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COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR A NEW BUSINESS

– Case Mintunvihreä

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This master's thesis studies corporate communications from a starting business's point of view. The aim of the research is to offer a communication plan for the commissioner that can be utilized in planning the company's communication processes.

The research was conducted by following the principles of action research. The methods used in the research included the researcher's own observstions, interviews and a questioner for a focus group. All findings were put in a theoretical framework by using literature resources.

The theoretical part of the thesis studies the concept of corporate communications from multiple angels, internal and external communications, strategy and execution and how communications can be used in building a brand.

The empirical part puts the theory into practice and uses the knowledge gained in studing the specific needs of the commissioner's business. The researcher worked in close collaboration with the commissioner during the research process. The close collaboration ensured that all plans were actionable and in line with the company's vision, mission and strategy.

The aim is gain understanding of the concept of corporate communications in a pragmatic level and utilize the knowledge gained in building a successful communication plan for the commissioner. The research showed that the key components of a successful communication plan are in understanding the needs of different stakeholder groups, methods used and in developing a strategy that is based on the key values of the company that is communicating.

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Tämä opinnäytetyö tutkii yritysviestintää aloittavan yrityksen näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tarjota toimeksiantajalle viestintäsuunnitelma, jota voidaan hyödyntää yrityksen viestintäprosessien suunnittelussa.

Tutkimus toteutettiin toimintatutkimuksen periaatteita noudattaen. Tutkimuksessa käytettyihin menetelmiin sisältyivät tutkijan omat havainnot, haastattelut ja kysely kohderyhmälle. Kaikki havainnot laitettiin teoreettiseen viitekehykseen käyttämällä aiheeseen liittyviä kirjallisuusviitteitä.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettisessa osassa tutkitaan yritysviestintää eri näkökulmista sisältäen sisäisen ja ulkoisen viestinnän, strategian sekä sen toteuttamisen yritysviestinnässä ja viestinnän roolin brändin rakentamisessa.

Empiirinen osa soveltaa teoriaa käytännössä ja tutkii toimeksiantajan yritykseen ja viestintään liittyviä erityistarpeita. Tutkija työskenteli tiiviissä yhteistyössä toimeksiantajan kanssa tutkimusprosessin aikana. Tiivis yhteistyö takasi sen, että kaikki suunnitelmat olivat toteutettavissa ja yrityksen vision, mission ja strategian mukaisia.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on ymmärtää yritysviestinnän käsite käytännöllisellä tasolla ja hyödyntää saatuja tietoja rakentamalla onnistunut viestintäsuunnitelma toimeksiantajalle. Tutkimus osoitti, että onnistuneen viestintäsuunnitelman avainkomponentit muodostuvat eri sidosryhmien tarpeiden ymmärtämisestä, oikeiden metodien valitsemisesta, sekä yrityksen ydinarvoihin perustuvan strategian luomisesta.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis focuses on the role of communications in starting a new business and it will offer a clear guideline in both external and internal communications, focusing on the primer. The pursuit and focus of the thesis are practical, how a new business should communicate in order to reach its goals. The ambition is to combine theory and practice of corporate communications in order to define a communication plan that serves the commissioner's needs.

The content and the channels used were raised both from the literature and the interviews conducted. The thesis will be applied as a guide for communications, as it defines the most important aspects of communications in building a business and also discusses the tools used and the content of communications.

This thesis combines theories and research methods in order to provide a unique approach to the commissioner's focus area. The research is conducted by following the principles of action research. The methods used are a mix of different qualitative methods. The researchs aim is to gain understanding of the role of communications when starting a business, resulting in building a communication plan that turns the idea of the business into profit. The purpose of the thesis is to apply the theories and research results to the practice and to use the knowledge gained in everyday actions.

The purpose of communication in the context of business and economics is to move potential customers forward in the decision-making process and help them in making the decision to buy (Pohjola 2019, 49). However, the role of communications as a competitive edge is growing, which is supported by theoretical findings. Communication capabilities are one of the most important skills in working life, since a growing part of the industrial production comes from immaterial sources such as ideas and thoughts (Hakala 2015, 20).

The ones communicating often fail for two reasons, either they fail to crystallize the *what* of their message, or they fail in expressing the *how* (Hakala 2015, 23). In building a communication plan it is thus important to define both the message in addition to how and where it should be communicated.

1.1 Background of the thesis

The thesis was inspired from a need and it is done for a commissioner as a case study. The commissioner's business is a starting business and it is based on ethical and sustainable values, the same values will offer a guideline for the communication plan. The external communication plan will take into consideration the key stakeholder groups for the company and the local environment that it operates in. The companys aim is to be socially responsible and involved in the local community. The business model is built around the commissioners existing blog that discusses environmental issues, low tox and vegan products and overall wellbeing in a sustainable context.

The commissioner's business model is based on a brick-and-mortar location, this means that the primarily competition will be other local secondhand stores. However, in an online era, the competition that happens online should not be overlooked. The commissioner's business model differs from traditional flea stores, as it will offer its own selection of carefully curated secondhand goods, however, the same customer segment shops at both. As far as the local competition is discussed, there is a few competitors that have targeted the same customer segment as the commissioner.

The business is co-owned, and the partners work closely together, however, the tasks are divided so that each partner can focus on their own field of expertise. By focusing on internal communication, the risk for overlapping performance or tasks left undone, will be eliminated. As the business expands and there is a need for employees, the importance of internal communications will grow.

The researcher works closely with the commissioner during the research process. The subject of communication was chosen for the study due to the researcher's interest in the field and the need from the commissioner. The research process was interesting and intense, due to the timeline set by the commissioner. The business will be launched in February. However, as the communication plan also discusses ways to use communication in building a brand, the need for guidelines is earlier than the business launch.

The research has been planned and executed in close collaboration with the commissioner and the researcher. The researcher is closely tied to the area studied after working in the field for a decade. The main opportunities the close collaboration and the

researcher's experience brings, are in the understanding of the business's needs, values and mission.

The results of the thesis will be implemented gradually as the business starts its communication. As the results will be implemented, the focus is in developing a plan that is pragmatic, theory based but most importantly, actionable.

1.2 Goals and research questions of the thesis

The target of the research is to gain understanding of communication as a process, identify how and where the communication should take place and how it can be used in building a brand. The research question is, what is the most functionable communication plan for the case company? Following support questions have been defined to assist research and development in the case company:

- What are the main stakeholder groups?

- What are the roles of internal and external communications?

- What is the role of communication in the company's strategy

and execution?

- How communications can be used in building a brand?

1.3 Research process

The research process aimed to answer the questions stated above, by conducting a qualitative case study that used mixed methods. The research focused on qualitative methods, as its nature is in exploring attitudes, experiences and behavior (Dawson 2011, 23). The subject on hand is one that is closely knit to emotions and preferences, due to this, the researcher felt the research would benefit from focusing on qualitative aspects instead of solely focusing on measurable facts.

In order to narrow down the research area, the researcher used five questions presented by Dawson:

1. What?

2. Why?
3. Who?
4. Where?
5. When?

(Dawson 2011, 5).

This process set the definition for data collection. The data was collected by using mixed methods that included interviews, observations and a questioner. The output of the research was kept in mind during the process, which was to produce an actionable communication plan for the commissioner.

In order to understand the needs and methods of corporate communications in a starting business, the researcher used her own observations and expertise gathered from working in the business area for more than ten years. The experience gained form similar work life experiences help to analyze the methods used and better understand the correlation between corporate communications and consumer behavior. The observations were done by observing similar businesses that had started their operations within the year. The observations focused on similar business models, ethical small businesses that focused on presenting their values in their communciations. The process continued with conducting an interview with the commissioner, that aimed to better understand the commissioner's needs and to gain knowledge of the business model that was being launched. The following interview was done with an expert in social media and influencer communication. The main purpose of the interview was to bring depth in the research and widen the aspect from covering solely literature references and the commissioners needs. The interviews were conducted in late November and early December in 2019.

There are three main interview types that are commonly used in social research: unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews (Dawson 2011, 66). In this research, the interviews were conducted by using a semi-structured method, as it served the purpose the best. By using a semi-structured method, the researcher was able assure that the interview brought insight to things that are in the core of the research, but did not restrict the interviewee bringing up aspects that might bring up new information.

The data collected from the interviews was recorder by using a voice recorder and by taking notes, this allowed the researcher to analyze the data collected during the writing

process. By using a voice recorder, the researcher was able to effortlessly return to any part of the interview that needed to be checked or further analyzed. Recording the interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to return to the interviewees tone of voice and emphasis that brought additional information to the research.

The research was completed with a questioner in order to get quantitive and qualitative data from the commissioner's potential customers. This stakeholder group was seen as one of the main stakeholder groups that needed to be taken into consideration when planning the commissioner's future communication. Questionner was selected as a research method since it allows to get multiple answers in a way that does not require the target group to commit to a long process. In addition, the data collected with a questioner offered to researcher the opportunity to narrow down the data by carefully planning the questions with co-operation with the commissioner.

The data analysis process can be distinguished by separating analysis from interpretation, where analysis represents a more formal inductive process that seeks to explain, whereas interpretation is a more intuitive process that gains understanding and insight from a holistic range of data (Simons 2014, 464). The data analysis in this research focused in gaining understanding and isight of the data collected and how to incorporate the results in daily communicational actions.

The methods and methodology were chosen due to their nature of bringing actionable results in a research focusing on the specific needs of one company. The research was done by following the methodology of action research and as typical for action research, the researcher works in close collaboration with the group in order to improve a situation (Dawson 2011, 17). The close collaboration between the researcher and the commissioner resulted in an actionable output. The focus was on developing a plan that is practical and competitive.

2 CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Corporate communications is a complex phenomenon manifesting in both written and oral forms, for a variety of target groups and it has multiple frames of action and communicative goals (Mautner&Rainer 2017, 57). In order to start the process of building a communication plan for a business, it is important to understand the roles of different stakeholder groups and to define the different aspects of communication. Without defining the groups that receive the information, there is a risk that the knowledge is shared in the wrong channels or for the wrong audience, both resulting in wasted resources.

2.1 Identifying the stakeholder groups

There are many stakeholder theories that make the distinctions based on different variables. A commonly used theory is by Freeman (1984), who defines a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives" (Phillips 2003, 67).

The traditional model, seen in figure 1, places the organization in the core of actions and portrays the relationship as one where both can affect the other. The stakeholder groups are traditional and offer a good basic understanding of different groups that affect or are affected by the organization's actions.
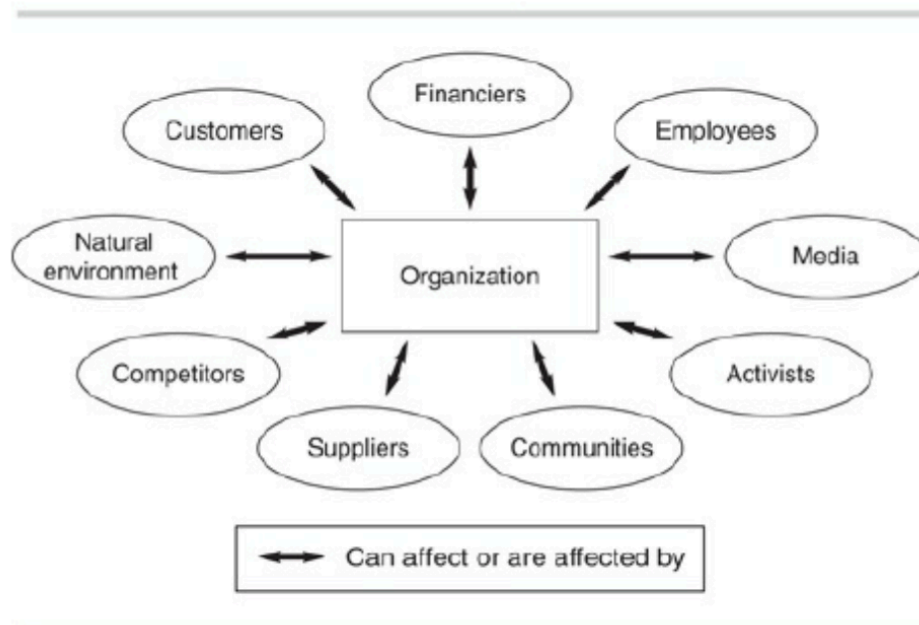
Figure 1. Traditional stakeholder map (Phillips 2003, 97).

However, later it has been argued that there is no singular stakeholder theory, but in fact there is a "genre" called stakeholder theory (Friedman&Miles 2006, 38). This would mean that the way the stakeholder groups are identified should be done according to the needs of the organization. A distinction of stakeholder groups must take place in order to communicate efficiently and in order to do so, the researcher must choose the right model for the company's need.

Friedman and Miles (2006) present a variety of stakeholder theories in their release, and they vary from normative stakeholder theorizing to analytic stakeholder theorizing, both segments containing multiple subcategories.

Normative stakeholder theory usually referrers to a theory that is based on eternal values, instead of observed norms (Friedman&Miles 2006, 36). Bishop (2000) presented a model consisting of seven factors in order to compare and asses normative theories:

1. Values
   Normative base on singular fundamental moral principle or plurality of values
2. Basis of values
   Religious or philosophical values, or a direct appeal to decency or moral sense

3. Decision principle

   Pragmatic guide for actions or polices

4. Agents

   Whose moral agent should use the decision principle?

5. Scope

   Which perspective is considered when using the decision principle?

6. Context

   In what circumstances is the decision principle used?

7. Structures

   Legal and regulatory structures that are assumed, such as employment or company law?

   (Bishop 2000, according to Friedman&Miles 2006, 37, 38).

Analytic stakeholder theories referres to theories that are not strictly normative (Friedman&Miles 2006, 83). The authors present their version (figure 2) of defining stakeholder groups, which falls in the category of analytic stakeholder theory.

Their model, as seen in figure 2, combines defining the stakeholder groups with strategic actions, contractual restrictions and a sense of urgency. The theory concentrates on meso levels and focuses on relationships between and within an organization, resulting in different groupings and opportunities (Friedman&Miles 2006, 103).

	Necessary	Contingent
Compatible	**A** **Explicit/implicit recognized** *Protectionist/defensive* Shareholders Top management Partners	**B** **Implicit unrecognized** *Opportunism/opportunistic* The general public Companies connected through common trade associations/ initiatives
Incompatible	**D** **Explicit/implicit recognized** *Concessionary/compromise* Trade unions Low-level employees Government and their agencies Customers Creditors Some NGOs	**C** **No contract** *competition/elimination* Aggrieved or criminal members of the public Some NGOs

Figure 2. Stakeholder configurations associated contractual forms and strategic actions, and associated stakeholder types. (Friedman&Miles 2006, 103).

Independent of the theory used, when discussing the communication strategy with stakeholder groups, the critical factors of stakeholder satisfaction needs to be discussed. According to Strong, Ringer and Taylor (2001), there are three critical factors that impact stakeholder satisfaction: timeliness of communication, that information received is complete and honest, and treatment from managers is empathetic and equal (Friedman&Miles 2006, 159).

All stakeholder theories aim to explain how to nourish the relationships between key stakeholder groups, in order to make it possible for the company to thrive in its field of business. In the core of actions are basic human interactions, and it should be kept in mind that stakeholder management is fundamentally stakeholder relationship management as it is the relationship that is being managed (Friedman&Miles 2006, 149).

2.2 The distinctions between internal and external communications

Communications can be divided into two segments, internal and external communications. The distinction is made according to who is the one communicating or who is the subject of the communication (Pesonen 2012, 115). Internal communications

cover all communications that happen within a working unit and external communications covers all the remaining stakeholder groups. External communications work as an interpreter between the company's management, employees and the audience (Pesonen 2012, 115), this means that even tough external communications are often thought be targeted solely at customers or potential buyers, it also covers all communications with the government, official workers and members of the community.

Different laws and regulations guide the communication with different stakeholder groups. Customs and culture play a part in communication as well. Company websites are considered as web messages and they are restricted by the act on the exercise of freedom of expression in mass media (Pesonen 2012, 131). This means that whoever is in charge of the content, needs to moderate it. The act means in practice that the offense based on the content of the message made available to the public is the responsibility of the person who is to be considered the perpetrator or a participant of the offense under criminal law (Pesonen 2012, 131). On top of following rules and regulations, a code of good ethics should be taken into consideration in all communications.

When it comes to communications with consumers, the Finnish consumer protection act needs to be taken into consideration. The act forbids the usage of violence, discrimination based on gender or ethnicity and the children's rights need to be taken into account (Finnish competition and consumer authority 2014).

2.2.1 Internal communications

Internal communication is directed to the entire staff, those working in a particular unit, department or place, or is communication between subordinates and supervisors or communication between colleagues (Pesonen 2012, 115). Internal communications play a big role in company's success. Effective and well-targeted internal communications enhances the meaning of work, engages and motivates staff, and helps convey a coherent image of the organization to the outside world (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 34−35).

In addition to motivational aspects, internal communications help employees understand different operating situations and the decision making in the company (Pesonen 2012,

115). Internal communications done right, set clear guidelines for working and helps understanding the core values of the business.

When talking about internal communications, the factor of psychological safety should be discussed. The importance of psychological safety in working life has been recognized in recent years, and it can be described as an invisible undercurrent that creates favorable conditions for social risk management (Toivanen 2019). Harvesting psychological safety means creating a working environment where the atmosphere is open and supportive and the personnel feels comfortable enough to to speak out about issues or bring up new ideas.

Psychological security refers to the shared belief in the community about the risk taking in an organizational context, and it is the fuel of collective learning (Viljanen 2018). Without psychological safety, there is a risk that the working unit does not take chances and the development decelerates.

Psychological safety depends on how well members of the community know each other, it is fostered by the quality of social relationships and the amount of interaction between team members (Toivanen 2019). In the light of research on the matter, fostering psychological safety should be taken into consedertion when planning the tools and manners in which internal communications will be conducted in a organization.

Dignan (2019) argues that people should not be seen as resoruces as they are capable of directing their time and attention to where it brings most value (Dignan 2019, 101). In this light, a company's internal communication should leave space for employees to plan their own schedules and priorities. Research indicate that by showing gratitude, well-being improves, impatience is reduced and it also boosts brain function (Dignan 2019, 148). These aspects should be acknowledged in internal communications.

Internal communication channels include internal newsletters, emails, the CEO's blog, info and briefing meetings, in-house training sessions, staff magazines, intranets, development discussions and even rumors circulating within the organization (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 84). As seen, the tools for internal communication are multiple and a company should choose what fits their individual needs the best.

When talking about corporate communications, the term employer branding often arises. The term can be related to both current and future employees. Employer brand is defined as "the brand an organization as employer stands for" (Welsing 2015, 18). All corporate

communications   should be consistent with what it stands for, weather the communication happens internally or externally (Łącka-Badura 2015, 19).

2.2.2 External communications

External communications are directed to the external audience, influencers and customers (Pesonen 2012, 115). Korhonen with her collague present different areas of external core corporate communication processes in their work, which include financial communications, communciations with the media, crisis and issue management, communications about organization's image and corporate advertising (2011).

The purpose of financial communications is to reduce uncertainty for investors and shareholders by communicating current, relevant and reliable information about the organization. Financial communications are based on numerical data and needs be consistent, understandable, open and transparent. The tools used for financial communciations include different fincancial raports. The financial communication process includes interim report process, annual report process, stock exchange and investor release process (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 85−86.)

Target groups need both information for building an image of the company and informative communication at different stages of the communication process (Pohjola 2019, 71). Depending of the stakeholder group, different information is considered important.

Corporate media communications include communciations with the media, advertisement and reputation management. Media communications aim to manage the organization's relationship with the media, where as reputation management is a communication process where the organization uses elements to manage the image stakeholders form about the company. Corporate advertising aims to reache investors, partners, social decision-makers, clients and potential employees and it is particulary used in times of change. (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 87,91,92.)

On top of covering traditional communication needs, a company must prepare itself for crisis management. There are different types of crises, such as natural disasters, crises caused by human error and intentional crises (Littlefield&Sellnow 2015, 1). It is apparent that crises cannot be forecasted, but all organizations should be prepared to face one. In the case of crisis, an organization must communicate immediately about it

and although a crisis cannot always be prevented, its effects on the organization can be alleviated by effective communication (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 89).

In a crisis, the focus of communication is likely to be on employees, key stakeholders, sponsors or possibly the media. Crisis management includes more than just communications and crisis management is a team effort both in planning and delivery. (Pilkington 2013, 148.)

Crisis communications icludes mostly pre-planning actions and in times of crisis, communications must be consistent, effective and proactive. In crisis management it is important that all stakeholders receive the same information at the same time, as a coherent message in a crisis is more credible than inconsistent (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 89.)

The dialog between a company and customers happens in more channels and is more personal than ever before (Hämäläinen et al 2016, 121). The content should be planned according to the stakeholder receiving the inrofamtion, as it has long been said that communications should be based on the genuine interest of the recipient, this means that there needs to be a change in how corporate communications should be done (Pohjola 2019, 41).

Goals and strategy of external communications differ depending of the company or organization. According to Pohjola, the communication strategy is based on the business strategy of the company and it supports the goals of the business (2019, 72). Communication strategy is always important but especially in situations of change. When a new business is built, business planning, corporate identity and corporate communications are shaped by pre-existing parameters, especially by the situation of competitors (Pohjola 2019, 72). The emphasis on communications has grown, partly due to new technologies that make sharing information easy and fast. If communications fail, the whole organization suffers (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 35). In the beginning of operations, communication is one of the rare tools a business possesses in order to build a brand and grow a future customer base.

The methods and tools in communications are multiple and communications can happen in written, oral or electronic format (Pesonen 2012, 115). Methods and tools also cover the area of ambassadors and influencers. It is a growing trend that the personnel work as brand ambassadors. Strong personal brands are beneficial for a company as they have a positive impact on the company's brand (Hämäläinen et al 2016, 170).

In addition to defining the content and messages of communications, it is also important to decide how the messages will be delivered. Defining the tone of voice answers to questions such as:

- what is the style and nature of verbal and pictorial communication?
- how do they embody the brand, its core, its values and its personality?
- how to define style in the most functional and engaging way possible?

(Pohjola 2019, 102).

Visual communications should not be overlooked, as most of our decisions are made based on visual information (Pohjola 2019, 43). Visual communications can be used as a part of storytelling. Stories are a powerful tool in communications since it evokes emotions in the recipients. Stories can be used in building business presentations or defining communication strategies. A signature story can be defined as a narrative that follows the basics of any story with its details, surprises and empathetic characters. Signature stories will help a product, or a brand stand out. (Gallo 2018, 160,162.) Figure 3 explains the different stages of a story and the key components of each stage.

	act 1 The set-up	act 2 The confrontation	act 3 The resolution
Business presentation	Status-quo is described, the current state of the company or industry	Obstacles are outlined and solutions to overcome them are described	The company's product, service or strategy solves the problem and the company thrives

Figure 3. The three-act storytelling structure (adapted and modified from Gallo 2018, 165).

Studies run by behavioral economist have shown that our decision making has become more simplistic and irrational caused by the dataoverload modern people face, making people trust numbers less and having them base their decisions more on stories (Damodaran 2017, 4).

Storytelling is more important at certain stages of a business's cycle, in an early stage, a company's value is mainly driven by its narrative. Understanding the different stages

and the numbers behind the stories, is crucial both when discussing investor relationship management and the management of the business itself. (Damodaran 2017, 9.) In order to take ful advantage of storytelling, a company needs to analyze its needs. Storytelling is critical for a business, since it allows a business to connect with employees, customers and investors and often evokes action and emotions better than facts or numbers (Damodaran 2017, 23).

The biggest difference between a business story and a fictional story is that business stories have to be grounded in reality, since a business is measured in credibility and ability to deliver what is promised (Damodaran 2017, 27–28).

Damodaran presents four ingredients that make a good business story:

1. The story is simple
2. The story is credible
3. The story is authentic
4. The story is emotional

A simple story has a core message that can be delivered without distractions and missunderstandings. Credibility means being truthfull and open about limitations, while presenting strengths. Authenticity in a business story aims to focus on the fact that stories resonate more when they reflect who is behind the company and what the business is truly about. (Damodaran 2017, 34.)

The widespread use of smartphones an other electronis are exmaples of conduct which encourages people to create, share, modify and move content and stories between one another. The consequeces of this possibilities are now shown in the facitily to alter existing aesthetic models, in ways of telling stories, communicating, informing and engaging. (Serafinelli 2018, 9–10.)

As communications cover all business areas, it is important to understand the different roles of communications and the distinctions between terms that often overlap, such as brand and content strategy. The overlap of brand and content strategy is natural, since they have the same core, but different functions (Keronen&Tanni 2007, 26).

The following chart (figure 4) by Keronen and Tanni (2017) explains the linkage between the organization's strategy, brand, content strategy and content marketing. These aspects must be kept in mind in all communications.

Content marketing = how we create value for the customer with each content

Content strategy = how we manage content according to above guidelines

Brand = what we are / want to be

Organization's strategy = vision, goal, direction and how to get there
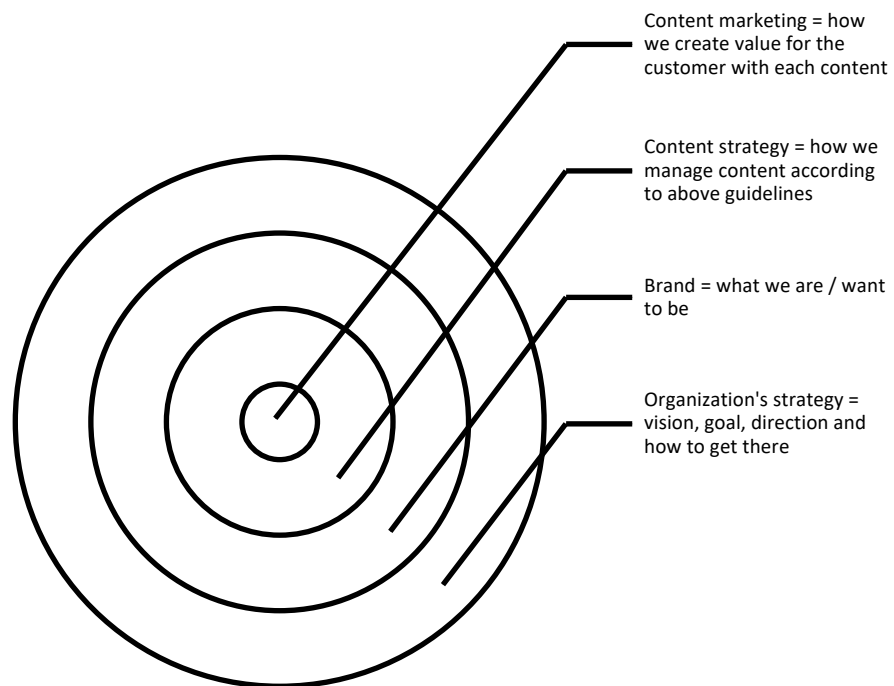
Figure 4. Brand and content strategy (modified from Keronen&Tanni 2017, 26).

Based on this, the process for building a communication plan should start by answering these questions:

1. What is the organization's strategy?
2. How will it be executed?
3. How will the progress be tracked?
4. How does the organization want to be perceived as?
5. How is the image communicated?
6. What brings value for the customer?

Defining the core of the brand crystallizes something essential about the brand, the first impression of the messages should support this image (Pohjola 2019, 92). Once the brand's core is crystallized, different tools as the ones discussed previously, can be efficiently utilized. As seen in the chart (figure 5) by Pohjola (2019), a brand is seen in all the company's different operating areas and together the areas form a clear picture to the stakeholders. From solely communication's standpoint, the main areas that are relevant according to the author are social media channels, communications and PR,

advertisement, network and mobile services and sponsoring. However, as discussed before, aspects such as visual communications have a big impact, when discussing communicational tools (Pohjola 2019, 43).
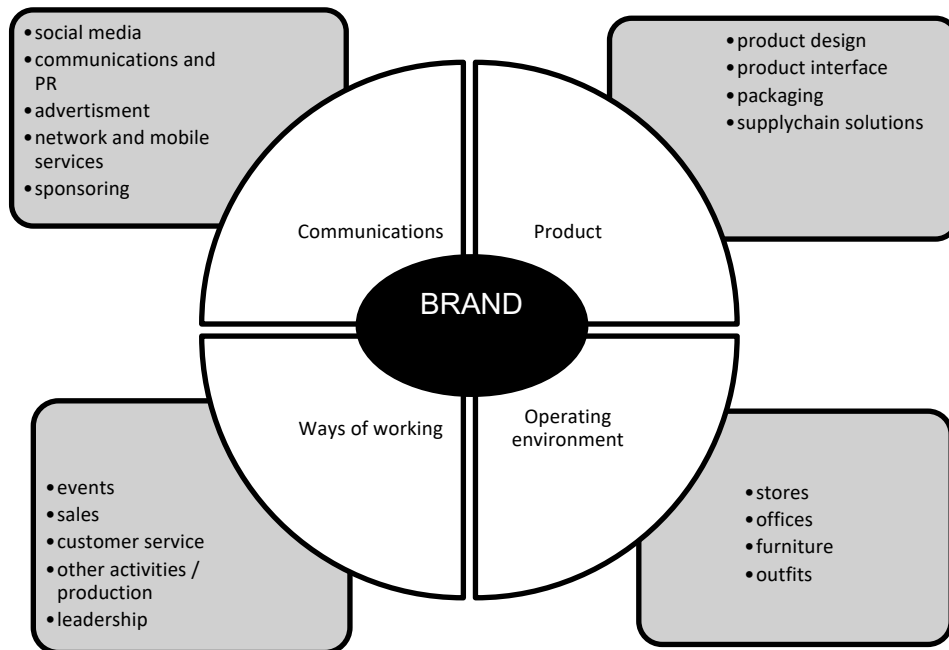

Figure 5. Areas of design management according to Pohjola (2019, 21).

3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN THESIS

The research process for the thesis began with the researcher familiarizing herself with the subject on hand. The researcher used her own observations to form an overall idea of the studied area and gathered literature to research different aspects of corporate communications.

As the commissioner represents a new business model, the researcher felt the need to collect data in more ways than one, in order to get a wide perspective of the subject being studied. The methodology that guided the research process, was action research. Action research is an umbrella for different participatory approaches that involve the researcher as scholar and facilitator of change (Daymon & Holloway 2010 ,197). The methods used in this thesis are interviews, questioner for a focus group and the researcher's own observations. This mix of research methods provided a good overlook of communications, as the subject being researched.

The main research question of the thesis is: What is the most functionable communication plan for the case company? The research question set the tone for the research, the research would focus on understanding the specific needs of the commissioner and what is the role of communication in their business and how they should utilize it in their actions.

The research question was supported with defining assisting research question that helped narrowing down the studied subject and structure the research process:

- What are the main stakeholder groups?

- What are the roles of internal and external communications?

- What is the role of communication in the company's strategy

and execution?

- How communications can be used in building a brand?

3.1 Stages of research

The research moved through four stages; planning, acting, observing and reflecting, as shown in figure 6. This plan set the framework of the research process. The research process needed to be planned as detailed as possible, due to the strict timeline set by the commissioner.

planning	acting	observing	reflecting
• narrow the research area • plan used research methods • define the key stakeholders and customer segments • define variables	• conduct interviews • gather a focus group and conduct survey	• observe and analyze the field studyied • keep the focus on subject on hand	• go through data and make sure it is valid • connect the data and actions that should follow • make a timeline and plan actions

Figure 6. Stages of research (Dawson 2011, 17).

3.1.1 Planning the research

In the planning stage, the main focus was to get an overall understanding of the subject being researched. During the planning process, the researcher used her own observations as one of the research methods. This helped gaining a better understanding of the large field of corporate communications. It was obvious that in order to conduct a functionable research, the field being studied needed to be narrowed down to focus on one company. By observing the field studied, the researcher was able to target her resources on studying the specific characters of ethical corporate communications.

Once agreeing to conduct the study for a commissioner, the research moved along and in co-operation with the commissioner, the methods and methodology were chosen. In

order to fit both the needs of the commissioning company and the needs of the researcher, the research was conducted as a qualitative case study research. Conducting a research as a case study does not mean that the research is defined by the methodology or methods used (Simons 2014, 457). Following the principles of action research, the commissioner and researcher worked closely together during the research process.

Qualitative case study research shares some characteristics with other forms of qualitative research, but in qualitative case study research, the focus is clearly singular (Simons 2014, 458). In this research, the focus was in forming the most functionable communication plan for the commissioner.

The methods used include a mix of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods were chosen for their nature that suits the research as, qualitative research aims to explore attitudes, behavior and experiences (Dawson 2011, 14). These aspects are crucial in deciding how to communicate. The methods used give more insight and depth to the researched topic, than focusing on collecting measurable data or forming statistics. Using mixed methods in a qualitative case study, increases the options of learning different ways of knowing and in some cases are preferred by stakeholders (Simons 2014, 458). Both the researcher and the commissioner wanted to study the case from different angles, making the decision to use mixed methods a natural choice.

In the core of the research, were interviews and a questioner for a focus group. All the gathered information was put in a theoretical context by adding theory from literature sources to the findings.

3.1.2 Acting

The research process started with an interview with the commissioner in order to define the company's needs, mission, vision and values. It is important to understand the company's core before planning the communication, since all communication plans should be tightly knit to the company's operations (Korhonen & Rajala 2011, 47). The interviews with the commissioner helped answering the main research question, what is the most functionable communication plan for the case company? By understanding the company's vision, mission, goals and both short- and long-term targets, the researcher

was able to concentrate on studying the specific area of small, sustainable business that focuses its communications mainly on online medias and emphasizes local operations.

The second interview with the expert in social media and influencer communications assisted in understanding social media channels in corporate communications and how communications can be used in building a brand. The interviewee also gave important insight in corporate communication strategies and especially what kind of content works the best while using online tools. From strategic standpoint, she also assisted in understanding the role of external communications in the case company by giving insight knowledge from the online behavior of one of the most important stakeholder groups, the customers.

The usage of focus group in a situation where a new business is launched, are multiple, most importantly, the focus group brings actionable insight. The researcher wanted to add a method that is often used in qualitative data collection and made a questioner for the focus group. The focus group was gathered from friends and acquaintances of the commissioner that are interested in ethical and sustainable choices. The commissioner and the researcher wanted the focus group to resemble the real-life customer base that will be segmented using values and joint interesses, instead of traditional segmenting procedures such as age or gender that often leave out potential customers.

The questioner was done in co-operation with the researcher and the commissioner. It consisted of ten questions and it was drafted using SurveyMonkey. The language chosen for the questioner was the focus group's native language, Finnish, in order to eliminate the possibility of misunderstanding the question. The questioner reached 42 respondents. The questioner as a whole is visible in attachments (appendix 1).

The main purpose for using a focus group was to define the content and the channels that should be used in the commissioner's communications. This helped answering the questions about communications role in company's strategy and execution and how communications can be used in building a brand, as content and used channel play a significant role in brand and strategy building.

The questioner was conducted anonymously. Anonymity in a research means that the researcher does not divulge the anonymity of the research participants to others (Daymon & Holloway 2010 ,67). The anonymity in this research was guaranteed by not asking personal information from the survey participants that could be linked to them.

The researcher conducted the survey anonymously in order to get truthful answers about content followed and online behavior from the focus group.

3.1.3 Observing

While observing the research, the researcher focused on staying in the core of the studied area. In this stage of the research, the researcher started to observe the linkages between the results that she had gotten from the interviews and literature sources and used the information gained in making sure that all actions taken were beneficial for the research. Since the timeline was strict, all actions needed to be planned ahead and there was no room for sidetracking.

3.1.4 Reflecting

The data from the interviews were analyzed by going through the interviews and gathering the main aspects of what was discussed. The result from the survey were analyzed and put together in a summary containing images of the statistics. Both the questions and the results were then translated to English. The main purpose of data-analysis is to reveal to others, through fresh insight, what the researcher has discovered (Saldaña 2014, 584). In this research, the main aspects found by using data-analysis were utilized throughout the work , finalizing in the communication plan. The results from the research gave important insight for the researcher and without a throughout research plan, there would have been a risk to overlook channels or content that were found useful by the results received from the study.

3.2 Role of the researcher

The principal of action research is that the researcher is involved in carrying out an investigation and using that investigation as a mean for stimulating change in the researched area, which requires extensive involvement in the field (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 201). As the main approach for the research was action research, the researcher had an active role throughout the research process. The research was conducted in close collaboration with the commissioner, making it possible for the researcher to focus the resources in specific characteristics of the case company. Action research should be

a democratic process (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 204). The democratic approach manifested in the process in open dialogue with the commissioner, all main decisions were discussed together with the researcher and the commissioner before taking action.

3.3 Reliability and validity

In qualitative research, there is often concerns about validity that are linked to objectivity. Objectivity in research means that the human elements and biases are removed, including researcher's own value system influencing the data. (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 82.) Objectivity was a crucial part in the research process, as there is a risk for losing objectivity when the researcher is closely involved in the studied area. The researcher recognized the risk and used reflexivity to minimize it. Reflexivity refers to critically reflecting the researchers own role and assumptions during the entire research process from data collection, analysis, interpretation and writing the research report (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 94). The steps in the research were planned so that the was time for reflecting the results, assuring that the researcher kept her objectivity. This said, a research is never wholly neutral or objective (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 82).

4 BUILDING A COMMUNICATION PLAN

As in any successful organization, the communication plan is a part of the business plan, it is planned together, it is active and continuous, well documented and actively communicated with others (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 29). As discussed before, the planning started with defining the company's main stakeholders, the role of internal and external communications, communication strategy and how communications can be used in building a brand. The research showed the different stages that need to be done before defining the actual communication plan. The groundwork includes understanding the company's stakeholders, the roles of external and internal communications and how they affect one another, the communication strategy and how communications can be used in building a brand.

4.1 Implementing theory

The communication plan was built in two phases. The first phase is based on theory from literature sources and research, that was guided by the researchers own observations and concluded with interviews. The second part of building the communication plan was based on the theory discussed in previous chapters and on the research done by conducting a second round of interviews and finished with a questioner for the focus group.

4.1.1 Key characters in commissioner's communication plan

It is essential to understand the commissioner's position in the market and plan the steps to make it attractive for potential customers as the business sector, the competitive situation, the position of the company in the market, the nature of the business and, for example, the role of communication as part of marketing, influence the communication strategy choices (Pohjola 2019, 74).

The communication plan for the commissioner is tightly knit to building a community around joint values that are visible in the commissioner's image. The image is created based on the values of the commissioner, but also in order to attract a customer base that shares the same values, as consumers build their identity by choices they make

(Hakala 2015, 45). The commissioner's business strategy is to offer a range of products and services that speak to the environmentally aware citizens of Turku. The strategic priority is to offer a selection that differs from the competitors and brings new aspects to the business area; quality products sold in an inspiring environment. In the core of actions is to mix business insight to values that have become megatrends; sustainability, peer to peer selling and being a part of a community (Sitra megatrends 2018). The objective is to build a successful business that does not compromise on quality or style, while being environmentally friendly.

The emotional value plays a big role in the commissioner's communication. The content produced for the community of followers and customers, is based on facts and inspiration. The inspiration comes from the joy of doing good and making exceptional finds. The overall atmosphere, location and visual effects, such as signage and interior, and the services and products offer symbolic value for the customers. Recent development has highlighted the importance of authenticity and transparency in communications (Pohjola 2019, 32). The commissioner aims to use this for her advantage, as the conventional parties are unlikely to able to do the same.

The budget used for the communication, is limited. As the business is a starting one, the commissioner needs to use methods that are budget friendly, this is possible by taking advantage of using a personal touch in communications and by storytelling. In addition, the communication plan needs to take into consideration the commissioner's values, print media is not an option in a business model that has sustainable values at its core. In order to stand out both from the local and online competition, the commissioner needs to focus on what else it can offer besides physical goods and communicate it efficiently.

4.1.2 Defining the commissioner's stakeholder groups

In order to produce a communication plan that fits the commissioner's needs, some definitions of the key variables must be made. One of the key tasks is to define the stakeholder groups that are touched by the communication. The communication plan must cover all areas from communication with customers to government officials and crisis management. By structuring organizational communications as a whole by target group, mission or nature of communication, different types of areas of communication can be identified (Pohjola 2019, 70).

Figure 7 explains the commissioner's key stakeholder groups that need to be taken into consideration when planning internal and external communications. The current stakeholder groups shown in figure 7, are fairly common, as the commissioner is a starting business. As the business grows, the need for defining the stakeholder groups resurfaces.
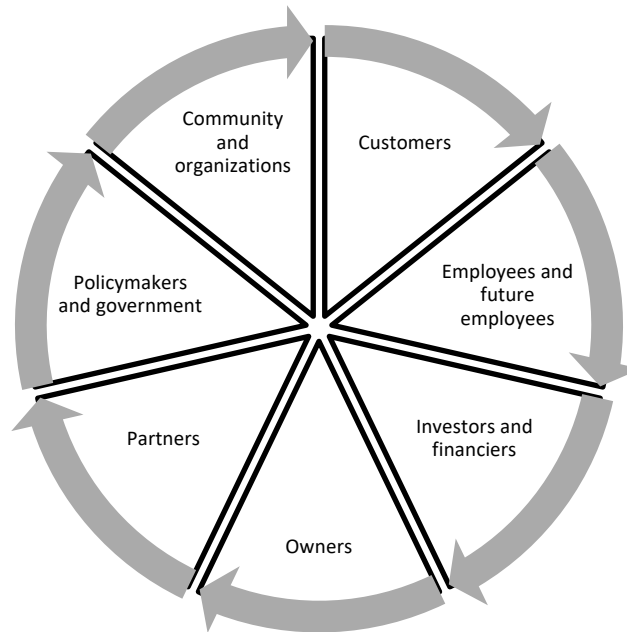

Figure 7.Key stakeholder groups (modified from Pohjola 2019, 71).

A clear distinction of stakeholder groups helps the business target its communication for the right group. By using motive-based segmentation, issues that occur in traditional segmentation models will resolve and by knowing the drivers that move your customers, you can find surprising similarities between customer groups that were thought as separate (Keronen&Tanni 2017, 61). Even though the distinction between different stakeholder groups is helpful, one must be cautious for making too narrow distinctions. When talking about defining the customer segment, the best way in the commissioner's case is to use motive-based segmentation. This assures that the communication is not targeted for a too narrow audience.

Targeting the chosen groups with information that brings value to them helps both in engaging potential customers and making official processes clear, keeping the process cost efficient. It has been shown that, companies that have invested in customer and

user experiences instead of focusing solely on technology or product development, have succeeded during the latest years (Hämäläinen et al, 2016 120).

Technology has changed the way people are pursued and a growing amount of information is being passed through mobile devices. The information being passed does not cover only the e-tailers, but in fact it has been shown that it has a huge impact on instore purchases as well, as 70% of shopper's instore purchases are influenced by what they see on their mobile devices (Gallo 2018, 39). In order to engage potential customers, communication needs to take place in mobile devices as well as other complimentary channels.

Communications also include influencer marketing, leveraging of youtubers and bloggers, lobbying or sponsorship (Pohjola 2019, 30). As the commissioner's business model is one that emphasis local and communal aspects, the chosen influencers are local micro influencers.

By borrowing a personal brand, a company gets the benefit using a celebrity or a known person to tell consumers about the brand's character and to get a "recommendation" (Pohjola 2019, 30).

4.1.3 Internal and external communications

The distinction between external and internal communication, presented in chapter two, is quite clear. Internal and external communications should be in line with one another and one of the functions of internal communication is to integrate internal activities and external community image into a functional entity (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 83). In addition, the manner that internal communication is handled, reflects in the working unit's culture that is highly visible for outside stakeholder groups.

The internal communication has been quite effortless in the commissioner's team, as the two owners have been the only employees. However, there is a plan for scaling the business and as the team grows, there needs to be more focus put on developing the internal communication's tools and manners. As all other areas of communication, the internal communication needs to represent the business's values, the number one priority is to be sustainable. The sustainability aspect in management and communications is also visible in how the team is handled.

The tools chosen for internal communication, are ones that support the employee's wellbeing. This means that the communication tools have been chosen so that all current and future employees can choose when they want to be available for business encounters. The tools chosen for internal communications are email, slack and phone calls. These tools were chosen in co-operation with the commissioner, based on the interviews conducted. Well-managed and open internal communication motivates, inspires and engages employees (Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 84). The commissioner's priority is for the communication to be a tool for making things clear and helping the team in their everyday actions.

The external communication regarding the main stakeholder group, the customers, was planned based on the survey conducted with the focus group. The results were analyzed and processed to form the frame for the communication plan that is visible in the attachments (appendix 2).

Other stakeholder groups were taken into consideration by defining the importance in the current situation. The business has started its operations in early January 2020 and there is no need for outside financiers at the moment. If the need for outside financiers would occur, the revenue model would need to be explained thoroughly. The revenue consists of three main streams: revenue from renting racks for customers to sell their items, the revenue from vegan cosmetics and household products and the income from secondhand clothes bought in by the commissioner.

The communication with the partners chosen, is planned as effective and informatic. The commissioner's image is seen in the communication, all partners are treated with respect and the commissioner aims to spread the aspect of communal thinking in all partnerships. This is done by mainly choosing partners that are close by both in distance and ideology. The sustainability aspect is seen in all external communications from government workers to future employees, the communications should aim to foster long-term relationships. The means used in communications support the commissioner's image, the usage of singe-used paper is avoided, and the tools used for communications are mainly online.

4.1.4 Role of communications in strategy and execution

The commissioner's vision is to offer an inspiring shopping atmosphere that focuses on environmentally friendly, cruelty free and sustainable products and secondhand clothing. As the current megatrends are leaning towards sustainability, peer selling and local thinking, the commissioner's image is built around these aspects accompanied with complementary characters that add depth to the image.

The key components in the commissioner's image are sustainability, locality and reliability. The business wants to be perceived as ethical and inspiring. The aspects shown in figure 8, are incorporated in all actions taken, from furniture and the selection of sold goods to communications. The items chosen for the cosmetics and household products have been thoroughly investigated by the commissioner so that all producst are vegan, ethically produced and local. In the secondhand selection the focus is on inspiring people to choose peerselling and secondhand items over fast fashion products. The idea behind this is that the items that are left unused, are the most unsustainable ones. The issues in the clothing industry are multiple, but the commissioner aims to offer an option for fast fashion and other traditional business models in the clothing industry.

Figure 8. Image of Mintunvihreä.

The customers growing awareness of ethical issues works for the commissioner's benefit as social and ethical responsibility are important factors for consumers as they choose which products, brands or stores to support. Responsibility is one of the most prominent areas of corporate communications in recent times (Pohjola 2019, 33). The same aspects might be important to all consumers, but they respond to different stimulus. The commissioner's communication plan mixes methods in order to engage a bigger percentage of respondents.

As seen in the following picture by Keronen and Tanni (figure 9), the main elements of content strategy are built around five elements. The business strategy explains strategic priorities and objectives, whereas customer insight aims to gather information about the customers and their motives. Content paths are created using the information received and modified to fit the needs of each stage of the customer journey. Content plan and production focuses on where to communicate and how. Measurement and analyzing finalized the process, making sure that the steps taken are effective. The process is reported throughout, focusing on right targeting.
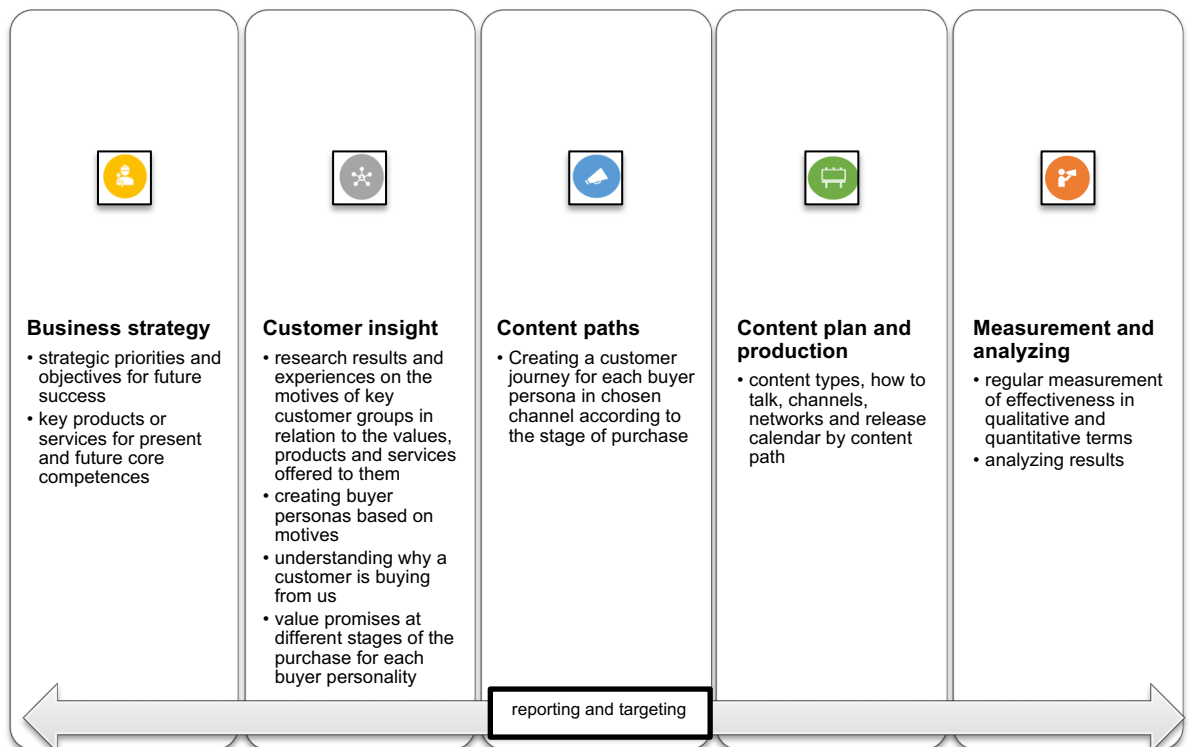

Figure 9. Elements of content strategy (modified from Keronen&Tanni 2017, 29).

The commissioner's competition is not solely focused on other local secondhand stores, the competition covers fast fashion as well. When talking about separating from competition, the commissioner needs to remember to communicate in a way that speaks to these consumers as well. The potential customer segment grows significantly if the consumers buying fast fashion are integrated in the customer segment as well. When deciding the content for external communication, this segment was also kept in mind, specially how to reach them and convey them, as valuable content for the customers is made where the customer and the company meet (Keronen&Tanni 2017, 21).

The key customer persona, that is in the focus when deciding on content strategy, is a person that is environmentally aware and shares the same values as the commissioner. The customer persona wants to validate his or her own decisions by being a part of a community. The customer persona lives a hectic lifestyle and on top of wanting to find goods that match with his or her personality and values, the buying process needs to be simple, inspiring and effortless.

The content is based on storytelling, as she has a relatable story behind the reasons for wanting to create a business that is based on sustainable values. The steps shown in figure 10, show the different stages of the buying process and what content are used in storytelling in each phase. The stories aim to be easy to comprehend and personal. The stories are built in a way that communicates the overall image of the commissioner, using visual aids and inspirational content as elements.
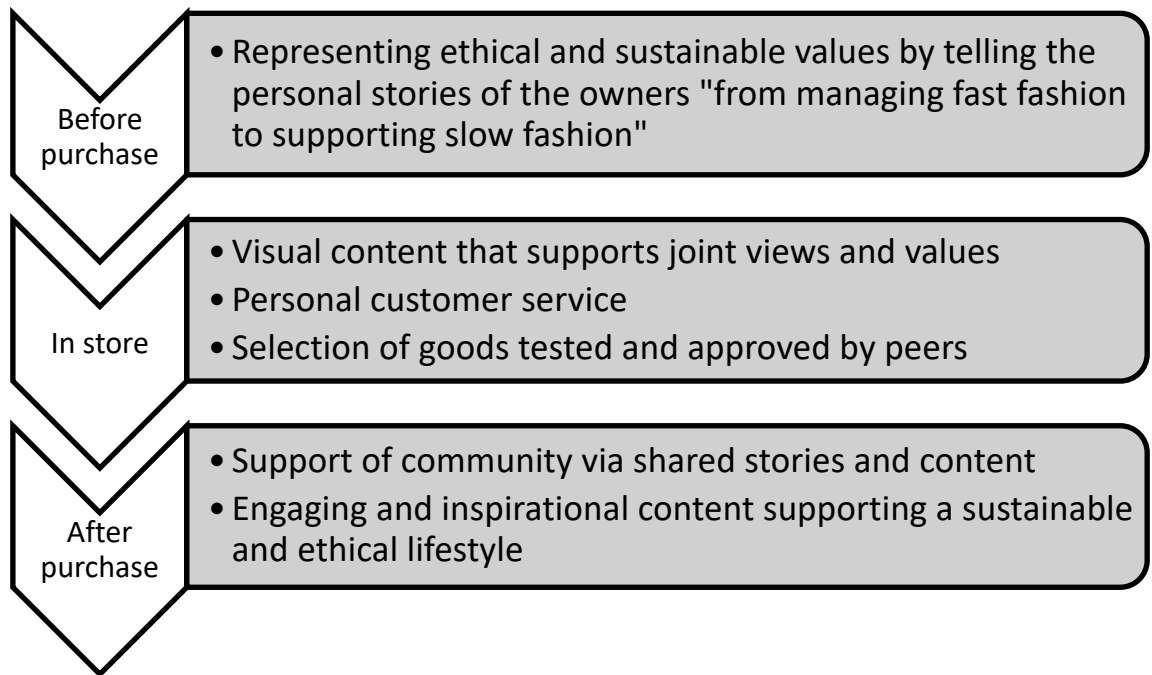
Figure 10. Content in different stages of purchase.

The stories are relatable and also speak to customers that are not too environmentally aware as that was the case for the commissioner in the past. The stories told can be modified to fit the needs of each stage of purchase and content is displayed in channels where the customer persona is active in his or her daily life.

Business or operational goals are the starting point for measuring the effectiveness of advertising and communications, in practice, this means measuring the change in the behavior of recipients (Pohjola 2019, 52). The success of the communication in the commissioner's case is measured depending on the tool being used. In online tools the success is measured using engagement rates, the purpose is to engage as many viewers and visitors as possible, but the goals should be set on a realistic target. The main tool for the commissioner for measuring results, is total turnover as the main purpose for the communication is to turn the idea of a business, into profit.

4.1.5 Communications in building a brand

Our actions and words are by far our most important and credible form of communication (Hakala 2015, 94). Knowing this, the values presented should be integrated in all communication, from face to face encounters with customers to written communications.

The company's vision is to be the number one shopping destination for people who want to shop in a sustainable way. As stated before, the commissioner's vision is to speak to urban citizens, so it is natural to choose a location that can be reached by public transport or by foot and an interior that is built by using recycled goods. All communicative actions highlight the commissioner's image and values, creating a coherent brand.

Customer value is a tool for understanding why a customer buys and remains a customer and it can be divided into four main themes as followed:

1. Economic value: the monetary benefit a customer gain
2. Functional value: saving a customer time and effort
3. Emotional value: pleasure a customer gets from inspiring content
4. Symbolic value: important meanings produced for the customer such as status, ethics, or eco-friendliness
   (Keronen&Tanni 2017, 35).

The key in tapping into these four aspects is to focus on emotions. Because emotions play a major role in decision-making, effective communication should leverage emotional communication (Hakala 2015, 45). One of the key methods in managing the commissioner's communication strategy and its implementation, is to base the content is visuality and storytelling, both powerful tools as discussed before. Visuality has the following measurable tasks; attention value, attractiveness, recognizability, impact and engagement (Pohjola 2019, 54). The physical or online location of a retailer should be considered when defining the communication strategy and planning the methods used. The ways to profile a store include means such as location, style, materials used, sounds and plants (Pohjola 2019, 219). This means that the atmosphere where the commissioner functions in, should reflect the same message used in storytelling.

By focusing on values in its communication, the commissioner can benefit from storytelling and personality, making it a cost-efficient way to separate their business model from competition. The competitive edge can be built in layers, using all of the tools mentioned above. The economic value for the commissioner's customer is clear, customers can find preloved quality items for a fraction of the recommended retail price. The functional value comes from offering a business model where everything is done easy for the customer. For the customers that want to sell their items, they can book the table online and pay it in advance, once they arrive on location, they just hang the items and they are done. All the tidying up is done by the staff and the only optional thing left

for the customer, is to track their sales online. For the customers that focus on buying, it is simple, all the items sold are tested and approved by the staff, the store is organized, and products are easy to find by categories.

The value brought to the customer is in the consistency, the brand value is created in unified communication that highlights sustainability. This promise is redeemed in the selection, customer service, atmosphere and location.

4.2 Main findings of survey and their implementation

The survey conducted with the focus group aimed to solve the issue of external communication, content and strategy and how to use communication in building a brand. The main findings discuss the content and tools for external communications.

The total amount of respondents was 42, majority of the respondents being women with 70,73 %. The age groups differed from 18-24 (2,44%), 25-30 (29,27%), 31-40 (43,90%) and 40+ (24,39%).

The first strategic question was about what content the respondents find interesting in a company's social media channel. The respondents were given the opportunity to choose more than one option, since usually people follow social media channels for multiple reasons. The most interesting content in social media channels was informative content (70,73%), followed by inspirational content (60,98%). Information about products to be sold was next (48,78%), followed by beautiful pictures (36,59%), last was behind the scenes material (29,27%). As the results of the survey show, the content should be both inspiring and informative.

The following question asked the respondents to rank eight different online channels according to what they personally prefer to use. Instagram and Facebook posts were the most preferred choices. Shared second place was between Instagram stories and company's own website. Third preferred channels were YouTube and a blog. Next was Twitter and the least preferred channel was LinkedIn. Next question was a follow up to the fourth question which asked the respondents to explain why they chose their most preferred channel over other options. Most common reason for the channel of choice was that it was the channel the respondent was already using the most. The quickness and ease of use of the channel were also highly appreciated. Some respondents felt that

social media channels were too fast and non-formal and felt that company's own website is a better place for information because of that.

This means that the chosen channels for the commissioner's communication should be online, consisting mainly of social media tools which can be used on mobile devices. The tools are chosen due to social media being widely used among the targeted customer segment, as shown by the survey. Social media channels' nature is one of being a place to share content with likeminded people and its cost structure. It is fairly easy to engage an audience with a limited budget. Social media is also great for its nature of being a platform that is created for shared content, for the commissioner this means that not all the content that is shared needs to be originally created by her. It is natural to use a platform that is created to form communities, as it is also the commissioner's vision.

Next question asked the respondents how important for them is that the company in question shares same kind of values as the respondent personally does. Most of the respondents (45,34%) answered sharing same values is important to some degree. Over a third (38,10%) of the respondents kept it highly important for them. Some of the respondents (11,90%) were feeling neutral about the subject and a small section (4,76%) did not think it was important for them at all.

This means that one of the most important communicative goal, especially in the beginning, is to be able to communicate the company's image in an efficient manner that separates it from the competition and moves the company closer to its targets. A company conveys an image through various encounters, experiences and communication, building the image is an important competitive tool (Pohjola 2019, 71).

Following question asked the respondents what they thought was a good pace for a company to publish content on their online media channels. Large section of the respondents (73,81%) thought 1-3 times a week is the best pace to publish content, followed by 4-6 times a week (9,52%). Publishing content once a day got 3 votes (7,14%). The time used for reading when discussing digital content, has gotten shorter. More information is consumed but in a faster phase, this has increased the importance of the distinctive nature of the message with digital channels. (Pohjola 2019, 32.) This means that the content created should fit the platform and be planned so that the message is apprehensible while being engaging. The survey results show that the pace should be kept within one to three times a week, so that it is still considered sufficient but not overwhelming by the stakeholders.

The next question asked the respondents how they would most likely contact a company. Email was the most preferred (40,48%) method of contact. Second favorite method of contacting a company was shared by a phone call and a form on a website, each getting 10 votes (23,81%). Contacting through Facebook Messenger got 4 votes (9,52%). Other answers than the options given were contacting through LinkedIn (2,38%). For the commissioner, this means that conventional methods should not be forgotten.

Next question was about what kind of content do the respondents feel they would most likely share on their own social media channel. Most respondents (47,62%) felt they would most likely share useful information on their own channel. Secondly popular (45,24%) answer was funny or amusing content. Next up was clever content (35,71%) followed by competitions (26,19%). Discounts or benefits were the least popular (14,29%) answer. This emphasis the fact that, customers follow the channels and content that they find valuable (Keronen&Tanni 2017, 21).

The last question was about what time of the day do the respondents use social media channels the most. Most popular time of the day by far was in the evening (85,71%). This was followed by afternoon (16,67%) and midday (9,52%). Morning had few votes (7,14%) and the least popular answer was night-time (4,76%).

5 KEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The main focus of the thesis was to understand the needs and aspects of corporate communications and from that knowledge gained, build a functionable communication plan for the commissioner. The research question was: what is the most functionable communication plan for the case company? This narrowed done the research to focus on the specific needs of the commissioner's company.

The following questions to support the research were defined as:

- What are the main stakeholder groups?

- What are the roles of internal and external communications?

- What is the role of communication in the company's strategy

and execution?

- How communications can be used in building a brand?

The content and structure of the thesis was built around the research question and the supportive questions. This helped to keep the research organized and assured that all actions aimed to solve the research questions. The literature sources helped to set the knowledge gained from the research in a theoretical framework.

The tools and methods of corporate communications were defined in the theory sections of this thesis, applied in chapter four and finally implemented in the communication plan presented in attachments.

The main focus of the research was to understand different aspects of corporate communications by using mixed research methods. The focus was not only to understand the role of corporate communications, but to use the knowledge gained in order to build a communication plan for the commissioner that gives a competitive edge and tools for building a new business.

Based on the research done using observation in the preliminary stage and interviews and questioner later in the process, a communication plan was drafted and implemented for the commissioner. As the research resulted in an actionable plan for the commissioner, a conclusion can be made that the research was successful.

5.1 Summary of results and key findings of the research

The research showed that the of tools used in corporate communications are multiple and the communication strategy should be built so that it is incorporated in the company's overall strategy (Pohjola 2019, 72). In order to build a functioning communication plan, the commissioner's goals need to be clear, the stakeholders need to be identified and the operating environment analyzed. As the interview with the expert social media and influencer communication showed, companies designing communication, need to take into consideration that people follow channels for different reasons. Companies planning their communications strategy, should provide different approached to serve the stakeholder's needs. The literature used in the research supported the expert's view in using stories to guide the commissioner's communication.

The strategy and the content were planned based on literature and the research. The main findings from the research was that in a consumer society, people use materia and consuming as ways to build their identity and to express themselves (Hämäläinen, Maula, Suominen 2016, 42). For the commissioner this means that likeminded people are more likely to want to join their community and support it as a part of building their identity. For taking full advantage of this, the commissioner needs to build a strong community around their mission, vision and values. It is not enough to tell about the values, the consumers need something they can relate to. The best way to do so is to understand what brings value for the customers. As Hämäläinen with her colleagues stated, value creation is based of understanding the customer's underlying motives for making a purchase (Hämäläinen et al, 2016 45).

Content strategy can be defined as an insight derived from business strategy and customer understanding into how content achieves strategic goals and what steps should be taken in order to achieve those goals (Keronen&Tanni 2017, 21). One of the main finding from the strategic standpoint was that in order to fully understand the strategic steps that best suits the commissioner, the needs of the stakeholders must be clear. In order to understand the needs, research must be carefully planned. In this research, the main process for understanding the commissioner's external strategy was defined though the survey and the internal ones with the interview conducted with the commissioner.

The following chart (figure11) is modified to show the advantages that planning the commissioner's communication brings for the company. The main aspects consist of efficiency, both from the aspect of cost efficiency and time-management. Other main aspects are in having structure, being systematic in actions which ensures that the communication is coherent. By planning the communication process, the commissioner ensures that staff performance is on the right level, knowledge is shared, and possible risks are managed.
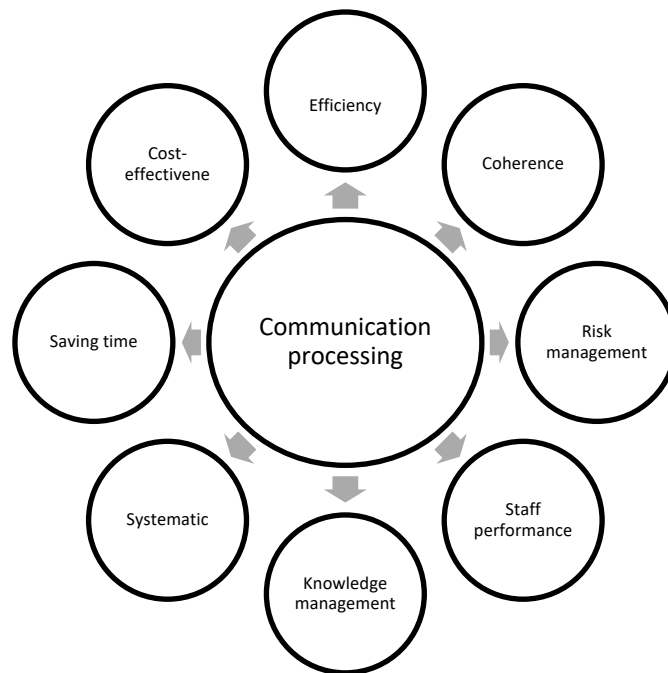

Figure 11. Advantages of communication processing (modified from Korhonen&Rajala 2011, 190).

A communication plan should set out what activity should take place and when. The aim is to ensure the activity level is appropriate towards the main stakeholder groups and in line with the objectives set in the communication strategy. A communication plan needs to include the target audience, objective delivered by the activity, the key message and who is in charge of delivering the message. (Pilkington 2013, 138−139.) The communication plan for the commissioner, visible in attachments, is drafted based on these guidelines and the information gained throughout the research.

5.2 Reliability and usability of the research

A limitation in action research is that it cannot be generalizable (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 204). The limitation was known when starting the research process, as it was done for a commissioner, the results cannot be replicated, however, by choosing the approach, the results were actionable, which was the main criteria for choosing the approach. The research targeted the specific needs of the case company and it focused on examining its stakeholders, the role of internal and external communications strategy, and brand building. All these aspects created a unique framework that link the findings to the case company. The steps and research methods could be replicated, but it is unlikely that the research would result in the exact same findings, nor was it the goal of the research.

Action research is by nature complex and democratic, making it difficult to carry out in an atmosphere where not everyone in the community wants to take part (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 204). The complexity in this research meant that there was no room delays or sidetracks, with careful planning and co-operation with the commissioner, these were avoided, however, it is important to recognize this limitation.

As external validity or generalizability refers to a situation where the finding and conclusions of a research can be applied to other contexts or settings, however, it is difficult to achieve in a qualitative research (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 79-80). In this framework, the research cannot be thought to be generazible or that it fills the criteria of external validity.

Internal validity can be described as the extent which the research and findings account accurately reflect the social world of the participants in the study and the phenomenon being investigated (Daymon & Holloway 2010, 79). From internal validity standpoint, the research is considered to be reliable and valid, as it succeeded in producing actionable results for the commissioner that reflect the business atmosphere it works in.

The challenge was to be able to build a communication plan that makes the commissioner stand out from the competition with limited resources, this meant that the plan could not be based on traditional means such as paid media. Limitations for the research were also brought by the strict timeline, as the communication plan was to be implemented during January 2020. Without a strict timeline, the research could have

been more thorough. Regarding the research, the survey intake could have been wider, which might have caused more deviation.

The research helped the commissioner define its stakeholders, understand the role of internal and external communication, specify its communication strategy and understand how to use communication in building a brand. Most importantly, the research resulted in a communication plan, that has been implemented in the case company.

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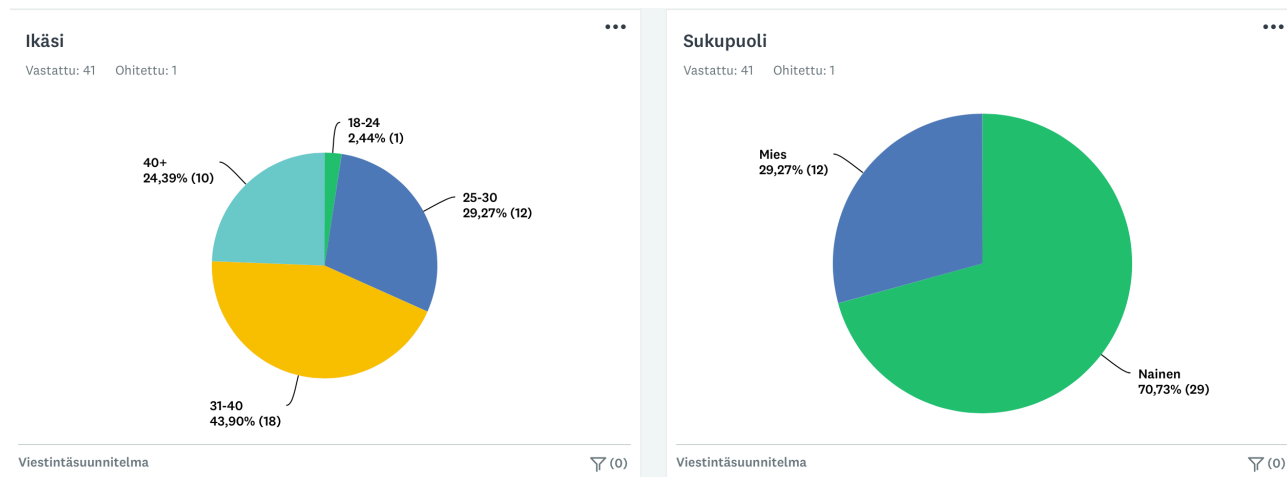
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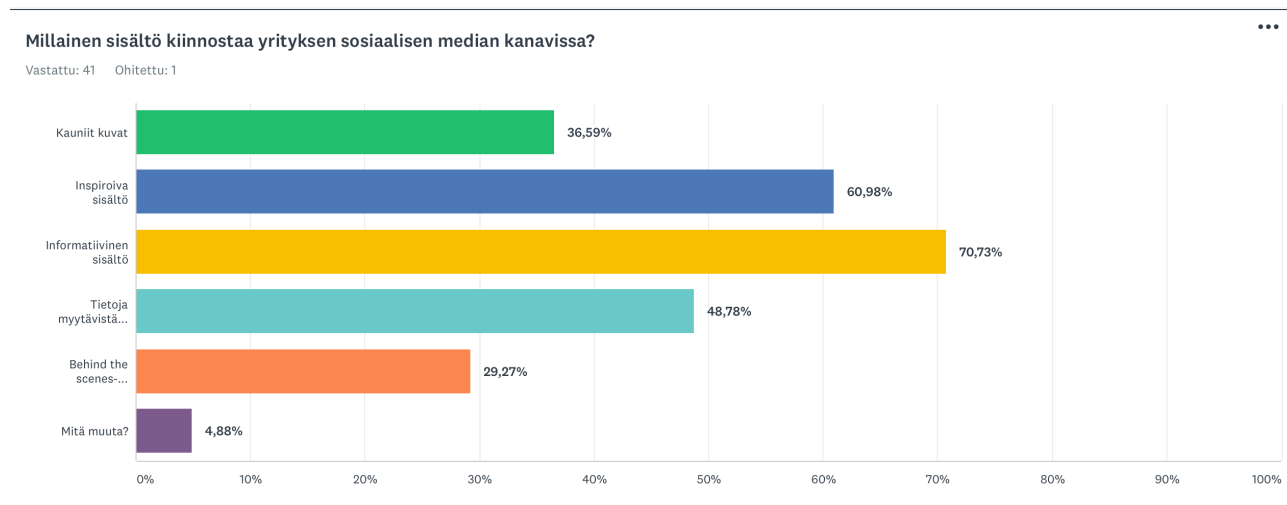
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Results of communication plan survey

Ikäsi
Vastattu: 41   Ohitettu: 1

18-24
2,44% (1)

40+
24,39% (10)

25-30
29,27% (12)

31-40
43,90% (18)

Viestintäsuunnitelma   ▽ (0)

Sukupuoli
Vastattu: 41   Ohitettu: 1

Mies
29,27% (12)

Nainen
70,73% (29)

Viestintäsuunnitelma   ▽ (0)

The total amount of respondents was 42. Gender question was answered by 41 respondents, majority of them being women with 70,73 %. The age groups differed from 18-24 (2,44%), 25-30 (29,27%), 31-40 (43,90%) and 40+ (24,39%) with 41 answers.

Millainen sisältö kiinnostaa yrityksen sosiaalisen median kanavissa?
Vastattu: 41   Ohitettu: 1

Kauniit kuvat	36,59%
Inspiroiva sisältö	60,98%
Informatiivinen sisältö	70,73%
Tietoja myytävistä...	48,78%
Behind the scenes-...	29,27%
Mitä muuta?	4,88%

The next question was about what content the respondents find interesting in a company's social media channel. The respondents were given the opportunity to choose more than one option, since usually people follow social media channels for multiple reasons.

The most interesting content in social media channels was informative content (70,73%), followed by inspirational content (60,98%). Information about products to be sold was next (48,78%), followed by beautiful pictures (36,59%), last was behind the scenes

material (29,27%). Optional "What else" section had one answer with information about the company's ethical factors. This question had 41 answers in total.
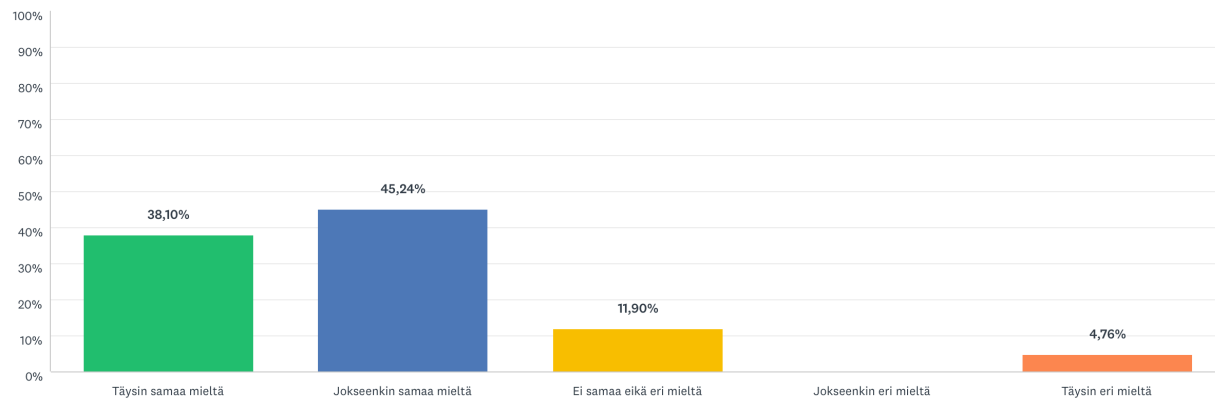

The fourth question asked the respondents to rank eight different online channels according to what they personally prefer to use. Instagram and Facebook posts were the most preferred choices. Shared second place was between Instagram stories and company's own website. Third preferred channels were Youtube and a blog. Next was Twitter and the least preferred channel was LinkedIn. This question got 41 answers.

Fifth question was a follow up to the fourth question which asked the respondents to explain why they chose their most preferred channel over other options.

Most common reason for the channel of choice was that it was the channel the respondent was already using the most. The quickness and ease of use of the channel were also highly appreciated. Some respondents felt that social media channels were too fast and non-formal and felt that company's own website is a better place for information because of that. Total of 37 answers for this question.

Samojen arvojen jakaminen seurattavan yrityksen kanssa on minulle tärkeää.

Vastattu: 42   Ohitettu: 0

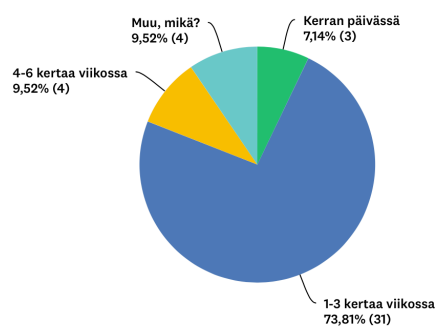Viestintäsuunnitelma   ▽ (0)

Next question asked the respondents how important for them is that the company in question shares same kind of values as the respondent personally does. Most of the respondents (45,34%) answered sharing same values is important to some degree. Over a third (38,10%) of the respondents keep it highly important for them. Some of the respondents (11,90%) were feeling neutral about the subject and a small section (4,76%) did not think it was important for them at all. All 42 of the respondents answered this question.

Millainen on yritykselle sopiva päivitystahti?
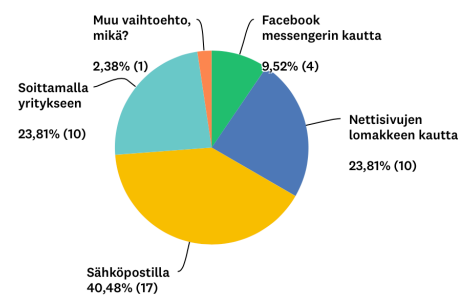
Vastattu: 42   Ohitettu: 0

Viestintäsuunnitelma   ▽ (0)

Mitä kautta haluat mieluiten ottaa yhteyttä yritykseen?

Vastattu: 42   Ohitettu: 0

Viestintäsuunnitelma   ▽ (0)

Seventh question asked the respondents what they thought was a good pace for a company to publish content on their online media channels.

Large section of the respondents (73,81%) thought 1-3 times a week is the best pace to publish content, followed by 4-6 times a week (9,52%). Publishing content once a day got 3 votes (7,14%).
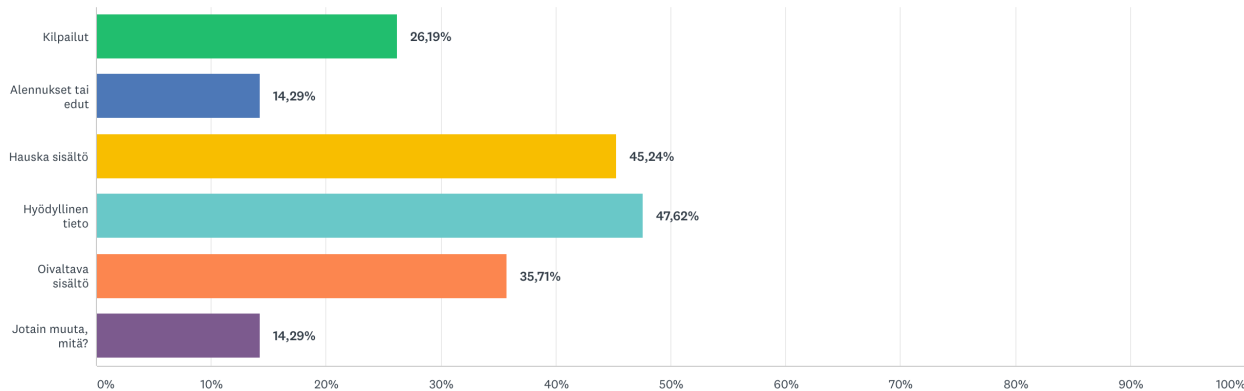
Some of the respondents answered something else than the options given. These answers were ranging from once a week to once a month. Some felt it depended on the company's line of field. This question had total of 42 answers.

Question number 8 asked the respondents how they would most likely contact a company.

Email was the most preferred (40,48%) method of contact. Second favourite method of contacting a company was shared by a phone call and a form on a website, each getting 10 votes (23,81%). Contacting through Facebook Messenger got 4 votes (9,52%). Other answers than the options given were contacting through LinkedIn (2,38%). All 42 respondents answered this question.

Millaista yrityksen julkaisemaa sisältöä jaat todennäköisemmin omaan kanavaasi?

Vastattu: 42   Ohitettu: 0

|	
Kilpailut	26,19%
Alennukset tai edut	14,29%
Hauska sisältö	45,24%
Hyödyllinen tieto	47,62%
Oivaltava sisältö	35,71%
Jotain muuta, mitä?	14,29%

Viestintäsuunnitelma

Next question was about what kind of content do the respondents feel they would most likely share on their own social media channel.

Most respondents (47,62%) felt they would most likely share useful information on their own channel. Secondly popular (45,24%) answer was funny or amusing content. Next

up was clever content (35,71%) followed by competitions (26,19%). Discounts or benefits were the least popular (14,29%) answer. Total of 42 answers for this question.

Mihin vuorokauden aikaan käytät eniten sosiaalisen median kanavia?

Vastattu: 42   Ohitettu: 0
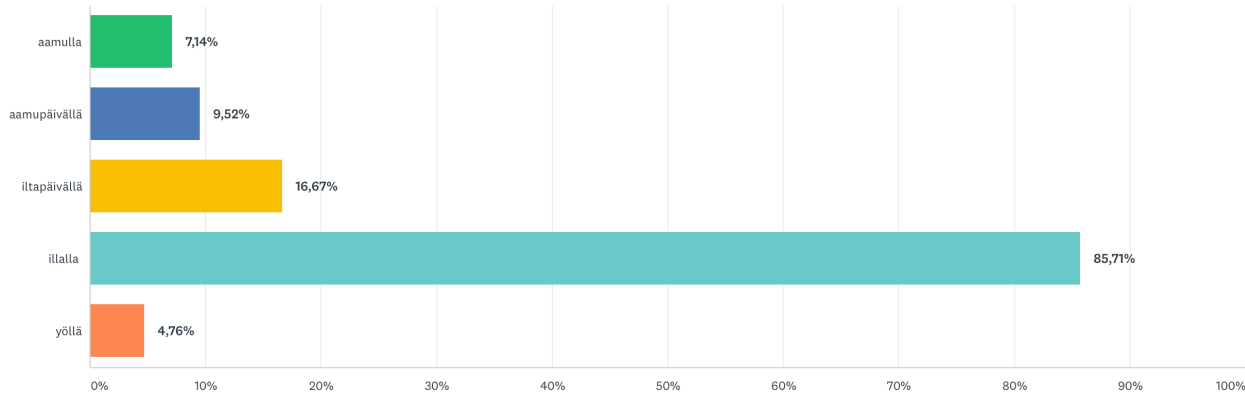
Viestintäsuunnitelma   ▽ (0)

Tenth and last question was about what time of the day do the respondents use social media channels the most.

Most popular time of the day by far was in the evening (85,71%). This was followed by afternoon (16,67%) and midday (9,52%). Morning had few votes (7,14%) and the least popular answer was night-time (4,76%). This question had total of 42 answers.

Communication plan

MINTUNVIHREÄ

Key stakeholders

CUSTOMERS

EMPLOYEES AND FUTURE EMPLOYEES

INVESTORS AND FINANCIERS

OWNERS

PARTNERS

POLICYMAKERS AND GOVERNMENT

COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONS

External communications

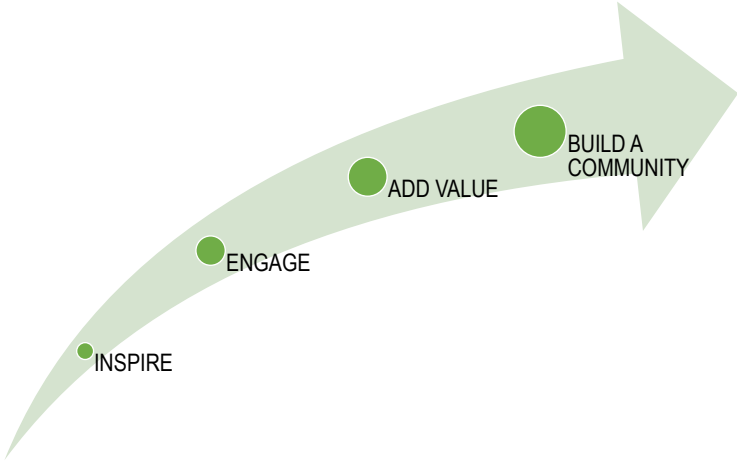| STAKEHOLDER	OBJECTIVE	KEY MESSAGE	METHOD	CHANNEL USED	FREQUENCY	INCHARGE OF DELIVERY
INVESTORS AND FINANCIERS	REDUCE UNCERTAINTY	FINANCIAL INDICATORS	CONTACTING CONTACT PERSONS	EMAIL, FACE TO FACE MEETINGS	ONCE A QUARTER	EEVA
COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONS	BUILD CO-OPERATIONS	KEY QUALITIES OF MINTUNVIHREÄ THAT BEENFIT THE COMMUNITY	HOSTING EVENTS DOING CHARITY WORK	SOCIAL MEDIA, PR–EVENTS	ONCE A QUARTER	MINTTU
OFFICIAL WORKERS	LEGAL RESPONSABILITIES	LEGALITY OF OPERATIONS	CONTACTING PERSONS IN CHARGE OF OPERATIONS	OFFICIAL CHANNELS		EEVA
PARTNERS	BE A WANTED BUSINESS PARTNER	FOSTERING TRUST BUILDING A BRAND	SELECTING EXCLUSIVE PARTNERS THAT SHARE THE SAME VALUES	FACE TO FACE MEETINGS EMAIL PHONE CALLS	ONCE A WEEK	MINTTU
POLICYMAKERS AND GOVERNMENT	LEGAL RESONSABILITIES	LEGALITY OF OPERATIONS		OFFICIAL CHANNELS		EEVA
FUTURE EMPLOYEES	EMPLOYEE BRANDUNG	WANTED PLACE TO WORK	SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT THE BRAND AND WORKPLACE	SOCIAL MEDIA F2F ENCOUNTERS	DAILY	EEVA + MINTTU
CUSTOMERS	ENGAGE CONVERT INTO PAYING CUSTOMERS RECOMMENDATIONS	BEING A PART OF A COMMUNITY GREAT PLACE FOR BUSINESS	STORYTELLING GIVING INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION	SOCIAL MEDIA OWN WEBSITE F2F ENCOUNTERS VISUALITY ON LOCATION	THREE TIMES A WEEK ON DEMAND DAILY DAILY	CONTENT: EEVA + MINTTU F2F ENCOUNTERS: ALL STAFF MEMBERS

Internal communications

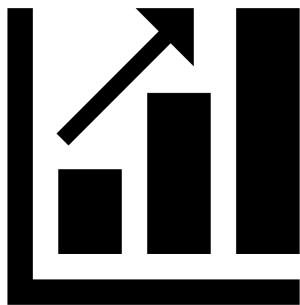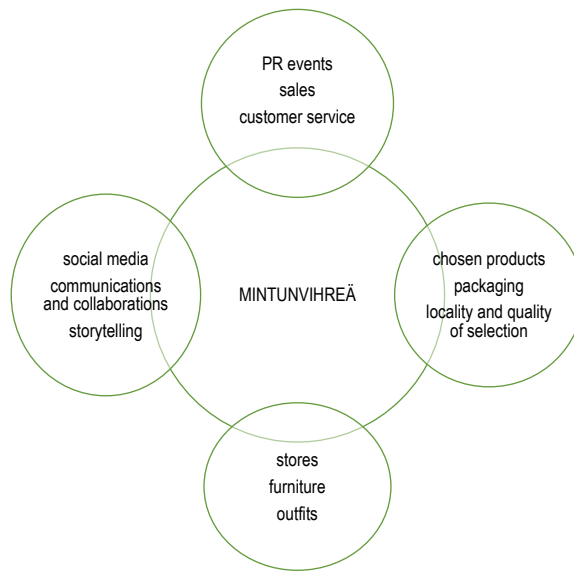| STAKEHOLDER	OBJECTIVE	KEY MESSAGE	METHOD	CHANNEL USED	FREQUENCY	INCHARGE OF DELIVERY
OWNERS	INFORM	CURRENT EVENTS	CONVERSATIONS	F2F	DAILY	EEVA + MINTTU
EMPLOYEES	SHARE KNOWLEDGE FOSTER TRUST AND A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT	CURRENT EVENTS MISSION, VISION, VALUES GOALS AND STRATEGY	CONVERSATIONS INFORMATION LETTERS	F2F EMAIL SLACK	DAILY OR WHEN NEEDED	EEVA + MINTTU

Crisis management

STAKEHOLDER	OBJECTIVE	KEY MESSAGE	CHANNEL USED	FREQUENCY	INCHARGE OF DELIVERY
INVESTORS AND FINANCIERS	INFORM	POSSIBLE FINANCIAL AFFECTS OF CRISIS	PHONE CALLS EMAIL	AS SOON AS POSSIBLE	MINTTU
COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONS	INFORM	POSSIBLE AFFECTS FOR THE COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONS	OWN WEBSITE SOCIAL MEDIA	AS SOON AS POSSIBLE	MINTTU
OFFICIAL WORKERS	INFORM	POSSIBLE LEGAL AFFECTS AND RESPONSABILITIES	OFFICIAL CHANNELS	AS SOON AS POSSIBLE	MINTTU
PARTNERS	INFORM	POSSIBLE AFFECTS ON PARTENRS	OWN WEBSITE PHONE CALLS	AS SOON AS POSSIBLE	MINTTU
POLICYMAKERS AND GOVERNMENT	INFORM	POSSIBLE LEGAL AFFECTS AND RESPONSABILITIES	OFFICIAL CHANNELS	AS SOON AS POSSIBLE	MINTTU
OWNERS	INFORM	POSSIBLE FINANCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL AFFETCS	F2F PHONE CALLS	AS SOON AS POSSIBLE	MINTTU
EMPLOYEES	INFORM	POSSIBLE ORGANIZATIONAL AND PERSONAL AFFECTS	F2F PHONE CALLS	AS SOON AS POSSIBLE	MINTTU

Communications in strategy and execution

BUILD A COMMUNITY

ADD VALUE

ENGAGE

INSPIRE

Communications in building a brand

PR events
sales
customer service

social media
communications
and collaborations
storytelling

MINTUNVIHREÄ

chosen products
packaging
locality and quality
of selection

stores
furniture
outfits

Measuring communications

- Engagement rate on social media platforms
- Total net sales
- Feedback
- Surveys
- Conversion rate