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Key components for successful personal branding on social media.

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DEGREE THESIS	
Arcada University of Applied Sciences	
Degree Programme:	International Business
Identification number:	16540
Author:	Stefani Kirilova
Title:	Branding your personality on social media – the power of pictures, videos and captions combined.
Supervisor (Arcada):	Christa Tigerstedt
Commissioned by:	

Abstract:

The thesis is about finding the key components for successful personal branding on social media. Thorough research of the Facebook, Youtube and Instagram platforms has been performed in order to better understand the essence of presenting a brand as a personality. Research of three already established Finnish influencers Youtube, Instagram and Facebook) is in focus. A look has been put to the power of pictures, captions and videos, a comparison between the engagement rates and posting patterns has been made for all three researched influencers in order to notice any reoccurring themes between them that might help readers with their own personal branding action plans. Attention has also been paid to target language, visual quality and quantity of the content as well as controversial topics such as making viral videos and handling negativity. The findings in the empirical part give readers a more concrete example of how they can make revenue by branding their own personality online.

The research is qualitative and the method used is purposive sampling. Three Finnish online influencers on Instagram, youtube and facebook have been chosen and their marketing efforts have been observed for a period of two months during which indicators such as posting patterns, quantity of content, engagement rates and exponential growth have been transcribed with the help of an online software NapoleonCat and the statistics website SocialBlade.

Keywords:	Blogging, Social Media, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Influencers, Self-branding.
Number of pages:	
Language:	English
Date of acceptance:	

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1 INTRODUCTION

Many "online personalities" are famous for just…being famous. They build a following and get many people engaged in their lives. They brand themselves and their lives become their careers, which means they make money out of sharing their every day lives with other people on the internet. It can be a lifestyle blogger or a person, who makes makeup videos or a short moviemaker on youtube, or perhaps an instagrammer who travels a lot. Whatever they do, they brand it with their face and character – their personality. They create viral content on weekly basis and provide entertainment to thousands of viewers and followers using big social media platforms as a tool to be seen. Whether or not they have put in some monetary investment into gaining popularity (pay Facebook to push their videos onto people's timelines or Instagram to do the same, or perhaps create Youtube ads which run on channels with content similar to theirs), they are a force to be reckoned with. This needs to be researched because it's a relatively new phenomena which is turning into a big trend faster than most industries can keep up with, which creates a lot of business opportunities both for people, who would like to brand themselves and for companies, who want to push their products out by gaining attention from a specific customer niche. This thesis is focusing on the online personalities and their everyday lives, the work they do to sustain their success and the branding efforts they put into their characters as well as the ways companies can approach them with collaborations and various product placements.

1.1 Research aim and research questions

The research aim is to find out how do online personalities brand themselves in Finland in a way that would benefit their existing career. The problem is that there are a lot of those "famous" online personalities and little information about how they actually got there, how they went viral. Is there a secret marketing equation that can get anyone to be successful in the social media branch? This research is done by theoretical consulting with books written

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on the topic of online branding. Branding yourself is a skill anyone can benefit from, so tracking the journey from the first Instagram post to 2 million youtube subscribers is important to research.

The main research question is: *Which components or factors are relevant for successful personal branding on social media?* Other questions to which answers could be found are: How does social media presence affect online personalities and what developmental possibilities and opportunities does it provide them with?

The expected results are to share some insight on online personal branding and to provide a reliable summarized guideline into advancing in online personal branding efforts for anyone interested.

1.2 Demarcation

The scope of the research includes popular and active social media channels in Finland. It concentrates on the local requirements and strategies for creating an online career by branding your personality. Taking a closer look at the chosen influencers will provide an understanding of how different online platforms complement each other to create a strong personal brand and make it possible to get monetary rewards through collaboration with companies and other online personalities, which also expose one's brand to different audiences.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To start this chapter one should identify the answers to a few questions. Firstly, what is the definition of an online personality? This is going to be one subject of exploration in this research. It proves to be difficult to find a simple definition, however many agree that it is

people who have gained popularity due to their online success. Whether their personality is real or acquired (fake), they gain followers and viewers, which make it possible to have a career based on their online efforts. Thomas Smale (2015) argues that,

"Your personal brand is how you appear to the world. Therefore, it serves to reason that a strong brand is preferable to one that is unpolished and uninteresting.
Once people know who you are and begin to identify you with a specific area of understanding or expertise, you'll be well on your way to becoming the go-to person in your niche or industry."

And how exactly is it a career and what does online branding have to do with it? According to an article by Douglas Hoult (2016):

"While companies have put their faith in branded content for the past decade, brute empirical evidence is now forcing them to reconsider. In YouTube or Instagram rankings of channels by number of subscribers, corporate brands barely appear. Only three have cracked the YouTube Top 500. Instead you'll find entertainers you've never heard of, appearing as if from nowhere."

It's as if the generation which has grown up online has stopped following brands and has started following personalities. This is how becoming a brand of your own is possible. People are in the center of a phenomena called *"crowdculture"* which means that they pay more attention to the crowd, to the people we feel are more similar to us, than to brands who have something to say. Creating a career by branding your voice as one of many has never been this popular before. In this thesis, the aspects of "creating" oneself online have been explored.

The internet has been open to the general public for a bit over 20 years now, with time more and more people especially in the western world have acquired a home computer/smartphone/tablet/other device, with which they can stay connected to the rest of the world. Youtube seems to be nowadays more popular than TV and with that comes the demand to watch other people online with the pure purpose of entertainment. With more demand comes more supply and more and more enthusiasts have jumped in and tried to build a career based

on the demand for entertainment. New platforms such as snapchat, vine and Instagram have emerged as another tool for creators to engage their audiences. And more social media keeps on emerging as a complementary tool to boost the online creators' viewership (soundcloud playlists, pinterest boards, YouNow live streams, etc).The personalities can be anything from lifestyle bloggers, cooks, meme creators, beauty advisors to gamers and DIY enthusiasts, a channel for every interest a person might have. David A. Aaker (2013) has a few brand building theories and how product brands are being measured, but it would be interesting to see if those theories are adaptable to personal branding and especially doing it online.

"Brands are powerful. They serve as the core of a customer relationship, a platform for strategic options, and a force that affects financials, including stock return." – David Aaker 2013

The main platforms are YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat, they are the heart of a good personal branding campaign and this thesis will focus on the power of videos, pictures and captions – things all of these platforms provide. It is no longer a matter of just "luck" when it comes down to gaining viewership, there are strategies we are going to look into for a deeper understanding of the matter. Some of the literature is provided by Paul Colligan, author of "Cross Channel Social Media Marketing" and "Youtube Strategies", which are books that are going to help with the research process. In there lies information about topics such as "How do I make my video go Viral", "What is the ideal length for a video", "What are the best third party tools in creating a personal brand" and other important questions, which will provide an overview of the major strategies to use in the aforementioned platforms.

"Live development isn't the only new development for Youtube. From a fully integrated social engine (across Google+ and the other social networks) to premium (paid) content options, Youtube's reach, and your potential impact with it, grows every day. Youtube keeps getting bigger and bigger – and her reach and impact continue to grow at an extremely impressive rate" – Paul Colligan, Foreword, Page 4 Book: Youtube Strategies, 2014

2.1 Personal branding

One of the most important parts of building your career is knowing how to brand a personality in a way that it is entertaining for big audiences (being commercial) and generates amounts of traffic big enough to sustain a lifestyle. (Wilson 2008)

For content creators it is crucial to be consistent of the image they want to show their followers. Most people are interested in "authenticity", even if they do not necessarily consciously focus on that aspect when browsing social media. In today's world we can see a shift of preferences towards specialized things. This is true, but not limited to, social media. As there are different social media platforms for searching certain type of content, such as videos for YouTube and pictures for Instagram, people also follow people focusing on certain aspects as described by Hietajärvi (2016). One account should be focusing mainly on one topic. A popular topic on social media tends to be beauty or travel amongst the younger users. Content creators might find that it is easier for them to target their audience if they choose one topic of interest for themselves and be consistent with it.

It might be easy to make the mistake of trying to reach as many followers as possible by trying to reach everyone. If the content is very diverse, for a while it might be a fast way to reach a vast audience. For content creators in social media, followers are one of the most crucial thing. However, to maintain the interest of the followers, it is easier to stick with the content one is passionate about and most interested in. People tend to notice if someone is only creating content as "clickbaits"; content that might sound scandalous or provocative but its true aim is to attract visitors or viewers, or collect "likes" (Wilson 2008). However, this is not a long-term strategy to gain followers, since people expect constantly new content, and the expectations for high quality are constantly increasing.

Content creators must carefully define their target audience and create content accordingly to gain and maintain a strong follower base. (Jokinen 2016)

Personal branding however, isn't just about how other people view a certain content creator, but also about what is associated with said creator, the brands affiliated with them, the messages and opinions which are transmitted and the overall impression the commercial audience is left with after looking at the content. In a way everyone is their own brand, but not everyone are

deemed "interesting enough" to make money out of their personality. There are however tips and tricks one can use to boost the traffic to a certain website/profile/page and keep it exponentially rising. (Wilson 2008)

"What if you could take a page right out of the corporate book of business development and use it to craft and implement dramatic, important changes in yourself that are focused on development of your own life? Successful brands convey a consistent message and create an emotional bond with consumers. Don't we all want to convey a consistent message and create a similar emotional bond with those important people around us? Absolutely! The process of building such brands is widely used in the commercial world, and now you, too, can use these techniques to build a brand-new you— a Brand YOU!" – Wilson, Jerry S. (2008)

David A. Aaker (2013) has a theory that a brand in general can be looked at from four different aspects: as a product, as a person, as an organization and as a symbol. He has divided them so we could more easily understand how consumers view the entirety of a product brand. Despite focusing on company brand and brand equity, he has points which are applicable to any branding efforts, because even Apple.Inc has a personality despite it being a huge corporation employing thousands of people. This goes to show that a personal brand could also be the efforts of more than one person and the differences between product branding and personal branding can be bypassed by changing some of the major elements. In the following table it can be seen how David's different aspects relate to each other.

While conducting research to back up David's theory with comments, the researcher of this thesis stumbled upon another thesis called "Branding People" written by Siina Hietajärvi in 2012. She talks about very similar issues and although there are major differences between the two research papers, they seem to be closely related to each other, hence her modified table of David Aaker's theory has been included in this chapter as it
 is relevant to it and explains better how a product brand and a personal brand correlate.

Brand as a product	Brand as a person	Brand as a symbol	Brand as an organisation
Product Brand • What it is • Who uses it • Emotional Benefits • Quality • Value	Product Brand • Personality • How the personality is viewed by consumers	Product Brand • Symbolic references such as symbols, imagery, slogans • Heritage	Product Brand • Organisational attributes such as innovation, practises etc. • Local vs. Global
Personal Brand • Refer to brand as a person.	Personal Brand • Who it is • Who are interested • Perceived quality • Value of performance • Target audience	Personal Brand • Symbolic reference such as brand name, brand imagery (promotional pictures etc.)	Personal Brand • Will be added after a brand has joined an organisation

Figure 1 Branding Attributes (Aaker 1996, 79). The personal branding attributes have been modified by Siina Hietajärvi (Rovaniemi, 2012, page 17),

Essentially one can agree that a brand and a personal brand are the same thing though personal branding may require more tweaking because the target audience might be smaller in scope. Of course some of the product brand attributes would need to be modified to fit a person, since most personal brands don't really have symbols, they depend more on the name of the person and their image or catch-phrase (for example travel youtuber Louis Cole's signature ending "Peace out, enjoy life and live the adventure! Boom!"), they don't depend on an organization, if anything – the organization depends on them. (Hietajärvi 2012)

To explain this better, a good example of that is the now inactive channel "Jacksgap", which followed the cinematic adventures of identical twins Jack and Finn Harries. They became so popular as a package that it would be unthinkable for any of them to split and start their own brand. Upon gaining popularity they shed light on organizations they were passionate about and created their own studio called "The Good collective", which depended entirely on their personal brand image.

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2.2 The person behind the brand?

Wilson (2008) argues that in order to become a brand, first it is important to start with the question "who am I?", which is an important step in identifying oneself. What are the strength and weaknesses possible to have and what is the core thing one does best. Before building a marketing plan for an online career, every content creator is advised to make a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) portrait of themselves as it is invaluable in narrowing down an area of expertise, it makes things look clearer for the creator as a personality and it gives insight into where should more work be put in.

This so called "SWOT" analysis is personal for each individual person, since our memories and experiences make us who we are and everyone has different things to show for and/or avoid. Wilson has divided a creator's life into five phases.
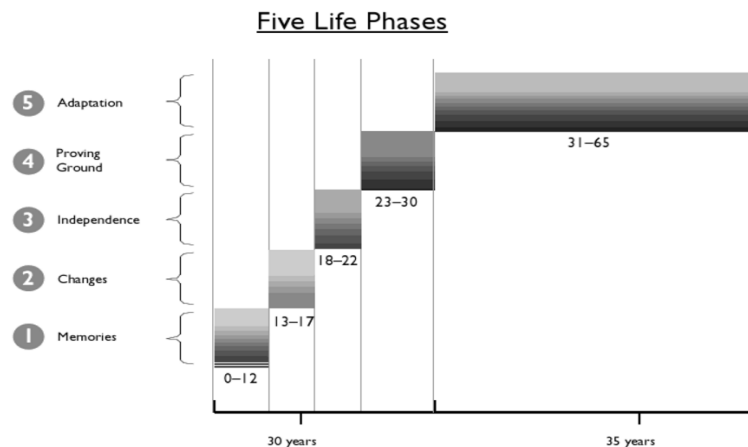
Figure 2 The five phases of life, WILSON, Jerry S., and BLUMENTHAL, Ira. Managing Brand You : 7 Steps to Creating Your Most Successful Self

"By organizing your life into these five phases, you can take stock of your life. It is interesting to note that the first three phases cover only 22 cumulative years, yet these phases have been very influential in forming Brand YOU; this will become even more apparent as you complete the audit." -

Wilson, Jerry S., and Blumenthal, Ira., Page 38

During the first phase most people have happy memories with their family and childhood friends as they were the people who were with them the most, whereas the second phase recognizes some changes both physical and mental. During that phase the self-esteem is shaped to be what it is for the rest of people's lives. The third and fourth phases are ones where each person has to prove themselves as an individual and differ themselves from everyone else. The last stage, Wilson suggests that it can involve marriage, divorce, success, failure, loss of loved ones, and everything else under the sun and it only proves that our individual personalities are shaped until the day we die.

So knowing this, identifying oneself can be a difficult task but it is the most important thing in branding one's personality. (Wilson 2008)

This cycle is good to reference, when one is thinking of an angle from which they could analyze themselves. Psychologically speaking, it is widely known that our personalities keep changing constantly. It's important to look back on our experiences and reflect on how they've changed and shaped us as people. It's been included in this research, because it's a simplified way of understanding more about ourselves, our values, beliefs and the image we want to portray to other people.

Carol Hoare (2001) has researched Erik. H. Erikson's widely regarded life cycle theories and has come to the conclusion that *"Erikson showed adults as prejudiced, as moral-ethical and spiritual, as playing and potentially childlike, as historically and culturally embedded, and as variously insightful and wise."* She argues that whereas his words are true, they are more relevant to the near past (when they were published) rather than the new modern concept of western adulthood that spreads across all sorts of cultures, ethnicities and values. Nowadays cynicism in adults is more common as well as more nihilistic concepts about our purpose yet there is no universal agreement of what it really means to be an adult. Eriksson demonstrated how we are driven along by qualities of which we are to a great extent ignorant and referred to group and social inclinations which help us present adult-like properties centered toward a certain era. He countered the elastic band misrepresentation, demonstrating that ideas about adulthood shouldn't be limited by the concept of adolescent thoughts shaping out overall personality.

Whatever theory one chooses to believe as a content creator, identifying the personality before branding it is important to do.

2.3 Online personal branding

This is where the branding efforts get a bit more technical. So in order to brand ourselves anywhere, it's important to know who you are and what message you want to convey to people. However when we are talking about online branding there are some things to take into account. For example the amount of times per day one posts. One important thing to remember is that nowadays social media is more about engaging with the audience rather than just informing them about things. This means that people are more eager to connect with the online personality and exchange ideas, opinions or just simple feedback. However engagement takes effort, because the content has to look and sound appealing to the viewer or follower.

"Our ability to utilize social media effectively will come down to having interesting and useful content to share, and being willing and able to engage in an open and authentic way." - Rowles, Daniel. Digital Branding, edited by Daniel Rowles, Kogan Page 46, 2014.

Part of having interesting content to share is its compatibility with mobile devices. Nowadays most of the views come from smartphones and tablets as everyone is in a bigger rush than ever and finding the time to sit down on a stationary computer can prove to be challenging. (Bosomworth, 2015) If a person as a content creator has a blog or a website, they need to make sure it is mobile device optimized. In addition to that they need to make sure that the links they share, should they not be from their own sites, have to also be optimized for maximum engagement of the audience.

In his book "Digital Branding, 2014" Daniel Rowels also argues that one also needs to do the so-called "social media listening", which consists of observing their audience and recognizing what they want to see, talk about and engage with. A great free tool for that is Google Trends, which shows how users search with google. This helps content creators follow recent trends

and recognize the rising or falling of old/new ones. For example around October 2011 one of the most searched words was "Jobs" as the founder of "Apple" Steve Jobs died then. This skyrocket of search activity can be a clear indicator about what people want to read about…or listen to (a peak upload of videos about the topic on Youtube). A similar phenomenon happens before big holidays every year. "Makeup look for Halloween" or "My New Year's resolution" or "Midsummer snacks" are all seasonally positioned titles which will drive a lot of traffic to them around the time they get published. Or around the same time of each year after publishing. This is called target positioning.

Some social analysis tools have also been made available for free from the social media websites. There are both Facebook and Youtube insights available for content creators which lets them see what content is actually working and which videos are getting more engagement. One can also track the demographics of the audience – gender, age, geographical location, time spent watching videos, average comment engagement and most popular time of day for watching the content. The more time passes the more advanced these tools are getting and the more features become available for free, which is of great use for all content creators. In addition to that there is also a Google Analytics feature available.

"If I keep on publishing useful and engaging content, regularly update my social channels and positively engage with anyone who leaves comments or feedback, I will gradually grow my social media audience. If, however, I want to speed up this process and create the maximum amplification for my efforts then I am going to need to focus on social media outreach." - Rowles, Daniel. Digital Branding, edited by Daniel Rowles, Kogan Page 57, 2014.

Rowles (2014) argues that if we want to speed up the process, we need to identify the advocates and the influencers within a certain group and use them to our advantage. The advocates are the positive feedback giving people, who always have something nice to say and are likely to engage and share your content with others. The influencers on the other hand are the ones who already have access to an audience. They can be identified through some of the aforementioned tools and then it's important to engage with them and persuade them to become our advocates. This way we can reach more people in a faster manner.

2.3.1 Target language

The language in which one brands oneself determines the reach they would have and their target audience - everyone who can read and speak the target language.

Languages such as Spanish, English, Chinese and Russian are more likely to have a bigger audience since there are more native speakers, whereas languages such as Bulgarian, Finnish, Greek or Afrikaans are more focuses towards a smaller audience since they are more country-specific.

"With my native language I only would reach a fraction of the world population. My native language is only spoken in one country and practically unknown outside its borders. Even adding in languages with similarities, my own language it is simply not the best basis for gaining a readership and building community, since the number of blogs would be a whole lot less. It wouldstill be possible to build
a position within that language, but I would be left with the feeling that there was an immense audience out there that could have been mine." - Liz Strauss, Successful Blog, July 19,2007

If one wants to reach out to a bigger audience and is fluent in a well known popular language. he/she should consider changing the language of their branding efforts in order to reach out to a bigger population base.

2.4 Visual marketing and branding

The importance of what kind of image we portray of outselves is in the center of our branding efforts, especially when considering visual social medias such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and even Snapchat. The image is everything both literally and figuratively speaking. This is why a great deal of attention has been raised to the quality and subliminal messages of the images we share. Successful instagram accounts rely on their bikini body pictures in the Dominican Republic, to get people to follow them and escape their routine life for a moment while scrolling on their timeline. Beauty gurus rely

on their makeup headshots which look appealing and alluring. It's what makes the viewer click on their video and follow their account.

A lot of what we see through them is also product positioning and staged marketing, but it works. How is it done though? It's a science of its own. Technically speaking a good creator invests in the quality of their visuals sooner or later.

"Sites containing high-quality images in addition to their relevant content get 94% more views than those that are purely text-based. That figure alone should be enough to make adding images to your site a top priority" – Erich Noack (2015)

This means for example, buying a better camera, lighting equipment, investing in a good editing software, which would enable having more cool effects and of course spending the time learning how to use it. This is all very time-consuming and not always all that cheap, but it makes their content viewable and they stay competitive within their field.

These details are something one learns as they go, no one's content is done perfectly the first time unless it's done by a professional team (for example Jamie Oliver's cooking channel), but it's a good idea to do some research on how to better one's quality beforehand. Everything from that accent watch on your wrist to the blue shirt that compliments your eyes to the state of your eyebrows and the color of your lipstick counts. Viewers get the whole picture, but the small details speak subliminally to them. (Langton & Campbell, 2011)

A technical example that can be given is the so-called heat map of a website. That is a visual representation in the form of colors – from green to red, of the gaze wander of a viewer of a certain website. In other words, it shows the site owner which parts of their site are most looked at.

Tools like these heat maps help creators with the optimization of their online influence by purely scientifically showing them where they could place their ads, what features are popular with their audience and why they could be leaving their web page earlier than hoped for.

A strive to look the part is important. Something to remember is that the image one presents of one self has to be a reflection of their personality and what they stand for. We can't expect a mechanic to post pictures of the right ways of applying highlighter.
Another trick worth getting into is staged visual marketing and branding. For example all those prank videos we see circling around on social media.
They have an already set goal, a camera man, a prankster and the (arguably) unsuspecting random strangers whom the prank would be pulled on. It's an intensive marketing trick, because seeing someone's surprised face is something that we as humans enjoy watching. It doesn't even have to be a "prank" per se, it could be charity or a social experiment, but those videos/images definitely gain popularity fast.

Creating a logo or a trademark sign is also a good idea as it is personalized and lets people know any of your online content is connected to you (if your face is not featured on it). This connects a simplistic image with your personality and enables people to remember you better. The right self-portrait also expresses a person's brand well. If a person is after branding their personality rather than their skills, then they shouldn't make their self-portrait too corporate.
This means less suits and crossed hands, which is something most people would prefer their accountant to have. Instead a more casual approach is appreciated. More smiles in a

relaxed environment with less formality flowing and a more genuine interest in one's work.

Anita Langton and David Campbell (2011) have written a book on "Visual Marketing" and there they give an example with a woman named Michelle Villalobos who runs marketing courses and teaches business concepts to others. For her self-portrait she put a picture, which any other professional would put.

"The result was a beautiful professional portrait— but it didn't really represent her. At one of her workshops on personal branding an audience member commented, "Your portrait doesn't reflect your brand— you're fun, young and vibrant, your headshot is sedate and boring. It's beautiful, but it looks like it belongs on Match.com— it's not the you we met today." - Campbell, and Langton. page 14 (2011)

After having changed her portrait to one that represents her more, she gained more popularity within her field. This only goes to show how important it is to listen to your audience and make changes where they are due, especially when it comes down to visuals. A picture speaks a thousand words and the first impression is the most important one, because people make judgments about a person after only 3 seconds of meeting them. Online though, every picture or video must be reviewed accordingly as search engines discover relevant information for the user searching and one never knows which picture or video will pop up first on their screen. Of course hand in hand with the picture content optimization are the appropriate captions and hashtags as it has been discussed earlier in this thesis. This makes content easily discoverable by new audiences and helps organizing it well by time, topic and other factors of the creator's choosing.

2.5 Handling negativity

By putting your personality online, you're bound to stumble upon some negativity. There are so many people online that it is virtually impossible to appeal to everyone. However

online negativity can be particularly brutal as the option of anonymity is widely available making people project their insecurities through cyber-bullying and nasty comments without having to take personal responsibility and account for their words. Victoria Magrath (2015), a famous blogger that goes under the name of "InTheFrow" has posted an article addressing her ways of dealing with negativity, "How I deal with hate online", available at: https://www.inthefrow.com/2015/10/how-i-deal-with-hate-online.html (Accessed on 15.11.2017 14:00)

This problem bothers a lot of creators and it takes time to overcome especially since so many of them are dependent on other people's perception of their online personality. Regardless of whether what we put online is how we actually are in real life, foul and negative comments always strike a personal chord in our minds.

It's important to distinguish between a few different kinds of negativity. According to Sussman and Leigh (2013), there are 3 distinct types:

➢ Constructive Criticism
➢ Simple Criticism
➢ Profanity

Handling all three of them requires a set of different approaches. Most of the time when constructive criticism is received, it is not meant to offend the creator but rather give feedback in hope for future improvement. These kinds of comments should be welcomed because one can learn from them. An appropriate response would be a humble apology for the caused disturbance and a regard for better quality next time. Simple criticism isn't always that clear, however. The creator may need to ask for more details on why the viewer is not pleased and come up with a solution to solve the problem.

In case of profanity, there should be no hesitation to ignore or delete the comment or even block the user, who has posted it. This is very frowned upon as it is in no way constructive or beneficial to anyone, it is written with the pure intent of offending and hurting someone. The creator should remember that those kinds of comments are rarely coming from a good place and have been impulsively put on display by people who don't know them. They shouldn't be taken personally.

In case of harassment or any sort of behavior that makes the online personality feel uncomfortable, they should relieve themselves of the person doing it. If telling them to

stop or blocking them doesn't work, such behavior should not be tolerated and the appropriate authorities should be contacted for further assistance with the issue.

If any of this behavior provokes unpleasant emotions, it is good to take a deep breath and perhaps even go offline and take the time to think before writing back an impulsive comment or doing some other rushed decision on how to act.

Bad press can happen to anyone, so it's good to know how to react to it and to be prepared before it occurs.

2.6 The social media

After having looked through the branding aspects of one's personality and the steps recommended we take, one has to look through the business side of making money online as a content creator. According to research conducted by Tomi Jokinen (2016, 42), *"At least 45% of social media users have at least once engaged with a brand on social media as a direct result of other users' social media activity." (2016, 42*). This is a huge percentage of the users given the fact that most of the western countries' population has a social media profile. This proves how important social media marketing is in present day. It is predicted that within the next few years the number of profiles will only rise exponentially. This is why it's important to know how to brand oneself on the different media platforms. In the following chapter we can find answers by looking at each major social media individually.

2.7 Youtube

Launched only 11 years ago, YouTube is the biggest video sharing site on the internet today. According to their own statistics available online (http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/en-GB/statistics.html accessed on 19.12.2016), it is available in 88 countries in 76 languages, its mobile views alone reach more 18-49 year olds than any US cable network. More than one seventh of the entire world population

has an account on that site and the mobile watch time keeps increasing exponentially (more than 40 minutes per session according to the latest data available on their official website.)

Having that in mind, the number of creators earning more than six figure revenues has increased by over 50%.

Also gaining momentum as one of the most popular music streaming softwares, YouTube had paid over 2 billion dollars in royalties for copyrights and invests in content creators through strategic workshops and programmed which have centers located in some of the biggest cities in the world (Berlin, Sao Paulo, Tokyo, etc).

So it's no doubt that this video streaming giant is a big money-making machine and self-branding is one of the only ways to gain viewership and monetize your content, thereby making money yourself. (Colligan, 2015)

2.7.1 How does making money work with Youtube

There are a few ways to make money from your content. In this chapter the focus is more on the financial part rather than the quality of the videos. As explained by Google AdSense (https://www.google.com/adsense/start/how-it-works/#/ Accessed on 15.11.2017), by uploading content one has the option to monetize it. This means that every time someone clicks on the video, an ad is going to pop up for them to see. Some of them are pay per click, some of them pay just by being there – visible for the viewers. Some ads you can skip after 5 seconds, others you have to watch until the end and of course, the more time the consumer spends in watching your ad, the more likely they are to click on it and therefore a longer advertisement is more expensive for the advertiser and brings more money to the creator whose videos are monetized. (Colligan 2016)

The risks here are that the longer an advertisement lasts, the more likely the viewer is to click away from the video altogether if it is something they are not interested in. By being apart of Google, however, the risk is reduced by tracking the viewer's search patterns and algorithmically showing them ads that they are likely to be interested in. For example a

21 year old girl watching makeup tutorials is more likely to be interested in "Belamy" hair extensions than a 43 year old man watching videos about fishing.

Described by Google Support in their "Youtube partnership program" explanation (Available at: https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72851?hl=en accessed on 15.11.2017), in order for a creator to be able to monetize their videos however, they have to be a part of YouTube's partner program, which is available for everyone to sign up to with a few requirements such as not violating copyright laws and not have history of previous infringements connected to the username and profile of the creator.

Per data gathered from Jim Edwards (2014), *"Ads are only run on a minority of videos shown. Roughly, a video creator will earn $2,000 for every million views. "And then YouTube takes 45 percent."* (Edwards, 2014). This means that a content creator would have to have a sometimes unrealistic view count to make ends meet. Therefore other ways of earning monetary remuneration are widely popular.

An alternative way to make money through Youtube is making partnerships with certain brands and companies, which are closely related to the content the creator is producing. The partnerships can be disclosed or undisclosed to the general public, but usually it works by the content creator mentioning or using the company's product/service in some of their videos, thereby increasing knowledge about the brand/company amongst the audience they communicate with. The content creators get either monetary compensation or products/services free of charge, or sometimes both.

For example a makeup artist on YouTube can collaborate with a makeup brand and get a discount code for their audience to be used at checkout on the makeup brand's site and the makeup artist gets a certain percentage of the profit of every order purchased with said discount code. This way the brand gets more orders and gains popularity, the artist gets paid and the audience gets products at a reduced price. This can be applied for all kinds of other products and services, depending on the theme of the channel and the target audience.

Another way for brands and creators to collaborate is by working together on a product or a service such as a book, fitness equipment or a makeup line. This way the audience is engaged in buying a product their entertainer has created and they get a bigger percentage of the profits along with the company they collaborated with. For this to happen however, the creator needs to have a substantial following, which would generate profits. This is determined by a preliminary market research by the company. (Colligan 2015)

The most important thing for all these methods to work is that the content creator has a solid amount of views and subscribers which come back every week for new content. This takes time and skills in branding oneself and producing good content. A lot of it has to do with creating viral videos as often as possible.

2.7.2 How to make viral videos

Whereas it is possible to make a viral video "by accident", it is usually not the case. Viral in its entirety means a video that people want to share, something that creates a visceral response so that people feel compelled to share it. Finding out *what* people feel compelled to share is difficult if one doesn't have the experience.
However, according to Paul Colligan (2016):

"They have to share really one thing, and that is something entirely unexpected. Nobody shares the expected, and everyone shares the unexpected. If they come to YouTube, they usually see a video they are expecting to see; and the transaction ends there. But if you get them something entirely different than everything else, then you've got a chance that they'll share it."

What could this unexpected thing be? Usually it is humor as people are inclined to share a funny joke and they want to be the first ones to do it, so popularity rises fast. Another trick is to mix two contradicting emotions in the video. For example when something scary jumps out after a beautiful moment or something tragic happening after a funny

beginning. These have the highest chance of getting shared and going viral because they have the shock value, which is the "unexpected" factor.

Sometimes people get lucky and get one viral video but have no idea how to make money out of it, because just the views alone don't guarantee an income if the video isn't monetized, if the user isn't enrolled into the partner program or if they don't know how to make use of the audience.

However, it is important to know that most viral videos are made by companies pouring thousands of dollars for the first few million views and whereas for some those are money well spent, a lot of thought and effort goes into making a viral video and few are left just to chance. Another good thing to remember is that just because a product has been featured in a viral video, it doesn't necessarily mean that it will change the viewers' opinion on it or their purchase patterns. For example, just because the panda cheese commercial made everyone laugh doesn't mean they will change their favorite brand of cheese. Or the volvo commercial featuring Jean-Claude Van Damme doing a split on two moving trucks – the average viewer doesn't need a volvo truck, however it is interesting to watch and it gave Volvo a lot of good press and credibility.

"The real money in online video, and specifically YouTube, is to be made using Google's platform to deliver a message that your specific audience needs. Focus on that, not on going viral. Find people who actually are interested in what it is that you have to say and leave the viral to chance." – Paul Colligan, Page 36 Book Youtube Strategies 2016

So the conclusion is that trying to make a viral video just isn't a good strategy as a person who is trying to brand themselves online. What is important is to appeal to your target audience and make your content as interesting as possible for them, so they could stay and increase your watch time, which in its turn increases your videos' search-ability and find-ability, so more people interested in the same topics can find you more easily with time. If a viral video happens – this is great, but the focus should always be on the content

and audience. Building that from scratch takes longer, but it is the more certain way to succeed in branding your personality online.

2.7.3 Things to look out for with YouTube

In order to create quality content, contrary to popular belief, there are guidelines which are beneficial to follow. Apart from using quality equipment, good editing software and optimizing the production of each video, there are many more things to keep in mind when creating the ultimate youtube video.

Some of those are optimizing the channel and integrating it with other social media, search engine optimization (SEO) for each video, finding the ideal length for a video, the use of annotations, the quality of the video produced, the actions one takes immediately after posting the video, the proper placement of ads, the optimization of the best third party tools and services for YouTube and taking advantage of the live options. (Google Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, 2013)

2.8 Instagram

With over 500 million users (as of July 2016), Instagram is the most popular picture-sharing social media platform on the internet (according to official statistics conducted by the Instagram team www.instagram.com accessed on 19.12.2016). Millions of users and an average of 60 million photos uploaded each day, this platform is only becoming more and more famous. Naturally a lot of opportunists have figured out a way to use it as a tool to their advantage by supporting their personality branding efforts and making a fast buck is easy if one has a big following. Essentially the point is to get as many people to see your picture and get redirected to your site or a sponsor brand's website.

By having a big following, one is more likely to get sponsorship deals, which just like with YouTube could be paid out in monetary compensation, physical products/services or both. Getting paid for showing one's abs is not unheard of if in the caption there is a redirection to a whey protein manufacturer's website.

Most Instagrammers also have their own website through which they make money, so their goal with Instagram posts could be to just generate more traffic to their money-making platform of choice. Extremely popular with bloggers, makeup artists and video content creators, it is a great way to expand one's social media presence and influence.

There is a separate category of instagrammers – meme creators. Memes are funny pictures, widely popular, relatable and share-able. This kind of content gains audience relatively fast and the holders of the account followed can choose to put company advertisements on it in the form of a picture post, which will receive a lot of views. Some of those posts may be removed after a certain amount of time – that way the longer it stays on the account's profile, the more money it generates for its owner.

2.8.1 The importance of hashtags, keywords and tags

Regardless of the social media one is one, by creating content one wants it to be found by other people and hashtags, keywords and tags do just that. They are a way to organize all the hectic information that keeps flowing with each passing day and a good way to get discovered. This is why knowledge of how to use them is essential in order to maximize and optimize one's presence on social media. Instagram is especially reliant on hashtags and tags. Hashtags are a one word description of what your content is about and can have a short relevance span as they can be used to mark an event or something else which is currently happening. For example #slush16 would be a hashtag for the event Slush during the year of 2016. The relevance goes down quickly because less people are interested in the event after it has already passed, however it is easier to find posts related to the event further in the future by just searching that hashtag.

Tags can be used to mention a certain company or product or user in a way that gives the viewers the opportunity to visit said company/product/user with just one click. It also notifies the tagged account, so that way they can see who has engaged in communicating

with them and that way receive more possible exposure to that Instagram profile's audience.

Kinga Odzimiek (2016) argues that tracking hashtags is important to one's image and participation in the buzz, following the the correct influencers and attempting to get on their radar by having discussions with them is extremely beneficial and important. Some social medias such as Twitter can have their Search Engine utilized to discover individuals with the same issues so one could provide insight

Keywords combines with the right hashtags and tags will drive a constant flow of visitors over a long period of time, because they drive an audience which is interested in what you as a personality brand have to say or offer. This way the visitors are more likely to stay on your page/channel longer, follow/subscribe to your content and come back for more. Using the right words serves for the best search engine optimization for your content.

2.9 Facebook

This is the biggest social media there is, with 1,79 billion monthly users (according to official data) and with reports of over 42% of marketers saying that it is an integral part of their business, surely it comes as no surprise that Facebook is a huge money generator and a great way to spread knowledge and awareness about important topics and news. Not only that, it is a personal way to share your content with the rest of the world, whether it is funny pictures and videos or food recipes and travel pictures. Almost every business has a facebook page and almost every person with access to internet has a user profile, with which they can interact with their friends, idols, favorite coffee shops, entertainers and colleagues.

Whereas Facebook is free for users, it does make money out of displaying advertisements on people's timelines, which have been specifically targeted towards them based on their search history and other available information such as gender, sexual orientation, political affiliations, style preferences, religion and many others. Thus, it is more likely that if you create ads, they are going to be shown to people with similar interests and background for more efficient marketing.

Making money on this social media requires like with most others, a lot of persistence, scheduling, SEO optimization (efficient use of tags, keywords and hashtags), a following and deals and sponsorships from companies similar to your personality brand image. Whereas, yes, it is possible to make money out of the ads displayed on your facebook page, the profit is insignificant enough to be able to add up to a sustainable career. Therefore the page needs to be optimized for a greater profit by driving traffic to sites which generate more income (own website/blog or YouTube page) and giving spotlight to brands and sponsors similar to your own content's theme – a.k.a something the audience would be interested to hear about and potentially buy or recommend to a friend/share on their timeline.

2.10 Blogging platforms

Blogging has been huge for the past ten to fifteen years and it still is a good way to make money and influence the young generation of trend followers.

"[..] it would be irresponsible of me to say that it is possible to make money blogging – and for some (but not all), it is possible to make very good money doing it.
There is a growing number of bloggers earning a full-time living from blogging [..], and even more who supplement their income on a part-time basis while spending other time doing other work, raising a family or studying." – Rowse & Garrett (2012)

Most of the content creators for those platforms are related to the beauty and fashion industries as the traffic to those blogs is generated by primarily young girls. Naturally they get sponsored by companies trying to advertise their products and appeal to new target groups by partnering up with their favorite blogger. (Jokinen, 2016)

How quickly one starts making money after creating a blog depends a lot on the quality of the content created, the amount of work put into developing traffic and the niche targeted. Of course, the more popular and relevant one's topic of blogging is, the higher the chances are for a bigger audience. Investing a lot into good camera equipment and training in self-branding, social media marketing and content creating/editing/copywriting) are essential for the success of a blogger.

2.10.1 How to blog?

To start with, it's vital for the content creator to weigh out their hosting site options. There are many of them, each of which offer different sets of features. Some of them are quite famous (e.x. Wordpress, Tumblr, Blogger) and others not so much (e.x. Wix, Squarespace, Ghost, etc.). Depending on the content and preferences of the individual, some sites are better than others. However, buying a domain with the personality's name is a very good idea. This way the readers can connect the brand with the name (e.x stefanikirilova.com), it's also a more personal way of establishing an online presence. According to Neil Patel (2014) however, when it comes to blogging there is a considerably large number of other important details, for example:

- The theme/looks of the blog. It should be something which represents the creator but still not overpower the content published by them. A minimalistic polished look with optimized widgets and an easy to follow order, which should be of course available in a mobile version as well. A good tool to use to find out what works for the readers is the heat map (more details on page 18).
- The content itself should be organized in an easily discoverable order and each post should have a clear logical structure and point. The advantage to that is that

one can use keywords and hashtags, the importance of which we already discussed.

- No post is easily readable without featured images. The importance of the images is as big as the one of the words following them. Each post should include some related to the topic image. For example cooking bloggers will include pictures of the how-to process of baking a cake and fashion bloggers will include a set of images featuring them wearing their favorite pieces of the month.

- Internal linking will also drive more traffic to older posts the creator might have done. This means featuring a link to a related post while making a new one. (for example: Monthly favorites – see also last month's favorites).

- A call to action and engagement with the readers is essential. Asking them questions, which they can answer in the comment section and activating them to do something as a community – suggest an interesting topic to discuss or enter a contest or just recommend a good read.

- Lastly, of course, attention to good grammar, political correctness and an overall well-behaved tone of publishing. Unless controversy is what the blogger is going after, keeping the language clean and universal is recommended.

2.11 Other tools

To be present on most social medias however, is an integral part of branding oneself. Having a snapchat profile, an instagram account, periscope, Instagram, a facebook page, youtube videos coming out every week takes hours of daily work, but by knowing how to use them, one can make money out of each of them separately while still having the same audience.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research and its findings would give individuals the means to gain confidence, build credibility, showcase their specialty, leave their mark, connect to a target audience, distinguish themselves from the competition, focus their energy and find the means to get the support they need. The thesis is supposed to help people define their brand and determine the ways they can do that.

It is a qualitative study where the researcher has looked into social media content on three content creators, one blogger and two youtubers.

When analyzing online material and online personalities content analytical and virtual ethnography tools (Bryan and Bell, 2011) are applied. In this case this means that the researches tries to analyze, interpret and understand social media usage and content created by the chosen online personalities. A content analysis is done and the researcher has used NapoleonCat and Social Blade (explained in section 3.2).

" communities are contexts in which consumers often partake in discussions, whose goals include attempts to inform and influence fellow consumers about products or brands [...] Therefore they are well placed to provide interesting market-related information about trends[...]" – Kozinets (2002:61), Business Research Methods, Bryman and Bell p.654
Companies can get a firsthand free feedback about the up and coming crazes and a relatively accurate market research results about their new products.

3.1 Approach

This thesis has looked at the cases of finnish blogger Marianna Mäkelä, youtubers Maiju Voutilainen (mansikkka) and Miisa Rotola-Pukkila (mmiisas). They have been present in the online community within a span of 4-5 years, which makes them comparable to each other. All three of them have the same theme of lifestyle, fashion and daily routines and they have enough influence to be included in this research and are currently trending

amongst the Finnish consumers. They run Instagram accounts, Facebook pages, blogs and YouTube channels and so their daily lives are followed by thousands of people. To answer the research question, a closer look at each of the personalities' channels is required in order to notice the patterns and the interesting stories emerging from them, as well as any deviations and differences between the collected data. This analysis is used to show what viewers find captivating in a certain content and the reason why they keep coming back to the same individual for more entertainment.

By the end of the research process, a prescriptive recommendation to branding one's personality on social media through videos, pictures and captions is to be expected.

The types of data collected are posting times and dates, fan base engagement rates, interactions, collaboration rates and hashtags. The channels taken under consideration are Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

The variable period is from July 2017 to September 2017, during which time all of the data for analysis will be collected from the online personalities' social media websites.

3.2 Data collection

The main approach is based on purposive sampling.

"Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling. The researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being posed." – Key concept 17.10, Bryman and Bell, 2011.

The data is analyzed by using qualitative analysis software NapoleonCat (https://napoleoncat.com/).

NapoleonCat software provides

- In-depth analytics on any page or profile on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Google+, allows tracking of effectiveness of your or your competitors' marketing efforts.
- Inbox feature which helps curate the current and future clients quickly responding to their questions and comments no matter if they come in a private message on Facebook, a comment on Instagram or tweet.
- Publishes on Facebook, Google+ and Twitter - everywhere and on multiple profiles at once. Help with planning content with calendar and drafts and customized post flows.
- Can assist by creating and sending PDF reports via e-mail to superiors or client periodically.
- Easily finds Instagram users that post with specific hashtags and engages with them instantly. Generates new sales leads, grows community or manages a brand-tag based activation.
- Gives the option to automate the most frequent and critical tasks.

The platform allows the researcher to track the effectiveness of the online personalities' marketing efforts. Specific posts based on similarity (most likes, shared and engaging) will be tracked and compared with one another to see which ones are the most liked and what are the reoccurring themes for them. This will help with the objective analysis and comparison of each of the researched individuals.

Social media analytics website SocialBlade (https://socialblade.com/) is also used for comparison of Maiju Voutilainen's and Miisa Rotola-Pukkila's youtube channels, estimated earnings and future success projections in order to get a more clear and structured report of each of their branding strategies.

About Social Blade

The platform gives all users access to their public database which, using advanced technology, is able to provide users with global analytics for any content creator, live streamer, or brand. Whether one is looking up popular YouTube creators, or Twitch streamers playing a specific game, Social Blade has it covered! They are always looking to expand their features to give their users the best experience possible.

3.3 Data analysis and interpretation

The data of all the aforementioned sources is assembled, transcribed and analyzed. Moreover, the main findings are outlined for discussion and forwarded if seen relevant to the research questions presented. Sources of error sre analyzed and necessary steps to minimize the errors are taken.

The reason why mainly online sources have been included is because of the easy and fast access of the most recently updated information. Most of the relevant to the study data is also only available via the internet (due to the very definition of **online** social media presence). And since said data is gathered using online observations, there is some minor numerical data that can be without a doubt interpreted in only one way, however due to the nature of the research topic, some of the interpretation could be done in more than one ways. It is however useful to know what the anticipated range of outcomes may be in answering the research questions.

The interpretation of data is done with the help of analytic induction, which is *"an approach to the analysis of data in which the researcher seeks universal explanations* [in this case, an answer to the research question] *of phenomena* [personal branding] *by*

pursuing the collection of data until no cases that are inconsistent with a hypothetical explanation (deviant or negative cases) of a phenomenon are found." – Byman and Bell, Business Research Methods (2011), page 575. In other words, a closer look has been put to the patterns in strategies between the three different personalities until a consistent model of self-branding has been found. This is done with the help of the theoretical part being compared to the empirical data.

4 ANALYSIS

In this part the researcher will give structured data information about the influencers, which will later be analyzed and drawn conclusions from. This is to answer the main research question: **Which components or factors are relevant for successful personal branding on social media?** The main things being looked for in all of the online personalities in this research for comparison are:

- How do the interaction statistics differ from one another and what are the similarities?
- How do the time of the day and the day of the week affect the content creators and their audiences?
- What is the most engaging post about and what makes it more engaging than any other?
- How do brand placement posts do in comparison with non-sponsored ones?

4.1 Instagram

4.1.1 Marianna Mäkelä

Using the trial version of a qualitative analysis software NapoleonCat for more accurate numbers, we can see the next few graphs show us curious insights about Marianna Mäkelä's (lifestyle blogger) Instagram profile.

Her current follower base (as of 18.09.17) is 217 257, she has received 77 846 likes last month but has gotten only 418 new comments. Her engagement rate has grown +24% since the previous month, but it still at a low average of 1.19.

These are her daily interactions with her follower base.
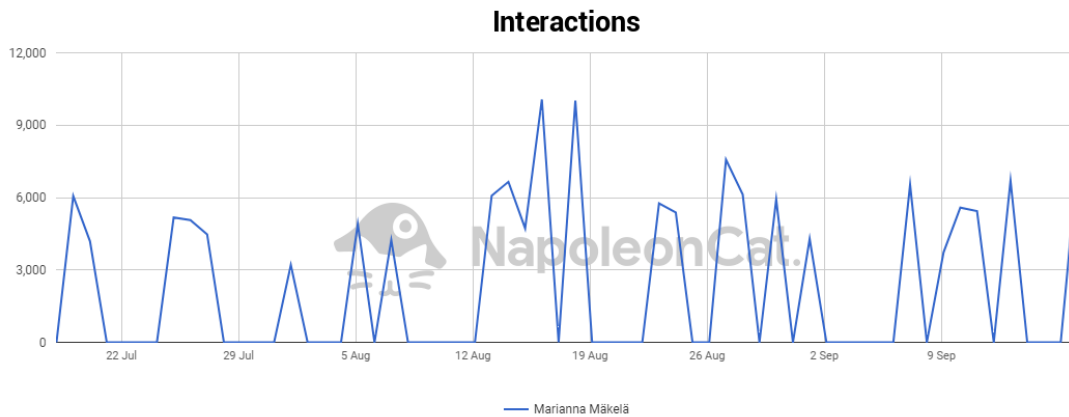
Figure 4: Marianna Mäkelä interactions Graph

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

Her grand total monthly interaction count is 88 285 with a staggering average of 2 847,9 interactions per day with her most active day being 18.07.2017 with 10 021 interactions.
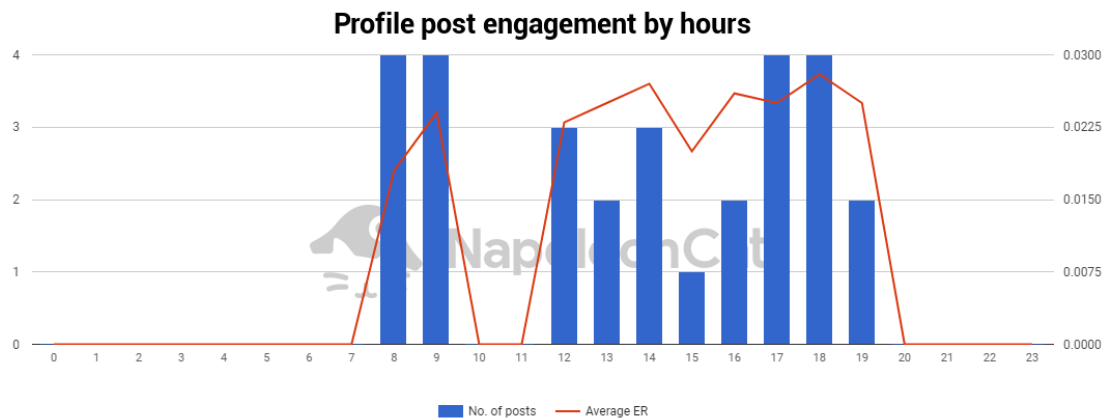

Figure 5: Marianna Mäkelä profile post engagement by hours.

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

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This graph shows the average engagement rate values published at different hours of the day and the number of posts published on that day. Here we can see some correlation. Marianna posts mostly between 14:00 – 14:59 and she gets the hit of her followers' likes almost precisely an hour later.

Figure 6: Marianna Mäkelä post engagement by days.
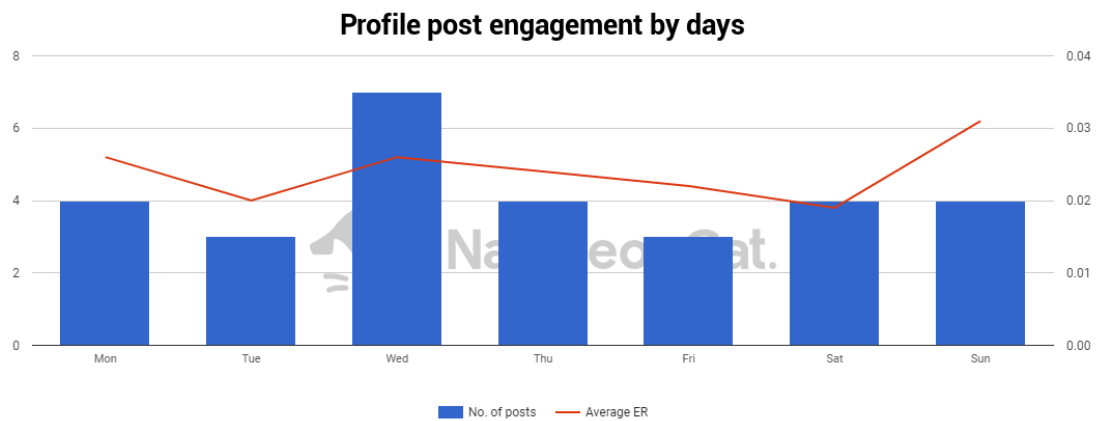
(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

Marianna posts mostly on Wednesdays, however the highest ER she receives is on Sundays. Note than neither her nor her fan base are as present on Tuesdays.

Her most engaging post is also the one which received the most likes. It is a throwback picture of her and her friend in the Maldives with the caption "Missing this."

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Figure 7: Marianna Mäkelä Instagram post screenshot

Accessed on 18.09.2017 13:55 from Instagram.com/mariannnan

Few of the reasons why this post could be doing so well are its quality (pure technicality of the photo), the good edit and the change of scenery. Clearly not a Finnish landscape, hints vacation and freedom. Despite being the most liked and engaging post, though it isn't by much as all of her posts have a similar amount of likes and engagement rates (amount of comments, likes and shares).

As for her collaborations, here is a chart with her most popular company brand or campaign hashtags for the time frame of 17.07.17-18.09.17
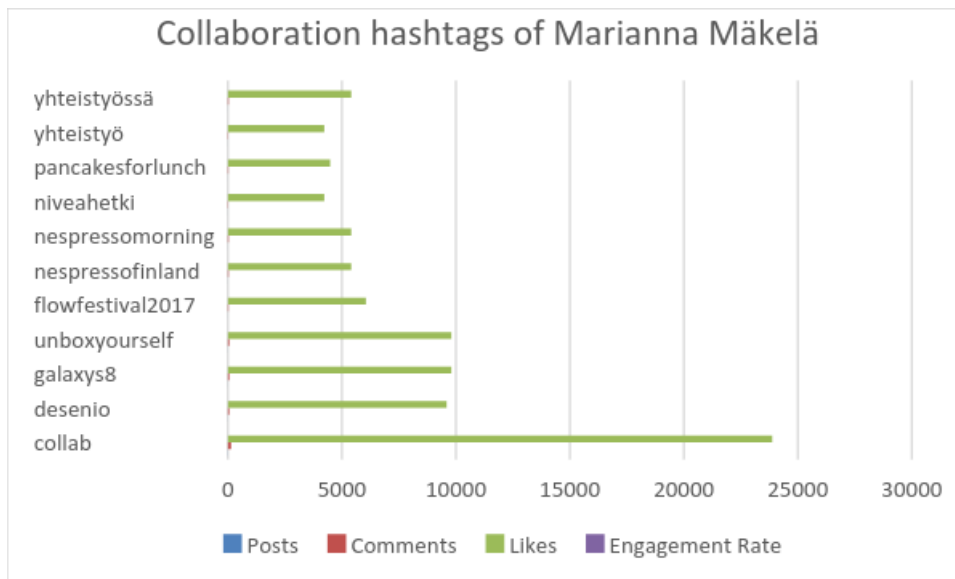
Figure 8: Marianna Mäkelä collaborations. Made on excel with data available on 18.09.2017.

As it can be seen, her collaborations are doing quite good with a huge number of likes. In fact it is so big that it is difficult to view and observe the amount of comments, posts and engagement rate she has received as well. However the numbers show that the hashtag "collab" has been used merely 5 times and all other hashtags less than that. This goes to show that most of her posts are either not sponsored or if they are, she tags them with their campaign specific hashtag. Neither of those posts has scored her highest like count, but they are all doing very well in her statistics.

Lifestyle posts seem to generate more comments than any other type of posts. Considering that this is Marianna Mäkelä's area of expertise and her main career theme, food, fashion and design photos are popular amongst her following. The most comments are stolen by her dog Minnie, but cozy design and hot chocolate pictures are definitely a second best.

4.1.2 Maiju Voutilainen (mansikkka)

Maiju Voutilainen, also known as masikkka is a lifestyle Finnish youtuber, who appeals only to the Finnish fan base as her primary language is Finnish. Here are her Instagram statistics. As of 18.09.2017 she has 195 687 followers and in the period between 17.07.17-

18.09.17 she has received 646 742 likes and 3136 comments. Her engagement rate with her followers is a great 10.71, much higher than Marianna's, but according to the NapoleonCat software, it is still dropping 17% from the previous few months, which have not been included in this research.
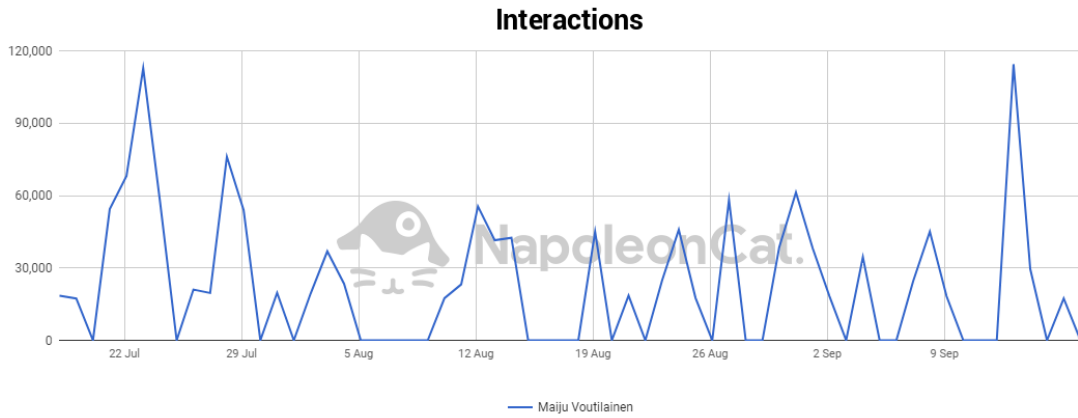

Figure 9: Maiju Voutilainen interactions graph.

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

Her total of daily interactions is 649 878 for the given time period and her average daily count is about 20 963.81 with her busiest day being 13.09.2017 with a total of 114 433 interactions.
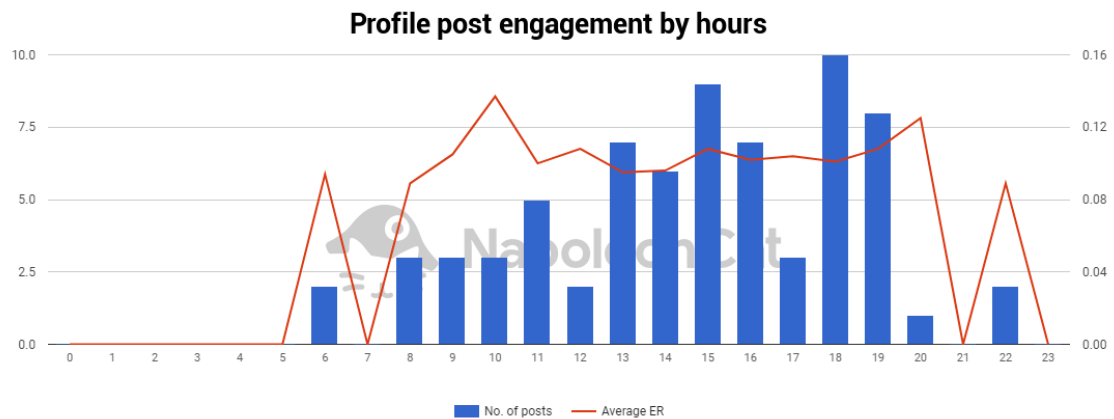

Figure 10: Maiju Voutilainen profile post engagement by hours.

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

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Maiju publishes most pf her posts between 18:00 and 18:59, however curiously enough, her highest engagement rate is between 12:00 and 12:59 during the day, which is surprising.
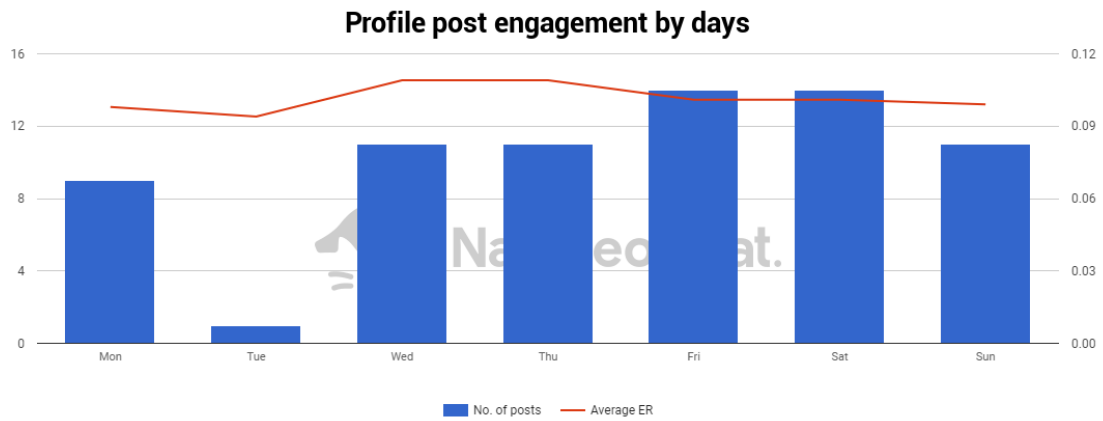

Figure 11: Maiju Voutilainen profile post engagement by days.

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

Another interesting to the research thing here is that Maiju's highest engagement rates come in on Thursday but most of her posts come in on Fridays and Saturdays. A similarity starts to pop up here with Marianna and it is that both her post activity and her followers' activity are slow on Tuesdays. An anti-Tuesday pattern starts to form.

Maiju's most engaging, liked and commented on post was this of her newly shaved head posted on 13.09.2017 (hence the spikes in the stats above.)

Figure 12: Maiju Voutilainen Instagram post screenshot.

Accessed on 18.09.2017 15:08 from Instagram.com/mansikkka

Why did this post gather so many reactions? Quite possibly because it has shock value. A shaved head without a warning, but still keeping her own style. It was also posted on a Wednesday, just before her big fan engagement hit on Thursday. Biggest success in 2 months for her.

Her hashtags also match her brand and the brands she works with. "Yhteistyö", which means "collaboration" in Finnish is her most used and liked hashtag with 33 551 likes as of 18.09.2017. She's used it a total of 19 times within the last 2 months, but unfortunately it never managed to generate as much engagement as any of Marianna's collaboration hashtagged posts. This could be due to the frequency of the used hashtag and putting too many sponsored content on her page rather than "free posts". With that being said, her sponsored photos still get a lot of likes and comments, possibly enough to sustain her career and power her further development.
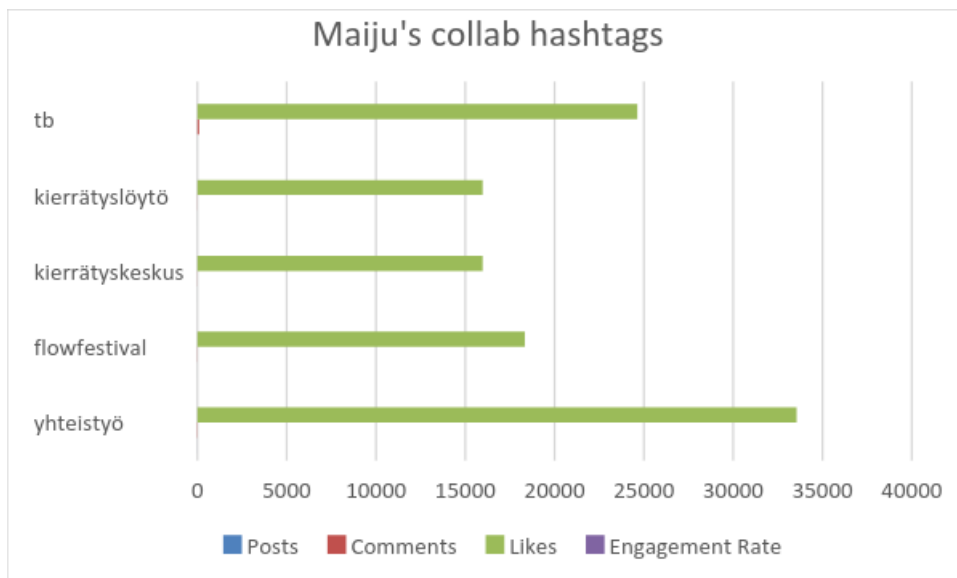
45

Figure 13: Maiju's collaboration hashtags.

Made on excel with data available on 18.09.2017.

Maiju's lifestyle photos are once more very popular, gaining a lot more (almost twice as much) likes than the seemingly bigger following of Marianna Mäkelä, but they both appeal to different style groups as Maiju is more hipster and alternative, whereas Marianna is a girly girl strongly affiliated with bigger fashion brands.

4.1.3 Miisa Rotola-Pukila

Miisa is a daily blogger and instagrammer, whose fan base is also primarily based in Finland and her language of conduction is Finnish. As of 18.09.2017, she has a total of 408 983 followers and has accumulated over 960 603 likes and 7655 comments during the period of 17.07.2017-18.09.2017. Her engagement rate is a stable 6.64.
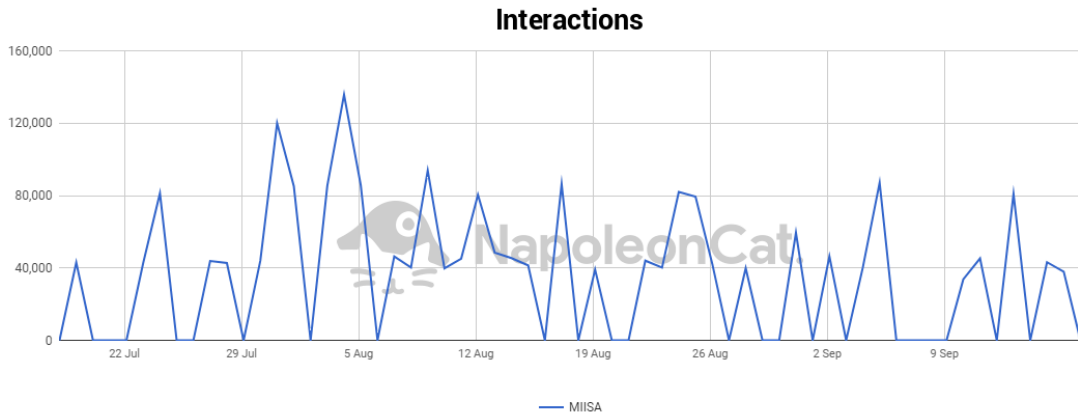
Figure 14: Miisa Rotola-Pukila interactions graph

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

Her total interactions are 968 268, which gives her an average or 31 234,45 per day. Curiously enough the most interactions she received was a staggering 87 119 on 05.09.2017, when similarly with Maiju, she posted an unusual to her profile picture. She's the most active out of the three online personalities with posts every single day.
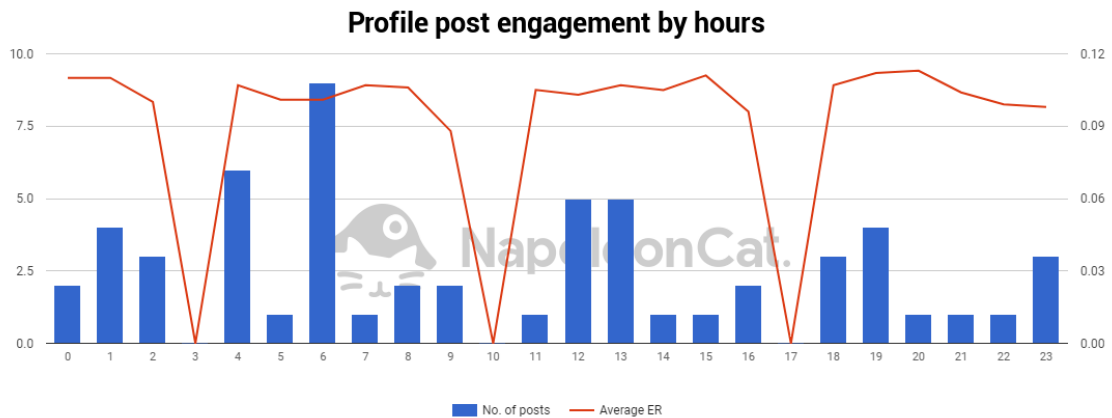

Figure 15: Miisa Rotola-Pukila profile post engagement by hours.

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

There is a big gap between her posting times and her viewing and engagement times. She is the most active in the morning between 08:00-08:59 but her fans are the most active over 12 hours later between 21:00-21:59, which is quite interesting for this research. They are at their lowest around noon, as for her, she likes her naps between 15:00-15:59 for the most part.
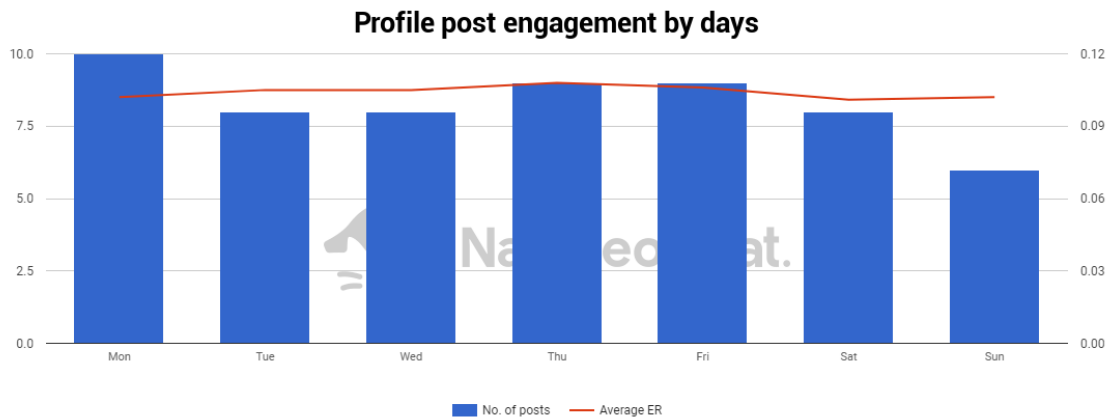

Figure 16: Miisa Rotola-Pukila profile post engagement by days.

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

Miisa posts the most on Mondays, however her engagement rate is the highest on Thursdays. She is well received on all days, however both her and her followers are less active on Sundays. The curious thing here is that there is no gap on Tuesdays like there is with Maiju and Marianna. As a daily vlogger and Instagram post publisher, Miisa remains active on most days.

Her most well received, commented on and liked post is this of her new dog Dexter, posted on 05.09.2017 causing a big spike in her usual statistics. Here he is.

We can notice an omit also with Marianna's posts. Despite her dog not being her most liked post, it is very high amongst the best received ones. Pictures of cute animals, shocking content and vacations are generally good show-stoppers. Note that every single one of the best received pictures has not been a sponsored post.

Sponsored content wise, in 2 months Miisa has posted only 5 different sponsored posts within the pool of so many other ones. Here are the hashtags she has used for them and we can see that they've received almost the same amount of likes, which is quite a lot. It seems that in here case less is more. The post are not treated any differently from any other online entry.
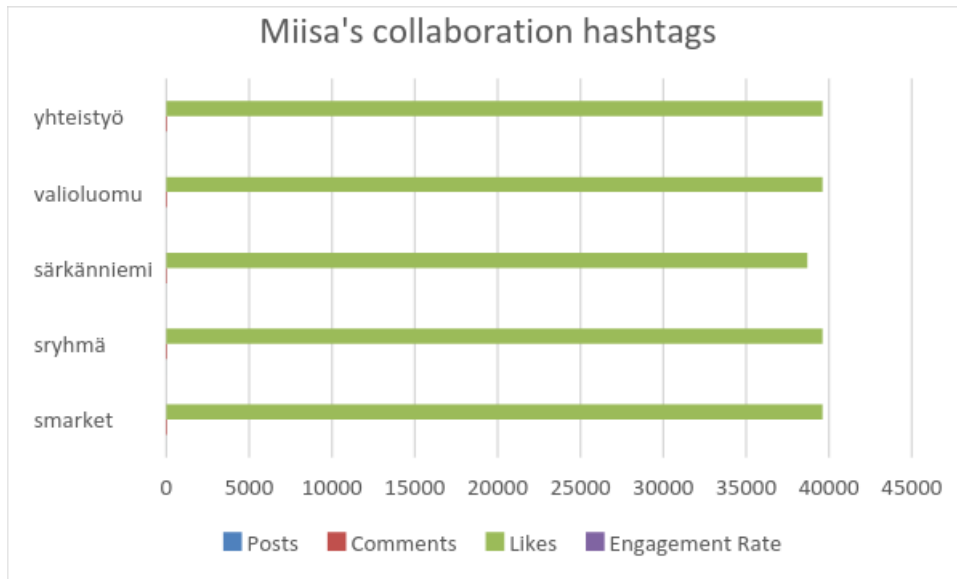
Made on excel with data available on 18.09.2017.

Looking at her other non-sponsored posts, they usually gather around 40 000 likes on average with significantly less comments. Her timeline is consistent and every post fits well with the rest, which gives it a nice visual continuity. Theme wise, she is sticking to her lifestyle and daily vlogging base and is earning popularity with it still. Her base keeps growing exponentially and steadily.

4.2 Facebook

4.2.1 Maiju Voutilainen

Maiju doesn't really have a huge following on Facebook (in comparison with their Instagram and YouTube profiles), so her statistics for this social media are not as relevant to their online success. The webpage is not frequently updated and if its, it is mainly links to her latest videos. This is why she has not been included in this chapter of the research.

4.2.2   Miisa Rotola-Pukila

Same could be said about Miisa, who uses her page (27 000 followers on 10.10) to post links to her videos months apart. She has been considered to therefore not make any branding efforts on that social media platform and has consequently also been excluded from the Facebook research.
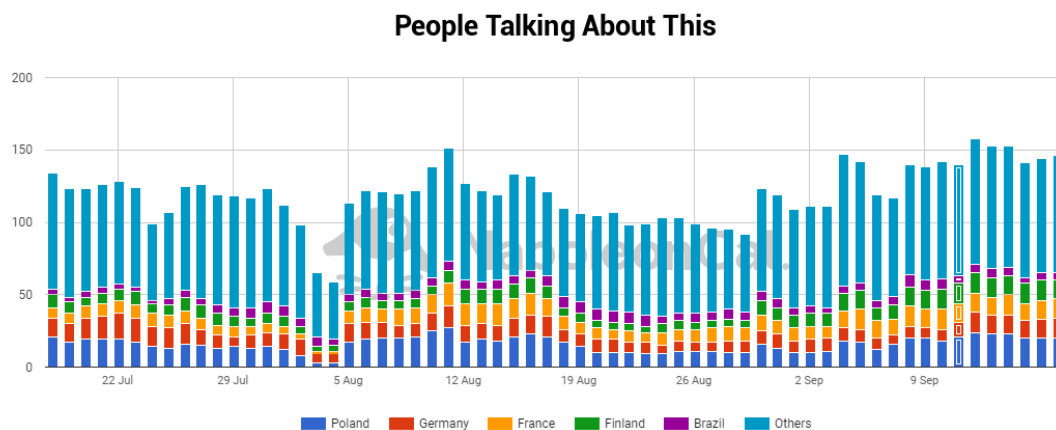
4.2.3   Marianna Mäkelä

Marianna however has a following of almost 100 000 fans, who read and react to her posts.

The difference between Marianna and the two other influencers Maiju and Miisa is that she is a blogger and does fashion blog posts rather than videos, so it is more suitable for her to have a facebook page, where she can tag all the brands she is working with and post links to her newest posts. It is a revenue factor for her. Maiju and Miisa make their living by doing videos – a field completely different than Marianna's, although admittedly still online based.

Having a facebook page makes Marianna easier to find for people outside of Finland. She is the most international Finnish online personality included in this research with her main language being English.
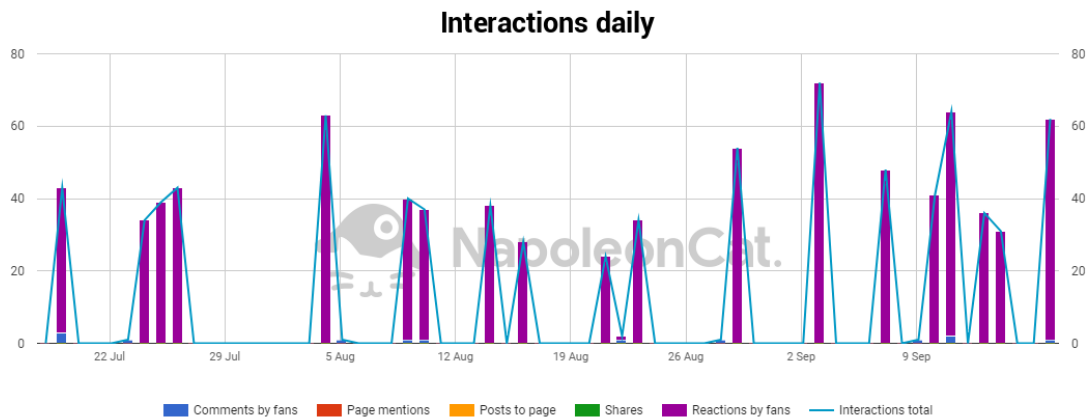
Figure 19: Marianna Mäkelä Facebook statistics.

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

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Finnish followers, although very loyal and consistent are only a small part of her growing international following of people from all over the world.

(Graph made by data input in NapoleonCat software on 18.09.2017)

She gets mostly reactions from her fans. Most popular one is "Like" immediately followed by "Love", which suggests that her readers like her content. She doesn't get many shares, which usually have the biggest impact on facebook pages traffic rise, but the behavior is not unusual as shares are on average very rare on any page.

Comments by fans	6	1.3%
Likes by fans	464	98.7%
Shares	0	0%
Posts by fans	0	0%
Profile mentions	0	0%
Total	470	100%

Screenshot taken on 18.09.2017 17:50 from NapoleonCat personal report on webpage.

We can see here that her statistics are not nearly as impressive as her Instagram influence, so she isn't likely to make a lot of revenue via facebook. There is a noticeable spike in interactions when she posts a link to a new post, which is to be expected.

Her most influential post on this platform for the period of 17.07.2017-18.09.2017 is actually her morning routine in collaboration with the brand Nesspresso. We can notice here that despite the quality of the picture and the promise of more information upon clicking on the link, it still doesn't get as many reactions as a regular photo post on Instagram. However, a peculiar fact about Facebook, which had not been seen in Instagram is the content of the most liked and appreciated post – a collaboration or in other words – a paid post. This leads to believe that the best chance of people liking a product the online personality is affiliated with is if it would be posted on Facebook along with all other channels. For Marianna getting her post seen and appreciated is more important than making money off of it immediately, as it builds her blog's brand and reestablishes her as a quality content creator.

Figure 22: Marianna Mäkelä facebook post screenshot.

Another thing to pay attention with Facebook (and all other social media for that matter) is the lifetime of a certain post. This means the time during which the followers are most likely to see the post and react to it shortly after its posting online. Because of the way Facebook's news algorithm works, it is the platform with the longest post lifetime, so it is viewed more times than anywhere else on the internet. And with it's brand friendliness, followers could possibly be less likely to be suspicious of a collaboration with brands and paid posts.

4.3 Youtube

In this chapter we will look at the statistical data base of MiisaRotola-Pukila and Maiju Voutilainen, who have a huge following on the social media. Marianna Mäkelä has not got an official youtube account and does not post daily videos and is therefore excluded from this chapter.

Things to be looked for in here are number of subscribers, posting pattern, future success projections, popular videos and repeating themes in them.

4.3.1 Maiju Voutilainen

Maiju is a 21 year old video blogger, who is very popular amongst the younger generation of internet users.

She likes to change her hair a lot and it's a reoccurring theme in her videos every few months. It keeps her viewers guessing what her next hairstyle might be and it creates a lot of buzz and engagement rates grow significantly every time she posts a video about it.
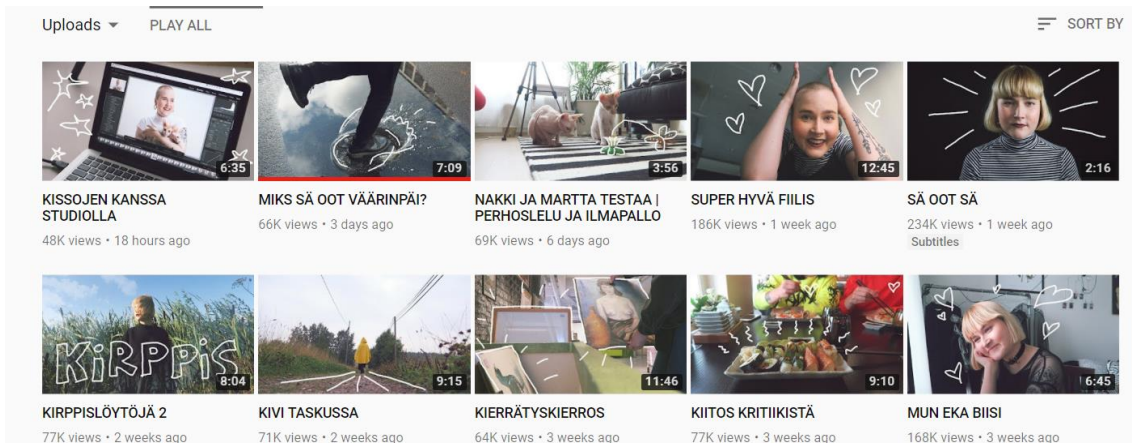
Figure 23: Maiju Voutilainen youtube channel screenshot taken on 22.09.2017 11:54.

Her most watched video of all time (486K views) is of her new cat, which looks quite extravagant and matches the style of her videos. During this research it has become somewhat clear that pets always steal the shine and it comes as no surprise that her cat video is the most watched. It can also be noticed that said cat is present in many of her uploads as she has probably noticed that it gets more reactions from her viewers. The rest of her content is lifestyle related, mostly about flea market fashion findings, food recipes and her thoughts on life .

4.3.2 Miisa Rotola-Pukila

Miisa has a total of 340,367 subscribers (as of 22.09.2017) and over 89,666,381 views with just 335 available videos to watch. Maiju has 158, 683 subscribers and 42, 558, 661 views, but with 395 uploads.

She is more travel oriented and takes opportunities to make videos with highly influential Finnish people (ex. The famous artist Antti Tuisku among many others), which has helped her double her fan base over time. Despite having more or less the same theme as Maiju, the same demographic appeal and content, Miisa is more popular also because she works with brands more.

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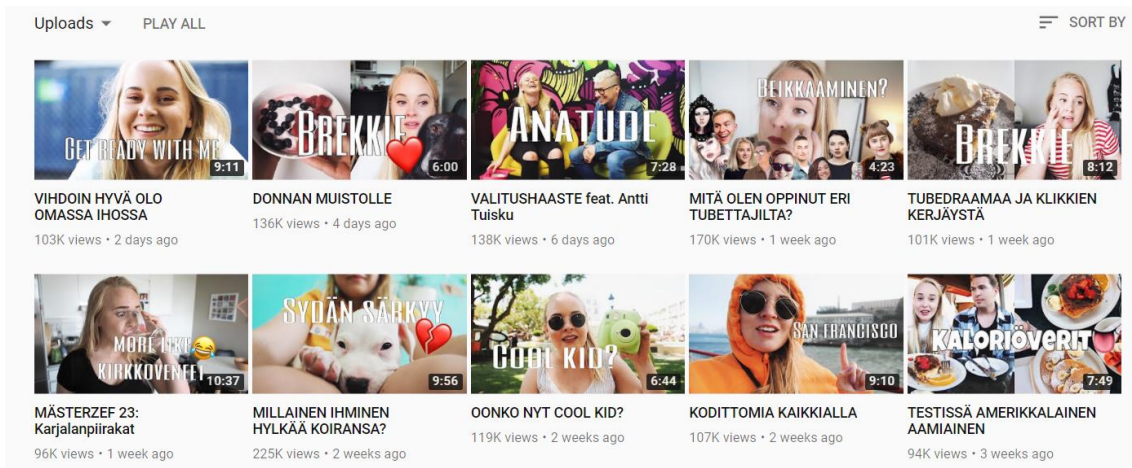
Figure 24: Screenshot taken from Miisa's channel on 22.09.2017 12:21.

Quite many of her videos are sponsored by Finnish brands such as Tupla, different Festivals and travel agencies, which allow her to travel and post more diverse content on her channel. This, of course attracts people and is part of her success story. However it is also important to note that not every video is sponsored, nor should it be. They are dispersed evenly throughout her video line and are not too obvious, otherwise the viewers would notice and get a bad vibe about the essence of her channel. Nobody likes a sell-out and too many commercials.

4.4 Comparison between Maiju and Miisa

Figure 25: comparison between Maiju and Miisa

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  It can be confirmed that both channels are doing well, but Miisa's one is doing twice as good despite having less uploads. They are growing more or less at the same rate.
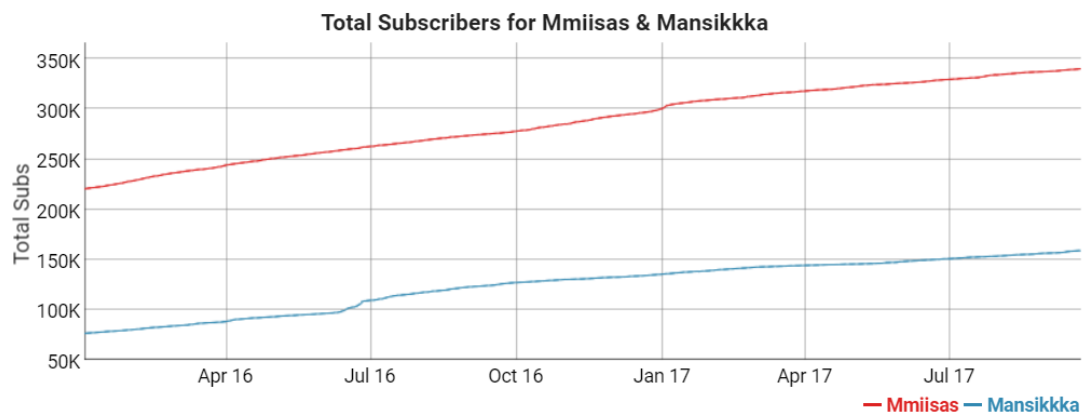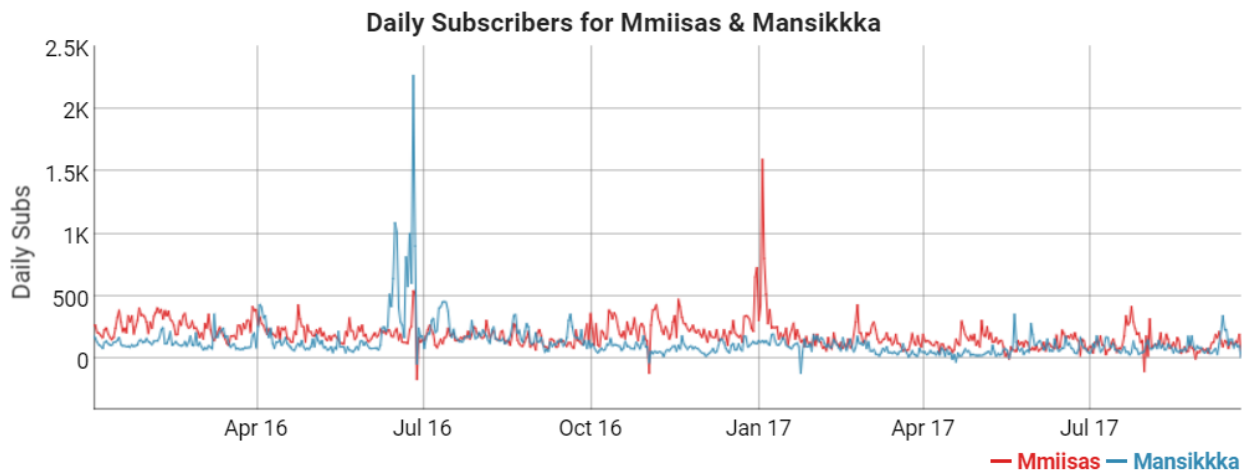
Figure 26: daily subscribers for Mmiisas & Mansikkka

Based on these statistics found on the webpage of Social Blade (2017) we can see an interesting growth for both ladies, they both gain about 110 subscribers per day with Maiju slightly higher (115) and Miisa slightly lower (106), but this tells us that the channels' exponential growth is similar.

Having ethical considerations in mind, here are the estimated earnings of Maiju and Miisa, which have been legally acquired from Social Blade's webpages for respectively Maiju (Available at: <u>https://socialblade.com/youtube/user/thelimemag</u> accessed on 25.09.2017) and Miisa (Available at: <u>https://socialblade.com/youtube/user/mmiisas</u> <u>accessed on 25.09.2017</u>). Those estimates may or may not be correct and have been used purely for the sole purpose of giving readers an idea of the possible earnings of an online video creator of the caliber of the researched individuals. It does not guarantee any specific amounts or shows how much each of them earns for certain.

	Maiju	Miisa
Daily	€13.36 - €219.78	€20 - €316.88
Monthly	€412.042 - €6 594.75	€594.03 - €9 504.50
Yearly	€4 920.21 - €79 150.66	€7 091.52 - €114 042.11

Figure 27: Maiju and Miisa's estimated earning (Made with information available on 25.09.2017)

According to Google Support (2017), the Estimated Earnings are based on the generally accepted CPM (click per thousand, M = roman numerial for 1000) range of €0.20 - €3.33 (fluctuating daily based on google algorithms). This range exists due to the many factors that influence the actual CPM one potentially receives.

"CPM bidding means that you pay based on the number of impressions (times your ads are shown) that you receive on the Google Display Network.

You'll use viewable CPM bidding to make sure you only pay when your ads are able to be seen. Existing CPM bids will be converted to vCPM automatically, but it's best to update your bids since viewable impressions are potentially more valuable." – Google Support, 2017

As we can see the margins are too big for us to get a more detailed look at their earnings, however it does present us with a general idea of some sort of income. This doesn't include deals with sponsors and brands as they are, of course, undisclosed, nor does it include earnings from other social media platforms.

5 INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION.

In this chapter the observations and findings will be discussed and interpreted in relation to the theory part of this research and the analytical facts shown in chapter 4. The researcher will create a model based on the important points of the findings

From the empirical qualitative analysis it can be seen that all three influencers are able to make money out of their branding efforts. To answer the main research question of this research - *Which components or factors are relevant for successful personal branding on social media? –* this section will discuss the research question and the possible answer to it as a result of this thesis project.

5.1 Identifying the brand

David A. Aaker's theory (2013) that a brand can be seen as a product, a person, an organization and a symbol is applicable to the researched subjects.

Following this theory the brand needs to be defined with the following questions: *Who it is? Who are interested? What is the perceived quality? What's the value of performance? What's the target audience? Does one have a symbolic brand name, image, etc? If yes, what is it, if not – why not?*

Marianna Mäkelä's "product" are her posts and they convey messages of coziness, luxury, brunches, clothes, home decor, sports and all things girly. A great way to sneak in plenty of brand positioning and different products. As a person she is lively, happy, motivated, driven, put together and friendly. This is her brand. She represents Finnish bloggers as an organization, she used to blog for IndieDays blogging platform but decided to separate herself and represent her own organization, namely mariannan.com. As for her symbolism, she symbolizes comfort, well-being, relaxation and girly giggles. This is why her viewers keep coming back for more after each post.

Maiju Voutilainen on the other hand as a product is purely second-hand store findings, hipster-like hairstyles and extravagant pet choices. She's different and unique but still leaves a window open for brand collaboration. Important to note is that all three of the online personalities collaborate only with brands fitting to their own personal content and they stray away from anything that might give a different message. As a person Maiju is more on the shy side, but definitely outgoing and ready to experiment with food, clothing and hair. She represents Finnish youtubers as an organization and symbolizes youth and the modern age.

The youtuber Miisa as a product is travel insights, collaboration with other people and lifestyle advice. Due to the nature of her channel she can afford to do a lot more product placement, but still refrains from doing it too often due to her genuine approach towards her audience. As a person she is honest, fun, a bit nerdy and a great laugh. She also represents the Finnish youtubers due to her base platform being Youtube and her language of choice Finnish. She symbolizes teenagehood, lust for traveling and a careless "life is great" attitude. An escape from every-day life for most of her viewers.

All three influencers have defined their brands – who they are, who is interested in them, what is their perceived quality, what's the value of their performance and what is their target audience. On top of that they have included a symbolic representation of themselves in the form of a name (mariannan, miisas, mansikkka), which gets them easily recognized and helps them stand out from everyone else.

5.2 Content optimization

Seeing, as their brands have been defined, the three influencers have thought about how to make themselves stand out from the crowd. Everyone's posts and videos are mobile device optimized since as discussed in the theoretical part of the research, quite a lot of the views come from smartphones and tablets.

Furthermore, as explained by Daniel Rowels (2014) *"Our ability to utilize social media effectively will come down to having interesting and useful content to share, and being willing and able to engage in an open and authentic way."* To find out what the audience needs, social media listening needs to be exercised to find the best times and ways to post in order to strengthen the personality-viewer relationship as much as possible.

Following these rules, social media listening is very much present with all three girls. They listen to what their audience would like to see and they deliver. Things such as Halloween costume ideas or Midsummer celebrations come as those holidays are right around the corner. What makes the relationship between the content creator and the viewers so great is that there is quick communication between the two sides, which makes them easily approachable and their content can be up to date sooner rather than later.

Another thing discussed in the theory part is the content quality and the power of an image and visuals. Complying with Erich Noack's (2015) statement about high-quality images receiving 94% more attention, Marianna, Maiju and Miisa put great effort into making their content look great. They have invested in good camera equipment and editing software and have spent many hours learning how to use them, so they can deliver good quality content for their viewers. So called "eye candy" is one of the most important things for them as influencers. If they want to be the part, they have to look the part.

In addition to that, their images and videos besides being of high quality also represent their personalities. As pointed out by Campbell and Langton (2011) it is important to let one's character shine through their content in order for it to be seen as reliable, authentic and genuine.

Technically wise, the personalities have optimized their content by using good equipment and gathering experience in editing, etc., but also figuring out the best topics to post about, best times, best length. For others this could be done easier perhaps with the help of a software. An understanding of search engine optimization, keywords and hashtags is also

essential in helping the brand get discovered and grow. Collaboration with other similar brands is also advisable in order to expand the reach and increase revenue.

Based on Wilson's (2008) understanding of what branding a personality really means *("Successful brands convey a consistent message and create an emotional bond with consumers.")* and on the qualitative data available at hand, a few patterns can be seen as reoccurring between the researched contents and they are as follows:

- Tuesdays are not a popular day for uploads or engagement rates. Seeing when one's following is the least active is essential to knowing when to post uploads in order of optimizing the content to the fullest. The only person who uploaded a lot on Tuesdays was Miisa, but her engagement rates stay more or less the same throughout the entire week.
- Timing is important. Posting just before the followers are the most active is the best way to get the most out of one's posts and get the most amount of engagement. Marianna does this perfectly with Maiju a good second best and Miisa in third place with a few tricks she could use to optimize her content sharing.
- Emotions beat the everyday routine. Posting about shocking, cute or heartbreaking topics will get more views than one's daily go-abouts. Dogs, cats, pets or anything fluffy in general brings extra points to the creator and posting about self-confidence or shaving one's head also definitely rises some brows. It's important to switch up the content every now and then with things that are surprising, honest and heartfelt.
- Sticking to the theme of the channel is key to keeping the same demographics as viewers, but uniqueness is what makes people come back for more. All three of the researched influencers have the same theme, but all of them are individual and have their own spin on the same topics. Marianna is more high-brow, but still down to earth and trendy, while Maiju is more hipster and Miisa is more teenage-like. You can see their personality shine through their posts.
- Collaborations bring more views. The more influential people one brings to their channel, the more views and subscribers they get. Making videos with other

influencers or talking about them brings their fan base over to one's social media channels and increases the engagement rates significantly.

● Less is more when it comes to sponsored content. The less sponsored content one puts out, the more valuable it is and the more money it brings. The creator can decide by themselves how much collaborations with brands they want to do, but they need to remember that the viewers are not gullible and strongly dislike too much sponsored content the same way a TV show watcher dislikes too a long commercial (as discussed in the theoretical framework). Facebook appears to be more forgiving of sponsored content due to their optimized news feed algorithm.

● Keeping it short and sweet is good. Too long videos or posts tend to be dragged out, a lot of gibberish is included and people lose interest fast. Sticking to the point and making each post/video as short as possible is good not only because it saves people more time to check out other posts, but also because it makes the content less chaotic.

● It's almost impossible to know how much an influencer is going to make due to big monetary variations with youtube and individual brands/sponsors contracts, but it's definitely possible to sustain a career in Finland. This is the new yet unwalked wild entrepreneurship paths waiting for pioneers to explore it.

Strategy wise, according to Jerry Wilson (2008) in the theoretical part of this research it was explained that successful brands convey a consistent message and create an emotional bond with the consumers. This is exactly the case with all three personalities. They are following the same steps to brand themselves as creators and choose to connect with their viewers by posting different heartfelt videos, giving prizes away and organizing physical meetups. Becoming "friends" with the viewers is a sure way to keep their loyalty and hold them interested in the content.

5.3 Being viral

Despite posting shocking content every now and then and including the "unexpected" factor into their routine, Maiju and Miisa can't know what will go viral for them. As Paul Colligan (2016) has said, *"the real money in online video is to deliver a message that your specific audience needs"* and this is exactly what Marianna has been sticking to the most. This has been done by staying consistent, engaging with her fans more than the other two influencers and having a base understanding of her demographics (having her blog in English or posting when her fans are the most active). The two young youtubers have more infrequent and diverse posts in comparison with Marianna Mäkelä's consistent flow, but regardless of their attempts of becoming "viral" (by shaving heads or making videos with celebrities), the constant stream of subscribers comes from their daily videos.

With that being said, it is true that the more different from their regular content a video is, the more reactions and possibly engagement rates it gets. However knowing which video is going to work and which isn't can prove to be a difficult task, especially since the definitions of "different", "shocking" and "unexpected" are subjective to each person's individual perception. Therefore the three researched influencers appear to go with the trial and error principle.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions and implications based on Chapter 5 are that given the desire of a person, they can brand themselves online with sources available for little to no cost at the tip of their fingertips. It's a long process that takes time and determination, but it is essentially based on persistence and continuous work towards one's goals. As it has been set as an example by the three researched influencers, anyone can learn how to become a brand, but in order to do that they have to have a definition of who they are as a person. By choosing the optimal for them strategy, software sources, good equipment and some

free time, online personal branding could become a career for any person willing to put the effort in.

6.1 Ethical considerations

It is important to mention some of the ethical considerations of this research.

Invasion of the influencers' privacy by analyzing their content is a real possibility and therefore the researcher has only used data available online for the public, refraining from using unethical methods in order to get more valuable insight.

Plagiarism has also been paid close attention to with the researcher referencing every part of the text, which has not been written by her own initiative.

No brand positioning has been placed in any of the pages of this research.

The media, including newspapers, magazines, television, radio and information Internet-agencies are showing increasing interest in scientific research, however the researcher has tried her best to feature only objective articles from credible sources.

Subjectivity of the research is always an issue and needs to be mentioned despite the researcher's efforts to stay as objective as possible. The validity, trustworthiness and reliability of the research is another ethical consideration. The researcher has tried to the best of her abilities to answer the research question with as little margin of error as possible gathering information from credible sources and following the same principals of analysis for each of the researched influencers.

6.2 Future research

What would be interesting for people interested in self-branding to further investigate is the financial aspect of becoming an entrepreneur and diving into an online personal branding career. Would it be possible to get a starting help from a bank in the form of a loan with a well structured business plan (after having read this research) and if yes, is it possible to estimate the time it takes before said loan is paid out and the influencer starts

making profits? This by itself could be the topic of another research document with a step-by-step financial guidance and advice from start to finish.

More quantitative research could be conducted for a broader understanding of the topic as this research is mostly qualitative and focused. Further investigation could be placed on the importance of language when it comes to self-branding and how do different languages set boundaries for influencers from all over the world.

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