Improving Travel Blogger Co-operation in Finnish Companies: Case Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland 2014

Silja Erkamo

Author or authors Silja Erkamo	Group or year of entry 2011
Title of report Improving Travel Blogger Co-operation in Finnish Companies: Case Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland 2014	**Number of report pages and attachment pages** 70 + 12
Teacher(s) or supervisor(s) Kristian Sievers	

This paper introduces the reader to different ways social media has changed tourism marketing and public relations and examines in more detail the co-operation between Finnish companies and international travel bloggers. Travel blogger co-operation is a form of word-of-mouth marketing, made possible by the emergence of social media.

This thesis is commissioned by Innastus Ltd. and the objective of the study is to examine how Finnish companies could maximize the marketing benefit derived from travel blogger co-operation. Development suggestions for Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland, a travel blogger program first organised in Finland in 2014 that serves as the case study in this thesis, are presented. The framework for the study is based on earlier research on word-of-mouth marketing in the online environment.

Case-based qualitative research method was chosen for this study and in-depth interviews were arranged with representatives of partner companies and organisers of Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland 2014 in late May and early July of 2014. In addition, feedback from bloggers and partners who participated in Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland 2014 is used to compliment the interview data.

The results indicate that blogger co-operation is still a new area of public relations for companies in Finland and that the level of knowledge about the subject and skills for execution varies among companies. Based on the study, allocating enough time for the planning phase of the co-operation, matching the right blogger with the right company and utilizing the material produced by bloggers are important factors for successful blogger co-operation from the company point of view. Two profiles of companies involved in blogger co-operation can be drawn from the results: companies that believe blogger co-operation is a meaningful public relations activity that can bring in customers indirectly and companies that believe blogger co-operation is not an essential public relations effort but more of an image-building activity that doesn't necessarily bring in customers. Also a ten-point list of development suggestions for Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland is included in the results.

Keywords Public relations, Word-of-mouth marketing, Electronic word-of-mouth, Social media, Travel blog, Blogger program

Table of contents

1 Introduction

Social media has become one of the most important marketing channels for the tourism and travel industry. Because of the emergence of social media, marketing has experienced a power shift from companies to consumers. While traditional marketing was based on interruption techniques, such as tv advertisments and billboards, the online marketing of today obliges companies to interact with their potential customers. It is also evident that buyers consume more and more consumer generated material in the Internet and rely more on peer reviews than paid advertisements when planning their next holiday. In the last couple of years, among other social media channels, blogs have gained popularity among various audiences. However, it is only recently that tourism companies in Finland have started to see the opportunities in co-operation with travel bloggers for PR purposes. The tourism industry is still learning how to manage blogger co-operation, and therefore this study deals with a current topic that is actively discussed in the industry.

Travel bloggers are online content creators who have their own websites called blogs, where they usually write about their experiences while traveling and give tips to their readers of where to go and what to do while on holiday. Many travel bloggers do it as a hobby, but some are full-time professionals in the field. Most travel bloggers are also active users of various social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and therefore are able to provide companies with material of their products or services that is widely spread through multiple channels.

This thesis concentrates on travel blogger programs as a mean to gain publicity for tourism companies and destinations. A travel blogger program is an organised program that brings travel bloggers and companies together to generate meaningful co-operation. Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland is a blogger program organised in Finland for the first time in 2014 and is used as the case study in this thesis. The objective of this thesis is to examine how Finnish companies could maximize the marketing benefit derived from travel blogger co-operation. Case-based qualitative research method was chosen for the study because of lack of existing valid material on the sub-

ject and the possibility to study a large group of major Finnish tourism companies at once.

Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland 2014 was a blogger program commissioned by Nordic Travel Fair MATKA, Helsinki Fair Centre, and organised by Innastus Ltd. and Transit Media in co-operation with Visit Finland and Visit Helsinki in January 2014. Forty international travel bloggers were invited to explore Finland and its neighbouring countries, to participate in the Nordic Travel Fair MATKA, and to write about their experiences on their personal travel blogs and other social media channels.

This thesis consists of a literature review and a case study. The impact of the emergence of social media to the tourism industry is first discussed, aiming to showcase the importance of using social media for marketing communications purposes in the field of tourism. In addition, the literature review introduces the reader to concepts related to blogging and social media in general. Furthermore, word-of-mouth marketing in the online environment and earlier research on the subject are discussed in order to provide a theoretical framework for the study.

This thesis is comissioned by Kohtaamistoimisto Innastus Ltd., a Finnish company founded by Inna-Pirjetta Lahti who was also the project manager of Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland 2014. Innastus offers service design, consultancy, communications, marketing and PR services. Inna-Pirjetta is also a motivational speaker, freelance writer and one of the authors of Lapsiperheen matkat (Travels of a family) –travel blog.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Media and the Tourism Industry

Internet and social media have enabled countless new ways for tourism companies to reach target audiences and to promote tourism products and services. According to a recent study, 89% of 16-24 year-olds, and almost 60% of 25-54-year-olds in Europe participate in social networks (Eurostat, 2013). More and more tourists are using the Internet to seek destination information and to conduct transactions online (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008, 461), and therefore many travel companies and tourism organisations have been forced to have a social media presense in order to keep up with their competition. Carson (2005, in Schmallegger & Carson, 2008, 99) proposed that there are five different applications for Internet use for tourism organisations: promotion, product distribution, communication, management and research. According to Stevenson and Hamill (2012, 293), social media can be also monitored for more effective, real-time online brand reputation management.

In many books and researches the terms social media and Web 2.0 are used interchangeably. VanRysdam (2010, 18) describes the term Web 2.0 as to have "emerged in the early 2000's to describe interactive elements like forums, blogs and user-generated content". However, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61) argue that social media and Web 2.0 are two different concepts, even though extremely closely related. They define Web 2.0 as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion.

Web 2.0 technologies refer to different interactive elements such as forums, blogs and other User-Generated Content (UGC) (VanRysdam, 2010, 18). Moreover, Web 2.0 technologies can also be described as application tools that online users can utilise to create content. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61) UGC is often described as the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users. However, UGC does not necessarily have to be published on a public site but

can also be available only for a limited amount of people in the online social environment.

Kaplain and Haenlein (2010, 61) define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of UGC. According to Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012, 6), social media and social networking sites describe similar online environments, and often refer to same digital technologies and applications. However, a distinction can be made between these two terms for research purposes: social networking sites focus on connecting users, whereas the emphasis on social media sites is on how users interact with each other. For the purposes of this thesis, both expressions are used according to suitability. Majority of the literature related to social media marketing and blogging used in this thesis do not make a clear distinction between social networking and social media sites. For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 62) state that social networking sites are a form of social media, among other forms such as content communities, virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, virtual game worlds and blogs.

2.1.1 A Power Shift from Companies to Customers

Even though companies can more easily reach their target audience through Internet, VanRysdam (2010, 18) states that the emergence of Internet as a marketing tool has triggered a power shift from companies to consumers. The popular marketing channels that were used before the emergence of Internet and social media, such as billboards, tv, newspapers and magazines, did not involve or engage the customer, but just interrupted a potential customer and informed them about a service or a product. However, social media, that is interactive by definition, has changed the way information flows in the society. Scott (2013, 18) states that instead of one-way interruption, web marketing is about interaction, information, education and choice. VanRysdam (2010, 18) emphasies that Web 2.0 gives the customers a voice they never had until recently. Accordingly, Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012, 11) state that social media must be at the heart of public relations activities because it can enhance organisation-public relationships by increasing and improving community relations

Before the Internet became one of the most used marketing platforms, word-of-mouth was one of the most important ways of "creating a buzz" about a service or a product. As will be discussed in the chapter below, electronic word-of-mouth can engage wider audiences than traditional word-of-mouth and accelerate the process of spreading the word significantly. With the help of multiple social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs, the consumers have the immediate opportunity to describe their customer experience or the functionality of a product to a wide audience of friends, family and other followers online. For example, instantly after a service encounter, the customer has the possibility to send a message to one of his many social media accounts to compliment the friendly service at their local coffee house or, on the contrary, to complain about an exceptionally rude worker they faced at the counter. The reach of one piece of UGC can be massive and "go viral", meaning that it will start spreading like a virus across the virtual world.

2.1.2 Electronical Word-of-Mouth in the Tourism Industry

Word-of-mouth has been consistently identified as a key source of information for consumers from various markets when they are planning a trip. Interpersonal influence and word-of-mouth are ranked as the most important information sources when a consumer in general is making a purchasing decision (Litvin et al., 2008, 458). In a tourism setting, especially independent travelers rely heavily on word-of-mouth (Carson, 2007, 112). Word-of-mouth is a process that allows consumers to share information and opinions that direct consumers towards or away from specific products, brands and services (Hawkins et al. 2004 in Litvin et al. 2008, 459). Furthermore, electronic word-of-mouth, also called word-of-mouse and referred to in this thesis as eWOM, can be defined as all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods or services, or their sellers (Litvin et al. 2008, 460). Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, eWOM exists in the Internet for an unlimited time (Wang, 2012, 234). Traditional word-of-mouth is momentary in nature, but for example blog posts stay available and drive traffic to a site for a long time and can be found through links and search engines even years after the day they were published. According to Volo (2012, 150), thanks to

its timeless and borderless nature, eWOM has the power to reach and engage wider audiences than traditional word-of-mouth communication. Electronic word-of-mouth can happen among consumers or between consumers and service providers on various platforms in the social online environment.

Nowadays it is a common practice to use sites including UGC like TripAdvisor or Booking.com, to compare different tourism services and products such as the hotel options of a destination. Potential tourists use this eWOM as information that helps them make their own travel decisions. Because of the intangibility of tourism services and products, word-of-mouth has an impact on the pre-purchasing stages in the customer's decision-making process (Wang, 2012, 232). An intangible product or service cannot be evaluated before the purchase decision is made, and therefore consumers frequently rely on informal and personal communication sources in making purchase decisions as opposed to more formal and organisational sources such as advertising campaigns (Bansal & Voyer, 2000, 166). In other words, tourists look for information, ratings and recommendations generated by other travelers who have already experienced the service or consumed the product themselves. Accordingly, a study among Tripadvisor.com users by Gretzel, Yoo and Purifoy (2007, 11) revealed that some of the most popular travel trip planning activities are consuming user generated materials, comments and travel blogs. According to another study among Taiwanese leisure tourists by Tan and Chen (2012, 468), a common denominator of a successful tourist information source is the presence of credible travel information preferably in a form of personal experience. To make an information source even more popular, entertainment and social networking aspects should be added. As Tan and Chen (2012, 457) state, just reading a description of someone else's travel experience can be entertaining.

As mentioned before, word-of-mouth has a higher perceived credibility of consumer opinions compared to traditional tourist information sources (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008, 100). Tourism services are experience-based services, and therefore information in the form of a personal experience, such as a story from a friend, is seen as a credible information source. Pan and Crotts (2012, 76) argue that it is seen as more credible

since the communicators are not paid for the referral. Tan and Chen (2012, 465) agree that leisure tourists like to see, value and trust accounts of personal experience that are channeled as a form of eWOM during their information search. Nowadays the story-tellers of social media are bloggers. Even though traditional marketing communication can be seen as trustworthy as well, Rak (2005 in Carson, 2008, 112) argues that blogs are often thought to be representatives of more authentic thoughts and feelings of consumers, because most bloggers simply describe what they did, where and when. Because blogs are channels that facilitate sharing product and service recommendations and endorsements among people who have never met, they are great platforms to start eWOM.

According to Tan and Chen's research (2012, 457), non-commercial travel blogs have a combination of personal and informal characteristics that guarantee success as a tourism information source. They were rated as better sources compared to Wikipedia and Yahoo! Knowledge+ (a kind of a Chinese "ask and answer" social media site) based on information, entertainment, social networking and credibility. Tan and Chen (2012, 465) emphasize the importance of personal experience that is transmitted to the reader through the text. The same study revealed that, especially when tourists are searching information about a very unfamiliar destination, sources that provide personal travel experiences, like travel blogs do, are high in demand because of their credibility, usefulness and access to complete information. Electronic word-of-mouth also includes rich media to accompany the message.

Wang (2012, 246) found in his studies that the perceived destination image created by blogs is a strong predictor of behavioral intention of possible tourists to travel. Blogs that can induce readers to generate emotional or intellectual identification with blog writers are more likely to help in building an affective destination image, which in turn encourages the reader to visit the location (Wang, 2012, 247). Wang (2012, 248) found out in his study that social influence affects the perceived destination image and that bloggers that had experienced positive encounters at the destination could spread eWOM that appeared at an "unprecedented large scale". Furthermore, the people in-

volved with the blog activities will spread the word even further by face-to-face communication and further influence the way people evaluate tourism products.

Electronic word-of-mouth in blogs also encourages relationship building between readers and site sponsors through perceptions that are related to interactivity with the brand and responsiveness (Wang, 2012, 235). Blogs and other social media that include a form of word-of-mouth can also be used for research purposes, such as to gather feedback, judge user's satisfaction levels, improve service quality and do damage control. Companies can also include consumer-generated content on their own websites with the precaution that the content should not seem orchestrated and therefore unreliable (Tan & Chen, 2012, 469).

In conclusion, eWOM can be a very useful tool in tourism marketing and communication due to the possibilities for wider and more rapid spreading than traditional word-of-mouth would be able to provide. Particularly travel blogs have an important role in influencing potential travelers' perceived destination image and intention to travel, since eWOM channeled through blogs is seen as credible information.

2.1.3   Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) is an increasingly important marketing technique which is often used in social media marketing. WOMM is the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques, based on the assumption that marketers can harness the credibility of consumer-to-consumer word-of-mouth (Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner, 2010, 71 & 83). The Network Co-Production Model (Figure 1) by Kozinets et al. (2010, 72) illustrates that the marketer is not the only active party in a WOMM campaign, but also customers are seen as active co-producers. This means that word-of-mouth communication about a service or a product is co-produced in consumer networks. The same can be applied to the online environment of social media, and therefore, in this thesis, the term WOMM is used to refer to word-of-mouth campaigns happening both in online and offline environments.

The Network Co-Production Model
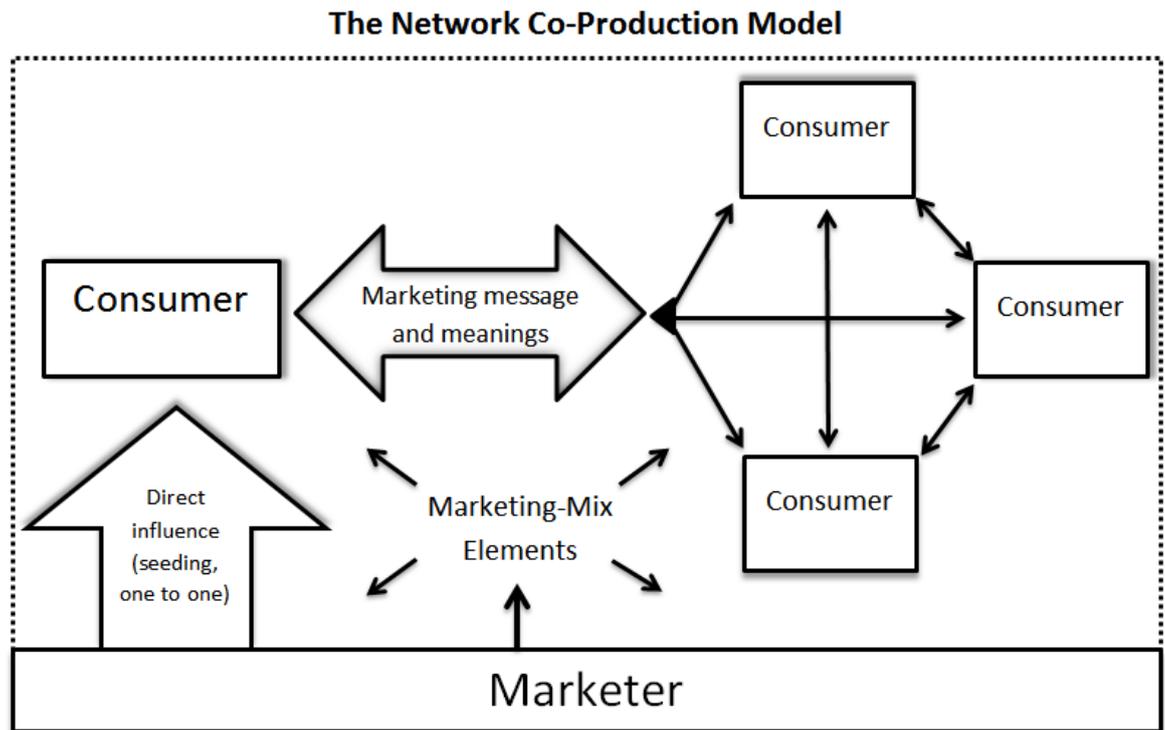
Figure 1. The Network Co-Production Model. Edited from Kozinets et al. (2010, 72)

Apart from monetary incentives (e.g. bloggers receiveing money for writing a blog post), different motivations exist to participate in spreading word-of-mouth. According to a study by Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry and Raman (2004, 344), that studied consumers motivations to participate in eWOM via email, revealed that consumers experience positive emotions when sending pass-along emails to one another. A pass-along email was defined as an email that one receives from someone one knows, and which that person most likely has received from someone they know and so on. The study revealed that the pass-along email and the situation needs to meet some conditions in order for the person to forward the email. According to the study, the person has to be in the right mood (excited, happy, helpful, or satisfied), have the time to forward the email and believe that the email contains important information or something the receiver will like (for consumers that receive and pass along emails frequently), or be relevant and meet the senders quality standards (for consumers that receive pass along emails infrequently but forward many of them). Following these results, Phelps et al. (2004, 345) state that targeting the right people who find the company's material interesting, is essential to any viral effect. They recommend

creating messages that create strong emotions in the receiver, such as inspiration, humor or sadness, because those kind of messages are likely to be forwarded.

With the help of the Network Co-Production Model (Figure 1), marketers can attempt to manage WOMM through targeted one-to-one seeding and communication programs between the marketer and the consumer. A seeding program means that a product is placed among consumers, such as bloggers, in order for them to spread favorable word about the product through their own networks. According to Libai, Muller & Peres (2013, 162) the value of seeding programs derives from market expansion and customer acceleration: the seeding company acquires new customers who otherwise would not have purchased the brand, and the company gets addittional revenue from accelerated purchases from customers who would have purchased the brand in any case, but at a later time.

A common practice in WOMM is to try to indirectly influence opinion leaders through traditional ways such as advertising, and to use them to spread the word about a product or a service. An opinion leader is a credible, respected and influential consumer. However, in the Network Co-Production Model, these opinion leaders or consumers are deliberately targeted and influenced directly one-by-one. Once this targeted consumer has contributed to the WOMM campaign, the marketing message and meanings do not start to flow following a one-way pattern, but rather, are exchanged among members of the consumer network. WOMM becomes a part of a complex cultural process that follows a pattern (Kozinets et al., 2010, 74). The Network Co-Production Model applies to various different types of WOMM, but in the online environment it is a useful tool when planning a campaign that uses bloggers as opinion leaders. In this model, bloggers have a dual role, because they are simultaneously target customers and marketers.

A study by Kozinets et al. (2010) that used the Network Co-Production Model discovered four elements that alter the nature of WOMM messages and their associated meanings. In addition, they found four different blogger communication

strategies. The study results were based on a product seeding WOMM campaign for a global technology manufacturer, which used bloggers as opinion leaders.

According to the study, there are four elements that alter the nature of a WOMM message and its associated meanings. These four elements are charater narratives, communications forums, marketing promotion elements and communal norms, as seen in Figure 2 (page 12). According to the study, they influence the expression, manifestation and reception of the WOMM campaign and transform it from commercial promotional material to information that is valuable to the whole community. For example, Kozinets et al. (2010) observed differences in responses to a campaign and its ethicalness among different communities, as well as differences in how various bloggers acted after being chosen as part of the campaign and how they adopted to the dual role of a consumer and a marketer.

Firstly, character narrative is the backbone of blog content. For example, a blogger that self-identifies themselves with the character of a loving mom, will create a narrative that stresses kindness, helpfulness and caring (Kozinets et al., 2010, 74). This narrative will transform the WOMM campaign. Secondly, communications forum is the forum that the communications are embedded in. For the purpose of this thesis, the most important forum is blogs, but also other social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter are taken into account. As discussed before, there are several different kinds of blog forums and blogs, such as lifestyle and travel blogs. Thirdly, marketing promotion elements are the message and meaning of the WOMM communications that are affected by the WOMM campaign and other related promotions, for example the type of the product or service, it's sell nature (hard-sell or soft-sell) and the objectives of the campaign. Finally, communal norms also affect the message of the WOMM campaign. These norms differ according to the interests, lifestyle and social class of community members. The norms affect how the message can or should be expressed, transmitted and what kind of reception it gets from the community.

Coproduced Network Elements Influencing the Expression of WOMM Narratives
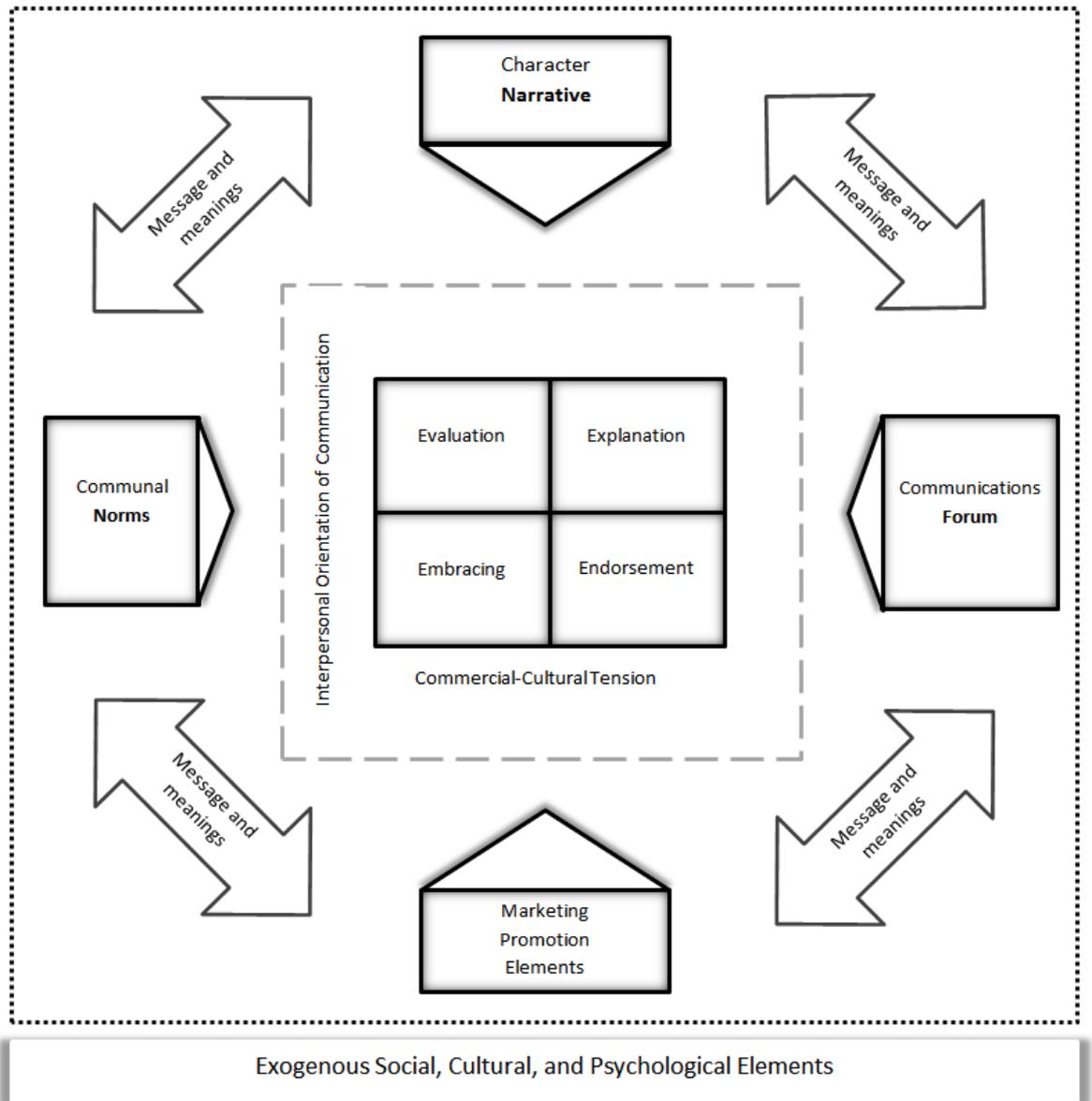
Figure 2. Co-produced Network Elements Influencing the Expression of WOMM Narratives. Edited from Kozinets et al. (2010, 75)

According to the results of the study (Kozinets et al., 2010, 83), there is a tension that derives from the dual role of the bloggers as consumers and marketers. This tension makes the bloggers to alter the market-generated, sales objective-oriented WOMM message and meaning to information that is more believable, relevant, useful and palatable for the community, and which is communally desirable and builds the reputation of the blogger as well as group relationships. Kozinets et al. (2010, 83) state that the successfulness of a WOMM campaign lies in this transformation. They state it is especially valuable to the marketer because the blogger doesn't only communicate

the marketing message to their community, but also stakes their reputation and trust relationships on the marketing message and converts the message to correspond the norms and expectations of the community. The blogger converts the message in order to maintain trust among the community by being consistent with his established character narrative and meeting the requirements of communal norms and standards.

There are four blogger communication strategies that were identified in the study, as seen in Figure 2. They are are evaluation, explanation, embracing and endorsement (Kozinets et al. 2010, 84). These strategies represent four different ways that the bloggers approach the fact that they have been chosen as part of a WOMM campaign and how they communicate about it to their network. A blogger with certain kind of character narrative is likely to yield a particular response to a WOMM campaign because they seek to provide a representation of the campaign that is consistent with the practices they have already established with their community. According to the study, by choosing to co-operate with a blogger with a certain kind of communication strategy, the community reaction can also be forecasted, if also the character narrative, forum and marketing promotion elements are taken into account. Now the different strategies are discussed in more detail.

According to the results, a blogger using the evaluation strategy avoids mentioning the WOMM campaign and participation in it, and rather focuses on the product itself. They aim at acknowledging the community needs and goals, and try to position themselves as a trustworthy information source. This strategy that ignores the marketer-community tension easily evokes negative reactions from the community, towards both the WOMM campaign and the blogger. The community might think that the blogger has hidden motives and benefits from the campaign on a personal level while pretending to put the community first. However, if the forum in which the marketing message is communicated is non-personal and driven by technical information, evaluative narrative can be welcomed positively. This narrative works best for hard-sell products (Kozinets et al., 2010, 87).

Kozinets et al. (2010) state that a blogger adopting the embracing strategy accepts their dual role as consumer and marketer enthusiastically. They emphasize their personal needs over the community needs and use them to justify participating in the campaign. They use promotional marketing language and terms and ask directly for new WOMM campaign opportunities. Community responses vary. Honesty and self-interest might be seen as refreshing, if it fits with the communal norms, character narrative and forum. Therefore this strategy could work in a community that is favorable towards commercialism and consumerism, such as brand communities and commercially sponsored communities. This strategy will most likely succeed in a less personal forum that provides content on entertainment or lifestyle. However, if prior content on the forum and character narrative didn't match the WOMM campaign, the community responses towards the campaign were negative and bloggers' trustworthiness was questioned. Therefore, communities that are resistant to profiting motives or are personable, tight-knit, local and have the mindset of sharing and caring do not result to a positive response with the embracing strategy.

Furthermore, Kozinets et al. (2010) show that bloggers using the endorsement strategy disclose their participation in the campaign and therefore acknowledge the commercial-communal tension that exists. They are aware that the marketers' intentions might not be in the best interest of the bloggers' network. However, they justify their participation with a personal need, and put their own needs ahead of those of the community. They appeal for assistance, support and understanding from the community. Like in the embracing strategy, these bloggers also use promotional marketing language and request for other marketing opportunities that could benefit themselves. Similarly, this strategy works best in communities that are favorable towards commercialism and consumerism. Bloggers that were able to emotionally connect with the community generated positive support towards their opinion leader role, especially in forums that offer great vulnerability and intimacy on part of the communicator. However, in other cases the reaction towards the WOMM campaign was tempered negative. Endorsement and embracing strategies most likely work best with soft-sell products and services that contribute to long-term brand building activities (Kozinets et al., 2010, 87).

Bloggers that use the explanation strategy openly disclose their participation in the WOMM campaign and explicitly signal awareness of cultural tension and conflict of interests between marketers and the community, therefore analysing the different communal impacts. However, this works to their own advantage and the discussion affirm their own value to the community as a safe and preferred source of information. This might even strengthen communal ties of their network, since they proactively assert communal orientation. Using this strategy, community reaction is supportive or neutral towards the WOMM campaign. However, acceptance of the blogger as an opinion leader differs according to the forum and communal norms. Similarly to the endorsement strategy, explanation works especially in forums that offer great vulnerability and intimacy on part of the communicator. Simiarly to the evaluation strategy, the explanation strategy works for hard-sell products and services (Kozinets et al., 2010, 87).

As can be seen from the results, the study by Kozinets et al. (2010) strongly suggests that the planning phase of blogger co-operation is critical to its success. There is a possibility to predict the community reaction on a certain level, but however, this requires a deeper level of knowledge about both the blogger and the company brand as well as their product or service.

2.2   Travel Blogs and Travel Blogging

Writers and journalists have written about travel for centuries, but recently also ordinary consumers have started to share their travel experiences online through different social media channels. Blogging has become more and more popular in recent years, and a sub-niche of travel blogs has emerged. In this chapter the definitions and charasterictics of a blog and a blogger are further discussed.

2.2.1   Travel Blogs

Volo (2012, 151) describes a blog as a free, public, web-based entry in reverse chronological order presented in a diary-style format. Similarly, Page and Thomas

(2011, 220) define blogs or web logs as frequently modified web pages in which the dated entries appear in reverse chronological order, so that the reader views the most recently written entries first. As Volo describes, a blog can be public, but it can also be on a website that is accessible only by certain people. A blog normally includes a comment box for every entry or blog post, adding an interactive aspect to the site. The majority of blogs are written by one person only, but the content for a blog can also be created by a group of people, an organisation or a company. It can be written under a nickname or be published under the writers real name.

The term "blog" emerged in 1997 in America when John Barger started to call his website with the term "weblog". Weblog was a combination of the words "web" and "a log". In 1999 Peter Merholz decided to play around with the term and ended up with "we blog" (Kilpi, 2006, 11). Nowadays blog is the most used word when referring to these kind of web pages. The blogosphere, which is a commonly used concept when talking about blogs, means the collective activities of blogs and bloggers (Carson, 2007, 111).

Schmallegger and Carson (2008, 101) divide blogs to four different categories: consumer to consumer (C2C), business to consumer (B2C), business to business (B2B) and government to consumer (G2C) blogs. C2C blogs are personal websites written by individuals to other individuals. B2C blogs are produced by a company, attempting to reach their targeted consumers and used as a communication tool between the company and the reader. B2B blogs often include discussion about current topics in the area of expertise of the companies and is targeted to other businesses in the field. G2C blogs are government run websites that aim to offer information about their field of work. To limit the scope of this thesis and to bring the most accurate results, C2C travel blogs are at the focus of this thesis.

Blogs allow the creation and exchange of UGC and thus are a form of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 62) classify different forms of social media according to

four charasteristics: social presence, media richness, self-presentation and self-disclosure[1]. According to their classification, blogs represent the form of social media with the highest self-presentation and self-disclosure, but the lowest social presense and media richness. The idea that blogs lack media richness can be explained by the history of blogs. When the first blogs emerged, they tended to be text-based. However, nowadays many blogs combine text with photography as well as video and audio material to enriche the content of the blog. This kind of material is also present in the majority of travel blogs.

There are multiple types of personal (C2C) blogs that address various themes and interests. In addittion to traveling, for example fashion, food, and lifestyle are popular themes among bloggers. A personal blog is written from a subjective point of view and often deals with everyday matters, hence the high level of self-presentation and self-disclosure. However, travel blogs differ from many other types of blogs because some of them are active only during the travels of the blogger. As Schmallegger and Carson (2008, 101) state, travel blogs are mostly used to publish personal travel stories and experiences and to keep in touch with family and friends at home. If a travel blog is active weekly or mothly, the writer often describes past travels or the planning process of a future trip. On the contrary, many other type of blogs can be easily updated more frequently, because they deal with matters from every-day life, such as clothing or food. Therefore many professional travel blogs are written by so called modern digital nomads who don't have a permanent home but travel from place to place and write about their travel experiences on a daily basis.

2.2.2 Travel Bloggers and Blog Readers

A person writing a blog is called a blogger. Travel bloggers are those online content creators who are specified in writing about their travel experiences. A travel blogger can have a special niche, such as family travel or outdoor activities, and this niche defines the main subject and theme for their blog. According to Technorati (2011), travel

---

[1] Definition of self-disclosure is as follows: "the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information that is consistent with the image one would like to give" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 62).

in general is the eight most blogged topic among bloggers around the world. What comes to motivations to write a blog, they vary. According to Lenhart and Fox (2006) the main reasons to blog are expressing oneself creatively and sharing personal experiences. Even though blogs emerged as an Internet diary and started as a mere hobby for their writers, nowadays there are also multiple bloggers who earn money through their personal blogs. There haven't been many studies about bloggers in general, but when Technorati (2011) did an international survey among bloggers, 5 different types of bloggers were identified: hobbyists, professional part-timers, professional full-timers, corporate bloggers and entrepreneurs who are individuals blogging for a company that they own. According to the study, most of the hobbyist primary reason for blogging was to speak their mind in the areas of their interest, but for professional full-timers the most popular primary reasons were to make money or supplement their income and share their expertise and experiences with others. Motivation and reasons to blog are of course related to the way bloggers measure their success. According to Technorati (2011) personal satisfaction, number of unique visitors on the site, number of posts or comments on the blog and number of people sharing their content on social media sites were the most popular measurements of success in general. In addition, professional full-timers measured their blog success also based on revenue derived from blogging.

It was found in the study by Technorati (2011) that, even though some bloggers do get income through their blog, it was only 37% of full-time professional bloggers who stated that their blog is their primary source of income. Furthermore, under 10 percent of entrepreneurs and corporate bloggers and under 5 percent of part-time professional bloggers stated the same. According to the information gathered by the survey, Technorati stated that they believe that most of the professional full timers are older and likely to be in a place in their life that allows them to pursue professional blogging, and also have other sources of income. Such situation could be stay-at-home parenting or getting additional income from another member of the family.

Blogging is an international phenomena, and therefore blogs can be in any language and bloggers represent multiple nationalities. According to Technorati (2011), the

majority of bloggers are 25 to 44 year-old females. However, a third of the respondents were over 44 years old. According to the study, majority of the bloggers have a college or a graduate degree.

The time spent blogging per week varies, but according to Technorati (2011), 60% of the respondents said that they blog up to three hours per week and the remaining 40% answered that they use even more time for blogging than that. The majority of bloggers stated that they update their blog around two or three times per week, with the exception of full-time professionals who said they update their site multiple times a day. According to the study some writers keep several blogs, with the average being three blogs per blogger.

According to the Generations Online –study in 2010, 40 to 49% of 18 to 32 year-old Americans who use the Internet read blogs (Zickuhr, 2010). Through travel blogs in particular, readers can access various kinds of information such as articles, photos and videos and use them as a source of travel information or entertainment. As Tudor (2012, 159) points out, consumers use travel blogs as an information source for objective evaluations and subjective opinions about the characteristics of a destination. This helps to formulate perceptions about the destination according to cognitive aspects, such as guides to local shopping possibilities, as well as affective aspects, such as generating empathy and experiencing appeal (Wang, 2012, 237). Most blogs allow commenting on the posts so that readers can share their comments and experiences with others. According to Tan & Chen (2012, 464 & 465), a person can create a wide virtual network of relationships and social ties on the Internet, and the interactive nature of blogs boost their role in social networking

2.2.3   Co-operation with Bloggers

There are several ways to use blogs for business purposes. In addition to starting a company blog, it is possible to do co-operation with C2C blogs in various ways. For example, tourism companies might consider identifying popular bloggers that appeal to their target audiences and invite them over for a destination trip similar to those organised for travel agents, writers and journalist (Litvin et al. 2006, 464), which is

similar to the seeding program discussed in chapter 2.1.3. According to Kozinets et al. (2010, 74) using bloggers as co-producers of a marketing campaign can be seen to have similarities with the traditional use of public relations (PR) or paid promotion. PR is defined as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics" (Public Relations Society of America, 2014). Wang (2012, 235) gives another example of a seeding program: co-operation between Dr Pepper and young bloggers, where the company recruited these bloggers and their parents to visit the headquarters of Dr Pepper in Dallas for a new product introduction and orientation. In exchange, the bloggers wrote posts about their personal experience with the brand, and that way created content related to Dr Pepper to their blog. In addition to this kind of content marketing, that can come in various forms, many blogs offer advertising space or do product and service reviews on their blog. Even though blogger co-operation is nowadays seen as a part of PR, a word-of-mouth marketing campaing targeting bloggers as customers and marketers, is dealing with far more complex, less defined and less established cultural relationships than traditional PR (Kozinets et al. 2010, 74).

According to the survey by Technorati (2011), product reviews have elicited the most positive responses among the readers of hobbyist and professional bloggers. In addition, among the readers of corporate and entrepreneur blogs, most positive response had been to advice or consultative content. Around 42% of professional full-time bloggers considered the communication between them and brands as valuable and 32% stated that brands are knowledgeable about their blog, content and blogging style. However, 19% said that what brands are asking from them, would compromise their credibility or content standards. According to Technorati (2011), most bloggers would possibly participate in product reviews, and the majority of those who had already done so, had kept the product and disclosed in their blog texts that they received it for a review. 38% of the bloggers stated that they blog about brands they love or hate, but most respondents said that the only do so rarely. However, professional full-timers were an expection, with 33% of them stating that they post reviews weekly. In addition, the majority of bloggers stated that they are influenced by a brand or a company's overall behaviour, but that they are still willing to write about

companies whose reputation they might not approve of. On the contrary, when it comes to advertising, the majority stated that it is very important that the advertising on their site align with their own values.

Bloggers, and especially professional bloggers, are active in the use of social media sites and mobile applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Google+. This also benefits the company planning to do co-operation with bloggers. These various social media channels are used to promote the blog, share information, keep up with the news, and to connect with and follow friends, audience, companies, organisations and other bloggers. According to Technorati (2011), the vast majority of the respondents use Twitter, Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn and YouTube for these purposes. Having a profile and being active on various social media channels allows the bloggers to reach wider audiences. The respondents of the study had between 500 and 1600 followers on Twitter, and felt like the most effective social media tool to drive traffic to their blog in addition to Twitter, was Facebook. Interestingly, it was found in the study by Technorati (2011) that the brands that bloggers follow on social media are covered in the blogs "frequently", and that 14% of bloggers stated they spend at least 21 hours per week visiting various social media sites.

The survey by Technorati (2011) states that, in addition to blogging, almost one third of bloggers have worked in traditional media. The survey doesn't clarify if the bloggers have been employed by the traditional media before starting a blog or if it has been the consequence for writing a successful blog. Majority of the respondents felt that brand representatives treated bloggers less professionally than they would treat traditional media. However, according to the survey, bloggers would rather work directly with the brand instead of intermediares who are commonly used when setting up PR activities with traditional media.

2.3   Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in the empirical part of this thesis is a combination of the information gathered in the literature review. As demonstrated in the study by Kozinets et al. (2010), bloggers who are chosen to act in the dual role of a marketer

and a consumer, have the need to balance the market-community tension while being consistent with the character of their original character elements. Character narratives, communications forums and communal elements are the key features to take into consideration when wanting to create a particular form of word-of-mouth narrative. Marketers have the opportunity to match their product or service with the right blogger in order to encourage particular character narratives that would be ideal for their campaign. However, bloggers that participate in a WOMM campaign need to be personal in a communally appropriate manner in order to evoke positive responses.

According to Kozinets et al. (2010, 86), positive communal attitudes towards a WOMM campaign depend firstly on its consistency with the goals, context, and history of the blogger's character narrative and the communication forum. Secondly, successful acknowledgement and discharge of marketer-community tension or offering a strong reason to participate in the campaign when there is an individualistic orientation, creates positive communal responses. Thirdly, the WOMM campaign should fit in with the community norms and objectives. Therefore, Kozinets et al. (2010) argue that measurement and classification of the different types of character narratives and forums is the first step to implement a WOMM campaign in the online environment. In the case of this thesis, the main forum is travel blogs. However, there are several types of character narratives in travel bloggers as well, such as the independent woman traveler, the newlywed couple or the travel industry expert.

According to Kozinets et al. (2010, 87), the marketer should carefully consider the terms presented to the blogger that is chosen as a part of a WOMM campaign. They argue that the freedom of diclosing their participation in the campaign, being able to blog about the product or not, and blogging in a positive way or not can affect the level of commercial-communal tension. According to Asatryan and Oh (2008, in Pan & Crotts, 2012, 76) consumers that are loyal to a company or a brand develop a feeling of connection towards them and manifest them into a sense of ownership: they use language such as "my", "mine" and "our" in their reviews. This leads to positive word-of-mouth and channeling negative experiences straight to the company. Writing a positive review on a travel blog is a way to reward the company. However, a consumer

that doesn't have this feeling of connetion might desire to influence the company indirectly by expressing both positive and negative comments publicly in order to communicate with potential customers. These people seek for satisfaction of being helpful to other consumers. Therefore, when creating a WOMM campaign, marketers could strategically ensure that the bloggers participating in it have a sense of phychological ownership and control, for example through freedom, trust and feedback.

Following in the footsteps of Kozinets et al. (2010), this thesis concentrates on what happens between the beginning of starting to choose a blogger for a blogger program and the time when the blogger has published their work. We concentrate on the framework provided by Kozinets et al. (Figure 1, page 9) which suggests that the outcome of a seeding program, such as blogger co-operation, is influenced by the marketing mix of the marketer, the direct influence on the customer in the seeding program and the marketing message and meanings delivered to the wider audience of customers. In the case of NBE, the marketer is both the organisers and parner companies of NBE, the consumer chosen for the seeding program is a travel blogger, the direct influence comes from the partner that the blogger visits and the marketing message is shared with the community of friends, family, readers and followers of the blog by the blogger.

This kind of framework suggests that the objective of the campaign should be to generate positive responses towards the WOMM campaign from the blogger and their community, instead of only measuring simple view counts or impressions. Engagement and interaction are the key words to a successful campaign with this kind of a framework.

2.4   Introduction to NBE Finland 2014

Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland 2014, from here on referred to as NBE, was staged in Helsinki from 12th to 17th of January 2014. The 5-day schedule of this blogger program included seminars, workshops, networking possibilities with participating companies and other industry professionals as well as multiple pre- and post-tours

around Finland and to Tallinn and Stockholm. The program was tailored to the needs of international travel bloggers and participating companies from the industry.

NBE was commissioned by Nordic Travel Fair MATKA, Helsinki Fair Centre, and organised by Innastus Ltd. and Transit Media in co-operation with Visit Finland and Visit Helsinki. Inna-Pirjetta Lahti from Innastus was in charge of the practical implementation and coordination of the blogger program, while Sebastian Canaves from Transit Media helped to compose the program and offered an experts view on working with bloggers. Visit Helsinki and Visit Finland were closely involved in the creation of the program by offering their resources and expertise. There were 19 partner companies participating in the program.

2.4.1 Aims and Objectives of the Program

NBE was organised to grow knowledge about Nordic Travel Fair MATKA among international bloggers, media and their audiences. MATKA is the leading travel exhibition in Northern Europe, and other purposes for the program were to gain added value for the customers and partners of MATKA, to increase the engagement of exhibitors to MATKA and strengthen the fairs image as a forerunner event. NBE was also intended to be used in building up a new kind of a partnership between MATKA and Visit Finland and Visit Helsinki. The target of the program was to contact at least 100 international travel bloggers and get 30 of them to participate in the 5-day program. One of the main aims was to create pictures, articles and blog posts about Finland, Helsinki, Nordic Travel Fair MATKA and the exhibitors participating to the exhibition. The objective on a larger scale was to build up and strengthen the image of Finland and Helsinki as an interesting and attractive destination.

Like any program or event, also NBE had risks. The identified main risks were that international travel bloggers would not be interested in the program, or the organisers would not receive enough applications from qualified bloggers. The organisers also took a risk when deciding to refuse to pay for the travel costs of the bloggers. However, all tours and other program was organised free of charge. In addition, the possibility that bloggers who would not be selected to participate to the program would be disap-

pointed and could create unwanted bad publicity for the program existed. Furthermore, there was a possibility of no-shows, and that the bloggers might not have a good time during the program and therefore would not write about their experiences, or would write in a negative tone. Also, the level of preparation from exhibitors' side to meet the bloggers could not be controlled.

2.4.2 A Short Introduction to the Process and Arrangements

According to Inna-Pirjetta Lahti, the idea of NBE came into existence in early 2013. The purpose of NBE was to build an interesting program for international travel bloggers mostly from Europe, Nordic Countries, Russia and Asia. The concept was ready to be presented to partners in June, when Inna-Pirjetta and Sebastian Canaves had started working together. During June and August, Visit Finland and Visit Helsinki came on board to the project as co-operators. The pre- and post-tour partners and seminar speakers were contacted by October.

Sebastian Canaves is a professional travel blogger, and he was the key person to reach other international travel bloggers and spread the word about the upcoming program. In October, some bloggers were met personally at TBEX Europe, which is one of the world's largest gatherings of travel bloggers, writers and new media content creators. Personal meetings with prospective bloggers were held also in November in World Travel Market (WTM), the leading travel industry exhibition, and word-of-mouth knowledge of the program spread among bloggers. In TBEX and WTM, information about the program was also shared by panelists and the Professional Travel Blogger Association (PTBA). Invitations for bloggers were sent already in October, with 120 applications coming back in from bloggers all around the world. Registration to the program ended on November 15th. The chosen bloggers were personally contacted during November and December, and informed about the program. This was also when different social media accounts were created for the program. A closed Facebook page was to set up to help engage the bloggers into the program and to offer a platform for open interaction between the involved industry members and bloggers. Hashtag #NBEFinland was used in social media channels before, during and after the program and all approved bloggers received a tag that they could add to their blog to

indicate that they will participate in NBE Finland as an official blogger. From the 120 applications received, 40 bloggers from 36 travel blogs were accepted to participate to the program. The bloggers came from various countries and areas such as Europe, USA, China, Latin America, Africa and Nordic Countries. The bloggers who participated in the program write in 11 different languages and have a total of over 2 million blog followers. As the majority of travel bloggers, they are very active social media users and many of them also act as speakers and panelists. In addition to the international travel bloggers, five Finnish host travel bloggers were selected to represent the Finnish travel blogging scene and to act as guides in the trips organised during the program. Also other Finnish travel bloggers had the opportunity to apply for a Blogger Pass for the MATKA Fair and more than 80 Finnish travel bloggers were accredited to attend.

The program of NBE consisted on pre- and post-tours that lasted from one to four days, a seminar and workshops related to blogging and social media at the MATKA fair, company visits, and other get-togethers in Helsinki. The complete program can be found in Attachment 1. After the program had ended and bloggers had headed to their next destinations, two separate online surveys were created for bloggers and companies that participated, to gather feedback about the overall success of the program. The results of these surveys will be discussed in chapters 4.1 and 4.2 In addition to gathering development ideas, post-marketing was started. The companies who participated in the program were sent results, such as the amount of social media visibility of the program including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram activity as well as a list of blog posts that had been published by 4th of February 2014. Partner companies were encouraged to use the material in their own marketing activities in their own online networks and other media. In addition to the communication between the organisers and the participating companies, also press releases were prepared.

During the spring of 2014 the participating companies have been kept up to date about advancements with NBE 2014 by email. At the moment of writing this thesis, the Facebook group that was established in December 2013 is still active, with bloggers and organisers sharing stories about their stay in Finland as well as personal, travel blog and NBE -related news. NBE was awarded the first price of the Finnish Municipal Market-

ing Championships in May 2014 and the program will be organised again in the year 2015. This thesis was commissioned by Innastus Ltd. in the spring of 2014.

3 Methodology

Qualitative research method was chosen for this thesis, because it studies questions such as "why" and "how". According to Silverman (2011, 3) qualitative research covers "a wide range of different, even conflicting, activities". A quantitative method would not have been sufficient to answer the questions related to this study or to cover the topic in depth. According to Silverman (2011, 5) qualitative research usually begins with a single case that was chosen because of its convenience or interest. In this thesis, case study research was a natural way to approach the issue at hand, because of the lack of valid existing material about the subject and the possibility to study what happened in NBE very closely. Accordingly, as Yin (2003, 1) puts it, case studies are preferred in social science research when the researcher is faced with "how" or "why" questions and when he hasn't got control over the events. Yin defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined". In addition, Yin states that the case study inquiry "copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another results, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis".

3.1 Research Question and Method

The purpose of this study is to examine how Finnish companies could maximize the marketing benefit derived from travel blogger co-operation. In order to gain insight about co-operation between travel bloggers and Finnish companies, case-based qualitative research method was chosen for the study. For the purpose of this study, it was important to interview both the organisers and participating companies. A semi-structured interview strategy was used, for there were certain matters that needed to be discussed in every interview, but it was also important to allow free discussion around the topic in order to gain deeper insight to the experience of participating in NBE and organising it. Bloggers that participated in the program were not interviewed because it

was seen that the feedback already gathered by the organisers of the program was sufficient to support the purpose of this study and no more extensive data gathering was needed, because the focus of this thesis is in the relationship between partner companies and organisers of the program. The survey material was gathered by Innastus Ltd. but analyzed by the author of this thesis. It was decided that the scope of this study needed to be kept as focused as possible around the partners of NBE in order to maintain the timeframe set for the study, to allocate resources effectively and to produce results that are as accurate as possible.

3.2 Data Collection Process

As NBE was staged in January of 2014, and the idea of completing this study came to existence in the spring of 2014, the organisers had already gathered some feedback from the bloggers, companies that participated in the program. From this feedback, online survey results are used to describe the bloggers point of view of the program and to support the findings of the interviews with partner companies. In order to get a thorough understanding of the relationship between the organisers and the program partners however, it was essential to put up interviews with both parties. Therefore, the main source of data in this study is two interviews with organisers and six interviews and one email answer from partners and the feedback gathered by Innastus is only used to describe the bloggers perspective.

3.2.1 Online Survey

The organisers of NBE Finland 2014 gathered feedback about the program by an online survey. There were two different surveys: one for the international travel bloggers that attended the program and one for the participating partner companies. A link to the survey was sent to the email addresses of the respondents after the program had finished. This allowed the participants to answer the questions when it suited them.

3.2.2 Interviews

In order to collect data about Finland, representatives of the participating companies and organising parties of NBE were interviewed. There were eleven prospective com-

panies to be interviewed among the partners of NBE. They were first approached by email based on a contact list that was provided by Inna-Pirjetta Lahti from Innastus. Six participating companies agreed to be interviewed. Three of the interviews were conducted via Skype due to scheduling and distance problems, and the other three interviews were conducted in Helsinki as a face-to-face interview at the interviewees own work places. At the time of the program, five of them were working as a director or in managerial positions in the fields of marketing, PR and sales and one as a general manager in a partner hotel. All of them had been actively involved in the co-operation between their company and NBE. From the remaining five partners who were approached, one agreed to send their answers by email because of scheduling problems, and another stated that they are a non-profit organisation and therefore not suitable for the study. Three partners didn't answer the email at all. Therefore six partners were interviewed and one sent their short answers to the same interview questions via email. All of the people that participated were from major tourism companies in Finland, with the exception of one interviewee from a Finnish design company.

In addition to the partners, two organisers were interviewed face-to-face in Helsinki. As stated earlier, multiple parties were involved in organising NBE, but however, only Inna-Pirjetta Lahti from Innastus and Virpi Aittokoski from Visit Finland were interviewed. Inna-Pirjetta was in charge of the practical implementation and coordination of the blogger program and Virpi worked as part of the team from Visit Finland. The representative of MATKA fair and Helsinki Fair Centre stated that they wouldn't bring any new perspective to the study because Inna-Pirjetta was aware of their actions and motives. Furthermore, interviews with Visit Helsinki and Sebastian Canaves didn't take place due to scheduling problems and other time constraints. Consequently, it should be noted that NBE is a project of such proportions that some insight related to it will inevitably stay hidden. However, from the two persons who were interviewed, Inna-Pirjetta had the overall picture of the whole program and had been in close contact with the partners throughout the process, and Virpi had been actively involved as a representative from Visit Finland. It wasn't absolutely crucial for the study to get Sebastian Canaves' point of view because his area of responsibility concentrated on staying in contact with the participating bloggers and offering a bloggers perspective to the

program, and similarly, Visit Helsinki wasn't so involved with the partners of NBE either.

All of the interviews took place during the last week of May and first week of June in 2014, they were conducted by the author herself and lasted from thirty to fifty minutes. It was made clear to the participants that the data would be used in a bachelor level thesis written by the interviewer. All of them were conducted in Finnish, the native language of the interviewees, and were recorded with the interviewees consent. Also some notes were taken with paper and pen. Any citations from the interviews have been translated from Finnish to English by the author of this thesis. Even though the final interviews were all in Finnish, the interview form that was sent to the participants in advance was written both in Finnish and English. The interview questions can be seen in attachments 5 and 6 (in English). Because the interviews took place 4 to 5 months after the blogger program took place, it was important that questions were sent to the interviewees a couple of days beforehand to offer them a chance to freshen their memory before the interview. However, prior preparation was not imperative. A list of the interviewees can be found above in Figure 4.

Interviewee 1	PR Manager	Design company	Face to face interview	26th of May 2014
Interviewee 2	International Sales and Marketing Manager	Shipping company, passenger cruises	Skype interview	27th of May 2014
Interviewee 3	Marketing Designer	Destination Tourism and Marketing Unit	Skype interview	28th of May 2014
Interviewee 4	Sales Manager	Shipping company, passenger cruises	Face to face interview	30th of May 2014
Interviewee 5	General manager	Hotel	Face to face interview	2nd of June 2014
Interviewee 6	Tourism and Marketing Director	Destination Tourism and Marketing Unit	Skype interview	2nd of June 2014
Interviewee 7	Communications manager	Airline	Email answers	6th of June 2014
Inna-Pirjetta Lahti	CEO	Innastus Ltd.	Face to face interview	3rd of June 2014
Virpi Aittokoski	Coordinator, PR & Media visits	Visit Finland	Face to face interview	28th of May 2014

Figure 4. List of interviewees.

3.3 Data Analysis Process

The starting point for this study is the presumption that co-operation between travel bloggers and travel companies creates a beneficial PR opportunity for those companies. This assumption is not questioned in the study.

Transcribing the interviews was started as soon as possible after every interview and basic transcribing was used leaving out expletives and unnecessary repetition of words. It was notable that the interviews conducted over Skype tended to be shorter than the ones done face-to-face with the interviewees. However, Skype interviews still included in-depth discussion similar to face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, the material received from interviewee 7 was different to these in-depth interviews. The answers received by email were relatively short but clearly answered the questions that were asked. There was a possibility to place further questions to the interviewee 7 by email, but it wasn't considered necessary, since the answers that were received were to the point. Even though email answers were different to the data gathered by face-to-face and Skype interviews, they were considered valuable information for this study and therefore were taken into consideration during the analysis. Data analysis was carried out from June to October in 2014. However, some preliminary managerial implications could be pointed out from the interview materials very early in the process and were handed over to Innastus already in July 2014. This was important so that the results made it in time to be considered in the planning phase of NBE Finland 2015.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This research has been conducted according to the bachelor thesis guidelines of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The whole process has been reported in detail in this document. The literature review has been conducted ethically, meaning that all correct authors have been cited truthfully according to the guidelines. This research doesn't include any plagiarism.

All of the data gathered for the purpose of this study is gathered ethically. All of the interviewees were aware that their answers would be used for a bachelor level thesis of

the interviewee and agreed to the interview voluntarily, making their independent decisions about participating. There were no monetary incentives for the partner companies to participate. The identity of the persons that were interviewed from the partner companies are kept secret throughout this report. However, the commissioner and other organisers interviewed appear with their own names. The bloggers who participated in NBE and representatives of partner companies filled in a feedback survey at a time when there was no knowledge about this research, but they were aware that their answers would be used for development purposes of the blogger program. They remain anonymous in this thesis.

In addition, the author and researcher of this thesis received no monetary reward for completing the research, but did it for her own professional growth and out of interest in the subject. Even though the author is a hobbyist travel blogger herself, she was not involved with the planning or execution phases of NBE and didn't participate in the program herself. However, she was aware of it taking place at the time.

4 Findings from Surveys

As mentioned earlier, before this thesis was started, the organisers of NBE Finland 2014 gathered feedback about the program by an online survey. There were two different surveys: one for the international travel bloggers that attended the program and one for the partner companies. The survey questions can be found in attachment 3 and 4. The results from these surveys are now discussed.

4.1 Blogger Survey Results

There were 29 respondents to the blogger survey, but not every respondent answered all of the questions. Out of 28 people, 71,4% of the respondents thought that NBE was very useful to them as travel bloggers, and the rest 28,6% answered that it was "useful". The majority of the respondents stated that they were equally interested in the tours and the Nordic Travel Fair MATKA, however 44% of the respondents answered that the tours were the main reason they decided to apply. Only one person stated that the tours were irrelevant to them and they only wanted to participate to the travel fair and seminars.

83% of respondents stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the business contacts they got during the program. The majority of the bloggers were going to write at least 4 blog posts about their visit. When asked how satisfied the bloggers were about specific parts of the program, such as invitation process, pre-program information, arrangement at the different tours or the Finnish sauna evening, on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 being not satisfied, 4 being very satisfied) all items gathered an average of 3 or above. However, the average might not reveal all opinions about the tours, since for example only 1 person answered the question regarding Rovaniemi pre-tour. The elements that divided bloggers' opinions the most were Bloggers Seminar on Wednesday, Nordic Travel Fair MATKA in general, Destinations Breakfast and Bloggers' "meeting" at the fair on Thursday. All in all, the total average for all of the arrangements and activities was 3.67 out of 4 and it can be concluded that the bloggers were satisfied with the different aspects of the program in general.

There were two open-ended questions in the survey. Bloggers were asked to mention the best parts of their overall experience in Finland and requested for feedback and development ideas for future NBE programs. The answers to these questions varied but were mostly written on a positive note. The most often mentioned best parts of the overall experience in Finland were participating in sauna evening, networking with industry representatives and other bloggers, meeting local Finnish people, participating in pre- and post-tours, eating Finnish food and participating in an outdoor day in Helsinki. 12 out of 24 respondents mentioned that the Sauna evening was the highlight of their stay, whereas 11 bloggers identified networking as the best part. Also 4 out of 24 respondents mentioned that getting to know Finnish culture was one of the best parts and praised the way NBE was organised.

19 bloggers gave feedback and over 30 different new ideas for future programs. Almost half of the respondents mentioned how well NBE was organised. However, the most common development idea was that the bloggers need more time on tours and during the day to take photographs, make notes and update their websites. 47% of the respondents mentioned lack of time in their feedback. Also, one respondent wanted to have more time for the blogger workshops. There was some feedback about the seminars, and 37% of respondents approached this issue. Three respondents mentioned that more industry people should attend the seminars and it was stated that there are existing events, such as travel blogger conference TBEX, where bloggers can meet other bloggers. One solution to this problem was given, which was to not organise workshops for industry people at the same time as the blogger seminar, so that more people from the industry would attend and get information about travel blogging. Two respondents stated that the presentations at the seminar were too basic and that they would have preferred to hear more industry experience about working with travel bloggers and project ideas for co-operation and one respondent though that there was too much promotional content in the seminars. In addition, three people addressed the issue of having bloggers and tour-operators on the same pre-trips. It was stated that it felt like they, as bloggers, were slowing the group down because of excessive time needed to take photographs and that bloggers were interested in less touristic places to visit than the tour-operators. Other feedback and development ideas considering the

program were to stay in a hotel closer to Helsinki Fair Centre, include bloggers in choosing the destinations for tours, consider the main topics of the bloggers when planning the program, have Wi-Fi available throughout the tours and other activities, provide better information about when the program will end in order to book flight tickets, provide pre-tour transportation to and from the hotel, inform the blogger which exhibitors could be interested in co-operation and have only Finnish destinations to see more of Finland and Helsinki itself as well as to experience other regions such as Lapland, the next year.

4.2 Partner Survey Results

There were 15 respondents from 14 different companies to the partner survey. 33% of the respondents thought that NBE was very beneficial for their company or region. The rest stated that it was beneficial. 86% of the respondents stated that they would be interested to participate in NBE in 2015 as well, and the rest answered that they might be interested. None of the respondents stated that they would not like to participate in the future. Majority of the respondents (57%) were interested in participating in NBE Finland 2015 by organising a pre- or post-tour for the bloggers, whereas 36% would like to sponsor a lunch or get some other kind of visibility, 29% to participate to a speed dating workshop between the bloggers and travel industry professionals and 14% would be interested to sponsor the bloggers' seminar or other parts of the program which are open to all participants.

In addition to this survey, one respondent approached Innastus by email and stated that they would have liked to have an open ended question in the survey. It was stated in the email that they are interested in similar visits in the future, but need to establish a policy of their own about how to work with bloggers. They said that in the future they will expect more thorough background information of the bloggers, their niche and travel motivations both from their own and the organisers' side. It was stated that the program for a blogger visit is challenging to put together with a group with such various interests. In addition, they stated that it is important that the bloggers are interested in the destination themselves and that financial aid is not the only reason for travelling there.

5 Findings from Interviews

The interviews that were conducted by the author of this thesis were divided into three different themes: planning phase, execution phase and post-program phase of NBE Finland 2014. The planning phase considers motivations to participate in the program, pre-program activities and other background information. The execution phase deals with the partners and organisers role during the visit of the bloggers. Post-program phase considers the activities that were conducted after the program was finished as well as development ideas for the future. The interview results will be now presented according to the themes.

5.1 Planning Phase

According to the interview with Inna-Pirjetta Lahti, the project manager of NBE, MATKA fair has been having a hard time attracting young people to participate to the fair, and the idea of NBE grew out of the need to attract them. MATKA fair had already done co-operation with a Finnish travel website www.rantapallo.fi that hosts many Finnish travel blogs, by organising a Bloggers' Lounge at the fair for Finnish bloggers. Because MATKA is an international travel fair, it was only natural that international bloggers would be welcomed along as well. Inna-Pirjetta happened to meet Sebastian Canaves at the ITB fair in Berlin. Sebastian had helped to build the blogger program of ITB Berlin and stated he would be interested to work in a similar project in Finland as well. The local tourism organisations Visit Finland and Visit Helsinki came along, because they have been important co-operation partners in MATKA, fair but it had been hard to find a natural way of co-operation before, and NBE felt like one that could work. As Virpi Aittokoski from Visit Finland stated, their organisation had done active work with bloggers already since 2012 and they knew it would be beneficial. According to Inna-Pirjetta, the active participation, and first of all the labor input and knowhow of Visit Finland and Visit Helsinki, were certainly one of the reasons why the program was so successful.

As discussed before, one of the other main motives behind this was to strengthen the place of MATKA fair as the leading tourism fair in northern Europe. According to Inna-Pirjetta, the main objectives from the viewpoint of MATKA fair was to strengthen their image as a forerunner in the field, to build the knowledge of their fair abroad and to create added value for the exhibitors at the fair. Virpi stated that Visit Finland came along to organise the program in order to gain international publicity for Finland, get the word spreading in social media through different channels, to get traditional media coverage and show Finnish people that Visit Finland follows the international trends and make new and innovative marketing campaigns.

5.1.1   Partners' Motives to Participate in NBE

Based on the interviews with partner companies, it appears that one of the major motivators to participate in NBE was the chance to try something new. Some of the companies had not done any or only very little co-operation with bloggers before and therefore wanted to learn more about how to work with bloggers and the opportunity that lies in it. In addition, the partners that had already worked with bloggers by themselves saw that NBE was a more systematic approach to working with international bloggers and especially an opportunity to welcome travel bloggers from around the world to get familiar with their destination or company products and services. These partners had previous positive experience from working with bloggers and wanted to expand and continue it. To be exact, six out of seven partners stated they had done some kind of co-operation with bloggers before and the one who hadn't, had continued it after NBE, even though they stated that they didn't have any big plans for the future. They stated that one of the reasons for this was the fact that it is very hard to determine if blogger co-operation is successful, because there are not so many ways to measure it. The co-operation that partners had done before with bloggers wasn't necessarily with travel bloggers, but also with lifestyle or design bloggers. Most companies had done co-operation on a local level, but not on an international level. Interviewee 3 stated that the blogger visits they had done before didn't differ from traditional press trips, but that they realize there are other options and that they are looking for new ways to work with bloggers at the moment. All of the partners stated that they get inquiries from bloggers that would like to use their service in exchange for blog posts.

However, only one, interviewee 6, specifically stated that they are active in inviting bloggers and other social media influencers to visit them. Interviewee 7 said that blogger relations are just as normal for them as relations to traditional media are, and that blogger co-operation is part of their PR. Based on the interviews, it didn't seem that NBE would have been a part of a bigger online campaign for any of the partners, but more of an extra task related to participating in the MATKA fair.

What comes to other objectives, coverage in the blogs was important to the partners, and it is notable that many of the partners also expected coverage in other social media, such as Facebook and Instagram. However, it could be noticed during the interviews that the fact that NBE was something new and different in Finland was a very important factor in making the decision to participate for many of the partners. In addition, maximizing visibility at the MATKA fair, bringing blogger co-operation to a new level, good timing, getting in contact with international media, having other significant partners from the travel industry participating (being "in good company") and the fact that a company wouldn't be able to organise a program like NBE by themselves motivated the partners as well. Many partners had worked with the organisers of NBE before in other projects, and therefore participating was seen as an easy thing that didn't require much extra work.

"To be there where the news of the trade are discussed and where other players are, it's very important"
– Interviewee 4

According to the organisers, the main incentive that was used when recruiting partners was coverage in the participating bloggers blogs and a network of connections with international travel bloggers.

5.1.2 Choosing Partners and Bloggers

According to the interview with Inna-Pirjetta Lahti, she did most of the work when contacting prospective partners for NBE. She contacted all exhibitors of MATKA fair about NBE by email or phone, and told them about the program. According to Virpi Aittokoski, they approached especially those Finnish brands that are known to do co-

operation or had done it before with the organisers. In addition, some of the partners came through the already existing Meet Finland –tours for international buyers. These partners offered pre-tours that had both international buyers and bloggers on them. Inna-Pirjetta stated that it was important to get different areas of Finland along, and that especially Lapland was an important area. This taken into consideration, she stated that the partnerships grew organically and there weren't much specific criteria for participating. However, when she approached prospective partners, she did have certain ideas in mind, such as "a ferry trip to Stockholm would be a good idea". According to both Inna-Pirjetta and Virpi, having tours in Stockholm and Tallinn was important because the organisers wanted to show how easy it is to get to other places from Finland, and use the country as a pit stop.

In the study by Kozinets et al. (2010) it is stated that matching the company profile with the right kind of bloggers is essential in creating the kind of coverage and community reaction that the company wants. However, in the case of NBE, this matter became a lot more complicated because of so many different expectations set up by organisers, bloggers and partners. When choosing bloggers for the campaign, various needs were to be met. The organisers made the choice of which bloggers from those who applied would be welcomed to participate. To reach the international travel bloggers in the first place, Sebastian Canaves used his personal contacts with travel bloggers, and Inna-Pirjetta used contacts of Visit Finland and Visit Helsinki, and together they started to invite different bloggers by personified emails to participate. Through these contacts, the word spread in social media, and other travel bloggers found out about the program as well. According to Inna-Pirjetta, she was also the face of the program, which gave a personal touch to the whole process and made the bloggers feel personally welcomed to apply. After the applications were received, Sebastian went through all of them and did a preliminary sorting, in which he marked the ones that he knew were not suitable and highlighted the ones he knew definitely would be great bloggers for the program. There was a deeper understanding of the bloggers and their blogs involved because Sebastian knew many of them personally. After this, all of the organising team went through the blogs together and decided whom to accept on board. According to Inna-Pirjetta, at this point, they didn't pay much attention to those

who Sebastian had marked as unsuitable, but there were 60-70 blogs that remained for inspection. According to the interviews, there was certain criterion that was followed when choosing the bloggers who would get to participate. The amount of blog readers and followers in other social media were important matters, but also the quality of the blog was considered. The quality and style of writing, the quality of pictures and videos, what the front page looked like, whether the blog seemed professional and the overall feeling were discussed. Inna-Pirjetta said that the quality of content was considered as well, but that they didn't have time or resources to deeply analyze the texts. According to Virpi, the blogs reader profile was important. In addition, how active the blogger was, does he receive a lot of comments and does he answer them, were indicators of how committed the person is to blogging and assurance that they were not just looking for a free holiday. The bloggers could also appeal to the organisers through an open ended question about why they should be chosen. This way blogs that had a lot of potential but, for example, hadn't yet built a big following, stood a chance to be chosen as well.

It was mentioned by Inna-Pirjetta that Visit Finland had gone through the blogs themselves as well, and therefore had a strong idea which bloggers they wanted to participate, and that they also looked into the blog reader profiles in more detail while doing research. In addition, Virpi said that the content of the blog needed to be something that appealed to Visit Finland's target audiences and that, if the blogger produces content in the same kind of style as Visit Finland does marketing communications, the blogger is probably a good match from their point of view.

All of the organisers wanted bloggers from certain geographical areas and bloggers who write in specific languages, so that the blog posts would reach their target audiences. However, because of the different parties involved (MATKA Fair, Visit Helsinki, Visit Finland and partners) some compromises needed to be made. Visit Finland and Visit Helsinki have their own market areas that needed to be taken into consideration, such as Visit Finland's target group of modern humanists in continental Europe, Russia, China, Japan and USA. Furthermore, because MATKA fair doesn't have a strict market area, and there is need for growth, bloggers from places like South

America were accepted even though it is not a market area for Visit Finland or Visit Helsinki. However, the majority of the bloggers came from the main market areas that are common for Finnish tourism operators.

The program was divided into three themes: Nature & Outdoor, Fashion & Design and Food & Culture. According to Inna-Pirjetta, the bloggers were asked when applying what theme they were interested in and which areas of Finland they would like to visit. Despite this, Virpi stated that the organisers didn't decide in advance that they needed to have a certain amount of adventure bloggers or culture bloggers. However she admitted that they tried to keep a balance, so that they would have bloggers from various niches. Because partners had also told what theme their own program suited to, asking the bloggers about their interests made it easier to match the right blogger with the right partner.

Most bloggers that were chosen were professionals or semi-professionals in blogging. However, because of cancellations and such, also promising hobbyists were chosen to participate. This ended up being a good solution, and the organisers plan to continue it next year. Finnish host bloggers were also taken aboard because of available spaces in the partner programs quite late in the planning. This ended up being a good solution as well and the amount of Finnish host bloggers will be increased next year.

When asked what was expected of the bloggers in return for getting to participate in the program, Inna-Pirjetta stated that she stands for a so-called blogger friendly co-operation which means that if the blogger does not get paid for creating content, it is not fair to expect them to make a certain amount of it. Virpi thought the same and stated that if there was a certain amount of blog posts that needed to be done, the content wouldn't be about quality anymore, but about quantity. However, it was said in the interviews that it was mentioned to the blogger that it would be great if they shared their experiences with their audience. Inna-Pirjetta also mentioned that in the future the organisers might also buy the bloggers services beforehand. For example, they could have an agreement that the organisers will buy video material produced by the blogger and use it for promotional purposes of NBE.

When asked what they would do differently about the process of choosing the bloggers next year, Inna-Pirjetta said that they will ask more specifically what is the blogger's sub-niche, for example family travel, or travel that focuses on food. They would also like to know the country of origin of the blogger in addition to the profile of the blog readers. It had been decided that a maximum of 50% of bloggers that would participate in NBE in 2015, could have participated in it also in 2014. Virpi stated that Visit Finland hopes to get more Asian bloggers involved in 2015, but admitted that it is a challenge and needs more preparation because of the language barrier and different style of blogging in Asia.

5.1.3 Matching Bloggers with Partners

What comes to fitting the partners programs to the bloggers needs and the other way round, it was a difficult task as well. According to the interviews with the partners, the amount of time that was alloted for the planning phase was very short and therefore many of the partners didn't have a chance to get to know the blogs or bloggers before they physically arrived. This was caused by the fact that most of their time that was alloted to NBE was spent to plan the program and activities. Virpi Aittokoski stated in her interview that the partners needed to trust the organisers with choosing the right bloggers for them, because they probably would have no time to do it by themselves. According to the interviews, for those partners who did find information about the bloggers, it was from a list provided by the organisers with brief information, and a look at the bloggers website. Four out of seven partners stated that it was almost impossible to get to know the bloggers beforehand because of time constraints. Only one of the interviewees stated that they spent a lot of time to get to know the bloggers beforehand and just two partners clearly stated that the brief research they did, influenced their program significantly, consequently trying to offer experiences that the bloggers readers would be interested in. These two partners were the only ones that also stated that they inquired about the bloggers interests once they had already arrived. The one who spent time getting to know the bloggers was interviewee 5, and he stated that the most important factor was who the readers of the bloggers were and how did they match with the company's target audiences. What kind of stories the bloggers

wrote about in general and in what kind of style, were also inspected by this partner. It was believed that a true commercial possibility would lie in the right bloggers and that it should be utilized.

"Let's say that, there were 40 bloggers, and I knew the names of six of them [who had readers that matched with our target audiences]" –Interviewee 5

Three out of seven partners stated they didn't get to know the bloggers background or the blog in advance at all. However, most of them agreed that it could be useful to know the bloggers in order to customise the program according to their needs. Interviewee 3 stated that personalizing the program would lead to a better result, but also mentioned that in the world of PR, there is never any guarantee of what the results will be. In addition, interviewee 4 was very clear stating that knowing the bloggers in advance wouldn't have changed their results or their program. She stated that bloggers always tell about their experience, whether they like it or not, and that the organiser can not influence them, because if they happen not to like it, they will write it. Regarding the program, she said that because there needs to be a certain framework anyway, it would have stayed the same. That said, she did tell that they needed to improvise some new activities during the actual stay in order to offer a more interesting program for the bloggers, and that the program could have been more flexible on their part.

"You can't trust [to get good results], it doesn't matter how good your program is, if the blogger doesn't like it, he doesn't like it" –Interviewee 4

Interviewee 3 stated they had skimmed through the content of the blogs, found out the bloggers' niche, background and style of writing as well as the amount of followers and where they were from, but didn't have time for an in-depth analysis. The same parner stated that they get inquiries from bloggers very often and normally choose the ones that seem to be the best fit for them. Their qualifications are the amount of readers, in which language the blogger writes, where they are from and where their readers are from, what the blogger writes about and if they are really interested in the companies offering. Interviewee 6 said they had familiarised themselves with the niche and

bakcground of the blog, but stated that writing style was hard to analyse because the bloggers wrote in foreign languages other than English.

Many of the interviewees remembered they had received a list of the bloggers and information about them. However, there was some confusion about what the list had entailed because of the time that had passed since January. One partner thought that the info they received was good, when another one stated it was only sufficient and included only basic info about the blogger and their followers. Furthermore, three partners noted that they would like to receive a more spot-on list with information about the bloggers with the exact same information on everyone. For example the niche of their blog, the amount of readers, where the blogger comes from and where their followers come from, were the kind of information hoped for in addition to names and links to the blogs.

In addition to the confusion about what information had been sent to the partners, the possibility to influence which bloggers participated in the activities organised or sponsored by the partners varied. Two partners stated they had no control over the selection of bloggers who came to familiarise themselves with the partners services. Interviewee 4 stated however that after this experience they know that they want to do co-operation in the future with mainly Finnish bloggers, because they reach the company's target audience better than someone from, for example, the USA. It didn't seem that these parners had been denied the possibility to influence the choises, but more like they hadn't even thought of it themselves, and they hadn't been offered to. On the contrary, three partners stated that they had made a wish regarding the language the bloggers write in, the bloggers country of origin and/or the readers country of origin and interviewee 7 simply stated in their email that they felt they had the possibility to influence the decision. However, one of the partners was more eager to be a part of this decision than the others: interviewee 3 stated they had set a wish of minimum amount of followers for the bloggers who would visit them, and stated that it was clear that they wouldn't have even participated if they didn't get the chance to influence this decision. They were also the only one that stated that they have become wiser from this experience and will know to ask for even more in the future. Another

partner, interviewee 6, who had done plenty of work with bloggers before, stated that they didn't wish for certain bloggers and don't think it would be useful because it would take too much time to get to know the blog and blogger, even though some big names would be nice to have as a visitor. They said they welcome all kinds of quality bloggers who do it continuingly with a certain amount of followers.

5.1.4 "Special Needs" of Bloggers

All of the interviewees agreed that a group of bloggers should be handled differently than a group of traditional press. However, for some of them, this thought came out of hindsight. Two of the partners didn't specifically know how making a program for bloggers would differ from a press trip. However, all of the partners stated that they got the support that they needed regarding this from the organisers. Especially Sebastian Canaves who offered the view point of a blogger, had helped by giving tips and guidelines. However, it was evident in some of the interviewees' answers that there wasn't enough time to take these things into consideration, and others stated it wasn't anything that they hadn't heard before. Interviewee 1 specifically stated that they don't normally treat bloggers the same as traditional media, but this time they had no time to plan anything special.

The differences of bloggers and traditional press were discussed in many of the interviews, and some examples how to treat bloggers were identified. Some ideas were to not send press releases to bloggers unless they ask for them, offering experiences, providing the customer point of view and a realistic idea of the services or the product. In addition, a behind-the-scenes kind of view, introduction to the locals' life and the "real Helsinki" as well as providing enough pauses and flexibility in the program to share their experiences on social media and to take photographs were mentioned as important factors in organising a successful program for bloggers. Also recognizing that this is a great possibility to get a positive word out, alert staff about the upcoming guests and make everything run smoothly was mentioned.

Even though almost half of the interviewees stated that they run their program mostly like a normal press trip, interviewee 4 stated that they had improvised some activities

during the day in order to satisfy the bloggers need. Interviewee 3 told that they offer experiences for the press as well and therefore thought their participation went well without any special arrangements, whereas interviewee 7 stated they had intentionally offered the bloggers something they wouldn't offer for traditional media.

5.2   Execution Phase

There were multiple different ways of how partner companies could participate in the program. For example, destination tourism and marketing units welcomed a group of bloggers to their city or area and had organised different kind of activities and other program for their stay. Company partners offered their services, such as accommodation, to the bloggers. All of the partners agreed that they had the power over what their own program would involve and some of them also stated that they discussed it with the organisers. It was clear to some of the partners that they would decide the program themselves, because they are the experts of their area or services. However, as discussed before, the fact that the visitors were bloggers influenced many of the programs and therefore some of the partners discussed what would be best for them with the organisers. Virpi Aittokoski stated that some of the partners were also offered different time slots for things to do, such as to host a lunch. However, they were able to decide the content and produce it on their own.

According to Inna-Pirjetta Lahti, when the partners had decided to participate in NBE, they told what kind of program they would like to do and in which theme it would belong to. There were three themes: Nature & Outdoor, Fashion & Design and Food & Culture. According to Inna-Pirjetta, destination partners could make a wish considering the origin of the bloggers according to geography and language. The organisers tried to match the bloggers niche with the right program of a partner in order to offer the blog readers what they wanted to read about. Inna-Pirjetta stated that both bloggers and partners wishes were meaningful, but it was very hard to match everyone perfectly. Some bloggers wanted to visit a place, for example Rovaniemi, because it is exotic, not because the partners program matched the bloggers niche. Therefore, in some of the cases the organisers followed more of partners' wishes. However, according to

47

Inna-Pirjetta, in the end quite many bloggers were happy with their program even if they didn't get to go where they would have hoped for.

According to Inna-Pirjetta, what made matching bloggers with partners even more of a challenge was that some areas had a program that matched more than one theme. For example a Finnish design company offered a tour around their factory, told the bloggers about their work and Finnish design in general, and the guests got a chance to make their own mugs. In addition, they provided the cutlery and tableware for a relaxed evening at the Sauna society, where the bloggers and the representatives of partners enjoyed sauna, ice swimming and Finnish food. As one of the few partner companies whose product is not a tourism product, it was evident from the interview, that they would have wanted the whole program to have a more distinct link between Finnish life, being Finnish and design, since the theme of the group that visited them was Fashion & Design.

"I'm assuming that there wasn't much of a cultural context in the program - they tried really cool things in lots of places [...] and then you have design, that is an interesting subject, but there's no common thread" –Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 stated that the multiple visits in different companies that were part of a theme should be a part of a bigger entity, and there should be a reason why the bloggers are visiting those certain places, in order to create a story around it. When the organisers were asked about this issue, they stated that there wasn't much of a storyline and that the themes were quite loose. The simple idea was that the bloggers would visit places that had something to do with the theme. It was also stated that it was such a busy time that even interviewee 1 herself didn't get what the bigger picture was and how their program related to the other visits the bloggers did. There wasn't any time to find out how much the bloggers knew about their company or Finnish design and there simply wasn't time to think how the company would benefit the most from NBE, and afterwards they felt that they didn't get anything from hosting the evening at Sauna Society. In hindsight, the interviewee stated that what was written about their services was something that they don't offer to normal tourist and they were left wondering if they should have organised something else instead.

Another partner, a ferry company, with the same theme of Fashion & Design offered the bloggers a pre-tour to Tallinn. It included breakfast at the ferry, a tour of the ship, some info about the entertainment on the ship and a chance to interview the captain. In Tallinn they visited Estonian design house, had lunch in a restaurant that is popular among the locals and visited a fashion designers atelier. Another ferry company offered their group of bloggers a ferry trip to Stockholm and Åland. The program was similar to the one of the Tallinn pre-tour: a welcoming toast, tour of the ship, and a good meal. However, they had a group that was mixed with both bloggers and representatives of travel agents, and therefore needed to make the program interesting for both. However, interviewee 2 didn't see it as a problem and didn't think anyone suffered because of the mixed group.

Two of the partners, represented by interviewees 3 and 6, were tourism and marketing units, and they also offered pre-tours for the bloggers. Interviewee 3 stated that they concentrated more on experience-based outdoor activities, whereas interviewee 6 said they had a very versatile program. Their pre-tour included ice swimming, dinner at a local family's house, visit to an art factory and introduction to Finnish tourism education, to name a few. Interviewee 3 told that they had decided to go with outdoor activities because they are their strengths and the thing that makes them different from other areas.

One of the partners that seemed to succeed in building a story around their program, accommodated all of the bloggers in their hotel. They started an Instagram account just because of NBE and created an Instagram competition that activated the bloggers already before they arrived to Finland. A personal welcome was made by the general manager in the Facebook group in advance. They tried to give a personal touch to the whole visit and had some special touches added such as a cheese platter ready at the room when they came back after a long day. The general manager also attended the evening at Sauna Society. Everything that they did opened up the story of the hotel. Also a private breakfast with the possibility to go to sauna was organised in the upper floor that offers a great view of Helsinki.

5.3   Post-program Phase

Even though a lot of the resources were allotted to the planning and execution phase, there were several activities to be followed through after the bloggers visit. In this chapter we discuss how the partners followed the results and measured their success. In addition, development ideas are discussed.

5.3.1   Following the Results

All of the interviewees stated they followed at least some of what the bloggers wrote about in their blogs, but the amount of time devoted for this activity varied considerably. For example, interviewees 2 and 4 stated that they weren't active in following the posts or the bloggers social media channels because it was a very busy time and interviewee 7 said they did so only randomly. It is also notable that interviewee 5 said they only saw the headings for some of the blog posts, and didn't actually click the link to see what had been written about them. Only interviewee 3 and 6 said that they had followed the results very carefully from various channels and interviewee 3 was the only one to state they kept statistics of blog coverage.

Everyone agreed that the closed Facebook group that had been established for the organisers and bloggers to contact each other was a very useful tool in following the blog posts. Many bloggers linked their stories to the group, and that way the partners could keep track of them. Five out of seven partners mentioned that they thought there weren't as many blog posts about them as they had expected. It was suggested that maybe the cause from this was that the bloggers were more interested in the destination as a whole and the tours around Finland, or that the bloggers simply weren't interested enough in the partners' services to write about their experience. Interviewee 7 suggested that there should be an agreement done beforehand on what kind of visibility they will get. It was also mentioned that the bloggers who were the most active and interested during the visit also wrote and posted the most in their social media channels about their experience. Interviewee 1 even said up front that they weren't sure if participating was worth it, because they had put a lot of effort into it and they got less

coverage than they expected. Despite all this, when asked if the posts that had been written were of good quality, everyone agreed that they were.

Only two partners, interviewees 3 and 5, told that they used a social media tracking service that identified blog posts, when two others stated that their media monitoring service doesn't include blogs or travel blogs. Three partners mentioned that they used a report of all the published blog posts that was sent to them by email. It included all the blog posts that had been published by 4th of February 2014. Five of the partners told they followed the coverage through other social media channels in addition to the closed Facebook group. Three specified that they used the bloggers own websites, two that they used Instagram, and one that they used Twitter for this purpose.

Only two of the partners, interviewees 2 and 5, stated they had paid any attention to the reaction of the blog readers or followers on other social media. Interviewee 5 stated they used mostly Instagram for this purpose, and concluded that most of the comments were about supporting and cheering the blogger and agreeing with their opinions, readers stating they wished they were at the spot where the blogger had been as well. Interviewee 2 said that they checked the posts right when they had been published and that there weren't many comments yet. Some agreed that it would have been good to get back to the posts after a couple of weeks to go through the comments.

Six partners said that the bloggers had given the kind of image of their area or services that they wished to. Interviewee 6 specified that they didn't want to have any kind of expectations of what the bloggers would write, but let them describe how they experienced the city. Interviewee 4 didn't directly answer the question, but stated instead that bloggers always tell about their own experience, whether it's good or bad.

Four partners said that they had used the content that the bloggers created during the visit in their own social media profiles, in sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. From the remaining three, interviewee 7 said that they had used very little of it for their own purposes and interviewee 4 stated that they had no policy for sharing the bloggers work, but one should be discussed and established with their communications depart-

ment. Interviewee 2, had however informed the proper market areas about the blog-
gers who had visited, and that they could be contacted if needed. Only one partner,
interviewee 6, mentioned they had used content created by the bloggers on their offi-
cial website and told that there was so much material that they could have shared it
even more. They said that even the local traditional media had been interested in the
program. However, none had used the materials that the bloggers produced directly for
traditional marketing communications.

As mentioned, one of the partners had distributed information about the bloggers to
their proper market areas. Also other partners knew how to benefit from the bloggers
network, and five out of seven said they had been in contact with at least some of the
bloggers after they had left Finland. Two of the partners had discussed buying the
bloggers other services such as social media training, two stated they had received in-
quiries from bloggers to visit them again and another was planning to inform the blog-
gers about an upcoming event for international social media influencers and to ask
them to spread the word about it. The same person, interviewee 6, told that they had
become so close with the bloggers during their stay, that they were now friends on
their personal Facebook profiles and exchanged information that way. In addition, one
blogger had attracted a foreign couple to travel to Helsinki and use one of the partners'
services. The amount of bloggers that had been contacted or had contacted the part-
ners varied. One told that they had only been in contact with two, and another one
stated they had exchanged materials with all of those who visited the company. Also
more background information had been asked from one partner. The ones who said
they hadn't been in contact with the bloggers, said that they followed them on social
media, with one exception, interviewee 4, who however, was planning to send summer
greetings to the bloggers through social media. The organisers of NBE stated that they
had, naturally, stayed in touch with the bloggers.

5.3.2 Successfulness of the Program

When the partners were asked whether they thought their participation in NBE was
successful or not, all of them answered that they were happy to have participated. Half
of them mentioned that the program gave great publicity to Finland as a destination,

and that promoting Finland as a whole is a good thing for individual tourism companies as well. However, it was also stated that participating in something like NBE is hardly a commercial success, and therefore it was interesting to ask the interviewees if they had measured the success of their participation in any way. From the viewpoint of the organisers, NBE was a success. Inna-Pirjetta stated that the measurements that were used to determine it were the widespread coverage in social media made by bloggers, for example 1.4 million people reached on Twitter, over 70 blogposts, almost 900 pictures in Instagram, the amount of applicants, publicity for the program in other media during the bloggers stay, e.g. MTV3 news, Markkinointi & Mainonta –magazine, Kauppalehti –newspaper and Yle and the fact that regional partners got good publicity also in their local medias. However, it was known already in the beginning that the results are hard to measure for partners in commercial terms because publicity and coverage generate visitors indirectly. In addition, other signs of success were the amount of applicants that resembles how interesting the program was to travel bloggers and the fact that from those who were chosen to participate, there were zero no-shows. Inna-Pirjetta also mentioned that the feedback gotten from bloggers and partner companies played a very big part in determining whether the program was successful or not. From the viewpoint of Visit Finland, the measurements for success were the amount of articles and blog posts published about Finland and also the amount of social media views in sites such as Twitter and Instagram. Both interviewees stated that they didn't have the resources or the time to do a thorough analysis of the quality of the blog posts and their content, or how they were received by the blog readers. However, both agreed that it would be a useful thing to do.

Once again, the answers of the partners to the question varied. Interviewee 4 said bluntly that participating in NBE was done for PR purposes and that PR cannot be measured, while four partners admitted that the success is very hard to measure. Interviewee 3 said they had measured their success based on the number of posts that came out and added that it would have been good to ask for the viewer figures from the bloggers afterwards. In addition, interviewee 6 said that they didn't put any directly measurable targets such as a certain amount of blog posts, but that the great amount of publicity, shared material and positive word about their area was the measure of suc-

cess for them. According to this partner, also the fact that the bloggers enjoyed their visit was important and it was stated that they are sure it will yield word-of-mouth recommendations to other prospective travelers. The two destination partners that were interviewed, represented by interviewees 3 and 6, also specifically mentioned that they had got very positive feedback from the locals and their followers in social media. However, interviewee 3 mentioning that it's impossible to say if somebody has come to their area because of NBE. The good team spirit that had been achieved between the bloggers, partners and organisers appeared to be a meaningful result for some of the partners. Based on the interviews, it seemed like most of the partners trusted their gut feeling to whether they succeeded in the program or not.

"The problem [with blogger co-operation] is that we know the input - but not the output"
–Interviewee 5

5.3.3 Development Suggestions

All of the partners were asked if they had any development suggestions for the organisers and if they thought they could have done something differently to benefit more as partners. The majority stated that there should have been more time to prepare. However, this was seen as not just a point of development for the organisers, but also as a note to themselves that they didn't have the change to allocate enough time for preparing. Half of the partners mentioned they wished they would have had more time to get to know the bloggers beforehand and personalize the program better according to their and their readers' interests.

Only interviewee 5 seemed to be completely happy with their own part of the work, stating that they were proactive and authentic, and didn't come to think of anything they definitely should have done differently. However, interviewees 4 and 6 stated they would have wanted to utilize more of the content the bloggers created in their own social media channels. In addition, interviewee 4 stated their program should have been more flexible to accommodate the needs of the bloggers, and interviewee 2 would have liked to get to know the bloggers better once they were in Finland and add a more personal touch to their visit. In addition, interviewee 1 hoped they had concen-

trated on one thing and only a specific part of the bloggers in order to have more preparation time and get better results.

There were some development ideas regarding coordinating the whole project. Interviewees 1 and 2 hoped that they would be provided a clearer bigger picture of the program and explained what the next steps are in the process. Interviewee 1 stated that this would also help them to make sure their own program wouldn't be out of context. It was also mentioned that it would be better to have fewer contact persons and clearer communication between the partners and the organisers. What is interesting however is that, interviewees 5 and 6 stated that the communication between them and the organisers had worked well and they had no problems relating to it. It was suggested by interviewee 1 that there would be a face-to-face meeting with the partners in the beginning of preparation, so that they could work together and that a common storyline could be established for the bloggers visit so that it would not feel like visiting random places one after another. It was even suggested that partners could join their forces and create experiences for the bloggers in co-operation.

[In the future I hope to] feel as part of a bigger entity as a partner and have a clearer understanding of how the program generates us more coverage that is meaningful to us" – Interviewee 1

However, most of the development ideas were related to the bloggers and their selection. Interviewee 2 hoped that the organisers would find ways to somehow encourage bloggers to post more about their experiences, interviewee 4 suggested that they should give information about the partners to the bloggers in advance, such as a list of their names, websites, and contact information, to encourage the bloggers to do some background research in advance and know the partners better before they actually visit them. Interviewee 5 hoped for more bloggers that would be interested in quality services and not only backpackers, and interviewee 3 stated that all of the bloggers interests didn't match the theme group they were in. In addition, interviewee 3 had an idea that there could be more bloggers invited to join the program, instead of waiting for bloggers to apply. They also wanted that the organisers would start finding the bloggers earlier, and invite them to participate based on the wishes of the partners, such as

wanted niche and target group, instead of making the partners choose from a group of bloggers that were already accepted to the program.

Even though these development suggestions were discussed, five partners specifically reminded without asking that this had been the first time NBE had been organised, and that they had been very satisfied with it. Four partners mentioned they would be happy to participate in the program again. In addition, it was interesting that interviewee 2 said participating in the program had made him personally think more highly of bloggers, and interviewee 5 said that they had learned to cast a critical eye towards the bloggers that approach the company and offer publicity in their blog in exchange for their services.

The organisers seemed to be aware of the development suggestions of the partners at the time of the interviews. Both Inna-Pirjetta and Virpi agreed that internal communication was to be developed, and Virpi suggested that it was to be decided who is in charge of which things already right in the beginning and that they needed to have a better back up plan in case someone falls ill, because in NBE 2014, Inna-Pirjetta had most of the responsibility. Also, developing communication between partners and bloggers as well as exhibitors of MATKA fair and bloggers was mentioned by Inna-Pirjetta. For example, speed dating was suggested between exhibitors and bloggers at the MATKA fair. In addition, one of the main development ideas that came up was to advice and help partners more on how to work with bloggers and how to share and utilize the content that the bloggers create. Inna-Pirjetta stated that during NBE 2014 it was a challenge, because many of the partners didn't use the content that was available to them. Inna-Pirjetta said that next year they will also concentrate on how to use the bloggers content on the organisers' channels already during the program and even before it. The organisers also plan to activate the bloggers to make more posts and other content by social media competitions that activate their readers as well before and during the program. Virpi mentioned that they had already developed different kind of packages for partners that include different ways to participate, such as sponsoring a part of the program or organising a pre-tour. According to her, every package will include a certain amount of things, such as the contact info of all the participants.

Other developments mentioned by the organisers were more related to the MATKA Fair, such as changes in the seminar program and making the bloggers post more about the actual fair in their social media accounts.

6 Conclusions and Implications

Based on the interviews done with the partners of NBE, it is evident that blogger co-operation is still a relatively new area of PR for companies in Finland. The amount of knowledge about the subject varies, as does the expectations about working with bloggers and the amount of efforts put into the execution. Some partners saw this kind of co-operation more valuable than others, and put more effort into it. However, it is clear that lack of resources and lack of time limits the amount of work that is done relating to these activities, even when companies are aware of how they should, and would like to, deal with bloggers. Nevertheless, it is clear that Finnish tourism companies are following the international trend and becoming more and more interested in working with travel bloggers. However, learning the different ways to do co-operation is something that many of these companies are still dealing with.

A clear distinction can be made between companies, that are represented in this study by interviewees 1, 2, 4 and 5, and destination tourism and marketing units, represented by interviewees 3 and 6. It became clear during the interviews that destination partners goals was to promote their destination or area, whereas company partners often had to deal with more commercial goals. Since blogger co-operation is a form of PR, destination partners were more easily satisfied with non-measurable outcomes than company partners. Destination partners also seemed to be more aware of how to work with bloggers in general and had clearer long-term plans to continue it. Because travel bloggers tend to concentrate on their personal experience on their blog, instead of showcasing a particular product, partners that offer experiences receive a more spot-on result for their efforts. As a consequence, it is essential that companies offering goods are ready to showcase them to the bloggers in a way that lets them somehow experience the product.

It is clear that all of the partners of NBE knew something about blogger co-operation and how it should be done already before participating in the program. However, time and resource restraints limited their investment to the program, especially the time put

into getting to know the bloggers. Even though not all of the companies had time to get to know the bloggers in advance, most of them agreed that it could have been a good thing to do. Organisers and partners agreed that, like Kozinets et al., (2010) stated, it is important to match the right blogger with the right company. If the partners would have gotten to know the bloggers better in advance, many of them agreed that they could have personalized their program accordingly. According to the survey results, bloggers were interested in both the MATKA fair and the tours, but mainly the tours. Because bloggers normally write about their experiences and interests, partners involved in the tours had an advantage to those who were only present outside the tours.

It is clear that there was a deeper understanding of the bloggers involved when Sebastian Canaves first choose the bloggers to consider for the program. However, this is different to the method suggested in the study by Kozinets et al. (2010), because there was only a limited understanding of the partner companies and their needs at the time. When choosing the bloggers to consider, the wider themes of the program were taken into consideration instead of individual companies. After the final group of bloggers was decided, partners were matched with the bloggers in that group. All in all, a screening as detailed as Kozinets et al. (2010) suggest in their study, is almost impossible when there is such a big group of parties involved as in NBE. Therefore, their approach is better suited for individual companies that are not a part of a blogger program like NBE. However, it is undisputable that the majority of the organisers and partners believed that the outcome of the co-operation would depend on what sort of a blogger they would get matched with. Based on the amount of good feedback, it is safe to say that NBE was successful from the partners' point of view, even though matching the bloggers with partners was not brought to such a detailed level. Therefore more studies should be done on how detailed the selection of bloggers needs to be. However, it seems that it is important to consider at least how many followers of the blog belong to the target group of the company and if the blogger communicates in a way that the company would also represent itself.

The interviews also revealed that most of the partners didn't know what to do with the material the bloggers produced during and after their visit. In traditional PR, after a company has offered the media their services or showcased their new product, it is the medias' part to write about it to their audience and the companies work is done. However, with social media, there lies a bigger opportunity to spread the marketing message. Popular bloggers are seen as opinion leaders in social media who tell about their experiences honestly, and therefore their say has more credibility than traditional journalists. Social media is all about sharing, and partner companies should take the possibility to share what bloggers wrote about them to their own followers. This way, even if the bloggers followers are not the companies target audience, the company can utilize the material more efficiently to reach their real target market.

Based on the interviews, two different profiles of companies doing blogger co-operation were established:

A) A company that believes blogger co-operation is a meaningful PR activity that can bring in customers indirectly
B) A company that believes blogger co-operation is not an essential PR effort but more of an image-building activity that doesn't necessarily bring in customers

Companies belonging to group A believe that working with bloggers can bring in new customers indirectly. They believe that these kinds of activities generate word-of-mouth, which in turn generates new users for their services or products. The companies belonging to group A are more easily satisfied with unmeasurable results than those belonging to group B. They also do their research better before the bloggers arrive and believe altering their offerings to the bloggers interests and needs derives better results. They are eager to share the story of the company with the bloggers and are more interested in blogger co-operation in general. Group A companies are also the most active in following the results and use their contacts to actively stay in touch with the bloggers afterwards. In addition, these companies are more interested in using the material produced by bloggers in their own online and social media channels than group B companies.

Companies in group B see blogger co-operation as a secondary activity that may generate word-of-mouth, but doesn't necessarily bring in customers. They see it more as an image building activity that shows their customers and rivals that they are following the trends in the industry. Therefore these companies are not as bothered to follow the results i.e. coverage, because they believe PR cannot be measured, but instead, are happy to just have participated. In addition, they don't even consider the blog followers reaction. These companies are less likely to believe that knowing the blogger would give a better result, because they argue that bloggers write about their experience as it is, whether they liked it or not. However, companies from both groups understand that bloggers should be offered experiences and not be treated as part of traditional media.

For successful co-operation between travel bloggers and companies belonging to group A, there should be sufficient background information available on the bloggers and enough time should be allotted to research the bloggers' interests and their community of readers and followers. These companies are interested in the bloggers and want to be able to make decisions concerning the activities they offer to the bloggers based on the blogger and reader profiles. Companies belonging to group A are also interested to follow the results after the bloggers' visit, and should plan ahead of time in order to allocate resources already when starting the co-operation. If the co-operation is part of a blogger program such as NBE, organisers don't need to use as much time providing them the material produced by the bloggers, or convincing them about the results as companies in group B, because group A companies are ready to do it more independently and use the material in their own social media channels, as well as keep in contact with the bloggers with future co-operation in mind. Group A companies are happy with only a few bloggers that visit them, as long as they have the opportunity to get to know them personally, their reader profile match with the company's target audience and the bloggers way of communicating in the Internet corresponds with the company's communication style. These companies believe that it is better to reach a niche group of potential clients through blogger co-operation than try to reach wider groups. However, after the bloggers have created material about their visit, companies should be reminded to share them on their own channels. From the

organisers' point of view, these companies are more ready to be actively involved in the process than group B companies and would like to contribute their own ideas to the program. There should be time to hear these suggestions and make adjustments accordingly.

Alternatively, when a company belonging to group B is involved in blogger co-operation, resources should be allotted to planning the activities, rather than research-ing the blogger and their community. It is important that the activities present the company brand and offerings as truthfully as possible, because these companies believe the bloggers portray their experience as it was, whether they liked it or not. If the co-operation is part of a blogger program such as NBE, the organisers need to allot more time to convince these companies about the results they get from the program. To sat-isfy the needs of B group companies, there should be more bloggers with more follow-ers to visit them. Contrary to group A companies, these companies believe that blogger co-operation is PR that mainly builds their image, and therefore would like to spread the word as far and wide as possible. They also want to see their brand present also outside their own activities to maximize visibility. From the organisers' point of view, these companies are in need of clear and precise communication, because they see blogger co-operation as one of the less important parts of their PR activities, and don't allocate as much time for it as companies in group A.

6.1 Managerial Implications

The objective of this thesis is to examine how Finnish companies could maximize the marketing benefit derived from travel blogger co-operation. Also providing managerial advice for the organisers of NBE Finland 2015 was set as a secondary goal. Based on the interviews with partners, a ten-point list of development suggestions and other feedback was put together and sent to the commissioner of this thesis, Innastus. These points are listed and discussed below.

1. Make sure partners understand the bigger picture.
   Some of the partners stated during the interviews that they didn't understand the bigger picture of NBE while they were working on their own program. This

was probably caused by the fact that this kind of a program had not been executed in Finland before, the very tight planning schedule and lack of clarity in communication from the organisers' part.

2. Stress clearer communication between organisers and partners.
   A few partners were hoping for simplified communication and less contact persons. Also a kick-off meeting with all of the partners present was suggested in order to clarify the bigger picture at once. Dealing with one contact person will also help to clarify the bigger picture.

3. Take into consideration that December and January are busy times for tourism businesses.
   Time limits were discussed in every single interview with the partner companies. Therefore planning NBE Finland 2015 needs to be started earlier than the previous year and Christmas holidays need to be taken into consideration as well as the fact that December and January are a busy time of year for the partners.

4. Provide partners with a more comprehensive list of bloggers.
   Partners were asking for more background information on the bloggers that would visit them. Therefore, a more comprehensive list of all of them should be compiled so that the partners know the same information about every blogger. At least their name, website address, contact information, travel niche and interests, amount of readers and followers and the profile of their audience should be included.

5. More thoughtful matching of bloggers and partners.
   Some ideas were thrown about how to match the bloggers better with the partners. From the partners' point of view, the blogs niche needs to match the company offerings as well as their reader profile to the companies target audience. This way the program the partner offers will interest not only the blogger themselves but also their readers. Also, if received enough time in advance, there is a possibility that the partners can customize their program to the blog-

gers' interests. In addition, the possibility that partners could suggests certain bloggers to be invited to participate is something to consider. Some partners hoped that they could concentrate on doing one thing in the best way possible instead of splitting their efforts to multiple activities. Despite all this, it should be noted that the organisers were faced with a difficult task when trying to match bloggers with partners, and because companies didn't get to do this themselves, it might be easier to be critical towards the bloggers they received.

6. Take the bigger picture into consideration when planning theme days.
   Perhaps the biggest development idea that came up in the interviews was to have a more precise common thread throughout the theme days and trips. It was suggested that different partner visits that are done during a theme day could tie together in a story-like way that would guide the bloggers through the day and provide added value. In addition, partners could organise some of the activities co-operatively.

7. Provide partners with clearer visibility at the events and trips.
   The partners believed that if they were more obviously present in the activities and events, it would lead to better visibility in blog posts and other social media.

8. Activate bloggers to post more and partners to share more.
   It was clear that partners were happy with the quality of the coverage they got in blogs and social media, but were expecting more of it. Therefore it is imperative to find ways to activate the bloggers more on the spot to update their social media accounts and engage their followers. However, it became evident during the interviews that only very few of the companies utilized the material on their own social media channels, and therefore they should be encouraged to do so.

9. Keep the Facebook group.
   All of the partners found the closed group meant for NBE organisers, partners and bloggers to be very useful. For many of them, it was the main channel to follow what the bloggers had written about them.

10. Keep the Finnish bloggers along.

Because many tourism companies main target market is Finnish people, it was considered important to keep Finnish host bloggers as part of the program in order to reach also domestic audiences.

6.2   Conclusion

In conclusion, travel blogger co-operation is new and exciting for companies in Finland, but there are no set ways of how to do it or how to benefit the most from it. Based on this research, when planning blogger co-operation, enough time should be allotted to the research phase. In other words, finding the right bloggers and planning what to offer them is important because it will have an impact on the results. There are many different approaches to choosing bloggers, with some companies that have a list of very specific criteria and other ones who welcome all quality bloggers to visit. However, when a blogger arrives, it should be remembered that they are not a member of traditional media and therefore need to be offered a more memorable visit that lets them somehow experience the product or service. Like in any business activity, it is important also in travel blogger co-operation to follow the results. Checking what was written and what the community response was shouldn't be forgotten, if the company wants to identify points of improvement for future co-operation.

6.3   Limitations and Remarks

This study is very specific to companies in Finland and travel blogging, and the results may not be directly applicable to other countries or niches of blogging. Majority of the companies that were interviewed are tourism companies, with only one exception of Interviewee 1, and consequently the results may not apply in other fields of business. The results paint a picture of how blogger co-operation is understood and completed among major tourism companies in Finland. The amount of participants is considered sufficient when taking into consideration the amount of partners in the program in general and the depth of the interviews. However, this study involved only large or medium sized companies in Finland, and did not take into consideration small busi-

nesses. Therefore it would be beneficial to study further the differences of travel blogger co-operation in large and small companies and the benefits derived from it. However, this is one of the first researches in Finland on this specific subject and therefore definitely provides insight into a field not yet much researched in Finland.

Because the sources used in the literature review are mostly foreign researches and articles, there is a possibility of bias in this study because of cultural differences. In addition, there is very few valid researches done about bloggers and blogging, and therefore the information base for chapter 2.2 was very limited. Furthermore, no research of blogger programs in particular could be found at the time of the gathering of data, and therefore individual cases of blogger co-operation might not apply to a larger scale blogger programs such as NBE. It would be beneficial to make a clearer distinction between individual blogger co-operation and blogger programs for the purposes of future research.

In general, there should be more research conducted on bloggers, blogging and blogger co-operation. The results of this study have been proved to be trustworthy by the actions already done by the organisers of NBE Finland 2015. Some of the changes that have been suggested in this research have already been made, without the organisers knowing of the results presented in this paper. In addition, when discussing these results with the appropriate persons, there have not been any major disagreements. However, it would be beneficial to repeat the research during NBE 2015 and see what kinds of changes have been made from 2014 and how they will affect the marketing benefit of partner companies.

As a final remark, it must be mentioned that the author of this thesis got interested in the subject through her own hobby of travel blogging. Even though in her personal life, she has both the viewpoints of a travel blogger and a tourism professional, in this study, the viewpoint of a tourism professional was taken. Nevertheless, through her own hobby, she has been able to gain a deeper knowledge from both points of view, which has helped her to understand the bigger picture of blogger co-operation as part of PR activities in companies in Finland.

References

Bansal, H. S. & Voyer, P. A. 2000. Word-of-mouth processess within a service purchase decision context. Journal of Service Research, 3, 2, pp. 166-177.

Carson, D. 2007. The 'blogosphere' as a market research tool for tourism destinations: A case study of Australia's Northern Territory. Journal of Vacation Marketing, 14, 2, pp. 111-119.

Eurostat. 2013. Internet use statistics – individuals. Three quarters of Europeans used the Internet in 2013. URL: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Internet_use_statistics_-_individuals#Internet_activity_by_age_group . Accessed 4 May 2014.

Gretzel, U. , Yoo, K. H. & Purifoy, M. 2007. Online Travel Review Study: Role and Impact of Online Travel Reviews. Laboratory of Intelligent Systems in Tourism, Texas A&M University. URL: http://www.tripadvisor.com/pdfs/OnlineTravelReviewReport.pdf . Accessed 28th April 2014.

Kaplan, A. M. & Haenlein, M. 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. Business Horizons, 53, pp. 59-68.

Kozinets, R. V. , de Valck, K. , Wojnicki, A. C. & Wilner, S. J.S. 2010. Networked Narratives : Understanding Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Online Communities. Journal of Marketing, 74, pp. 71-89.

Lenhart, A. & Fox, S. 2006. Bloggers: A portrait of the Internet's new storytellers. Pew Internet & American Life Project, Washington.

Libai, B., Muller, E. & Peres, R. 2013. Decomposing the Value of Word-of-Mouth Seeding Programs: Acceleration Versus Expansion. Journal of Marketing Research, 50, 2, pp. 161-176.

Litvin, S. W. , Goldsmith, R. E. & Pan, B. 2008. Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. Tourism Management 29, 3, pp. 458-468.

Messukeskus Helsinki. 2014. NBE Finland 2014. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4uUcFexrvo . Accessed 29th of April 2014.

Page, R. & Thomas, B. 2011. New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age. UNP - Nebraska Paperback. Lincoln, NE, USA

Pan, B. & Crotts, J. C. 2012. Theorethical models of social media, marketing implications, and future research directions. In Sigala, M. , Christou, E. & Gretzel, U. (eds.) Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases, pp. 73-85. Ashgate Publishing Limited. Surrey.

Phelps, J. E., Lewis, R., Mobilio, L., Perry, D. & Raman, N. 2004. Viral Marketing or Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising: Examining Consumer Responses and Motivatino to Pass Along Email. Journal of Advertising Research, 44, 4, pp. 333-348.

Public Relations Society of America. 2014. URL: http://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/PublicRelationsDefined/#.VGcxL_msWSo . Accessed 15th of November 2014.

Schmallegger, D. & Carson, D. 2008. Blogs in tourism: Changing approaches to information exchange. Journal of Vacation Marketing, 14, 2, pp. 99-110.

Scott, D. M. 2013. The New Rules of Marketing and PR, 4th ed., John Wiley & Sons Inc. Hoboken, New Jersey.

Silverman, D. 2011. Interpreting Qualitative Data, 4th ed., Sage Publications.

Stevenson, A. & Hamill, J. 2012. Social Media Monitoring: A Practical Case Example of City Destinations. In Sigala, M. , Christou, E. & Gretzel, U. (eds.) Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases, pp. 293-311. Ashgate Publishing Limited. Surrey.

Tan, W-K. & Chen, T-H. 2012. The usage of online tourist information sources in tourist information search: an exploratory study. The Service Industries Journal, 32, 3, pp. 451 – 476.

Technorati. 2011. State of the Blogosphere 2011. URL: http://technorati.com/social-media/feature/state-of-the-blogosphere-2011/ . Accessed 24 April 2014.

Tudor, R. 2012. Using travel blogs to promote Romania as tourist destination. A comparative study on personal travel blogs of French and Romanian travelers. Revista Română de Comunicare și Relații Publice, 14, 5, pp. 159-183.

Valentini, C. & Kruckeberg, D. 2012. New Media Versus Social Media: A conceptualization of their meanings, uses and implications for public relations. In Duhé, S. (eds.) New Media and Public Relations, 2nd ed., pp. 3-12. Lang publishing, New York.

VanRysdam, P. 2010. Marketing in a Web 2.0 World – Using Social Media, Webinars, Blogs and More to Boost Your Small Business on a Budget. Atlantic Publishing Group, Inc. Florida.

Volo, S. 2012. Blogs: "Re-inventing" Tourism Communication. In Sigala, M. , Christou, E. & Gretzel, U. (eds.) Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases, pp. 149-163. Ashgate Publishing Limited. Surrey.

Wang, H-Y. 2012. Investigating the determinants of travel blogs influencing readers' intention to travel. The Service Industries Journal, 32, 2, pp. 231-255.

Yin, R. 2003. Case Study Research: Design and Methods, 3rd ed., Sage Publications.

Zickuhr, K. 2010. Generations Online 2010. Pew Internet & American Life Project. URL: http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/12/16/generations-2010/ Accessed: 4 May 2014.

Attachments

Attachment 1. The program of NBE Finland 2014

Program for the week: Sunday 12th of January to Friday 17th of January

Sunday 12.1.2014

12.00 Stockholm departure to Turku with train

17.00 Åland departure to Turku with train

18.00 Get together, Helsinki

Monday 13.1.2014

10.00 Departure to Hämeenlinna

12.00 -15.00 Flight simulator (group 1)

15.30 Departure for the design theme group

16.00 -19.00 Design theme group

16.20 Departure to Rovaniemi

19.00 Departure to Porvoo

19:30 Evening together

Tuesday 14.1.2014

6.45 Tallinn group departure

10.10 Stockholm group arrival to Helsinki

21.15 Tallinn group arrival to Helsinki

Wednesday 15.1.2014

10.10 Åland group arrival to Helsinki

11.00 Flight simulator (group 2)

14.00 Workshop Day gathering at Helsinki Fair Centre

15.00 Seminar: Bloggers & Industry – How To Work Together – Discussion & Case Study: International travel bloggers and industry representatives and The Finnish view

17.00 Welcome to Helsinki Cocktails hosted by Helsinki

18.30 Bloggers sauna evening

Thursday 16.1.2014

08:00-9:30 Destinations Breakfast

11:00 Official opening of MATKA

Lunch offered by one of the partners

16-18 Mingle with Bloggers at the Bloggers' Lounge

16:00 – 16:05 - Opening by Sebastian Canaves

16:05 – 16:25 The Power Of Language and Niche by Travel Blogger Conni Biesalski

16.25 – 16:45 Co-operation Can Be More Reach and Influence for Everyone by Travel Blogger Adeline Gressin

16:45 – 18:00 – Informal Meetings Between Bloggers and Exhibitors

19.15 NBE Bloggers evening

Instagram Travel Thursday Event with Finnish Travel Bloggers

18-19 Happy hour

Friday 17.1.2014

08.30 Breakfast surprise

09.30 Full day program in Helsinki:

Food & Culture

Fashion & Design

Nature & Adventure

15-16:30 Bloggers' Gathering

19.00 Farewell dinner hosted by City of Helsinki at A21

Bloggers Seminar

15:00 – 15:30 How to Measure ROI in Blogging? By Travel Blogger Melvin Boecher

15:30 – 15:45 How to Find the Right Blogger to Create a Successful Co-operation, by Laurel Robbins from PTBA (Professional Travel Bloggers Association)

15:45 – 16:25 Panel: Can Bloggers and the Travel Industry Have a Win-Win Co-operation?

Panel:

Kashyap Bhattacharya, Travel Blogger

Sebastian Canaves , Travel Blogger

Zhang Xiaoguang, Travel Blogger

Nicholas Montemaggi, manager of Blogville, Emilia Romagna

Jaume Marin, Marketing director, Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board

Moderator: Alastair McKenzie, social media journalist

16:25 -16:30 – Co-operation with Bloggers – A Great Experience or Waste of Money? By Tuomo Meretniemi, Managing Director, Aurinkomatkat Oy

16:30 – 17:00 – Panel: Is Travel Blogging a Real Tool in the Nordic Market?

Panel:

Anna-Kaisa "Aku" Varamäki , Social Media Manager, Finnair

Virpi Aittokoski , Media and Blogger Relations, Visit Finland

Riikka Krenn, Editor in Chief, Rantapallo

Tuomo Meretniemi, Managing Director, Aurinkomatkat Oy

Moderator:

Inna-Pirjetta Lahti, Travel Writer & Speaker, Innastus Oy

Pre- and Post-tours:

Food & Culture
Porvoo 13.-15.1.
Åland 12.-15.1.

Fashion & Design
Tallinn 14.1.
Stockholm 12.-14.1.

Nature & Adventure
Kimitoön 13.-15.1.
Rovaniemi 13.-15.1.
Hämeenlinna 13.-15.1.
Wild Taiga 17.-19.1.

Some of the tours were organised in co-operation with Meet Finland -tours for international buyers.

Attachment 2. List of bloggers that participated in NBE Finland 2014

International Travel Bloggers

Andy Higgs www.grownuptravelguide.com

Lola Åkerström www.lolaakinmade.com

Melvin Boecher www.traveldudes.org

Kashyap Bhattacharya www.budgettraveller.org

Ryan Mehabed www.lesacados.com

Andre Motta www.viagemcriativa.com.br

Adeline Gressin www.voyagesetc.fr

Janicke Hansen www norskereiseblogger.no

Amanda Mouttaki and Youssef Mouttaki www.marocmama.com

Francesca Di Pietro www.viaggiaredasoli.net

Julia Trushina www vk.com/knowfinland

Michael Hohenadler and DJ Yabis www.dreameurotrip.com

Nienke Krook www.thetraveltester.com

Marco Torri www.viaggi-lowcost.info

Kate Baxter www.fabricofmylife.co.uk

Alastair McKenzie www.travelcoffeebreak.com

Constanza Lucadamo www.lamaletadeconstanza.blogspot.com

Semirah Dolan www.soundofcharm.blogspot.com

Cacinda Maloney www.pointsandtravel.com

Nicole www.bittenbythetravelbug.com

Isabel Romano www.chavetas.es, www.diariodeabordoblog.com

Simona Forti www.bigodino.it/viaggi

Victoria and Stephen Kennedy www.bridgesandballoons.com

Nelson Medina and Zuzana Esentierová www.mochileros.org/nelson

Jenny, Xiaoguang Zhang www.blog.sina.com.cn/xgzh66

Conni Biesalski www.planetbackpack.de

Inma Gregorio www.aworldtotravel.com

Katja Presnal www.skimbacolifestyle.com

Piotr Kroczak www.bien-voyager.com

Sebastian Canaves www.off-the-path.com

Robin Ewers www.weltreisejunkies.de www.cachingwelt.de

Nadine Pober www.thenadwork.com

Laurel Robbins www.monkeysandmountains.com

Eugene Kostylev www.travel.ru

Oxana Yurkova www.oksa_sun.lj.ru

Auston Matta www.twobadtourists.com

Finnish Host Travel Bloggers

Satu Vänskä-Westgarth www.todestinationunknown.com

Marinella Ruusunen www.kaukokaipuumatkablogi.net

Laura Santanen www.urbaaniviidakkoseikkailijatar.fi

Chryssa Skodra www.vision51.com

Inari Fernández www.lapsiperheenmatkat.fi

Attachment 3. Survey questions for the bloggers

1. How useful was NBE for you as a travel blogger?
-Very useful
-Useful
-Not so useful
-Not useful at all

2. How appealing and relevant were the pre-tours when you decided to apply for the NBE-program?
-Very relevant. They were the main reasons I decided to apply.
-Quite relevant. I was equally interested by the tours as well as the Nordic Travel Fair Matka.
-Rather irrelevant. I applied mainly because I wanted to participate to the Nordic Travel Fair Matka and its seminars.

3. In your opinion, what were some of the best parts of your overall experience in Finland? Open ended question.

4. How satisfied are you with the new business contacts you got during the program?
-Very satisfied
-Satisfied
-Not so satisfied
-Very dissatisfied

5. How satisfied were you about following items:
-Invitation process
-The information you got before arriving in Finland
-The arrangements during your visit
-The arrangements at Porvoo pre tour

-The arrangements at Tallinn pre tour

-The arrangements at Kemiö pre tour

-The arrangements at Åland pre tour

-The arrangements at Rovaniemi pre tour

-The arrangements at Stockholm pre tour

-The arrangements at Hämeenlinna pre tour

-The arrangements at Wild Taiga post tour

-The bloggers' seminar on Wed 15 Jan

-Finnish "sauna" evening on Wed 15 Jan

-Destinations Breakfast

-Nordic Travel Fair MATKA in general

-Bloggers' "meeting" at the fair on Thu 16 Jan

-Bloggers evening at Plaza on Thu 16 Jan

-Helsinki Day

-The Finnish hosts of NBE during the program

6. How many blog posts you are writing or planning to write about your NBE visit?

-1 to 3

-4 to 7

-Over 8

7. Please give us any feedback or ideas you might have for making the NBE-program better in the future. You can also give ideas for seminar themes and pre/post -tour destinations for 2015. Open ended question.

Attachment 4. Survey questions for the partners.

1. How beneficial you think the participation to Nordic Bloggers' Experience 2014 was for your company / region?

-Very beneficial

-Beneficial

-Ineffectual

-Very ineffectual

2. How much would you be able to pay for a similar visibility in NBE program next year?

-10 000€ +

-5000 – 9999€

-2501 – 5000€

-1500 – 2500€

-1001 – 1500€

-Less than 1000€

-Nothing

3. Are you interested to participate in NBE next year?

-Yes

-Probably

-No

4. How would you like to participate next year?

-By arranging a pre/post tour

-By sponsoring the seminar or other activities that are open for all participants

-By sponsoring a lunch or getting some other kind of visibility

-By participating in a speed dating workshop

-I'm not interested in taking part in the NBE program next year

Attachment 5. Interview form for the organisers.

1. Name, company, role in the NBE program?
2. Why did you start developing the Nordic Bloggers' Experience Finland 2014?
3. What were the main goals of the program?
4. What were the criteria to pass in order for a blogger to participate in the program?
5. Did you segment the chosen bloggers in any way?
6. Were the bloggers told that they need to write about their experience in exchange for free travel, activities and accommodation?
7. Did you familiarize yourselves with the background and niche of the bloggers that applied before accepting them on to the program?
8. Did you familiarize yourselves with the writing style or the readers of the bloggers that applied before accepting them on to the program?
9. How did you choose the partners for the program?
10. Did the partners decide individually what kind of activities they want to provide for the bloggers?
11. How did you decide which blogger could participate in a certain trip or in a certain activity?
12. How did you measure the successfulness of the program?
13. In your opinion, what could you as organisers do differently in order for NBE 2015 to be even more useful for the partner companies?

Attachment 6. Interview form for partner companies.

General information

1. Name, company, role in the NBE program?
2. Why did your company decide to participate in NBE?
3. What kind of co-operation did you do with NBE (e.g. organised activities, sponsored meals or other for the bloggers)?
4. Was participating in NBE part of a bigger campaign for your company?

Planning phase

5. Did you familiarize yourselves with the background and niche of the participating bloggers before NBE?
6. Did you familiarize yourselves with the writing style or the readers of the participating bloggers before NBE?
7. What kind of information did you find out about the blogger and where did you find it from? Did it affect your decisions related to the NBE program?
8. Did you have the possibility to influence the decision which bloggers would participate in your activity?
9. How did you prepare for the bloggers visit? Did you have personal contact before the program?
10. During the visit, did you take into account the special needs of bloggers such as time to take photographs or to make notes?

After the bloggers visit

11. After the program ended, did you follow what bloggers wrote about you in their blogs and social media channels? What about the reaction of their followers?
12. Have you been in contact with the bloggers after the program? What have you discussed?
13. Have you used the material generated by the bloggers in your own social media channels? How about traditional marketing channels?
14. Did the bloggers who wrote about you give the kind of image about your company that you intended?

15. In your opinion, how successful your company's participation was in NBE? How have you measured the success?

16. What kind of positive and negative results did your company get from participating in the NBE program? (For example new partners, clients or positive/negative publicity)

17. What should your company do differently in order for NBE 2015 to be more useful for your company?

18. What should the organisers take into consideration, so that NBE would be even more useful for your company next year?