TourayTravels - An inbound travel agency venture in The Gambia

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This is a project-oriented thesis about a startup business specializing in the field of inbound tourism in the small West-African country; The Gambia. The products are sold simply face-to-face to the customers, using various methods of approach. The goal is to create a revenue flow in the popular tourism destination and establish Touray Travels as an inbound travel agency for years to come.

The vision of our venture is to assist in developing the tourism sector of the country by offering more sustainable tourism products for the international visitors. In the theory part of this thesis we will handle the current tourism issues and what sustainability means in the tourism sector. In the project part we will have a closer look on the development process of a startup business and focus on sales.

During the process of this thesis there will also be a qualitative research conducted from the data collected from our customers, industry workers and senior tourism sector officials. The purpose of this is to shine light upon the sustainability matters from the customers' perspective as well as to reveal any issues the company could improve upon. The aim is to have one hundred respondents/customers during the first season of 2018 (Jan – May).

As a result of this venture TourayTravels will be a fully operational destination management company working alongside with travel agencies in the future with a focus on the Scandinavian market.

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1   Introduction

This is a project-based thesis about a start-up venture called TourayTravels created by two brothers with roots both from Finland and The Gambia. The reason we chose this topic is, because the plan of establishing a company in The Gambia has existed with us for a while. One of us studies Tourism and the other international business which will grant us a wider vision of the opportunities. After thinking hard about what kind of an enterprise we should base, we came to a conclusion of establishing a tour operating company due to the country's high amount of visitors. Since we study international business and tourism, it is the perfect choice of field for us since we can teach each other something from our fields.

There's also nothing as pleasant to us as challenging ourselves business wise outside of Europe and this project gave us the perfect chance to take on our ambitions and test our business skills in action. It provided us the opportunity to go out of school environment into the real world and test our business plan in action from Feb 1st to April 13th, 2018 in The Gambia.

The aim of this project is to test our business model in action In The Gambia from Feb 1st to April 13th, 2018. Our aim is to learn as much as possible about the tourism sector in The Gambia, provide sustainable tours for the tourists in the country, test our business model canvas in action and provide insight for those planning on establishing their own company.

The thesis is written in a zipper-structure model which means that each chapter from the business model canvas starts with the theory of each specific block, followed by our initial plan of manifesting it in to our venture. We focused on the important aspects for our business which could prove useful in the future of the company. This part of the thesis was written before going to The Gambia. After explaining we move on to the implementation chapter which includes the ups, the downs and the changes we had to make to our initial plan during our stay. The implementation chapter's purpose is to describe our journey in a story like form. By empirically investigating the land and the opportunities we reflect on our realisations which could only have been revealed by actually experiencing them in first-hand.

The chief objective of this project is to focus on our journey to The Gambia, learn to conduct excursions for the tourists and gain as much insight as much as possible about the tourism sector in the country. Please notice that this a project-based thesis. We conducted

a small qualitative research in order to understand the Gambian tourists' feelings, perspective and experiences. We did this with the aim of learning useful information that can assist us in the future years on marketing the destination. Also by being students from a university our chances of getting partnerships could increase and we could approach customers more easily.

1.1   Project Plan

This project is about testing our business model in action between 1st of February to April 13^{th,}, 2018 in The Gambia. We have devised a Business Model Canvas, originally proposed by Mr. Alexander Osterwalder, which will be used as our main tool during the course of this project. Before diving in deeper to what the business model canvas looks like in this case, let's have a closer look on some of the generalities of this particular project venture.

Mission statement

> "Our aim is to provide safe, extraordinary and fun experiences to the kind members of the club called humanity. Laughter, smiles and unforgettable memories delivered in a sustainable way is our chief mission. So much is already being offered for the tourist, this is for the traveller. "

Business Philosophy

> "We intend to create win-win situations in all environments TourayTravels is a part of. When time goes on and more people get involved, it is important that all stakeholders are treated with respect and left with a feeling of gratitude.

Our primary objective of this thesis is to sell tours to 50 people and conduct 50 qualitative interviews, infiltrate ourselves into The Gambian tourism field and gaining valuable information for the future in a two month period. If we reach these numbers we will evaluate the project as a great successes. If we do not reach these numbers, but acquire valuable information and make ourselves known in the Tourism field of The Gambia we evaluate it as partly succeeded. And if we sold and learned nothing along the project, we will consider it as a lesson learned.

Our goal is to grow TourayTravels into a professional Destination management company. The vision is to lead the field in the tourism business and promote sustainability through all of the environmental- socio- and -economic sectors. An additional goal is to own a green themed hotel in the coastal region by 2022.

2 Business Model Canvas of TourayTravels

Business Model Canvas is a strategic tool for businesses devised by Mr. Alexander Oster-walder and Yves Pigneur. Its purpose is to assist organizations to create, deliver and capture value. The tool consists of 9 essential building blocks which are: value proposition, customer segments, channels, customer relations, key activities, key partnerships, key resources, cost structure and revenue streams. By clarifying these elements for the organization the stakeholders can visually see and understand more complex ideas in a structured and simpler way. It's also a beneficial tool for startup companies to help the staff understand the contents of their business better. Many companies fail during the first few years after launching, partly because they hadn't thought of all the aspects of their business (Martin, 2015)

By using this tool we aspire to lay out a clear concise business model to succeed in our thesis project to The Gambia. We are aware that the model will most probably change in some sense after arriving to the country, which is fine. We will have 2 parts in each of the blocks, first in theory what the block is and secondly what our design is for that specific block

2.1 Value proposition

The value proposition is the benefit which the customer gets by choosing your company's product instead of others. It is the foundation of the business, without bringing value to the customer with its product or service the business will not be able to compete in the markets. Customers tend to choose the product or service from a company which they gain the most value from. (Martin, 2015)

The value proposition can also appeal to people's emotions and by creating a story around it customers can feel drawn to it. The interest of something new gathers customers and gains publicity for the company, and the story raises credibility in the value gained from it. (Martin, 2015)

The design of a value proposition should be done with time and focus to maximize the value that is offered for the customers. Nowadays due to technology the company needs to think hard whether the product or service is brining any value for its customers. (Martin, 2015)

According to (Tracy, 2005) before deciding on the product the entrepreneur should take good time to think about the product or service that's going to be provided. The more you think about the advantages and disadvantages of the product will it help you to make better decisions in making it successful.

An entrepreneur needs to take in consideration three main factors when creating the value proposition. First rule of this is to understand the customer by creating a profile by analyzing the customer jobs, their problem, and how do they solve their problem at the moment. The second part is to create a value map to crystalize the products or services offered for them. And the last part is to find a match between these two factors. (Martin, 2015)

The value proposition can be based on elements such as newness, performance, customization, design, brand/status, cost reduction. When a company chooses to have newness in their value proposition they will need to bring something new to the markets and usually also keep improving their product. A good example of this is the telecommunication markets. Every year we see new phones arriving with something new added in them. Performance is quite similar to newness. The company's main focus is to improve their products performance when compared to an older product, or even to launch a better product then their competitor. Nowadays customization has made it way to the markets. Many people in the world want to have a product just the way they like it. By the ability to offer customers customized products the company gives them the feeling of individualism and importance. For example Nike has offered customers the chance to tailor their shoes on their website. The customer is able to pick their color, design, palette and size. Afterwards they will see how their end product would look like. It's due to the same reason of wanting something unique as a customer that many clothing companies demand more money from their products due to their unique designs on their products.

Brand and status go pretty much hand in hand because their appeal is very similar. People are loyal to a brand due to its design, as well as they would show loyalty to a product because of the status they gain from using it. For example, a person wearing a Rolex watch indicates that they are wealthy due to Rolexes high prices and brand recognition. Although customers are eager to have the newest model, best performance, a product with a strong brand/status or a unique design or a on their product, many people value cheapness over those qualities. That's the reason why price is one of the most common value propositions for companies entering the markets. They promise to offer a product with same qualities as their competitors with a cheaper price. (Martin, Business Model Canvas: Creating a Value Proposition, 2015).

2.1.1 Design of our value proposition

Having education in two different fields Tourism & International business, gave us the advantage of fulfilling each other's ideas, but it still wasn't fully crystalized to us what our value proposition would finally be. We came up with an idea to build up a tour package around the Monkey Park, Alligator Park and City Tour, so that the customers could customize their trips by mixing, combining and timing in order to create their own personal flexible experience.

We had knowledge of the country but a limited awareness of the tourism markets due to the fact that there was no information online in abundance regarding the tour operators in The Gambia. The information online implied that the tourists in the hotels were mainly taken care of by the local tour operators. We thought that there would not be so many tour operators or hustlers. The belief of our expertise in sales and customer service brought us to believe that we could offer customers increased value in the quality of the tours and for very competitive prices. We visioned fresh and attractive tours for our three customer segments. By going in the country and finding the elements we would find relevant and combining them in order to create something sustainable, affordable and totally new. The plan was to offer the visitors our mix & match packages straight from the hotel lobbies. Little did we know how much effort, struggle and convincing this would require.

2.2 Customer segments

Customer segmentation is the division of the market to customer subgroups by common characteristics and needs. This assists a company in differentiating between groups that it considers worthy of marketing to, increasing its efficiency by focusing its limited resources on the efforts that ensure the best return of investment. There are many reasons for a company to segment their market, but the most common one is creating offers for the various groups according to their needs, thus benefiting the company and the customer. Sometimes startup companies might discover their customer segment through trial and error, because researching the segments can be quite costly. For example a bicycle company could focus their sales on young bikers, more specifically on 14-18 year old girls, and again more specifically on very girly girls. Then figure out what they can do to please this customer segment the best. On the other hand the same company could choose not to limit itself on such a scale and instead creates a unisex bicycle for all youth minded

people and start marketing it as such (take Jopo for example). Thus it is of vital importance to calculate accurately which kind limitations a company should accept, which are beneficial, and which ones are too limiting. (Martin, 2018)

All in all, the markets can be segmented in various ways: geographically, regionally, by age, gender, family size, religion, income, life style, personality and behavior. The objective is to allow the company to differentiate its products or message to the right group according to the market's dimensions. If a company isn't doing too well in regards to its sales it might have miscalculated it's customer segment. Often new companies might have had too wide of a segmentation for their service/product. Narrowing down a bit might prove useful and make the customer feel like the service/product is more personally suited for his or her needs. By doing this both parties benefit the most, your company because marketing is more efficient, and the customer because the service is aimed at their needs. We humans tend to be attracted to things that are in alignment with our beliefs, lifestyle and "tribe". Therefore thinking through this particular block of the Business Model Canvas might change all the other components. (Martin, 2018)

2.2.1 Design of our customer segments

In order for us to be as effective as possible when it comes to sales and marketing had visioned three "ideal customer avatars". We thought that these three groups would be our main customer segments and our packages were going to revolve around them. They possess the main traits that we're looking for in our customers. Let's call them: Leeroy & Friends, Martin & Family and Bonnie & Clyde. Please have a look at table 1 for more information regarding these three types.

LEROY & FRIENDS AVATAR

Leroy is an adventurous traveler, under 39 years of age, likely to travel in a group, allocentric by nature and tends to spend more on experiences than for material goods. Leroy doesn't care about his or others' appearances as much as he cares for character and sincerity. He is a people's person who appreciates arts, music, and different cultures. He is all about new experiences and connections and is less likely to revisit the country. He is the ultimate traveler, and can be found on the unbeaten path. Allocentric by nature, he of-

ten travels just with his backpack and a camera. You will not find him in all-inclusive resorts and he is less likely to purchase packages from tour operators. What he instead likes to do in a new destination is to make a personal contact in the area, and immerse himself with the locals. Catching Leroy isn't the easiest thing for a tour operator. Therefore we need to catch him in his natural habitat, which is when he's on the move. We can spot him by his appearances and pitch him the idea of going on a tour with us, more as a friend than a customer.

BONNIE & CLYDE AVATAR

This particular group consists of two lone travelers in a romantic relationship. They are more prone for spontaneity and luxurious entertainment services. That's why it's easiest to upsell trips and services for them during their stay. They tend to be in a good mood more than the other travelers, hence complaints can be sorted easier, but will still demand good facilities. Bonnie & Clyde can be of any age and they embarked on the journey to spend time with each other. Depending on the temperaments of the passengers, they may want to relax around the hotel areas or go exploring. Anyhow packages will be offered to them, like to all of the groups, before and during their stay. For this group restaurant packages with a romantic theme will be recommended.

MARTIN & FAMILY AVATAR

Martin and his family like to plan their trip well ahead. He and his wife are working most of the year around and the one to three trips they take are very valued. Hence, this customer segment is the most probable to demand for a reimbursement if everything doesn't go as planned. There's a good chance that Martin and his wife travel for work purposes and are very aware of how a travel plan, timing, and service need to be delivered. This is why dealing with this customer segment details and punctuality are crucial. The way to influence their purchasing decision will, by a large measure, happen through their kids. Therefore the packages offered to them need to have a good amount of kid friendly activities, such as: pool, children's corner, kids' games, a hotel suitable for children etc. This particular group is the least active of the three group we've covered, they are expected to enjoy their free time in the resorts, but will still go for a tour or two. When served well this group has a high probability of recommending and returning in the following seasons.

Table 1. Customer segment map.

Younger travelers	Families	High end customers.

-Faster tempo	-Souvenir markets	-Honey mooners
-Experience Driven	-Dance classes for kids	-5star hotels
-Party tours	-Monkey & crocodile parks	-City Tours
-Sports tours	-Immersive home cook out visits	-Fancy restaurants
-School visits		-River Gambia
-Quad drive tours		

2.3 Key partnerships

Partnerships are alliances between two or more entities whose interests are in harmony with each other and decide working together (Anastasia, 2015). A good example of a working partnership is the Star Alliance partnership between numerous airline carriers such as: United Airlines, Scandinavian Airlines, and Air China (Star Alliance, 2018). The reason for a partnership is mutual benefit, and in business they may vary from monetary gain to Corporate Social Responsibility. Some partnerships may be very loose where both entities retain their independence and at times they may be exclusive. In this case the companies must draw up a contract which limits the two entities to only that one relation-ship. Sometimes changes in the marketplace can cause the parties to reconsider their partnerships. At other times mutual benefit has not been reached, which again might lead into dissolving the partnership. This is why it is of great value to examine the possible out-comes of a partnership in detail before sealing a deal. Companies should always strive for a win-win situation in order to keep an ethical approach to the marketplace. (Anastasia, 2015)

Perhaps the most common partnership type is the buyer-consumer partnerships. These are for example between a soap manufacturer and a soap outlet. The partnership is formed to ensure that there is a reliable source of supplies and that there is a steady con-firmed buyer for the product/service. Discounts and bigger than normal stock purchases are common in this type of a scenario. (Anastasia, 2015)

2.3.1 Design of our key partnerships

Our plan regarding the company's partnerships revolved around keeping good relations with other business owners like the Monkey Park, the hotels and the equipment rental companies. Our main challenge was to develop a professional relationship with the hotels in order for them to regard us as valuable partners providing their customers with quality

tours. Conveying a professional image of our project was crucial and we'd only get one chance of succeeding per hotel. If we would not be able to pull this off, we'd be left with no key partners thus probably failing the project. Since in a partnership both parties are meant to benefit from one another, we thought about providing the hotels with the key insights of our research so that if they find something relevant they may develop their services accordingly and keep good relations for the seasons to come.

2.4 Key resources

Key resources are the main resources which the company uses to create its value proposition and customer segment. These three are the main things for the business model to work. Key resources sort out the operational side of the business spectrum and define such things as what kind of materials are needed, what kind of equipment is required and what kind of people should be employed. It has a direct impact on making the value proposition work on the chosen customer segment and defines the minimum needed to offer for the customers. (Anastasia, 2015)

> The business model of an organization is a major indicator of the type of key resource being utilized by the company. Hence, there is a clear difference between the key resources employed by a microchip manufacturer and a microchip designer. The microchip designer will probably consider his human resources as the key resource, while the manufacturer will favor his production hardware as his key resource."((Anastasia, Key Resources Building Block in Business Model Canvas, 2015))

Key resources have a straight impact on the number and type of key activities needed. For example, if the company doubled its excursions in a year and started getting inquiries beyond their expectations. It would need to be aware of the key resources and what effects it would have. The company should know that could the physical resources meet the demand and would the employers be able to handle the workload. (Anastasia, 2015)

They are usually categorized into physical, intellectual, financial and human. There's also an option to lease, own or having key partners to provide the key resources. (Anastasia, 2015)

Physical resources are tangible assets used to create the value proposition. It includes inventory, buildings, equipment and distribution networks enabling the business to work.

Intellectual resources are non-physical, intangible resources like patents, brands, copyrights and partnerships. Nowadays even your own people, customer lists and customer knowledge are regarded as intellectual resources. They take a great amount of time and money to develop into a key resource, but once they are developed the company can have one of a kind advantages. For a service company a very vital resource are its employees, they are easily undermined when comparing to the other key resources. Usually the only representatives that the customers are in contact with a service based company are its employees so they have to behave as the "face" of the company. Employers are regarded as intellectual resources for the company due to their expertise and knowledge with the customers. Sometimes when customers are given great service they tend to come back due to that employees service. The financial resources could be such as lines of credit, cash and the ability to have stock option for employees. (Anastasia, 2015)

2.4.1   The design of our key resources

Our main key resources were the following: resourcefulness of our sales team, the ability to adapt to the new environment, getting the permission from the hotels and using our research as a means of getting our foot between the door.

Since we both have experience in sales and customer service most of our physical and intellectual resources were only revealed to us later in the project, thus in the beginning we solely relied on our human resources. The only physical resource we had was a 7-seated vehicle for transportation and the intellectual resource was the fact that we speak the local language and can bargain for the best prices. We also realized well ahead that we might need to obtain another vehicle in case of a high demand

2.5   Key activities

Like the heading points out, these are the most important tasks that a company must accomplish in order to get wind under its wings and keep it from crash landing. These activities are entirely dependent on the type of business model the company has. In order for the venture to be successful it'll have to take a good look at which activities to focus on and which ones to label as "not crucial". According to the Pareto Principle (80-20 rule), 80% of most outcomes are due to the 20% input. It is important to keep in mind that this is not a universal truth, but still a concept worthy of examining. Taking a good look at one's

Business Model Canvas will assist in figuring out what could the key activities be. For example, what are the key activities to reach our value proposition? What are the key activities in maintaining good customer relationships? What could be the key activities in ensuring us a positive contact with our customer segment? What key actions should we take in order to get access to the key resources? (Bala, 2012)

Needless to say the value proposition will offer the most crucial key activities for a company. Hence listing these in order from the most vital downwards will often prove very useful. For example, the key activities for a company like IBM most probably will be to develop their software, and for an organization like Greenpeace it could be to create discussion of humanity's impact on our planet. We can think of the value proposition block as what and key activities block as how. Many companies have the following as their key activities: production, research, marketing, sales and customer service, problem solving. (Anastasia, 2015)

2.5.1 Our design of key activities

Since our value proposition was to offer our customers something customized, sustainable and cheap our key activity would be to ensure to find the right packages for all customer segments. After coming to a decision of limiting our offerings into a couple tours we had to make sure that they would be attractive for the travellers. We also figured, that if we would only approach the hotels with an inquiry of using their premises for sales purposes we would probably be turned down quickly. We came up with an idea of creating a qualitative research for the travellers visiting The Gambia to gain insight on their travel habits for our school project, hence we decided to include a qualitative research in the project.

Other key activities would consist of finding the right connections, negotiating good rates form third-party service providers, educating ourselves of the tourist attractions and of course after creating the right packages selling them to the tourists.

Here is a summary of our first meeting we had with each other regarding, which we conducted via WhatsApp.

"Contacting the hotels, associations and NGO's will be our top priority before going to the country. The benefit from gaining their attention will make the research and the sales part much easier for us. When arriving to the country we need to acquire tour guide passes in

order to look professional and gain the customers trust. After completing all these tasks it is very important to choose the top excursions which our company will offer.
There are variety of different possibilities to choose from, so we need to make sure that the most attractive ones are in our catalogue. After choosing the excursions we need to create a banner/flyer to give out to the possible customers in order to support the sales. By providing information and visual context of the destinations we will have a better chance of closing the sale. Later on we need to create a website and a logo for our company. The webpage needs to be pleasant for the user and full of information of the excursions. Since we are starting with F2F-sales we will not be needing an office right away, however when the business starts to grow it is essential for us to have a location where we can accept inquiries and phone calls." Little did we know how drastically we would have to change our approach.

We also did a market analysis of the tour operators operating in the Gambia before arriving to the country. The findings in a nutshell were that there were only couple of operators ruling the markets. Most of these operators are functioning from the hotel lobbies and/or from the most popular tourist destination SeneGambia (Kane 2006, 98). These operators were: The Gambia Experience, West African Tours, Corendon & Tjäreborg. Many of them have also acquired deals with the travel agencies in Scandinavia so that the tourists have had the chance of purchasing an excursions before coming to the country. Due to the reason of very small amount of competition the tour operators have pretty expensive prices for their tours. There are also independent tour operators, some of whom are legitimate and some whom have no tour guide passes nor businesses to sell their packages. These are called the "bumsters", who normally are there every day trying to make ends meet. Stopping people in the streets and harassing them make the tourists feel bothered and unsecure. We feel this will make the tourists focus more on the reliable tour operators which is good when we will establish our company. (Visit The Gambia, 2018)

2.6   Channels

Channels are the mediums through which companies provide their value proposition to the customer. There are various types of channels, and it can be of vital service for a start-up to consider carefully which channel to use with each customer segment. Before arriving to a conclusion, a thorough SWOT analysis should be done in regards to the strength of the channel. There are many factors that influence the final decision on the channel, but in the past they've mostly been: quickness, efficiency and affordability. Needless to say in today's world of rapid temperature rising and climate change, also the ecological aspects must be examined. It has a huge role in regarding the customer experience. They also are a customer touchpoint and can be categorized as marketing, sales or distribution (Martin, 2015). Since our project deals with distribution issues only superficially, here we have concentrated more on sales & marketing.

2.6.1 Marketing

Marketing is a vital aspect for most companies. Simply put it is teaching consumers why they should choose your product. In many cases it is seen only as advertising when in fact, it is everything that the consumer encounters about the company. Let it be the advertising, customer service, follow-up care or what is heard about the company. All of these procedures are included in marketing. That is the reason why the marketing strategy plays a key role in the successes of a product/service. (Lake, 2018)

2.6.2 Finding the right marketing strategy

When writing the marketing strategy one needs to know how your service/product benefits others and differs from the competition, having unique selling propositions will give an edge to the other companies. In order to succeed a market research has to be done to understand what the competitors have to offer. (Duermyer, 2018)

A very good way of identifying marketing is using a new 5p model which includes: Product, Price, Promotion, Place and People.

Product: What are you selling? What is the uniqueness of your service/product? How does the service/product differ from your competitors and what value/benefits does it give you customer?

Price: What is the price of your service/product? What will your profit margin be according to your price and at what price are your competitors selling theirs?

Promotion: How will you let the market know your service/product? How will they know about the features and benefits that you got to offer? Which marketing tactics will you use and what are the benefits and beliefs of each method?

Place: Where will your service/product be available for purchase? If the company has multiple sales platforms it should calculate the sales percentage from each platform.

People: Who are the people helping to deliver your service/product? In which way can they help (sales team, virtual assistants) and what is their job?

According to (Duermyer, 2018), there are six ways of making a company known in the community. These methods are especially useful for small businesses or start-ups due to the low costs of the methods. These ways are: offering free classes/workshops, joining local business organisations and networking groups, create or become a sponsor in a charitable event or create a blog.

2.6.3 Social media in marketing

Social media channels are internet based platforms. They can be used by applications designed for smartphones which helps sharing information between people, for instance pictures and videos. Some of the most popular social media sites are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Blogging in social media is also a possible tool to use as means of communication. Everyday more and more companies take the advantage of social media marketing. Facebook has more than 2 billion users a month and more than 2.5 million Finnish users in a month so it is the perfect tool to reach potential customers (Kallas, 2018). The main purpose for companies to use social media is to enhance their image and market their products. Creating the right image and brand is essential especially for a service based company. (Kauppalehti, 2013)

According to Niko (2015) it is important to understand the basics of one platform before spreading in to many different channels. By learning the ins and outs of one channel first makes it easier to reach better results. It will also help to identify which marketing operation works. The platforms on social media change constantly due to updates so it's easier to follow these changes by learning the use of one platform at a time. Finally when the use of one platform has been mastered he advises to expand to new platforms.

2.6.4 Facebook

Facebook ranks as the most popular social media site with more than 2 billion monthly users (Kallas, 2018). The site has many tools built in to help a company with their marketing goals. They offer different functions with different results. Whether it is brand awareness, reaching people, engagement or conversion Facebook has a tool for all each of them. (Facebook, 2018)

2.6.5 YouTube

YouTube is the world's second largest search engine. It's a service for sharing videos with more than 1.8 Billion monthly users (Kallas, 2018). YouTube allows its users to watch, share, like and upload their own videos. It is accessible on smart phones, PCs, laptops and tablets. It is a great place for people to discover and follow things that they like. It is used to watch comedy shows, music videos, how to guides and to follow vloggers (video blogger) or celebrities. (Collins, 2018)

YouTube is a great source of entertainment due to the funny videos it offers, but it's becoming an essential tool for marketing. 48 % of marketers are planning using YouTube in their marketing strategy. Statistics claim that one third of all online activity is spent watching videos, and YouTube has more than 1.8 billion monthly users from all around the world reaching more 18 – 49 year olds than any other broadcast or a cable network. Nevertheless YouTube marketing requires plenty of time to plan, film, edit, market and analyse. The brand's goals need to be clear in order to achieve these results through videos. (Collins, n.d)

2.6.6 Instagram

Instagram is an application which has become very popular since its creation seven years ago with more than then the total of 800 million monthly users. It allows its users to post their pictures, short videos and stories for their followers from all around the world. It is the prefect tool to raise brand awareness and introducing products. Instagram is no different from many other social media sites with its constantly changing feed, that's why choosing the right hashtag will generate more relevant visits on a company's Instagram page. Hashtags are a keyword or a keyword phrase spelled without spaces with a (#) in the beginning of the keyword. They are used in order to associate posts with events, conferences, entertainment or themes. They will make your content more visible and allows people who are not connected to the same feed to interact with each other. (Collins, n.d)

2.6.7 Sales

According to Adizes (2017) sales is finding a customer who has a need for a service or a product and convincing them to exchange their money for a product or a service.

He states that many companies believe having a strong sales team, when in fact they only have order handlers. A B2C scenario where a customer pays for a product to an employee standing behind a counter, and waiting to take the order. This is called sales, even though actual "selling" did not occur. There was no convincing, closing or offering. Adizes thinks the marketing team is responsible for bringing customers in the store, and the sales clerk handles the order. A real salesman would be on the street, in front of the store promoting his business, stopping the people passing by and inviting them to the store. When someone is interested he will present many reasons why should they buy from his store. There are different kind of sales methods for a company: B2B F2F, via telephone or online.

2.6.8   Design for our channels

Our main channels will be F2F contacting in the hotel areas. Once we've acquired recognition we will contact Finnish travel agencies and start negotiating with them about offering their customers our packages when they arrive to the country. This will make it easy for the travelers to hear about the available packages and make the bookings right away. We will have a presentation of all of our packages and a registration form. That will give them the opportunity to choose a package that they feel interested in immediately.
We have planned on using social media as a means of gaining recognition. We believe Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat are the most useful for us since we are both capable of using social media platforms. Posting funny clips, videos and pictures of our excursions and of the beautiful landscape of The Gambia. By doing this we will strive for a strong social media presence.

2.7   Customer relationships

Customer relationships describes how you establish a relationship with your customer segment. Any organization must choose which type of a relationship it will have with its customers for it to be sustainable and successful in the long run. A single company may have different strategies in communicating with its different customer segments. For example, a company might choose to upkeep a different type of customer relationship with its +60-year olds versus -35-year old customers. There are 3 fundamental reasons why a company would want to establish a relationship with customers: acquisition, retention and upselling. Let's take phone operators for this example. During the 1990's when cell phones became popular the phone operators' sole focus was in gaining new customers.

Soon when the market saturated and it became harder to acquire new customers, the operators changed their strategy and value proposition more to retention and upselling. It wasn't sufficient enough to just keep acquiring new ones, they had to change tactics in order to keep the old ones and sell various different products such as ringtones and data plans. (Anastasia, 2015)

Customer relations can be divided into six distinctive categories: personal assistance, dedicated personal assistance, self-service, automated services, communities and co-creation. It is very useful for a startup company to ponder on which type of a relation will work best with their customer segment. (Anastasia, 2015)

Personal assistance is the characterized strongly with human touch. The customer is directly in touch with a sales representative or a customer service representative in person or through phone. The customer has an opportunity to interact with a human before and after the sale in regards to the service. Dedicated personal assistance takes the personal assistance a step further by assigning a dedicated representative with a set of customers. By setting a single point of contact between the company and the customer it enhances the feeling of uniqueness from the customer's' point of view. This type of a relationship can be seen used in banking for example. With personal assistance and dedicated personal assistance the customer is in contact with people, but with self-service the company allows the customers to communicate with themselves via the tools provided by the organization. The current fast development in technologies has enabled this as a new revolutionary way of dealing with customers in our quickly changing world. It is swiftly becoming more and more popular way of customer relations all around the world. Automated services, it is the next plateau from self-services, by making it more convenient for customers to perform services for themselves. These tend to be much more customizable and normally use the customer's online history and other data to provide suggestions for the client's shopping experience. (Anastasia, 2015)

In today's social media driven world communities are public and easily accessible for nearly everyone. Companies can use this phenomenon in opening discussion between groups of people, gaining insight on their behavior and creating platforms where customers can get together and share knowledge and create content. A good example of this is when Glaxo SmithKline launched their weight-loss drug and at the same time it gave customers a platform to form communities and at the same time understand the problems overweight people face. Co-creation, by involving the customer in the creation part of the product you are more likely to gain those people as your brand champions. Open source

companies tend to do this quite well. By taking in the opinions and ideas of the public the final product may be more customer oriented, which is ideal. Also a giant like Amazon encourages its customers to write reviews on books and Youtube almost entirely relies on the co-creation of their customers. (Anastasia, 2015)

2.7.1 Our Design of customer relationships

Since in the beginning we will mainly do F2F sales we have to rely to grow through the word of mouth strategy. We also have the qualitative research form which will make the guests of the hotels feel appreciated and that their opinion matters. After the excursions our customers will be given the chance to give us feedback and tips how to improve our services.
The hotels that will give us the opportunity to use their space as a platform will be given the results of our research. They can analyze the findings and improve their businesses from that.

Like we mentioned before, we created our own TourayTravels sales method, which are opened below.

The first step is approaching the potential customer as students doing a research regarding their stay in the Gambia. A professional conduct is of great importance in order to get the visitor to volunteer for the research. In this step we will interview the visitor of his or her experiences in the country and gain as much of information of their stay and their preferences. This step also opens the possibility of creating a personal relationship and earning their trust as well as creating a good image of TourayTravels.

The second step starts by explaining more about our project, which happens right after the research. We express the fact that the research is only a smaller part of the project and that we're also conducting our own excursions. We then explain the contents of our excursions and the possibility of mixing and combining them. The main point here is to express how easy it is for the customer to choose their own type of package from the point of view of their needs and preferences. The first step allowed us to extract useful information from the customer so that we may use it in this step to counter their possible arguments.

The third and final step is closing the sale by asking which date would fit their schedule the best. If any arguments arise we listen to them carefully agreeing with everything the

customer feels, and then return to step two for a while before closing again by asking for the sale. When we've come to a mutual agreement we will fill in the vouchers and collect the deposit for the excursion. The customer then receives the other half of the voucher and all the necessary information for the pickup. Rest of the money will be collected in the beginning of the excursion.

We feel that it is of great importance to follow these steps in this order to get the best results. If any step isn't done with full concentration and focus the sale will be harder to achieve. Step one is mapping out the customer, step two is recommending our product and step three is closing the deal.

2.8   Revenue streams

Revenue streams doesn't represent the profit, but the cash that has flowed in the company and what earnings the business gets when costs are subtracted from the revenue gained from each customer segment. When a company does this with care, it will lead to many revenue streams being gained from the customer segments. It is important to list out various revenue streams, but also equally important to list their pricing and estimated length as well. The reason behind it, is to determine if it's profitable for a company to opt for a revenue stream. If the designing and production costs of a product are higher then what the customer would pay or greater than the revenue gained from a product before it's lifecycle comes to an end, then it doesn't make sense business wise to follow through with the product. It is also a smart move to evaluate how big of a problem is the product going to solve in the customer's life, and how much would they be willing to pay for it.

> Pricing mechanisms refer to the effect of the pricing of a product on its expected demand and supply. This is essentially a tool to match buyers to the sellers of a product. Each revenue stream in a business can have its individual pricing mechanism. The pricing mechanism selected has a significant impact on the revenues generated by the revenue stream in question. Pricing mechanisms can be divided into two types; a) fixed pricing and b) dynamic pricing. (Anastasia, 2015)

As the name suggests with fixed pricing the prices stay the same and are non-negotiable due to the fact that there's not a lot of changes in the process. It consists of fixed-, product feature dependent-, customer segment dependent-, or volume dependent-pricing. With dynamic pricing the price changes according to the conditions of the markets, as well as the variables put in the product. Typical dynamic pricing methods are bargaining, auctioning and yield management. Bargaining is one of the oldest ways to conduct an exchange. Two parties negotiate until coming to a mutual conclusion of a price for a product, or a

service. The price agreed will highly depend on, which of the parties has the upper-hand as well as negotiation skills. In auctioning the price is set by the highest bidder and the price is often determined by the customer's perception of the product. The sold product will go through bidding, in which the customers say what they are offering for the product or a service. The customer with the highest bid will get the product. With yield management the company aims to influence and anticipate the customer behaviour. The price is set by the available inventory and the time of the purchase. A good example of yield management pricing is in the hotel business where the price of the room is based on how many available rooms there are, and also how far in advance the booking is made. (Anastasia, 2015)

2.8.1 Our Design of revenue streams

Our revenue streams will only consist of money gained from the customers purchasing our excursions. We have not thought about the prices for our excursions due to the lack of information on prices online. Once we arrive to The Gambia we will visit the Monkey- and Crocodile Park in order to know how to price the tours. We will calculate the variable costs of the excursions and subtract them from the profits we gain. The prices will be fixed prices on to make it clear for the customers how much each has to pay. We have considered on giving group discounts for parties bigger than three.

2.9 Cost structure

Cost structure includes all the costs of the company. Many companies fail due to their lack of knowledge about the costs of their goods or services that they have promised in their value proposition. The company must take into consideration the costs of bringing their value proposition to life, revenue streams and maintaining long customer relationships. When a company knows their key partnerships, key activities and key resources the costs of these blocks will be easier to calculate.

The cost structure consists of the following parts. Fixed costs, as the name tells, these expenses stay the same no matter what the volume of business is. Usually they are time bound and will not change for a long period of time. For example rents and employers salaries are fixed costs for a company. Variable costs are costs that are very dependent on the volume of output that the business produces. They are costs that come from for example renting out a boat to take tourists on an excursions. Simply put if the company sells a

lot of excursions they have to rent out the boat many times compared to if there are no excursions the boat doesn't need to be rented. That's why it's hard to predict what the variable costs will be since they are linked to the production of a product or a service. Economies of scale means higher the volume of a company is, the lower the overall cost per unit will be. For example instead of taking five tourists on an excursion every day, the company should make three trips in a week with fifteen tourists in order to lower the variable costs and be able to offer the tours cheaper. On a product based company this is seen when big companies bulk buy many units of the same product in order to negotiate a lower price per unit. (Anastasia, 2015)

2.9.1 Design of our cost structure

We have created our own budget sheet of our costs and revenue streams as a part of our thesis. Instead of writing it we made it with Microsoft Excel.

Excursions 1	Costs GMD	Amount	Total GMD	Total I
Boat rent	3 000 GMD	1	3 000 GMD	52 I
Food per person	50 GMD	7	350 GMD	6 I
Beverages	100 GMD	7	700 GMD	12 I
Transportation	200 GMD	2	400 GMD	7 I
Fishing rods	50 GMD	7	350 GMD	6 I
Baits/person	40 GMD	7	280 GMD	5 I
Variable costs	3 440 GMD		5 080 GMD	88 €

Excursions 2	Costs GMD	Amount	Total GMD	Total I
Boat rent	3 000 GMD	1	3 000 GMD	52 I
Food per person	50 GMD	8	400 GMD	7 I
Beverages	100 GMD	8	800 GMD	14 I
Transportation	200 GMD	2	400 GMD	7 I
Fishing rods	50 GMD	8	400 GMD	7 I
Baits	40 GMD	8	320 GMD	6 I
Variable costs	3 700 GMD		5 320 GMD	92 €

Excursions 3	Costs GMD	Amount	Total GMD	Total I
Boat rent	3 000 GMD	1	3 000 GMD	52 I
Food per person	50 GMD	7	350 GMD	6 I
Beverages	100 GMD	7	700 GMD	12 I
Transportation	200 GMD	2	400 GMD	7 I
Fishing rods	50 GMD	7	350 GMD	6 I
Baits	40 GMD	7	280 GMD	5 I
Variable costs	3 700 GMD		5 080 GMD	88 €

Picture 1. Picture of TourayTravels' costs in the excel sheet

3 Implementation of our business model canvas

In this part we will discuss the knowledge gained by our first-hand experience from spending three months in The Gambia with this project. Here we will go through the changes which we had to make on TourayTravels business model canvas and the knowledge gained from the interviews. We will reflect on the mistakes, challenges and opportunities that came with this project. This section is mostly written in a learning diary form which allows the reader to see our journey in a linear narrative.

3.1 Arriving to The Gambia

In the planning process of the project, we decided that the best way to sell our packages would be by acquiring a spot in one of the hotels in the tourism region of the Gambia (SeneGambia). The vision was to interview, sell and conduct tours to the guests of hotels. We knew that it would be challenging to find a hotel partner which would give us access to use their premises for monetary gain, so we had a backup plan to market our services in the streets of SeneGambia where the streets and restaurants were filled with elderly people, mostly travelling in groups or couples, only a small percentage were travelling with their children.

As we boarded the plane from London, we soon had a realization that our assumption of the age-group of the tourists was misjudged. Our belief had been that there were going to be a lot of young travellers visiting the country, and that they would gather up a majority of the tourists. During the flight we counted that we did not spot a single Leroy & friends-avatar customer segment, which had been our main target. We were hoping that after arriving to the tourist destination, we would find the younger tourists lingering around the strips. We were wrong.

After two days of familiarizing ourselves with the surroundings, we came to the conclusion that we had to change our design of the packages. We looked at our project plan and noticed that the goal of serving fifty tourists with our packages was quite ambitious. The initial plan was to sell multi mix and match excursions to the Monkey Park, Crocodile Park and a city-tour. In order for us to reach this number we revised a new plan of organizing an event targeted at the new customer segment.

It was time to go back to the drawing board and start developing new ideas. This changed our value proposition, which earlier had relied on fresh and exciting tours around the most popular tourist attractions. After further analysing the customer behaviour we noticed that our new customer segment the elderly people, were most lively and active during the evenings after the sun had set. Since we had just arrived and were in a stretch without a package nor a platform, we had to reinvent our tours before approaching the hotels with an inquiry regarding the usage of their premises.

We came up with a plan of organising an event revolving around the elements of culture, education, feasting and live entertainment. It was named as the AfroNightTrain-event. We started to scout for venues for the event and received a lot of assistance and ideas from friends, family and the people working in the industry. About two weeks had gone by since our arrival and we had finally figured out what the package would include. Now it was time to start inquiring about the platforms from the hotel managers. We entered the SeneGambia beach hotel and while sitting around the premises, we started to talk with one of the staff members. It turned out that the hotel arranges these kind of events already and have an assigned staffing team called the event team for this particular job. The staff member also told, that the other larger hotels in the region do have similar events almost every night.

Since the competitors for our event were the biggest hotels in the region, we calculated that the market was already saturated with these type of events. Once again we had to ditch our design of a package and return to the drawing board. By now three weeks had passed by and we were in square one again.

We started to analyse the opportunities, but this time keeping in mind the market saturation of the attractions. The monkey park was too accessible and the events were organised every night already, we had to come up with a package with a better market niche. Our friend knew a director of the tourism institute of Gambia and managed to arrange a meeting for us. Mr. Niang explained in detail the future development areas of the tourism-sector and right at the end of the interview mentioned how he loved the River Gambia and would like to see tourists enjoy this historical attraction more (in a sustainable way). As we left the meeting both of us immediately knew that this was the opportunity we had been looking for. By now we had spent a full month in the country without any successes. Stress and frustration had accumulated due to the set-backs and changes in the package.

We asked tour operators about the River Gambia excursion and learned that even though some tour-operators offered the trip, it wasn't as popular as the other excursions. This was the perfect chance for us to enter the markets. A couple of tasks had to be done before we could approach the hotel managers in regards the meetings and our main tasks were to find a suitable boat to suit the tourists, come up with the research questions and convince the hotel managers and tourists of our professionalism. As far as we knew, we had to have something tangible to show, so we created a voucher to be handed at the end of the sale.

At this point we decided to concentrate solely on one product to focus on to use time effectively. Sustainability had to be a key factor in our choice of excursion so we started to scout for boat owners with the right type of equipment. There had to be a few mandatory items in order to pull the package together; a boat with enough to fit more than 15 passengers, kitchen, a toilet, life vests, fishing equipment and a captain to handle the ship.

We started the scouting from the biggest touristic boat docks; Lamin Lodge by The River Gambia. After visiting the location twice, we soon realized that all the owners were charging us tourist prices, which we were not interested in. Everybody we spoke to wanted to charge us per person. If we brought 10 people, the rate would be 1000 GMD (about 12€) per person plus the boats were not up to our standards. Anxiety started to kick in once again because despite our endeavours it seemed that none of the boat men wanted to share us their boat owner's connections.

There are a lot of police check-points in The Gambia and by chance we encountered one kind officer who suggested that we visit a local docks by the river called The Denton Bridge near the capital. After a day's period of searching we finally stumbled upon a boat owner called Mr. Edris. He too, like everybody we so far had encountered, tried to bargain per person rates with us. After negotiating with him for the second time we came to a mutual agreement. The initial price he quoted was 20 000 GMD (344€) for all the items required, he finally reduced the total of a 3h boat cruise to 3 000 GMD (52€). We gladly accepted. After almost a month of searching we were finally in business.

Picture 2. The boat in which we took the tourists on a tour to The River Gambia

3.2   Searching for the platform

In order for us to sell our packages we had to find a suitable place. At first we approached the customers with a F2F method. As we saw many of the tourists walking by the beachside we thought that it would be a great place to approach them. This proved to be a very difficult method since there were large amounts of other people eager to sell their tours and products. We realised that the beach wasn't the right place for us. In order for us to succeed the only way to get the tourists to listen to us without prejudice would be in their natural habitat, the hotels. After another change of plans we came up with an idea to contact the Hotel association of the Gambia with a request to have a meeting with them to acquire a suitable platform where we could contact the tourists.

Communication with the Hotel Association was a long process. Sometimes the e-mails would go to junk mail and at times their inbox was full. After a while we decided to take matters in our own hands. The preparation for this started with listing of the biggest hotels in the country. We developed a pitch for the hotel managers both in written and in verbal. After sending out dozens of e-mails with no response there was no choice but to visit the hotels in person and book an appointment with the General Managers.

We met with nearly 10 General Managers in 3 weeks' time receiving the same response:

> *"Yes you can interview our guests for the research, but unfortunately offering the excursions would be a liability."*

Since the excursion was a part of our project, we had no other option but to keep on striving. Each failure was valuable, since afterwards we went through all the points of the meetings. As we were waiting for the GM of the Paradise Beach Hotel, we hit a stroke of luck and accidently bumped in to the chair of the Hotel Association of Gambia. After discussing with her shortly, we exchanged numbers and talked about having a meeting with the Senegambia Beach Hotel. She was happy to help and reached out to the GM of the hotel. We were finally ready to take on the biggest hotel in the country, the Senegambia Beach Hotel. Through trial and error and knowing the arguments of the previous GM's we were now 100% prepared to pitch our idea. As we entered the office of Bunama Njie, the GM of Senegambia Beach Hotel, he told us that he had heard about us from the Vice Chairman of the Hotel Association of the Gambia and that he was in fact the Chairman of the Gambia Hotel Association.

We spent about forty five minutes with him and discussed the project in full. He was pleased that we had decided to establish our own company which would benefit all the stakeholders. We came to an agreement that we could use all of the hotels premises for selling and interviewing their guests. Finally the work started to show results.

He introduced us to the head of the hotel's human resource department who laid out the terms and explained the hotels policies on how to approach and offer our services. We got the permission to promote our services for a total of 3 days. We inquired when the next group of tourists would arrive and found out that new groups were arriving on that week's Thursday and Friday. Those days worked for him and us, so the days were locked in.

On Thursday we sat down and went through the plan how to approach and pull the customers. We came to a conclusion that one of us would ask the guests to join our interview and direct them willing to participants to a table where the other one of us would be sitting with a laptop. The first few approaches failed, but slowly we found the flow, gained self-confidence and learned how to interact and "sell" the interviews and the excursions to them.

The sales-steps which we designed beforehand, proved to work. We noticed that the assumption that we made to interest the tourists was by handling the interviews first. After the qualitative research was done, we would pitch them to join us on an excursion to The River Gambia.

We then explained that the total amount was GMD 3000 (51€) per person and the deposit GMD 1000 (17€). A part of our sales strategy was to tell the customers at the end of the pitch that the price for groups bigger than three would be reduced to GMD 2000 (34€, equivalent of a 33% discount). By doing this we noticed that the tourists would be more likely to join the excursion and ask their friends to join.

Table 2. TourayTravels price list

Excursion	Rate	Length	Deposit
The River Gambia	GMD 3000 = 51€ GMD 2000 = 34€ (group discount)	3 hours	1000

3.3 Conducting the interviews and excursions

We managed to sell three boat rides with a total amount of twenty two passengers and conducted 34 qualitative interviews. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes up to 45 minutes. The average time per interview was 30 minutes. 80% of the interviews were conducted around the hotel premises and the remaining 20% on the boat during the river excursion.

After getting a group to pay the deposit we would contact our boat supplier Edris and schedule the boat on the agreed date. We would then meet him and discuss all the relevant issues. Our checklist with Edris comprised of: the number of lifejackets, the amount of fishing rods and baits and the staff. This would happen the night before the excursion, which is also when also most of the preparations for the excursion would be taken care of. These tasks were such as acquiring a second vehicle, placing the order for the food and preparing the program for the tour.

On the morning of the excursion we had to still complete some errands such as picking up the food and making sure the boat and staff were set. Here is an itinerary from the first excursion we did for a group of 7 Finnish gentlemen.

Table 3. Itinerary of the excursion

DAY MAR 1ST 2018	7 PAX
10:00	**Pick up** Kombo Beach Hotel 10:00, Palma Rima, 10:15
10:45	**Arriving at the harbour** Toilets, beverages and shopping
11:30	**Embarking on boat** Instructions, life vests and welcoming
	FREE RELAXATION TIME (Interviews for the willing)
12:30	**PROGRAM** Fishing & Cards
13:00	**LUNCH TIME** (Interviews for the willing)
13:30	**PROGRAM** Gambian History Quiz
14.30	**ARRIVAL AT HARBOUR** Announcing the quiz winners
15:00	**DROP OFF** At hotels

The day before the excursion we used the strategy of customer touch point mapping to insure that the flow of our 5-hour tour would be enjoyable for the clients. We would do this mainly by discussing and memorizing the program in detail and planning it so that there would be times of letting the customers enjoy the sun and the views and times when we would to engage with them for activities. It was important for us to make the cruises a memorable experience, so we planned the elements carefully. The tour had to be entertaining, relaxing and educating, hence we included a card game, a quiz and sun bathing

chairs on the second level of the boat. The customers were asked for any allergies before-hand and served traditional African shrimp soup after an hour had passed from the embarking.

The cruises were done by using a traditional pique boat. The boat had a modest toilet, cooking place, table and a second level for the sun seekers. The two programs we had prepared were intended to be entertaining and educational. The card game was Gambia's most popular card game called "Crazy Eight" and the quiz revolved around the country's history, geography and cultural issues. We noticed that the quiz was a success and the card game less relevant. Still the clients mentioned that it was fun to learn an African card game. When we arrived back at the harbor we announced the winners of the quiz and presented them the awards of souvenir like handmade key rings. The customers saw this as a delightful extra amenity, since we hadn't mentioned anything about the rewards beforehand. This also left them with a smile after dropping them off back at the hotels.

Picture 2. Customers at our first excursion

Picture 3. Photo from the TourayTravels' first excursion

All in all the customers seemed very pleased after the excursions and told us that they received good value for their money. The first tour was the most problematic, and a bit chaotic first since the car we borrowed from our uncle did not start in the morning. We had to leave it behind and rush to the customers with only one vehicle and do two trips delaying our embarking on the cruise. Also the traffic was very jammed on the same morning and

one of us had to break a couple traffic laws in order to reach the second set of customers. Luckily our boat contact Edris was a very flexible and reasonable man and despite the late arrival granted us the agreed 3-hours of using his boat. The first cruise was very eye-opening and taught us that anything could happen, even something so unexpected like a car breaking down and traffic. Luckily the customers were 7 elderly gentlemen who liked to enjoy alcohol in vast amounts and could not care less about the timetable. They seemed to enjoy their time with us and told us stories of their younger days and chit chatted about anything. Few of the gentlemen were more prone to relaxing and chose to use the boats sun bathing chairs more. Everyone seemed to enjoy the food and especially the quiz. After arriving back at the harbor one of the gentlemen was so intoxicated that we had to literally help him get his pants back on. When we dropped them back off they thanked us for introducing the River Gambia to them and invited us to join them to an after party at their hotel's bar. We kindly declined, wished them well off and left.

Straight after we analyzed the cruise and went through the learning points, which we will discuss now. We need more time in the morning in case of unexpected turnovers. The quiz was ranked the highest on the touch-point map. It was good to leave the reward at the end to heighten the customers' energy right before separating with them. One of the customers who had drank a lot wasn't instructed to slow down, but it all played out nicely in the end. We did assign him with a life jacket and were with next to him during the whole cruise to secure his safety. We were asked to set up another tour for the gentlemen for another attraction, which we could not time wise manage. They were leaving already in a few days and we still had other groups to take care of. They specially thanked us for the easygoing atmosphere which allowed them to relax and fool around. According to them they preferred our river excursion over another tour operator's excursion because with us they had more freedom. Rigid timetables were not what they valued, instead they appreciated a more easygoing approach since they were on a holiday in an exotic country.

The other two excursion went from our perspective more professionally. One of the groups was an entourage of 4 British couples and the other a Finnish family. Since they enjoyed alcohol moderately we speculate that any mishaps or unexpected timetable changes would not have been regarded as happily as the group of the gentlemen. It seemed like the groups saw us more as their travelling companions than tour guides, which we were happy about. The cruises were absolutely the most enjoyable part for us during the whole project.

We made good profits, met interesting people, and managed to get the captain and his co-sailor good tips, which were many times higher than their average wages. In our perspective the cruises were a win-win for everybody. Only one thing we did not succeed 100% in, which was sustainability from the perspective of the environment. We had visioned on creating zero emissions on our tours, but the boat had an old diesel engine. In the long run this needs to be replaced with a more Eco-friendly option, perhaps with an electric motor. We did manage to create positive sustainable impacts from the view point of community based tourism. The food we served was cooked by our neighboring lady, who in turn made good profits and the wooden key ring rewards we gave were from a local artist. Thus good portions of the revenue was flowing back to the local community of Gambia and 100% of our company costs stayed in the country.

3.4   Understanding The Gambian visitors

We sold The River Cruise Package as a research discovery trip, which included the interview, transportation, lunch, entertainment and fishing equipment. In this chapter we will go through the knowledge we gained from the research and what we learned from conducting the boat excursion.

We decided to conduct a small qualitative research to get useful information from visitors currently in The Gambia. The main purpose for the research was to gain insights on how to market The Gambia for European travelers. **The research question was: what makes a perfect holiday?**

Here are the ten questions.

1. Describe your dream holiday?
2. Describe your current holiday?
3. Describe your booking process.
4. What do you consider when choosing a destination and why?
5. What made you choose Gambia?
6. What do you appreciate about in The Gambia? Pros & Cons.
7. How do you see Gambia as a tourism destination?
8. What have you done so far and what do you plan to do?
9. How much money have you estimated to spend on excursions?
10. What kind of excursions do you enjoy the most?

The average length of an interview was 30 minutes and in total we interviewed 30 tourists from varying age groups and from different countries. Here's what we learned from them.

100 percent of the interviewees mentioned that their dream holiday was in a sunny and warm place. Different aged people thought differently about what the content of the dream holiday would look like. Older people on the spectrum leaned towards relaxing and learning about the history and culture, while the youngsters were more interested in activities such as the safaris and watersports. When asked what colors came to mind when describing their dream holiday the top three were: yellow, blue and green. Which represented the sun, the ocean and nature.

The vast majority were either happy or extremely happy about their holiday. Quite approximately half had come for relaxing and the other half for cultural experiences. Not a single person was unpleased with their hotel accommodation. Most of our interviewees were also daring enough to venture outside their hotel premises where the locals dwelled. Restaurants and taxis were used by everyone.

Everybody except for one couple had booked their tickets from the web. Thomas Cook, and TUI were without a doubt the biggest travel agencies used. A few couples had booked their flights and hotels separately by themselves. These were on the younger end of the scale. Families normally had planned their trip quite far ahead while others, regardless of age, had booked their trips spontaneously in the last minute. These were more adventurous tourist types who enjoyed longer excursions and more immersive excursions.

The biggest pull factor that made the travelers choose Gambia was the climate. Sun was mentioned by everyone. Novelty and a change of environment were also a key pull factor. Most people had had a magical esoteric feeling about Africa, and chose to visit The Gambia because it was a relatively safe, close, without a big gap in the time difference and culturally abundant.

All of the interviewees appreciated the warm and welcoming atmosphere. But at the same time the biggest negative element was the over eagerness of some of the merchants. Especially Finnish folks felt that their personal space was invaded frequently. Some found this extremely obnoxious, while others soon got used to it. From 30 people 25 found this the most negative aspect about the destination. The positive elements in order were: the weather, the people and the nature.

27 out of 30 saw potential in the growth of the destination. One gentleman had seen corruption in a school they visited, and pointed out that if the government could stop the corruption, the country's tourism sector would flourish. They also were very pleased with the standards of the hotels and did not believe that sex tourism would take over the destination.

Some of the interviewees had been in the country for weeks while others had just arrived when we got to interview them. Only a few travelers that had come for less than a 7 day mini holiday hadn't planned to go on any excursions. Their main purpose for them was to relax and enjoy the sun. A vast majority had either already been on a excursion, or planned on going for an excursion. Many had already bought an excursion from the travel agency while booking the trip or later after arriving the hotel lobbies, where their own tour operator would be offering the tours. The amount to be spent on excursions wasn't specific, rather the tourists picked tours without thinking too much about the budget. When asked to estimate the percentage of their "pocket money" budget, they'd use on excursions, they mostly answered 50 percent. This meant that they'd use around 50 percent of their pocket money to activities that interested them versus spending it on restaurants, shopping etc. This question wasn't formulated very well and might have been a bit too intrusive, but still provided interesting data.

When asked about what kind of excursions they liked the most, the answers varied drastically. Older people enjoyed slow-paced, historical, cultural, high-end/luxurious and stress free tours. Younger people were keener on adventurous trips, such as safaris, watersports, group-activities and meeting likeminded people. While the older end of the spectrum people wanted to be more passive on the excursions, younger folks wanted to engage in the surroundings and people. The older the people got the more emphasis they had on education and learning on the trips, while the younger they got the weight was more on entertainment and fun.

We believe that the reliability of the research is quite sound, excluding the question nine, where the interviewees are asked about their budget. This question might have been too personal taking in consideration that money is a sensitive topic. Nevertheless, some insight was extracted from this, such as, people rarely plan the money they put to excursions and would rather buy them felt like it. The reason why we believe that the research's reliability is quite good, is because there was no apparent reason for the interviewees to hold back on their answers.

The validity on the other hand could have been better. The reason for this was that the questions were too generic. Still a lot of knowledge was gained for the future marketing endeavors. The target group was rightly selected since, we got to interview the tourists who had made their buying decisions to visit Gambia after being influenced by marketing.

The interviews were very insightful and provided us with a better understanding of the tourism sector and also revealed what the visitors want to experience. After listening to more than 15 hours of their opinions we know have good tools to start developing the future packages and start promoting the country as a destination.

4   Discussion

We still need another trip to the country to establish the company and finalize few other packages. During this project we solely focused on The River Gambia Cruise, and did not have the time to familiarize with the other attractions well enough to be able to offer them on a professional level. The next journey is set on Feb. 2019 – Mar. 2019 to build 5 - 6 more packages.

All in all the project was a very eye opening experience on entrepreneurship. We now know what it takes to start-up an inbound travel agency in The Gambia and for that matter anywhere. Through trial and error we managed to inject ourselves into the tourism industry of the country and succeeded in creating our own unique product, sell it to strangers and create value for us, them and everybody involved. We made great connections, met good people and learned unforgettable lessons. The journey wasn't quite what we expected, but without a doubt worth it. In the end the workload was three times greater than we had initially expected.

The business model canvas was a helpful tool in visualizing all the aspects of the venture. It was very useful in concentrating on ideas that weren't clear and develop the aspects of the business that otherwise would not have been paid much attention to. By using it we were able to project our ideas into a concrete tangible document. We learned how interconnected all the aspects of a business can be in reality. If we could change something we did during the project it would be to not assume the customer segment, but research it well beforehand. We did the mistake of believing that there would be an abundance of young travelers (Leroy & friends) when in reality they were the smallest group of all visitors in the country. We had to change our customer segment to families (Steve & the family) which resulted in affecting most of the other blocks of the business model canvas. That's why it is extremely important for any business to have a good understanding of their customer segments, because changing it will greatly impact your business operations.

Another great lesson we learned was the power of focus. By focusing our efforts on one product and giving it our undivided attention we managed to make it better in quality compared to having 3 or 4 products that would not have reached the same standard. By creating a one longer excursion that comprised of bigger groups our final product became more standardized, cost effective and employed people in a sustainable way. Before arriving to the country we thought of getting groups of two or three and take them to the Monkey Parks and other easily accessible attractions. This would not have been as challenging and would have left us with less in the end. In the beginning of the project we did not imagine organizing such a complex tour that would include other staff members, deposits, contracts, dozens of emails, arranging items and using three different vehicles.

There were times when we thought that the obstacles were too great to overcome. After all we knew next to nothing on the practicalities, attractions, hotels, and tourism behavior of the country. It took us over a month to even develop the right package, but in the end it was definitely worth it. The final product was stronger and the perfect tour to sell, since the River Gambia wasn't easily accessible for the tourists. Thus the biggest learning point we can take out of the project is not to give up when in uncertainty. Working towards your goals will eventually reward you if you can stand the pressure. We can now return to the country with a good knowledge on the tourism sector's behavior and put together a few more good packages to create our TourayTravels Package list. Shortly after this and the administrative tasks we're ready to start our marketing campaigns on the Finnish travel markets.

We would like to thank the whole staff of SeneGambia Beach hotel for allowing us to fulfill our project. They were happy to hear that everything went nicely and that the customers were satisfied. Without them this project would not have got the level we intended. Also we'd like to thank Mr. Njie from the Tourism and Hospitality school of Gambia for inspiring us to create the River Cruise and the whole staff of Edris from the harbor. And of course a huge thank you goes to our lovely neighbor and the whole Sonko family who helped us preparing the delicious shrimp soup which we will never forget. Thank you Gambia and most importantly thank you for our school HAAGA-HELIA UAS and Marika Alhonen for allowing us to dive in our own project and go explore our chances on creating a startup business in another country. Thank you for our family, friends and everyone who was a part of this project. TourayBrothers out!

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Appendices

Appendix 1. TourayTravels Budget sheet

			Budget sheet for TourayTravels				
						€ rate/GMD	
						58,00 €	
Revenue							
Name	Amount of passengers	Price/person GMD	Price/person €	Group discount/person GMD	Amount of group discounts	Total excursion revenue GMD	Total revenue €
Excursion 1	7	3 000 GMD	51,7 €	1000	7	14 000 GMD	241 €
Excursion 2	8	3 000 GMD	51,7 €	1000	8	16 000 GMD	276 €
Excursion 3	7	3 000 GMD	51,7 €	1000	7	14 000 GMD	241 €
					Total revenue	44 000 GMD	759 €

Excursions 1	Costs GMD	Amount	Total GMD	Total €
Boat rent	3 000 GMD	1	3 000 GMD	52 €
Food per person	50 GMD	7	350 GMD	6 €
Beverages	100 GMD	7	700 GMD	12 €
Transportation	200 GMD	2	400 GMD	7 €
Fishing rods	50 GMD	7	350 GMD	6 €
Baits/person	40 GMD	7	280 GMD	5 €
Variable costs	3 440 GMD		5 080 GMD	88 €

Excursions 2	Costs GMD	Amount	Total GMD	Total €
Boat rent	3 000 GMD	1	3 000 GMD	52 €
Food per person	50 GMD	8	400 GMD	7 €
Beverages	100 GMD	8	800 GMD	14 €
Transportation	200 GMD	2	400 GMD	7 €
Fishing rods	50 GMD	8	400 GMD	7 €
Baits	40 GMD	8	320 GMD	6 €
Variable costs	85 510 GMD		5 320 GMD	92 €

Excursions 3	Costs GMD	Amount	Total GMD	Total €
Boat rent	3 000 GMD	1	3 000 GMD	52 €
Food per person	50 GMD	7	350 GMD	6 €
Beverages	100 GMD	7	700 GMD	12 €
Transportation	200 GMD	2	400 GMD	7 €
Fishing rods	50 GMD	7	350 GMD	6 €
Baits	40 GMD	7	280 GMD	5 €
Variable costs	25 000 GMD		5 080 GMD	88 €

Total variable costs				267 €

Fixed costs	Costs GMD	Amount	Total GMD	Total €
Phone bills	1000	2	2000	34,5 €
Drinks at meetings	60	12	720	12,4 €
Car costs	200	14	2800	48,3 €
Office equipment	500	2	1000	17,2 €
Vouchers	50	4	200	3,4 €
Cab fares	75	10	750	12,9 €
Total fixed costs			7470	128,8 €

Total Revenue				759 €
Variable costs				267 €
Gross Margin				491,7 €
Fixed costs				128,8 €
Profits				362,9 €

GM %				64,82
Critical point				198,7 €