



## **Benchmarking travel blogs**

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## Abstract

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<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> 34 + 3
<p>This thesis focuses on gaining knowledge about travel blogs with a benchmarking method. Reason for researching already existing travel blogs was author's own interested of starting an own travel blog. Without previous understanding of blogging aim for this research was to gain solid starting base for the future planning of travel blog.</p> <p>The theoretical part discusses the topics of benchmarking, social media content, content marketing, social media and different forms of it such as Facebook, Instagram and blogging. The theoretical part includes research of different content marketing models like REAN -model and Google -model Hero, Hub, Help. These models could be used as a tool when in the future author starts to plan content for his travel blog.</p> <p>Benchmarking is well known method to study others as a aim is to learn from them and bring those learnings a part of your processes. Benchmarking worked as qualitative research method and provided useful information about amount of blog visitors and target groups. Further analysis showed patterns on blog posts headings, posting frequency, number of images and words. Different benchmarking models and history of benchmarking is discussed on theoretical framework.</p> <p>The results indicate that starting a successful travel blog would be possible, but it requires a lot of work. Professional bloggers are posting almost in daily basis with high quality content that are really bringing value for the reader. Important thing to notice is that value is also brought to the blogger, and this is happening mainly through affiliate links. As a future recommendation further research is needed to gain understanding of how artificial intelligence might effect on content creation and blogging.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Social media, benchmarking, blogging, content marketing

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## 1 Introduction

As the research question is to answer question what kind of content author should post on his future travel blog it is important to understand what social media means and how content marketing could be used in this process. Social media, content and content marketing and especially blogging is explained in theoretical framework. Author goes through Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest as well since blogging has changes much since its beginning and now content creators are on multiple channels and are not only posting blog posts. Other social media platforms are ways to get traffic for your main site for those who are really interested on your topic.

Social media has plenty of users all around the world. It is estimated that over 4.7 billion people are using social media. This means about 60% of all people in the world. These high numbers have been evolved quickly since only in 2004 first social media platform MySpace got 1 million active users in monthly. Social media has quickly become the main media for many people to get information about news so its not only about social connection but as well getting information about daily basis on everything that happens around us. Businesses have also noticed it benefits and social media is highly used in marketing. (Dollarhide 2023.)

Social media as a term went viral in 2005 when websites began to be more user friendly and allowed users to make content by themselves. With social media could be meant for multiple different communication practises where people from different backgrounds are involved with different kind of content. Some of the well-known and staple forms of social media are for example blogging and social networking. Content sharing through different websites like videos, music, text or images are a part of social media. (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 17-19.)

Content can be in different forms and especially since social media it has taken important role of marketing. Different type of content is posted on websites, emails, blogs and different social media platforms. This could be images, infographics and different visual elements. Videos in different channels. Text, like articles, blogs or posts in different platforms. Voice like a podcast or music behind image or video. Different type of content is widely generated, and it changes fast. To be able to provide interesting and engaging content need for well structured content marketing plans has increased. What type of content to post differs a lot of the platform that is used. (Kananen 2018, 11-52.)

Blog is a shorter word of a weblog and it goes back to the late 1990s. Development could be said to started from beginning of web journal to web log to wee logs and then to blogs. For audience it is much simpler word to understand and it avoids confusion between server log files that web log means as well. (Tremayne 2007, VII.) In the beginning of blogging there were no designed

platforms that could be directly used to write a blog. Instead, bloggers had to write and code the blog on their own. This meant that if you wanted to update your blog you had to code it. This changed in late 1999 when new products were published that automated weblog publication. Two of the well-known products were called Blogger and Pitas. (Kresh 2007, 264-265.)

With its user-friendly interface Blogger soon became a popular platform to use when building a blog. They had punchline "Push-button publishing for the people" which promised to change weblogging. It was easy to use since it had a field where to write text instead of needing to use coding skills. This made people use it without skills to include links to other website to their posts, so people started posting short messages and this became to know as a start of blogging as we know it now. Later, new feature permalink was published meaning that you could use same link to find a certain post which you before had to search manually and commenting on posts became possible. (Kresh 2007, 265-266.)

Blogs represent the earliest form of social media and are a type of websites that display content on specific topic or with diary type of format following certain timeline. Blogs used to be only personal type of diaries explaining on one person's life but now variety of different type of blogs has increased and companies have taken part of blogging as well. Companies are for example posting about new innovations, promoting their products or things that might affect stakeholders. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 63.)

Research method was chosen to be benchmarking since author had quite limited timetable for this research and benchmarking did not require any surveys or interviews which could have taken a lot of time. With benchmarking it was possible to gain understanding what type of content bloggers are posting and how often. Benchmarking does have its limitations and data what are you getting from other websites is not always trustworthy, so it is important to view those results critically.

Benchmarking practices that are used now days are based on 1970s when a company called Xerox developed their benchmarking tool which allowed them to cut down logistics cost and high up their product quality and cost (Stapenhurst 2009, 9). Company was founded in 1906 and it was first one to produce xerographic plain-paper copiers that were invented on 1938 (InspireIP s.a.). In 1960s company had increased its profit from 1961 2,5 million up to 128 million in 1968 but in 1970s they faced problems when Japanese products entered in markets. Xerox had its new model but in many ways, it did not fulfil markets expectations and they had to redevelop it. After a year they went back to market, but result was same. Eventually they decided to visit Japan to learn more about what they are doing so differently than them. After the visit they realized that Xerox overheads were double than Japanese, their inventory was smaller and the quality of incoming good were much better. When realizing that they were behind in many sectors of their competitors they

develop a plan how to improve their own performance. They involved their employees on process and did benchmarking of their competitors. They found out which companies had the best logistics, best quality, marketing, product development and engineering and then learned how to include those practices to their processes. These steps are considered to be cornerstones of benchmarking. (Stapenhurst 2009, 9.)

## 2 Theoretical framework

In this chapter theoretical framework of thesis is explained. Social media and different channels as well meaning of a blogging and its terminology is explained. Social media content and different types of social media content marketing models are explained as they are important tools when planning on posting in social media. Content research is made with use of benchmarking and different benchmarking models are introduced. Theoretical framework provides deeper understanding of social media, social media content marketing and benchmarking.

### 2.1 Social media

Davis (2016, 1) defines social media as “the set of interactive Internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content”. This includes various different platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Graigslist, Youtube and so on. What is similar to all these platforms is that all involve interactivity between users since they make and share content but still there are multiple differences how these platforms are used such as platform structure, its users and rules. (Davis 2016, 1-3.)

Dollarhide (2023) explains social media as “A computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities.” Dictionary of University of Cambridge (s.a.) define social media to be “forms of media that allow people to communicate and share information using the internet or mobile phones.” On the other words, Scott and Jacka (2011, 5) are defining social media as:

*“Social media is the set of Web-based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content to publishers. With the ability to achieve massive scalability in real time, these technologies empower people to connect with each other to create (or co -create) value through online conversation and collaboration.”*

They do state that the most impressive thing that has become when using these new technologies is to improvement of social relationships. Interaction could be with family, customers, employees or investors and it has become easy with new fast evolving technology (Scott & Jacka 2011, 5-6). In image below are listed most used social media platforms in January 2023 and how many million active users they have. In first place is Facebook with almost 3 billion active users. In top six all platforms have over one billion active users. If we look research about mobile app’s active users we can notice that in top ten we can find YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram which all are on the list with most used social media platforms as well. (Kemp 2023.)

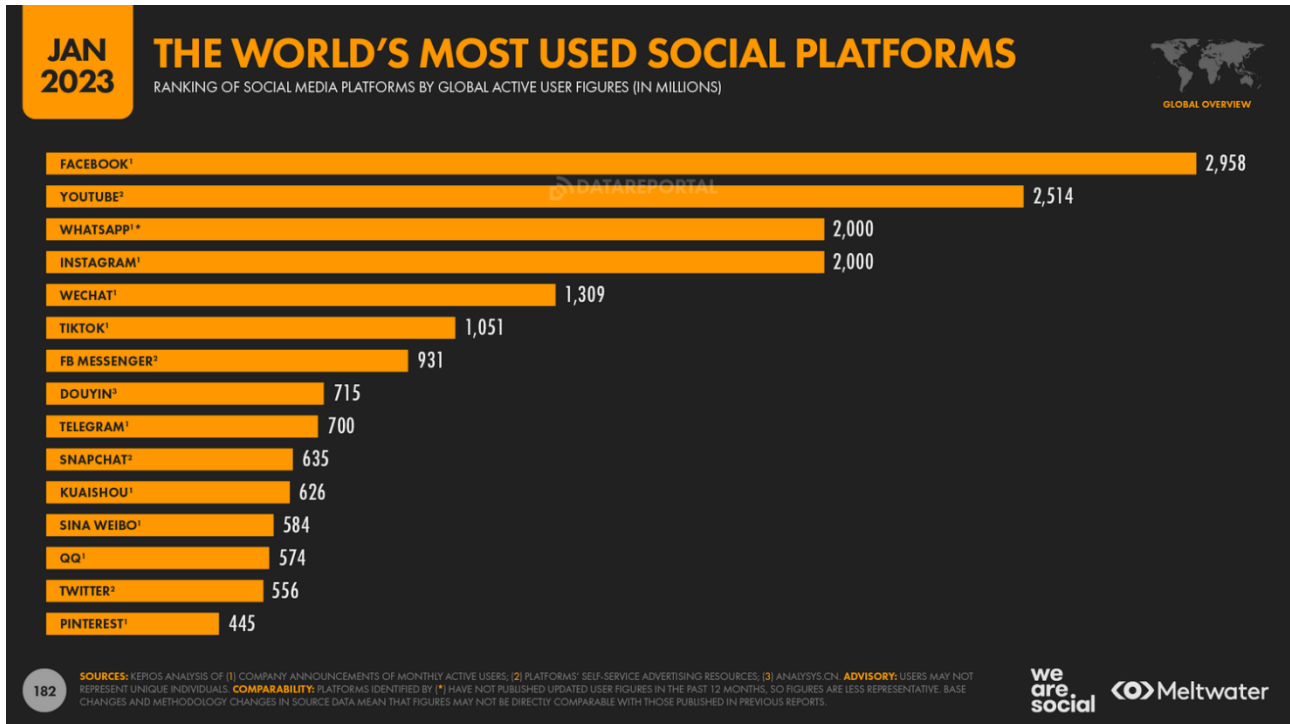


Image 1. The world's most used social media platforms (Kemp 2023)

### 2.1.1 Facebook

Facebook is a social media platform that allows users to share ideas, videos, music, photos and articles to other users. It is free for its users to sign-up and gives possibility to connect with friends, family, and colleagues. Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes while they all were studying in Harvard University. Facebook has estimated to be almost 3 billion active users which makes it the most used social media platform in the world. While offering a free platform Facebook makes most of its income from advertisements that are on the site. (Ray 2023.)

To start use of Facebook user needs to create an account and add asked information as can be seen in image below. Fill in first and last name, email address or phone number, password, birthday, and gender. Birthday is used to confirm your age as well it affects what kind of advertisements you will get. Gender has same effect and if chosen custom you need to choose pronoun after that. When required detail have been filled it's possible to add profile picture and cover photo. Other options are offered as well and place for education, employment, hometown, and marital status can be added. You can decide which information is visible for other users with your privacy settings. (Kakar 8 October 2023.)

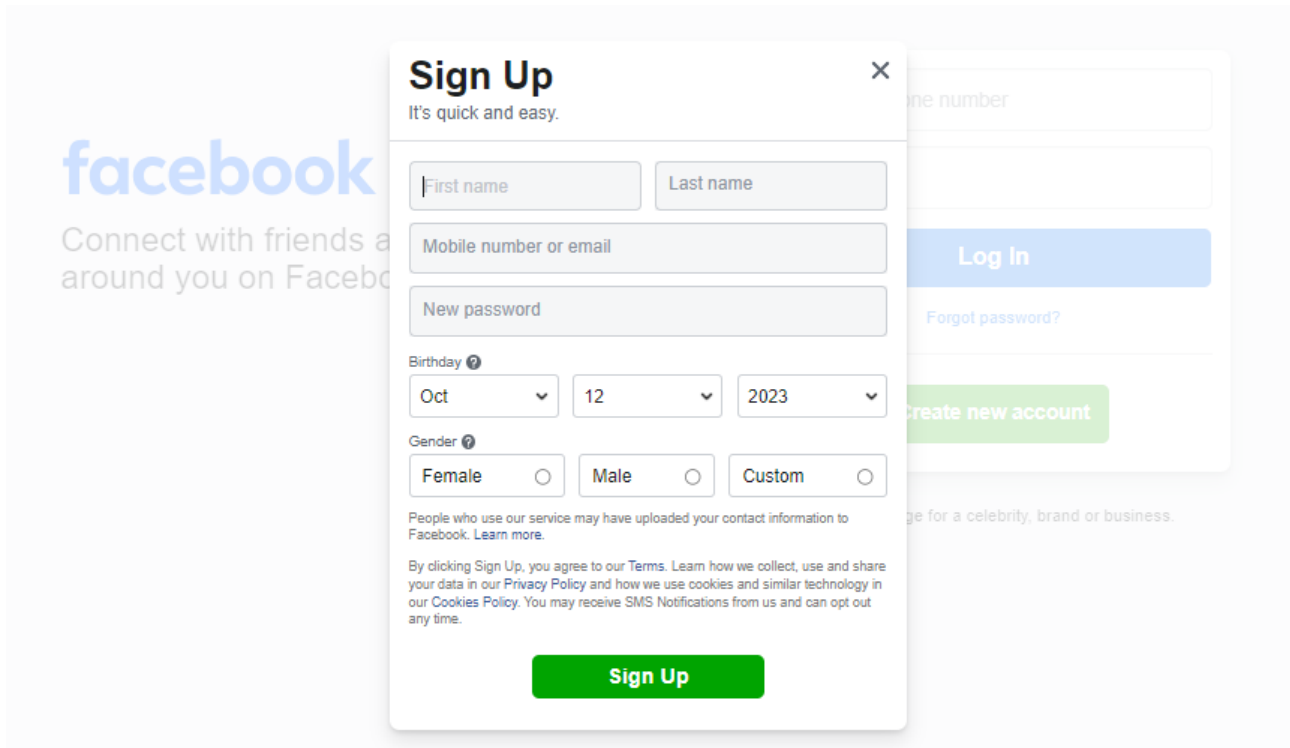


Image 2. Facebook Sign up page (Facebook 2023)

One of the main things on Facebooks is to connect with friends and colleagues. You can search people with name or email address and send friend request. Connecting with other people gives social experience and you can share important moments with them and keep up what people are doing. In news feed you can see post from your friends and things that Facebook algorithm recommends you based on your interests and previous activity. To posts you can comment and like and you can post by yourself as well. While posting you can decide if post is visible for all your friends or just for certain people. (Kakar 8 October 2023.)

Facebook groups allow you to join groups that you interested about. Group could be made for your childhood friends, colleagues or it could be about a hobby or other thing that interest you. It is a great way of learning new things and connecting with other people that have same interests than you. While it is possible to comment on post you can have private or group conversations on Facebook Messenger where it is possible to chat, send images, audio, videos, stickers, or emoticons. (Kakar 8 October 2023.)

Creating and managing Pages is important especially for companies and groups to reach larger audience. Pages allow you to build your brand, connect with customers and present your products. You can as well manage, and use adds and collect data for analytics. Since Facebook collects a lot of user information adds can reach your target audience effectively. (Kakar 8 October 2023.)

### 2.1.2 Instagram

Instagram is a free application that allows users to share and make content like photos and videos through mobile application that is available on Android and iPhone phones. Users can share, comment and like photos and videos to personalized friend group or with all users. Application is available for all people over the age of 13 years old. (Instagram s.a.)

Instagram was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Kriger in San Francisco. First application was published in 2010 for iPhone and 2012 for the Android phone. Application became quite popular and gained over 40 million users in two years. After huge success Facebook bought the company in 2012 for one billion dollars. In the beginning it was only possible to share photos but 2013 they launched possibility to share short 15 second videos as well and 2016 limit was extended to 60 seconds. (Holak & McLaughlin May 2017.)

After the launch of application Instagram have developed multiple new features. Instagram Feed is users main page where is possible to publish photos and videos. With different post your feed gets attention of viewer and image what your account is about. Typical post are photos, memes, text and videos. If posting a lot of text-based content, you could think about it as a type of a blog even. While posting if you use similar background on your post, it could help you to build your brand and feed looks more professional as well. (Lehtomaa 2020, chapter 3.)

Instagram story feature was published in 2016. It allows users to post photos or videos that are available only for 24 hours. This tool has become highly used by social media influencer since this type on content is considered to be more trustworthy and real than normal posts. Since Instagram Feed is more about brand building gives stories possibilities to see behind the scenes of brand. When giving more detailed and personal content to audience it makes them more committed and engaged to your brand. Instagram is offering multiple free tools to make example questioners which can help to build your relationship with your followers. (Lehtomaa 2020, chapter 3.)

Instagram reels feature was published in august 2020 and together with Facebook reels are viewed over 140 billion times per day. At first it gave possibility to publish only 15 second short video clips which could be edited with new creative tools and audio. Now it is possible to publish up to 15-minute-long reels, but Instagram is recommend to keep videos under 90 seconds to reach wider audience. If account is public, then your reel has a possibility to reach audience in globally. (About Instagram 2017 & Business Instagram s.a.)

### 2.1.3 Pinterest

Pinterest is a web and mobile social media application for sharing visual content, functioning like a visual bookmarking tool. Users can post images, GIFs, and videos on bulletin board-style boards. Pinterest is available in multiple languages, and it lets users to discover, save, and share content with common interests. It also makes possible sharing on other social media platforms and embedding pins on websites. (Social Bee s.a.)

The platform's name, "Pinterest," reflects its purpose – a blend of "pin" and "interest." It enables users to virtually pin items of interest, creating visual boards for easy access. Founded by Ben Silbermann in 2010, Pinterest has grown into a network of over 445 million active global users (see Image 1.). While it's a social media platform, its initial appeal was as an online bookmarking tool for collecting and sharing favourite ideas, outfits, wishlists and recipes. It has since evolved into a source of inspiration, focusing on comparing interesting ideas, products, and projects. Pinterest is now an important tool for individuals and businesses looking to enhance their online presence. (Social Bee s.a.)

### 2.1.4 Blogging

Meaning of a term blog is not that simple to explain like many terms in social media. Here are few definitions that could be found on literature. In a book *The Handbook of Online and Social Media Research* author Ray Poynter (2010, 172) defines blog to as:

1. *“A Website accessed via an internet browser or mobile device.*
2. *Having an author (either person or a company); occasionally a blog has more than one author.*
3. *Having post which are added sequentially. Most blogs allow readers to sort the posts by topics or tags, but default is chronological.”*

In *The Whole Digital Library Handbook* term weblog is defined by Jorn Barger who was one of the editors of original weblog called Robot Wisdom. He defined it as “a web page where a weblogger ‘logs’ all the other web pages she finds interesting”. It is important to know that back in 1997 weblogs were mainly webpages that had transformed from typical diaries to web and many of weblogs were only with little of text and included links to other websites which author found to be interesting. (Kresh 2007, 264.)

Quite similar definitions could be found on different online sources. Cambridge University Dictionary (s.a.) defines blog “a record of news, people's opinions, photos, and videos about a particular subject that someone puts on the internet and adds information, pictures, etc. to regularly” and

Marketingterms (s.a.) define it as: "A frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and links". To summarize what does a term blog mean we could come in conclusion that it is an online publication that is written by one or multiple authors in chronological order with possibility to comment on it.

Blogs have different forms and could be divided into written blogs, video blogs and image blogs. Written blogs are most common but often include images and videos as well or links to them. Microblogging is one form of written blog and as the name says those are short texts published in different social media platforms such in X, previous Twitter. Video blogs or vlogs are blogs that are made in video format and are published in different social media channels such as in YouTube. (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008. 33.)

### **2.1.5 Blogging terms**

Blogosphere means all the blogs that are out online for people to read. It is a wide social community in mainly on text format. Since communication is on text format it makes easy to track down origin of the story and go back on archives to research older publications. What defines blogosphere is connection between the blogs. Bloggers are sharing links to other blogs which they find interesting, or they think that reader might be interested of those. Connection to other blogs and bloggers is crucial if you want blog to be successful and reach wide audience. (Tremayne 2007, x-xiii.)

When discussing about blogging, which means actual postings on blog, it is important to know what a blogger does and what is meant by it. Blogger is a person or a group of persons who write a blog. Bloggers could be amateur or professional or something between. Bloggers can provide links to other websites or blogs on their blog page, blogging sites or in the blog text. Bloggers can also decide if they want to keep blog private, available to all or invitation only. (Tremayne 2007, 7 & Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008. 31-33.)

Blogroll is a side bar on your blog that shows reader what blogs you are reading yourself and are recommending for your readers as well. Recommending other blogs is a part of blogging and it helps for making a contact with other bloggers and they might also add your blog to their blogroll which might gain you more readers. It is recommended to keep in mind that add only blogs that are good and you really think that can benefit your reader as well. (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, Chapter 1.)

## 2.2 Social Media Content

With different type of platforms should content also be different if goal is to attract reader. Here is example about blog post which shows an idea what type of content and how it should be formed to be interesting. Blog post should have headline that attracts reader to look about the actual post. Headline should be standing out and with the shorter sub-headline there should be a short introduction what whole post is including. With other sub-headlines reader can quickly get an idea if blog post is worth reading or not. With visual effects like photos or videos post gain more personal look and those are things that reader will notice first. With visual effects search engines are also finding your post better and with right key words search result could be optimized even further. Call of action should be in some form since with blog post writer do want something from the reader. It could be newsletter subscription, affiliate link to by a product that has been promoted or just button to front page for example. (Kananen 2018, 57-72.)

What is a good content? Rummukainen, Hakola & Hiila (2019, 268) summarise good content to be the one that is somehow helpful for the reader. If thinking about business point of view, then both company and customer should gain benefits for content interaction in the long run. Neither business or customers want to spend time to something that does not bring any value. If company's or for example free time blogger that have made plan for content marketing has results that reach goals that have been set, then content has been good. For a company this could mean certain number of sales made through content marketing and for blogger it could mean number of new subscribers.

## 2.3 Content marketing

Content marketing has changed during the years and since development of social media, there are multiple different channels that successful marketer should master. Without a structured strategy and plan to whom, how, when and where to make content, it is hard to succeed. To help with these processes there are multiple different content marketing models that could be used based on your goals and in following sub-chapters two of those are presented. All models have same basic principles that can be seen in figure 3. below. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 153-154.)

## Planning phase

- Content strategy
- Content marketing model
- Content plan

## Production Phase

- Content

Figure 3. Basic content marketing model (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 155)

Planning phase and content strategy is aiming to find out what are our goals. Who are we trying to talk to and what kind of content and tools we need. Content marketing model dives in deeper and should give tools to decide which marketing model is most suitable for our needs. Content plan is actual plan what, where and when do we publish. Lastly the production phase should be clear to execute when plan is ready and actual content can be made according to the plan. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 155.)

### 2.3.1 REAN – Model

REAN – Model is based on different steps of customer journey, and it comes from words reach, engage, activate and nurture. This model is highly used when most of the marketing processes are automated and measuring how content is used and engaged by customers. This allows to understand which type of content should be produced for a certain customer in different part of customer journey. Next four steps are further explained. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 178-179.)

Reach as a first step is phase where brand value is built. Building a strong brand is important since customer might yet not know about us at all. Aim is to reach as wide audience as possible for potential target market. When aiming to reach wide audience, content is not that specific or focusing just one part of your business but wider area and even outside of your core business since goal is to reach as many people as possible. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 180.)

Second step is engage, where customer already knows our brand and our competitors as well but is comparing different options. Our content should provide extra value for customer and what kind of benefits our product brings. Main goal is to make customer believe that our brand and products are the best ones available. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 180.)

Active customers to make purchase since they have made already decision to buy product, service, subscription or for example, contacting your customer service or sales department. Content to provide at this step should be as easy to find as possible and it should make customer to finalise purchase. This could be information how to reach sales department, how to make actual order online or how to find closest store for example. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 181.)

When customer already knows the brand and has made purchase is time for nurture content. This part is important since you would like to keep already existing customer engaged with your brand. With right type of content, you can make customer share experiences with your product to others and this helps to build even stronger brand. Content could be for example, reviews on products or some kind of membership that makes customer more engaged with the brand. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 181.)

Benefits for this model is that it makes to think all steps of the customer journey and not just activation part for example. If only one step of process is concentrated and other parts not it is highly possible that the purchase is not made. Reason for this could be that process to actually buy is made so hard that customer decides to use service that is easier to use. Often the last part nurturing might be down looked but with this model is not going to be forgotten. Happy customers are usually the best market tools when they are promoting your services to friends and family. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 184.)

### **2.3.2 Google model: Hero, Hub, Help**

Google has originally published this model in 2015 to help with YouTube content creators but it could be used as a base for any platform that content is published. It has three categories where all content is divided during the year and when starting planning of content marketing plan this is kept in mind. Figure 4 below demonstrates how model is divided. If model is followed correctly, it makes sure that all type of content is created and planned and not only the really interesting one. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 157.)

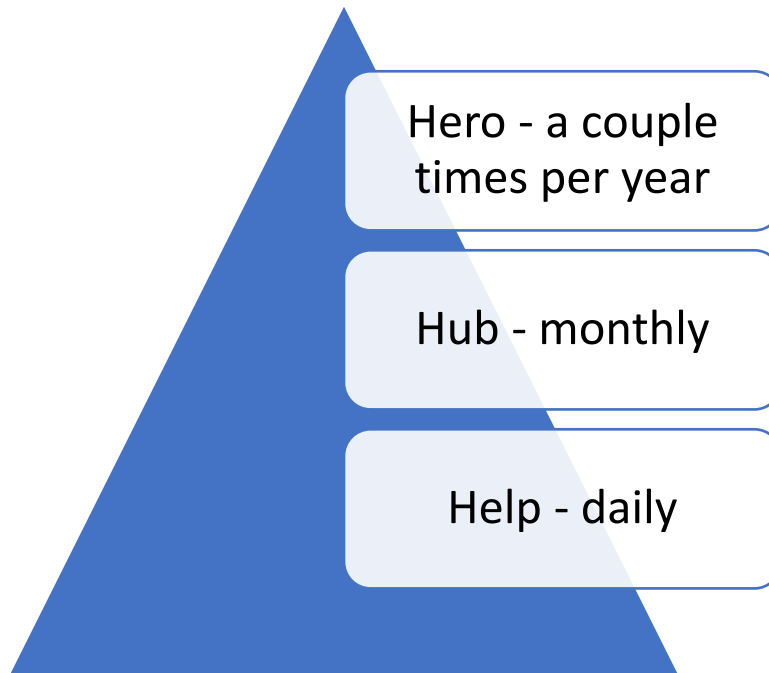


Figure 4. Hero, Hub, Help -model (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 158)

As figure 4 shows Help – content is on bottom, and it is the biggest category for content. This content should be the one that customers need in daily basis. This could be guides, product information, test result or comparisons. Basically, all information that customer might want right now and not later on. If relevant information is not available there is a risk that customers are going for your competitors. Content is usually quite light, and it should answer customers questions like – How it works or What are the key features. Content production does not typically need a lot of resources so its rather easy to keep up to date and if needed make new one as well. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 158-159.)

Hub – content is typically content that is produced on one-to-three-month bases. This content should bring more depth to your brand and make customers more aware about your brand and what are you offering. Content should give customers reason to follow your brand in social media and with new content you will show better on search engine results. Hub – content could be something that has connection with time of the year. This can be tips for autumn travel, content on your brand event or taking a part of up-to-date conversations that are relevant for your brand. Main ide for Hub – content is to build brand awareness and inform customers what brand and its products are doing for the world. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 159-160.)

Here – content should be made at least ones a year. This content is something that should gain bigger awareness about your brand and bring value for your customers. This could be for example, a new product launch or brand reformation. Hero – content should support Hub and Help – content

so it is recommended to keep in mind that there is connection between all content that is made during the year. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 160-161.)

How different types of content are attracting customers can be divided in push and pull marketing. Pull – content is helpful for the customers and pulling towards your brand and this is happening in daily basis which makes it important that your Help – content is providing value for the customer. Push – marketing is making more awareness towards your brand, and it is those big events or product launches that bring a lot of attention to you. Hub – content is in the middle of push and pull marketing and its helping to provide information for customers and building up brand image. With this model the best results might come if there is not so many different product categories or services in the company. (Rummukainen & al. 2019, 161.)

## **2.4 Benchmarking**

This thesis aims to find the best practises for how to build a successful travel and exercise blog. To find out what top bloggers are doing and how are those blogs and social media channels studied with use of benchmarking. Benchmarking gives understanding what your competitors are doing and how. This helps you to build your own brand and compare your ideas to others so its possible to see if those are worth of trying or not.

Benchmarking as a term does not have one and only definition. It can include a lot of different practises that company is taking to measure its performance against competitors and based on results they can adopt those practices or processes which they think that can help to improve their performance. Organizations with high performance levels might only consider benchmarking to be comparison of performance metrics and not include process of development and adaptation to their processes. Benchmarking can be used to compare performance or learn from others, and it is mainly used for to improve products, services or practises inside the organization. Your competitors to benchmarking process should be chosen to be those whose performance is on higher level than yours or you could choose industry leaders so you could see what is the highest level of performance that there is. (Stapenhurst 2009, 3-4.)

Benchmarking in different forms and practices have become a part of a daily life. Here are a few examples from Stapenhurst (2009, 10) how different forms of benchmarking are used.

- Different consumer magazines or medias are testing and comparing different products and usually rating those. It could be the best car of a year 2023 or which hotel has the most local products on their breakfast.
- In stock market investors are often comparing and analysing different companies before they make investment

- Organizations compare their operating functions or facilities, and they can benchmark their different processes like recruitment or development process.
- Organizations benchmark their long-term strategies, and it can focus on customer service or product development for example.
- Different events or even construction projects can be benchmarked with project benchmarking.

Tuominen and Lahti (2021, 12-15) on the other hand divide different benchmarking types on four categories as followed.

- Strategic benchmarking compares different strategies how to get same or different outcomes. For example, in which market company is, what type of customers they have, what kind of products they have and how do they grow. Comparing companies in same field helps to get an idea about how business is made and to gain different ideas comparison can be made for companies outside of your field.
- Product benchmarking can be used on product development. To measure your product against your competitors can give ideas how it would be possible to improve your product. Product can be a service as well and for example service quality or price could be measured.
- Process benchmarking aims to find out which part of process needs to be developed. Differences in different part of logistic chain for example could make delivery and production process to take a lot longer time than other company. By comparing these processes and setting goals for improvement huge advances could be gained.
- Know how benchmarking aims to find out how work could be done more effectively. For example, sales process could be same in different countries but on other country salesperson has skill to sell more complex solutions and on factory machines could be similar but on other factory employee uses two machines at the same time.

#### **2.4.1 Different benchmarking models**

With benchmarking goal is to learn from others that are doing a part of business better than you. Like mentioned before system is not a new one and with a lot of different guides and books available it is possible for anyone to use. To help with benchmarking proses Tuominen and Lahti (2021, 33) have developed ten and seven step models to make benchmarking proses faster. Models could be used to develop business idea, products, processes, and employees.

1. Define benchmarking target
2. Recognize benchmarking companies
3. Measure performance difference
4. Identify the factors behind success
5. Learn how we do it
6. Learn how they do it
7. Set goals
8. Apply and adapt
9. Establish and develop further
10. Star benchmarking again with different goals

Figure 1. 10 Step benchmarking model by Tuominen and Lahti (2021, 35)

Ten step benchmarking model has following steps that can be seen on figure 1 above. The first step is to choose benchmarking target. It should be something that is important for company success. For example, product quality is something that could be improved, and it should increase customer satisfaction and internal processes at the same time. Measure where are you now, how have you developed so far and where you want to be and when.

Recognize companies that are top performers and relevant to your benchmarking target. Companies could be from the same field or from different one depending on your target. If aim is to improve logistic process, then companies outside of your field might give ideas that you would have never thought of implementing. On the other hand, if product quality is to be improved then comparing to your competitors better product would be great idea.

Performance differences are measured against the top performer or performers. Measuring should include past results, where company is now and how development is estimated to be in the future. Comparing these results to your company results gives out the differences. On the fourth part identify the factors that are affecting success. This could include one or multiple factors. For example, processes, employees, knowledge, or marketing could be the things that make performance level higher.

Measure and analyse your performance levels so that you understand where you at and can then compare and improve your performance. This part should include people who responsible for

processes that are developed, and close attention should be towards factors that are holding back performance. Comparison to the top performer should be started by identifying same things that were affecting your processes. Difference is that more attention should be given to factors that are making performance better. Define factors that are affecting performance levels and how those factors have been measured. This part explains which processes and elements are making the best results and which should be implemented to your own processes.

If possible, implement those practices that are going to improve your performance immediately. For the second part set a short and long period goals how performance is going to be improved and measured. Setting up goals and understanding factors behind the performance are highly important for benchmarking. After benchmarking is done its time for involve all departments that are on touch with the processes that are going to be improved. It is important to make sure that the plan for implementing changes is clear and there is enough time to make these changes. To improve and development new methods it is recommended to involve as many employees as possible to gain quick responses if something needs to be changed.

Benchmarking implementations should be monitored and controlled to make sure that goals are met. For the future measuring should be continued to ensure ongoing development of processes. Finally, benchmarking should be taken a part of permanent processes. It should be developed and new goals in benchmarking companies should be researched. Different approaches could be used to gain more results and from literature and previous research can give ideas how to change approach. (Tuominen & Lahti 2020, 36-45.)

Tuominen and Lahti (2021) present as well 7 step benchmarking model which has following steps:

1. Define target.
2. Define benchmarking companies.
3. Learn how we do it.
4. Learn how they do it.
5. Set goals.
6. Apply and take use.
7. Make it as standard process and develop further (Tuominen & Lahti, 2021, 60)

Similarity to 10 step model is notable and main difference is that they just removed some specified phases and made this model simpler to understand.

Vuorinen and Huikkola (2023) on the other present benchmarking as 5 step process that is shown in figure 2 below.

1. Define development need/s and open up own current processes

2. Choose development area and find out who is doing it better

3. Exchange experiences with the best and learn how they do it

4. Analyze differences and set goals

5. Apply what you have learnt and rate your new performance

Figure 2. Benchmarking process (Vuorinen & Huikkola 2023)

These three different models all have a lot of similar phases, and it could be said that based on your type of benchmarking you could modify your model to fit in your needs. Example with the last model presented step 3 might not be possible to do since other companies might not want to change information with you if there is no benefit for them. In this case benchmarking could be done with the data that is available for you.

### 3 Methods

Aim for this thesis was to find out what kind of content to post on authors future travel blog. To gain understanding about what type of content would be good for blog was benchmarking chosen as qualitative research method. Based on Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019, 175) qualitative research method gathers non-numeric data like words and images whereas quantitative research method gathers numeric data. Quantitative research is often taken form of surveys whereas quantitative can be considered to be interviews or data analysis process that is not using numeric data, for example. On that reason benchmarking was chosen as qualitative research method since blogs are typically filled with written text and images and goal was to analyse that type of content.

For benchmarking author chose 7 step model that Tuominen and Lahti (2020) have presented. Some changes were required to it since author does not have a blog yet where to compare results and at this point results that are gained are not yet applied for same reason. Even though findings cannot be compared those should give ideas what type of post might reach potential readers. Benchmarking is made by exploring blogs and with help of website that tracks users and gives out data. For example, how many visitors blog have, which countries are they from and what is sex and age of most of the visitors.

What blogs to choose for benchmarking? That's a tricky question since author was not quite sure for example, what will be his main audience and would blog only be about own experiences or could it be more about travelling overall and finding out interesting destinations, for example. To help with finding out which blog to choose was website called Similiarweb used. This website gives out data for almost every website that there is. It shows for example, where website visitors are from, their age group, gender, top keywords that are bringing traffic to the site, number of visitors per month and comparison to previous month. It is important to know that this website offers this type of data for free and with paying it possible to get more information about websites. Based on idea that free version is used it should be taken consideration how reliable data is. Table 1 below shows key numbers of each blog that were chosen for benchmarking.

Table 1. Key numbers of benchmarking blogs. (Similarweb 2023a; Similarweb 2023b; Similarweb 2023c)

	The World Travel Guy	The Global Viewpoint	The Nomadic Matt
Visitors September 2023	306 300	427 900	1 200 000

Gender % -male	46,34%	45,93%	42,19%
Two of the biggest age groups	35,09%, 25-34	29,67%, 25-34	32,03%, 25-34
	19,44%, 35-44	19,29%, 35-44	19,60%, 35-44
Top 3 countries where visitors are from	USA 45,52%	USA 62,48%	USA 47,34%
	Australia 6,81%	United Kingdom 6,6%	Canada 8,04%
	Indonesia 4,56%	Canada 3,85%	United Kingdom 7,66%

Blog number one is The World Travel Guy -blog that was founded by American guy David Leiter who has been travelling around the world since 2016. Blog is about his own experiences during the travels. Blog has over 300 posts with wide variety. For example, top 10 things to do, drone videos, specific guides for visiting a certain destination and a lot of more. It is possible to search post with based on locations or you could for example, search with categories like volcanos or beaches. As table 1 above shows blog had on September 2023 over 300 000 visitors from mainly of age 25 to 34. 46,34% of visitors were males and almost half of all visitors were from USA. (The World Travel Guy 2023.)

Blog number two is the Global Viewpoint travel blog that was founded by Jon Miksis since 2017. He is a full-time travel blogger from Boston, USA. Blog has over 500 post and older post are updated actively. There are for example, plenty of posts about what are cheapest airports to fly in, 12 best things to do in certain destination or 10 most beautiful places. According to John blog had over 370 000 pageviews in January 2022 so when comparing table 1 findings to Jon´s acquisition those numbers seem quite realistic. Global Viewpoint had 427 900 visitors in September 2023 and 29,67% of those were between of 25 to 34 years of age. Most of the visitors were from USA. (The Global Viewpoint 2023.)

Blog number three is the Nomadic Matt that was founded by Matthew Kepnes in 2008. Blog has approximately 1000 posts about travelling related topics. Blog has post for example about, where to stay in a certain destination, what are the best hotels, what to pack when going to travel, what to do in a certain destination and plenty of more. Blog is also accepting guest writers' stories and those are separately marked in blog. Table 1 shows that the Nomadic Matt had the most monthly visits at 1 200 000 total. From all the visitors 42,19% were males and 32,03% were between 25 to 34 years of age. 47,34% of visitors were from USA. (The Nomadic Matt 2023.)

All the blogs have a lot of monthly visitors which makes them a good for benchmarking. Also, all blogs have most of their readers from age groups between 25 to 34 and second one from 35 to 44 which is good since author is 33 years old. Since most of visitors are from USA it should be kept in mind when planning own content. Gender distribution shows that a bit over half of the readers are females.

Three blogs above mentioned were chosen for benchmarking based on their wide audience and suitable target group. Since deciding which three blogs to use for benchmarking its possible to start to learn how they do blogs and try to figure out what makes them so successful. Here is the list on what should be found out from benchmarked blogs.

1. How many images and how many words of text?
2. Headlines. Are those following some patterns?
3. How often they are posting?
4. What are main keywords that readers are using when entering on blog.

Timetable for conducting this research was quite narrow and data for benchmarking was gathered between October and November 2023. Since Similiarweb-site only gives out data for free in previous month was data from September 2023 used. This on the other hand made impossible to go back on those numbers when month changed. Luckily this did not cause any problems since all data was properly gathered before month changed.

## 4 Results

When learnt a lot about blogs and blogging together, with benchmarking was time to begin with benchmarking process to find out what kind of content should be posted on future travel blog. At this point goal is to find out a type of content three of the very successful travel blogs are posting. This is for example, what type of post are posted, what are popular headlines, how many images are used per posts and how long posts are.

To find out what type of posts blogs are doing ten latest blog post were analysed in each blog. The Global Viewpoint had multiple updated posts that originally are posted way before so those were not used. Analysing all post would have taken too much time and probably benefit from that would not have been remarkable so 10 posts from each blog was chosen. Number of words has been counted with tool that website Thehot.com offers. It counts all words from website that is given to system. This on the other means that also headings and texts from side bar are counted on that number as well so it does not give exact number of words that are directly related to blog post. Basen on own calculation for example post “Tiger’s Nest Monastery Bhutan Hike (Paro Taktsang)” had only 3088 words versus 4268 which is from the whole blog post website. This should be taken in consideration when thinking about blog post length.

Date of publish was founded in each blog post and can be used as an example how often blog post should be posted. Number of images has been calculated manually and includes only images that are relevant for blog post. Mainly those images were taken by blogger but in some cases other images were used as well. If post was about “12 best thing” then there were, one or two image on each of those. Overall quality of images was good and those really brought value for the reader. Next there are findings from each three blogs in separate tables.

Table 2 shows 10 latest blog posts from the World Travel Guy blog with name of blog post, date of publish, number of images and words. It shows that posts have been made in less than two weeks which means that posts have been made almost every day. 17,3 was an average amount of images per post which includes only images that was relevant for blog post. Average amount of words per blog post was 3361 words which includes all words from blog post page. Names of blog post include mentions of specific locations, certain activities, comparative information, and use of visuals are as well used on headings.

Table 2. 10 latest blog posts from the World Travel Guy blog with name of blog post, date of publish, number of images and words (The World Travel Guy 2023)

Date of publish	Name of blog post	Number of images	Number of words
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21 October 2023	Tiger's Nest Monastery Bhutan Hike (Paro Taktsang)	21	4268
20 October 2023	Seram Island & Ora Beach Travel Guide (Maluku, Indonesia)	25	3302
19 October 2023	Antelope Canyon Tours: Which Is Best? (Upper, Lower, X)	20	3452
19 October 2023	Antelope Canyon X Tour Review, Photos & Experience	11	3116
18 October 2023	Vietnam Incense Village Tour (Quang Phu Cau) From Hanoi	9	2133
10 October 2023	Half Dome Deaths: How Many People Have Died On The Hike?	13	4488
8 October 2023	Palau Scenic Flight Over The Rock Islands + Pictures	19	2761
8 October 2023	Rock Islands Palau Boat Tour: Milky Way, Long Beach & More	16	3328
8 October 2023	Bohol Philippines Island Travel Guide & How To Visit	25	3870

8 October 2023	Mount Dukono Volcano Hike In Maluku, Indonesia	14	2892
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Table 3 below shows 10 latest blog posts from the Global Viewpoint blog with name of blog post, date of publish and number of images and words. 10 blog posts have been made in one week. This means that more than one post per day have been published. Post had an average of 15 images and all post had 15 or 16 images except one. Average number of words was 4163 per post. There were a lot of variety with number of words with 1543 word as lowest and highest 5324 words. Names of blog post demonstrate hidden or unique experiences, have strong focus on destination and posts are formed in list type of format.

Table 3. 10 latest blog posts from the Global Viewpoint blog with name of blog post, date of publish, number of images and words (The Global Viewpoint 2023)

Date of publish	Name of blog post	Number of images	Number of words
23 October 2023	THESE 5 DIGITAL NOMAD DESTINATIONS ARE SURGING IN POPULARITY	11	1543
18 October 2023	12 BEST THINGS TO DO IN THE FALKLAND ISLANDS: TOP ATTRACTIONS TO VISIT	15	4204
18 October 2023	12 MOST BEAUTIFUL PLACES ON THE RHINE RIVER TO VISIT	15	4032
18 October 2023	11 MOST BEAUTIFUL PLACES IN MOZAMBIQUE TO VISIT	15	4198
17 October 2023	12 BEST HIDDEN GEMS IN SAN DIEGO: A GUIDE	16	4101

	TO THE CITY'S SECRET WONDERS		
17 October 2023	12 BEST HIDDEN GEMS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA: DISCOVERING THE GOLDEN COAST OFF THE BEATEN PATH	16	4269
17 October 2023	12 BEST HIDDEN GEMS IN CHICAGO: DISCOVERING THE CITY OFF THE BEATEN PATH	16	4451
17 October 2023	12 BEST HIDDEN GEMS IN SWITZERLAND : A JOURNEY TO DISCOVER SWITZERLAND'S HIDDEN TREASURES	15	5324
17 October 2023	12 BEST HIDDEN GEMS IN THE MIDWEST: A JOURNEY INTO THE UNEXPLORED	16	4598
17 October 2023	11 BEST HIDDEN GEMS IN PARIS: TOP UNDER-RATED PARIS SIGHTS	15	4913

Table 4 shows 10 latest blog posts from the Nomadic Matt blog with name of blog post, date of publish, number of images and words. Blog posts have been published in two weeks period. Posts had an average of 10,3 images with the lowest number of one and the highest 28. Posts had an average 2425 words with the lowest number of 1507 and the highest 3290. Blog post names differ a lot and are all the way from practical credit card information to accommodation recommendations.

Table 4. 10 latest blog posts from the Nomadic Matt blog with name of blog post, date of publish, number of images and words (The Nomadic Matt 2023)

Date of publish	Name of blog post	Number of images	Number of words
30 October 2023	MY TOP GIFTS FOR TRAVELERS FOR THE HOLIDAYS	28	2994
30 October 2023	MY FAVORITE GEAR FOR TRAVELERS	26	2962
30 October 2023	WORK FROM HOME GIFT GUIDE: 18 AMAZING GIFTS FOR REMOTE WORKERS	19	2264
29 October 2023	THE BEST CREDIT CARDS FOR STUDENTS WHO WANT TO TRAVEL	4	2129
29 October 2023	WHERE TO STAY IN BUDAPEST: THE BEST NEIGHBORHOODS FOR YOUR VISIT	6	2376
29 October 2023	WHERE TO STAY IN VANCOUVER: THE BEST NEIGHBORHOODS FOR YOUR VISIT	6	2304
26 October 2023	THE BEST CREDIT CARDS FOR TRAVEL INSURANCE	5	2652
26 October 2023	THE BEST WALKING TOURS IN VENICE	1	1507

26 October 2023	THE 4 BEST HOSTELS IN LAGOS, PORTUGAL	5	1778
16 October 2023	WHAT IS BILT RENT DAY? EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW	3	3290

Table 5 below shows main keywords that have been used when entering to blog websites. There are similarities in all three blogs but some differences as well. Most used ones are travel blog and travel blogs. Bucket list ideas and underrated summer travel ideas stand out from other since those could be very well used as a topic of blog post. Some destinations from Asia are also mentioned.

Table 5. Top keywords that are driving from website (Similarweb 2023a; Similarweb 2023b; Similarweb 2023c)

Name of blog	The World Travel Guy	The Global Viewpoint	The Nomadic Matt
Keyword 1.	Travel blog	Travel blogs	Nomadic matt
Keyword 2.	International travel	Bucket list ideas	Travel blog
Keyword 3.	Where is Bali	Underrated summer travel ideas	Travel blogs
Keyword 4.	Nusa penida	Best travel blogs	Things to do in Taiwan
Keyword 5.	Travel blogs	Misogi	Japan itinerary

## 5 Discussion

The purpose of this research is to find out what type of content author should be posting on his future travel blog. To be able to answer the question social media, content marketing, blogging, and benchmarking were studied further to gain understanding of topic. With benchmarking process information about other blogs were gained and those findings could be used on planning process of the blog posts.

During research meaning of blog was confirmed as Poynter (2010 ,172) defined it to be a website that could be accessed, it would have one or multiple authors and would have multiple post that have been posted in chronological order. All three blogs that were benchmarked with in these definitions. All though it was a bit unclear if blog posts were posted by actual bloggers or if those were made by their team since all blogs had published ten posts in under two weeks period. Reason behind this could be that all researched blogs had grown to reach hundreds of thousand readers monthly and doing interesting and valuable content could be a difficult job for one person.

Blog posts names were informative and depending on blog those followed same patterns. As Kananen (2018) discussed blog post headline should attract reader to look the actual posts and this was met. All posts had also images that make them more visual and personalized which will help to keep readers interested about your blog. This was not a surprise since all blogs are very professional and very basics of blogging technics should be mastered. Most of posts had also affiliate links that could give commission to blogger if reader makes booking through link. This as well is something that Kananen (2018) wrote that bloggers should do.

Keywords that readers had used when going to blog page were not that surprising since the most popular was "Travel blog/blogs". What did come by a bit of surprise founding was that some of the keywords were very specific towards certain destination. This could be something to take consideration when planning posts and thinking about what to actually write. Other thing to consider might be doing blog posts on lists of different things since popular keyword combinations "Bucket list ideas" and "Underrated summer travel ideas" were used.

Number of images in blog posts varied a lot. As mentioned before images make blog more visual and it feels more personalized. Most images in blog post were 28 and fewest was one. This of course differs based on type of the post. Multiple post was made with heading including a number basically meant that if it was 12 then there were 12 images so one image per one thing on the list. This could be tourist attraction or hotels for example. Some post had multiple images of same place but mainly one image per one thing was enough.

Blog posts number of words varied between 1507 and 5324. These numbers are giving an idea of typical blog post length but it important to know that these numbers include all words from blog post website which means that actual number of words is lower. Blog post length differs a lot based on topic of post and as well about the blog and blogger itself. If there are more images, then there might not be that much need for that many words.

In this research author gained understanding about social media and content marketing which are important topics to know when starting a blog. Benchmarking of three different blogs gained understanding about benchmarking process and more about blogging and what type of blog posts could interest readers. Benchmarking process helped to support findings from the literature review. Further research is necessary to do when author actual starts blogging. Type of blog, more specific niche and name of blog should be research, for example.

## 6 Conclusion

Social media has developed a lot and changed our lives in the last decades. Nearly 5 billion people are using some sort of social media platform which is about 60% of world population. First platform to gain million users in 2004 was MySpace and now 2023 Facebook has nearly 3 billion users. Since development of social media blogging has developed as well and it can take forms of text, images and videos. First blogs were type of journals and if you wished to have your own blog you had to code it by yourself. This might be hard to think of since today it does not require any coding skills but only ability to create content and then publish it on blogging site.

Content marketing and more specific social media content marketing would be great tool when planning of making new content. Good quality content is crucial if you wish to succeed with social media since there is a lot of competition. With blog post content should bring value to the reader and not waste time. All starts with good heading that gives out relevant information what blog post is about and that is followed with short introduction. Images and visual aspects are important to make blog look more personal and to make blog more interesting for reader. Images and videos could give a lot of value since search engines might find post easier and that way attract more readers. Blog should bring value for blogger as well and it could be for example, in a form of affiliate links.

Benchmarking as a research method has its ups and downs. It can give good insides on a certain topic but if data is not available then it becomes hard or even impossible to gain results with this method. Benchmarking is based on learning from others and then usually comparing those findings on your own results. In this research there wasn't nothing where to compare the findings because author does not have own blog yet, but those findings could be used in future as a guideline of what type of content blog should have and how often to publish it for example. In this research benchmarking of blogs worked well as learning method for author since knowledge of blogging and blogs overall was not on that good level.

Results from benchmarking did not bring up any major surprises which was quite expected result. All blogs were very professionally made and followed certain style. Blog posts were posted almost everyday in each of the blogs which for one blogger would be a lot of work to do. It seems based on professionalism and how often posts are made that all blogs had team of employees who are helping with process. Still main responsibility is on person who founded the blog. To be able to reach this level it would require putting a lot of effort and thinking about blogging as a job.

Blog posts headlines were very informative and many of those included numbering but there were differences in each blog. This means that there is no one right or wrong way to decide the

headline. It depends on what your post is about but of course you might think about what to post if your headline is decided before hand and it is proven to be working. Besides the numbering headlines included for example, destination names, mentions of activities and visualizations. Words “best” and “most” were used multiple times as well in headings to attract reader to click on post.

## **6.1 Future recommendations**

Blogging has been a quite big phenomenon in last decades. It is hard to yet say if it would continue to grow or could other social media platforms attract even more readers away from typical blogs. This is one thing that should be taken in consideration when thinking about building a new blog. Social media is rapidly changing and for example artificial intelligence might change content creation in ways that cannot be imagined at this point.

Benchmarking process should be continued and make it more about the content. This means that analysis of text and deeper analysis about images should be made. This would help to get concrete ideas how to write and what kind of images bring more value to the reader. Good thing to also note is that even though analysis good be made and learnt from those it does not take away the fact that the best way to learn is from doing. So, it is highly recommended to get started about blogging if you have decided what blog is about and it's been named. First posts are never perfect.

## **6.2 Own reflection**

Thesis process did go quite fast after it started. Reason for this was mainly because I had only one semester time to study and finish the work. Topic of thesis was easy to chose but it was a bit problematic to narrow it down and actually decide how to do this research. At the beginning goal was to get ideas for future travel and sports blog but soon I realized that I would only consider travel blogs and leave sport aspect out of this work. With benchmarking it was a bit surprise how much you could benefit from it and gain ideas about how others are doing blogs. Benchmarking as a process worked out well and it was surprisingly easy to use.

I had doubts before this project mainly because it had been a couple of years since my last studies and writing in English could have been a bit of an issue and especially it could have taken a lot of time. Surprisingly writing process went quite fast but there are plenty of things to learn about grammar and academic writing. Overall time management during the writing process went mostly as planned. More time could have been used on benchmarking and result process but those are something that could be continued in the future.

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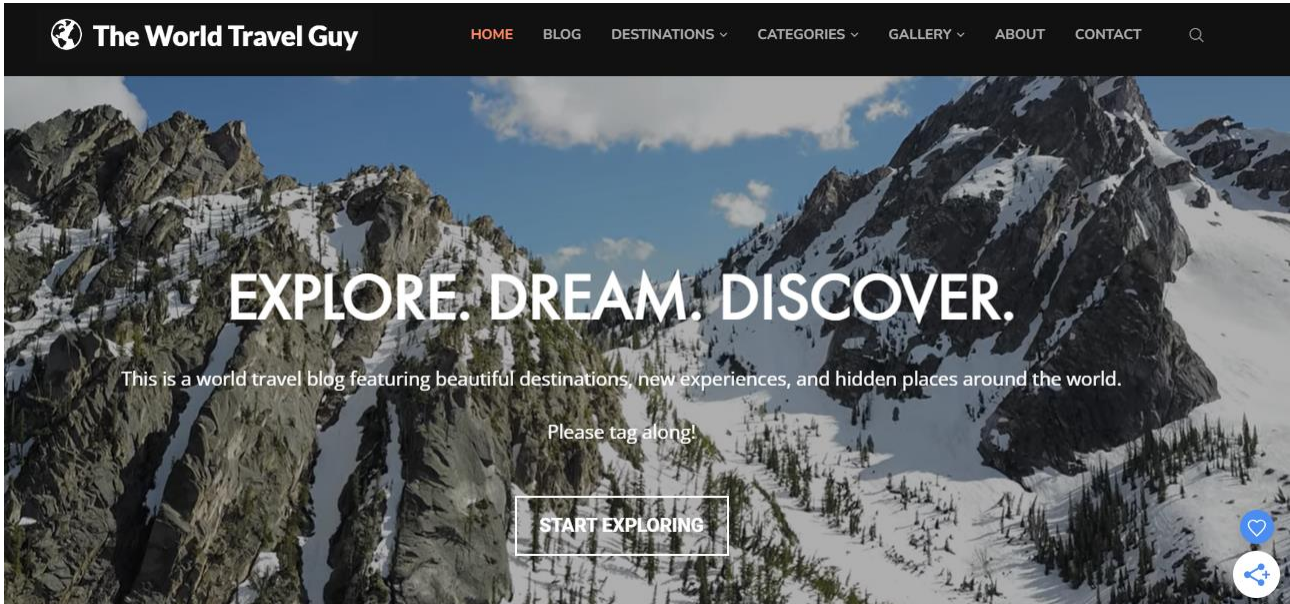
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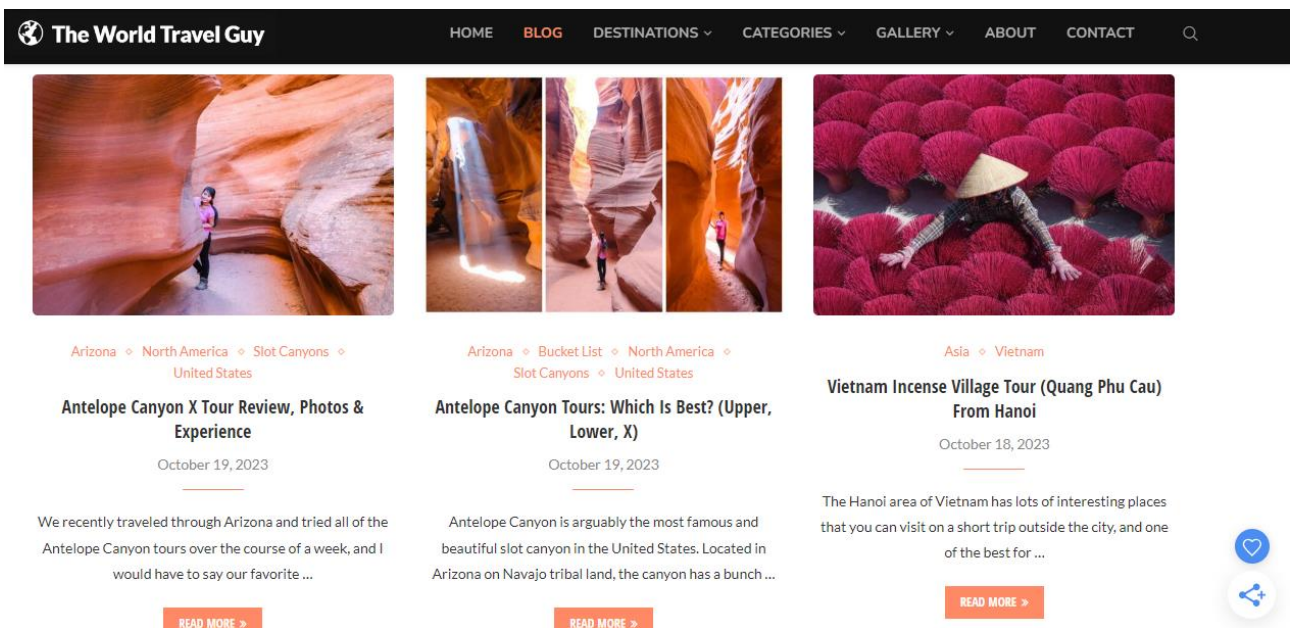
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## Appendices

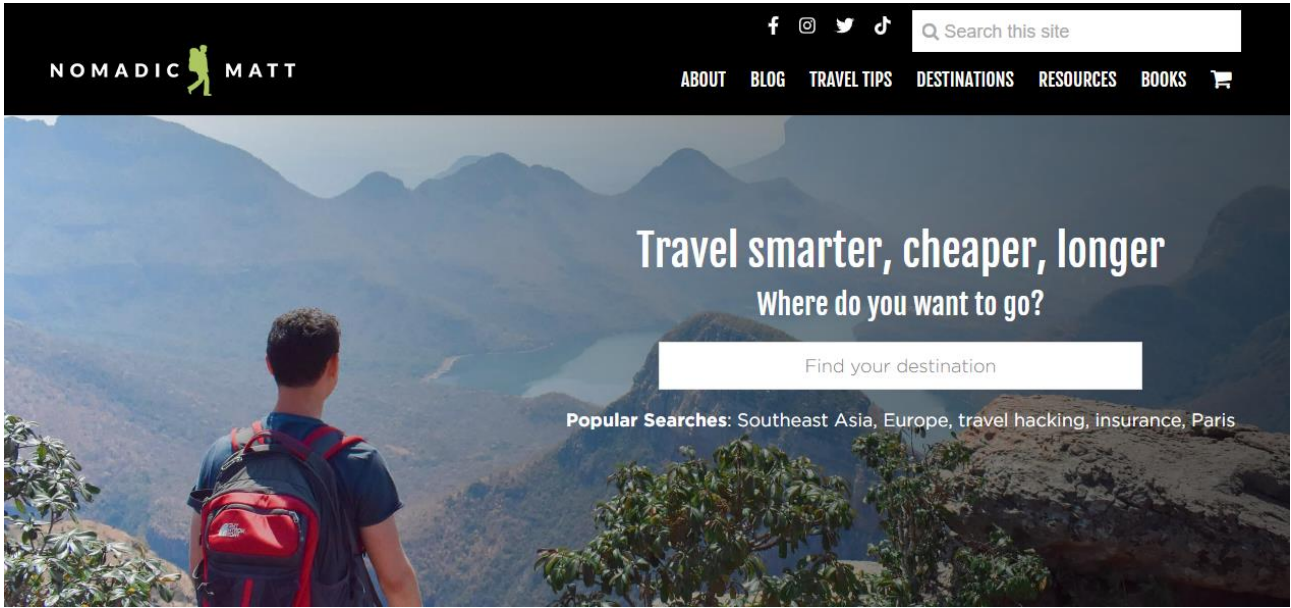
### Appendix 1. Images from the benchmarked blogs



Landing page of the World Travel Guy -blog (The World Travel Guy 2023)



Blog-post page of the World Travel Guy -blog (The World Travel Guy 2023)



Landing page of The Nomadic Matt -blog (The Nomadic Matt 2023)



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Blog-post page of The Nomadic Matt -blog (The Nomadic Matt 2023)

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Landing page of The Global Viewpoint -blog (The Global Viewpoint 2023)



Blog-post page of The Global Viewpoint -blog (The Global Viewpoint 2023)