

Service Design for strategic decision making, a Case Study



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<p>In the recent years, the online has taken a central place in human interaction. From merely social interaction, to entertainment, all human interaction is gradually becoming part of the web.</p> <p>In this context is that different kinds of business have started to shape themselves in new ways in this space that has appeared thanks to the internet and the technology that it has become readily available for users all around the globe.</p> <p>One of said business is Company X, a new player in the video sharing platform market, it is coming in with the appeal of offering 360-degree videos dedicated to specifically to travel.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this research is composed of the Online Community Life Cycle Theory, a framework initiated by the work of Alicia Iriberry and Gondy Leroy and that encompasses online communities as living organisms that have a predetermined life cycle which can indicate key aspects and actions to take regarding community building. On the other hand, Service Design provides with tools needed to understand users and generate answers to their needs.</p> <p>Qualitative research was chosen to gain deep understanding of the user experiences, with some quantitative methods added to gain access to a bigger share of the user base.</p> <p>The study provides with some conclusions regarding the approach that might be taken to kindle the user base and revealed certain issues that Company X might be dealing with.</p> <p>This project started in April 2019 and ended on November 2019.</p>	
Keywords Service Design, Virtual Communities, Online Communities,	

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1 Introduction

Due to NDA in this study we will refer to the Commissioner as Company X.

In the new and wild world of the internet, there are many platforms that cover different necessities for different users. From expanding their networking capabilities to simply go and lipsync to their favorite songs for fun. In this landscape is that one of the most important functions that users look for is video streaming. “An image is worth a thousand words” is a very true statement for many of us people, let us imagine then how many words a video is worth then (Fan et al., 2019).

In this context is that video streaming platforms have gained traction offering to their users tools and a place where to share their creations. These platforms originated plenty of communities due to the wide variety of content that can exist in them (Autio et al., 2013) (Fisher, 2019).

Between these communities is that Company X originates, seeing that new technology has been developed, namely immersive goggles that allow for a 360° experience, it aims to get their users a look into travel experiences that have never been seen before, while in the meantime generating value (Gänsluckner et al., 2017) for their partners/sponsors and investors using their native content.

In this context is that the authors inspired by the growing importance of community generated business and the development of new technologies that call for further understanding and delimitations, start this study with the aim to apply different theories in an effort to provide tools for Company X's success.

In the first place, the company will be presented to the extent possible due to the aforementioned NDA, what they do, what they are aiming for and their business model will be explained in order to provide with further understanding to the reader. Furthermore, the environment in which Company X is a part will be described for contextual purposes.

In the second place, the different theoretical framework theories from which this study case will be approached from will be presented. Design Thinking, what it means as a framework, the tools and limitations it has and what it allows as a theory will be presented. To further our understanding and narrow the spectrum of this case, other theoretical aspects will be taken into account in this chapter as well. Video sharing platforms, what they are and how they came to be, and community theory will be introduced to enable the reader to follow onto the discussion.

To finalize the theoretical framework, the Online Community Lyfe Cycle theory will be introduced to aid in understanding what are we dealing with when trying to build a community in an online setting, how it can be different from a normal community and what are the characteristics of each stage.

In the third place, the methodology will be presented. The reasons for choosing a qualitative research approach and why certain ways of gathering data were chosen over others will be explained and justified.

Finally, the results will be presented and analysed to understand the situation and potentially provide Company X with pathways to enhance their results and thus attaining the levels of development they are searching for.

2 Background

Before moving into the Theoretical Framework, let us all take a closer look to the Commissioner. The following chapter introduces Company X in further detail, giving an overlook of who they are, their business approach and what they are trying to implement.

Company X is an up and coming company that is aiming to make travelling available to anyone, no matter the challenges the individual has, be it money, time or physical condition. Regarding this, their founder states:

“A couple of years ago when I first experienced VR glasses, I was stunned! Such an amazing way to experience new things and feel like I really would be there. I immediately thought of my godmother and her work with patients with disabilities. We could bring the world to them.

At Company X, we believe that every person deserves to experience the world and that the lack of money, time or physical capabilities should not be a roadblock. “

- Founder and Chairman of the board

Geared towards this objective, the company provides a platform for uploading and reproducing 360° videos, in which accompanied by a traveller host on site, anyone can get anywhere and experience travelling using the new technologies we have at hand.

With this in mind, the company is trying to build up a community with the same interest around the platform they themselves provide.

2.1 Business Concept

In today's entertainment landscape, there are endless ways to shape it. Entertainment is tailor made and, in many ways, niche. This is made easier by the possibilities the Internet and technology provide facilitating the distribution of said entertainment forms. Ranging from comedy, gameplay videos, recipes and the popular tutorials, the onlinescape has become with no doubt in an endless fountain for entertainment seekers, and not only that, but one that can cater to as different tastes as there are people (50Minutos, 2018).

In this context is that we find one of the most effective ways to leverage people's attention through using one of the most successful and known new technologies. Be all welcome to video streaming, a technology that enables users to broadcast content, captured with

camera devices through an Internet enabled device. The viewer receives content, be it either in real time or to be reproduced later on.

2.2 Advertisements

Anyone active in the Internet is already familiar with the ads that appear while a video is reproduced on any Video Sharing Platform. These ads might seem a nuisance to the viewer, but they are the main tool that content creators have in the video streaming world for financially supporting their work. The fee is usually determined by the length of the video, and advertising companies normally pay per click (Asdemir et al., 2012).

Although everyone is familiar with ads, there is more to them than what the average user would think. Recently the internet has been separated into two main lines of advertising: Native ads and Traditional (or banner) ads. The latter is the one anyone would be familiar with, the ads we have described up to this point. The second category, Native ads, are a very different sort of campaign altogether. Native ads resemble normal video content and they are made in a tailored way, which takes a long time of research and use storytelling as a more complex narrative to deliver the message aimed for. This means the Native ads mimic quality content, the type of content viewers would follow until the end of the video (Wang et al., 2018).

Here is where Company X is aiming to put its mark, while not quite a Native ad, the aim of Company X is to provide organic content that seamlessly and effortlessly leads the viewer to the advertised content, this by using user created content from the site as a means to the campaigns. The unexplored land in between a Traditional ad and a Native ad is where the aim is directed.

2.3 Sponsors

Sponsorships come with the territory when a Content Creator is successful. But how does a site owner earn revenue? Sometimes, brands may approach a Content Creator directly, reaching a mutual financial agreement. On the other hand, a Site Owner can approach brands with the promise that in their platform, the top 10 users can endorse their product during a fixed number of video sessions. This saves the brand money and time, and it leaves the Site Owner as the middleman. This of course, means that the Site Owner can liaise the deal with a fee in between. A revenue share agreement would make most sense

in such a case, where the advertiser would pay a fixed sum per click, which the Site Owner would then share with the Content Creator in a pre-decided ratio (De Jans et al., 2018).

2.4 The Struggle and Objectives

Company X as an up and coming platform for video streaming, it has to deal with manifold challenges in order to insert itself in the market it is aiming for. There are plenty of different platforms for streaming and sharing video, and some of them have 360° video capabilities. In order to situate itself and differentiate itself from the competition, Company X has tried different strategies to catch the attention of their potential viewer public, and while this has been achieved with different levels of success with the use of different tools in different campaigns and towards different target groups, it still stands that traction has not been achieved and the conversion rate per user remains under the goals they set up for themselves.

The goal of this study is to identify the possible challenges users are encountering when accessing Company X's content, to facilitate their navigation and engagement in Company X's website.

Besides this and with the aim of generating the traction needed for Company X to succeed is that the need for a community to thrive has been identified. Towards this goal is that tools for community facilitation, a space for it to exist and incentives for users to interact between each other will take place.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Service Design

What is Service Design?

Defining Service Design can be challenging and confusing due to it being a new field of study and, as multi-faceted as it is, the answer does not come as easily and naturally as one might be inclined to think. In fact, the answer to this question can be tackled in many ways.

According to Moritz (2005) "Service Design is rooted in design thinking, and brings a creative, human-centered process to service improvement and designing new services". In the design thinking process the problem is approached from a Design perspective, which provides the problem solvers with tools characteristic from the Design discipline, such as empathy, experimentation and iteration, centered on the customer/user point of view and also considering other actors, like the staff members. This opposes the way in which services have traditionally being designed considering mainly the providers' point of view

Moreover, "Service Design helps organizations see their services from a customer perspective. It is an approach to designing services that balances the needs of the customer with the needs of the business, aiming to create seamless and quality service experiences" (Stickdorn et al. 2018). This approach allows decision making based on data of what customers' real wants and needs are instead of companies making risky bets on what they guess will be a successful choice.

Additionally, "through collaborative methods that engage both customers and service delivery teams, Service Design helps organizations gain true, end-to-end understanding of their services, enabling holistic and meaningful improvements" (Stickdorn et al. 2018). In service design multi-disciplinary teams collaborate along with customers aiming to cover as many points of view as possible to gain an understanding of a situation in the most complete way possible, and with this information deliver creative solutions that can be implemented to add value to a service. It is important to state that the service is considered at its full, so the changes are not just cover solutions to patch isolated problems on the service process. For the improvements to be meaningful it is necessary to understand the user's needs beyond what is noticeable at first sight, sometimes it is necessary to identify needs that even users are not aware of.

In the 2018 book “This Is Service Design Doing: Applying Service Design Thinking in the Real World”, by Adam Lawrence, Jakob Schneider, Marc Stickdorn, and Markus Edgar Hormess, the authors propose that there are six Service Design principles:

1. Human-centered: Consider the experience of all the people affected by the service.
2. Collaborative: Stakeholders of various backgrounds and functions should be actively engaged in the service design process.
3. Iterative: Service design is an exploratory, adaptive, and experimental approach, iterating toward implementation.
4. Sequential: The service should be visualized and orchestrated as a sequence of interrelated actions.
5. Real: Needs should be researched in reality, ideas prototyped in reality, and intangible values evidenced as physical or digital reality.
6. Holistic: Services should sustainably address the needs of all stakeholders through the entire service and across the business.

Furthermore, in the book “This is Service Design Thinking: Basics, Tools, Cases” (2012), authors mention principles that resemble strongly the ones before mentioned, the first principle is service design being “user-centred”. In this case "User" is referencing anyone that is making use of the specific service system that is being studied/developed, this might include not only customers but even the company’s employees. This is why human centered will be preferred, due to its inclusion of everyone that is involved in the service system, clearly stating that human includes service providers, customers, and all other relevant stakeholders.

“Collaborative” and “iterative” come from the principle “co-creative” in this is service design thinking. The service exists with the participation of customers, and is created by a group of people from different backgrounds. In most cases, people tend to focus only on the meaning of “collaborative” emphasizing the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of service design, but ignored a service only exists with the participation of a customer. Therefore, in the definition of new service design principles, the "co-creative" is divided into two principles of "collaborative" and "iterative". "Collaboration" is used to indicate the process of creation by the entire stakeholders from different backgrounds. "Iteration" is used to describe Service Design as a repetitive process that keeps evolving to adapt to the changes of business posture (Stickdorn et al. 2018).

“Sequential” means that service need to be logically, rhythmically and visually displayed. Service Design is a dynamic process of a period of time. The timeline is important for customers in the service system. For example, when a customer shop at an online website, the first information showed up should be the regions where the products can be delivered. In this way, if the customer finds that the products cannot be delivered to their region, they will not continually browse the products on the website (Stickdorn et al. 2018).

Service is often invisible and occurs in a state that the user cannot perceive. “Real” means that the intangible service needs to be displayed in a tangible way. For example, when people order food in a restaurant, they cannot perceive the various attributes of the food. If we play the cultivation and picking process of vegetables in the restaurant, people can perceive the intangible services in the backstage, such as the cultivation of organic vegetables, and get a quality service experience. This service also helps the restaurant establish a natural and organic brand image to customers (Moritz, 2005).

Thinking in a holistic way is the cornerstone of Service Design. Holistic thinking needs to consider both intangible and tangible service, and ensure that every moment the user interacts with the service, such moment called touchpoint, is considered and optimized. Holistic thinking also needs to understand that customers have multiple logics to complete an experience process. Thus, Service Design should think about each aspect from different perspectives to ensure that no needs are missing (Fayard et al., 2017).

3.2 Why is Service Design important?

Customers nowadays have a full set of tools to make an informed purchase decision as a result of the digital revolution of the last decade. People can access through their phones to advertisements, marketing campaigns using “influencers” (public personalities in whom their audience trust), reviews and optimized logistics that sometimes make easier to buy a product or service from a country on the other side of the world using internet than going to the store in the same city (Stickdorn et al. 2018). As a result, it is not possible to just aim to cover the basic customer’s needs but it becomes mandatory to add extra value to what is offered so organizations can stand out against competition (Moritz, 2005).

For companies it is better from a resources point of view to identify the possible struggles sooner than later. When Service Design is used on the service creation process, an idea

serves as a starting point for the creation of a prototype which is tested to help find problems. This process is repeated as many times as needed to refine the prototype until it can be introduced to customers, a practice also known as iteration (Stickdorn et al. 2018).

Service Design is an efficient way of uniting all departments within a company. The bigger the organization, it is more likely that different departments develop their own way of working so communication between them can be ineffective. When trying to solve an issue with only one of these groups, the generation of new ideas is less likely to happen and the solution would be missing other important stages of the service process that are part of other department's responsibilities. With Service Design all stakeholders are taken into consideration and mapped so it is easier to get a full perspective of the service process, which translates into a better understanding of the problems and more effective solutions to them (Stickdorn et al. 2018).

3.3 Tools

3.3.1 Customer journey

A Customer Journey is a tool in which a narrative is built based on the service experience process from a user's point of view. It describes all the steps (Touch Points) of their experience including what they do, think and feel while they interact with the service process. It is important to mention that empathy is key to build a reliable Customer Journey. It needs to include all the details, high and lows of the experience (Miller & Flowers 2016).

This tool allows designers to understand the user's experience and identify elements that are working correctly and also stages in which the user struggles and can be improved, also known as Pain Points (Brand et al. 2015).

A Customer Journey, most of the time, is not based on a single user's experience. It is built based on information compiled from customer research, using a Persona to contextualize the narrative based on its values, needs and interests (Miller & Flowers 2016).

Mapping through a Customer Journey can be used in all stages of the design process. At the beginning, it acts as a diagnose tool to get a clear understanding of the current state of the experience users are going through and later on, it can help to imagine and ideate

what the experience may be like after applying modifications to the Touch Points (Miller & Flowers 2016).

3.3.2 Service Blueprint

While a Customer Journey exposes the front end of the user's experience, a Service Blueprint goes deeper identifying all the different layers composing the service's structure. From the policies and budgets that set boundaries to the company, through all internal actors and the system that support their work, until the front end in which the user directly interacts with the service (Miller & Flowers 2016).

A Service Blueprint is important to connect all the levels in an organization to get a clear understanding of how they interact and affect other layers of the service process and to visualize the inner workings of how the customer experiences are actually produced (Miller & Flowers 2016).

Service Blueprints are organized mainly in five levels, which are:

1. **Physical Evidence:**

In this level are registered all props and places that the user encounter during their Customer Journey. It also includes all signage, products or physical locations used or seen by internal employees.

2. **Customer Actions:**

Here are registered all actions that users need to perform in order to access to the service.

3. **Frontstage**

Activities, people and physical evidence that users interact with while experiencing the service.

4. **Backstage**

Elements that are necessary to offer a service that are not seen or experienced directly by users.

5. Support Process

Activities performed by the rest of the organization or external partners.

Service Blueprints help organizations to identify Pain Points that exist on the internal processes so meaningful changes can be made acting at the core of the problem (Miller & Flowers 2016).

3.3.3 Limitations of Design Thinking

Design thinking is a different approach to problem solving that started to be seen as the ultimate way to enable companies to attain success every time, the ultimate way to transform business, technology, management, products, services, and education (Fayard et al., 2017). Many articles were written regarding the rebellious and revolutionary way in which design thinking works, which of course led to criticism. Here we will address some of the most important ones.

Design thinking is not well defined

Design thinking is a flexible approach, which methods can be applied in problems of very different magnitudes and in different fields. This adaptability can lead to manifold definitions, interpretations and uses. The problem with using Design Thinking as an approach in this many instances is that the results can differ depending heavily on the paths and tools used in each situation (Stickdorn et al. 2018).

Design thinking is heavily process oriented

At the core of Design Thinking is creativity. Creativity stems from the process and different iterations that in time give rise to new insights and ways to do things. It is a balancing of rules and rule breaking. Organizations, trying to achieve change try to make this process into a rigid set of rules and ways to do, creativity does not happen in a setting where rules are at the core. Creativity is not efficiency oriented (Stickdorn et al. 2018).

Brainstorming is unreliable

In general co-creation means that non experts will be involved in the process. There is no other way to know if the ideas that are taken out of it are effective than to try them out, which can demand a large amount of resources (Leitch, 2016).

When to use design thinking and when not to?

Design Thinking is best suited for open ended processes. It is a methodology that comes from an exploratory approach, used when a problem is not completely understood and a solution is not simple and at hand. When a design thinking process starts, it is important to have a plan of the steps and methods needed to face the challenge. However, the outcome will still depend on the insights that will be gathered during the process itself, which means that new tools and paths might be needed. The results that were expected might not be the ones that will happen in the end, that is why having a set outcome in mind is not an ideal approach when using the design thinking paradigm (Leitch, 2016).

3.4 Video Sharing Platforms

Video sharing has shaped the way in which content is distributed on the Internet. By the end of 2018, 74% of all Internet traffic was video content (Wibbitz, 2018).

The video content revolution started in 1997 ShareYourWorld when was created as the first platform for online video storing, but to visualize content it was necessary first to download it (50Minutos.es, 2018).

Later, in 2005, YouTube is created, featuring a streaming technology which allows watching video content while it is loading without being saved on the user's device. The service has remained available free of charge since its launching and it does not require any external software use to upload, watch or share a video. Only four months after the website was launched, it allowed users to integrate a YouTube video player in any website. Sharing opportunities were endless (50Minutos.es, 2018).

YouTube allows people from all over the world to upload content, it offers an unlimited communication tool for them to share their experiences, show their daily life, support a political cause or share their knowledge.

At the moment, YouTube is by far the leading platform for video sharing and in second and third places are Facebook and Instagram with its feature IGTV, which allows uploading long duration videos (Wibbitz, 2018).

All Video Sharing Platforms have in common a social aspect. Besides from sharing and uploading content for it to be watched by other people, they also feature tools to react to the content in the form of “likes” and comments section. Content it is also meant to be shared by viewers with their contacts, via Social Media, which triggers a process known as Electronic Word of Mouth.

Electronic word of mouth or eWOM is a phenomenon that appears in a time of technological advances, mainly since the emergence of Web 2.0 and it has gained relevance for scholars due to its implications in customers’ and users’ behaviour (Aghakhani et al., 2018). eWOM has been defined by Gremler et al. as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”. Aghakhani et al. (2018) identify two types of eWOM, in the first place, an “implicit eWOM” when its expressed through non-textual format as in “likes”, “follows” that can be given to a brand or product in Social Media platforms or “check-ins” in physical locations that are registered by sites like Facebook. In second place, an “explicit eWOM” refers to a comment or review written in text that is visible to all public or partially visible to a user’s personal network. Both types of eWOM have been proven by studies (Aghakhani et al., 2018) (Fang, 2014) to have an influence on customers’ and users’ perceptions of brands and their products and services.

Regarding motivations to adopt eWOM, users are urged by creators to react to their content and to share it with others via Social Media to gain visibility and in some cases, generate revenue from the amount of views their content gets (Wang & Yang, 2015). Viewers tend to share videos with their social network mainly when they think the content is entertaining or useful to their contacts. They also share when they think content will be appreciated by recipients. Viewers also seek for some form of social gratification, affection or validation when sharing content (Wang & Yang, 2015).

Moreover, companies also make use of Video Sharing Platforms to create relevant content for their customers as part of their Content Marketing strategy, which is a method of marketing a product or service by providing customers with free content that is appealing to them and it is directly or indirectly related to what they offer. This content can be distributed in the form of blog and social media posts, images, websites, webinars and videos (Spinuzzi & Wall, 2018), and it also can rely on eWOM.

3.5 360° Video

360° video is audiovisual content where video is recorded from every angle at the same time to provide a complete view, using an omnidirectional camera. When reproducing this type of video, and opposed to the regular format where the perspective is set by the recorder, the viewer has the possibility to move the angle to explore different points of view, getting an experience close to what it would be to be present on the spot when the video was recorded. This characteristic in particular makes 360° videos a popular tool to share content related to experiences, such as showcasing a travel destination or the practice of extreme sports.

At the moment, most Sharing Video Platforms support 360° video reproduction. In March, 2015, YouTube launched support for uploading and reproducing this type of video on their website and mobile apps (Wired, 2015). Later the same year, in September, Facebook allowed playback of 360° videos on their website (TechCrunch, 2015). In March 2017 Vimeo also joined the trend and begun supporting 360° videos to be uploaded and reproduced using their tools.

3.6 User generated Content

User generated content is an important part of all video content that is uploaded to Video Sharing Platforms. As defined by Daugherty et al (2008), user generated content is “media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals” that it is shared online and it covers all areas, from educational content to entertainment. It is produced in different formats, such as blog posts, images, audio, etc. but in this case, we will focus on the content that is produced in video format. In general, user generated content can be branded or unbranded (Martin & Poch, 2015), which means that companies can sponsor content by exchanging some type of gratification to the creator for fea-

turing their brand in their videos. It is relevant to stress the fact that even if brands are present on the content and companies encourage its creation, they do not participate or interfere on the actual creative process (Martin & Poch, 2015).

As Niederhoffer et al. (2007) suggest, one of the main factors that allowed user generated content to flourish is the declining reach of many traditional media. Nowadays, people tend to use the internet to cover their needs of networking, searching for information, staying updated with the current news and entertainment.

Additionally, the advances in technology and the fact that they are becoming more and more accessible for most people, have reduced the perceived risk associated with generating content, as content creation now requires little time, expertise and resources (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). As Muñiz & Schau also suggested in 2007, "Software enabling the creation of audio, video, and animation content is now easily and cheaply accessible to regular desktop users", now this is even more extreme since it is possible to record and edit easily, and in semiprofessional quality, video content using a mobile phone.

As a result, and according to Jaffe (2005), "the market of user generated content has broadened and the continuous and rapid changes evident in technology are likely to continue driving this trend among consumers. The growth of content created by consumers is expected to persist in the future".

3.7 Virtual Reality

For centuries, philosophers have discussed to be able to define what is reality. According to the Oxford Dictionary, reality is "The state or quality of having existence or substance" and "Existence that is absolute, self-sufficient, or objective, and not subject to human decisions or conventions" (Lexico, 2019), but for the purposes of this research we will adopt the definition of reality by Gaskin et al. (2019) who define it as "the environment we naturally perceive without any additional information provided by communication technologies."

In like manner, Virtual Reality can be defined as "the experience of presence in an environment by means of a communication medium" (Steuer, 1992). Additionally, the phenomenon of modified perception, called immersion (Arnaldi et al. 2018) is a key element to consider (Gaskin et al., 2019) when narrowing the definition of Virtual Reality for the purpose of this research.

Virtual Reality, opposed to what most people would think, appears as early as the 1990s. Nowadays it is experiencing a revival and a process of democratization due to technology advances that make VR tools, like immersive headsets, more affordable. Moreover, the use of VR technologies has opened up to large-scale use (Arnaldi et al. 2018).

Virtual Reality technology has developed towards providing users with an improved immersive experience, increasing the sense of being present in a different environment (Gaskin et al., 2019).

3.8 Communities

Community is a word that we use freely and without much thought, but at its core, the “simple” action of defining it is a multi-faceted problem. Let us take two different approaches to this task.

First and at our base we are social animals that require others in order to fully function (Sahney & Benton, 2008) In ecology, a community is a group or association of populations of two or more different species occupying the same geographical area and in a particular time (Grime et al. 2008). The term community has a variety of uses. In its simplest form it refers to groups of organisms in a specific place or time, for example, "the fish community of Lake Saimaa before human settlements".

On a deeper level the meaning and value of the community concept in ecology is up for debate. Communities have traditionally been understood on a fine scale in terms of local processes constructing (or destructing) an assemblage of species, such as the way climate change is likely to affect the make-up of grass communities. Recently this local community focus has been criticised. Robert Ricklefs has argued that it is more useful to think of communities on a regional scale, drawing on evolutionary taxonomy and biogeography, where some species or clades evolve and others go extinct. (Ricklefs, 2008)

In this sense we have to further understand that while communities in our human world essentially function in a similar way, there are some differences.

Towards the end of understanding how we form and what it means to be a community is that sociology directs its efforts. The foundational claim in this piece of work will be supported by how Emil Durkheim defines society and community. In Durkheim's sociology, and what is to make up the subject matter for sociology, is the existence of what Durkheim calls social facts. A social fact, as defined in *Rules*, is "a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him." (Durkheim, 1982) According to Durkheim, social facts have an objective reality that sociologists can study in a way similar to how other scientists, such as physicists, study the physical world. An important corollary to the above definition is that social facts are also internal to individuals, and it is only through individuals that social facts are able to exist. In this sense, externality means interior to individuals other than the individual subject. This leads to the seemingly paradoxical statement that social facts are both external and internal to the individual, a claim that has frequently been misunderstood and left Durkheim's work open to criticism.

To understand deeply how social facts function, it is important to understand that for Durkheim Society is not simply subjects that happen to share a geographical setting. Society is a complex interaction of ideas and ways to understand things and how to act upon them. Reality is the result of this complex interaction.

Therefore, what Durkheim refers as society is bigger than the simple addition of its parts and it cannot be analysed or measured by the existence of sole individuals.

Social facts, can therefore just be defined by social constructs for reality just exists in the interaction of those, through them individuals acquire particular traits, such as a language, a monetary system, values, religious beliefs, tendencies for suicide, or technologies, that they would never have had living in total isolation. This is what a community is made of.

3.9 Online Communities

According to Fisher (2019), in the last couple of decades, the concept of Online Community has gotten its own category in research, separating from other types of community theory. Online communities can be defined as Internet based groups of users who communicate and share content through virtual platforms, who gather around a common interest (Autio et al., 2013). They frequently interact and through these interactions, they build a social structure (Dahlander & Frederiksen, 2012). The advances in technology towards accessibility and user friendliness contribute to frequent interaction due to the Internet's

expanding reach and mobile connectivity development (Faraj et al., 2011). At the moment it is possible to find online communities growing around almost any topic, groups sharing content about hobbies, sports, situations (illnesses, retirement, pregnancy, etc.) and admiration towards public personalities, to name some of them (Füller et al., 2007).

Online communities depend on their participants' voluntary interaction and motivation to exist and develop (Faraj et al., 2011). In this regard, communities are completely dependent on their members to exist. This is why motivating them and making them feel as part of the community is paramount.

Online communities enable users to exchange and discuss ideas, share impressions and reach out for each other, this means that organizations can benefit from online communities heavily due to the ease of reach that these online platforms provide to anyone able to access them.

In order to benefit from an online community, organizations have to effectively participate in the community to the point of being perceived as part of it by its other members (Fisher, 2019). Users exchange information about their topic of interest frequently and freely, so when an organization, let us say a company, becomes part of that exchange, they can access valuable first-hand information about user's interests, opinions and needs. This information can transform into competitive advantages for the company (Fisher, 2019).

Benefits, Tactics, and Firm Attributes Underpinning Community-Based Advantage in an Online Community

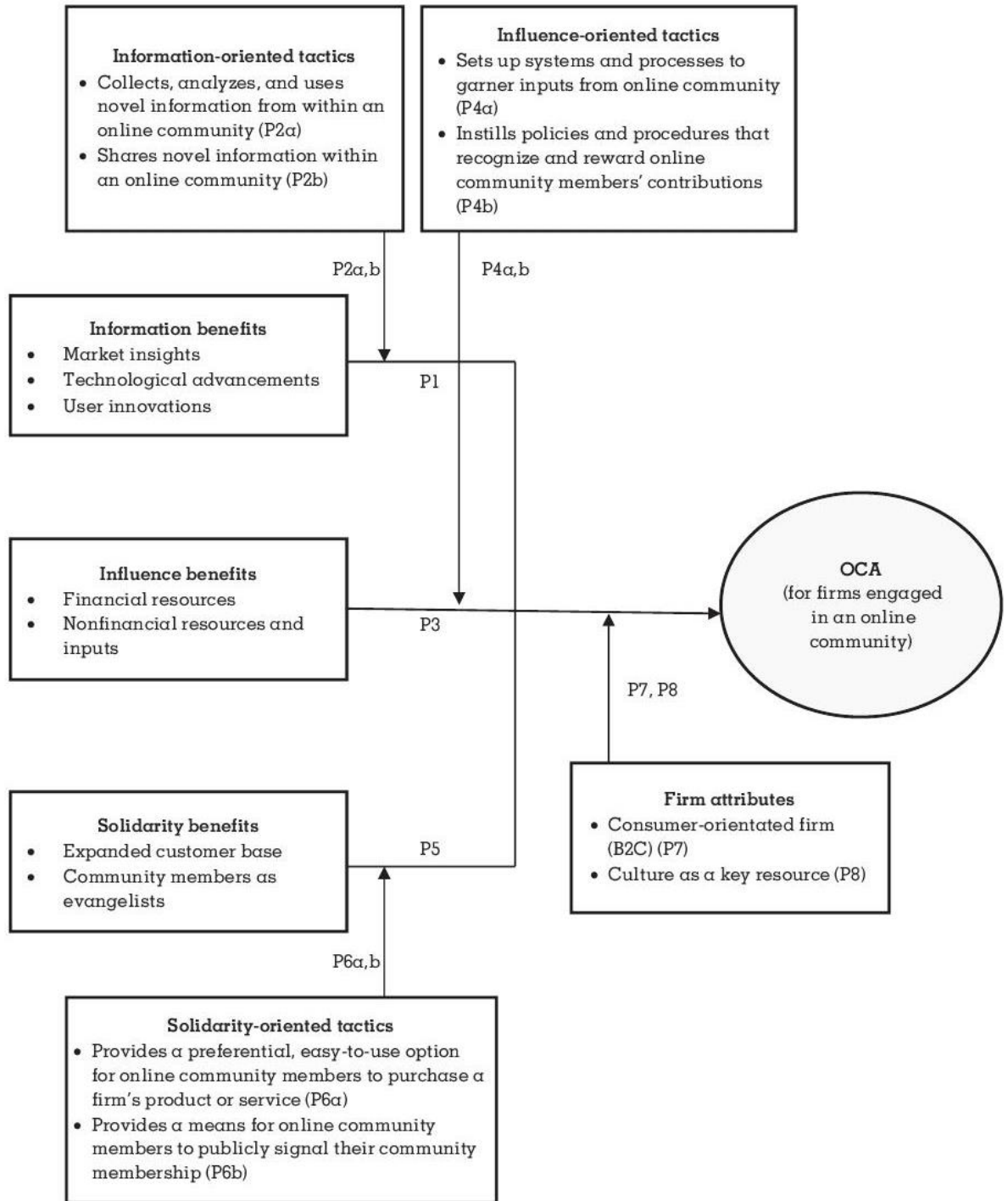


Figure 1. Benefits, tactics and Firm attributes underpinning Community-based advantage in an Online Community (Fisher, 2019).

To begin with, Online Communities help companies to generate visibility around them or their products and services, as Kane et al. (2014) suggest, “When individuals engage with a firm’s posts, others who are tied to the individual, but not necessarily to the firm, can see such interactions through notifications by the social networking platform”, highlighting again the relevance of eWOM for companies.

Additionally, companies can get market insights from interactions inside the Online Community. Users communicate with others their opinions about changing preferences and desires and the company being part of the community can also access this information. With this information, the company can improve their current services and products or can create new ones that meet their customer’s base current and future needs (Fisher, 2019). They can also spot new needs and markets that could lead to company growth (Autio et al., 2013).

Moreover, companies may access information that helps them develop solutions or improve technologies to make their products or services more efficient and to deliver them to users in a more effective way (Fisher, 2019).

As a consequence, and as Fisher (2019) proposes in his study, companies that insert themselves in new markets will increase their revenue, and when they invest in technology to improve their processes, it is possible for them to reduce costs that will increase margins. These two factors, increasing revenue and margins are elements that create value for the company and their shareholders.

3.10 Online Communities Lifecycle

Online communities are also subject to evolution. This can express itself in different ways, such as growth, development, change and death. In this light is that different scholars have started trying to come up with models that explain and predict said evolution.

For our work we will use Iriberry and Leroy’s 2009 Online Communities Lifecycle model and the modifications introduced by Richard Millington in 2013.

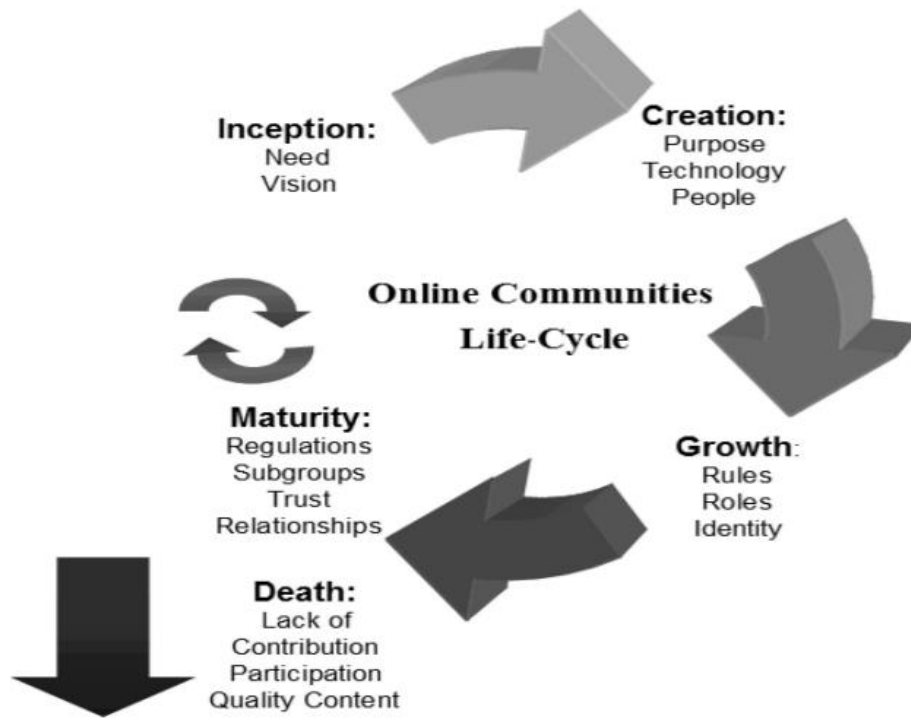


Figure 2. Online Communities Lifecycle (Iriberry & Leroy, 2009)

Stage 1: Inception

Inception begins when interaction is engaged with the target audience and it ends when there is a critical mass of activity and growth. Critical mass in this context means the quantity of community members and activity that enables the community to be self-sustainable and can exist without the direct involvement of the founders/company. The point of critical mass is defined by authors (Iriberry & Leroy, 2009) (Millington, 2013) as when 50% of activity is user generated without the direct involvement of any management.

The one and only objective of this stage is to achieve the self-sustainability state. In order to get to the point of self-sustainability it is needed to grow a small group of highly active members inside the community. Said group becomes in time the foundation that will carry on to become pillars of the community activity and growth (Iriberry & Leroy, 2009).

The most important activities to happen in this stage are:

- 1) Invite members to join the community
- 2) Initiate and sustain discussions
- 3) Build relationships

Potential Problems

The Inception stage can last from 0 to 9 months, according to the theory (Iriberry & Leroy, 2009) if it takes longer, there might be a conceptual or tactical problem to address due to the community not reaching the self-sustainability stage.

Stage 2: Establishment

This stage begins when the community reaches the point of being self-sustainable. Meaning that 50% or more of its activity and growth is self-generated. In this stage the rate of self-generated content and the rate of response of the community increases gradually (Millington, 2013).

The Establishment stage ends when the community itself is generating around 90% of the content and growth. In this stage a sense of community belonging, an identity, begins to exist. This is what eventually will lead to the next stage of the life cycle (Millington, 2013).

In this stage the role of the community manager begins to shift from micromanaging and generating interaction to macro level activities such as events that reach various members at the same time, all this directed to the growth and the bringing about of the sense of belonging (Millington, 2013).

Important activities of this stage are:

1. Referral and promotional growth, word of mouth
2. Scaling activity
3. Generate a Sense of community

Potential problems

Drops in growth or activity are major signs that there can be a problem. For example, if growth continues but activity starts to drop, it indicates the majority of members are becoming less active and the share of activity relies heavily in a smaller group of members. This might indicate that self-sustainability was still not achieved and maybe micromanagement is still needed.

Stage 3: Maturity

The Maturity stage is reached when the community itself is generating around 90% of the content and growth. In this stage a sense of community belonging, an identity, begins to exist. These indicators are measured through growth, activity, and sense of community metrics. The Maturity phase ends when the community has a highly developed sense of community, but the level of activity or sense of community amongst members has plateaued (Millington, 2013).

Most of the familiar Online Communities are in the Maturity phase of the Online Community Lifecycle. They are established, highly active, and have a highly developed sense of community. They also merit a lot of attention within their ecosystem (Millington, 2013).

In this stage activities are mainly focused on the macro level of management, generating activities and situations in which the majority of members of the community can partake. At this stage the long term starts to be of importance (Millington, 2013).

During this stage the Community might hit a plateau in its growth. This is a natural process when the community reaches its full potential, this means that the target audience was reached and is captive already. Furthermore, an activity plateau will happen. Members that have a strong sense of belonging will continue to dedicate themselves to the community (Millington, 2013).

At this stage the main goal is to sustain the levels of activity and continue to generate a sense of belonging in its members (Iriberry & Leroy, 2009).

Hitting the plateau, is in fact what this stage is about, becoming familiar and getting to know who the members are and why they are in this particular community (Millington, 2013).

During this phase, all growth will come from referrals/word-of-mouth and e WOM activity (such as sharing content/discussions, networking at events, or generally being a well known community within the sector), and potentially major promotional activity undertaken by the organization. The community manager helps facilitate the latter gaining publicity in major outlets and by developing a system by which all members feel a sense of ownership over areas of the community. This will involve ensuring the community is frequently mentioned with regards to its sector and also making the community have influence within its realm. For example, by releasing regular statements related to relevant issues within the

sector and working with Social Influencers, who are users with a large number of fans or followers, and who have compelling power in both social media coverage and consumer persuasion (Casaló et al. 2018) to implement desirable change within the sector.

Youtube, for example, frequently campaigns on behalf of its members. Even further, members run campaigns inside Youtube, giving the platform more visibility (Millington, 2013).

Important activities of the stage are:

1. Keep a sense of belonging
2. Hit a plateau in activity and growth

Potential Problems

At this stage the community instead of hitting a plateau, could potentially start to dwindle and eventually die out (Millington, 2013) (Iriberry & Leroy, 2009).

Stage 4: Mitosis or Death

This stage in the Lifecycle of an Online Community starts when the community sustains almost entirely by itself and becomes an entity that might continue indefinitely (Millington, 2013).

Mitosis is a stage that not all communities reach, not only due to a conceptual or tactical mistake or suboptimal approach, but due to simply not having enough members, due to mitosis needing the community to divide in different subgroups

It is important to understand that not all communities advance to mitosis. Smaller communities might reach the state of self-sustainability without ever reaching a point in which subgroups part become something of their own.

The main activities during this stage are:

1. Growth in different subgroups
2. Stimulate the different subgroups activities
3. Generate new subcommunities around different topics inside the community

Sense of community

The sense of community at this stage will dip before rising considerably. Past a certain stage, it is impossible for all members to feel a sense of connection with everyone. Breaking the community into smaller sub-groups helps sustain these connections. At this point, fewer people are regularly active in the community (Millington, 2013).

Community Managers should spend considerable time helping boost the sense of community in each of these groups. It is therefore important not to launch multiple groups at a single time, but to gradually increase the number of groups in the community.

Mitosis-phase tasks

During this phase of the community lifecycle, the Community Manager balances the role of sustaining a healthy community in the Maturity phase with developing self-sustaining groups.

Note with the tasks at this stage, as per the previous phases, there is a gradual shift from the Maturity level tasks to the Mitosis level tasks. This should not be an abrupt change. It may be possible not to split the entire community into sub-groups, just elements/people within the community.

Whilst the number of mitosis tasks feels light, it is a highly iterative process. This means, for instance, the amount of managing of sub-group leaders will steadily increase throughout the lifespan of the community (Millington, 2013).

Signs of development

As the community advances into the Mitosis phase of the Community Lifecycle, an increasing number of successful niche groups/topics should begin to be visible within the community. These should be independently run with only small assistance from the Community Managers.

Over time, these sub-groups should be organizing regular events, maintaining a regular content schedule, and become relatively self-sustaining, close-knit, entities within the community (Millington, 2013).

Potential dangers

As mentioned earlier, it is common for Community Managers to let their community become too big and too active without a proper structure.

Beyond a certain level of activity and a certain number of members it becomes difficult for all members to believe they can influence the community.

Past a certain number of active members in a community, it becomes impossible for a high level of familiarity to persist. Members will know fewer and fewer of the participating members. Therefore, the overall sense of community in the community begins to decrease. This often leads to less ownership over the community and eventually a lower number of participating members.

This is similar for the level of activity in a community. Once a community becomes too active, it becomes difficult for members to stay abreast of what is new and what is popular in the community. It becomes difficult to follow the overall narrative of the community. This is often referred to as 'information overload'.

A member that is used to catch up on 10 missed messages feels less motivation to catch up on 50, or 500 messages. It becomes harder to find the messages that will be of most relevance to that individual.

If data and monitoring are not part of the strategies to manage the community, potentially, it can result in the number of members gradually declining to a small group who retain a limited sense of community with one another.

Another potential danger at this stage is top-down community planning. Instead of reacting to interests which have risen naturally within the community, those that have clearly gained a high level of participation, the community attempts a top-down approach to try and facilitate multiple groups at once. This approach is not suited to community development.

In summary, firstly, creating multiple groups rapidly dissipates activity within the community. This can cause a sharp, uncontrolled, drop in the level of activity. Secondly, it can fail to develop any group to critical mass. Sub-groups need to be nurtured to advance past

the inception stage. It's important to develop these individually before making a drastic change at this stage (Millington, 2013).

4 Methodology

In this chapter, we will understand the different types of research approaches from a theoretical standpoint, then we will further our view in this specific research in the why's of the authors choosing of a qualitative research method. Moving forward, how data was used and in which ways the different theories presented in the theoretical framework will be used. How interviews and interviewees were chosen and how the analysis was done.

Finally, reliability, validity and their limitations will be stated.

4.1 Research methods

Any research first starts with something that needs to be answered, a question or a problem to solve (Altinay et al. 2016).

For different questions or problems approaches can differ, they depend on the kind of answer we are searching for, the insight that is being tried to get. In a wide sense there are two different research approaches: quantitative and qualitative methods, which in turn represent two different ways of understanding the world, namely positivism in the case of quantitative research and phenomenology in the case of qualitative research.

Both methods make possible for research to be conducted studies on different kinds of subjects , but to be able to choose the best possible method, the scholar needs to deeply understand his research problem, in order to know if the question at hand is answered through descriptive or numerical data. There is a possibility that the problem might be answered by any and thus, the problem requires open data. Then the researcher needs to evaluate the purpose or aim of the study, meaning that it might be that the study tries to generalize, understand or change something regarding the phenomenon (Altinay et al. 2016)

The main elements of quantitative data include that the data is gathered with structured questions, which can be analysed in a numerical form or with statistics (Myers 2009). This type of data enables researcher to generalise and forecast a phenomenon (Kananen 2013). Quantitative research can be divided into descriptive and experimental studies as suggested by Levent Altinay and his colleagues. In descriptive research, the purpose is to measure results without attempting to change it. In experimental study in

contrast, the purpose is to test hypotheses and the meaning is to change conditions. (Altinay et al. 2016)

In one hand quantitative research produces numerical data, qualitative research produces textual data. In this sense qualitative research is used the most when the research is conducted on a subject with little to no information, thus deeper analysis on new insights is needed to understand the phenomenon in a more thorough form.

A qualitative approach is called for when emotions, experiences and beliefs are at the core of the research. The aim is not to generalise but to describe what is being studied in the best way possible. (Altinay et al. 2016)

4.2 Interviewing as a research tool

Interviewing is a research tool/technique that collects information and experiences/feelings firsthand from people to whom the interview is conducted, the so-called interviewees. This tool helps the researchers to better understand attitudes, ways of thinking, behavior, opinions to be able to draw connections and/or conclusions. Interviews potentially can provide with rich narratives that can give premiere insights into the participants' experiences and through this, gain an understanding of wider group behavior.

Interviews should be used when the research is aiming to get valuable firsthand impressions and/or life experiences from people. It is an interesting method when the aim is to understand how people relate with certain event/situation, time period, brand, etc.

To successfully conduct an interview there are some factors to consider. First, the steps to plan the interview which can be organized as follows:

Step One: Find Interviewees

Determine what is it that you aim to learn from the interview and identify the group/segment of people that can provide with the richest data for the particular question you are trying to answer. It is of prime importance to match the scope of the research with the amount of people that are to be interviewed to provide the study with the necessary reliability. It is important to notify of any nuances to the interviewees to be sure that the nature of the interview is known by everyone beforehand to avoid any problems or misunderstandings.

Step Two: Record Information

It is important to be able to have the source of your information at hand. The interview can be recorded in a wide variety of methods, but regardless of that, the main issue at hand is that having a transcription, video, etc. gives the researchers the capability to go back to the information and analyze it in a deeper way or with fresh eyes. Besides this, the transparency that it gives for peers to be able to know where certain conclusion is drawn from, provides the research with further credibility.

Step Three: Questions

At this point there are some decisions to be made. Firstly, it is important to decide the type of interview you want to go forward with. There are two main ways to go about interviewing people for research purposes: Structured and Unstructured interview.

4.2.1 Structured Interview

This is also known as a formal interview, although this term is used more often to describe a job interview.

The questions in this interview style are intended to be used in a set order which the interviewer should not alter. This is done to enhance how easy it would be to replicate the situation in new settings/times, sacrificing flexibility for reliability.

In general, this interview style couples with close ended questions.

Strengths

1. As previously explained, structured interviews, due to the nature of their standardization are easy to replicate and test for reliability.
2. This interview style facilitates the ease with which interviews can be made. This means that as a tool it is easier to use which leads to not needing to train the interviewers extensively. Furthermore, the interviews can be done in a short span of time. All this means that a large sampling can be obtained in a cheaper way and in a shorter span of time (Cronin et al. 2009).

Limitations

1. Structured interviews are in many ways static. Meaning that no questions can be added or follow up questions changed on the fly. Schedule is absolute.
2. Lack of rich data. Due to the nature of structured interviews, it is difficult to go into detail and get richer information from the interviewees. This means that the data, while reliable, might not answer all the questions that the research is aiming for.

4.2.2 Unstructured Interview

Also called informal interviews. This interview style resembles more a “guided conversation” from which rich data can be obtained. It is highly story oriented.

Interview schedule is not hard set and can be modified by the interviewer if the need arises. Besides, the interview will contain open ended questions that can be used at any point, this gives the interview flexibility. Questions might be used or just ignored depending on the specific interviewee or information that is being looked for (Cronin et al. 2009).

Strengths

1. Interviews in this style, as mentioned before, are more flexible. Questions can be adapted, swapped or just not used. Besides, questions can be added if the interviewer thinks it is appropriate.
2. This interview style is ideal to generate rich qualitative data using open ended questions that let the interviewee explain further their processes and how they relate to their own reality. Depth is the most important asset that this type of interview provides. (Gill et al., 2008)
3. Validity is increased, this due to the opportunity unstructured interviews give to go in search for deeper understanding, asking for further clarification.

Limitations

1. Time consuming, due to the sheer quantity of data that can be obtained from one interviewee. Besides this, it is difficult to classify information and get the important parts from the less important ones.

2. Training an interviewer can be taxing. Time and money is needed to have an interviewer that can react and steer during the interview in the best possible ways.

There is as well an in-between of both styles of interview, in which some reliability is sacrificed, and some flexibility is sacrificed, this style is the semi-structured interview. There is a structure to it and questions appear in a certain order as in the structured interview, but in these cases, the order might be altered or new follow up questions added.

Step Four: Interview the Participants

In this step, the actual interview takes place. Firstly, sit down with your interviewee/s in a previously selected safe space, where they feel comfortable and relaxed. At first, it is important to start small to get them in the right mood to answer your questions. This can be done with small talk and ice breakers. Secondly, when conducting the interview and depending on which type was chose, pay attention to the key points of each interview style. If conducting an unstructured interview, then have all your topics ready and be prepared to have an open dialog and follow up questions to what they answer. If you are conducting a structured style of interview, then have in mind the importance of sticking to your questions and the order they were made to appear in, so that you repeat the same with all the interviewees.

Step Five: Go back to Research

Interviews are normally just a tool in a pool of other used tools in a bigger effort to gather data. They provide rich, insightful data that is nevertheless anecdotal relating how people feel and act. Interviews provide insights from the insiders, the people you are interested in. However, interviews need to be cross referenced with other data gathering tools or studies that help with filling gaps. This means going back to researching (The Academic Triangle. 2016).

Presenting results

It is of great importance that data is dealt with in a way that is understandable. This means that it must be organized and put into a way that can be understood not only by the researchers, but by the readers. This can take many forms, and there is a degree of disciplinary variation in the presentation of data (Golden-Biddle et al. 1997). To use an example, while a thesis in marketing and one from social psychology will most likely use interviews as a way to approach the subject of study, and the data might even be analyzed in similar

ways, the results of said research will be presented in very different shapes and ways due to both researchers/teams are trying to answer very different questions. The representation of results that deal with experimental studies will as well have different ways of being represented, although in all cases the presentation will have an organization that will reflect:

- Aims of the research
- Method and framework

It is very important to note as well, that it is no mere description of the phenomenon what it is being looked for here, but a showing of correlations, interactions and how the data is relevant to answer a research question.

In qualitative research the discussion and presentation of data tend to be combined. This because it is a difficult task to present qualitative data in tables or numbers. It tends to be presented in words, which means there will be extensive quantity of written material to guide any potential reader through (Golden-Biddle et al. 1997).

For this reason, it is relevant that structure is clear, and no time is wasted in explaining every minute detail. Mention important parts, the key findings and the topics that are related to answering the research question.

A second tool that can be used to great effect in qualitative data presentation is to use visualization tools. This can be anything that allows the researcher to convey meaning in an effective way to the reader without the use of so many words. For example, an arrow can signify an implication, a double arrow a correlation, a circle can be a cycle, etc. Always keep in mind that the aim of visualization is to reduce the use of words while making the content easy to understand (Silverman 2005).

4.3 Automated Remote Research

Automated remote research is a quantitative research process in which relevant data is gathered using statistics that show relevant information about user's behavior online. With this tool it is possible to determine who is using a website and track their activities. This information is valuable to evaluate how the website is working and also to identify which is working and what could be improved on the site to meet user's interests and values (Harrington & Martin, 2012).

In this case, the Automated Remote Research tool used was Google Analytics with access provided by the commissioning company. We focused on data regarding age, gender, location, language and interests of the website's visitors, as well as the time they spent on the website and if they were first timers or returning users.

4.4 Personas

Once enough data from users has been collected, the creation of Personas is an effective tool to organize the information helping to identify groups of customers with similar backgrounds and values. More specifically, Personas are meant to help designers to focus on the human aspect of the users instead of describing groups based on their demographic similarities. This can be achieved by integrating qualitative findings to the quantitative data obtained from the research (Moritz, 2005).

Personas are user archetypes provided with a name, an image, a description of their life situation and interests, values, as well as their strengths and challenges. For designers this is a powerful tool to empathize with customers and be able to keep them in the center of the design process (Hanington & Martin, 2012).

In this case study Personas were chosen due to the Company X not knowing who their user base is. This calls for a tool that allows for narrowing of the community through characteristics, interests and needs that would be useful to address or could be made to help the development of Company X's influence through creation of directed content, the addition of features that the users call for or solutions to hurdles Company X might not be aware of.

5 Results

In this chapter, the results that were brought up by applying the different tools at our disposal will be presented. The main points will be organized in different sub-chapters to be easier to understand.

In the first place, the situation of Company X will be analysed under the lens of the Online Community Life Cycle, which will bring light over the current situation, how it came to be and what would be the next steps to follow.

5.1 Where are we

Company X started in October of 2016 as a platform in which people could share their 360 travel videos, in this stage the platform owners were supposed to invite new members and maintain their attention and engaged. This would be attained by initiating discussions and interactions that would make members participating and getting to know each other. Not only that but initiating conversation and being engaging is supposed to enable Company X to convert newcomers into recurrent users. It is important to note, that Company X directly asked the authors to take April 2019 as the beginning date for their operations and the present analysis. While the authors complied, it is important to note that under the Online Community Life Cycle Theory the initial situation does hold importance when determining the potential hurdles or steps to follow.

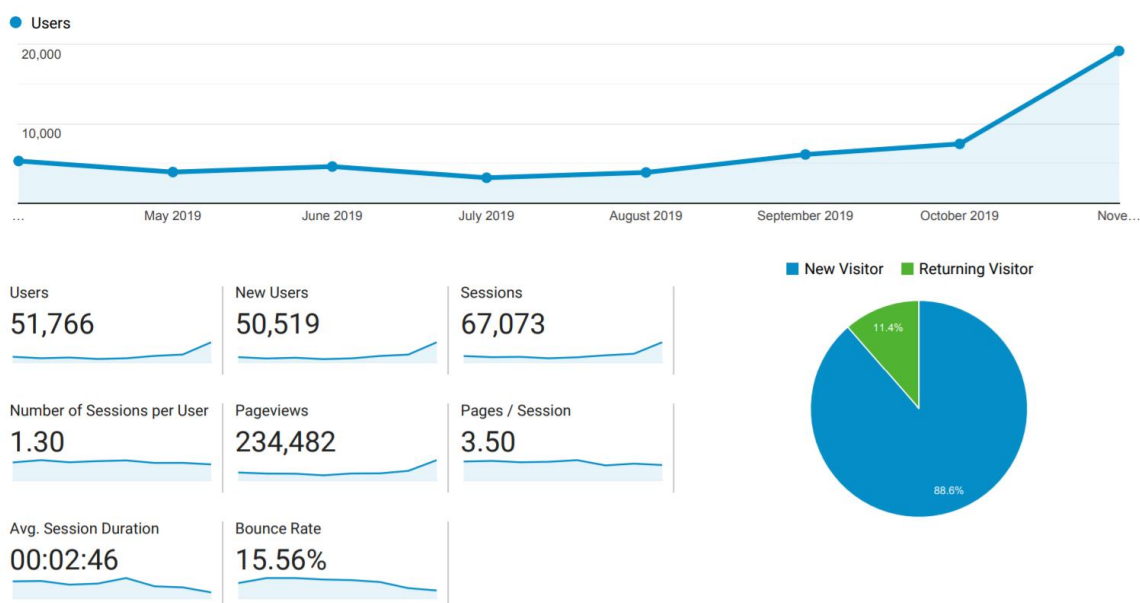
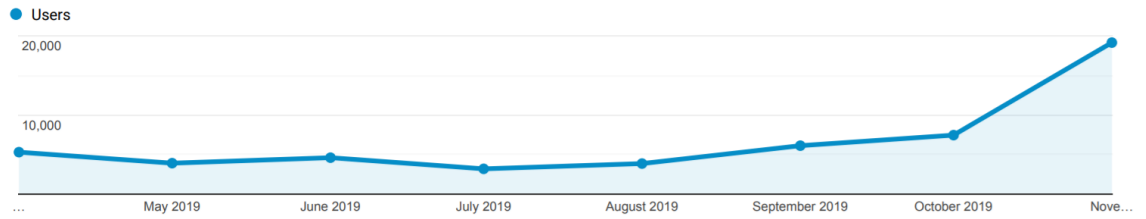


Figure 1 showcasing the users in the period Apr 2019 – Nov 2019



User Type	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions Goal 1: Visit the sign up page		
	Users	New Users	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages / Session	Avg. Session Duration	Visit the sign up page (Goal 1 Conversion Rate)	Visit the sign up page (Goal 1 Completions)	Visit the sign up page (Goal 1 Value)
	51,766 % of Total: 100.00% (51,766)	50,559 % of Total: 100.08% (50,519)	67,073 % of Total: 100.00% (67,073)	15.56% Avg for View: 15.56% (0.00%)	3.50 Avg for View: 3.50 (0.00%)	00:02:46 Avg for View: 00:02:46 (0.00%)	19.77% Avg for View: 19.77% (0.00%)	13,263 % of Total: 100.00% (13,263)	€0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (€0.00)
1. New Visitor	50,878 (88.61%)	50,559 (100.00%)	50,559 (75.38%)	13.66%	3.08	00:01:39	17.82%	9,012 (67.95%)	€0.00 (0.00%)
2. Returning Visitor	6,539 (11.39%)	0 (0.00%)	16,514 (24.62%)	21.38%	4.78	00:06:10	25.74%	4,251 (32.05%)	€0.00 (0.00%)

Rows 1 - 2 of 2

Figure 2 showcasing the differences between new visitor and returning visitor

Here it is possible to observe how 11% of the whole user base that has been flowing through the page is composed of returning users, the users that would be at the core of any community and that are the ones that any company that has a business model that requires traffic and an active community has to keep bringing in.

On the other hand the other 89% of users, are all potential recurrent visitors and community members, then again, we might be able to visualize why it does not happen through engagement.

Furthermore it is observable how sessions in general tend to widely vary from new visitor to a returning visitor, while the bounce rate, the ratio at which users leave the website on the first page they visited, is lower in the new visitors side.

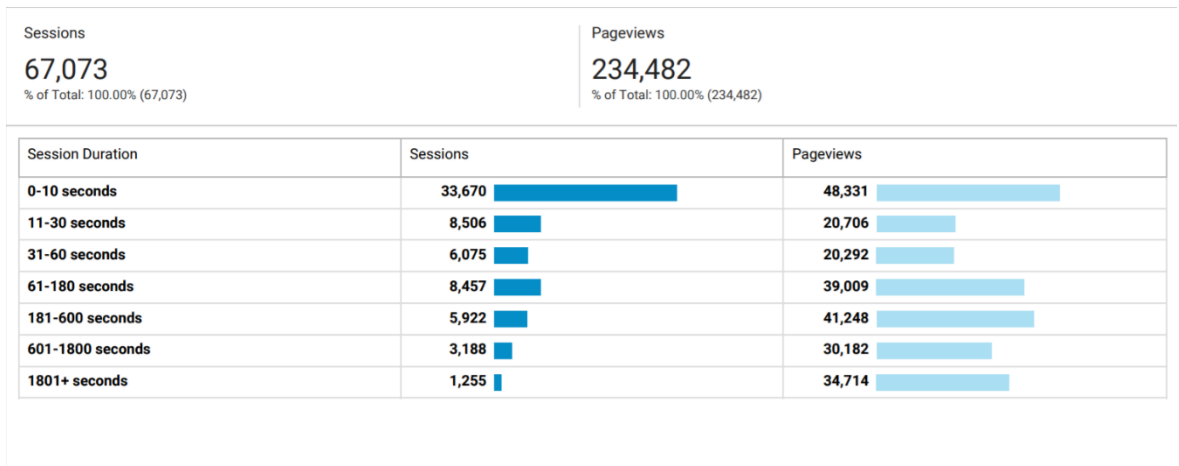


Figure 3 showcasing the session duration for all users

Data showing how long users stay in Company X's web page indicates that 56% of the users spent between 0-10 seconds on Company X's website, while 65% of users visited only one page per session and then exited the website. This means that the engagement attained by Company X's content likely does not attain the objective of keeping users on the website and thus, subscriptions are not being made.

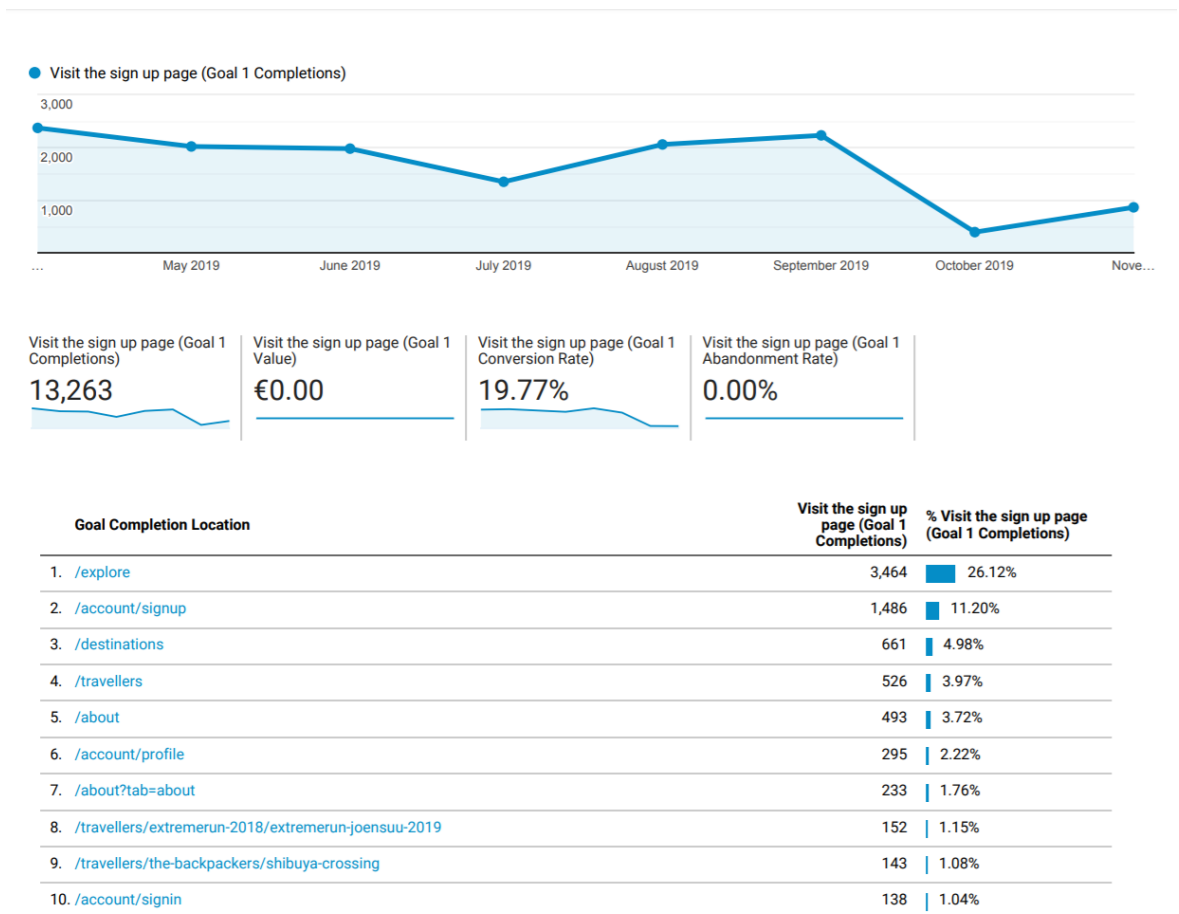


Figure 4 showcasing the amount of users that visit the sign up page

Data showcasing the quantity of users that get to the signup page, indicates that 19% of the users get to this stage. While only a 2% actually goes through with the process, this sustained ratio of subscriptions would assure a continuous growth, but this data is not accurately showing that, this only means that users get to this page, via landing, links or partners. From the 2% users that go through with the process, only 0.3% are the actual subscriptions that are being made.

Important to note is that at the moment there is no tool to follow all subscribers, in order to know their activities and how participative they are in the community.

Another important point is that the members that are most active in Company X's website are people invited for the purpose of catching other users, influencers and other personalities are the ones spearheading the views on the page. Furthermore, a following function is in place, function that facilitates engagement of creator and viewer, so that users become a captive audience. In this case the top followed channel reaches 10 followers, with the top channels getting between 3 - 5 followers and most having none.

Besides this, there is a comment function implemented in April 2019, said function facilitates interactions between users watching a certain video or following a certain creator, but the function has not been used in most of the cases and comments are made by the community moderators and creators.

With the data presented and under the lens of Online Community Life Cycle Theory, the most likely stage Company X is at currently is the insertion stage. Even though the content is mostly made by the community, it is not engaging for the users, interaction is not started and the tools at the users disposal are not being used.

5.2 Interviews

In this chapter the interview results will be presented. The interviews were made after having the results from the stage in which Company X is regarding Online Community Life Cycle. Interviews were tailored to assess the perception that users have about the platform and their service. Quotations of the interviewees will be used to correlate their answers to behaviors observable in the website.

Besides this the interviews will try to evaluate if Company X is doing the tasks that the stage they are at according to the Online Community Life Cycle requires.

Question 1 What made you come in the first time?

Most interviewees described that they found out through a radio announcement or social media advertisement.

Interviewee 3: I was browsing through Instagram when I stumbled on it. The site looked legit, so I clicked and liked what I saw. Went into a video of a girl I liked and that is when trouble started... It was so slow.

Interviewee 6: I was listening to Program X and the host started talking about this cool site that has people travelling and that you can be there with them with this cool cameras. I was up for it, so I just googled it and got in.

Question 2 What was your first impression when you entered the website?

All of the interviewees agreed that the looks of the site are appealing, and that navigation is not difficult. It was repeated that the content seemed interesting.

Interviewee 1: I really liked the colours and all the destinations! It was really interesting to be able to search places that I wanted to see and maybe want to visit one day.

Interviewee 7: The layout really called to me. It was very in my face and I liked it. I especially liked the location search, I didn't care so much for the people that hosted but for the places, so that was ideal.

Question 3 How easy to use is the website?

While most interviewees agreed that the site itself was easy to use, there were comments on the slowness of the download speeds and some about the amount of clicks to get to the desired content.

Interviewee 3: It is easy, but very slow. I really disliked it in desktop, in mobile it is fine. I think the 360 degrees is not great, it only makes it for a slower download speed, which is annoying.

Interviewee 4: I found it boring, kind of slow. It seems easy, but I had to click so much to get anywhere!

Question 4 Anything made you feel bothered when using the website?

Users in general agreed that there was lack of content and again, that the download speed was slow, which made videos difficult to watch and enjoy.

Interviewee 2: When I was watching the video, it got stuttered so much that I just stopped. I have 4g on my mobile and it still took forever, so I was just done.

Interviewee 6: I was using my phone and I got to watch a really cool video about a beach, then again I remember that I wanted to find more content about it, but there was none. I feel that it doesn't have enough content.

Question 5 What do you like the most and the least about the website?

In general users commended the new option that 360 videos give, mentioning the freedom it gives, although when questioned if this would make them use Company X's website instead of Youtube all gave a negative answer. On a negative aspect, the camera usage and the download speeds were at the forefront.

Interviewee 1: I felt excited about the new 360 videos. I knew they existed but never bothered to watch one, it was fun to see the place how I wanted and not how the camera wanted me to. Felt like I had some freedom in there. The video stuttering made me want to get out after a bit.

Interviewee 3: The videos stuttered all the time, it was painful to use and in the computer, it is a hassle, very difficult to move the camera around. I really feel the function is extremely unnecessary. I liked the location function; it was good to get to the content I wanted if I could only watch it.

Interviewee 7: I really enjoyed the idea of making videos to share with people in a calm and paced way. It would be enjoyable to get to do that. I didn't like that all the content was only about traveling.

Question 6 Have you ever commented on a video?

No users commented on a video.

Question 7 Have you ever followed a Traveller?

From the 7 interviewees only 2 have ever followed a Traveller

Question 8 Have you ever spoken to another user?

No interviewee had spoken or interacted with other users in the website.

Question 9 What is the most important feature that should be added?

In general, the features asked for were focused on quality of life improvements and performance for the website.

Interviewee 3: For sure the download speeds must be improved. Maybe a way to use the camera on a better way.

Interviewee 4: I feel like there must be a way to interact with the creators and other people in the page, like Youtube has.

Interviewee 5: I would like to follow creators on other social media, but here there is nowhere to find that. I wanna know more about them.

5.3 Service Design Outcomes

Following the results from the interviews is that Service Design becomes the approach taken, in a first step towards further understanding the user base and their needs.

Towards this end is that the authors need to become users themselves, to understand how is that a user feels when in contact with Company X's website. This while knowing how the backstage of Company X's business model and approach is. After this immersion, the outcome is the Service Blueprint presented next.

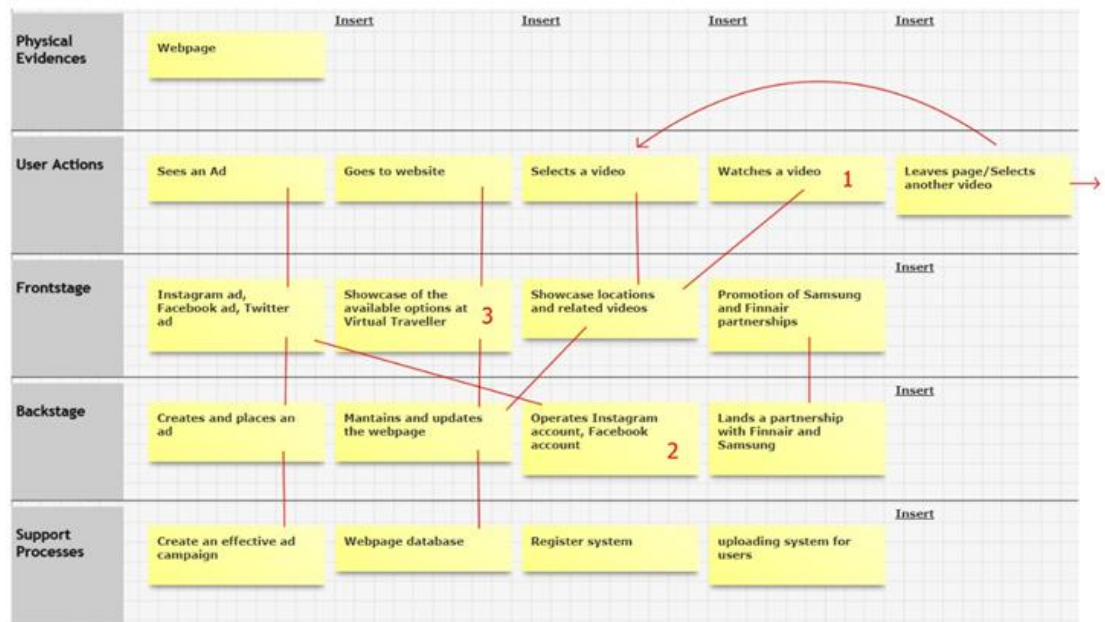


Figure 8 showcasing the Service Blueprint

After understanding how the service operates and how users move through it, is that further knowledge about how users behave and operate becomes extremely relevant. With that information it would be possible to develop a service that users are happy to engage with and become part of it as a community member.

With this in mind is that the dimensions that will be studied will be general characteristics of the website users, in order to get to know in a wider sense who they are to in conjunction with the interviews enable for a more through understanding of what needs and hurdles might be happening and which features or improvements could be put in place to facilitate the growth of the potential community.

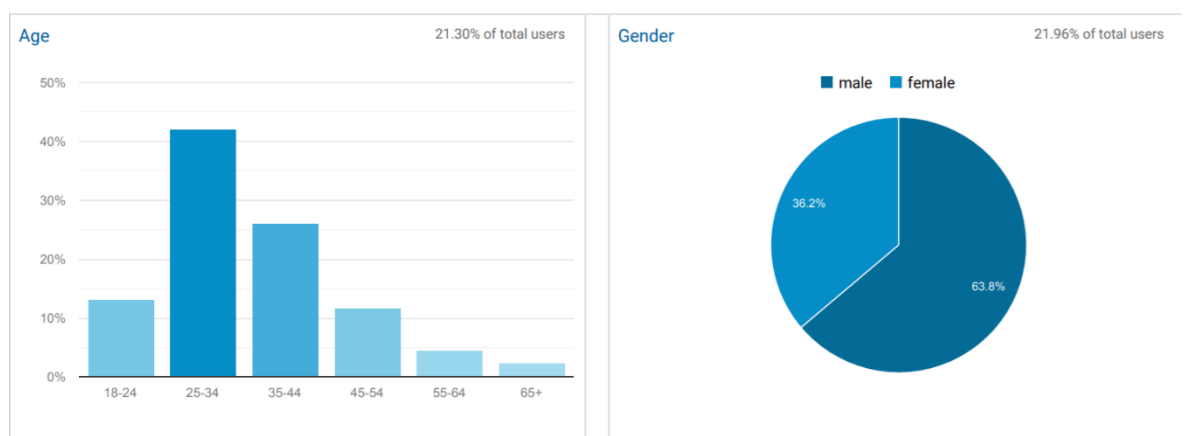


Figure 5 showcasing age and gender of the users

Affinity Category (reach)		31.69% of total users	In-Market Segment		26.69% of total users
3.75%	Shoppers/Value Shoppers		2.79%	Autos & Vehicles/Motor Vehicles	
3.08%	Food & Dining/Cooking Enthusiasts/30 Minute Chefs		2.31%	Business Services/Advertising & Marketing Services	
2.78%	Media & Entertainment/Music Lovers		2.29%	Real Estate/Residential Properties	
2.63%	Lifestyles & Hobbies/Business Professionals		2.12%	Travel/Trips by Destination/Trips to Europe	
2.49%	Media & Entertainment/Movie Lovers		1.82%	Travel/Hotels & Accommodations	
2.44%	Sports & Fitness/Sports Fans		1.71%	Travel/Air Travel	
2.38%	Beauty & Wellness/Frequently Visits Salons		1.45%	Software/Business & Productivity Software	
2.36%	Technology/Technophiles		1.41%	Employment	
2.35%	Travel/Travel Buffs		1.37%	Financial Services/Investment Services	
2.27%	Lifestyles & Hobbies/Outdoor Enthusiasts		1.36%	Consumer Electronics/Mobile Phones	

Other Category		29.26% of total users
4.03%	Arts & Entertainment/Celebrities & Entertainment News	
3.72%	Shopping/Classifieds	
3.06%	Sports/Team Sports/Hockey	
2.36%	Sports/Team Sports/Soccer	
2.24%	News/Weather	
2.10%	News/Business News/Company News/Company Earnings	
1.97%	Arts & Entertainment/TV & Video/Online Video	
1.54%	Travel/Air Travel	
1.50%	Autos & Vehicles/Vehicle Shopping/Used Vehicles	
1.42%	Travel/Hotels & Accommodations	

Figure 6 showcasing the interests of the users

		51,766 % of Total: 100.00% (51,766)	% of Total: 100.00
1.	fi-fi	36,352	70.14%
2.	en-us	6,545	12.63%
3.	en-gb	2,192	4.23%
4.	fi	2,139	4.13%
5.	fr-fr	700	1.35%
6.	sv-se	629	1.21%
7.	en-sg	231	0.45%
8.	en-fi	223	0.43%
9.	ru-ru	201	0.39%
10.	en-au	190	0.37%

Figure 7 showcasing the language of the users

After gathering the information displayed previously, it is possible to, in combination with the Service Blueprint, create personas that can go through the flow of users in the website, so that hurdles and possible improvements can appear in the interaction of all the parts.

Customer journey

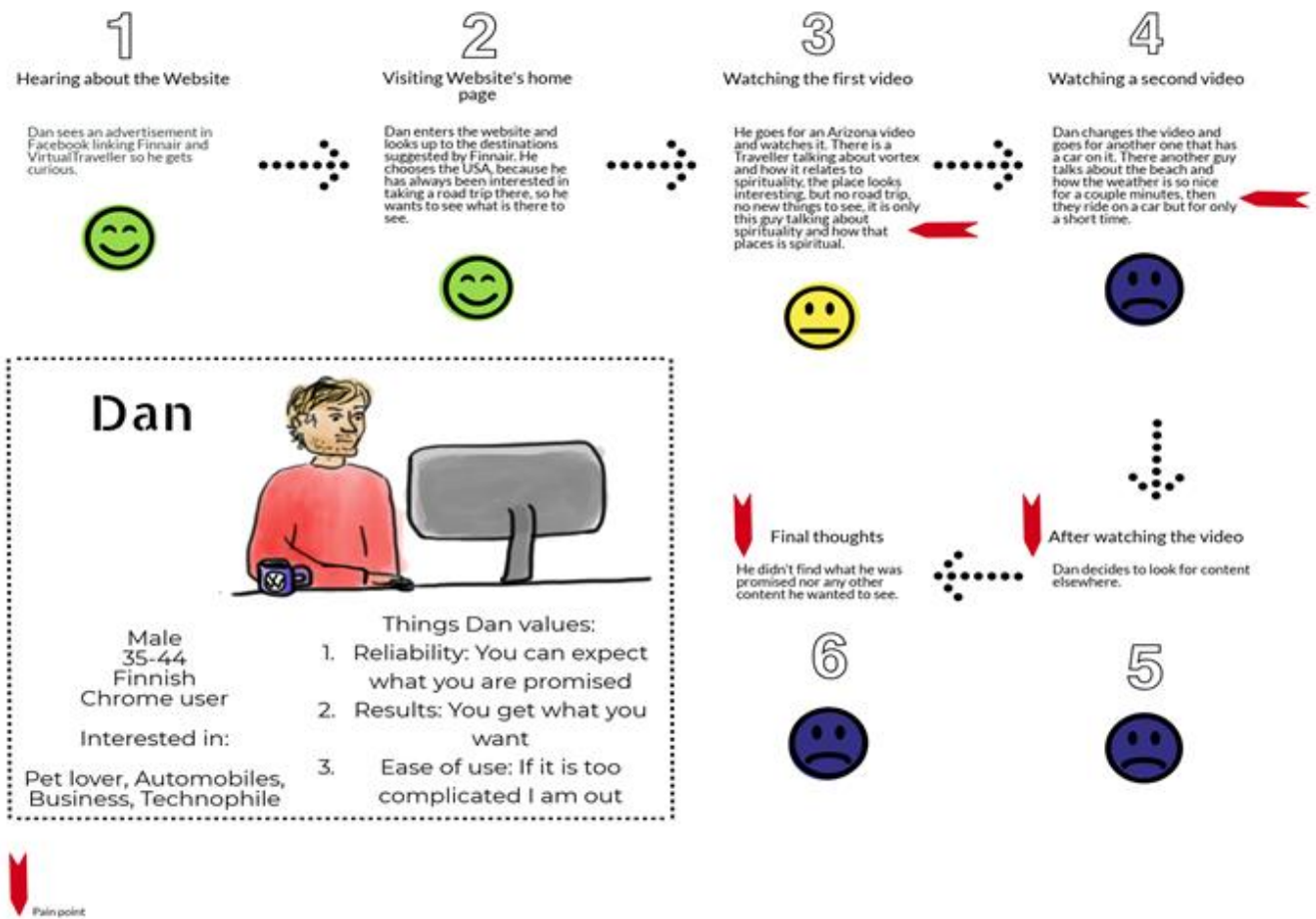


Figure 10 showcasing a customer journey

Customer journey

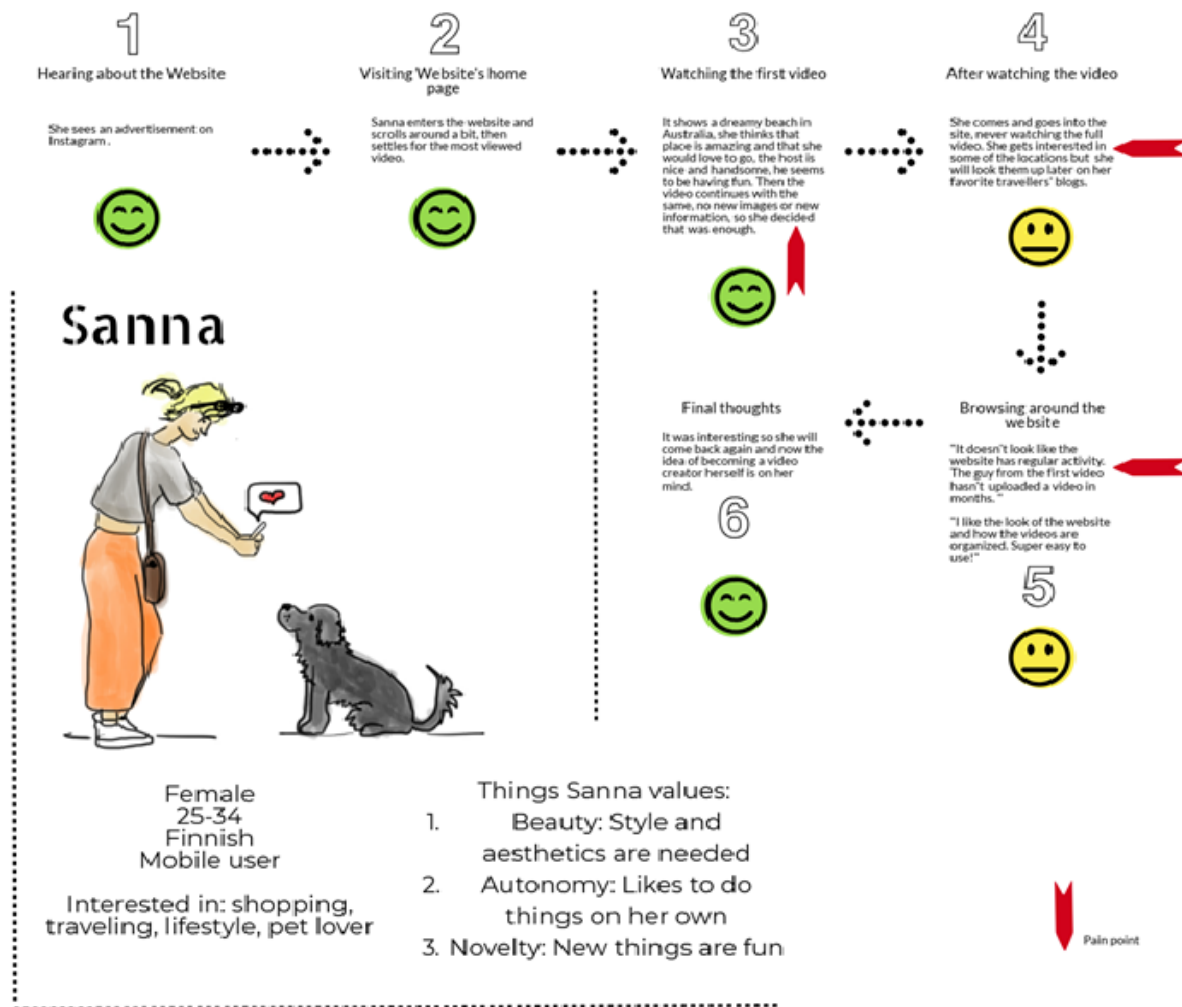


Figure 11 showcasing a customer journey

Customer journey

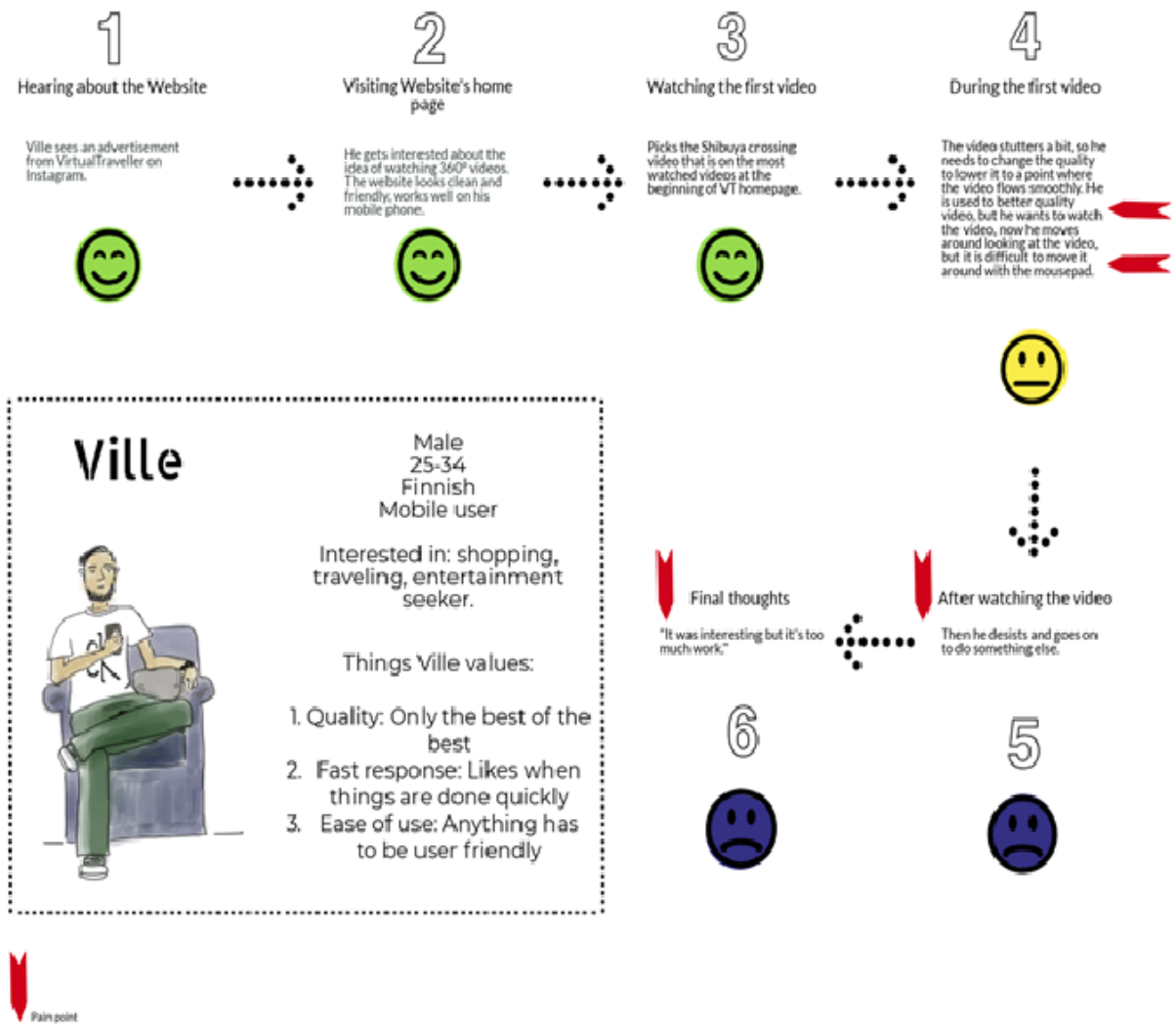


Figure 12 showcasing a customer journey

In the figures presented, customer journeys were created for the personas that emerged product of the Service Blueprint, the Analytics data and the insights from the interviews. These customer journeys and personas provide with possible pain points for the users of Company X's website. These pain points can be improved and thus enhance the chances of users engaging further with the service.

6 Discussion

In this chapter, it is time to answer to the research question with which we started this paper, for this effect we will take our customer journeys and personas and try to solve the pain points they presented previously.

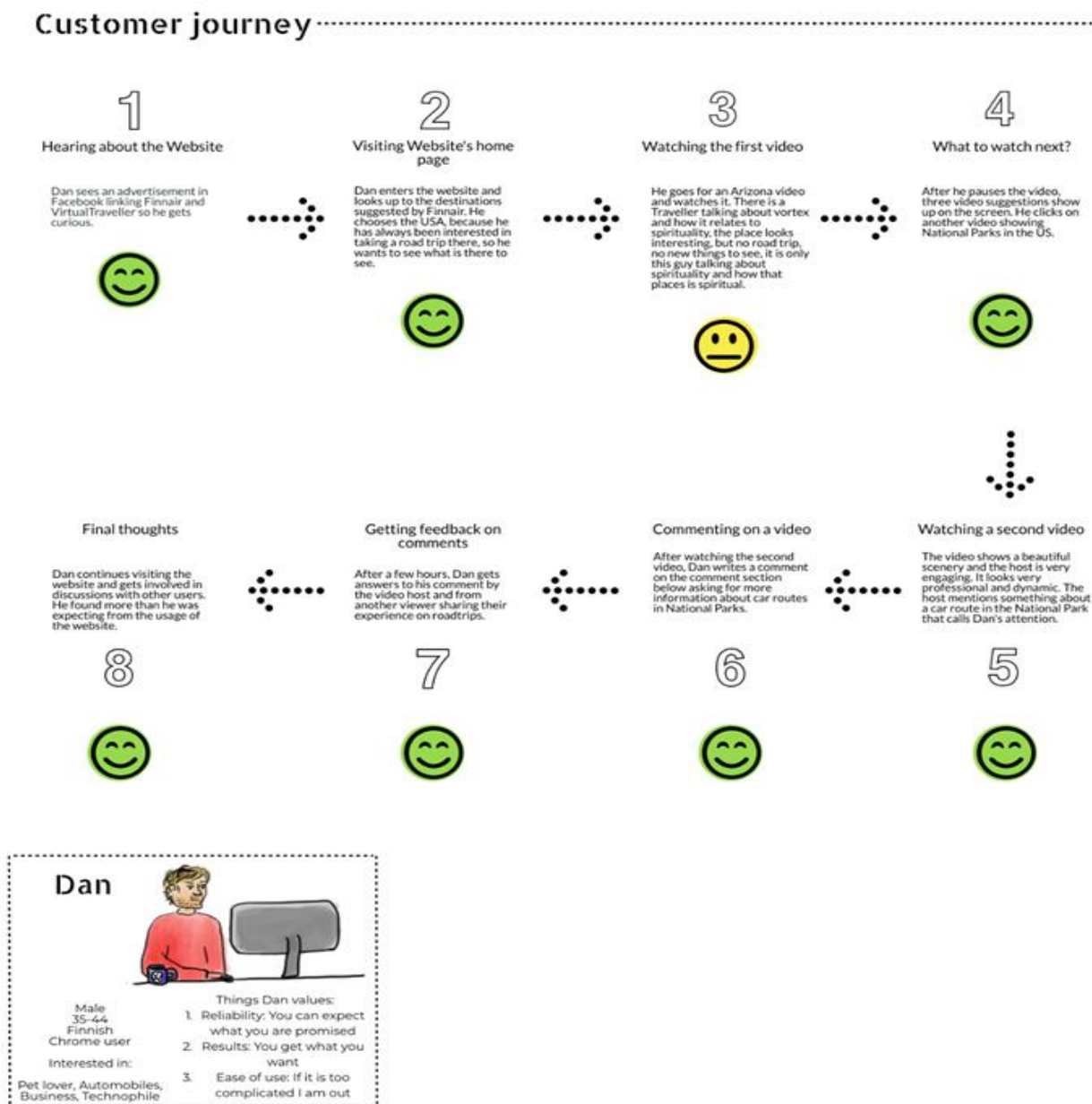
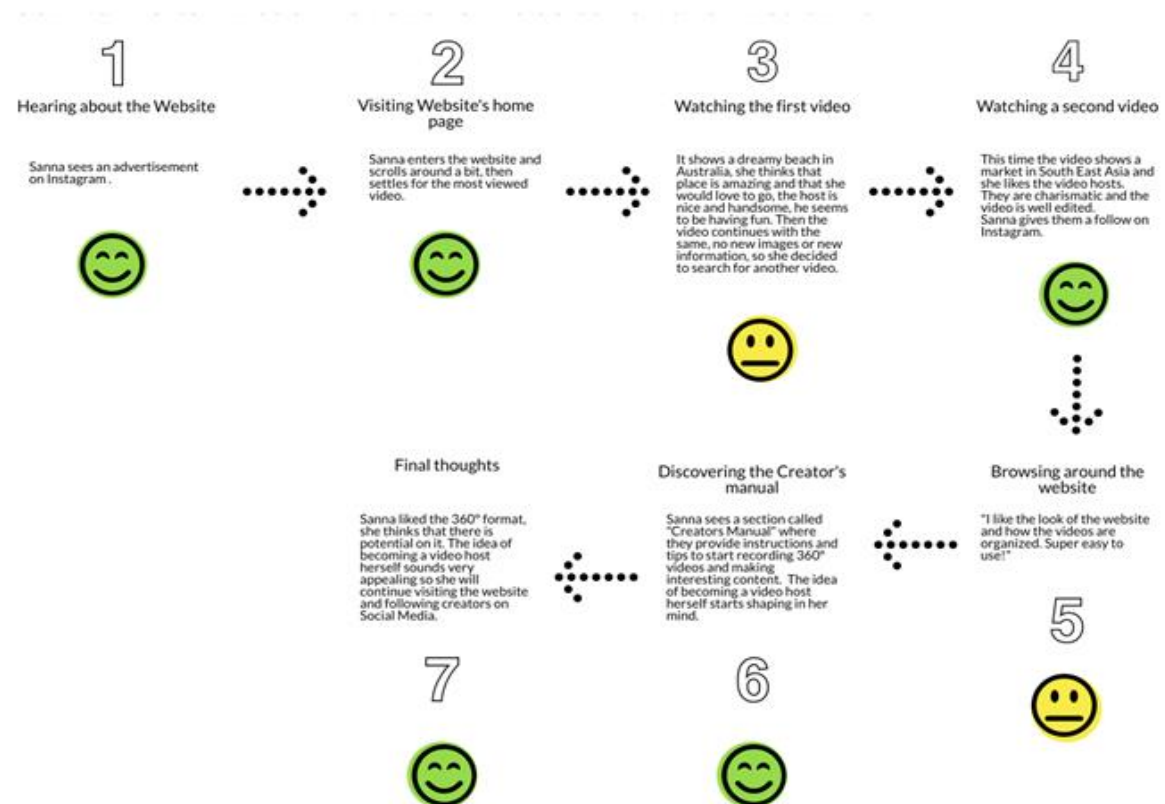


Figure 13 showcasing the improved customer journey

Dan is all about reliability and effectiveness, he moves along with the flow if things are working fine. This means that if the service provides Dan with what he looks for he is likely to stay and enjoy his time in the website. Dan likes to get answers and in turn can become an active user that starts interactions. He is not only a valuable user but can become a community starter for Company X.

Customer journey



Sanna

Female
25-34
Finnish
Mobile user

Interested in: shopping, traveling, lifestyle, pet lover

Things Sanna values:

1. Beauty: Style and aesthetics are needed
2. Autonomy: Likes to do things on her own
3. Novelty: New things are fun

Figure 14 showcasing the improved customer journey

Sanna is all about being active and become the protagonist of her own story. She wants things that are pleasing and that she can do on her own, because of this she gets curious about this new format of video and the chance to become involved as a creator. To channel this want, a user manual with suggestions and how-to's is implemented, through this Sanna understands the steps to follow, what she wins for becoming a creator and how Company X can help her to achieve what she wants. This potentially makes of Sanna a user that becomes a creator, driving force of a website that depends on the user generated content.

Furthermore, a relationship can start with Sanna and Company X and if results come, she can become a creator that gets other users motivated to create content due to her success.

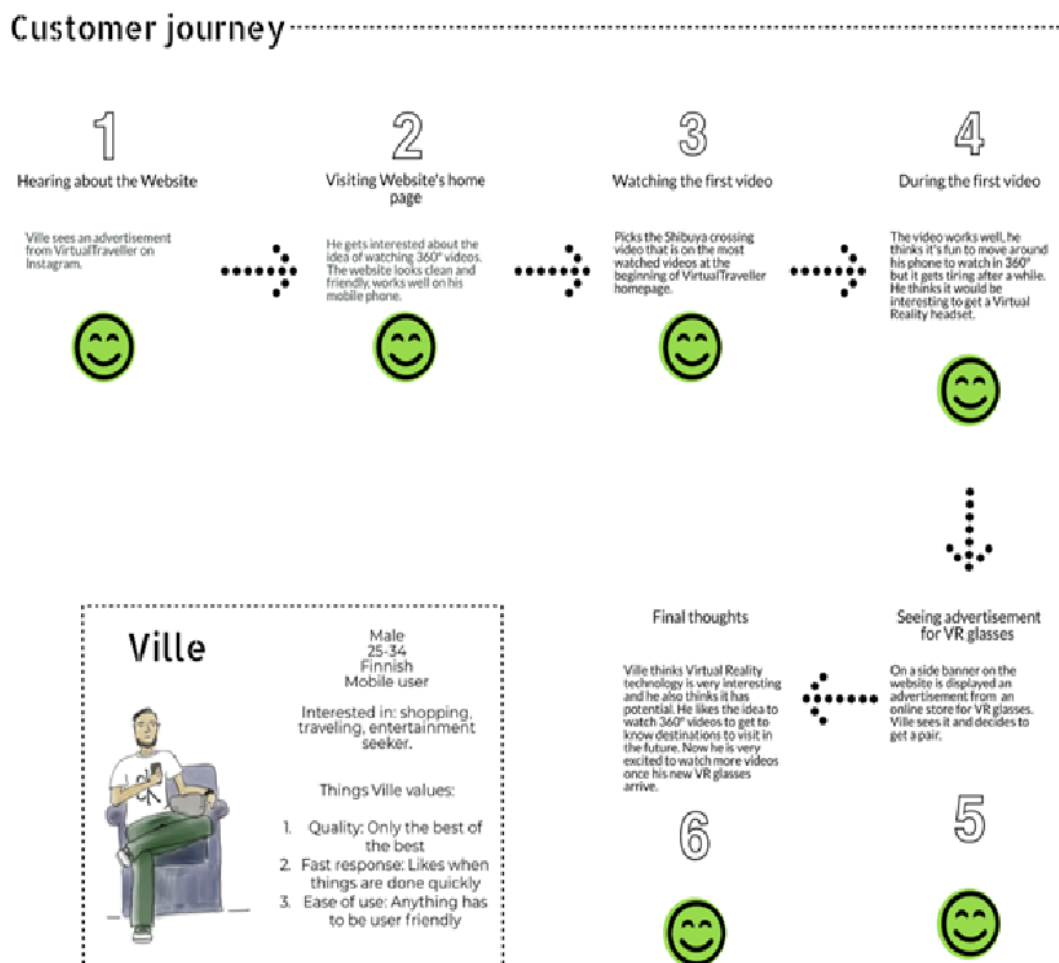


Figure 15 showcasing the improved customer journey

Ville is all about quality, he wants to get things done quickly and timely. Ville is willing to invest to get new experiences that he thinks are deserving, as long as he can try things with the best quality available, since he is into gadgets if he gets offered a discount or simply shown the possibilities of VR he might invest in VR glasses.

This means that with Ville, a possibility for deals with VR companies can happen in which both parties would be benefited by the visibility this would give.

7 Conclusion

Scholars and practitioners of a multiple areas of knowledge are beginning to give raise to question on how online communities work, what are the conditions under which they thrive and what are the best practices to attain success. In practice understanding communities as living entities enables us to understand how to approach and act in the way that is appropriate for each time frame and stage, due to the constantly evolving nature that communities have.

Being able to know what is needed does not necessarily provide with all the tools needed for the correct path to be taken, due to this using different tools to approach the problem is vital, no theory is a know it all/solve it all way, thus, it is central to get a tool box of techniques at hand.

The present study tried to give just this, to provide an answer to the need of a company that was striving to form its own niche in an already existing market, this without accounting for the importance of their users as a community for the success of their project. This brought them to the spot they find themselves in presently, continuously striving to put some fuel to the flame, having to invest new resources continuously to keep users coming in, since a community is still not present. This, for a platform that depends on user generated content can be lethal.

The authors have tried to provide them with some basic changes and guidelines, that could be done at almost no cost and that could improve significantly the engagement of the users, to the point in which a community can be nurtured and become the pillars on which the platform can take off.

Nevertheless, it is important following on with the Online Community Life Cycle Theory, that there might be a core issue at work here, that of a concept that might not entail the possibility of growing further. According to the Online Community Life Cycle Theory, a period of 6-9 months is the normal amount of time during which a community might attain self-sustainability, if not so, an analysis on the hurdles that might be holding it back needs to be done or the community is at risk of disappearing.

In this sense, it would be interesting to try to implement the suggestions already given, adding to those instances in which the community could actually interact, a place in which users can be heard and get to know Company X and other users. Relationships are at the

core of a community, relationships that in turn give space to a sense of belonging, of a reason to come back to the same place to interact with the same people and content that is meaningful for the user. That is in the end what will enable Company X to succeed.

7.1 Reflection on own learning

This thesis as a project was really eye opening in many ways for the authors, a prime opportunity to have insights in how it is to operate with a platform and with users that might or not react to the content you are providing. Furthermore, it gave us the opportunity to have a look at the world of entrepreneurs, a world of fast moving and intelligent people that have lots of ideas, ideas that transform into projects, that in time might transform into business. It certainly developed our curiosity for this world that opened in front of us, not an easy world for certain, alas an interesting one.

This project made us develop skills that we did not know were going to be useful when starting off, Analytics, classes in marketing, overseeing a marketing campaign, paid ads, how costs are ran through a young company.

Besides all this, digging for information to just being able to contact interviewees was not an easy task, using social media and small incentives in an attempt to “lure in” participants and get the insights needed.

While the results are there, it would have been interesting to be able to dedicate ourselves fully to the project, there were some unexpected complications from within the research as well as from without, this means things could have been done in a more thorough manner.

It would have been an interesting task if we could have had the opportunity to work with another more established company to, in that way see other stages of the Online Community Life Cycle Theory and thus, give other perspectives that could have aided the research as well as our commissioner.

All in all, it has been an interesting experience and we look forward to how we could use this framework for practical work in the future.

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