

# **UTILIZATION PROCESS OF DIGITAL TOURISM PLATFORM**

Case: Outdooractive

## Abstract

Author(s) Tabulovich, Anita	Type of publication Bachelor's thesis	Published Spring 2020
	Number of pages 46	
Title of publication <b>Utilization process of digital tourism platform</b> Case: Outdooractive		
Name of Degree Bachelor of Business Administration		
Abstract <p>During recent years, digitalization has transformed the tourism business ecosystem with technological advances as its main booster. Digital platforms now significantly affect the rise of the tourism sector by providing the latest marketing and quality control tools, global market entree as well as rise of diversity and quantity of tourism products and services.</p> <p>The main objective of this study was to discover how the implementation process of the case platform, Outdooractive, can be improved in order to better meet current clients' needs within B2B context in the Finnish market. The thesis explored digital transformation in the travel industry, current and future trends of this process as well as its impact on Destination Marketing Organizations. The thesis discussed the concept of the digital platform and its implementation and usage in tourism. Also, the thesis introduces the case platform as a tourism business development tool.</p> <p>The study was based on the deductive approach and uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Secondary and primary data sources were collected in the study. Primary data was gathered through an online survey conducted among corporate users of the Outdooractive platform. Secondary data was collected from reliable printed and electronic sources that are relevant to the topic.</p> <p>The results of the study indicated that digital platforms are popular, widely used, and have become the main industry boosters in tourism. Moreover, the thesis produced recommendations for improving the implementation and use of the Outdooractive platform based on the key findings of the study: set clear steps with deadlines for cooperation, and regularly notify clients about any changes, modifications, or new functions of the platform.</p>		
Keywords digital platform, tourism, digitalization, platform implementation, platform utilization		

## CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	1
1 INTRODUCTION .....	2
1.1 Research Background .....	2
1.2 Research Objectives, Questions and Limitations .....	3
1.3 Research Methodology and Data Collection .....	4
1.4 Thesis Structure .....	4
2 DIGITALIZATION IN TOURISM.....	6
2.1 Industry Transformation .....	6
2.2 Current and Future Trends .....	8
2.3 Destination Marketing Organizations .....	12
2.4 Digital Platforms in Tourism .....	14
3 DIGITAL TOURISM PLATFORM IMPLEMENTATION.....	17
3.1 Acquisition .....	17
3.2 Development .....	18
3.3 Deployment .....	19
4 CASE PLATFORM STUDY.....	21
4.1 Case Review .....	21
4.2 Current Implementation Process of the Case Platform .....	24
5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS.....	26
5.1 Data Collection .....	26
5.2 Data Analysis.....	27
5.3 Recommendations for Improvement .....	34
6 CONCLUSIONS .....	36
6.1 Answers to the Research Questions .....	36
6.2 Reliability and Validity .....	38
6.3 Suggestions for Further Research .....	39
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	40
APPENDICES.....	43

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI - Artificial Intelligence

AR - Augmented Reality

DMO - Destination Marketing Organization

DMS - Destination Management System

IoT - Internet of Things

UX - User Experience

VR - Virtual Reality

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

Tourism is one of the most rapidly increasing global industries. It is an essential part of the developing economy that has the potential to produce lots of jobs, improve business relationships, promote entrepreneurship and implement innovations. However, the tourism business ecosystem has brought crucial changes due to the emergence of digital technologies and innovations. (The World Bank 2018)

Nowadays, modern technology is the motive force for most kinds of business. The travel industry is not an exception. Digitalization has transformed the whole working process of the tourism sector. This revolution concerns tourism enterprises' structure, business models and operations, products, roles of consumers and destinations. The utilization of digital technologies gives new opportunities for travel companies to enter the global market and significantly extend prospects. Technological innovations offer modern tools to add value to tourism products, services and experiences. However, along with new possibilities, digital technologies have created new challenges for the travel industry as all operational processes, concepts of travel and trip-related needs are changing. (PATA & Oxford Economics 2018)

Therefore, knowledge about orientation in this new environment is becoming vital. More and more touristic organizations try to use up-to-date technologies to differ themselves from their rivals and become more successful in this changing environment. (PATA & Oxford Economics 2018)

Currently, the travel industry is greatly affected by digital platforms. They provide worldwide admission to customers and travelers as well as give the latest marketing and quality control tools to travel corporations for boosting the rise of the tourism sector. The growth of digital platforms has increased the diversity and quantity of tourism products, services and involvements. Moreover, digital platforms improve experiences for consumers, employees and partners. For travel companies it becomes extremely important to obtain a full insight of current technologies and platforms to make smart and sensible decisions. (Dredge, et al. 2018)

Considering the present growth of digital platform usage in tourism, understanding the process of its effective implementation becomes urgent. This thesis explores how digitalization transforms the tourism sector and what are current and future trends of the industry. Also, the research analyzes stages of the successful implementation of the digital tourism platform.

The case platform of this study is Outdooractive. It is an international platform for the outdoor tourism sector which is based on a central content database. Outdooractive provides an indispensable interface to integrate content into customers' communication channels. The platform merges diverse up-to-date information from different sources. Content is displayed via the content-marketing network of the Outdooractive platform. It represents the whole tourist infrastructure of the area and its outdoor options.

The Outdooractive platform is used by Ellare Oy which is a Destination Marketing Organization and the case company of this study. Ellare is a Finnish outdoor tourism company that offers expert services in tourism, coaching, content production, Outdooractive technology and marketing campaigns. The thesis investigates the existing utilization process of the case platform between Ellare and its clients. Lastly, some suggestions for improvements are proposed based on the study discoveries.

## 1.2 Research Objectives, Questions and Limitations

The main objective of this study is to discover how the implementation process of the case platform, Outdooractive, can be improved in order to better meet current clients' needs within B2B context in the Finnish market.

Also, the thesis aims to:

- Explore contemporary researches and current trends in the tourism industry
- Provide a better understanding of the case platform as a tourism business development tool
- Evaluate the importance of effective implementation and utilization of the case platform
- Collect current data and analyze user experience of the case platform
- Create a list of suggestions for further improvement

Research question and sub-questions are essential elements of this thesis. They help to provide a clear structure and easy-to-follow path through the research.

The main research question for this thesis is:

- What is the role of digital platform utilization in the tourism business?

In order to help to answer the main research question and explore the study field deeper, the following subordinate research questions have been formulated:

- How does digitalization affect the tourism industry?
- What are the stages of digital tourism platform implementation?

- How does the case platform utilization help to follow the trends of digitalization in tourism?
- What should be considered to improve user experience of B2B users of the case platform?

The research has several limitations. Firstly, the topic can be viewed from different perspectives, that is why the thesis only considers tourism in B2B context and the Finnish market. The second limitation is that the study focuses exactly on the case platform and may not apply to other cases appropriately. However, it can be still reviewed by everyone interested in the topic or trends in the tourism industry. Finally, the topic has a limited amount of available prior studies and data because it is not widely discussed in the industry.

### 1.3 Research Methodology and Data Collection

There are two basic research approaches: deductive and inductive approach. The deductive approach starts with the theory and tests its validity, whereas the inductive approach focuses on the development of new phenomena from existing data. (Gabriel 2013) This thesis applies the deductive research approach.

Furthermore, two commonly used research methodologies are qualitative and quantitative. They are based on diverse ways of data collection and analysis as well as they help to respond to different types of research questions. The quantitative research method is mostly applied to verify or confirm assumptions and establish common evidence about a topic. This kind of research is expressed in numbers, graphs, figures or tables. On the other hand, the qualitative research method focuses on comprehension of ideas, thoughts or knowledge as well as permits to gain a deep understanding of topics. This kind of research is primarily expressed in words. (Streefkerk 2019) This thesis uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

In addition, both primary and secondary data was gathered for this thesis. Primary data was collected from an online survey conducted within corporate users of the case platform. Secondary data was gathered by reviewing different reliable information sources, analyzing related data and examination of the case platform.

### 1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis consists of six main sections. Figure 1 represents the complete structure of the thesis.

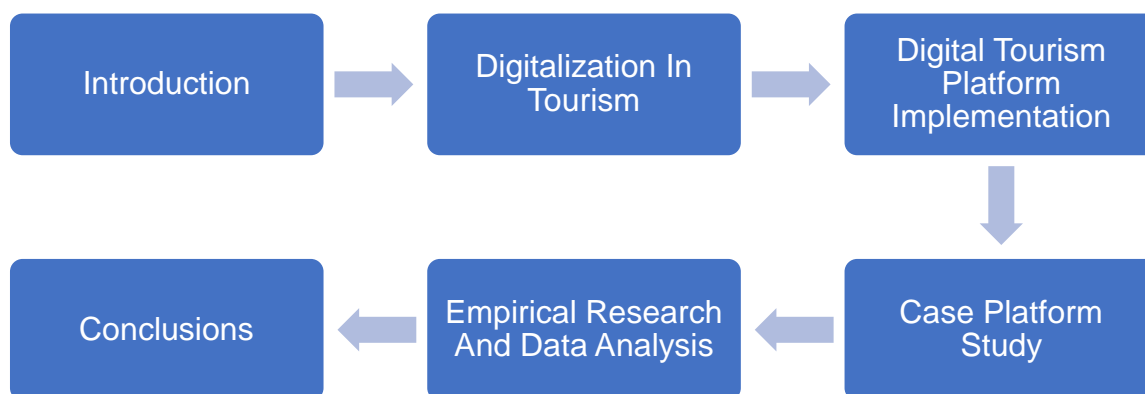


Figure 1. Thesis structure

Chapter 1 introduces the topic, research background and main objectives of the research. It defines research questions and limitations as well as presents research methodology and data collection.

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are the theoretical foundations of the thesis. They present a literature review as well as an exploration of related information, materials and studies. Chapter 2 explores the digital transformation in the travel industry. It discusses current and future trends of digitalization in tourism and its impact on business processes in the industry. The chapter outlines changes in Destination Marketing Organizations' operations. Also, the concept of digital platforms and their usage in tourism are described. Chapter 3 focuses on the digital tourism platform implementation. It reviews each step of this process which is acquisition, development and deployment.

Chapter 4 explores the case platform as a business development tool. It reviews functionality, fundamental tools and main purposes of the case platform. Also, operations and processes such as marketing, distribution, implementation and utilization of the platform are studied.

Chapter 5 is an empirical part of the thesis. It explains the methods of data collection and analysis as well as presents the results of the analysis. The last sub-chapter of Chapter 5 includes recommendations for improvement of the case platform implementation and utilization processes.

Chapter 6 finalizes and summarizes the whole thesis. It provides research conclusions, answers to the research questions, evaluation of the study's reliability and validity. Lastly, it offers suggestions for further research.



## 2 DIGITALIZATION IN TOURISM

### 2.1 Industry Transformation

In recent years digital transformation has strongly influenced the majority of global industries. Tourism has not become an exception. Digitalization has affected literally every aspect of the travel business ecosystem. However, tourism is one of the best and the earliest adopters of modern digital innovations because this industry has always depended on automation to provide high-quality customer service. (Zamiatina 2020)

Digital transformation rethinks concepts of travel and leads trip-related needs. This revolution is related to new products and services creation as well as the implementation of new culture, structure, methods, innovations and technologies. (Poggi 2019) Digital transformation creates value for the tourism sector by growing profitability and by value migration from traditional companies to novel players (Brysch 2017). According to the World Economic Forum's Digital Transformation Initiative (2015), the digitalization of aviation, travel and tourism can unlock \$1 trillion of value for the industry and society over the next decade (from 2016 to 2025).

Technological advances are boosting revolution, progress and globalization in the tourism industry. Digital technologies offer universal infrastructure for people and companies for sharing information, cooperating and connecting. More than that, technology has become the highest importance in business development as it concerns each aspect of tourism. (BBC Travel 2020) According to the research from Smart Insight (2016), 60% of leisure and 41% of business tourists made travel arrangements through the internet in 2016. Today, more advanced technologies, that can change main business operations and the workforce, have appeared.

Today travelling is more affordable, available and convenient than ever before. Digital changes in tourism provide more benefits for consumers such as time savings, security improvements, convenience, accessibility, sharing and risk reduction. World Economic Forum's Digital Transformation Initiative (2015) states that digitalization is expected to produce benefits valued at \$700 billion for customers and wider society from 2016 to 2025. Moreover, the quantity of customers is increasing as well as their behavior has significantly transformed. Tourists became smarter and got more opportunities for the best deals search. (Brysch 2017) According to The UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, international tourist arrivals increased by 3.8% in 2019 and reached 1.5 billion, based on the data stated by destinations worldwide. Moreover, 2019 was the tenth year in a row of constant rise since 2009.

Travel organizations face a new reality where digital transformation adaptation is not voluntary but a vital condition. Today, it is significant for the company to have enough knowledge and information in order to continue to be competitive and meet changing consumers' demands. The present marketplace requires the advancement of superior forecasting abilities for brand, customer and business development. (Sigliano 2020) Only with appropriate data analysis, it is probable now to understand business and end customers as well as make informed and progressive decisions. Therefore, travel companies, that are more flexible and adaptive, are more probable to survive and benefit. Company employees should accept the new digital culture and create a mindset accordingly with digital strategy. Most traditional large organizations are usually slower and less compliant in the transformation process. On the other hand, startups are more supple and ready for modifications. (Poggi 2019)

The movement of current jobs is also notable in the tourism sector. Computerization has an impact on the industry workforce and is likely to modify the essence of some travel jobs and totally extirpate others. The creation of next-generation skilled jobs is predictable inside and outside the travel environment. For example, serious shifts in sales and distribution have already sharply decreased the number of travel agencies. (World Economic Forum 2020) Moreover, the TrekkSoft Travel Trend Report (2019) shows that about 82% of all travel bookings in 2018 were made via online channels without any communication with people. As can be observed from Figure 2, this percentage was less just a year ago and was near to 76%. With this tendency, travel booking without human interaction is going to increase each year.

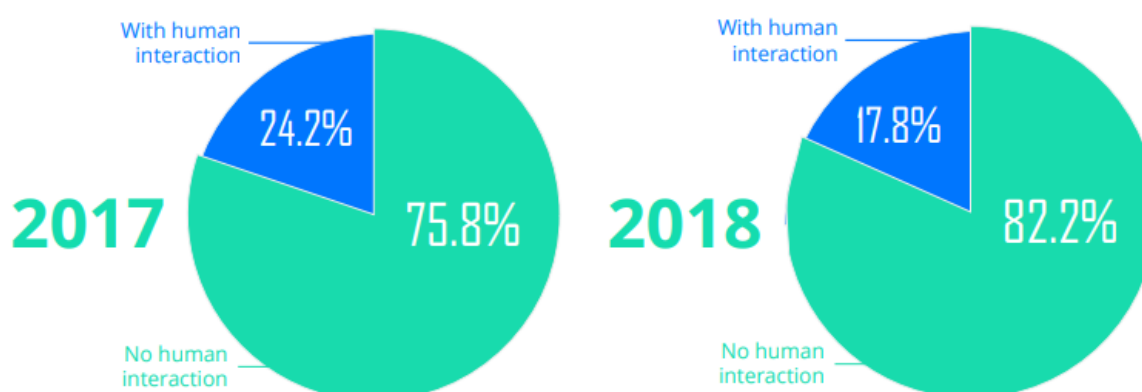


Figure 2. Percentage comparison of bookings made with and without human interaction in 2017 and 2018 (TrekkSoft Travel Trend Report 2019)

Summing up, digitalization strongly affects tourism and fosters more sustainable industry development with the help of modernizations in business, smart assets and effective

resources usage. In accordance with the present high demand for traveling, further digital transformation is significant to meet expectations of tomorrow's customers and stay in the marketplace. The following sub-chapter will observe concrete current trends and future forecasts of digital transformation in the travel industry.

## 2.2 Current and Future Trends

The tourism sector has experienced a digital transformation. This process is constant and seriously affects the industry. To ensure a positive influence and optimize business performance, tourism should adapt to the most significant digital transformation trends and be familiar with tendencies for the near future.

Present-day travel companies feel the need to have business intelligence along with the right strategy. This combination defines if they can manage every distribution channel and interact with consumers more effectively. Also, it allows to sell with more profit, make customer acquisition costs lower and conversion rates better. For example, conversion cost savings for hotels can be up to 70% and in some cases even 200%. Strategy in the travel business is intended to become more and more scientific, aiming to fully quantify and measure everything. (Sigliano 2020)

Moreover, reputation tends to be one of the main purposes. Companies in the travel industry work on their brand awareness, try to make clear brand values and be recognizable and reliable. These aspects are important in order to get the best financial outcomes. Touristic organizations need to learn the best way of communicating with their present and potential customers. For example, social media and content marketing have now more impact on traveler decision-making than ever before. These digital tools can easily help to keep customers updated, share the company's news, promote special offers and as a result improve brand awareness and become trustworthy. (RubyGarage 2019)

The vital part of the travel business transformation, which has got the biggest priority, is personalization. It is no longer something extraordinary. A personalized approach is now a real expectation. Nearly 90% of travelers worldwide claim that the typical process of traveling is not enough anymore. People start to appreciate a unique experience which they can get. Today, customized offers, that are based on personal preferences, is a sign of success. Research by American Express in 2015 discovered that 85% of respondents of all ages prefer personalized tour packages rather than general offerings (RubyGarage 2019). Personalization involves delicacy, interest and technological solutions. However, the challenge here is to take needed data and at the same time do not violate the ethics of personal privacy. (Chuba 2018)

More than that, data is a real supporter of digital transformation. Nowadays, touristic companies gather and store enormous volumes of data. They capture information during each stage of the travel journey. As a result of this data usage, travel companies have an opportunity to make more knowledgeable decisions, learn about customers and competitors, advance customer experience and raise incomes. Also, internal data (e.g. previous occupancy rates, room revenue and present bookings) can be combined with external data (e.g. dates of local events, flights, national and school holidays) to more precisely forecast and envisage demand. (Zamiatina 2020)

The digital transformation of the tourism sector makes companies apply a scientific approach in their strategies. Travel organizations need to implement up-to-date technologies to go with the tides of the latest industry trends. The TrekkSoft Travel Trend Report (2019) states that unique experience is one of the key customers' demands of the year. Therefore, in order to provide this requirement, the integration of modern technologies within the industry tends to be extremely important and inevitably.

We are living in a global mobile presence where it is difficult to imagine life without a smartphone. 62.9% of people around the world have a smartphone and on average use it from 3.5 to 5 hours on a daily basis. Mobile integration is now more significant than ever before and is vital recruitment for the business. A serious shift in confidence and trust of mobile phones is also visible. A study by Google and PhocusWright in 2018 revealed that seeking destinations, hotels and airfares on a mobile device is today as regular for the users as online shopping. Furthermore, data from the TrekkSoft Travel Trend Report (2019) prove the fact that mobile bookings have gone ahead of desktop bookings. Figure 3 demonstrates mobile bookings growth from 51.5% to 56.7% between 2017 and 2018. (Mittiga, et al. 2019)

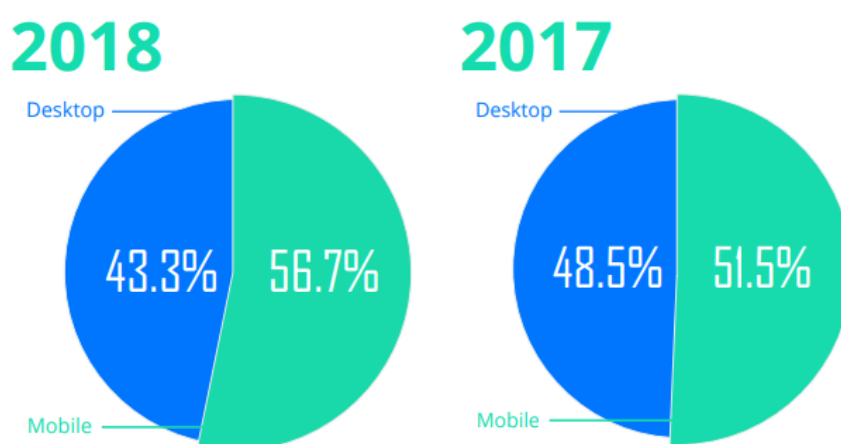


Figure 3. Proportion of mobile and desktop bookings (TrekkSoft Travel Trend Report 2019)

Moreover, according to Skift Research (2018), the majority of travelers use their smartphones at each step of the trip for in-destination bookings. As Figure 4 below shows, now the biggest percentage of mobile phone usage is for air travel, maps/navigation, hotel and finding places to eat. (Peltier and Sheivachman 2018)

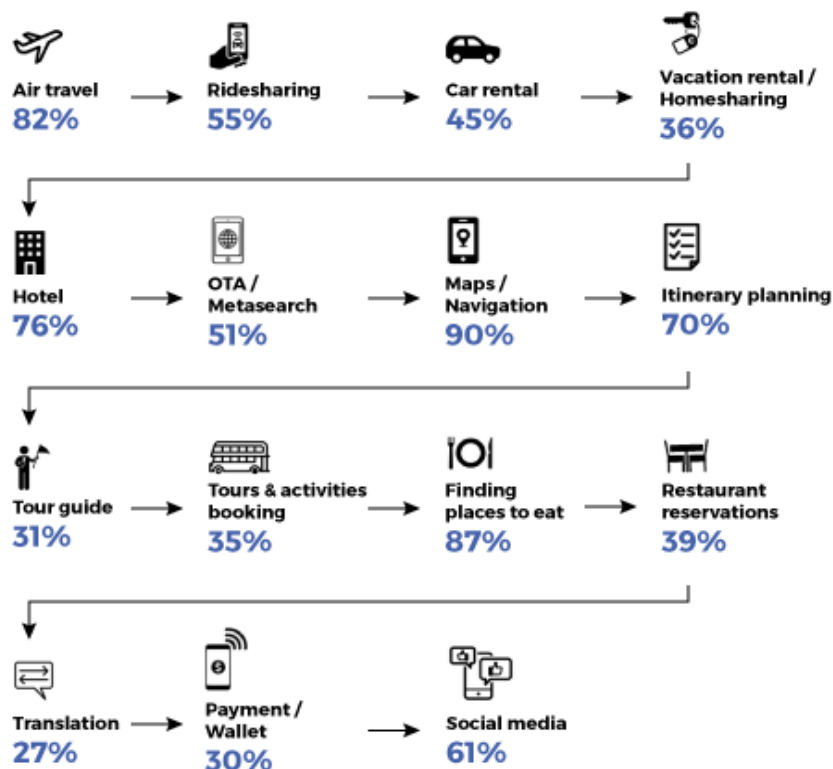


Figure 4. Percentage of tourists who have ever used mobile phones at each part of the in-destination journey (Skift Research 2018)

Today, more advanced technologies have appeared. The main ones, that drive tourism, are discussed below.

Firstly, mixed reality is a promising digital trend that has been progressively applied in the tourism industry. This innovation provides customers with a unique possibility to get a pre-experience and make digital travel without actually going anywhere. Mixed reality technology in tourism includes virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Analysis by Adobe Digital Insights (2017) showed that social mentions for travel and AR/VR- associated experiences have risen by 13% from 2016 to 2017. (RubyGarage 2019) VR makes users feel that they are physically present in a digitally developed environment. For instance, customers usually ask for quite a lot of information before they book a holiday or accommodation. With the use of VR, they can experience the virtual creation of hotel rooms, accommodation facilities or nearby attractions in advance and then make more informed choices. Meanwhile, AR is used to enhance the actual user's surroundings through

overlays and is commonly integrated into a smartphone app. For example, the environment can become interactive in real-time and tourists can find out information about location, old building, local attraction or restaurant. (Revfine 2020b)

Secondly, the crucial trend, that is arisen in the travel industry, is the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI represents computer usage in order to perform typical human responsibilities. Nowadays, customers have access to a huge amount of data at any time and from different devices as it is provided through AI-powered applications and technologies. Chatbot is trending AI technology in the travel industry for better customer support. Chatbots have first-class ability to sort information precisely and permanently. They can quickly reply to the problems, questions and requests from customers. Moreover, there are some experiments with AI robots that can offer directions and some other information for travelers as a reply to human speech. (Revfine 2020a)

Thirdly, recognition technology is a digital trend with a big potential for the tourism sector. Advanced technologies of recognition comprise fingerprint, facial recognition, retina scanning and other biometric identification methods. This innovation has been implemented in tourism mostly with the aim of authentication, security and law enforcement. For example, recognition technology helps to gather data and identify tourist's personality in order to deliver personalized services or offerings to the customer. (Chuba 2018) Also, in the hospitality sphere it can be used to automatically unlock the room, authorize payments or check out from the hotel. This recognition technology usage can extremely decrease queues and free up reception workers. (Revfine 2020b)

The next digital trend in the tourism industry is The Internet of Things (IoT). This technology means the usage of internet abilities for communication between everyday smart devices when they can send and receive data. IoT provides a large range of prospects and various advantages for travel-related activities. It can be implemented to automatically decrease expenses and improve customer experience without any human intervention. For instance, in the hotels smart energy systems can be integrated for automatic temperature and light regulation in the rooms according to guests' requirements and energy saving in empty rooms. (Revfine 2020b)

In addition, robotic technology is a near-future trend in the tourism sector that is going to become useful for intelligent tasks execution. There is a large amount of possible robotic technologies usages from customer service to data processing. Robots can have different shapes and perform several processes from physical to those that need cognitive functions. Nowadays, the tourism industry realizes the need to introduce robotic technologies because travelers' behaviors are changing and demand for self-service possibilities is

increasing. For example, in hotel industry robots have the potential to meet the guests, accomplish check-in and check-out processes, bring luggage to the rooms or provide concierge services. Robots can be used in airports to discover illegal items. (Chuba 2018) Moreover, travel agents can use robots as digital assistants. Robots can find out information from customers, investigate preferences and intelligently suggest destinations or tours that suited better. (Revfine 2020b)

The next revolutionary technical trend of future tourism is blockchain. The technology of blockchain has appeared several years ago in the digital world and continues to be an unclear concept for many people. However, blockchain has great opportunities in almost every industry and for sure in the world of travel. The core concept of the blockchain is in the data storage and transmitting it via specific clusters where information is constantly safe, protected, traceable and transparent. In the nearest future this technology can already completely modify the travel industry. Blockchain can do all the compulsory procedures fully online in association with other up-to-date trends in tourism. It is possible that travelers will be able to trust flight bookings, hotel reservations or car renting regulations to chatbots and robots that are operating via the blockchain-based technology. (Chuba 2018)

To sum up, it is significant to keep up with the modern trends of digital transformation in tourism. Now it is time to accept, follow and adopt changes. Understanding of the latest trends helps to integrate innovations in the business. As a result, it gives the opportunity to get advantages over competitors, offer something unique, improve customer experience and not be left behind. The next sub-chapter particularly concentrates on the impact of digital transformation on Destination Marketing Organizations and its operations.

### 2.3 Destination Marketing Organizations

Digital transformation in tourism has also changed and continue changing Destination Marketing Organizations' (DMOs) proficiency of destinations promotion. Attention to efficient destination marketing and management increases. Thus, DMOs meet new challenges that they should adapt to.

Destination Marketing Organization, also known as Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), is an organization which promotes specific location and its key components in order to raise the quantity of visitors. It can be a town, city, region, or country with its attractions, accommodations, tourism services, transportation or events. Pursuant to the World Tourism Organization, three types of DMOs can be defined:

- National level DMOs (National Tourism Organization (NTO) or Authority (NTA))

- Regional level DMOs (Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs))
- Local level DMOs which serve a city or minor geographic territory (Christian 2015)

DMOs promote the development and marketing of a destination with a concentration on convention sales, tourism marketing and services. They aim to increase awareness about destinations, enhance the number of visitors and develop local economies. Most destinations trust DMOs to create and implement effective marketing strategies for their representation. (Christian 2015)

Due to the digitalization, DMOs have faced the need to expand their scope. Now they have less impact on destination marketing. Instead of that, DMOs start to concentrate on tourism management at the destination level. Successful destination management provides essential benefits such as the creation of competitive advantage, the guarantee of sustainability, development of strong brand identity and tourism culture in the destination.

Current key functions of DMO's are:

- Strategic planning
- Formulation and implementation of the destination's tourism policy
- Market intelligence
- Tourism product and business development
- Digitalization and innovation
- Monitoring
- Crisis management
- Training and capacity building
- Promotion, marketing and branding
- Funding and fostering investments (World Tourism Organization 2019)

Moreover, our digital world offers various options of up-to-date innovations for DMOs to manage destinations and reach more consumers. Therefore, they feel the need to follow and implement modern technological trends. DMOs change current ways of promotion and operations to digital ones in order to reach higher effectiveness. Also, there is a constantly increasing system of digital touchpoints that generates unique possibilities for DMOs to connect with tourists at any phase during the visitor journey. DMOs need to be existing at these valuable points and provide all digital activities for the destination's general goal. They should use the most efficient methods to reach customers and keep up with present clients' demand because their expectations are now truly high. Additionally, DMOs tend to pay attention to the importance of partnership and focus on collective diligence of knowledge and skills to move destinations forward. (Digital Tourism Think Tank 2020)



Summing up, Destination Marketing Organizations have also been significantly affected by digital transformation in tourism. In order to reach higher effectiveness and profitability, they have changed their work focus on destination management, digital promotion and operations as well as following and usage of modern technologies. The following sub-chapter explores the utilization of digital platforms in tourism as well as new opportunities, prospects and challenges that it brings to the industry.

## 2.4 Digital Platforms in Tourism

Digital platforms are important movers of digital transformation in the tourism industry. They disrupt the way how the travel sector functions. Digital platforms provide worldwide access to customers and give the newest promotion and quality control tools for touristic companies. In tourism they are more and more used both by tourists and by businesses. Therefore, digital platforms are now significant travel sector boosters.

A digital platform is an online technology for combination and modernization of business operations as well as IT systems. They are used to access new markets and create a better experience for users, employees and partners. Digital platforms go against old-style business structures, policies and technology usage in order to enable modern operating models. (Bendor-Samuel 2018) Nowadays, digital platforms are intermediaries between suppliers and users. They allow the promotion and marketing of services or products at the lowest cost all over the world. Digital platforms help to gather different offers, simplify transactions, resolve disputes, share reviews and feedbacks. Also, they aim to make confident and trustful relationships between consumers and suppliers. (World Tourism Organization 2017)

Within the travel industry digital platforms have got great popularity and wide usage. Figure 5 below illustrates the scheme of digital tourism platforms utilization as intermediaries in tourism. It has three groups of actors: service providers, digital platforms and users.

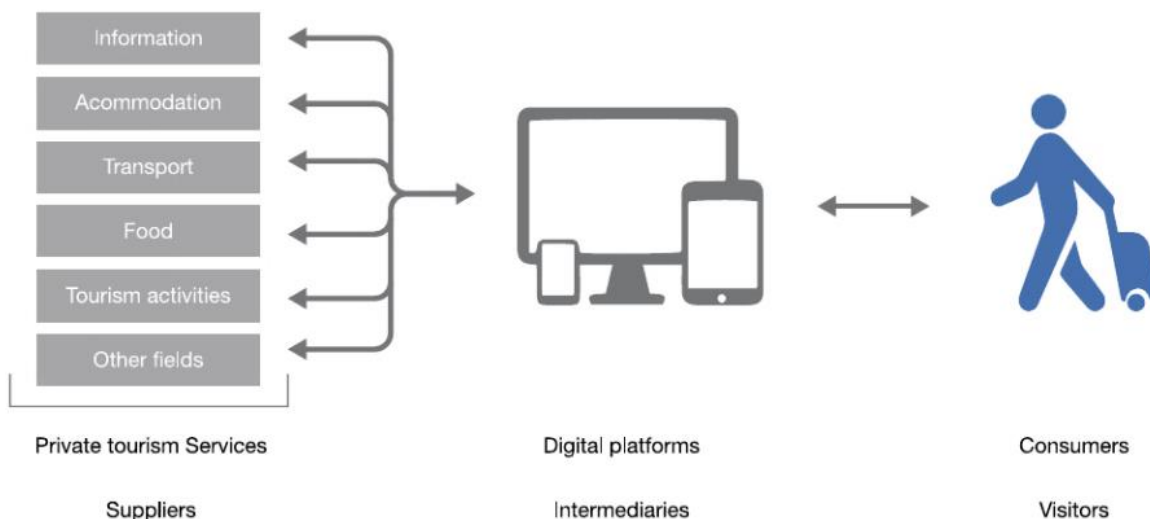


Figure 5. Digital platforms as intermediaries (World Tourism Organization 2017)

In order to get the required information, tourists interact with digital platforms at every phase of the trip preparation process. As Figure 6 demonstrates, these travel planning stages are dreaming, planning, booking, experiencing and sharing. A large variety of digital platforms support the digital ecosystem throughout them. Also, platforms enable and facilitate digital interactions that generate valuable data. Later this data can be used by businesses and DMOs to develop products and services for tourists and stimulate future progress. (PATA & Oxford Economics 2018)

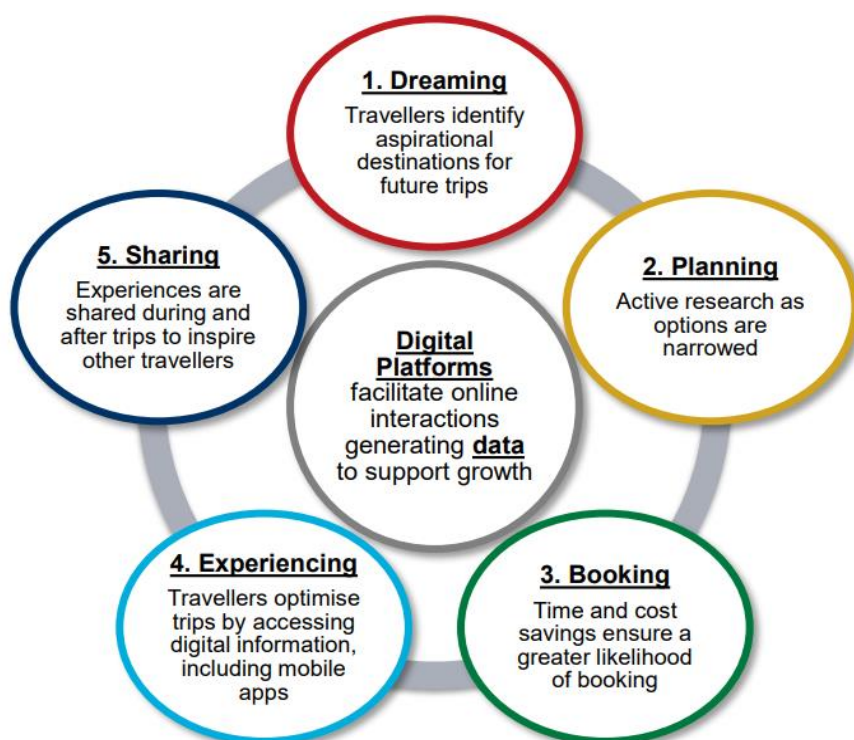


Figure 6 Five stages of travel planning supported by digital platforms (PATA & Oxford Economics 2018)

Furthermore, in the travel industry digital platforms have extended quickly across different areas. Nowadays, there are five most common fields of activities in the tourism industry where digital platforms are used:

- **Information:** content for tourism-related services, users reviews and rankings (e.g. TripAdvisor, Yelp)
- **Accommodation:** rent of beds, rooms, apartments or houses (e.g. Airbnb, HomeAway, Couchsurfing)
- **Transport:** car-sharing, short- and long-distance ridesharing, (e.g. Uber, Lyft, BlaBlaCar)
- **Food:** communal dining or meal sharing (e.g. EatWith, Feastly, VizEat)
- **Tourism activities:** guided tours, excursions, attractions and other activities (e.g. BeMyGuest, ToursByLocals, Vayable) (World Tourism Organization 2017)

Digital platforms boost the development of the travel industry and its competitive standards. They affect all participants of the tourism marketplace. Firstly, digital tourism platforms create innovative methods of engagement between users and service providers. With digital platform usage, customers can get improved user experience, find a huge number of variants in one place and, as a result, make better choices. While businesses can ensure world consumer access, enter new markets, reduce advertising costs, receive more efficient possibilities to involve and understand their target segment. Secondly, digital tourism platforms collect and deliver big data. Thus, they bring together minor and world-famous players. Small companies have a real probability to advantage from this rather than be left behind. Also, digital platforms that permit environment groupings continue appearing because sharing of asset and data become more significant from B2B viewpoint. Thirdly, digital tourism platforms contribute to popularizing unknown destinations as well as help historical, cultural and natural attractions to stay preserved, renovated and promoted. (Dimitrova 2019)

To sum up, digital tourism platforms are significant driving forces of present tourism. They play an essential role in the transformation of the travel industry. Digital platforms influence all marketplace participants and each travel planning stage. The next chapter focuses on the digital tourism platform implementation process and describes its stages in detail.

### 3 DIGITAL TOURISM PLATFORM IMPLEMENTATION

#### 3.1 Acquisition

Currently, information technologies are one of the main company assets. However, technology implementation is not the easiest procedure. When technology is gotten from the outside, this process includes several stages which generally are acquisition, development, deployment. The acquisition is the first phrase and is discussed in this sub-chapter.

The acquisition of technology from external sources is now a rising trend. Getting proper technology can help to support business and improve company competitiveness. In order to make this process successful, it is significant to understand business requirements and the strategic position of the technology. In terms of digital platform acquisition, this process involves a responsible approach and constant diligence. (Mortara and Ford 2012)

In general, the acquisition of digital tourism platform begins with deep investigation and study. Firstly, the company needs to set objectives and clearly understand its motives for acquisition and what results are expected. Also, the company should elicit, classify and analyze platform requirements as well as define problems and challenges which platform should help to overcome. (Mortara and Ford 2012)

Then potential variants of digital platforms should be identified and qualified. The company estimates if a probable acquisition is likely to meet all requirements. It evaluates the match between technical abilities and market potential. The company should understand if it can effectively implement and utilize provided digital technologies. Moreover, the assessment of potential vendors needs to be made in order to realize the level of compatibility between the company and them. (Mortara and Ford 2012)

The next step of digital tourism platform acquisition is the selection of the most promising match of preferred seller and platform. It should be done in accordance with attention to thorough terms and regulations of the acquisition. Parameters for regulating and handling the acquisition include, for example, future technical development, ownership of intellectual property, rights to use the technology, protection strategies and the type of relationship contract. (Mortara and Ford 2012)

After that terms of digital platform acquisition obligate to be agreed between the company and vendor. In the case of successful results of negotiation, transition documents should be properly prepared. Finally, the contract must be signed. As a result, technology should

be transferred to the acquirer for future adaptation and development. (Mortara and Ford 2012)

In conclusion, all four steps of digital tourism platform acquisition, which were discussed above, are represented in Figure 7.

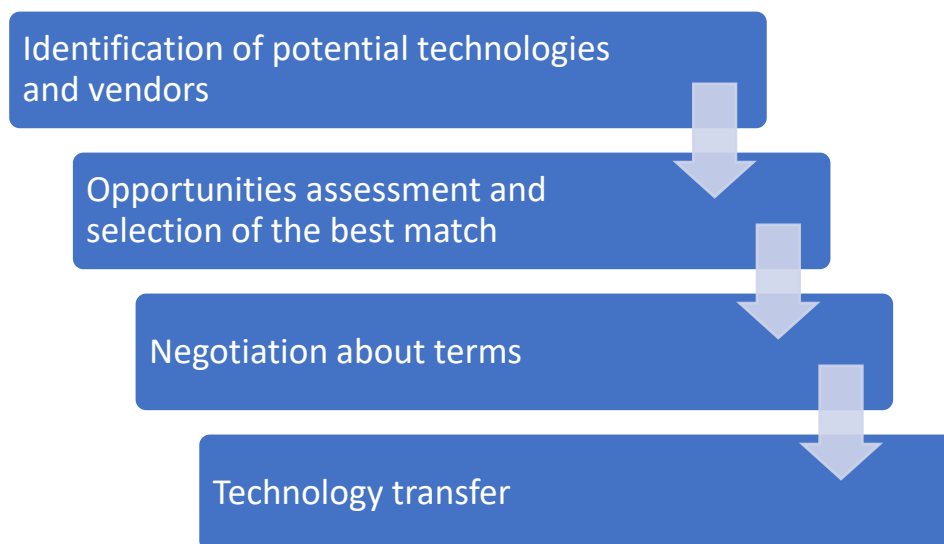


Figure 7. Digital platform acquisition process

### 3.2 Development

The second step in digital tourism platform implementation is development. It is a process of platform improvement, modifying and becoming more advanced. The company should adopt and customized acquired technology to its business needs, goals and processes in order to get planned results. Already in the near future successfully developed digital platform can attract more customers, boost profitable growth and increase the reputation of the business.

Firstly, the company should estimate the digital user market size and coverage. It is important to be prepared for gaining market share and entering much bigger markets than now. The company needs to show its competitiveness and stand out from other businesses that use the same platform. A modified digital tourism platform should facilitate and organizes online travel. (Morvan, Hintermann and Vazirani 2016)

Secondly, appropriate content for the platform should be carefully created, integrated and verified. It is extremely important to put effort and spend enough time on effective promotional content creation. Good content is original and can generate interest. It fosters and stimulates digital users' behavior. Therefore, content helps exceed expectations of

potential clients and attract more of them. It is especially essential in the marketplaces with a low level of online involvement. (Morvan, Hintermann and Vazirani 2016)

Thirdly, when customization of the platform is finished, the ending of the development process should be properly verified. Subsequently, the platform must go through all final acceptance assessments. It needs to be previewed, tested, evaluated and accepted according to the company's standards or rules. After that platform is fully ready for further integration and deployment process. (Mortara and Ford 2012)

### 3.3 Deployment

The next and final stage of digital tourism platform implementation is deployment. Technology deployment is a colossal process that involves the majority of the company's functional parts. The successful introduction of new technology is significant as it profits for the company, its processes and customers.

First of all, a customized platform should be totally ready for deployment. Only when the digital tourism platform completed all activities of development and verification, it can go live and be established in action. The company needs to install and deliver the digital platform in order to make it accessible for use. Thus, a new platform should be distributed within the organization and become available for customers. (Mortara and Ford 2012)

Moreover, the deployment process has to be coordinated across the company. Affected or possibly affected company employees should be well-informed and provided with general information about the new platform. They need to clearly understand how new technology affects present business processes and how the company benefits from it. Special training or consultations should be provided if necessary. (Fried 2015)

In addition, the real achievements of the new technology cannot be seen and realized without understanding and evaluation of its benefits. Therefore, it is extremely important to track new operations, processes and changes caused by deployed digital tourism platform. Outcomes should be monitored, analyses and estimated according to the purposes and requirements that were defined during the beginning of acquisition. Also, these results can help with further maintaining and updating of the platform. (Fried 2015)

Summing up, the process of digital tourism platform implementation includes acquisition, development and deployment. The company should pay enough attention and be careful at each stage as they are vital for the success of the whole process. Effective implementation of digital platform improve business, increase competitiveness and attract more

customers from wider markets. Also, afterwards proper support and maintenance of the platform should be provided.

The following chapter introduces the case platform. It presents an overview of the platform, its major functions, fundamental tools and main objectives. Operations and processes such as marketing, distribution, implementation and utilization of the case platform are studied. Also, the current platform implementation process on the example of the case company and its clients is described.

## 4 CASE PLATFORM STUDY

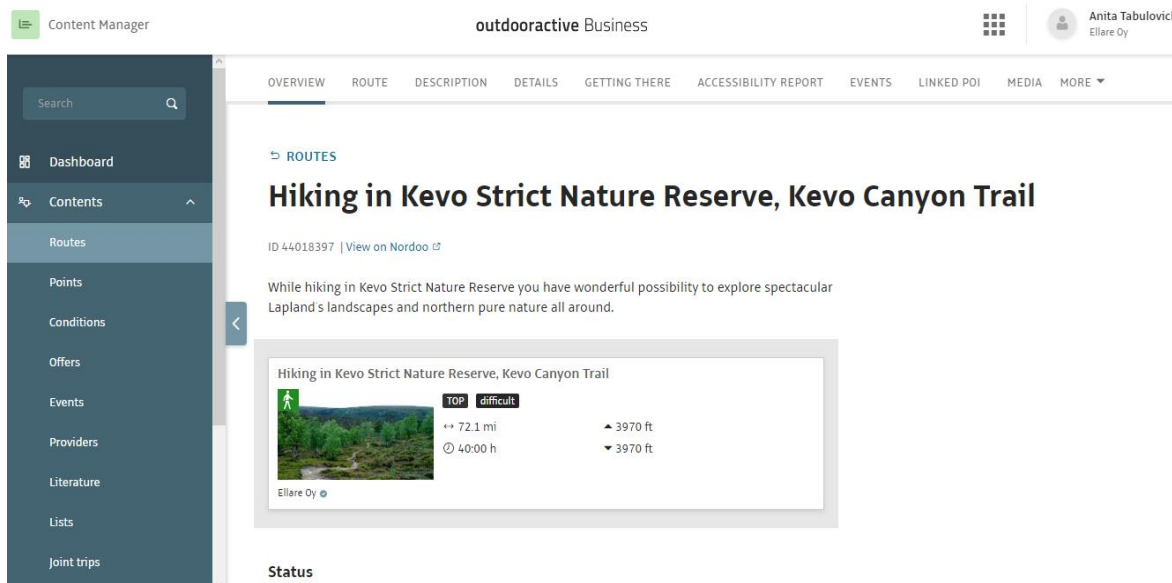
### 4.1 Case Review

Outdooractive is the case platform of this study. It is the biggest outdoor tourism platform in Europe which is a digital home for the worldwide community of outdoor lovers. Outdooractive is a reliable online travel guide. It helps to discover the world by planning own trips and finding the best routes with modern maps usage. The platform offers helpful tools and guidelines for different types of outdoor activities during all seasons. Furthermore, Outdooractive aims to use the whole potential of digitalization and improve outdoor tourism. It enables to increase the reach for brands and destinations due to guaranteed quality content, wide distribution and improved interaction with the target audience. (Outdooractive Corporate 2020a)

Outdooractive is based on a large fundamental content database. The platform merges diverse up-to-date information from various sources. It contains numerous datasets of points of interests (POIs), tours, events, offers, lists, accommodations, travel-guide pages, location-based stories as well as multimedia and interactive content such as images, videos, clickable infographics and 3D elements. Different kinds of these content are connected within the platform. It allows the development of an exclusive informational structure. Therefore, the platform can authentically represent the whole tourist infrastructure of the area and its outdoor options. Moreover, the Outdooractive platform is based on a community of solidarity. Thus, everybody who adds content to the database has permission for other authors' content usage. Content for the platform can be created by Outdooractive Team, partners and Outdooractive Community. (Outdooractive GmbH 2019)

Content appears on the platform due to Outdooractive Business which is a special destination management system (DMS) for georeferenced and touristic data. In one place all the content is managed and entered into the Outdooractive database according to current international data standards. Therefore, Outdooractive Business helps users easily create, edit and maintain their content as well as upload different media and documents. Picture 1 below demonstrates the user interface example of the route managing page. Also, Outdooractive Business places content into the correct context, facilitates rights management and offers complete reporting. (Outdooractive Corporate 2020b)





Picture 1. Route managing page at Outdooractive DMS

Additionally, Outdooractive provides an indispensable interface to integrate content into output channels. It ensures synchronized targeted content distribution with maximum visibility. The platform has an extensive content marketing network that reaches about 5 million users per month. This network covers tourism, sport, leisure and health sectors. Distribution is going through various portals, websites, apps, blogs, navigational systems, social networks and print products. Also, Outdooractive is a content provider for other global platforms and search engines. (Outdooractive Corporate 2020a)

Figure 8 summarizes below the scheme of the Outdooractive working process with Outdooractive Business, content, platform, marketing and distribution network.

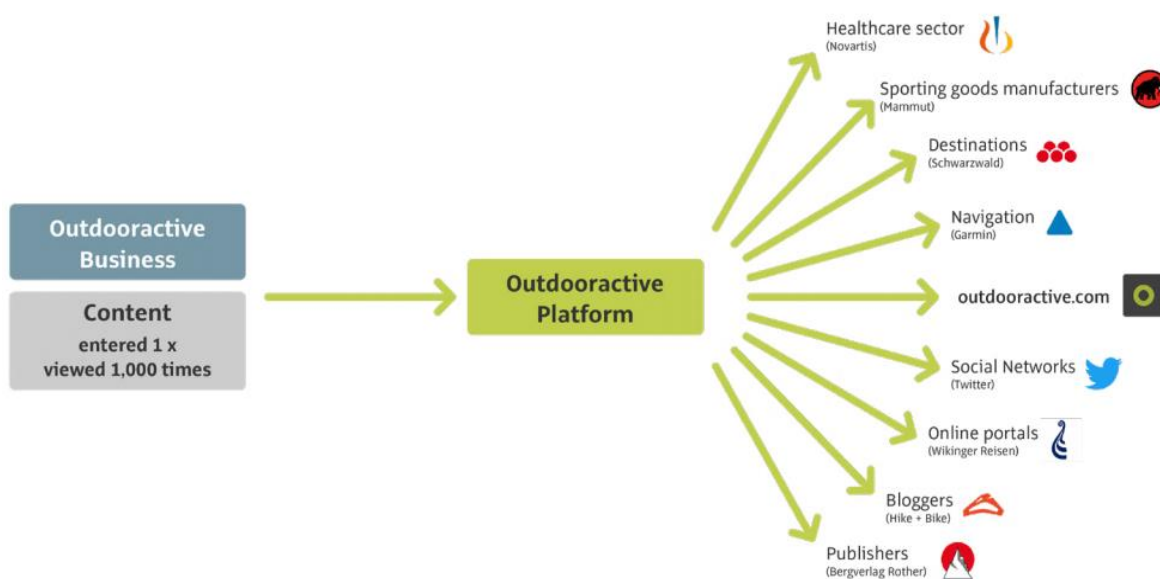


Figure 8. Outdooractive content marketing network (Outdooractive GmbH 2019)

Furthermore, Outdooractive offers different products for web, app, cartography, content services, online-marketing, facility and publisher partnerships. For instance, Outdooractive Regio is a digital tour guide and interactive independent outdoor portal. Regio is a website with a substantive URL that can be either autonomous or be integrated into an existing web presence. It shows the content created with the help of Outdooractive Business. Regio provides route planner, community integration option, map with official data and tools for target-group marketing. (Outdooractive Corporate 2020c)

Another example, Outdooractive FlexView, is a special tool that ensures the integration of particular content from the Outdooractive platform into the user's own website. Detailed information, map and gallery of the selected content can be displayed with the help of FlexView. It is a software as a service (SaaS) product with standardized configurations. FlexView provides rapid, straightforward and cost-efficient implementation with maximum functionality and minimal effort. FlexView is responsive and optimized for all mobile devices. (Outdooractive Corporate 2020c)


Picture 2 below illustrates an example of how the content is presented for the users on the Outdooractive website. The interface of the hiking route page displays detailed trail description, turn-by-turn direction, how to get there, map with official data, images and all the necessary information that was entered through Outdooractive DMS.

[Back](#) [Start](#) [Routes](#) [Hiking in Kevo Strict Nature Reserve, Kevo Canyon Trail](#) [Share](#) [Bookmark](#) [My Map](#) [Print](#) [...](#)


## Hiking in Kevo Strict Nature Reserve, Kevo Canyon Trail

Hikes · Finland

[Add comment](#)



6 / 8 Trail in Kevo Strict Nature Reserve  
Photo: Karl Brodowsky, CC BY: commons.wikimedia.org



3D flight

ELLARE OUTDOORS  
Responsible for this content  
Ellare Oy

**THE ROUTE** DETAILS TURN-BY-TURN DIRECTIONS GETTING THERE LISTS:FEATURE

CURRENT INFORMATION

**While hiking in Kevo Strict Nature Reserve you have wonderful possibility to explore spectacular Lapland's landscapes and northern pure nature all around.**

Kevo Strict Nature Reserve was created in 1956 in order to save and protect the Kevo Canyon and neighboring fell area. Kevo is divided into canyon area and fell area. Each of them has special hiking trail.

Kevo Canyon trail is a picturesque road with the length of 63 km. It is going through stunning birch and pine forests with huge tundra-like open mires. Moreover, here you have an opportunity to see the most remarkable sights of Kevo Strict Nature Reserve like Fiellu Waterfall and the Wall of Kevo. The main highlight of this trail and Nature Reserve in general is a Kevo Canyon. It is a 40 km long canyon-like valley of Kevojoki river with the depth of 80 m.

The path is marked with orange signs on the trees and wooden poles during the whole way. Also, this trail has all needed facilities such as signs, campfire places, camping spots, steps and so on. This trail is really challenging because the road leads numerous times to the bottom of the canyon and then rises back to the top.

Difficulty **difficult**

Distance	116 km ↔
Duration	40:00h ⌚
Ascent	1210 m ▲
Descent	1210 m ▼

In and out Multi-stage route Scenic

Refreshment stops available

Healthy climate

Trailhead

CURRENT -6 °C

TOMORROW -2 °C | -10 °C


THURSDAY -3 °C | -8 °C

Proceed to forecast

powered by MetGIS

Author  
**Anita Tabulovich**  
Updated: December 12, 2019

**Similar routes nearby**



Hiking in Kevo Strict Nature

These suggestions were created automatically.

Statistics **3**

Created at	December 12, 2019
Teasers	4,215
Pageviews	176
Actions	112
Print & Download	3
Outdooractive Rank:	81

Picture 2. The user interface of the route page on Outdooractive website

## 4.2 Current Implementation Process of the Case Platform

The case company of this study is Ellare Oy which is the partner of Outdooractive. Ellare is a Finnish company that offers expert services in tourism, coaching, content production, Outdooractive technology and marketing campaigns for major Central European markets. It is a DMO that specializes in outdoor tourism as well as the development of natural, sports, tourist routes and offers for traveler destinations, municipalities, cities and

associations. Ellare provides off-the-shelf research and development tools to enhance customer service and customer focus. Also, they organize benchmarking trips to get acquainted with working concepts.

Ellare represents Outdooractive in Finland and offers this technology to its clients. Currently, they organize the process of the Outdooractive platform utilization mostly within Finnish companies. Thus, implementation of the Outdooractive platform starts by contacting a client and the introduction of the platform, its possibilities and advantages. Then Ellare makes an offer according to customer's needs and requirements. If the client is satisfied with all aspects and terms, he makes an order.

After that Ellare ensures technical development, familiarizes customer with Outdooractive DMS and procedure of content production for the platform. Depending on the case, during the next step either Ellare creates content or the client does it by himself. Moreover, in some cases, Ellare provides a possible implementation for customer's own distribution channels.

Finally, Ellare helps, guides and supports the client with further questions and follow-ups. Ellare aims to build successful long-term relationships with their customers. Thus, it tries to provide top-quality after-sales services.

Additionally, Ellare is interested in the improvement of the Outdooractive platform implementation and utilization processes in order to provide better customer experience.

The next chapter presents the empirical research which was conducted for the thesis. The aim of the research was to discover how the implementation process of the Outdooractive platform can be improved in order to better meet the current needs of corporate users in the Finnish market.

## 5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Data Collection

For this thesis empirical research was conducted. The goal was to evaluate the importance of effective integration and utilization of the case platform and create a list of suggestions for further improvement of these processes.

Firstly, the chosen methods of data gathering are described. The following figure, Figure 9, demonstrates the whole process of data collection and analysis as well as the schedule of each step.

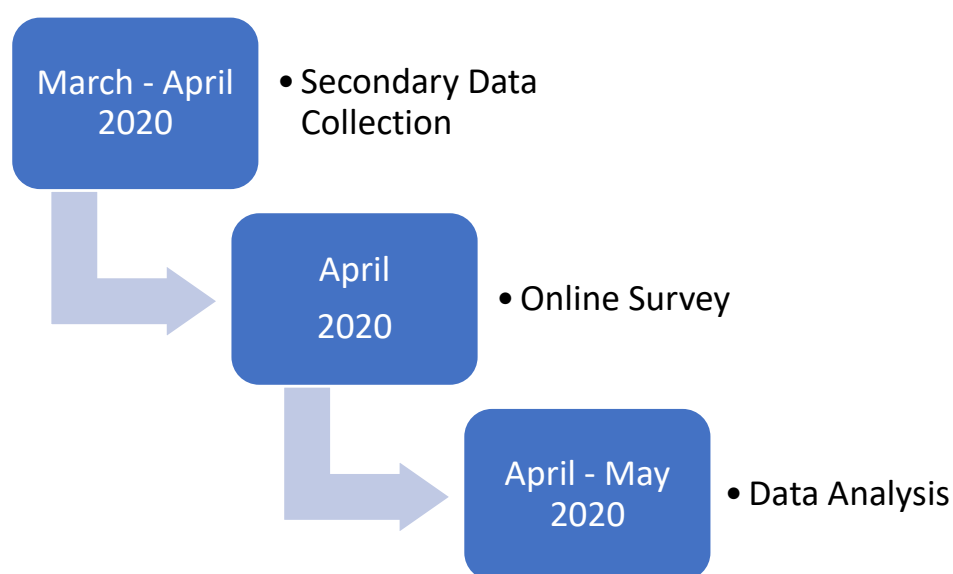


Figure 9. Data collection and analysis timetable

For the study secondary data was gathered from academic books, research articles, reports, journals and up to date electronic publications from specialists of the industry. The key goals of secondary data collection were topic study, related concepts exploration and creation of the theoretical foundation.

The primary data was gathered through an online survey that was conducted within corporate users of the case platform. The main purpose of the survey was to discover how the implementation process of the Outdooractive platform can be improved in order to better meet the current needs of corporate users. Also, it aimed to help to answer the research questions and provide recommendations for improvement of the case platform utilization and implementation.

An online survey was created and fulfilled using Google Forms. It was distributed among corporate users of the case platform, Outdooractive, in Finland who are present clients of

the case company, Ellare. Five companies agreed to participate in the questionnaire and provided trustworthy data. The survey consisted of 21 questions that were divided into three main parts. The first part contained general questions about participating companies. The second part included questions about the Outdooractive platform implementation process between Ellare and participating companies. The third part had questions about the Outdooractive platform usage by participating companies. The survey comprised different types of questions. Mostly there were interview type questions that required detailed responses. A qualitative research method was applied to collect and analyze answers to such open-ended questions. Also, the survey had rating scale questions, matrix questions and multiple-choice questions. In order to gather and analyze this numerical data, a quantitative method was used. The full questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1.

Lastly, information was gathered from the survey's responses and then it was analyzed. Explanation of collected data analysis and presentation of outcomes are provided in the following sub-chapter of the thesis.

## 5.2 Data Analysis

This sub-chapter presents an analysis of the data received from the online survey, summarizes findings and introduces the results of the study. The questionnaire had three main parts. The analysis of each of them is presented separately below.

### **Participating companies' general data**

The first part of the online survey collected general data about participating companies. It was necessary in order to conduct successful user research and create an overall idea about companies and their relations with Outdooractive.

Participants of the questionnaire were different types of Finnish tourism companies such as state-owned tourism enterprise, geopark, tourist associations and destination representative. They have been using the Outdooractive platform for various periods. It starts from 4 months and ends with 3 years. Also, participating companies got to know about the platform from diverse sources:

- co-worker
- Visit Finland Outdoor program
- manager of Ellare has contacted
- it was already known in the company

Participants are using different Outdooractive products or several of them. They are Outdooractive Business, Regio and FlexView. Therefore, participants of the online survey were dissimilar, had various experiences, provided information from different points of view and perspectives.

### Outdooractive platform implementation process

The second part of the online survey gathered information about the Outdooractive platform implementation process between Ellare and participating companies. There were questions about each step of this process separately.

Firstly, there was a section with questions about acquisition process which includes contacting, introduction of Outdooractive technology, offer and order. At first participants evaluated if this process was clear and understandable. They rated it on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree”. The average grade for the acquisition process is 3.2. However, as can be observed from Figure 10 below, assessments are fairly dissimilar and have a wide range. The length of platform usage should be considered because the longer company uses the platform the less grade it gave. This means that Ellare has improved and developed activities of the platform acquisition process over time.

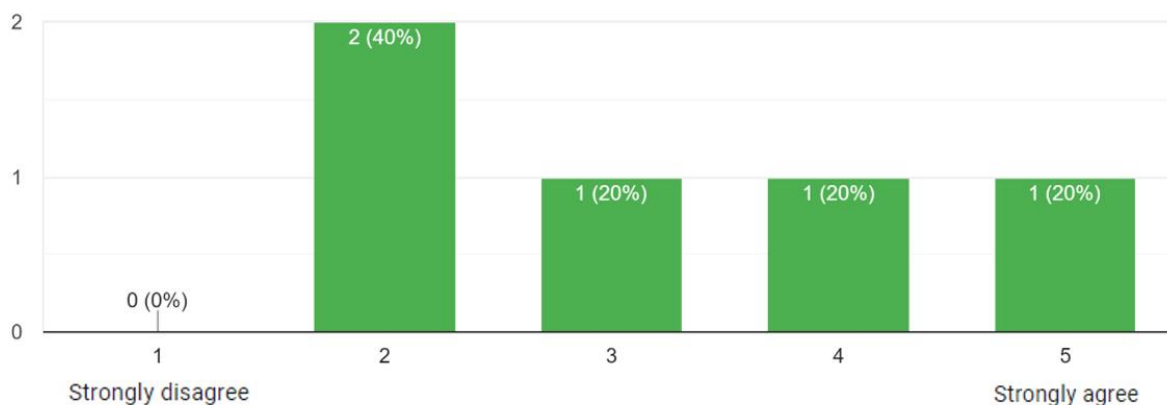


Figure 10. Assessment of the acquisition process

Furthermore, while answering questions about the introduction of Outdooractive technology, respondents noted that different Outdooractive offers from Ellare were relatively indistinct for them:

*The products/parts/stages of Outdooractive have been quite confusing to us*

The reason for this fact is that offers include various products with different prices and contents as well as the names of the products have changed in the meanwhile.

Consequently, from the client's point of view, a clear understanding of the offers is highly important, valuable and recommended. Most of the participants desire:

*More visual presentation on what each Outdooractive product consists of.*

Secondly, there was a section with questions about technical development, DMS webinars, content production and integration. At first participants estimated and rated these activities on a scale from 1 to 5. Here 1 is "strongly disagree" and 5 is "strongly agree" that they were clear and understandable. The tendency of grading is the same as with the acquisition process. Thus, Ellare has also improved the activities of the platform development process over time. However, the average rating is 3.4 which is a little bit higher. Figure 11 below demonstrates the assessment of development activities' clearness.

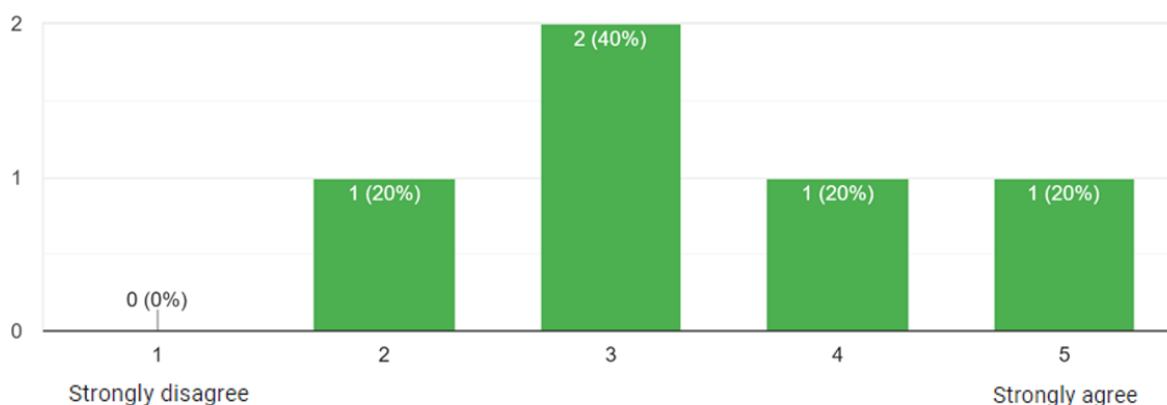


Figure 11. Assessment of development process

Also, the majority of the respondents mentioned that the Outdooractive platform is easy to use and everything generally went well during its development. They think that the manual provided by Outdooractive has now become much better, more helpful and more comprehensive. However, some of the opinions were that it was rather difficult to negotiate in order to get what they need, while the requirements are pretty clear. For example, one of the participants said:

*Quite often we felt like we "didn't speak the same language".*

Nevertheless, respondents stated that once their needs have been understood, everything starts to progress rapidly.

Moreover, according to answers, bugs and other technical development issues are processed and fixed fairly slowly, while reporting about them are done quite often. For instance, one of the participants claimed:

*I have made numerous bug report. Some have been fixed, but not all.*



This situation causes some discontent and comments like this:

*not very professional and we have not been informed properly on why this has been delayed for such a long time.*

Furthermore, in one answer website integration was highlighted as the main challenge during the technical implementation process. One recommendation for technical development was to set clear steps for cooperation which precisely describe who will do what and by which date.

Thirdly, there was a section about after-sales services that Ellare provides. They include follow-up, free webinars, information on extra services/new features, technical support and marketing opportunities. At first participants evaluated and rated the overall satisfaction with each of these activities on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is “very unsatisfied” and 5 is “extremely satisfied”). Following Figure 12 illustrates these assessments. Columns on the figure show number of respondents that gave particular grades for a certain service. Also, different colors are used for each grade: blue is for 1, red is for 2, orange is for 3, green is for 4 and violet is for 5.

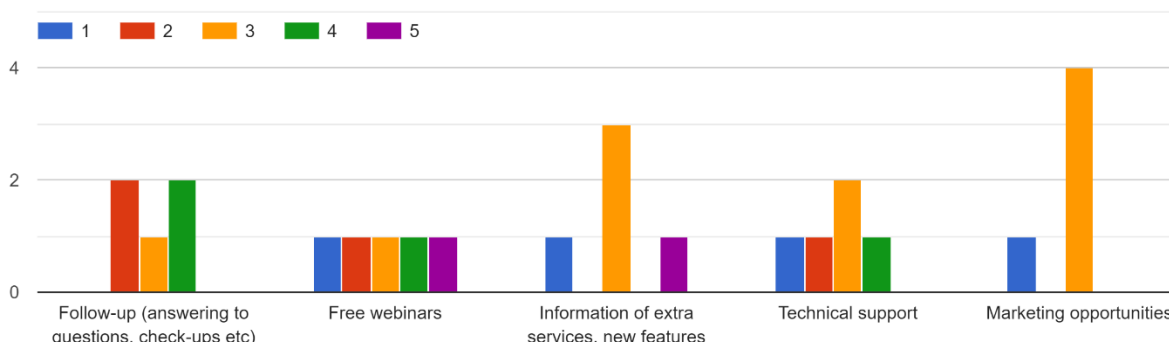


Figure 12. Assessment of after-sales activities

According to collected data, the average grade was calculated for each service. For the follow-up, free webinars and information on extra services/new features it is 3 for each. Both technical support and marketing opportunities have 2.6 as the average grade. Overall, after-sales services got a rating of 2.84. Also, companies who are using the platform longer have more experience with after-sales services and, as a result, they gave higher grades for them.

Additionally, participants did not give any answers about what other after-sales services they would need. However, they expressed some ideas about further improvement of existing ones. The majority would like to get quicker actions, faster and more informed answers. Especially it concerns replies to bug reports. Participants specified:

*Answer bugs fast and fix bugs fast!*

Also, one of the respondents suggested:

*Plan for regular check-ups on how we are doing and whether we need help or whether we have noticed new features etc.*

Participants paid attention that they appreciate when promises are kept and would like to receive everything that was offered and expected at the beginning:

*Make sure that you fulfill your promises made by the salesperson.*

### **Outdooractive platform usage**

The third part of the online survey collected data about Outdooractive platform usage by participating companies and their satisfaction with the platform.

At first respondents estimated from 1 to 5 how well the Outdooractive platform meets their needs and requirements. On this scale 1 is “poor” and 5 is “excellent”. The average score is 3.6 which is relatively high. This means that the Outdooractive platform successfully meets travel companies’ requirements, helps to achieve initially established goals and provides effective business development. The assessment is presented below in Figure 13.

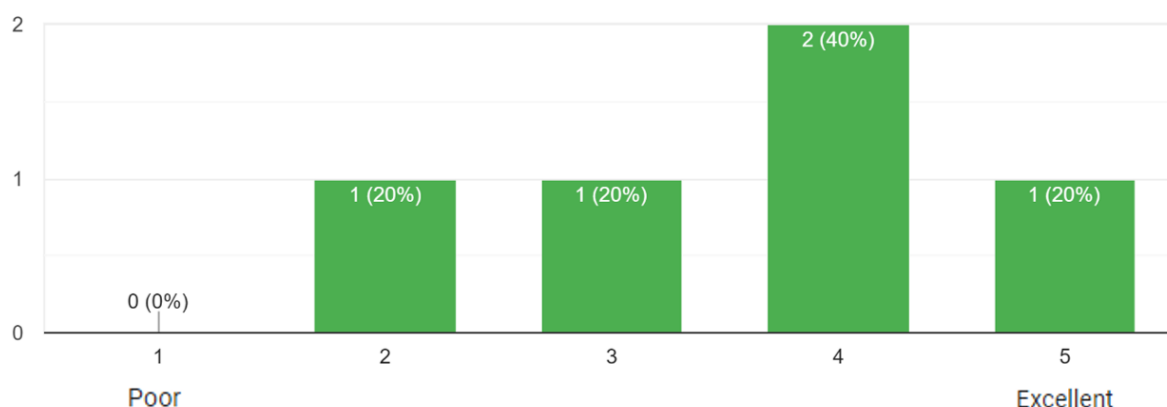


Figure 13. Assessment of how well the Outdooractive platform meet clients’ needs

Then participants were asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is “poor” and 5 is “excellent”, how well they are informed about Outdooractive platform functionalities. Following Figure 14 displays the results.

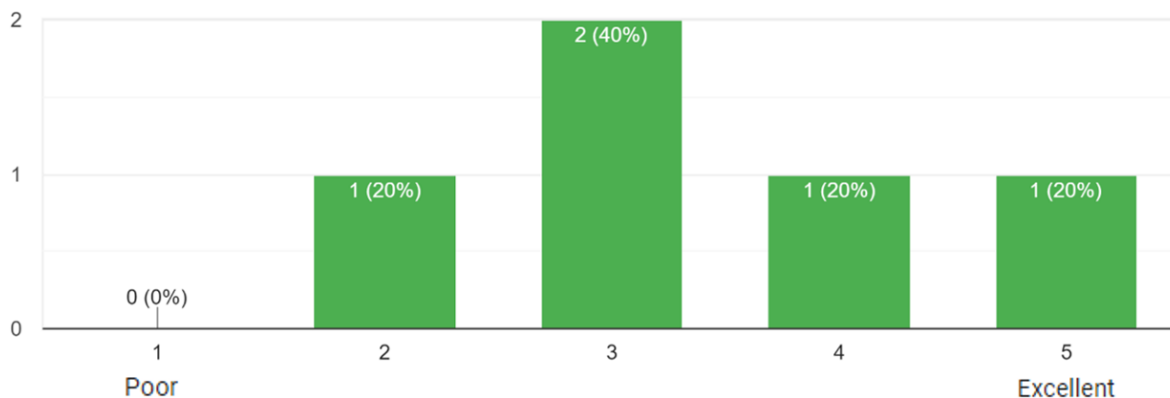


Figure 14. Assessment of awareness about Outdooractive platform functionalities

In accordance with received data, the average grade of awareness about Outdooractive platform functionalities is 3.4. The height of this index shows that most companies have enough information in order to use the whole potential of the platform. Also, these results are related to the length of platform usage. Companies, that have used Outdooractive for a longer time, already know more functions and features of the platform. Consequently, they gave higher grades.

Additionally, there was a question about the features and functions of the Outdooractive platform that participants appreciate the most. The majority mentioned that they really appreciate Outdooractive DMS as it is easy-to-use and allows input offers, products and information on various aspects. They like that the platform is multi-language and has all the content in one place as well as that service providers are clearly visible. Respondents find the platform is beneficial for its target audience:

*The platform itself is potentially useful for its users (outdoor enthusiasts).*

However, they would appreciate more attention and quick reaction for their bug reports. One of the respondents said:

*Many bugs are found and are still found and fixing them is sometimes very slow, or nothing is done.*

Finally, participants rated their level of expertise as Outdooractive platform users from 1 to 5 where 1 is “novice”, 2 is “advanced beginner”, 3 is “intermediate”, 4 is “advanced” and 5 is “expert”. Figure 15 shows the results below.

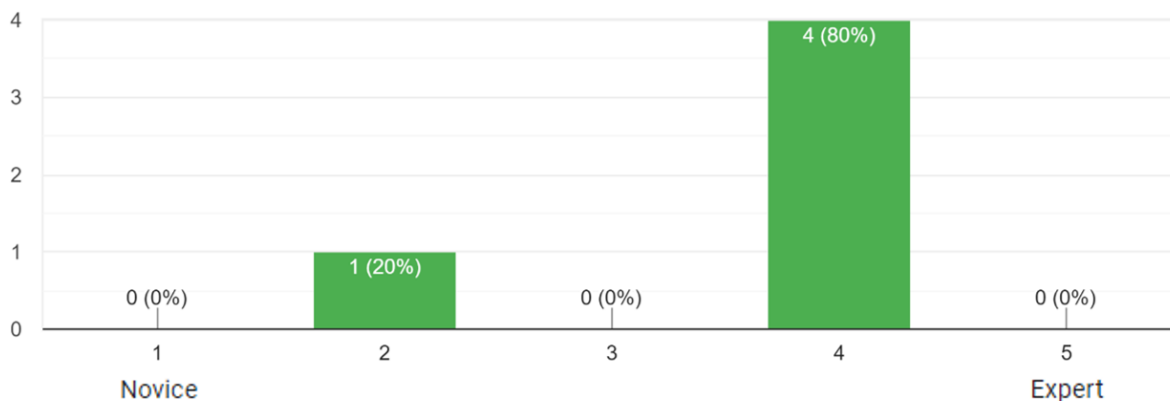


Figure 15. Assessment of Outdooractive platform user expertise level

As can be observed from Figure 15, the majority of respondents gave a grade of 4. Consequently, they position themselves as advanced users of the platform. Only one respondent gave a rating of 2 which means advance beginner. This can be explained by the fact that this company has used the Outdooractive platform less than others - only for about 4 months.

The last question of the survey was not compulsory. It allowed to leave some additional comments that participants wanted to share. Most of the notes were concerning Outdooractive functionality and desired features. For example, hide less important menu options, create notifications about missing translation, the possibility to copy content with links and formatting. Also, participants would like to receive annual statistics of overall Outdooractive users such as demographics and interests. That is because this information can be useful for comparison with previous years and within the different audiences. For instance, one of the respondents stated:

*Also, the Statistics section is not very useful since it lacks the possibility to compare to the previous year/years.*

Moreover, some comments said that there are a lot of advertisements on the platform which is perceived as spam:

*Please make the adverts on the .com platform less intrusive. I have got many comments from people who have found us there that we should change provider as the adverts are perceived as spam as there are so many.*

Based on the results and key findings of the data collection and analysis, recommendations for improvement of the case platform implementation and utilization processes were created. They are presented in the next sub-chapter.

### 5.3 Recommendations for Improvement

This part of the thesis provides some recommendations for improvement of the case platform implementation and utilization processes in order to better meet current clients' needs within B2B context in the Finnish market. The suggestions are based on the study of theoretical materials on the research topic, the case platform review, collected and analyzed data from the online survey. They concern the case platform, Ellare, and aim to improve its performance.

Firstly, during the induction of the Outdooractive platform to potential clients, the presentation of provided offers is suggested to have more visual content. It should clearly display all information about the offer such as product description, price, content, differences from other products and some practical showcases. Also, in accordance with collected data, it is important to understand the client's business and your offered product in order to apply a personalized approach as well as establish a good relationship with the consumer. Therefore, the presentation should provide concrete examples of how Outdooractive utilization benefits, advantages and positively impacts client business.

Secondly, it is recommended to keep Outdooractive corporate users constantly well informed about platform functionality. They should receive useful instructions and a platform manual at the beginning of work. It is significant to have enough knowledge about features, operations, possibilities of the platform in order to successfully and profitably utilize all its potential. Moreover, users need to be regularly notified about any changes, modifications and new functions of the platform to be always up to date.

Thirdly, for better user experience it is vital to listen carefully to customer requirements, needs and goals as well as be patient, enthusiastic and always ready to help. Gathered feedbacks have shown that all arisen technical and non-technical issues are expected to be processed and fixed quickly. Thus, it is suggested to provide a fast reaction to users' reports about any problems. Also, if some problem cannot be solved rapidly, then the user should be necessarily informed about possible delays.

Fourthly, it is suggested to clearly identify and set steps of collaboration with deadlines. Based on collected responses, clients want to explicitly understand each stage of cooperation, how the working process is organized, who does what and when. They should not be confused and lost during work.

Lastly, keeping promises given during the acquisition is extremely essential. According to collected answers, it concerns especially long-time corporate users of Outdooractive. That is because they can already clearly define if promises match reality or not. Consequently,

it is recommended to provide some systematic checks on how the working process is going on, if everything is fine and if users are satisfied. Users should feel support, help and that they are not forgotten and left alone. Each user needs to receive a sufficient level of assistance and enough spent time.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 Answers to the Research Questions

In conclusion, digital platforms significantly force the rise of the tourism sector nowadays. They provide global market entry opportunities, the latest marketing and quality control tools as well as boost the rise of diversity and quantity of tourism products and services.

The objective of the study was to discover how the implementation process of the case platform can be improved in order to better meet current clients' needs within B2B context in the Finnish market. In order to achieve this purpose answers to the research questions, that were formulated in Chapter 1, are provided below.

Sub-questions of the research with answers are presented first:

#### **How does digitalization affect the tourism industry?**

Digitalization scientifically transforms the whole tourism industry. It rethinks concepts of travel, leads trip-related needs, forces new tourism products and services creation. Also, digitalization modifies culture, structure, working processes and strategies of travel companies as well as shifts workforces in the industry.

Digital changes in the travel sector provide more benefits for consumers such as time savings, security improvements, convenience, accessibility, sharing and risk reduction.

Moreover, the integration of innovations and modern technologies in tourism gets the highest priority and becomes inevitable as it offers a worldwide infrastructure for the industry.

#### **What are the stages of digital tourism platform implementation?**

When the digital platform is gotten from the outside, its implementation process includes three common stages which are acquisition, development and deployment.

The acquisition includes identification of potential technologies and vendors, opportunities assessment, selection of the best match, negotiation about terms and technology transfer. Development is a process of platform improvement, modifying and customization according to company needs. During deployment, the company installs and distributes digital platform in order to make it accessible for use.

### **How does the case platform utilization help to follow the trends of digitalization in tourism?**

Outdooractive aims to use the whole potential of digitalization and improve outdoor tourism. Utilization of the case platform helps to follow several trends of digitalization in tourism.

- Outdooractive supports brand awareness, reputation as well as increases the reach for brands and destinations because it is the biggest outdoor tourism platform in Europe
- Outdooractive utilization provides solutions and tools which allow applying business intelligence and management strategy with a scientific approach
- Usage of the Outdooractive platform guarantees wide distribution via different kinds of digital channels and high-quality interaction with the target audience
- Outdooractive offers cutting-edge technologies for web, app, cartography, content services, online-marketing, facility and publisher partnerships
- The Outdooractive platform supports the usage of interactive content such as images, videos, clickable infographics and 3D elements
- The Outdooractive platform is responsive and optimized for all mobile devices

### **What should be considered to improve user experience of B2B users of the case platform?**

For better user experience of B2B users of the case platform, the following issues recommended being considered by the case company:

- Promise users only what can be really accomplished
- Set clear steps of cooperation and deadlines
- Try to understand users' requirements and goals better
- Make sure that users utilize all potential of the platform
- Notify about new features and any changes in the platform regularly
- React on reports about arisen problems rapidly
- Fix technical issues quicker
- Inform about possible delays on time
- Provide systematic checks on how the working process is going on

Finally, the main research question is answered below:



### **What is the role of digital platform utilization in the tourism business?**

Within the travel industry digital platforms have got great popularity, wide usage and have started to play an essential role.

Digital tourism platform creates, enables and facilitates innovative methods of interaction between users and service providers as well as makes confident and trustful relationships between them. Digital tourism platform generates, collects and delivers big valuable data. It gathers different offers, simplifies transactions, resolves disputes, shares reviews and feedbacks. Digital tourism platform brings together minor and world-famous market players. It forces the creation of new travel products and services.

With digital platform usage, travel companies can ensure world consumer access, enter new markets, reduce advertising costs, receive more efficient possibilities to involve and understand their target segment. While customers have an opportunity to get improved user experience, find a huge number of variants in one place and, as a result, make better choices. Also, digital tourism platform contributes to popularizing unknown destinations as well as helps historical, cultural and natural attractions to stay preserved, renovated and promoted.

### **6.2 Reliability and Validity**

The thesis used secondary and primary data sources. Secondary sources were academic books, research articles, reports, journals and up to date electronic publications from specialists of the industry. Primary data was collected through the online survey. The survey was conducted within the case company clients who are the corporate users of the case platform. Also, main and subordinate research questions were answered as well as the purposes of the study were achieved based on the literature review, case platform study and the analysis of primary data. Therefore, the research can be considered valid.

General outcomes and conclusions of the research have sufficient reliability. However, the study was conducted when the tourism industry is significantly affected by COVID-19 pandemic. Most travel companies do not work in the previous mode. Thus, it was hard to get them involved in the research and the number of survey respondents was not as high as was expected initially.

Moreover, the tourism industry is transforming quickly due to digitalization, and findings may change if the study is made later. The results of the study and data analysis are reliable for the case platform. However, the research was focused on B2B context and the

Finnish market. Therefore, the results may not reflect the situation for other platforms, countries and business models.

### 6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

This thesis analyzes the implementation process of the Outdooractive platform and how it can be improved in order to better meet current clients' needs within B2B context in the Finnish market. However, digital platforms' usage in tourism is now rising rapidly. Thus, further research on the topic in several years is suggested as it may determine new outcomes and ways of improvement.

For this study data was collected only among corporate users of the case platform in Finland. In order to ensure more in-depth new insights into the topic, further research could be conducted within a bigger number of participants from other countries' markets.

Studying the subject more would bring advantage for travel companies who already work with case platform, attract new corporate users and partners all over the world as well as provide the ways of platform's service offerings improvements.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

### Printed Sources

- Brysch, A. 2017. Digital Transformation in the Tourism Sector - Challenges and Opportunities. International Conference on Tourism Dynamics and Trends, At Seville.
- Dimitrova, R. R. 2019. Online tourism platforms and their effect on the participants in the tourist market. *Economics and Management*, 119-125.
- Dredge, D., Phi, G., Mahadevan, R., Meehan, E., & Popescu, E. (2018). Digitalization in Tourism: In-depth analysis of challenges and opportunities. Low Value procedure GRO-SME-17-C-091-A for Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME) Virtual Tourism Observatory. Copenhagen: Aalborg University.
- Fried, L. 2015. Acquisition and Deployment of Advanced Information Technology. USA.
- Mittiga, A., Silva, B., Wernet, F., Kow, N., & Kutschera, S. 2019. Travel Trend Report 2019. TrekkSoft.
- Mortara, L., & Ford, S. 2012. Technology acquisitions: A guided approach to technology acquisition and protection decisions. Great Britain: Centre for Technology Management, Institute for Manufacturing, University of Cambridge.
- Morvan, L., Hintermann, F., & Vazirani, M. 2016. Five Ways to Win with Digital Platforms. Accenture.
- Outdooractive GmbH. 2019. Guideline for creating touristic content. Germany: Outdooractive GmbH.
- PATA & Oxford Economics. 2018. Data & Digital Platforms: Driving Tourism Growth in Asia Pacific. Bangkok: Oxford Economics and Pacific Asia Travel Association.
- World Economic Forum. 2015. Digital Transformation Initiative. World Economic Forum in collaboration with Accenture.
- World Tourism Organization. 2017. New Platform Tourism Services (or the so-called Sharing Economy) Understand, Rethink and Adapt. Madrid: UNWTO.
- World Tourism Organization. 2019. UNWTO Guidelines for Institutional Strengthening of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) – Preparing DMOs for new challenges. Madrid: UNWTO.
- World Tourism Organization. 2020. World Tourism Barometer. Madrid: UNWTO.

## Electronic Sources

BBC Travel. 2020. How digitalisation is revolutionising the travel industry. BBC Travel [accessed 6 April 2020]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/storyworks/travel/the-new-tourism-trend/technology-redefine-tourism-industry>

Bendor-Samuel, P. 2018. What is a digital platform? The Enterprisers project [accessed 13 April 2020]. Available at: <https://enterpriseproject.com/article/2018/12/what-digital-platform>

Christian. 2015. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in the EU. AALEP [accessed 12 April 2020]. Available at: <http://www.aalep.eu/destination-marketing-organizations-dmos-eu>

Chuba, O. 2018. Top 10 Travel Industry Trends in 2019. Stfalcon [accessed 9 April 2020]. Available at: <https://stfalcon.com/en/blog/post/travel-industry-trends%20in-2019>

Digital Tourism Think Tank. 2020. What DMOs want to know in 2020? Digital Tourism Think Tank [accessed 11 April 2020]. Available at: <https://www.thinkdigital.travel/opinion/what-dmos-want-to-know-in-2020/>

Gabriel, D. 2013. Inductive and deductive approaches to research. Dr Deborah Gabriel [accessed 3 April 2020]. Available at: <https://deborahgabriel.com/2013/03/17/inductive-and-deductive-approaches-to-research/>

Outdooractive Corporate. 2020a. Our worldwide outdoor platform. Outdooractive Corporate [accessed 20 April 2020]. Available at: <https://corporate.outdooractive.com/en/platform/>

Outdooractive Corporate. 2020b. Outdooractive Business. Outdooractive Corporate [accessed 20 April 2020]. Available at: <https://corporate.outdooractive.com/en/outdooractive-business/>

Outdooractive Corporate. 2020c. Our Products. Outdooractive Corporate [accessed 21 April 2020]. Available at: <https://corporate.outdooractive.com/en/products/>

Peltier, D., & Sheivachman, A. 2018. Tours and Experiences: The Next Great Untapped Market in Online Travel. Skift [accessed 9 April 2020]. Available at: <https://skift.com/2018/09/18/tours-and-experiences-the-next-great-untapped-market-in-online-travel/>

- Poggi, M. 2019. Digital transformation in tourism: how to begin? World Travel Market [accessed 7 April 2020]. Available at: <https://news.wtm.com/digital-transformation-in-tourism-how-to-begin/>
- Revfine. 2020a. 3 Hot Digital Trends in the Tourism Industry. Revfine [accessed 10 April 2020]. Available at: <https://www.revfine.com/digital-trends-tourism-industry/>
- Revfine. 2020b. Key Digital Trends in the Tourism and Travel Industry. Revfine [accessed 10 April 2020]. Available at: <https://www.revfine.com/digital-trends-travel-industry/>
- RubyGarage. 2019. The Most Significant Digital Transformation Trends in the Travel Industry for 2019. RubyGarage [accessed 9 April 2020]. Available at: <https://rubygarage.org/blog/digital-transformation-trends-in-travel-industry>
- Sigliano, K. 2020. Digital Transformation Strategies in Tourism. Urbannext [accessed 7 April 2020]. Available at: <https://urbannext.net/digital-transformation-strategies-tourism/>
- Streefkerk, R. 2019. Qualitative vs. quantitative research. Scribbr [accessed 3 April 2020]. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative-quantitative-research/>
- The World Bank. 2018. Digital Platforms and the Future of Tourism. The World Bank [accessed 14 April 2020]. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/09/25/digital-platforms-and-the-future-of-tourism-a-world-tourism-celebration>
- World Economic Forum. 2020. Aviation, Travel and Tourism: more disruption ahead for a digital trailblazer. World Economic Forum [accessed 9 April 2020]. Available at: <https://reports.weforum.org/digital-transformation/aviation-travel-and-tourism-more-disruption-ahead-for-a-digital-trailblazer/>
- Zamiatina, A. 2020. Top 7 digital transformation trends in the travel industry. Datumize [accessed 8 April 2020]. Available at: <https://blog.datumize.com/top-7-digital-transformation-trends-in-the-travel-industry>

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Online questionnaire

**1. General questions**

What company or organisation do you present? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been using Outdooractive platform? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about the Outdooractive platform? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Which products are you using? \*

Outdooractive Business

Outdooractive FlexView

Outdooractive Regio

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Questions about Outdooractive platform implementation process**

Based on your experience of Outdooractive platform utilization, please answer the questions about each step of this process (introduction, implementation and after sales services).

**Introduction (Contacting, Introduction of Outdooractive, Offer, Order)**

Was introduction clear and understandable? Rate it on scale from 1 to 5. \*

1      2      3      4      5

Strongly disagree                        Strongly agree

What are the things you liked the most during the process? And why? \*

Your answer

What are the things you liked the least during the process? And why? \*

Your answer

What were the main difficulties/challenges for you during the process? \*

Your answer

Is there anything that you would recommend to improve? \*

Your answer

**Implementation (Technical implementation, DMS -webinar, Content production)**

Was implementation process clear and understandable? Rate it on scale from 1 to 5. \*

Strongly disagree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly agree

What are the things you liked the most during the process? And why? \*

Your answer

Did you encounter any challenges during the implementation process? \*

Your answer

Is there anything that you would recommend to improve? \*

Your answer





On a scale from 1 to 5, how well are you informed about Outdooractive platform functionalities? \*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent

What are the features of Outdooractive platform that you appreciate the most? \*

Your answer

---

Rate your level of expertise as Outdooractive platform user from 1 to 5 (where 1 – novice, 2 – advanced beginner, 3 – intermediate, 4 – advanced, 5 – expert).

	1	2	3	4	5	
Novice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Expert

If there are any comments that you would like to share additionally, please write them below.

Your answer

---

Submit