields of study offered are Business Management, Social Services, Health Care and Hospitality Management. In total, there are 7 800 students, over 600 employees and more than 30 000 alumni in the Laurea community. (Laurea University of Applied Sciences, 2022)



Picture 1. Screenshot of Laurea's Instagram and Facebook pages. (Instagram, 2022; Facebook, 2022)

Laurea is active on all major social media platforms. For this paper, only Facebook and Instagram are researched and analysed. On Facebook, Laurea's page has 12 557 likes (Facebook, 2022) and in addition, Laurea recently created a private Facebook group for students and other community members, which now has over 1 173 members. On Instagram, their profile has over 5 011 followers (Instagram, 2022). The content on both platforms focuses on Laurea as a university of applied sciences, including posts about

e.g. degree programmes, course offerings, exchanges, students and alumni as well as different events and projects. The tone of voice is casual, positive and inclusive while also aiming to keep the atmosphere and feeling fun, especially on Instagram. There is usually one post per day on Instagram combined with Instagram Story content. On Facebook, on the other hand, the typical amount of posts is between one and two. During peak times, such as the joint application period, the posting schedule tends to be busier, and on the contrary, during quieter times, such as the summer holiday season, the schedule may be less frequent. The main objective is to keep the channels active and relevant. All content is published by the marketing team working in-house at Laurea.

Laurea has two main customer personas as their target market that are crucial to take into account in Laurea's Facebook and Instagram strategy and when aiming to increase engagement. One is formed by students who begin their Bachelor's studies after upper secondary or vocational school with only some work experience, usually being between 18-25 years old. The second one consists of more mature students, who are 30+ years old and tend to have, on average, around ten years of work experience. Since the customer personas have different interests and motivations due to their age, life situation and experiences, the information and content they want and like to see differs from each other, making it important to provide content in the right balance for both target markets.

1.3 Research questions and objectives

The principal research question of this paper is divided into the following two:

- How to increase engagement rate on Facebook and Instagram?
- What steps can Laurea take to improve engagement?

Additional subquestions of this paper are:

- How to improve the customer journey on Facebook and Instagram?
- What metrics should a company use to calculate, analyse and evaluate the success of Facebook and Instagram posts?

The objective is to provide the case company information on what they can do to improve their engagement on Facebook and Instagram while also strengthening the knowledge of the author and any reader of this paper.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

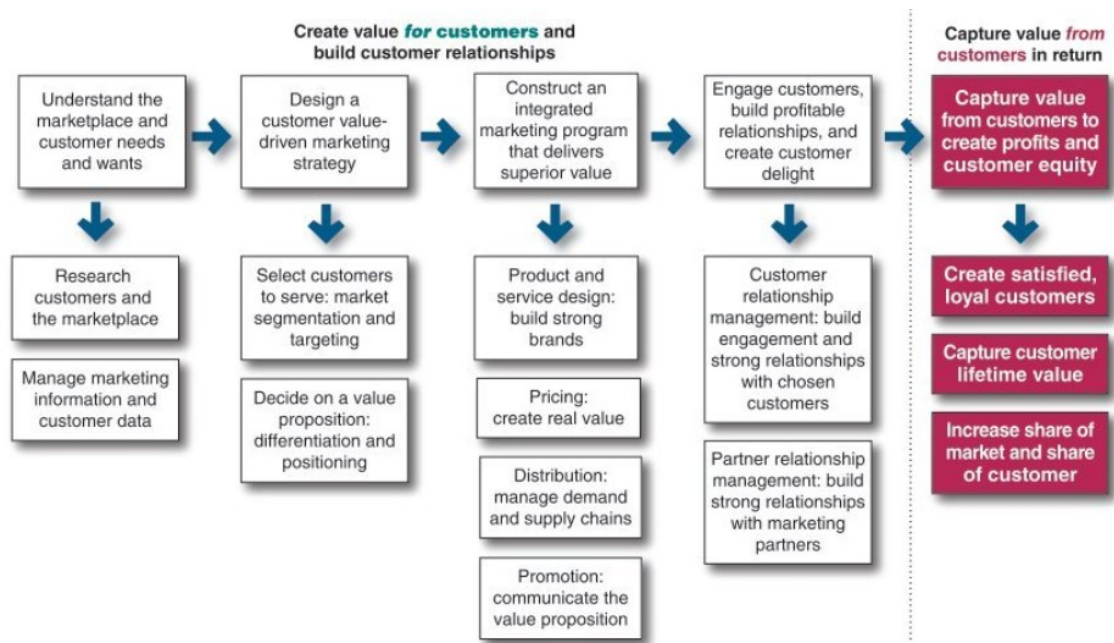
2.1 Definition of marketing

Marketing is a mixture of strategy and tactic, which nowadays also guides most business decisions and solutions (Bergström and Leppänen, 2021). Therefore, it is a crucial part in any business and could be defined as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (American Marketing Association, 2022). The modern perspective of marketing emphasizes providing value for all parties and interaction between stakeholders (Bergström and Leppänen, 2021). The generalised goal is to “attract new customers by promising superior value and to keep and grow current customers by delivering value and satisfaction” (Kotler et al., 2021, p.24). According to management guru Peter Drucker, “The aim of marketing is to make selling unnecessary” (Kotler et al., 2021, p.25).

Selling and advertising are simply part of a set of marketing tools, the marketing mix, that work aims to engage customers, satisfy customer needs and build customer relationship. The most traditional model businesses may follow to succeed in it is the marketing mix of Four P's; product, price, promotion and place. With the rise of social media marketing a fifth P, participation, has gained significance in the model. With the use of social media, customers can be engaged and involved easier because social media channels provide the possibility for a two-way communication. According to Tuten and Solomon, “social media marketing is the utilization of social media technologies, channels and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders”. (Tuten and Solomon, 2018, p.18)

2.2 The marketing process

To be successful in marketing, it is essential to understand how the marketing process works. It is fundamental for customer journey planning and excellent social media marketing.



Picture 2. The Marketing Process (Kotler et al., 2021, p.48)

Kotler's Marketing Process model provides five simple steps to create and capture customer value (Picture 2). The process is divided into two parts, from which steps 1-4 create value for customers and build customer relationships, and step 5 captures value from customers in return. The whole marketing process begins with understanding the marketplace and customer needs and wants. Businesses should aim to fully understand the following five core concepts during the first stage:

1. Needs, wants and demands
2. Market offerings (products, services and experiences)
3. Value and satisfaction
4. Exchanges and relationships
5. Markets

The second step is to design a customer value-driven marketing strategy and plan, which is a natural step after the customers and marketplace have been analysed. Two essential questions at this stage are what customers will the business serve, so in other words who forms the target market, and how can the business serve these customers best, which becomes the value proposition. The third step of preparing an integrated marketing plan and program consists of how the plan and program will deliver the intended value to the target market. It puts the strategy into action using the chosen marketing mix tools. The fourth step focuses on building engagement and managing customer relationships.

A typical goal for this step is building loyal, long-term relationships with customers and other partners. This can be achieved by, for instance, using customer engagement marketing in the strategy. According to Kotler et al. (2021, p.37), it means “making the brand a meaningful part of consumers’ conversations and lives by fostering direct and continuous customer involvement in shaping brand conversations, experiences, and community”. The fifth step is about what customers give in return for the value they received, and it is visible in the form of things, such as sales, market share, advocacy and profits. (Kotler et al., 2021, p.48-49)

To clarify, students are seen as the customers of Laurea. The marketing process for Laurea would begin with profoundly understanding why people want to study and educate themselves and consequently complete a degree in order to fulfil the desire. Next, there should be a strong emphasis on ensuring that degree offering is showcased in the most appealing way possible and that various opportunities available for students are being introduced to differentiate them from competitors. In step three, it is crucial for Laurea to find the most suitable social media channels to serve its target market and to create and implement a strategic plan to reach objectives. After having a clear plan, the goal of the fourth step is to publish the right kind of content at the correct time of the customer journey to activate students. The last step is mainly about achieving advocacy, which is the key to increasing engagement. Active and engaged students tend to participate both on social media and in real life to spread their good experiences by sharing and commenting on them.

2.3 Social media

Social media can be defined as “tools for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques – such as web-based, mobile technologies – to turn communication into interactive dialogue” (Shawky et al., 2019, p.567). It allows users to create content and interact with other users or businesses. Due to the popularity of social media and the interactive nature of it, it has become a much more powerful platform to build intimate relationships with customers compared to traditional media. (Shawky et al., 2019, p.569)



Table 1. Money spent in digital marketing vs social media marketing 2018-2020 (Kantar, 2019; 2020; 2021)

Digital marketing, and in specific social media marketing, is one of the most powerful marketing methods nowadays, making the topic highly relevant. As seen on Table 1, in 2020 a total of 399,7 million euros was used for digital marketing in Finland, with a 3,4% growth from 2019. It is 35,5% of the total amount spent in marketing in general, which makes it the largest group compared to other forms of marketing. 150,2 million euros were used in social media marketing only, which is 13,3% of the total, experiencing an 8,4% growth from 2019. Social media marketing had the most considerable increase compared to other methods. (Kantar, 2021) In addition, a Meltwater report (2022) about the state of social media in 2022 states that “78% of organisations are planning to either increase their social media budget or spend the same amount as in 2021”. Therefore, it seems that the popularity and usage of social media marketing will continue increasing in the future. Due to the significant growth and the rise of importance of engagement on social media, it seemed like a valuable and relevant topic.

Perhaps one of the biggest strengths of social media is that it gives a platform for two-way communication between people, which companies can use to their advantage to build closer relationships with consumers. “Through social media, companies can generate excitement for the brand and communicate with their target market in a channel that the market likes, while also generating data and providing effective customer

service, all of which lead to strong brand attachments” (Bal et al., 2015, p.190). This can be especially useful in the higher education industry, since the primary target market tends to be young digital natives who are used to social media being part of their everyday lives. Laurea has acknowledged the potential of social media in marketing by constantly working on ways to ensure a strong presence and active communication between the university of applied sciences and students. Since interns are a fundamental part of Laurea’s marketing team each semester, they manage to keep their views and approach on social media fresh and relatable for students.

2.4 Facebook and Instagram

Facebook is a social media platform where users can share text posts, photos, videos or links to external content, such as blog posts, articles or news. It was first founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg for fellow Harvard University students. It began growing and becoming available for other universities in the United States, and in 2006 it was launched to the public. (GCFGlobal, 2022) As seen on Table 2, both revenue and profit of Facebook have been steadily increasing during the past decade. Years 2013 and 2014 were the critical turning points when both figures began experiencing even more significant growth, which led to the revenue being \$85.9 billion and the profit being \$32.6 billion in 2020. (Iqbal, 2021)

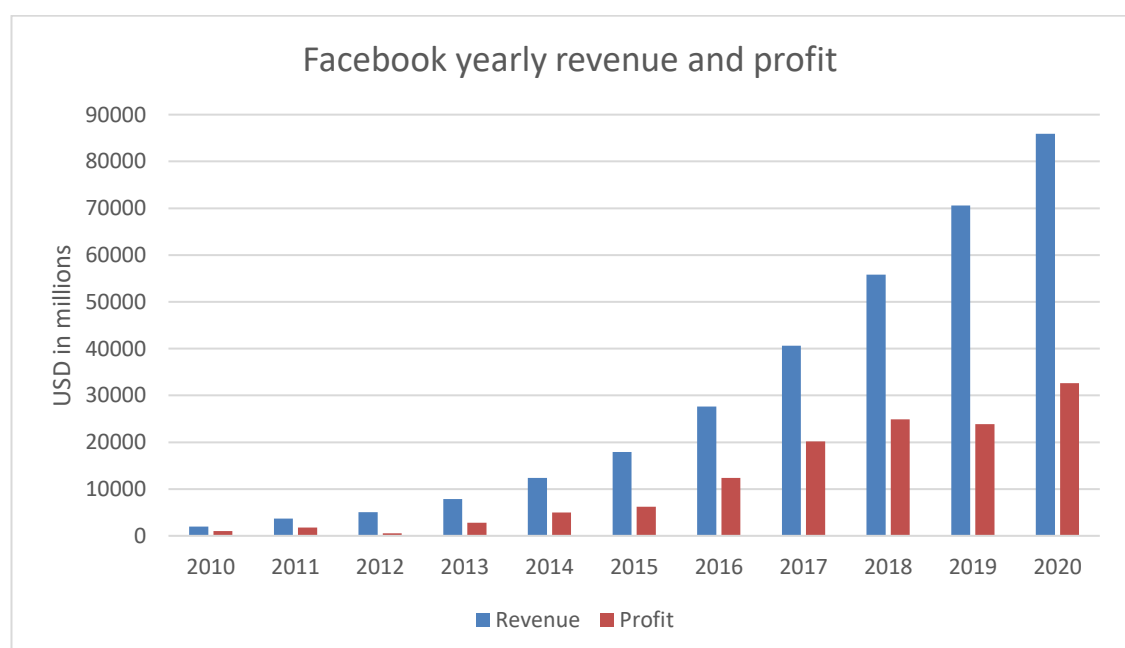


Table 2. Facebook yearly revenue and profit 2010-2020. (Iqbal, 2021)

Facebook has a large variety of features, which can all be utilised to activate users and encourage people to a two-way communication. Therefore, there is potential to eventually increase engagement with the help of some or all of the features. The following are the most relevant to know and understand for this paper:

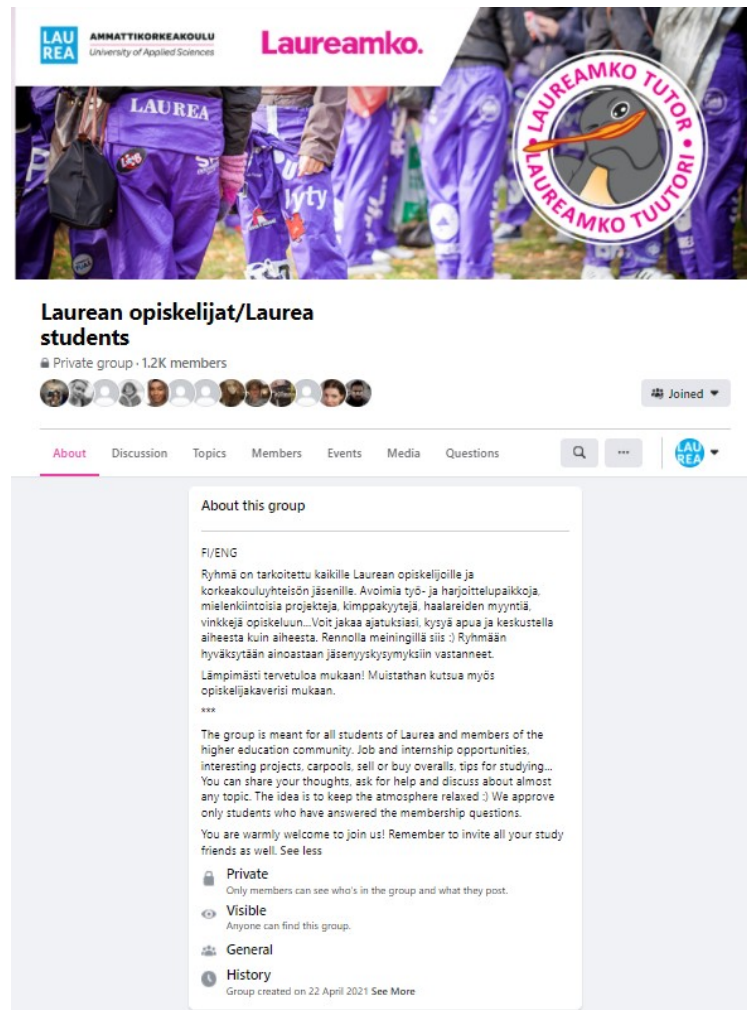
- Facebook Stories. Short images or videos that are visible to a user's friends or a page's followers for 24 hours. Fully customisable with a variety of features, including polls, music, feelings and animations.
- Facebook Reactions. Reactions are an extension to the Like button. They can be utilised either by hovering over the Like button on desktop or by holding down the Like button on mobile and then by proceeding to tap on the desired Reaction button. See Picture 3 for an example of how reactions were used in one Facebook post of Laurea.



Picture 3. An example of the use of reactions on a Facebook post by Laurea. (Facebook, 2022)

- Groups. A group can be public or private and it forms a community of users. The idea for creating a group can be for similar interests or other unitive factors.

Admins and members of groups can start conversations together and share different things. Laurea created a private Facebook group for their students in spring 2021 (see Picture 4).



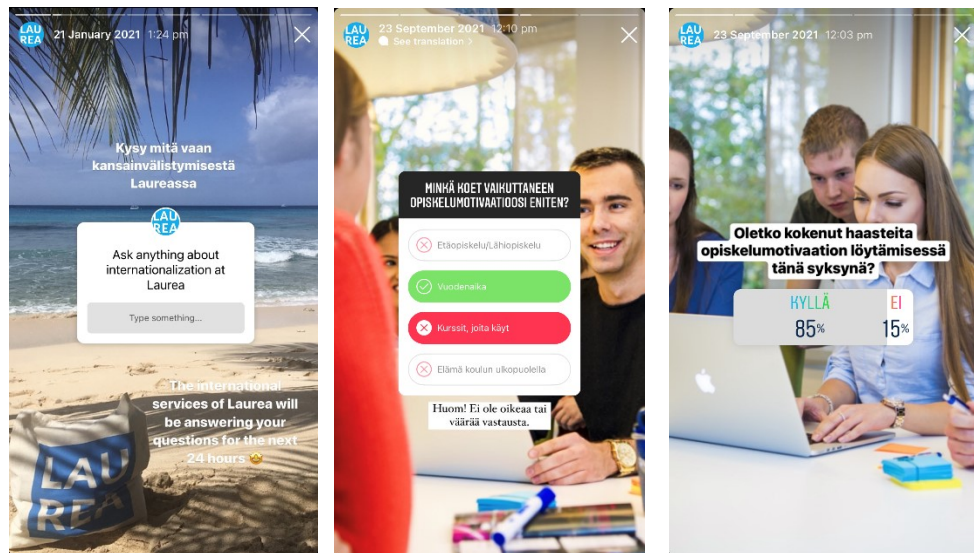
Picture 4. Laurea's private Facebook group for students. (Facebook, 2022)

(Chi, 2021)

Instagram is a photo and video sharing platform founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 and acquired by Facebook for \$1.0 billion in 2012. It is primarily designed to be a mobile-based application, but a limited desktop version is also available for users. (Reiff, 2021) Recently the app has been experiencing changes and new plans for the near future as in June 2021 Adam Mosseri, the Head of Instagram, announced that the company is no longer only a photo-sharing application and that they will be focusing on video and entertainment due to the enormous success of its competitors, such as TikTok and Youtube (Clark, 2021). According to a Kurio (2022) report, short video content is a

growing trend in social media. Instagram offers a variety of different features as well, which are relevant in increasing engagement, such as the following:

- Instagram Stories. Customisable photos or videos that are visible for 24 hours only. Can be added to Highlights on the profile if the user wishes to keep them available to public after that. Stories can be customised with different features, such as filters, polls, quizzes, question boxes, songs and links (see Picture 5).



Picture 5. Examples of Laureia utilising question boxes, quizzes and polls on Instagram Stories. (Instagram, 2022)

- Instagram Live. A livestream video format, which can afterwards be saved on IGTV for anyone to watch it later. Viewers can send comments and questions during lives.
- Instagram Reels. Short videos of up to 30 seconds, which can be edited and customised with songs, texts and other special effects.

(Antonelli, 2020)

Facebook and Instagram naturally share many of the features because they are part of the same company. Another aspect both sites have in common is that they use algorithms, which “construct individual psychological profiles and produce patterns of behaviour” (White and Boatwright, 2020). Algorithms then use the information collected to organise posts in a way that users stay on the social media platforms as long as possible, showing the most relevant and engaging content first. (White and Boatwright, 2020) While the exact details about each platform’s algorithms are not public information,

it is known that “algorithms and organic reach control the messages that actors receive based on their interests and their network’s interests” (Shawky et al., 2020, p.572). Algorithms also use previous behaviour on social media to determine what a user might see on their news feed or explore page. In addition, users tend to interact with a company with lower hesitation if, for instance, their friends have engaged with them beforehand. (Shawky et al., 2020, p.572) The objective for a business is to discover the best way to combine and target the strategic use of each feature on both platforms and, as a consequence, maximise exposure with the help of algorithms. Higher exposure is connected to increasing engagement.

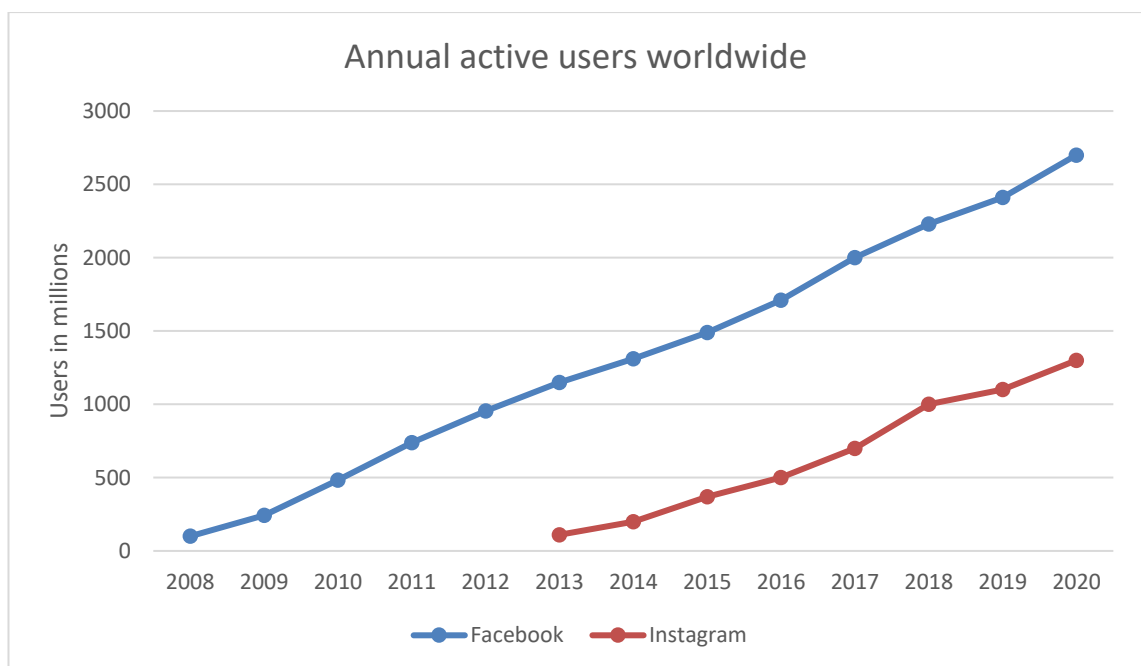


Table 3. Annual active users worldwide. (Iqbal, 2021a; 2021b)

The annual active users on both Facebook and Instagram have been steadily increasing during the past years, which makes both channels attractive platforms for marketing (see Table 3). In 2020, Facebook had 2.7 billion users and Instagram had 1.3 billion users worldwide.

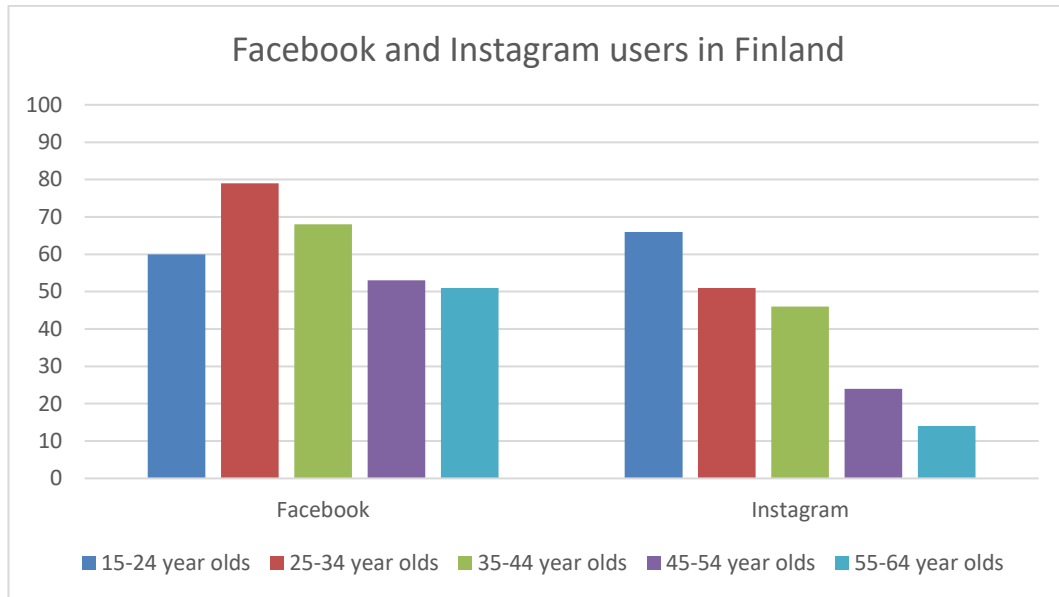


Table 4. Facebook and Instagram users in Finland. (Niemi, 2019)

The topic of this paper is narrowed down to Facebook and Instagram because the two channels are the most significant ones for Laurea, considering the target market. The target market consists of both young individuals beginning their studies after upper secondary school or vocational school and slightly more mature students who are aiming to pursue new challenges in their careers or simply develop their skills further. In 2019, Facebook had 2,7 million users and Instagram had 1,6 million users in Finland. This made them the third and fourth most used social media platforms after Whatsapp and Youtube. When looking at demographics (see Table 4), Instagram was the most popular among 15 to 24-year-old Finns. Facebook, on the other hand, had the most users in the age group of 25 to 34-year-olds. (Niemi, 2019) As mentioned previously, Laurea has two main customer personas, young adults and mature students, which match the national demographics on both platforms. This is also clearly visible in the content strategy meaning that, e.g. style of communication, content type and visual elements are chosen based on the customer personas as well as company brand and values.

The two main competitors of Laurea are Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, which both operate in the Uusimaa region. To better understand the starting point of this paper, two similar time periods were chosen and used to compare the Facebook and Instagram statistics extracted from Meltwater (2022) of Laurea, Haaga-Helia and Metropolia. It is vital to take into account that both Haaga-Helia and Metropolia have more students, which can also affect both Facebook

and Instagram statistics giving them some advantage. The time periods chosen for the reports were April 1st to May 31st 2021, and October 1st to November 30th 2021. The reason behind choosing those exact time periods was that there was no joint application period during neither of the times, which could affect the results due to a higher emphasis on paid advertising campaigns and an increased interest in the universities' social media channels.

Pages

Review aggregate activity for pages and the posts published during the selected time period.

Page	Fans ▼	Net Fan Growth	Published Posts	Public Engagements	Public Engagements per Post	% Fan Growth
Your Pages Average	12,142.00	107.00	80.00	2,060.00	25.75	0.89%
Competitor Pages Average	15,737.00	50.00	57.00	741.00	13.00	0.32%
1 Haaga-Helia Uni...	18,088	37	72	794	11.03	0.20%
2 Metropolia Amm...	13,386	63	42	688	16.38	0.47%
3 Laurea Univers...	12,142	107	80	2,060	25.75	0.89%

Picture 6. Facebook competitor report April 1-May 31 (Meltwater, 2022)

Pages

Review aggregate activity for pages and the posts published during the selected time period.

Page	Fans ▼	Net Fan Growth	Published Posts	Public Engagements	Public Engagements per Post	% Fan Growth
Your Pages Average	12,370.00	5.00	68.00	2,066.00	30.38	0.04%
Competitor Pages Average	16,135.00	74.00	59.50	913.00	15.34	0.46%
1 Haaga-Helia Uni...	18,377	61	50	996	19.92	0.33%
2 Metropolia Amm...	13,893	87	69	830	12.03	0.63%
3 Laurea Univers...	12,370	5	68	2,066	30.38	0.04%

Picture 7. Facebook competitor report October 1-November 30 (Meltwater, 2022)

The Facebook competitor reports (see Pictures 6 and 7) make it clear that even though Laurea has the least followers of the three, it still has the strongest engagement on the

platform. Therefore, if the universities were ranked based on the total engagement or even the average engagement per post, Laurea would be on the first place. This is an important metric because it positively affects visibility and brand image. However, when looking at the total amount of followers and received average engagement per post, there is room for improvement since an average of 30.38 people out of over 12 000 is a very low number. From the spring to autumn, the engagement per post average experienced a slight increase, which indicates that Laurea is going towards the correct direction. The follower growth for all three universities was moderate with no major changes.

Profiles

Review aggregate activity for pages and the posts published during the selected time period.

Profile	Followers ▼	Net Follower Growth	Published Posts & IGTV Videos	Public Engagements	Public Engagements per Post	% Follower Growth
Your Profiles Average	4,292.00	95.00	44.00	3,292.00	74.82	2.26%
Competitor Profiles Average	7,487.50	121.50	49.00	7,601.50	155.13	1.65%
1 haagahelia	8,102	117	60	8,778	146.30	1.47%
2 metropolia_uas	6,873	126	38	6,425	169.08	1.87%
3 laureauas	4,292	95	44	3,292	74.82	2.26%

Picture 8. Instagram competitor report April 1-May 31 (Meltwater, 2022)

Profiles

Review aggregate activity for pages and the posts published during the selected time period.

Profile	Followers ▼	Net Follower Growth	Published Posts & IGTV Videos	Public Engagements	Public Engagements per Post	% Follower Growth
Your Profiles Average	4,747.00	200.00	47.00	3,505.00	74.57	4.40%
Competitor Profiles Average	8,380.50	267.00	51.50	8,113.50	157.54	3.29%
1 haagahelia	8,916	250	60	9,244	154.07	2.88%
2 metropolia_uas	7,845	284	43	6,983	162.40	3.76%
3 laureauas	4,747	200	47	3,505	74.57	4.40%

Picture 9. Instagram competitor report October 1-November 30 (Meltwater, 2022)

The Instagram competitor report (see Pictures 8 and 9) shows that Laurea is behind in both followers and engagement. Laurea has the least followers of the three on Instagram while simultaneously having the highest follower growth percentage during both time periods. Engagement was lower than on the competitors' accounts, but in comparison to the total amount of followers, it was better than on Laurea's Facebook page. This may be due to the target market mostly being under 25 year-olds, which is also the demographic that uses Instagram more than Facebook (Niemi, 2019). However, there is clearly potential to reach higher engagement on Instagram. Haaga-Helia, for instance, receives an average of 154.07 engagement per post and Metropolia 162.40, while Laurea is way behind with an average of 74.57. This indicates that it could be possible even to double the engagement. However, as a limitation, this also requires some growth of followers, and as stated previously, both Haaga-Helia and Metropolia have the advantage of having more students.

2.5 Customer journey

A customer journey is a combination of events that customers go through to learn about, purchase and interact with a product or service. The aim of a successful customer journey is "to deliver value to the customer, profitability to the company and differentiation from the competition". (Norton and Pine, 2013) Customer journey tends to have six stages (see Picture 10). It is essential to ensure the customer goes through the customer journey steps to the last post-purchase stage, which is when they become a loyal and engaged customer.



Picture 10. Customer journey stages (Filenius, 2015)

1. Accessibility

The core of the accessibility stage is how well the product can be accessed during different moments. This, for Laurea, would be how easily and from which channel

a potential customer finds the university of applied sciences. This could be through social media, Google, a friend, or traditional advertising, such as in bus stops and metro stations due to the target market's high public transport usage. In digital channels, Laurea should ensure accessibility and visibility with the efficient use of keywords to improve and maximise SEO.

2. Searching and finding

The next step of searching and finding is when the customer begins to search and collect information. For Laurea, this can happen both on their website and on social media channels since both provide information about studying at the university. Providing information about degree programmes is part of Laurea's Facebook and Instagram strategy. It is implemented by regularly uploading student and alumni stories on both platforms during joint application periods and at "off-peak" times.

3. Choosing and decision-making

Choosing and decision-making is the last step before the actual purchase and could mean comparing different options or finding even further information to know how to proceed to purchase. This step for Laurea happens both on their website and Opintopolku.fi. Some people may still be looking for more detailed information about the offerings on Laurea's website, while others may be already looking for all final details regarding degree programmes and instructions on how to apply can be found. Opintopolku is easily accessible directly through each degree's webpage.

4. Purchase

The fourth step, purchase, is quite self-explanatory and covers the purchase of the product or service. This step for Laurea is when an applicant sends their application through Opintopolku.fi.

5. Deployment

Next, the deployment stage is all about how to start using the product or service. As Laurea is a university of applied sciences, this step would happen when an applicant gets accepted to study at Laurea and begins their studies.

6. Post-purchase activities





Lastly, the post-purchase activities consist of everything that happens afterwards with the customer relationship and how everything is handled. For Laurea, this part is important as this is when students can be encouraged to be student

advocates, which plays a substantial role in increasing engagement in the long run.

Customer journey can be implemented and visualised through a variety of different models and frameworks, such as the following three. These are the most relevant ones found in the literature review, and the aim is to discover which one is the most suitable one to implement in Laurea's Facebook and Instagram strategy to increase engagement. The most suitable framework will be utilised in the conclusion chapter to provide recommendations on how to increase engagement while also taking into account the customer journey.

2.5.1 Google's See-Think-Do-Care framework

Google has created its own framework that consists of two main objectives (see Picture 11). In the See, Think and Care stages businesses aim to increase mental availability and awareness. In the Do stage, the focus is on making the purchase as easy as possible for the customer. The See stage focuses on ensuring a potential customer discovers the company and their product/service offering. The second stage, Think, occurs when the potential customer that discovered the company begins to consider purchasing a product/service from the company. Next is the Do stage, which is when the potential customer finally decides to purchase and, therefore, proceeds to the Care stage, making them an existing customer. (Eriksson, 2015)

	What	Example from fashion industry
 See	Anyone that could buy your product	People wearing clothes (that's a lot of people)
 Think	Anyone that could buy your product showing some commercial intent	People wearing clothes, thinking that they might need some new ones
 Do	Anyone that could buy your product showing some commercial intent	People wearing clothes, thinking that they might need some new ones NOW
 Care	Your existing customers	People who bought clothes from you

Picture 11. Google's See-Think-Do-Care framework. (Eriksson, 2015)

While this is Google's framework, it can also be used in the social media environment because the process can be executed there as well. Facebook and Instagram are excellent places to drive awareness for a brand, product or service either organically or by advertising. Both platforms offer direct shopping features nowadays, which means a customer can buy a product without leaving the social media channel. If the business is not a tangible product, it is also simple to provide links to external websites to fulfil the do stage. (Eriksson, 2015)

In the case of Laurea, this model works in a way that a potential customer sees either organic or advertised content of Laurea on Facebook or Instagram. Other possibilities to discover the university on social media could be through influencer marketing or seeing current students tag or mention Laurea on their profiles or content. This may lead them to consider studying at the university and possibly doing more research on available degree programmes and application periods either directly on Facebook or Instagram or by entering the university's website from a link on the social media pages. All this covers the See and Think stages. After this, the potential customer would move on to applying to Laurea during the next application period and, if successful, get accepted to their desired degree programme. This would be the Do stage, after which the new student would become part of the Care stage. There are no significant limitations for Laurea when using this framework.

2.5.2 Facebook Pitch-Play-Plunge framework

Facebook's Pitch-Play-Plunge model (Picture 12) suggests that content should be created for different states customers are in at different times. While the framework is initially designed for Facebook's platforms, it can be utilised in other social media channels and digital environments as well. The pitching stage is targeted towards people that may be travelling or passively scrolling on social media. Their attention span is short, which means content needs to be immediate and go straight to the point in order to successfully grab their attention and avoid them losing interest. The play stage is intended for customers with a bit more time to spend on the content. At this stage, it is crucial to ensure content is interactive and aim for the people to get engaged and intrigued. Lastly, the plunge stage is when customers are willing to spend the most time on social media, making longer content ideal. (Divecha, 2019) The best result should be achieved with a combination of the three stages since there is content available for

various needs. Using all three methods can generate 1.2x the recall and awareness and twice the affinity compared to when using only one (Kershaw, 2019).



Picture 12. Facebook's Pitch-Play-Plunge framework. (Sang, 2019)

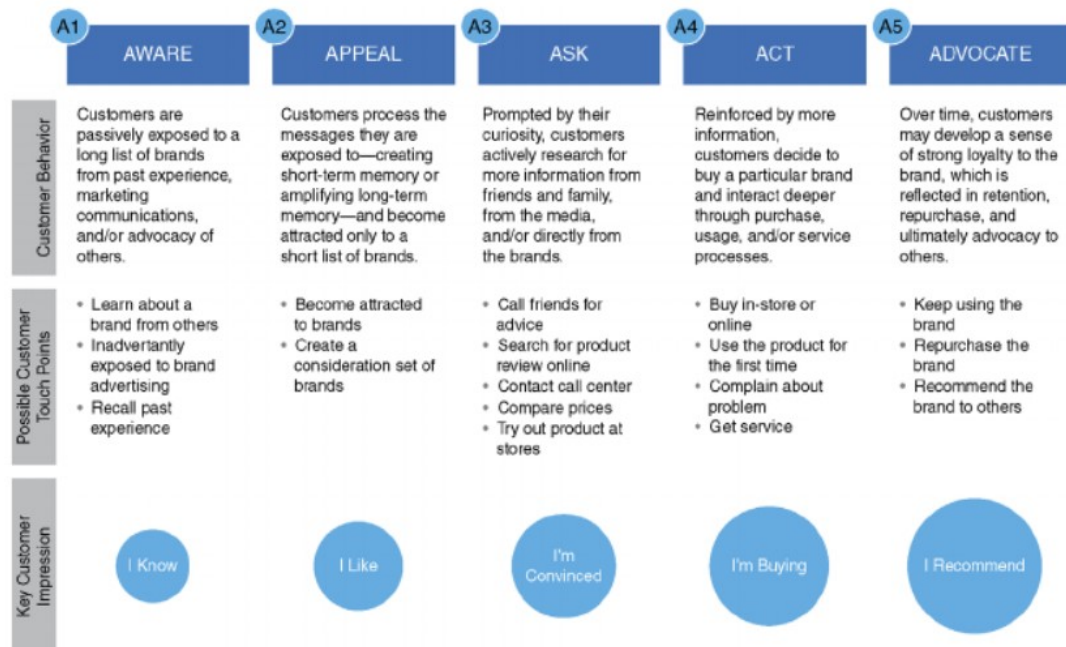
While Laurea does use different length and depth content for both Facebook and Instagram, the main focus is on longer, more profound content because in most occasions, the shared information requires more time and thought from the customer. This is also the major limitation for the Pitch-Play-Plunge model, as it does not entirely suit Laurea's social media strategy. Another limitation is the challenge of successfully ensuring that the right length and depth content reaches the right person at the most suitable time. This highly depends on algorithms, paid advertising and how self-imposedly the customer is willing to find the right type of content for themselves. Also, the concepts of short, midlength and long content are subjective, which can challenge the planning process of each kind of content.

Currently, for the pitch stage Laurea has shorter story content and brief posts about diverse topics for the customer to check out when being busy or in a rush. It is good to note that sometimes, for example, Instagram and Facebook Story takeovers by students may end up being long, which would possibly make people with less time lose their interest fast. Nonetheless, a longer Story takeover could be ideal for either the Play or Plunge stages. For people with more time available, polls and questions boxes are sometimes utilised on Instagram and Facebook Stories to encourage interaction. For the Plunge part, Laurea uses longer videos either embedded on both platforms or linked from Youtube. During 2021, Laurea also organised Instagram Lives lasting approximately half an hour, which have interactive features but require a lot of time from

the viewer. Due to this, many of the viewers did not watch the entire Lives and only stayed for some parts.

2.5.3 The 5A model

The fourth framework is Kotler's 5A model, which consists of aware, appeal, ask, act and advocate stages (see Picture 13). All the steps can be achieved through Facebook and Instagram, making the framework relevant for this paper. The tool is flexible and applicable to any industry, which means it can provide valuable insights into the company's relationships with customers. (Kotler et al., 2017, p.62-66)



Picture 13. Kotler's 5A model. (Kotler et al., 2017, p.64)

The customer path begins with raising the customer's awareness. In this research, it would be through Facebook and Instagram, from which both are excellent outlets to raise brand awareness. The objective is to expose potential customers to the brand and therefore strengthen the recognisability and likelihood of gaining a new customer. (Kotler et al., 2017, p.62-66)

Since people are constantly seeing ads and different brands on social media, the next stage, appeal, is to stand out from the rest and become attractive. (Kotler et al., 2017,

p.62-66) Having a strong Facebook and Instagram engagement can positively affect the probability of a customer finding a brand appealing and convincing.

Next up, the potential customer who finds a brand appealing tends to proceed to the asking phase of finding out more information about the product or service. Nowadays, social media is utilised for seeking information, feedback and previous experiences of existing customers. Since the asking phase changes the customer path from individual to social, having existing, satisfied customers who advocate about the brand can make an enormous difference. (Kotler et al., 2017, p.62-66)

If the asking step is successful, the customer proceeds to the act phase. It is important that the experience is positive to ensure a proper relationship can be formed between the customer and brand. (Kotler et al., 2017, p.62-66)

Lastly, the advocate step is what makes the framework succeed. It is achieved when a customer develops a sense of loyalty. This can happen through retention, repurchase and/or advocacy to others. (Kotler et al., 2017, p.62-66) When obtaining this phase, it will most likely also affect engagement on social media positively because brand loyal customers tend to interact more.

Laurea takes many steps to raise awareness by maintaining an active Facebook and Instagram presence and incrementing its reach by implementing influencer marketing in its strategy. Next, to be appealing to potential students, information about degree programmes and special qualities of the university are being shared on social media to make it stand out from competitors and bring more value. For the asking step, Laurea provides customer service through Facebook Messenger and Instagram's direct messages to reply to possible questions and to provide more information about degrees, the university and applying. The act stage is accomplished when a potential student applies to study at Laurea and possibly gets accepted. The last step, advocacy, tends to be formed over time, and Laurea aims to encourage advocacy by maintaining interaction with students on social media and continuously aiming to post relevant posts on Facebook and Instagram. Also, the private Facebook group for Laurea students enhances the sense of community. As a limitation, even though this model covers all steps of the customer journey, it is quite extensive especially to a social media environment.

2.6 Social media and customer engagement

Engagement is evidently a key term for this paper. The concept of engagement is profound and complex since it can mean various things in different contexts. It can be a “psychological state that occurs through interactive, co-creative consumer experiences with a focal agent/object”, which highlights the role of participation and context (Tuten and Solomon, 2018, p.79). Another way to define engagement is thinking about it as “behavioural manifestation towards a brand that goes beyond transactions” (Harmeling et al., 2016, p.314), which can be purely motivational and a way to show oneself identity. Due to the concept being highly linked to psychology, motivation and behaviour, engaged customers tend to feel a strong connection with the brand, which consequently leads to participation on social media more often (Mishra, 2019).

On social media, engagement is most commonly known as visible measurables, such as likes, reactions, comments, shares and saves. Looking at it more deeply, social media engagement is a three-dimensional framework consisting of consumption, contribution and creation.

1. Consumption

Users who passively consume content without participating form the consumption group, which in other words requires minimum engagement. As a metric, it could be viewed as reach or impressions of a post. These type of users tend to be looking for information, which is the primary motivation for the consuming engagement behaviour.

2. Contribution

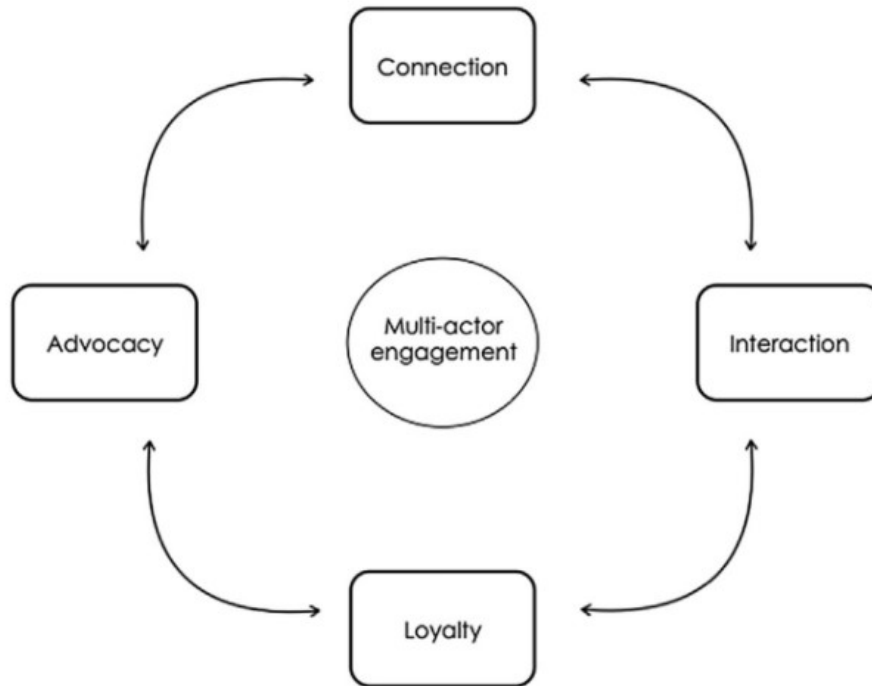
Users who contribute participate in already published content by either a brand or an individual by for example liking, commenting or sharing it. This is the middle level of engagement and motivational factors for these users may be things such as entertainment, remuneration, personal identity or social interaction.

3. Creation

The strongest level of engagement is received from the customers forming the creation stage. It refers to the customers who create and publish brand-related content voluntarily on their own social media channels and consequently possibly influence purchase decisions positively. The main motivational drivers for creating are personal identity, social interaction, empowerment and entertainment.

(Mishra, 2019; Yesiloglu et al., 2021)

Similarly to the consumption, contribution and creation framework, previous research has also identified a multi-actor engagement framework, which consists of four levels of different intensity: connection, interaction, loyalty and advocacy (Picture 14).



Picture 14. Multi-actor engagement framework (Shawky et al., 2020, p.572)

The lowest level of engagement in this framework is connection, which mainly stays as one-way communication between a brand and customer. Despite it requiring the least amount of engagement, it is still fundamental for the whole process since all engagement relationships begin with forming a connection. This level can be seen as a passive form of engagement as the customer would choose not to participate when seeing a post. As a limitation, it is useful to know that this can also be temporary due to different personal reasons as well as the fact that the likelihood of participating on social media may also be tied to a person's personality (e.g. introverts vs extroverts). The biggest advantage of connection is the ability to raise awareness, which can be measured with impressions, views and reach. (Shawky et al., 2020, p.572-574)

Interaction develops the one-way communication to a two-way communication. This level can be identified in customers being actively engaged, expressing themselves,

participating in value-creation and influencing others. It is measurable with metrics such as likes, reactions, messages, comments and replies to comments. The interaction level also has different intensities because just as in the connection level, the way of interaction depends on each person's personality as well. While this may be considered a limitation since it can be difficult to differentiate the intensity of engagement between, for example, a like that probably took a few seconds to leave and a comment or message which needed more effort. Nonetheless, it is also an opportunity for companies to understand the characters of their customers better. (Shawky et al., 2020, p.572-574)

The next level of engagement, loyalty, is achieved when interaction happens repeatedly by a user and can be measured by the amount of interactions by individuals over a longer period of time. Loyal customers tend to have either an affective or cognitive attachment to the company. When it is affective, it is an emotional bond and when it is cognitive, it is a rational decision that benefits them by, for example, receiving information about the company's services. There are several ways to encourage and develop loyalty, which can be included in the marketing strategy of a company. The most traditional methods are probably incentives and promotions, but there are other ways too, such as showing appreciation towards loyal customers or creating another community to interact even more with them. Loyalty can be both a consequence and an influencer of engagement, making it beneficial for companies. One loyal customer may encourage more people to become actively engaged customers and so on. (Shawky et al., 2020, p.572-574)

Advocacy, the highest level of engagement, includes contributions such as participating in creating content and sharing the company's messages. Therefore, measuring happens through the amount of content creation, shares, the number of tagged friends and word of mouth. Even though users may create content on interaction and loyalty levels, advocacy is differentiated by tangible actions to express love and support towards a company. Therefore, the attachment is both affective and cognitive for advocates and they believe in the company, which motivates them to speak positively about their experiences. In addition, sometimes a customer goes directly from the connection level to advocacy if they feel strongly about the company immediately. (Shawky et al., 2020 p.572-574)

Laurea benefits the most if student advocacy is achieved. In the ideal situation, this happens voluntarily due to a student's positive experience and satisfaction with his or her studies. The most minimal way of showing student advocacy is when students share that they study at Laurea on their Instagram bio or by adding the university to their

Facebook personal details. Actively engaging with Laurea's social media posts is also a sign of student advocacy. The highest stage is when students are willing to recommend Laurea to their friends, family members or other acquaintances or even share content on social media. The user-generated content is also something Laurea can usually share on their own pages afterwards, which is a huge advantage. However, achieving the advocacy stage can be challenging and it does not always happen automatically. The alternative way is to encourage students to share their experiences with the help of different incentives. The rather reserved Finnish culture can affect students' will to share their experiences on social media, which is why incentives can be a helpful way.

The reason engagement is an increasingly important topic in marketing is that it is a useful way for brands to build a deeper relationship with existing customers or even new, potential customers. (Tuten and Solomon, 2018, p.43) According to a Meltwater report (2022), social media engagement is the primary social media metric that marketing professionals track, receiving a strong 78,71% support. The benefits of good social media engagement are a combination of marketing, visibility, branding, connection, trustworthiness and authenticity. Engagement is what makes social media social after all, and the main reason it is different from other medias and marketing channels. Listening to customers and encouraging them to communicate on social media builds trust. The feeling of connection increases when customers feel like they are heard by businesses. This can positively affect customers' loyalty towards a brand and strengthen their desire to voluntarily support the brand on social media in the future. Constant engagement increases reach, and therefore the business receives more visibility. For instance, when a person likes or reacts to a post on Facebook, their friends will see it on their homepage. This is beneficial for Laurea especially when someone engages with posts about different degree programmes since they then get more exposure and opportunities to reach potential people considering higher education studies. Instagram works differently in this aspect. However, the Explore page suggests posts to users based on previous activities and interactions and to reach people on there, engagement is a key factor. (Voss and Kumar, 2013)

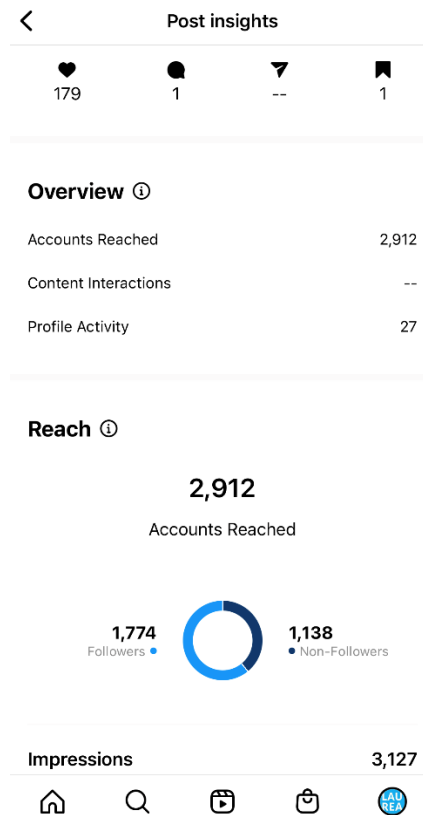
While engagement is a multi-dimensional topic and can be measured and analysed in many ways due to the number of different metrics available (see Table 5), a standardised engagement rate has been created to enable businesses or individual people to calculate engagement and have measurable and comparable data to analyse.

Metric	Definition
Like (or reaction)	The amount of times individual people liked or reacted to a post
Comment	The amount of comments in a post
Share	The amount of times a post was shared (i.e. via direct message, Stories, Facebook wall etc) The use of this metric is limited in the EU.
Save	The amount of times someone saved a post
Reach	The total amount of individual people that viewed a post
Impressions	The total amount of times a post has been viewed
Views (specific for video content)	The amount of times a video post has been viewed
Link clicks	The amount of times a link was clicked

Table 5. Different metrics available on Facebook and Instagram. (Facebook, 2022; Instagram 2022)

Before deciding on how and what to measure, it is important to consider the desired objectives and goals since both of them tend to differ at different times of a customer journey. The most popularly engagement rate is used to track how actively followers interact with published content. Engagement rate indicates about the health and genuineness of followers, which makes it an essential aspect for companies wanting to succeed in social media marketing. (Chen, 2021) Engagement rate can be calculated at a general level as an average of all posts or for individual posts if more specific data is wanted. For example, the engagement rate formula for a single post would be the total engagement received, including likes and comments, divided by the total amount of followers times 100. (Sehl, 2019) In practice, an Instagram post by Laurea (see Picture 15) received 179 likes and one comment and the account has 4 889 followers, which means the engagement rate for that specific post would be 3,68%. However, as said, the marketing objectives and goals affect the way engagement should be calculated. The formula can easily be adapted to many different objectives, which is probably why it has become so popular. For example, if reach and saves are essential and valued metrics in addition to likes and comments, a company could compare the amount of likes, comments and saves a post achieved in relation to the reach. If this formula is applied

to the insights of the same Instagram post of Laurea (Image 15), the engagement rate would then be 6,22%, which is higher than the previously calculated one.



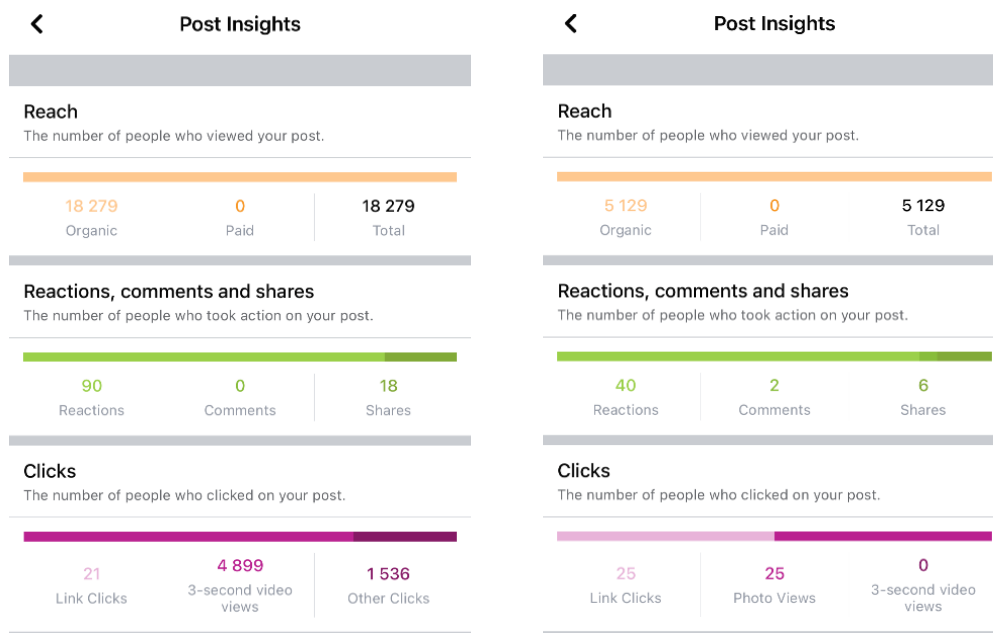
Picture 15. Insights of a post published on Laurea's Instagram page. (Instagram, 2022)

Determining what a good engagement rate is a rather complicated question. According to Sehl and Tien (2021), a good engagement rate is between 1% to 5% and the bigger the account, the harder it usually is to achieve. It tends to vary based on the industry and account type. Therefore, there is no one answer to this and the best way to get an idea is to benchmark the top competitors' engagement and make comparisons from different perspectives depending on the objectives.

Analysing engagement can be challenging though, because as a limitation, most people only observe and do not actually participate. 1% of users regularly participate, 9% do so intermittently, while the rest 90% tend to simply review the page, which does increase reach and impressions but not engagement (Tuten and Solomon, 2018, p.79). The reason to this may be the previously mentioned consume, contribute and create - framework. People have different aims on social media, which reflects in their participation behaviour. However, there are also people who tend to like or react more

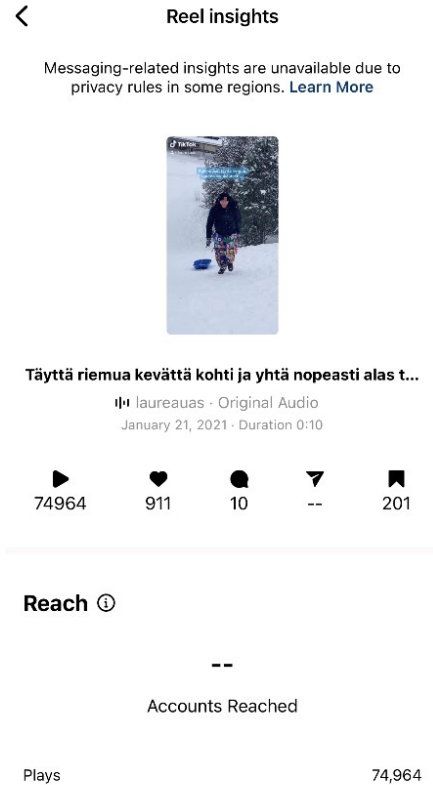
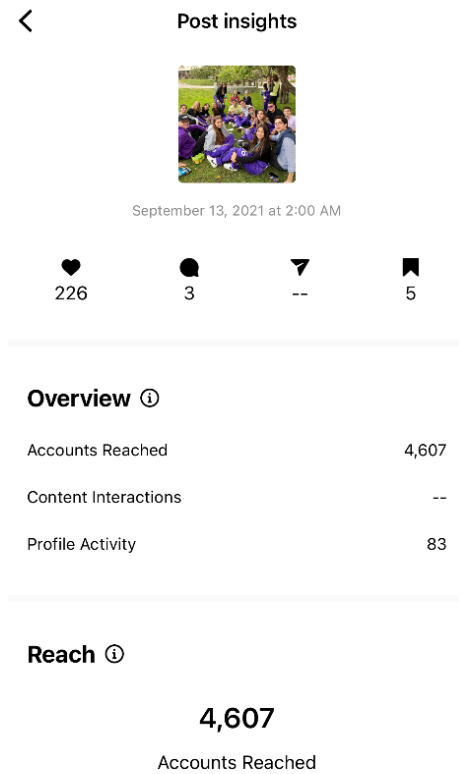
easily and even without a stronger purpose. In contrast, others are more selective of the amount of participation on social media. In addition, even if a person is an active follower of a brand on social media, they may not automatically become a purchasing customer and someone who is not even following a brand on social media could still be a loyal customer. For example, millions of people follow Tesla both on Facebook and Instagram and actively see and engage with the brand's posts, but most likely a big portion of them have not purchased anything from them and are not going to do so in the future. On the other hand, some higher education students may not follow the institution they are studying at due to the preference of keeping their free time separate from studies.

Picture 16 gives two examples of Laurea's well-performing posts on Facebook. The first one is an alumni story video, which has a total of 90 reactions and 18 shares. 18 278 people were reached with that post organically. The second post, on the other hand, is a photo post about the possibility to continue and finish a previously interrupted degree. The photo has 40 likes, 2 comments and 6 shares and an organic reach of 5 129 people.



Picture 16. Examples of insights of two Facebook posts by Laurea. (Facebook, 2022)

Picture 17 is a screenshot of two of Laurea's top posts on Instagram. The first one is a photo about a freshman picnic. It has 226 likes, 3 comments and 5 saves. The reach was 4 607, also achieved organically. The second one is a Reel video with almost 75 000 views. The video has 911 likes, 10 comments and 201 saves.



Picture 17. Examples of insights of two Instagram posts by Laurea. (Instagram, 2022)

As it can be observed from these examples, video content has a higher potential to reach and engage more people. However, if photo posts are about a fun or interesting topic, they can also perform well.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative approach

The research approach for this paper was qualitative. Qualitative data collection techniques, such as interviews, generate or use non-numerical data. Qualitative research “is based on subjective assessment of behaviour, attitude, opinions, behaviour impressions etc.” (Krishnaswamy and Satyaprasad, 2010, p.7). Qualitative research tends to be seen as interpretive due to the data usually being subjective and requiring the researcher to operate in a natural setting. Since the meanings of data are obtained by analysing words and images instead of numbers, various meanings and unclarity can arise when interpreting data. It is crucial to clarify any possible unclear meanings with participants to maintain the data neutral and reliable. (Saunders et al., 2019, p.179)

This paper is a case study, meaning that “it is an in-depth inquiry into a topic or phenomenon within its real-life setting” (Saunders et al., 2019, p.196). The word ‘case’ in this research refers to Laurea University of Applied Sciences as an organisation. The benefit of a case study is that it offers intensive and in-depth insights about the topic, ensuring rich and empirical data. (Saunders et al., 2019, p.196) The objectives of a case study could be, for example, to understand the life cycle of the researched topic or the development of the topic over time (Krishnaswamy and Satyaprasad, 2010, p.15).

Interviewing was used as a primary data collection method. It could be defined as “a two-way systematic conversation between an investigator and an informant” (Krishnaswamy and Satyaprasad, 2010, p.99), which is conducted to gain knowledge on an agreed topic. Other things that can be observed and analysed during interviews are gestures, facial expressions and pauses. The interviews for this paper were structured interviews, meaning that the same set of questions was utilised in all interviews to ensure data is comparable. While interviews are a great method to collect high-quality and in-depth information on a topic, there are certain limitations as well. There may be misunderstandings or the interview can be affected by humanly aspects, such as fatigue, nervousness or stress. Some responses could end up being incomplete, and the interviewer’s bias could affect the data. (Krishnaswamy and Satyaprasad, 2010, p.99-112),

3.2 Primary data

In total, eight interviews with social media marketing professionals were conducted for this research to gain fresh perspectives and ideas since social media marketing is a continuously evolving industry. The candidates work at Finnish marketing agencies and media companies, which means that the findings are especially applicable and relevant in Finland. The objective of conducting the interviews was to receive valuable insights and industry expertise that could later be compared and analysed together with theory from literature and Laurea's perspective.

The first step was determining the approximate amount of candidates that were needed for the interviews to be considered a reliable source. The objective was to find between five and ten candidates, and it was essential for the candidates to work in Finnish agencies to ensure the information would be accurate for the Finnish market. The author utilised Google and personal knowledge to find and choose the marketing agencies to contact. Next, the aim was to find the most suitable employee considering the topic of this thesis from each company's website. All companies provided contact information of their employees, some more extensively and some more briefly. Based on job titles, the author personally emailed an employee from each company. The research topic as well as the approximate length of the interview were mentioned. Each candidate was kindly asked to forward the email to a more relevant person in case they were not the correct match. A few of the contacted people forwarded the author to a more suitable person. Only one person out of the contacted candidates was not able to participate due to a busy schedule. Since eight out of nine people were interviewed, the participation rate was an impressive 89 per cent.

The interviews were conducted as online video interviews via Microsoft Teams in June 2021. All of them were recorded to have the possibility to fully focus on the interview moment as well as be able to listen to the answers afterwards. As mentioned earlier, the interviews were structured with the same set of questions. The questions were sent to one expert beforehand due to their personal request for it and the rest replied spontaneously without having seen the questions before. Each interview was approximately half an hour long like planned, with the exception of one lasting a whole hour. The hour-long interview was with the one, who had seen the questions beforehand, which explains why the answers were more extensive.

The answers to all questions were analysed by comparing them together and finding any possible similarities and differences. Furthermore, the findings were also compared to the knowledge gathered in the literature review to ensure conclusions would be in line with both. Interview answers validated and confirmed what was found in the literature. Therefore, interviews were an excellent tool to reveal if literature coordinates with the thoughts, opinions and experiences of professionals working within the industry. It also gave a unique perspective to the study, as more real-life examples, experiences and expertise were discovered through them.

3.3 Secondary data

Data that were originally collected for another purpose are called secondary data. It consists of raw data and published summaries (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 338). For this research books, journals, reports and articles were used as secondary data. The literature was used to provide theoretical knowledge to the study and to have clear facts to compare and analyse with the rest of the data. In addition, Facebook and Instagram insights of Laurea were utilised to achieve data on the previous and current state of social media content as well as to provide real-life examples.

A limitation regarding the secondary data is whether the literature was recent enough due to the ever-changing nature of Facebook and Instagram. Since algorithms and other features are constantly evolving, data from last year could already be outdated by now. Therefore, extra attention was paid to find the most relevant possible information. Another limitation is the potential influence of paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram insights. As this research had a primary focus on organic content, the effects of paid advertising were aimed to keep minimal by analysing insights from off-peak times and specific posts that did not include sponsoring.

4 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Eight social media marketing professionals were interviewed for this research. All of them were chosen based on having the correct expertise and therefore being the most suitable person from each company to talk about engagement. The below experts were interviewed:

- Creative Strategist from marketing agency 1
- Digital Communications Specialist from marketing agency 2
- Content Director and Creative Director from marketing agency 3
- Founder and Digital Specialist from marketing agency 4
- Communications Specialist from marketing and media agency 5
- Content Manager from marketing agency 6
- Senior Advisor from marketing agency 7
- Content Strategist from marketing agency 8

Six of the companies are leading marketing and media agencies in Finland, and two of them are smaller agencies. Their strong knowledge and experience in the industry ensure the answers are high-quality, valuable and reliable.

The findings in this chapter present the most relevant answers received from each interview, possible similarities between them and connections to the literature review.

Question 1. Why is the engagement of followers such an important topic in social media marketing, and why has the popularity of it increased in recent years?

One point that makes the topic important that interviewees 7 (2021), 6 (2021) and 5 (2021) all mentioned was that engagement is a way to increase visibility and consequently also reach new potential customers. When a post receives reactions, it indicates to social media algorithms that people are interested in it, and therefore, the algorithm then pushes it to an even larger audience (see Chapter 2.6). As a positive consequence, this can be utilised to decrease the economic effort in marketing and communications because the target market is reached organically (Interviewee 7, 2021). However, algorithms evolve all the time, so it requires businesses to constantly stay informed about new trends and features to ensure a brand keeps reaching the correct people. This is influenced by how strongly engaged the current customers are due to the connection of engagement and reach. (Interviewee 6, 2021)

Another aspect that may have increased the popularity of the metric is that analysing engagement can be used to understand the target market better and to know what type of content works the best. This came up in the answers of four experts; 6 (2021), 4 (2021), 2 (2021) and 1 (2021). Engagement is an easily analysable metric available for everyone, which indicates about the quality of content and what kind of posts interest the target market (Interviewee 1, 2021).

Engagement strengthens brand image and credibility (Interviewee 7, 2021), while also having a clear commercial purpose. The more engaged a person is, the more often they return to a brand, which is the most important thing for a business (Interviewee 3, 2021). Since social media marketing is more strategic nowadays, engagement can also be beneficial in building customer loyalty, increasing sales and extending the customer life cycle (Interviewee 8, 2021). Especially understanding the target market (see Chapter 2.2) and strengthening customer loyalty (see Chapters 2.5 and 2.6) were covered in the literature review.

Question 2. What different ways can a business use to increase engagement on Facebook and Instagram? Should engagement be combined with some other measurable parameter?

In general, the most significant way to increase engagement that came up in the interviews was building two-way communication, which is in line with the literature review as well (see Chapters 2.1, 2.3 and 2.6). To successfully achieve conversation between a brand and customers, the emphasis is also on knowing the target market and to what kind of content they react to. Both Facebook and Instagram offer multiple tools, such as polls, question boxes, quizzes etc., that are useful for building interaction and were also recommended by most professionals (see Chapter 2.4). Activating followers should be done strategically and by knowing the audience, it is possible to ask more profound questions in posts (Interviewee 2, 2021). Interviewee 5 (2021) reminded that it is good to follow the quality of engagement since there could also appear, for example, negative comments that may affect the brand image in the long run.

Measuring is strongly attached to the industry and objectives of each company. Therefore, to decide whether engagement should be combined with another measurable parameter, each business should consider what is important for them and what are the most critical metrics for the industry they are operating in and the channels they are using (see Chapter 2.6). For example, for one company it may be essential to gain more

followers, while another company may have their main focus on sales. (Interviewee 3, 2021) As a limitation, interviewee 8 (2021) stated that 15-20% of people like to “like” posts, and paid advertising can even be targeted to that specific audience. Due to this, Facebook even encourages businesses not to measure only likes. Therefore, other relevant metrics could be reach and the amount of time a person spent viewing the content. Interviewee 4 (2021) added that website data could be combined with engagement to achieve a bigger picture of what people are doing. Interviewee 3 (2021) shared a similar view saying that it could be measured how many people did social media posts manage to get to the company website and did they, for instance, download some material from there showing clear interest and whether all this affects the achievement of objectives and success in the long run.

Question 3. Are there any specific types of posts or content that tend to increase engagement?

The majority of interviewees said that video content has been popular in recent years, especially in a younger demographic. The secondary data also showed clear evidence that video content is a big and growing trend on both Facebook and Instagram (see Chapter 2.4). Instagram launched Instagram Reels in 2020, and ever since, the algorithm has been sharing Reel content to a larger audience of people (Interviewee 2, 2021), making it more likely for the video to get to the Explore page, which is crucial for reaching new people on Instagram (Interviewee 7, 2021). Instagram Reels is a strong tool to create interesting short and fast-paced videos (Interviewee 6, 2021), which tend to be successful especially among the younger generations due to the recent popularity of TikTok (Interviewee 3, 2021; Interviewee 8, 2021). However, interviewee 2 (2021) also stated that higher visibility in Reels may not always achieve higher engagement since many people watch videos without further reacting to them in any way. Knowing what to measure from short videos can also be challenging since views may come more easily due to the length of the video, but it is important to know whether the quality of viewers was good and what objectives could be achieved (Interviewee 8, 2021).

Instagram or Facebook Story content is also popular and mentioned by most of the experts. Videos can be utilised on Stories and interaction can be enhanced with polls, question boxes and other interactive tools that were mentioned in the answers of question two as well. (see Chapter 2.4) It is important that the person responsible for the social media of a company is aware of new tools and features and knows how to

implement elements in, for example, Stories that the target market is comfortable in using (Interviewee 1, 2021).

In addition, interviewee 7 (2021) mentioned that Carousel posts on Instagram seem to be performing well usually, while interviewee 5 (2021) said that posts about people have been successful in their experience. In general, the type of posts that succeed depend on the target audience, what they like and want to see and what gives them the most value. It is essential to look at the big picture and possibly combine different post types in order to achieve the best results (Interviewee 3, 2021). Also, both Facebook's and Instagram's algorithms also customise each person's experience on the platforms based on the content they view the most, meaning that if a person, for instance, watches a lot of videos, they will see more videos in the future (Interviewee 7, 2021).

Question 4. Does the company you work at use Kotler's 5A model or some other theory to visualise the customer journey?

All answers to question four were similar. Theories are mainly used as a base, but previous experiences and collected data are utilised as main guidelines. For example, interviewee 4 (2021) told that they have collected an extensive amount of data throughout the years, and they always analyse their customer's data before and after to see the results. Interviewee 6 (2021) reminded of the importance of staying up-to-date in the world of social media and how testing and piloting new ideas can be beneficial. Interviewees 3 (2021), 1 (2021) and 8 (2021) talked about the usage of theories the most. Both interviewees 3 (2021) and 8 (2021) told that they have multiple different theories, from which they choose one that suits each customer's needs the best and solves the problem they have. Interviewee 1 (2021), on the other hand, mentioned two good examples of theories: Google's See-Think-Do-Care model and Facebook's Pitch-Play-Plunge model, from which especially the Facebook one has resonated with them. Since it is important to understand the customer journey, Kotler's 5A, Google's and Facebook's models are all covered more extensively in Chapter 2.5.

Question 5. Is there a specific moment during the customer journey when increasing engagement is particularly important, or should it simply be taken into account in all customer journey steps?

In general, engagement is important during all times of a customer journey, however, it became clear during the interviews that the emphasis on different steps of the journey highly depends on the objectives of each business. Interviewees 4 (2021), 1 (2021) and

8 (2021) all said it is more difficult to get a new potential customer engaged immediately and it may take time, some remarketing efforts as well as more encounters on social media to start engaging with a brand. Therefore, according to interviewee 1 (2021), in a way the importance increases the further a customer proceeds on the customer journey, although a purchase can also happen without engaging with a brand on social media. Interviewee 8 (2021) spoke about how probably the most ideal moment to increase engagement is during a customership to ensure further engagement and loyalty (see Chapters 2.5 and 2.6). It is also vital to handle possible negative experiences or reclamations that may be published on social media because how a company responds to criticism can affect what the customer says about the brand in the future (Interviewee 5, 2021).

Two limitations also came up, one being that young people scroll Facebook and Instagram much faster so a company has less time to make an impact, while older generations tend to use more time, e.g. 0.5 seconds vs 3 seconds (Interviewee 7, 2021). The other is that in Finland it is rare for a brand to achieve actual fans like it may be the case abroad, so social media can be used to influence the attractiveness of a company in all stages of the customer journey (Interviewee 2, 2021).

Question 6. What can a business do to further activate already engaged customers?

Firstly, interviewees 6 (2021) and 2 (2021) both said that communication between a brand and existing customers must be maintained since it is something social media users expect these days. On top of that, there should be a balance between content targeted towards existing customers and potential customers. Organic content should mainly be suitable for everyone, whereas paid advertising could be utilised to retarget existing customers. (Interviewee 7, 2021; Interviewee 4, 2021) Published posts should be created in a way that they can be shared because engaged customers may want to share something about a brand on their own account as it is also a way to show one's identity (Interviewee 1, 2021). Another aspect to consider is including the customer in the content creation process somehow to gain user-generated content and earned publicity (Interviewee 5, 2021). Similar aspects about activating loyal customers as well as limitations to it in the case of Laurea are covered in Chapters 2.5 and 2.6.

It is important to make existing customers feel special since many times the main focus is easily on new customers. Some ways to enhance this would be viewing the customers as a community and possibly asking them for feedback (Interviewee 8, 2021). If it is

possible in the industry, some type of membership is a way to ensure higher loyalty (Interviewee 6, 2021; Interviewee 1, 2021). Interviewees 4 (2021) and 6 (2021) mentioned the usage of newsletters outside of social media as well, since it is an efficient way to provide exclusive information. In addition, after the actual purchase a company could share information about other services etc (Interviewee 3, 2021).

Question 7. What are the best ways to measure and analyse engagement on Facebook and Instagram, and is it better to measure from various touchpoints?

All experts agreed that it is good to measure from different touchpoints to get a better understanding of what works the best, what has been achieved and what could be improved. Interviewees 7 (2021) and 5 (2021) talked about the popularity of reach as a metric since it tends to directly correlate with the amount of engagement received, while also reaching a large audience. Reach indicates about the big picture because not everyone reacts, while measuring the engagement rate shows which posts have been the most interesting and valuable ones. Saves and comments are also valuable metrics, according to interviewees 6 (2021) and 2 (2021). On Facebook, especially reactions and comments have a high value and in general, Facebook shares posts that have been reacted to or commented on to the person's friend's newsfeeds (Interviewee 7, 2021). In Chapter 2.6, it was also stated that there is not only one way to measure engagement.

Additionally, the quality and efficiency of engagement and content should be analysed to gain deeper insights. Interviewee 8 (2021) mentioned that, for example, video content can also be measured by how many times a video was watched and until what part. In the best scenario, a customer proceeds from social media to the company's website, which allows the brand to have even more data on the customer's actions, while also giving valuable insights into how many people out of the total reached audience visited the website. Interviewee 1 (2021) suggested comparing insights on organic and paid posts because organic reach is usually voluntary, while paid advertising is in a way forced. Therefore, even if a paid post has less engagement, it does not directly mean that it is of worse quality.

All in all, the metrics that should be analysed depend on the business objectives. If analysed strategically, data and insights can be used to draw conclusions on what type of content engages the audience the best, how much and when should a company post and what brings the customers back to the brand (Interviewee 3, 2021). It is important to measure and combine different metrics to get a better understanding of engagement. In

addition, combining website data is essential for Laurea since they offer a lot of information about degree programmes and other study related topics and website data gives them more possibilities to analyse potential customers. This has been taken into account in the conclusions and recommendations.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research objective was to find out how to increase engagement on Facebook and Instagram. One of Laurea's social media objectives was to increase engagement because it is seen as a way to strengthen Laurea's brand image and connection with students. The research questions covered the topic from two different aspects: increasing and measuring engagement rate and strengthening customer journey.

5.1 Conclusions

Research question 1. How to increase engagement rate on Facebook and Instagram?

In conclusion, as it has become clear throughout this paper, increasing engagement is a strongly individual process for all people and companies as it is also important to be able to show personality. Therefore to increase engagement, the marketing strategy should always be tested, analysed, evaluated and tailored for each person or company and their target market. The strategy should also be monitored continuously since social media and algorithms are constantly evolving and new trends come up all the time.

On a general level, increasing engagement comes down to understanding the target market and building a two-way communication in all possible ways and during all steps of the customer journey. This also builds loyalty and in the long run, possibly even advocacy, which both contribute to achieving better engagement. Advocacy is a big trend, which is natural due to the human nature of listening to and valuing the opinions and thoughts of friends and family and trusting what they say. Therefore, if a friend talks positively about a company, it is highly likely that the other person considers using the products or services of the company and consequently possibly becomes an actively engaged customer in their social media channels.

More specifically, short video content and the use of interactive features, such as polls, question boxes and reactions, are currently important and popular features that tend to engage followers more. The algorithms of both Facebook and Instagram value the mentioned features, which means there is a better chance to reach more people when using them. If reach is higher, it will lead to higher engagement.

While the research mainly focused on organic content, it should be noted that paid advertising is an excellent way to support organic posts. In addition to this, combining a company website to the social media strategy offers more in-depth data and provides a better opportunity to strengthen SEO as well. Especially in the case of Laurea, the website is an essential part of the business and gives a lot of added value to the target market.

Research question 2. What steps can Laurea take to improve engagement?

When thinking about Laurea, all previously mentioned tactics from research question 1 have a lot of potential due to the target market mainly being relatively young. New trends are therefore adapted faster by the target market, which also requires Laurea to maintain up to date with new features and trending topics.

Short video content is a huge growing trend right now, and there is a lot of potential in increasing engagement with it. Laurea should continue utilizing videos and implement more of them on both platforms, especially Instagram due to the demographic. Another aspect to take into account is maximising all possibilities to create interaction with students, which also increases loyalty in the long run. Two-way communication is fundamental in social media these days, and it is directly connected to improving engagement because Facebook and Instagram algorithms increase the visibility of posts with more interaction.

It is also crucial to ensure content includes real, relevant and important topics for students because if the posts are interesting, the target customers will be much more likely to react. Students must have a reason why they follow and engage with Laurea's content, so it should provide added value with the correct topics. Lastly, activating current students to achieve advocacy is a valuable and important issue to tackle. The more loyal current students are, the more it shows in Facebook and Instagram engagement. This also positively affects new students' probability to engage with Laurea due to the stronger feeling of community, which enhances Laurea's brand image and customer advocacy.

Subquestion 1. How to improve the customer journey on Facebook and Instagram?

To improve the customer journey on Facebook and Instagram, a company benefits from choosing a customer journey framework that best suits the business and target customers. Different options should be compared and analysed and after deciding the best one, it can be used to plan a functional strategy for both Facebook and Instagram.

All steps of the customer journey are important to take into account in social media strategy. By doing this, it can be ensured that the customer goes all the way to the last step, making them a loyal customer. In this research, it became clear that advocacy is a key topic in increasing engagement and building a sense of community.

For Laurea's Facebook and Instagram channels, the recommended framework is Google's See-Think-Do-Care model since it covers the customer journey in a sufficient amount of depth for the social media environment and there were no major limitations. In chapter 5.2, proposed activities for each customer journey phase for Laurea are presented more in-depth.

Subquestion 2. What metrics should a company use to calculate, analyse and evaluate the success of Facebook and Instagram posts?

The most important metrics for measuring success depend on what the company wants to find out or achieve. For example, if the goal is to raise awareness, reach is probably the highest value metric, whereas if the company aims to improve communication with followers, comments would have a much bigger value. Therefore, there is not just one metric that is universal for each company, meaning that it is crucial to tailor the metrics analysed for each company, objective and even individual campaign.

For Laurea, as the goal is to improve engagement rate, the most valuable metrics are reach, likes, comments and the frequency of same individuals repeatedly engaging with posts. Other metrics to monitor are participation in different interactive features used in Instagram or Facebook story content. It is not used for engagement rate, nevertheless, it gives valuable insights about the level of loyalty of students. If interaction on story content is high and loyalty strong, it will also impact engagement on regular posts. In addition to social media metrics, it is crucial to combine website data to get the big picture and a more extensive understanding of engagement and customers. Laurea also benefits from comparing metrics with main competitors like done in chapter 2.4.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on this study, the following four steps provide suggestions to take into account to increase engagement. After the four steps, the recommendable customer journey framework for Laurea is presented with examples of actions for each customer journey phase.

Laurea can increase engagement on Facebook and Instagram with the following activities:

1. Short video content

Reels, stories and other short video content is strongly trending especially in the younger demographic due to the skyrocketing success of TikTok. Both Facebook and Instagram are continuously aiming to provide features to keep up with the new competitor. The combination of both platforms' algorithms pushing short video content and the high interest towards it from the target market gives it a lot of potential to increase engagement. While this research focused on Facebook and Instagram, Laurea should also develop the use of TikTok even more as it is a suitable platform for the target market and there is a lot of potential in using it in marketing.

2. Interaction with students

It is important for students to feel like they are being heard and included in the community. Building continuous interaction also motivates previously engaged students to stay engaged in the future. Many interactive features on Facebook and Instagram are also in the use of the target market, so participating in content that utilises them comes naturally from a large majority of students. Laurea's private Facebook group is also an excellent place to interact with students, possibly even more personally than on public Facebook or Instagram posts. Also, paying attention to student feedback and recommendations for content and other topics is essential and a way to improve engagement and possibly even loyalty.

3. Including real, relevant and important topics for students

Evidently, the topics shared on social media should be targeted for the target market. Finding the interesting and important topics as well as pain points of students is a great way to discover new content ideas. If this can be combined with using a current student to share these kinds of things makes it even more relatable. Potential topics to share about could be, for instance, studies, tips on how to succeed and cope with distance learning, information and support on finding an internship place and different aspects of health or wellbeing.

4. Activating current students and alumni to achieve advocacy

Advocacy has a direct connection to engagement, which is why it can also be useful for Laurea. Currently, loyalty and advocacy seem to be a bit low, so it would be important to improve them. The more students are actively engaged and potentially even share their own content about their studies or experiences,

the more other students will feel encouraged to do the same. Young adults are more easily influenced by their fellow students, so if it becomes popular to share own content relating to Laurea and participate in the posts published by Laurea, more people will feel the urge to do similar things. Laurea could, for example, aim to use alumni even more in order to strengthen loyalty and advocacy.

As stated earlier, Google's See-Think-Do-Care framework is recommended for Laurea. By implementing the framework to Laurea's two main customer personas, young adults and mature students, various content and actions are proposed to enhance Laurea's customer journey and, consequently, engagement (see Table 6).

	SEE	THINK	DO	CARE
Young adults 18-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short and fun video content to reach new potential students - Using more students in video content to increase relevance - Active influencer marketing to raise awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility to ask questions from current students on Instagram - Short and casual information packages about degree programmes from current students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support, tips and reminders about application periods - Interactive and gamified Instagram Story content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making existing students feel part of the community by encouraging interaction and ensuring as many students join Laurea's Facebook group - Information about postgraduate study possibilities for undergraduate students - Activating students to achieve student and alumni advocacy
Mature students 30+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing solutions for a career change or further education - Information about open university studies - Tone of voice more formal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informative webinar (e.g. Open Day -type Facebook live) to share information about degree programmes and provide potential students to ask questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear communication about application period times - Webinar or chat possibility on how to complete the application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about postgraduate study possibilities for undergraduate students - Activating students to achieve student and alumni advocacy

Table 6. Google's See-Think-Do-Care framework applied to Laurea.

For young adults, the See stage should include short and fun video content as well as actively utilizing influencer marketing. These are excellent ways to attract the younger generation's attention and therefore raise awareness. Also, using more students in video content increases relevance of the content. Next, the Think stage could provide the possibility to ask questions from current students on Instagram. Short information packages about degree programmes could also be shared, preferably created and shared by current students to maintain the communication relatable. The Do stage should focus on reminding about application period deadlines, sharing tips and support about the application process and publishing interactive and gamified Story content. For the Care stage, steps to strengthen the sense of community should be taken. Students could be encouraged to be active, interact and join Laurea's Facebook group. Information about postgraduate study options is also valuable at this point.

Mature students, on the other hand, require slightly different type of communication. Do stage could have an emphasis on suggesting a career change or further education while maintaining a more formal tone of voice. Open university could also be promoted. For the Think stage, an Open Day -type of webinar should be arranged to provide extensive information and the chance to ask about degree programmes. The Do stage should include clear communication about application times as well as a webinar or chat possibility with support on how to complete the application. Lastly, the Care stage would be similar to the other target market. Postgraduate study options should be promoted as well as aiming to activate students to eventually achieve student and alumni advocacy.

All in all, Laurea's engagement and social media strategy are on a good level. However, there were some clear ways that it could be improved further. Since the topic is a fast-changing area, it is important to monitor possible changes and make improvements when necessary.

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