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How to grow a strong alcoholic beverage brand and following on social media in Finland?

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to identify strategies and tactics used by strong alcoholic beverage brands for growing their brand and following on social media in Finland. The Finnish strong alcoholic beverage sector is highly competitive and restricted due to the Finnish alcohol act. Due to the above factors, the subject was investigated.

Qualitative primary research, as well as secondary research, were utilised in this study. The qualitative research data consisted of two in-depth interviews with representatives of Finnish strong alcoholic beverage brands, Laplandia Vodka and Kyrö Distillery Company. The secondary data was gathered from the internet, which consists of white papers, articles, and bibliography related to the study topic.

The results of the interviews revealed some specific strategies and tactics used by alcohol brands in Finland. The most important thing was the importance of corporate image advertising as a form of marketing used by the brand. In addition, the right positioning strategy and being present in the right channels also came to the fore. The quality of content and authentic storytelling on social media also proved to be an important factor in consumer engagement and increasing the number of followers. The study also shows that by expanding the brand's product range to, for example, mild alcohol products, the company gets more opportunities in terms of advertising and marketing, which in turn helps the company to spread the awareness of all its products and grow its brand.

The author recommends Finnish alcohol brands use creativity when developing growth strategies and tactics on social media. While the Finnish Alcohol Act prevents many measures from being taken on social media and beyond, brands need to think "outside the box" and keep a close analysis of every factor related to the brand and find the right opportunities to grow the brand and following on social media.

Keywords: Alcohol Marketing, Social Media, Alcohol Branding

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1 Introduction

In order to better understand the topic of the work and the research question, the work begins with an introduction to the Finnish alcohol sector, highlighting the legislation of the Finnish Alcohol Act and alcohol consumption among consumers in Finland.

Finnish Alcohol Act

The legislation of the Finnish Alcohol Act had its roots in the 1919-1932 century when a ban on alcohol was imposed in Finland. During this time, it was not allowed to sell or manufacture alcoholic beverages in Finland. However, Parliament repealed the Prohibition Act in 1932, as the Prohibition Act eventually proved to be a failure in the opinion of all parties. The state-owned Oy Alkoholiliike Ab (Alko Oy) was given a monopoly position to import, export, manufacture, and sell alcoholic beverages in 1932. The Alcohol Act has been amended and updated several times, but the most recent amendment came into force in 2018. Today Alko has only a retail monopoly position in Finland (Vastamäki, 2019).

Where is alcohol law needed?

The purpose of the law is to reduce the consumption of alcoholic substances by restricting and controlling the related business activities in order to prevent harm caused by alcohol to its users, other people, and society as a whole (Alcohol Act 1102/2017, 1§). The Alcohol Act regulates everything related to the manufacture, import, export, transportation, sale, and other disposals, use, possession, and marketing of alcoholic substances (Alcohol Act 1102/2017, 2§) (Finlex, 2018).

Valvira (National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health) has issued guidance on alcohol marketing which contains examples of what types of marketing can be considered allowed or prohibited.

According to Valvira (National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health), 2018: The current Alcohol Act of 2018 completely bans the marketing (direct and indirect advertising) of alcoholic beverages over 22%, including on social media. Advertising regulations are not limited to the marketing of a particular brand, but advertising under a brand name may also be prohibited. Valvira guides companies as follows "...using the generic name of a strong alcoholic beverage is not prohibited in the advertising of other products if such advertising has no direct link to the sale of strong alcoholic beverages" (Valvira, 2018:14).

Restrictions on the marketing of alcoholic beverages do not apply to individuals or material produced in the context of journalistic freedom of expression or artistic freedom. However, for example, a blogger is not allowed to introduce spirits on her/his blog for a fee (Valvira, 2018).

In principle, pure corporate image advertising is also permitted for a producer, importer, seller, or broker of spirits. In other words, a company producing spirits may market itself but not its products. Corporate image advertising refers to advertising that creates a positive image of a company by telling about, for example, the company's operating principles, goals, history, and product quality (Valvira, 2018).

Taking into account the information provided by Valvira on the Finnish Alcohol Act, one can state that alcohol is quite a restricted industry.

Consumption

The National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) publishes annual statistics on alcohol consumption by Finns. According to the latest statistical report by Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL): in 2019, the statistical consumption of alcoholic beverages was 38.0 million liters of 100% alcohol, which means 8.2 liters of 100% alcohol per capita aged 15 and over. For spirits (> 22%), consumption was 1.7 liters per capita, with 10% of the total consumption of alcohol (THL, 2020).

When looking at alcohol consumption in the longer term, It can be seen from the figure that the consumption of alcohol of Finns has varied during the fifty-year period under review. Alcohol consumption has been growing steadily until the mid-2000s, after which it has started to decline slightly.

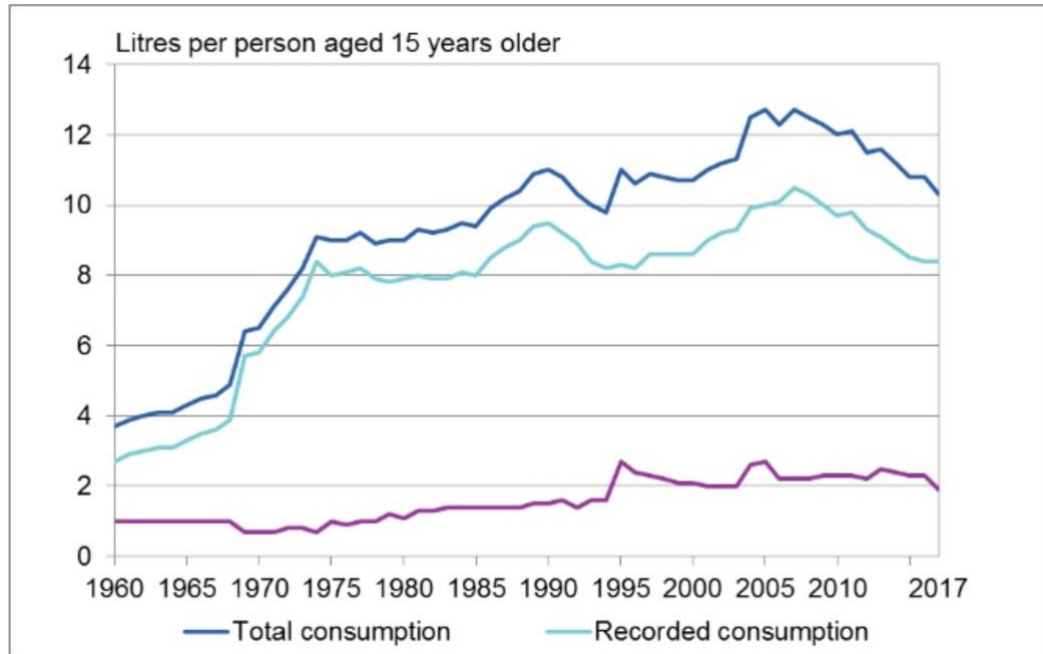


Figure 1. Consumption of alcohol beverages as pure alcohol per person aged 15 years or older, 1960-2017 (THL, 2018)

Figure 2. shows that the consumption of alcohol of Finns has varied during the fifty-year period under review. Consumption of spirits has fallen by about 40 percent over the past ten years. This may have been somewhat influenced by legislation, trends, and the general change in consumer habits among consumers.

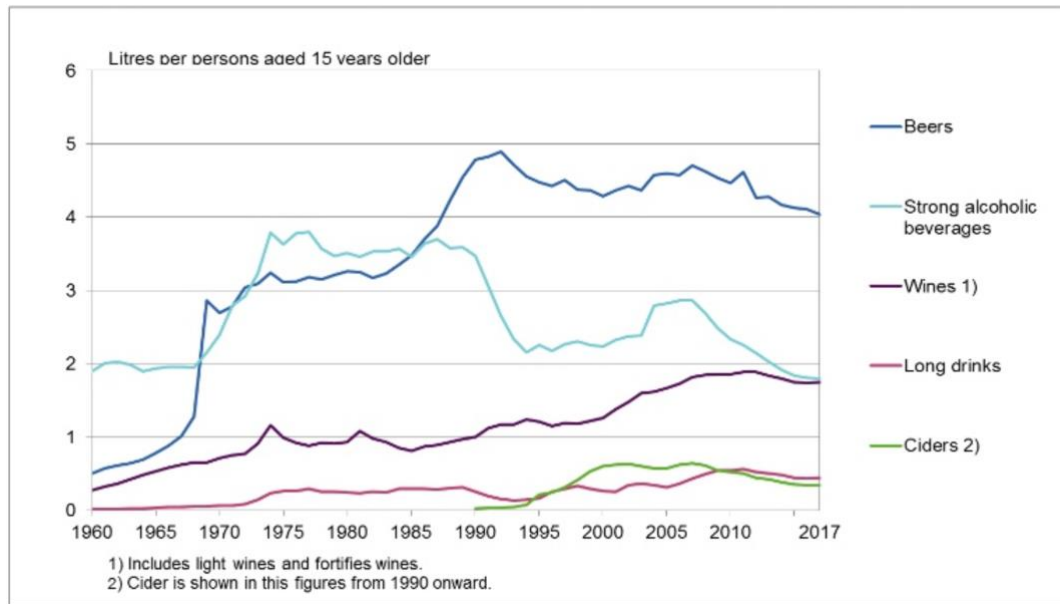


Figure 2. Recorded consumption of alcohol beverages as pure alcohol per person aged 15 years or older, according to beverage type, 1960-2017 (THL, 2018)

2 Literature review

In order to understand how to grow a brand and following on social media, it is first necessary to review basic marketing and branding theories to gain an understanding of the subject matter before delving into more complex elements of the topic.

2.1 Marketing

Marketing has various definitions, but perhaps the simplest definition is: "Marketing is the process of engaging customers and building profitable customer relationships by creating value for customers and capturing value in return" (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris & He 2020:28). The goal of marketing is to create superior value, which can attract new customers, and by delivering value and satisfaction, it keeps and grows current customers of the company (Kotler et al., 2020). Below is a simple model of the marketing process, which include five steps:

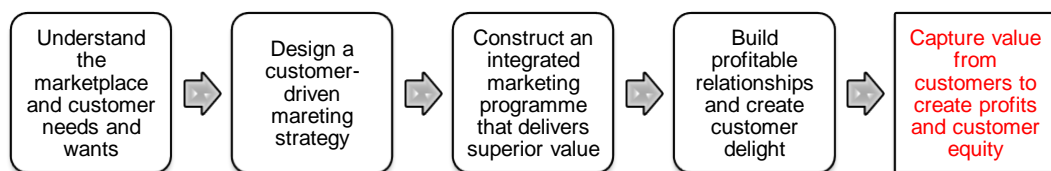


Figure 3. A simple model of marketing process (Kotler et al., 2020)

2.1.1 Value proposition and customer relationship

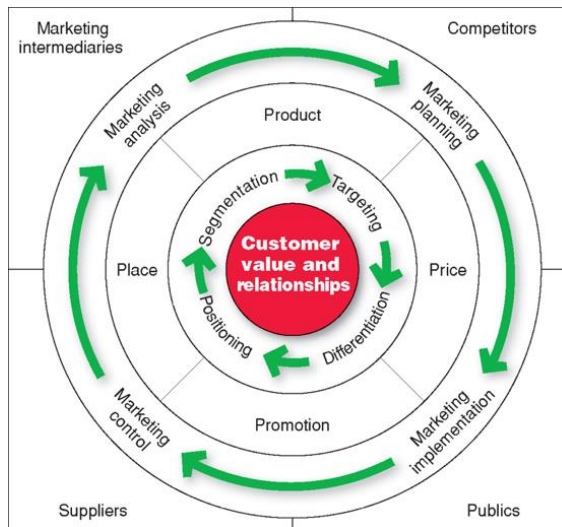


Figure 4. Summary of the customer-driven marketing strategy and marketing mix

Today's world is full of different products and services, and experiences, just as we humans are different. Every customer has its own expectations about the value and satisfaction, which companies are trying to satisfy. Businesses need to understand consumer's value and satisfaction as satisfied customers are more likely to buy again, while dissatisfied customers are more likely to switch to competitors and discredit the product to others (Kotler et al., 2020). Kotler et al. define value proposition as "The full positioning of a brand – the full mix of benefits on which it is positioned" (2020:677). In other words, it consists of benefits or values that are promised for the consumer by the company (Kotler et al., 2020).

A customer relationship is a relationship between the company and its customer segments. It occurs when consumers decide to satisfy their needs and wants through exchange relationships (Kotler et al., 2020). In a nutshell, companies should maintain the customer relationship to keep connected with customers and build strong relationships by keeping their value proposition, thus delivering customer value (Ibid.).

2.1.2 Market segmentation and Market targeting

The market consist of many types of consumers, products, and needs. Due to this, companies divide markets into segments to reach consumers more efficiently and effectively (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris and He: 2020). Companies marketing managements utilize the major segmentation variables such as geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioural segments to divide the market (Kotler et al., 2020: 201).

When choosing which market company will target, marketing management needs first to define its market segments. After deciding on one or more segments, the company evaluates each market segment's attractiveness and profitably that generates the greatest customer value. Because a company cannot serve all customers in every way, it selects (targets) the customers whom it can serve well and profitably (Kotler et al., 2020:10). Companies use a marketing mix that consists of product, price, place, and promotion as a set of tactical marketing tools. These tools are "used to produce the response it wants in the target market" (Ibid., 2020:51). A company can choose one or more segments depending on its resources (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris, He: 2020).

2.1.3 Market differentiation and positioning

After the company has determined in which market segments to enter and which target group to serve, it must decide how it will differentiate from its competitors by creating superior value for the customers (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris, He: 2020). In the context of alcohol marketing, "The need to differentiation becomes vital to the survival of these brands" (Musonera & Hemley, 2011:2). In order to achieve an ideal position in the market, the company must position its brand by identifying possible customer value differences that provide competitive advantages on which build the position. In its simplicity, where the product stands in the marketplace in relation to others offering similar products and services, as well as the mind of the consumers (Kotler et al., 2020). Kotler et al., 2020 define positioning as an act of "Arranging for a product to occupy a clear, distinctive and

desirable place relative to competing products in the mind of target consumers" (2020:51).

J.N Kapferer 2012 argues that "positioning is a crucial concept" (2012:152). The reason for this may be because consumers make their decisions through comparisons (Ibid.), and if a brand is not properly positioned, consumers may choose a competitor's product over another brand. Kapferer summarizes the aim of positioning as following: "The aim of positioning is to identify, and take possession of, a strong purchasing rationale that gives us a real or perceived advantage" and "It implies a desire to take up a long-term position and defend it" (2012:154).

When creating a company's marketing strategy and positioning itself, companies must also consider external factors outside the company that the company cannot control itself and which have an impact on its operations: these forces are called the macroenvironment (Kotler et al., 2020:75). Macroenvironment consists of factors, e.g., legal factors, which guide the marketing actions made by companies: "sets of laws and regulations that limit business for the good of society as a whole" (Kotler et al., 2020:91). A common tool for companies to identify external factors is called PESTLE Analysis, which consists of Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental issues. The PESTLE analysis helps companies to understand the business environment as seeing it as 'big picture' (Newton, P., & Bristoll, H., 2013).

The moment when a company is deciding how the brand will differentiate from its competitors in the same market segment and how the brand is positioned, the process has three steps. First, it must build a position that includes a set of differentiating competitive advantages. Secondly, select an overall positioning strategy as well as the right competitive advantages (Kotler et al., 2020), and thirdly, according to Ibid.: "Once the company has chosen the desired position, it must take strong steps to deliver and communicate that position to target consumers." (2020:51).

2.1.4 Needs, wants, and demands

In order to continue basic marketing tasks, marketing teams need to know what are the needs, wants, and demands of the consumers. Kotler et al. explain customer needs, wants, and demands in a way that: “Human needs are states of felt deprivation”; “Wants are the form of human needs take as they are shaped by the culture and individual personality.”; and Demands are human wants that are backed by buying power” (2020:7).

Marketing teams focus on consumer needs and wants to determine the value consumers desire. Identifying consumers’ desires and behaviour further informs how consumers make choices. Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2016 defines consumer behaviour as: “the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs or desires” (2016:670). Consumer behaviour is an important element in marketing. As Yi Zhang states in the article of Open Journal of Business and Management, 2015: ”In the increasingly competitive world marketplace, companies need to have a deeper insight into consumer behavior and educate consumers about the brand in order to develop effective marketing strategies.” (2015: 3, 59).

2.1.5 Marketing communications

Referring to earlier text in the positioning section, “Once the company has chosen the desired position, it must take strong steps to deliver and communicate that position to target consumers.” (2020:51); marketing communications is the way how brands communicate with consumers.

Marketing communications have changed significantly during the last decades due to the developing technology and the internet. Traditional marketing communications have mainly utilized mass media, but nowadays, mass media effectiveness has been questioned. Keller stated in 2009 that traditional advertising media (e.g., tv, newspapers, radio & magazines) ”are losing their grip on consumers” as consumers have access to a large amount of information about brands on e.g. social media (Kevin Keller, 2009:139-141). In the same context,

Rodriguez-Sanchez & Sancho Esper, 2015 has identified that "alcoholic beverage firms have huge budgets to spend on online-communication strategies, mainly to implement their social media strategies" (2015:395).

What does marketing communication mean? Keller defines this marketing effort as: "Marketing communications are the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the products and brands they sell" (2009:141). In other words, marketing communications are classified as the voice of a company and its brands. Marketing communications allow a company to form a conversation and customer relationships between the brand and consumers (2009:141).

2.2 Branding

2.2.1 Definition of a brand

Since the research question refers to branding on social media and its growth, one's needs to know what branding is and what elements it consists of. Today's marketplace is full of different brands, and "hardly anything goes unbranded" (Kotler et al., 2020:241).

The traditional approach of branding says that: "A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors." (David Aaker, 1991:21). While the traditional view is mostly about the visual aspect of the brand, Aaker describes a more modern definition as a "... organization's promise to a customer to deliver what the brand stands for not only in terms of functional benefits but also emotional, self-expressive, and social benefits" (Aaker, 2014:1) J.N. Kapferer argues that all organizations should see the brand as a: "name that symbolizes a long term engagement, crusade or commitment to a unique set of values, embedded into products, services and behaviours, which make the organization, person or product stand apart or stand out" (2012:12). From the

companies' perspective, brands are called assets, which include equity, and which purpose is to drive business strategy and performance. (Aaker, 2014:7).

Branded product or service helps consumers to identify products that might benefit them, and if purchased products of the same brands, the consumer knows that the features, benefits, and quality remains same. From a company's perspective, branded products help companies to "provide legal protection for unique product features that otherwise might be copied by competitors", and "a brand name becomes the basis on which a whole story can be built about a product's special qualities" (Kotler et al., 2020:241).

The perceptions and experiences that customer has, evolves customer relationship with the brand (David Aaker, 2014:7-11). In other words, every time a customer connects to a brand, it strengthens the bond between brand and customer (Ibid.). In an ideal situation, consumers become loyal to the brand, which is the heart of any brand's value (Ibid.).

2.2.2 Brand elements

Brand elements play a crucial role in branding; thus, it is a "...visual or verbal information that serves to identify and differentiate a product" (Farhana Mosarrat, 2012:225). The common elements of a brand include name, logo, symbol, character, packaging, and slogan (Ibid.). In the context of alcohol branding, the name of the brand and packaging plays a crucial role due to the highly competitive markets (Musonera & Hemley, 2008:2). Musonera & Hemley, 2008 state that "In some cases, vodka manufacturers attempt to create an image of quality in the packaging of their product" (Ibid.).

2.2.3 Brand equity

Brand equity is essential for the companies; thus, it creates value for the customer and the company in many ways. According to David Aaker, 1991, for companies, brand equity can create value by increasing marginal cash flow, as it enables it

to attract new customers and increase the brand loyalty of its customers. It also allows for higher pricing for its products as well as brand expansion (1991:27).

Authors have a different definition of brand equity as Kotler et al., 2012 define brand equity: "The differential effect that knowing the brand name has on customer response to the product or its marketing" (2012:666). While David Aaker puts it "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers." (1991:27). Aaker states that "A primary-brand building goal will be to build, enhance, or leverage brand equity, the major dimensions of which are—awareness, associations, and loyalty of the customer base" (2014:10).

2.2.4 Consumer-based brand equity (CBBE)

As previously mentioned, brand equity creates value for the consumer. The way how it creates value is according to Aaker, 1991, "They can help them interpret, process, and store huge quantities of information about products and brands."; and "They also can affect customers' confidence in the purchase decision (due to either past-use experience or familiarity with the brand and its characteristics)." (1991:27). The concept of brand equity has many definitions by researchers. A well-known Keller model is invented by Kevin Lane Keller. Keller opens the matter as follows: "The Basic premise of the model is that the power of the brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand over time" (2001, 3). Keller's model is essential for the brands; thus, it helps companies to build stronger brands. To better understand of Keller model, it is divided into four steps: Brand Identity, Brand Meaning, Brand Response, and Resonance. All four stages include questions that customers ask about brands: (Keller, 2001).

1. Brand Identity: Who are you?
2. Brand Meaning: What are you?
3. Brand Response: What about you?
4. Brand relationships: What about you and me?

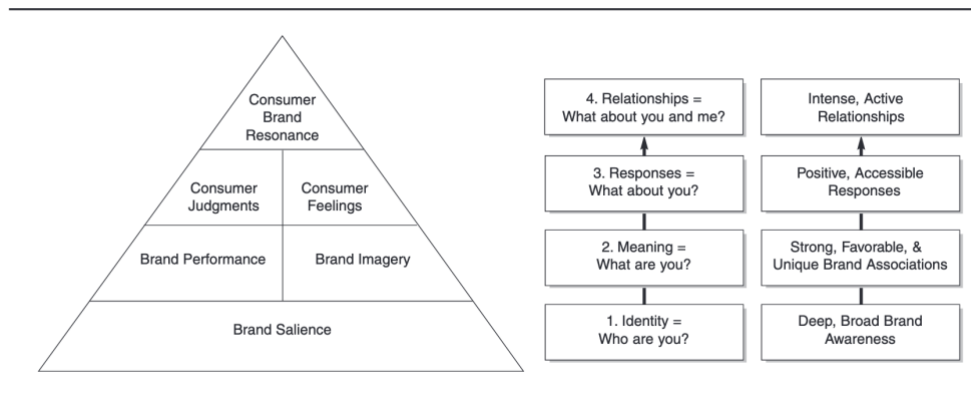


Figure 5. Keller's Brand Equity Model (Keller, 2001:7)

When the lowest step of the pyramid has been reached, one can move to the next step. In other words, Brand meaning cannot be confirmed until the brand identity is created. The meaning of the brand must be created in order to receive a response, and the brand relationships cannot be created before the consumers' response (Keller, 2001).

2.2.5 Brand identity

The importance of brand identity lies in what makes the brand meaningful and unique (Janonis, Dovalienė, and Virvilaitė 2007:70). Moral image, aim, and values of the brand are the core elements of the identity which "together constitute the essence of individuality while differentiating the brand" (2007:70). A well-developed brand identity has several benefits for the brand: Identity offers companies to position brands better in the intense competition in the marketplace, which provides a competitive advantage (Ibid). A well-positioned brand, in turn, helps the firms in the "development of the relationship between brand and consumer, providing a particular benefit" (Ibid).

J.N Kapferer has developed The prism of brand identity, which helps firms better understand the underlying concept of brand identity. Figure 8. Shows the external elements: Physical appearance, which is the "core of brand and its value added" (2012:72); a relationship that occurs between consumer and brand; and consumer reflection, which would show how consumers "image themselves

consuming a particular good” (Ibid.). On the right side of the prism, internal elements are presented. Personality refers to the way ”...by which any brand ”talks” about its goods and services and indicates a particular human person” (Ibid); Culture, which ”brands possess that culture in which they originated”; and Consumer self-image, which is ”a set of beliefs about oneself, retained in memory” of consumer (2012:72-73).

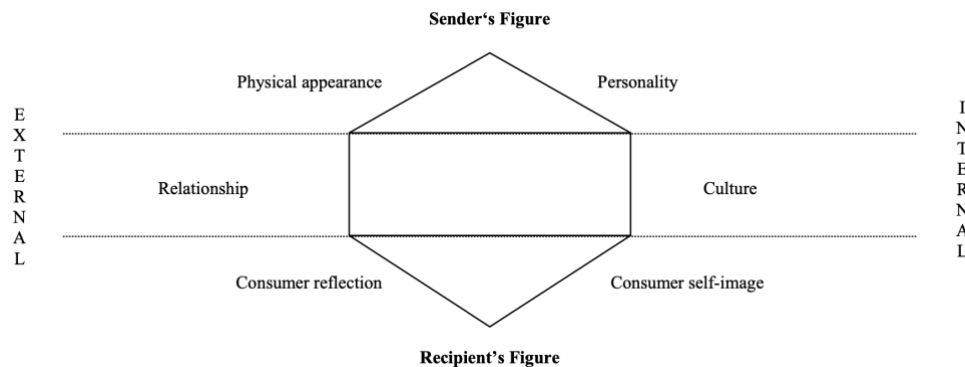


Figure 6. The prism of brand identity (Vytautas Janonis, Aistė Dovalienė, Regina Virvilaitė, 2007:72)

2.2.6 Brand image

While the brand identity is created by the company to inform its image to consumers, brand image is the ”...consumer understanding of complete brand set, developed by a company” (Janonis, Dovalienė, and Virvilaitė, 2007). In other words, it is the image that consumers see about the brand. Park, Jaworski, MacInnis claims that: ”Communicating a brand image to a target segment has long been as an important marketing activity” (1989:135), because it could help companies to establish a brand position and isolate the brand from the competition.

Brand image plays a crucial factor in branding; thus, it influences consumer behaviour as Zhang, Y. 2015 argues: ”Despite the change of consumers’ lifestyle and the way of information processing, the brand image remains the dominant impact factor of consumption decisions.” (2015:59). In the same context, the market of alcoholic beverages is highly competitive, and therefore, the brand image is an important element of a brand (Montonen & Tuominen, 2016:205)

According to Janonis et al., brand identity, brand positioning, and brand image are closely connected elements in the brand image building process. The idea can be explained as: "Positive brand image that ensures a competitive advantage is to build up when conveying brand identity to consumers efficiently and employing particular strategies of positioning." (2007:75)

2.2.7 Brand awareness

Brand awareness is a traditional branding metric and reflects how well people know a particular brand (Rowles, 2018:47). According to David Aaker (1991:61), "Brand awareness is the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category." Aaker continues to state that: "In some contexts, it can be a driver of brand choice and even loyalty" (1996:114).

Factors that can influence brand awareness are the Name of a brand; Advertising; Promotions and sales; and 1st Mover Advantage, which means the situation when a company brings any product for the first time in the market (Shahid, Hussain & aZafar, 2017:36).



Figure 7. The awareness pyramid (Aaker, 1991)

Brand awareness can be divided into the levels depicted in figure 5. At the bottom of the awareness pyramid is a level where the consumer is unaware of the brand. The next level is brand recognition, which is the lowest level of brand awareness. The consumer has been exposed to the brand at one point in the past or has

heard the brand's name and remembers it through this. The level is vital at the point of purchase because it may influence the consumer purchasing decisions (Aaker 1991:62). Access to the next level (brand recall) requires the consumer to name the brand in a product class (Aaker 1991:63). In other words, the situation where the consumer has an opinion about the brand or the consumer knows what this brand stands for (Aaker 1996:115). The highest level of brand awareness is top of mind, which means that some particular brand is "...ahead of the other brands in a persons mind" (1991:62-63).

2.3 Social media

2.3.1 Definition and types of social media

Referring to the research question "How to grow a strong alcoholic beverage brand and following on social media in Finland?", one needs to understand what social media is and which types of social media exist. Solomon et al. define social media as "...the online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility" (2016:683).

Social media has various types, from social networking (e.g., Facebook & Instagram) and microblogging (e.g., Twitter) to video-sharing (e.g., Youtube) (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Facebook is the most popular social networking site globally, as of the fourth quarter of 2020, company had 2.8 billion monthly active users (Hollensen 2019:59; Tankovska, 2021). Facebook provides companies to create Business Page, which can be used to share "content including text, pictures, and videos which promote the alcohol brand either explicitly or subtly" (Lim, Hare, Carrotte and Dietze 2016:2). In addition to this, the platform allows monitoring its traffic through the insights page, which helps companies to understand the demographics of their fans (Hollensen et al., 2019).

In addition to Facebook, a well-known social network platform is Instagram. Hollensen, Kotler, Opresnik defines Instagram as an "...online mobile photo-

sharing app that allows its users to share pictures and videos either publicly or privately, as well as through a variety of other social media networking platforms, such as Facebook...” (2019:99). Like on Facebook, Instagram provides analytics for Instagram Business account (Instagram, 2021).

Microblogging platform Twitter is a special form of blogging, but it is also used for social networking (Hollensen et al., 2019:71). According to Hollensen et al., 2019 Twitter is ”easy, requires little investment of time, and can quickly prove valuable increased buzz, turnover, and customer insight” (2019:72). Due to this, it is instrumental for most companies to be on Twitter (Ibid.)

Youtube is an American video-sharing website owned by Google from 2006 onwards (Hollensen et al., 2019). According to Hollensen et al., ”The site allows the users upload, view, rate, share, comment and add to favourites” (2019, 128). In the early days of Youtube, the content of the site was mostly uploaded by individuals, but today, many brands have seen the opportunity to integrate Youtube as a way to influence customers (Ibid., 2019). Hollensen argues that in the future, more brands are marketed through the video-sharing website (2019:131).

As a unifying factor for all above-mentioned platforms, social media provides engagement in social interactions for individuals and companies, as well as ”The interactive nature of these digital media not only allows sellers to share and exchange information with their customers but also allows customers to share and exchange information with one another” (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2013:328-329).

2.4 Branding in social media

2.4.1 Overview

Daniel Rowles, 2018 states that ”Social media has fundamentally changed how we engage and interact with brands and has led to the fundamental shift in branding...” (2018:47). The above-mentioned fundamental shift is that social

media provide two-way communications, while traditional media is based on one-way communication (Rowles, 2018). In other words, social media is a conversation between brands and consumers.

According to Lim, Hare, Carrotte and Dietze 2016, Alcohols are the one of the most advertised product category in the global market place and daily promoted on social network (2016:). Due to the rising use of social media platforms in recent years among consumers, brands have noticed the potential and unique opportunity for engage with their fans, e.g., Instagram (Hollensen, Kotler & Opresnik 2019). The alcohol industry is not an exemption. Alcohol companies have repositioned their marketing focus to social media. By way of illustration of Bacardi, which shifted their digital marketing budget up to 90% to facebook in 2011 (Nicholls, 2012:1).

Lim, Hare, Carrotte, and Dietze 2016 state that "Social media offers an effective bi-directional advertising platform for alcohol companies, as brands can advertise to specific target groups and communicate directly with their consumers." (2016:1) More specifically, social media users in, e.g., Facebook, can share and comment on the brand pages: "The participation of users creating and sharing alcohol brand content may strengthen marketing influence on peer groups" (Lim et al., 2016:1). The essential ability for the brands is to share valuable and interesting content and same time able to engage consumers in an open and authentic way (Rowles, 2018). Rowles states that companies need to understand which social media platforms the target audience is mainly using and, most importantly, provide value for the consumers. (Ibid.)

When thinking about what branding on social media can bring to a brand, Christy Ashley and Tracy Tuten argue that: "branded social media activities can be used to increase brand awareness and brand liking, promote customer engagement and loyalty, inspire consumer word-of-mouth communication about the brand, and potentially drive traffic to brand locations on and offline."

2.4.2 Branded content

Branded content which refers to content produced by the brand and for the brand, has been used widely by marketers. (Chan-Olmsted & Wolter, 2018). The purpose of branded content is to connect the brand with the audience with content that helps brands to stand out in the competitive media environment. The effectiveness of content depends on content's "quality, relevance and storytelling ability" (2018:23). In the example of Facebook posts, the novelty of the information mainly influences consumer's engagement with the branded content. According to Ibid., the narrative approach of storytelling will give consumers "...strong sense of empathy towards the subjects portrayed in the story..." (Ibid.). In its entirety, the goal of branded content is to engage consumers by informing brand values using a storytelling approach of communication (Chan-Olmsted & Wolter 2018:29).

In the context of brands' storytelling, Stephen Herskovitz and Malcolm Crystal, 2010 argue that "persona-focused storytelling is essential to branding" (2010:21); thus, it generates "a long lasting emotional bond with the audience" (Ibid.) The persona is a set of human-like characters attached to a brand to make it easier for people to find similarities in the brand to themselves, to identify, and thus engage (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

In general, social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) "create opportunities for branded messages to be re-distributed rapidly and widely by the media users to their friends and social networks. This provides free publicity for the original message and, by being embedded in a user-endorsed medium, increases the likelihood that the message will attract a recipient's attention." (Lobstein, Landon, Thornton & Jernigan 2016:22).

2.4.3 Nine Goals of Social Media in Branding

Every brand needs goals when using social media in branding. In Journal of brand management vol.19, Jack Yan presents the nine goals of social media in

branding. The main aim for every brand, including alcohol brands, in social media is to "...serve the organization both internally and externally." (2011:691)

Yan describes the nine goals as following: (1) "Build a sense of membership or citizenship with the organization"; (2) "Encourage the acceptance and communication of brand values", and (3) "Encourage the audience to engage in dialogue and promote the brand" (2011:619-620) From a strategic perspective, the above-mentioned dialogue can (4) "Help the organization find and maintain a competitive advantage"; (5) "Inform the vision behind the brand and build differentiation for it; and (6) "Act as a check on whether the brand is being properly communicated and understood by the audiences" (Ibid.) The results of the above-mentioned actions can (7) "build positive brand associations"; (8) "build the perceived quality of the brand", as well as (9) "Build greater awareness of the brand to audiences that it has not yet reached." (Ibid.).

In other words, it is essential for every brand (including alcohol) to establish a connection with consumers and encourage a sense of belonging via engagement. Yan states that "The brand is strengthened through participation, allowing external audiences to identify with it, and become involved in it." (2011:691).

2.5 Brand strategies on social media

When considering brands' strategies, market penetration is a common method for firms to grow "...by better penetrating current markets with current products" (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris & He 2020:46). In a situation where a firm decides to bring new products to the market, two common brand strategies came up from earlier academic papers: Line extension strategy and brand extension strategy. (Durmaz & Yaşar, 2016:53). Line extension strategy refers to the method where the company adds "...new characteristics to the product category below the same brand name and without changing the core of the brand" (2016:54), which is commonly used by vodka brands to "...increase brand's quality reputation – the perceived value that customers associate with a particular brand name or a logo" (Musonera & Hemley, 2008:8), while brand extension strategy means when the

company makes a new product or a new product category, using the same brand name (Ibid.) In this context, brand extension is a common strategy used by vodka brands (Musonera & Hemley, 2008:3). According to Durmaz & Yaşar, 2016 companies should establish brand strategies that support other marketing strategies of their firm (2016:53). In other words, brand strategies should serve the firm internally and externally (David Kelly, 2016:15). Once the strategy is decided, the company communicates with consumers by positioning the brand (Kotler et al., 2020:51).

When designing social media brand strategies, the base idea is to "...encourage recognition, exchange of ideas and communication of brand values" (Kelly, 2016:16), which develops the trustiness of the brand among consumers (2016:17). Kelly, 2016 emphasizes the importance of communication of how brands communicate to consumers and what kind of message the consumer receives about the brand. The message should be consistent, that does not confuse the consumer. While the consumers in social media receive a mass of messages from brands daily, brands should continually communicate the same message in order for consumers to truly understand the meaning of a brand. Brands need to avoid overload their consumers with its content and keep simplicity in mind when considering the social media strategy. In the context of the content, visual appeal is essential for every brand. According to Kelly, 2016 companies should determine the images that are in line with the brand and continually bring those images to its audiences. While social media is full of different brands, the differentiation of a brand is vital for companies. In other words, brands must stand out in social media with its content, in order to gain the consumers' attention (2016:19-22).

To gain popularity (e.g., following) of the brand on social media, companies must carefully determine the social networks where to be present and select one's that supports the brand image (2016:24-25). Each of the previously mentioned social media platforms has its pros. After choosing the right platforms, brands should offer interesting and clear content that consumers can easily embrace. More specifically, meaningful content can give the audience powerful impressions and

reactions. So it can be said that it is essential to think about what style of content the brand distributes on social media. For example, visual content has been found to be 90% more effective than plain text (2016:25-32). In addition to this, companies can direct consumers to their social media pages by adding links to their website or, e.g., blog pages. This increases the traffic to social media pages. Viceversa, adding webpage links to social media pages might increase the traffic to websites and therefore provide product information to brands' target audience (David Kelly, 2016:38; Musonera & Hemley, 2008:4).

In conclusion, social media can be counted as a 'tool' for brand strategies. It is part of the company's overall long-term strategy and should help consumers to understand and participate of the company's brand and business (Kelly, 2016:38).

2.5.1 Measuring the effectiveness of social media

In order to determine that social media has had a positive impact on brand growth and following on social media, these need to be measured. When measuring the effectiveness of social media on brands, it consists of two main measures: Non-financial Social Metrics and Financial Social Metrics. (Hollensen, Kotler & Opresnik, 2019) Non-Financial social metrics are quantitative, consisting of attitudinal and behavioural measures. (Ibid.) Metrics of this category are according to Hollensen et al.: Volume of mentions, which include "...count of total number of the brands' mentions in social media channels over a period of time" (2019:166); Share of Voice = "Indicator of how effectively a company is creating positive buzz" (Ibid.); Engagement, which "...refers to the potential customers that take some action beyond viewing or reading a website". This can be measured by activities such as: 'Liking', commenting, or replying to a post (Ibid.) Metrics also include Advocates, which refers to "Being an 'Advocate' for the brand, by creating and uploading content that actively promotes the brand..." (2019:167).

While the Non-financial social metrics measure refers to the aforementioned attitudinal and behavioural measures, financial social metrics "emphasize the revenue generated by marketing communication activities" (Hollensen et al.

2019:169). Return on Investment (ROI) is a measure that provides information for the company about the effectiveness of used capital. (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). In social media marketing, ROI is called 'social media return of investment (SMROI). In other words, "How much income did our investments in social media marketing generate" (2018:354). According to Hoffman & Fodor 2010, while the traditional ROI refers to the return on the company investment, companies should: "...asses consumers motivations to use social media and measure the social media investments customers make as they engage with the marketers' brand" (2010:41).

2.5.2 Activities on social media by alcohol brands in Finland and globally

Due to the lack of studies globally related to strong alcoholic beverage brands, this part of the literature review consists of earlier studies of Finnish and foreign countries' alcohol drink brands' activities on social media.

The Finnish comparative audit study made in 2014-2017 by Emmi Kauppila, Mikaela Lindeman, Johan Svensson, Matilda Hellman & Anu Katainen, 2019 gives the view of alcohol brands' activity in social media. The study revealed that some of the brands posted content that "enhance a brand's credibility" (2019:78). These included 'making of' content, which introduced the audience, e.g., to the brewing process of beers and promoting of "guided tours of production facilities" (Ibid.) 'Local identity' was another element in content posted on social media, e.g., "pictures of local landscapes, often depicting nature and agriculture" (Ibid.), and posts related to environmental awareness. Some of the large breweries included "corporate philanthropic activities such as donating money to a children's hospital and sponsoring junior sports clubs" (Ibid.) Among the brands was also found posts related to seasonal content e.g., seasonal events, festivities and winter season (2019:79). The brands under the study also posted content related to national identity, such as using hashtags (e.g., #Thisisfinland, #visitfinland); nationalistic symbols, and imaginary (e.g., Finnish flag and pictures of Finnish nature and sauna) (2019:81). Some of the brands included posts "portraying the brands participating in fairs, conferences and other events" (Ibid.) In addition to this, Marjatta Montonen and Ismo Tuominen, 2016 state that Finnish

alcohol brands have taken part at clubs, concerts, sports events, and the like, which are "expanded through online sharing of experiences" (2016:209). In The same context, Montonen & Tuominen explains it as "In social media, interactivity provides the basis for distinct but interlinked and mutually reinforcing techniques, many of which are designed to enhance consumer engagement with the imagery and events created around the brand and with real or imaginary fellow consumers" (Ibid.). As a unifying factor, all the communication strategies used by brands relate to image-building aims (Kauppila et al., 2019:83).

While the above-mentioned ways of how brands communicate on social media do not directly provide information on what strategies they use, it gives an overall picture of how brands communicate with consumers.

According to Carah N., 2017, alcohol brands have taken part in cultural events as real-world activations. These activations and materials produced in events were utilized on media platforms. As a good example, Strongbow cider brand placed an antique sailing ship on the grounds in the Grass music festival, while Kopparberg cider brand builds a traditional 'Swedish village' in the same festival, giving the people able to play traditional games during the festival (2017:16). In the same context, Moreno, D'Angelo & Whitehill 2016, says that the most common tactics used by alcohol brands included "...promoting an offline branded event (e.g. at night club or sporting event)..." (2016:51-52). Carah, 2017 points out that alcohol brands have used promoters to "Promote venues, club nights, artists, and DJs for a combination of cash and in-kind payment" (2017:17). Promoters, who also use social networks, "...generate engagement with venues and products" (2017:18), and are said to be valuable for brands; thus they promote brands and products simultaneously at various social media platforms (Ibid.). The above-mentioned activities are said to generate engagement and following on social media (Ibid.).

Recent studies also point out that alcohol brands are using online video platforms in their strategies. In the example of Youtube, alcohol brands are seeking 'viral' phenomenon by creating content, which can be shared through social media sites

by consumers. In this situation, consumers become the 'brand ambassadors' of a brand. In this context, "Absolut created series of viral videos featuring American comedians that was designed to target the "online comedy community." (Chester, Montgomery & Dorfman, 2010:9). According to Chester et al., 2010, this kind of activities will be able to "drive community engagement", when audience comment, rate and share content (Ibid.).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research method

Research methods are classified as tools and techniques for the research process (Walliman, N., 2011:16). Nicholas Walliman, 2011 defines the term 'research' as "...any kind of investigation that is intended to uncover interesting or new facts." (Ibid.). The first step in the research process is to define the research problem and therefore develop an approach to the problem. It helps the researcher design the research and choose the most appreciated method for particular research (Mohapatra et al., 2014).

Research design can be classified into three different methods: 'Exploratory', 'Descriptive' and 'Causal'. Descriptive method refers to the collection of information "...by asking a set of pre-formulated questions in a predetermined sequence in a structured questionnaire to a sample of individuals drawn so as to be representative of a defined population is known as survey" (Mohapatra et al., 2014:58). While the aim of the 'Causal' method is to "...identify the cause and effect relationship between variables", and "The basic premise of the causal relationship is that when we do a particular thing (cause), it gives rise to another thing (effect)." (Mohapatra et al., 2014:82).

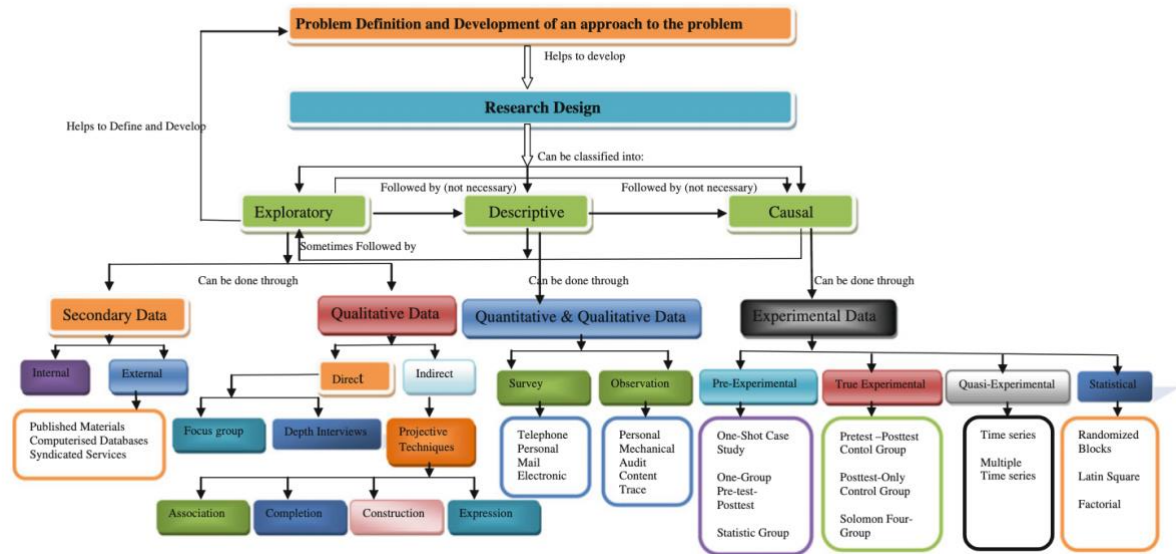


Figure 8. An overview of research design (Mohapatra et al., 2014:29)

Exploratory research is a research method, which results are commonly used for "...subsequent research to attain conclusive results for a particular problem situation." (Sreejesh, S., Mohapatra, S., & Anusree, M.R., 2014:31). Three main reasons for conducting exploratory research consist of "...to analyse a problem situation, to evaluate alternatives and to discover new ideas." (Ibid.). Exploratory research can be done through 'secondary data' or 'qualitative data' (Mohapatra et al., 2014:29).

Secondary data is a form of data that is based on primary data collected from written sources (Walliman, 2011:84). While qualitative research is "...based on data expressed mostly in the form of words – descriptions, accounts, opinions, feelings etc...." (Walliman, 2011:145). This type of research consists of three different techniques: Depth Interviews, Focus groups, & Projective Techniques (Mohapatra et al., 2014:47). The first two mentioned methods are classified as 'direct' approach, while 'projective techniques are 'indirect'. Depth Interviews can be classified into three different categories. Unstructured interviews are the form "...of a natural conversation and the interviewer brings up various topics that are of interest to him during the course of the conversation" (2014:48), which is also "...known as non-directive interview as there are no preformulated set of

questionnaires and no pre-determined paths to route the interviewee responses.” (Ibid.). Although this research method provides flexible and responsive interview to individual, from research perspective this method ”...is known to generate less systematic data it is very difficult and time-consuming to classify and analyse such data.” (Ibid.). Second technique is called as 'semi-structured' interview method, which is ”...more structured than the non-directive interviews.” (Ibid.). Semi-structured interviews are primarily used to ”...interact with busy executives, technical experts, and thought leaders” (Ibid.). Mohapatra et al., states that interviewer must have strong knowledge of the topic, in order to gain relevant answers. The third interview technic is 'standardized Open-Ended Interviews', which gives flexibility in the questionnaire (2014:49). For this technique, the questionnaire contains ”...a set of sequential ordered, carefully worded, open-ended questions” (Ibid.), and is appropriate ”...when two or more interviewers conduct the interviews” (Ibid.).

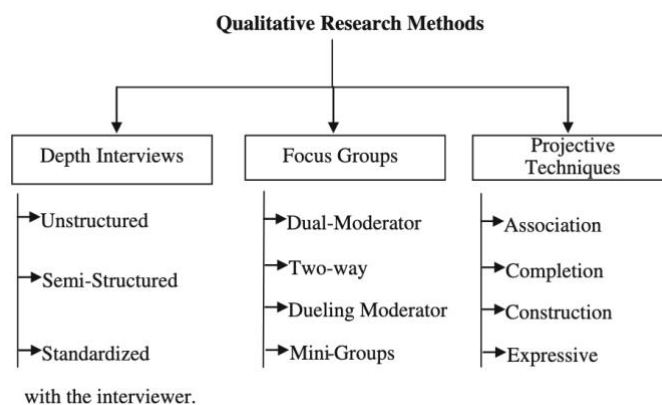


Figure 9. Classification of qualitative research methods (Mohapatra et al., 2014:47)

3.2 Implementation

The research method of this thesis has been chosen as exploratory research, using qualitative data from the semi-structured depth interviews, thus the interviewer ”...will be more informed about the facts and these will not be distorted by someone else’s interpretation” (Walliman, 2011:85). In addition to the research results, the research results section will utilize literature review theories

gathered from secondary data, e.g., white papers, articles, and books, making it easier for the reader to understand the connection between the topics. A depth interview method was chosen because it provides the best possible way to gather information and provides the best qualitative results in terms of the subject of the study. Since the topic and the research question refer to marketing and branding, both interviewees are members of companies' marketing teams, which provides information on companies' marketing measures. The purpose of the interview is to gather information on the basis of which the research question can be answered by utilizing the theoretical parts of the thesis. The interview was conducted remotely due to the prevailing covid-19 situation. The interviews were held from 12.-13 April 2021, which was attended by two interviewed company representatives.

The interview questions consist of four sections: 1. Opening and general marketing questions, 2. Alcohol marketing questions, 3. Alcohol branding questions, and 4. Alcohol branding on social media questions. In the first section, the aim of the questions is to get to know the interviewee and to get an overview image of marketing. The second section is for alcohol marketing questions, which purpose is to found out and understand the alcohol marketing actions made by the companies. In the third section, the questions cover out how the company has branded its products, and the aim is to understand the factors that have contributed to the way how the company has developed the brand. The last section of questions consists of branding on social media, which purpose is to find out how the company uses social media for brand purposes, how the company sees the usage of social media, and does the alcohol law affects social media activities. The questions are designed to provide important information related to the research topic and make it easier to understand how companies brand their products and how they utilize social media for it. Based on the answers received from the questions, the aim is to answer the research question of the thesis.

3.3 Limitations

Due to the prevailing covid-19 situation, the interview sessions were held remotely. However, a face-to-face interview would have possibly given a more natural interview situation. Four different companies were asked to be interviewed, two of whom agreed to participate. Therefore, a small number of participants can be counted as a limitation of this research because the interview provides information on the activities of only two companies operating in the market. In addition to this, the lack of previous research studies on the subject contributed to the work's progress. For this reason, the research theory section had to utilize theories at a general level and not directly with information intended for the topic. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and afterwards translated into English, which can pose a threat to the accuracy of the data.

4 Results

4.1 Introduction to Interviewees

The subject of the interview was two Finnish alcohol companies: Laplandia Vodka and Kyrö Distillery Company. The interview was attended by the founder/owner of Laplandia Vodka, who has worked in the company since its establishment in 2009. The company's product portfolio consists of a wide range of flavored vodka spirits. The Laplandia Vodka brand is part of Global Drinks Finland Oy, and the production is subcontracted at Lignell & Piispanen distillery in Kuopio. The company's portfolio also includes another Vodka brand called Moses vodka. However, the interview focused on the Laplandia Vodka brand.



Figure 10. Laplandia Vodka's Instagram post (Laplandia Vodka, 2021)

The second interviewee was Kyrö Distillery Company's Community Manager, who has worked for the company for the last two years. The role of the interviewee in the company is to be responsible for social media channels and content, marketing campaigns, budgets, and all digital advertising. Kyrö was established in 2012, and its product portfolio includes mild alcoholic beverages (Long Drinks and Liqueurs), strong spirits (gin and whiskey), and by-products (e.g., hand sanitizer and merch). Most of the products are produced in Kyrö Distillery, the company's production facility in Iso-Kyrö, Finland.



Figure 11. Kyrö Distillery Company's Instagram post (Kyrö Distillery Company, 2020)

Based on the introduction of the companies, it can be stated that two very different companies in the Finnish alcohol sector took part in the interview, offering a diverse perspective on the Finnish alcohol sector.

4.2 Research results

4.2.1 Marketing in general

In this question section, The interviewees were asked how marketing, consumers, and consumer behavior have changed in general during the last ten years. The results of the interview show that digital marketing has changed significantly over ten years. The significant change is the proliferation and growth of social media: the emergence of new channels, different content tactics, and the continuous development of the marketing field are the most significant changes. Due to the proliferation of social media, traditional marketing measures,

i.e., mass marketing, have decreased. More specifically, guerrilla marketing and influencer marketing have become more common in marketing. In addition to this, marketing communication has changed the way how companies communicate with consumers. Rowles, 2018 supports this view, as "Social media has fundamentally changed how we engage and interact with brands and has led to the fundamentally shift in branding..." (2018:47). One-way brand communication to consumers has decreased, and companies are investing in a two-way conversation with consumers. One primary reason for this is that consumers and consumer behavior have changed with the growth of social media.

Generational change has influenced consumer behavior as consumers have become much more aware of brands and the measures behind them. With digitalization, consumers have access to a large amount of information via the internet and can easily find out about brands and their products. For this reason, untrue brand promises and communication can no longer be practiced. Responsibility and sustainability trends have risen on the consumer surface and have affected both consumers and brands. Consumers want to make responsible decisions, buy responsible products, and be involved in caring for the planet. In other words, consumers are more aware of what products they want, what values are supported, and what is not. For this reason, brands need to stick to their value propositions and think carefully about how they communicate with consumers so that consumers believe in the brand.

4.2.2 Alcohol marketing

The interview revealed that the alcohol industry has changed during the last ten years. The change has been driven by a change in consumers' drinking culture. In Finland and elsewhere in the world, drinking behavior has previously been mainly binge drinking. However, nowadays, there has been a trend towards more responsible consumption and 'enjoyment.' Younger age groups now consume less alcohol and prefer premium drinks instead of "squat liquor." So it can be said that young people are more quality conscious and consume one drink less as long as the drink tastes good. In addition to this, low alcohol drinks have become

more common, and alcohol companies have been noticed that and satisfied consumers' needs by producing non-alcoholic beverages for the market.

Globally, over the past 50 years, the alcohol market has been dominated by large alcohol corporations. However, the number of small breweries and distilleries categorized as " Craft" segments has increased significantly. In 2018 alone, 250 new breweries and distilleries were established in Finland. Companies are looking to bring something new to the markets, and the trend is to localize raw materials and focus on responsibility.

In the interview, the value proposition of the companies were asked. Two very different propositions came up. According to Laplandia Vodka's founder, their value proposition is Land of Purity, which refers to the pure nature of Finnish Lapland and was developed during the holiday trip in Lapland. The company promises that the raw materials used in the product are clean and of high quality. Kyrö's value proposition is Dream and Dear, which is based on the idea of daring to make dreams come true. The value proposition has its roots in the founding times of the company, where the founders sat in the sauna and dreamed of setting up a rye distillery in Finland.

As mentioned earlier, there is fierce competition in the alcohol market, so interviewees were asked how their company stands out from its competitors. Both of the company representatives argued that, in the alcohol markets, companies find it challenging to stand out without a large marketing budget, which is why communicating about brand identity and values to consumers is challenging. However, brands have found their unique way to stand out. Both interviewees argued that international alcoholic beverage competitions in which both brands have won awards are an excellent way to differentiate themselves from competitors.

The Laplandia Vodka has invented the term 'Affordable luxury', which reflects the brand. All the brand attributes such as values, quality, and raw materials used in the products are top-notch, which can be compared to the most expensive and

high-class products in the world. As a competitive advantage, the company's products are of high quality and available at a lower price than its competitors. While Lapland Vodka bases its competitive advantage on quality and price level, Kyrö stands out from its competitors with its strong brand story. The story, which has been formed since the company was founded, is the core of the Kyrö Distillery. According to the community manager of Kyrö, the company has not decided to create a brand whose product tastes not only good but a product with a real story behind it.

Because the consumer segment is generally different for each company, the interview was conducted to identify the companies target audience. According to Kyrö, their target consumer group is culturally active and taste-conscious consumers' called Cultural Explorers'. Specifically, people aged 25-35, working in the arts or media industry. The Laplandia Vodka's target consumer audience is quality-conscious consumers aged 25-50, who look after the products they consume.

The interview revealed that Laplandia Vodka's marketing activities are minimal. The reason for this is the Finnish Alcohol Act, which restricts marketing, and for this reason, the company has done little marketing. Another reason is that the company is not at the stage where large-scale marketing activities could be measured. For Kyrö, the company measures marketing efforts in many different ways, and efforts are made to measure awareness of the brand. This includes measuring the revenue generated from the webshop, e.g., how much one lead costs for Kyrö and how much it generates value for the company. Sales are also monitored. However, this is not easy at a certain level because the Alko Oy does not provide accurate figures on product sales.

Because Finnish alcohol legislation is strict for alcoholic beverages, the interview asked interviewees for their views on the Alcohol Act and its impact on the company's overall marketing strategy. Based on the responses, it can be stated that the alcohol law divides opinions. According to Laplandia Vodka's representative, the company's overall strategy is strongly based on exports. The

Laplandia Vodka experiences alcohol law as restrictive and unequal. The reason is that the Finnish brand cannot be easily presented in Finland due to the restrictive law. In addition to this, foreign exports also suffer if the brand does not have a strong position in Finland, as importers most often ask what position the brand has in the domestic market. On the other hand, Kyrö's representative does not see the alcohol law as restrictive. This was justified as "when one thing is forbidden, one can easily find alternative ways". The interviewee feels that marketing opportunities should be leveled out in EU countries in order to bring opportunities for Finnish companies to globalize their businesses and improve the "Finnish image" in the world. The Alcohol Act was strongly taken into account during the Kyrö's founding times, and the company decided to create a strategy that focuses on corporate image advertising.

4.2.3 Alcohol branding

In this section, interviewees were asked questions about branding and its brand elements. The purpose was to get a complete picture of the alcohol brands and how they have built the brand into what it is today.

In the case of Kyrö, strong cooperation has been established with the branding agency Werklig Oy in building the brand. According to the interviewee, traditional branding models have not been directly utilized in brand building. The brand has grown with its own weight during its life cycle, and the story of the brand itself has been strongly focused during the building of the brand. In the case of Lapland vodka, there has been no cooperation with any branding agency. In the early days of the brand, the products were sold as good-tasting vodka as it is. As cocktail culture has been on the rise in the past few years, the company decided to change its strategy and create a "do-it-yourself" category that refers to a "home bartender" style beverage culture. The company views its strategy as fitting well with the above trend.

When considering the positioning of brands, both of the brands have found their place in the market. In the case of Vodka beverages, positioning is strongly based on price. In this field, products are divided into three different categories: Basic

(e.g., Suomi Viina, Leijona Viina), Premium (e.g., Absolut, Finlandia, and Smirnoff), and Super Premium (e.g., Belvedere, Grey Goose). Lapland has positioned its brand between the premium and super-premium categories in terms of price. On the other hand, Kyrö has positioned its brand differently compared to Lapland, possibly because the brands are entirely different from each other. The brand's positioning has always been strongly based on an ideology that seeks to shape Finnish alcohol culture. Through this, the brand positioning has formed with its own weight. Legislation has also affected how the brand has been brought to the fore. After the company moved to foreign markets, positioning in Finland has provided a good foundation for the company, and using this strategy, the company has started to conquer other markets, taking into account the tougher competition.

As argued earlier in the text, "Once the company has chosen the desired position, it must take strong steps to deliver and communicate that position to target consumers." (Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., Harris, L., and He, H, 2020:51). According to the interview, for both brands, the main communication channel is social media, which is explained in more detail in the following results section. In addition to this, Kyrö has been strongly present at various events that the brand finds particularly important. For example, the brand is present at festivals and organizes its own 'Kyrö festival', which seeks customer encounters and through which the aim is to build brand love among consumers. The primary purpose is to be present in those channels where the target consumer group is.

Every brand needs an identity to stand out from others operating in the industry. Kyrö's brand identity has strongly based on Finnishness and authenticity, which also serves as an identity in foreign markets. However, the company has carefully considered how to communicate Finnishness in a foreign market in order to be effective for those consumers. The company has also done brand research on how consumers perceive the brand's image compared to the brand's identity. The results have shown that there is a very small "brand gap" between identity and image. Brand awareness has also been studied in collaboration with ToinenPHD Helsinki Oy. The research has been conducted in Finland and abroad, for

example, in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. According to the interviewee, the company is up to date in terms of awareness. The brand's tone of voice is strongly based on the company's values and has been highlighted strongly in daily activities. Authenticity, honesty, whimsy, humor, and communality come to the fore in tone-of-voice and previously mentioned, "Dream and Dare" is the company's brand promise.

In an interview with a representative of Laplandia vodka, it became clear that the brand identity is strongly based on the company's value proposition, "Land of Purity", which reflects pure nature, clean raw materials, and sustainability. The brand does not yet have enough capabilities, sales, or customers to investigate the brand gap or brand awareness. However, the company firmly believes that brand identity matches consumers' perception of the brand. From the beginning, the brand's tone-of-voice has been a casual, informal, slightly twinkle in the corner of the eye type of "take it easy" style, which comes up on the brand's social media channels.

At the end of the alcohol branding questions, companies were asked how the branding of alcoholic beverages has changed over the years and what things have contributed to it. The answers indicate that the previously mentioned 'craft boom' has affected how alcohol products are branded. New generations have brought micro-breweries and distilleries to the market, and collaboration between top designers as well as brand offices with alcohol brands has become more common. Thus, it can be said that alcohol branding has been modernized. Also, the packaging and design of the products are designed with export in mind as most of the products are in English. The interview also highlighted that the most important factor is that all elements of the brand are in line and support the brand as a whole. The reason is that consumers today demand holistically well-made brands as a whole, i.e., all elements are invested in and not just certain things are done well. There is more focus on packaging and communication, and while the content of the bottle is the most important, things that happen around the brand need to be strongly based on the brand as a whole.

4.2.4 Alcohol branding on social media

As mentioned earlier, alcohol companies have noticed the potential of social media, including Kyrö Distillery and Laplandia Vodka. In the case of Kyrö, at the beginning of the company's timeline, it was noticed that social media would proliferate, and it was considered a so-called new black. For the brand, social media has been the primary marketing channel. Because of the ultimately precise targeting and immediate visibility of the results of marketing measures. In addition to this, social media has been a tool for the company to bring the brand story to consumers. The brand is present on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Youtube. The main channel of storytelling is Instagram, on which the company focuses primarily. At the same time, Facebook has been used more for marketing raptures. When thinking about a company's overall strategy, its primary goal is to increase awareness. At the same time, social media strategy is based on maintaining and strengthening engagement. According to the company, consumers' love for the brand must be created so strong that consumers buy the product. To strengthen the engagement of the consumers', the brand is focused on everyday storytelling with content that interests consumers and is in line with Finnish law. As an example, content highlighting the operation of the distillery and its people. Due to the refinement of the brand's target audience, the company has changed its content strategy to "help" style content. These include content that helps and encourages the consumer to try something new, such as drink recipes made from brand products. While responsibility is one of the values of a brand, it is not directly highlighted in social media content but focuses on creating content that serves the target consumer group. In a nutshell, entertaining and being helpful is the company's primary role on social media.

Social media has strongly affected consumers' awareness of the brand. As an example of Kyrö hand-sanitizer, which was introduced to the audience during the covid-19 on 2020, gave an opportunity for the company to advertise the product on social media. In addition to this, the company launched Kyrö's Cream Liquour, a mild alcohol beverage, opening an opportunity for paid advertising. Promoting the brand on social media also contributed to the increase in brand awareness,

including consumer awareness of the company's other products. Through PR, awareness has grown significantly. As a good example, when Napue Gin was chosen as the best gin in the world, it was strongly featured in the media. Awareness has been most influenced by word-of-mouth, which has allowed brand awareness to spread among consumers.

According to the interviewee, there is a clear link between social media and company sales. Advertising of cream liqueur on social media has boosted product sales. However, the impact of sales and social media is challenging to measure because the results of a particular campaign cannot be directly compared to sales results due to limited statistics provided by Alko.

The growth of the brand has been significantly influenced by social media, as in social media, the brand can constantly be present and available in a certain way. If consumers have questions about the brand, they will get a quick answer. Kyrö invests in social media because it gives the company so much benefit and helps grow its brand. Presence on social media mainly supports all the brand's activities, both online and offline, and acts as a tool that sums up everything the brand does. Corporate image advertising has also had a clear connection to the company's growth. The company has been investing in corporate image advertising since the beginning and has found tactics along the way that are effective for consumers. With the help of corporate image advertising, Kyrö has also been able to present its products without advertising them. This can be counted as a competitive advantage of the company.

Because the company's marketing activities are strongly based on social media, the company monitors social media activities on a daily and monthly basis. The company's co-operation partner is Hopkins oy, which is a digital marketing and analytics office. Through collaboration, they have created a social media dashboard that allows the company to track the best posts, engagement, reach and count of followers. The company mainly monitors and invests in engagement.

In the case of Laplandia Vodka, the company mainly uses social media as a so-called business card that is comparable to the company's website. In other words, if the consumer is looking for more information about the brand, social media provides a channel for this. According to the representative of Laplandia Vodka, the company does not have any specific strategy for social media but focuses creating content on channels that interest the target consumer group. The brand is active on Instagram and Facebook and uses the channels for communication with consumers. The content on social media consists of "cocktail" content and information about their products, e.g., drink recipes. The content aims to highlight the visual elements of the products. In addition to this, the content includes information about the events and fairs where the brand is present.

No direct link has been found with social media to the growth of consumer awareness. The reason for this may be that the company has not used any particular tactics to raise consumer awareness of the brand. However, there have been situations where companies are looking for products for their markets, and Lapland has been contacted through social media. From a sales scale, social media has had no connection to sales. The reason for this may be that no advertising can be done on strong alcohol products, and therefore the impact of social media on sales is difficult to measure.

In the past, social media activities have been monitored and measured on a general level. However, because there is currently no specific person or team in the company, social media activities and measurements have remained low.

According to the representative of Laplandia, events have been the most significant factor in brand growth. The company's representative has toured around the world at alcohol fairs and sought to find export partners for the brand. In Finland, the brand has been present at events in the restaurant industry where alcohol products can be legally displayed and have gained growth for the brand.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Creating and running a successful alcohol brand in Finland is not a matter of course. Finnish alcohol law is so restrictive that creativity is the essential skill that can be used to grow an alcohol brand when working in the industry. The alcohol industry changes as consumers and consumer behavior change, so brands need to stay up to date with the latest trends and consumers' needs. Because nowadays, almost every person uses social media in some form, brands need to be present in the channels where the consumer target group is, and through this, consumers might find your brand.

No direct way to increase following on social media was found with the interview. However, it can be said that as a company's brand grows, so does following on social media. The brand's operation on social media must support the company's values, operating methods, and, in general, the brand's overall strategy. When a consumer encounters a brand in any situation, the consumer's perception should remain the same or change positively.

Based on the results of the interview, two very different brands participated. Kyrö's product portfolio includes various products from strong alcohols to mild beverages, while the Lapland product portfolio is based on strong alcoholic flavoured vodkas. As Finnish alcohol legislation completely restricts the advertising and marketing of strong alcoholic beverages, it is easier for a mild alcoholic beverage company to increase its awareness in the Finnish market. Therefore, it can be said that a company with a versatile product range has more opportunities in terms of marketing and growth of the brand.

Using the opportunities that are available, the brand is able to grow through social media. Content that interests consumers, the way consumers are addressed, and how the brand as a whole is presented are the most critical factors in differentiating on social media. The above factors also affect the number of followers and the growth of the brand. When the consumer faces the brand and perceives the content produced by the brand on social media positively, the

consumer is likely to start following the brand. Success in competitions and attendance at events can also affect brand growth and consumer trustness towards the brand, especially in situations that garner PR attention. In addition to this, word-of-mouth plays a crucial role in raising awareness, as today consumers communicate closely with each other, sharing information and opinions about brands.

The results also showed that well-implemented strategic pure corporate image advertising brings an opportunity to grow a brand because advertising the company brings consumers closer to its products. Internationalization also increases the growth of the brand in general and brings new possibilities in terms of marketing.

In conclusion, companies need to build their brand properly from the beginning, taking into account the consumer target of their group and thereby produce interesting content on social media channels. Consumer-friendly content can lead to increased following on social media. In addition to this, brands need to use the available means under the alcohol law and think about the possibilities using the "outside the box" thinking.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Opening and marketing:

1. Can you please tell me about yourself and your role in the company?
2. How has marketing in general changed over the course of your career or in the past 10 years?
3. How have consumers and consumer behavior changed over those years?

Alcohol marketing:

4. How has the alcohol market changed over the last 10 years? What factors have contributed to the change?
5. What is your company's value proposition? Can you explain how this was developed?
6. Given the fierce competition in the alcohol market, how does your brand stand out compared to its competitors?
7. Which consumer segment do you target your brand, and what steps does your company take to reach your target customer group?
8. What kind of marketing metrics does your company track?
9. What has been the main impact of the alcohol laws on your marketing strategy? What are your views on the alcohol laws, do you find them to be even-handed or restrictive? Are there some elements that should be changed?

Alcohol Branding:

10. How have you developed your brand if you think about the whole brand story? Can you talk me through how you have developed your brand and brand story? Have you used some models for example Brand equity model etc.?

11. How have you positioned your brand, and what things have contributed to this?

12. How does your brand communicate with consumers, and what channels do you use to communicate?

13. How have you developed your brand identity, and does it match consumers' perceptions of your brand image from your company's perspective? so-called 'brand gap.' Have you used some models for example identity prism?

14. What is your brand promise?

15. What is your brand's tone of voice?

16. Do you know the general awareness toward your brand? Is this something you try to track?

17. Looking back on branding in the alcohol industry in Finland compared to today – what are the key changes? What about packaging and design etc.?

Alcohol Branding on Social Media:

18. How does your company see the use of social media in general from a company perspective? What benefits and weaknesses have you noticed when using social media? What are your goals in using social media?

19. What social media channels do you use for marketing communications?

20. What is the overall strategy of your brand, and what strategies do you use on social media? (Aims and objectives)

21. What kind of content your brand produces to social media and what the content is aimed for?

22. How have you raised brand awareness among consumers? How much has social media contributed to raising awareness?

23. How do you measure social media activities, could you explain the KPIs/metrics that you track most? and how often? daily, weekly, monthly? What software do you use to measure social media? Is there a dedicated person or team for measurement?

24. Is there any connection between social media and the sale of your product? Have you noticed whether social media activities have affected your sales?

25. What kind of tactics have you used on social media to increase the number of followers?

26. How have you grown your brand, and how has social media contributed to your company's growth?

27. How the alcohol laws affect to your social media marketing?

28. Since pure corporate image advertising is not prohibited by law, have you taken advantage of this form of marketing, and has it had an impact on brand growth?

