

Organic Social Media Marketing Solutions for Etraveli Group AB

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<p>This research-oriented bachelor thesis aimed to gather knowledge about social media marketing to improve customer satisfaction and the overall business performance in the travel industry. The research objective was to build effective organic social media marketing solutions to generate website traffic and increase sales for the commissioning company Etraveli Group's three demarked brands.</p> <p>The thesis consists of an empirical study comprising a questionnaire study and theoretical framework. The theory section focuses on social media marketing theories, methods and trends, and COVID-19's impact on consumer preferences and buying behavior in the tourism industry. The framework also included theories about measuring and improving customer satisfaction. When, the questionnaire study focuses on gathering quantitative data from the commissioning company's current consumers. The questionnaire included multiple-choice questions about traveling-related buying preferences, customer satisfaction, and social media usage. The recommendations are constructed by using the secondary data gathered from the theoretical framework as well as the primary data from the questionnaire results.</p> <p>The thesis results implicated that organic social media marketing improves website traffic increases exposure and sales. Additionally, social media is a key in building long-term brand loyalty and helping to gain real-time insights about the marketplace. The survey results highlighted that most of the respondents use social media in order to research and purchase products and services online.</p> <p>This study's key findings and recommendations could be utilized by online travel agencies and marketing professionals to understand the impact of organic social media marketing when designing an effective marketing strategy.</p>	
Keywords Social media marketing, organic marketing, online travel agency, customer satisfaction	

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1 Introduction

This is a research type of a bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business in the major specialization of Customer Relationship Management and Communication in the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. This chapter will introduce the thesis topic, background, the main objectives, and research- and investigative questions. One can also learn about the anticipated thesis benefits and the primary risk mitigation. The commissioning company, international aspects, and key components of the topic will also be introduced.

1.1 Background

In today's challenging and ever-changing business environment, the digitalization growth strategy can be crucial for e-commerce organizations to become successful, gain a competitive advantage, and maintain their market position. The consumer demand for new digital content and product and service offering is growing continuously. There have also been changes in the customer experience requirements, which means that companies must develop and penetrate flexible digital marketing strategies to keep up with the rapid shifts in the environment. (Ricciardi 2020.)

"Social media channels have quickly become the backbone of business strategies and are key to building meaningful connections with customers to drive long-term brand loyalty (Meredith 2020)." An effective social media strategy helps brands gain real-time insights into the audience's preferences and test their visual strategy to optimize digital marketing and online selling. Social media is a perfect launchpad for storytelling, new initiatives, and product or service launches. Providing visuals that inspire the audience for a specific or desired action is something that companies should ensure. Companies that understand what resonates with their target audience are paramount in fostering an engaged community on social media. Organic social media marketing can leverage robust engagement and conversion opportunities for brands. Visually appealing content is a critical component in creating meaningful connections online and ultimately increasing revenue. The new era of e-commerce has made social media marketing a business-critical operation. (Meredith 2020.)

Digitalization has changed social media drastically over the last decade. Social media has grown and developed its initial formats from socialization and blogging platforms to "a myriad of opportunities, ranging from communications, commerce, entertainment, services and more (Passport 2020)". Globally, more than 70% of connected consumers report visiting a social media platform almost daily. The increase in access to the internet has shaped consumer behavior to be more dependent on the online community to fulfill their

needs. The high rate of social media usage has geared platforms to develop attractive online opportunities for users, increasing the frequency of usage and revenue sources. (Passport 2020.) The rising social media trend of online commerce and digital payments has affected the increase of platform evolutions.

The COVID-19 outbreak inevitably has shifted people's activities towards online channels, both businesses and consumers. The global pandemic's acceleration of the digital curve and the enhanced digital mindset will likely benefit the social media industry. (Passport 2020.) During the challenging times of COVID-19, businesses have had to cut resources and rely on digital marketing more than ever. Especially the travel industry has faced many difficulties during the outbreak of COVID-19. The fear of the unknown, the danger and difficulty of traveling during a pandemic, and the many traveling restrictions have negatively affected the industry's business operations. Travel companies and organizations must take advantage of the free social media marketing platforms and methods to gain customer insights and feedback, engage with current and potential consumers, build their brand, and most importantly, understand the changes in customer behavior and need. (Ricciardi 2020.)

In 2020, the global pandemic COVID-19 affected Etraveli Group and the whole travel industry drastically. The government's actions to slow down the spread of COVID-19 and the heavy global travel restrictions have had a huge impact on the tourism industry. The significant changes in travel demand and tourism have decreased ETG's sales radically. The industry difficulties have increased the management's urge to get insights into customer satisfaction and buying preferences and needs. The pandemic has also accelerated digitalization, and thus, more people use the internet and online platforms, such as social media, for purchasing and researching products and services. ETG wants to distinguish how it should respond to the changing business environment and consumer behavior. Additionally, ETG wants to gain knowledge about the benefits of organic social media marketing in terms of improving customer satisfaction and generating sales. Currently, Etraveli does not perform any social media marketing, and none of its brands are present on social media platforms.

The thesis is commissioned with a Swedish online travel agency (OTA), Etraveli Group (ETG), which is interested in organic social media marketing opportunities to gain traffic to their website and generate sales. In this case study, one can learn about the benefits of organic social media marketing and its effects on business development. The primary objective is to develop effective organic social media solutions and recommendations for ETG's Business to Consumer (B2C) operations. For this case study, a quantitative research method is used to measure ETG's current customer preferences and demands

during the COVID-19 outbreak. The marketing recommendations are concentrated on ETG's three brands, which are stated later in the thesis.

1.2 Research purpose and research question

The thesis aims to improve the commissioning company ETG's website traffic, generate sales, and increase customer satisfaction with organic social media marketing solutions. The thesis's outcome is to achieve a deeper understanding of effective organic social media marketing methods for today's digitalized business environment and its evolving customer behavior and requirements. The thesis examines what strategies could help the commissioning company gain its main goals and investigate the potential of organic social media marketing in the e-commerce industry, particularly in the travel industry. The thesis aims to answer the main research question with broad quantitative research, theoretical analysis, and questionnaire study. In addition to the research question, investigative questions were created, which support the main research objective.

The research question (RQ) of this thesis is: **"How can ETG utilize organic social media marketing to drive traffic to their website and generate sales?"**

The research question is divided into investigative questions (IQs):

IQ 1. What are ETG's customer needs and preferences currently during the COVID-19 pandemic?

IQ 2. Which social media channels should ETG use in their social media marketing?

IQ 3. What organic social media marketing content and activities could attract potential customers to ETG's website? (SEO, content, target audience analysis, trends)

IQ 4. What recommendations can be made to ETG in order to initiate their organic social media marketing?

Table 1. The overlay Matrix presents the investigative questions, theoretical framework components, research methods and indicates a result chapter for each investigative question.

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results (chapter)
IQ 1. What are ETG's customer needs and preferences currently during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Customer satisfaction, Customer loyalty, measuring customer satisfaction, improving customer satisfaction	Quantitative questionnaire for the current B2C consumers, theoretical literature, research articles survey questions 3, 5, 6, 9, 10,11, 12	2.4, 4.2, 4.3, 6.1
IQ 2. Which social media channels ETG should use in their social media marketing?	Leading social media marketing networks, leading online marketing channels among marketers	A quantitative questionnaire, theoretical literature, research articles survey questions 13, 14	2.3.1, 2.3.4, 4.4, 6.1
IQ 3. What organic social media marketing content and activities could attract potential customers to ETG's website? (SEO, content, target audience analysis, trends)	See above IQ 1 and IQ 2, social media marketing, organic marketing, SEO, social media trends, SOSTAC Framework	A quantitative questionnaire, theoretical literature, research articles survey questions 15, 16, 17, 18	2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.3.5, 2.3.6, 2.3.8, 4.4, 6.1
IQ 4. What recommendations can be made to ETG in order to initiate their organic social media marketing?	Organic marketing, Social media trends, SOSTAC Framework	Making recommendations based on the survey results, theoretical literature, research articles	2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.3.5, 2.3.6, 2.3.8, 2.3.9 4, 5, 6.1

1.3 Demarcation

In this research-based thesis, the result will be suggestions based on quantitative research and a theory review for organic social media marketing for ETG. The marketing will be constructed for the company's Business to consumer (B2C) operations by using the current customer demands and the new potential customer requirements. The author will not provide a solid marketing strategy, marketing plans, or campaign plan. However, ETG prepares the marketing based on the thesis results and the author's recommendations as they deem best. The holding company ETG has 21 operating brands globally and desires the author to concentrate on three of the internationally biggest ones. The three biggest and demarked brands for this thesis' objective include *GotoGate*, *MyTrip*, and *Flight Network*.

1.4 International Aspect

This thesis's international aspect will be highlighted by building the case study around an international commissioning company operating in 77 markets in 6 different continents. The company has business operations, for example, in Australia, Japan, Singapore, Russia, the UK, and Latin America. The company's global operations will provide an international aspect to the thesis topic. Also, a quantitative survey is developed to gain international research data and information from existing and potential B2C customers worldwide.

1.5 Anticipated benefits

The commissioning company ETG's B2C operations will benefit from this thesis by gaining new data and information about their current customer demands and new potential customer requirements during these unstable and challenging times of a global pandemic. The company's stakeholders, such as the Customer Experience Department, can penetrate this information to their future operations, increase customer satisfaction, generate website traffic, and increase sales by using the author's social media marketing suggestions.

The reader can gain knowledge and a deeper understanding of how organic social media marketing methods can positively affect business operations, for example, by improving website traffic and customer satisfaction. The reader will also learn how to adapt effective marketing solutions to current, pandemic-affected customer needs and behavior. The thesis also provides the newest social media trends for building a successful marketing strategy.

The author will benefit from the thesis process by obtaining crucial information about the social media marketing industry. The author will gain knowledge about digital marketing in general and gain the latest insights and trends about social media marketing. The thesis process is a great opportunity for the author to show her professional ability to develop social media marketing solutions, improve her CV and increase her future possibilities in working in the marketing field.

1.6 Key Concepts

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a mini dictionary of key concepts for a reader who is not familiar with the Customer Relationship Management and Communication field. Below one can find a list of the key concepts with brief definitions or direct quotations from

high-quality literature. The list aims to help the reader to understand the main aspects of the thesis topic.

"Social Media Marketing is the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders" (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 18).

Customer satisfaction highlights "how a product or service and overall experience falls short, meets, or exceeds customer expectations (Patel 2021)".

"Organic Marketing is best used to develop a brand voice, enable authentic interactions with customers, educate and convert blog readers, and drive traffic to land pages, your website, and other online assets (Salesforce 2018)." Organic marketing includes natural, authentic, and value-based marketing activities that benefit the company over a longer period. These tactics build brand image and awareness, improve customer engagement, educate the target audience, and generate loyal customers. (Thiefels 2018.)

"Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are the critical key indicators of progress toward an intended result. KPIs provide a focus for strategic and operational improvement, create an analytical basis for decision making and help focus attention on what matters most." (KPI.org 2020.)

1.7 Commissioning Company

Etraveli Group AB (ETG) is a global online travel agency founded in 2000, with headquarters in Uppsala, Sweden. Since 2017, ETG has been owned by the CVC Capital Partners, a leading private equity and investment advisory company. The flight-centric online travel agency and a global leader in flight booking technology, ETG, has "found remarkable success in new countries throughout Europe, APAC (Asia-Pacific), and South America by leveraging economies of scale (Etraveli Group AB 2021c)". In 2019, the company employed more than 1000 people internally and another 1000 employees externally. In addition to the headquarters, the company has offices in Athens, Gothenburg, Stockholm, Toronto, Mumbai, Pune, and Buenos Aires. The company also has some outsourced operations in India and China. (Etraveli Group AB 2021a.) Today, Etraveli has operations in more than 70 markets on six different continents. Their booking value was more than 3 billion euros in 2018. ETG's annual average growth was 25% in 2019, and annual revenue was USD 92.89 million in 2019. (Etraveli Group AB 2021b.)

The company's primary business consists of B2C operations, such as offering flights, accommodation, and other travel-related services. For B2B operations, they provide an Application Programming Interface (API) system solution to other travel companies. Through their leading air-tech solution, API system, the company has acquired many successful partners, such as Google Flights, Booking.com, Amadeus, and Expedia. Under the holding company Etraveli Group AB, they have 21 own brands, such as Supersaver, Flight Network, Seat24, MyTrip, and GotoGate. The company enjoys 14 million customers per year as of 2019. (Etraveli Group AB 2021b.)

In 2019, the ETG expanded its business by acquiring Flygresor.se, a flight price comparison site. During the same year, the company strengthened its global position by acquiring an air technology specialist TripStack, and an online travel agency, Flight Network, both based in Canada. Through strategic acquisitions, organic air tech solutions, and the best possible flight content, the company has established one of the world's largest, innovative and modern flight-centric online travel agencies. (Etraveli Group AB 2021c.)

2 Social Media Marketing in the Travel Industry

This chapter aims to provide theory data of previous secondary data gathered from documented sources. There are three major parts to this chapter. The first part is an introduction, followed by the theoretical framework and the last part concludes the theory study. This chapter will discuss the critical key concepts, theories, and methods. The theoretical framework is gathered to give enhanced results and benefits for the commissioning company, the business industry, and other further stakeholders that the study might concern.

The framework will support the thesis research questions by highlighting the benefits organic social media marketing could accomplish for the company's brand image and customer satisfaction. The reader can learn about the most relevant and modernized social media marketing methods and branding theories for improving brand image, awareness, and perception, particularly in e-commerce. The framework will also provide information about organic marketing activities and the newest social media marketing trends. This chapter also discusses the competencies and theories that help create customer satisfaction and understand how it can be measured.

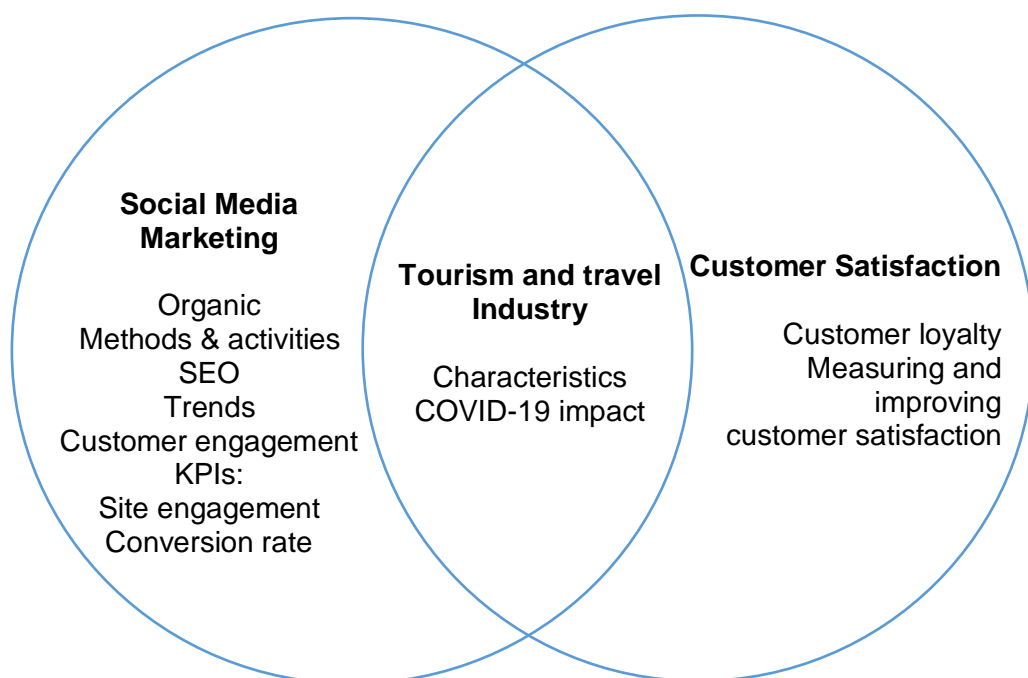


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The Theoretical Framework Figure 1. implicates the three aspects of the thesis, comprising tourism and travel industry, social media marketing, and customer satisfaction. The theoretical framework will provide information about the travel industry, theories and

methods for social media marketing, and improving and measuring customer satisfaction. The framework will include a social media marketing strategy framework, SOSTAC Framework, utilized in building effective organic social media strategy recommendations for the commissioning company.

2.1 Tourism and Travel Industry

The tourism, or Travel industry, is a wide-range industry including multiple business sectors, such as lodging, transport, hotel, attractions, travel companies, and more. Tourism is one of the world's largest industries which provides huge economic benefits to multiple countries. Many visitors' or tourists' traveling expenditure provides money to the travel destination and towards local businesses. The traveling industry also provides jobs for people working in the transport and hospitality sector or other tourism industry-related sectors. (Revfine 2021.) "In its broadest sense, tourism is defined as when people travel and stay in places outside of their usual environment for less than one consecutive year for leisure, business, health or other reasons (Statista 2021e)." International and domestic traveling has become increasingly common globally and has greatly affected the growth of the global economy. The spending in, both leisure travel and business travel, saw year-over-year growth in the five years before COVID-19. (Statista 2021e.)

The total contribution of the travel and tourism industry to gross domestic product (GDP) worldwide from 2015 to 2019 has been growing steadily. In 2019, the contribution of travel and tourism to GDP worldwide was a little over 9 billion USD. The share of the total GDP generated by the worldwide travel and tourism industry in 2019 was over 10%, which indicates how big an impact the industry has on the global economy. (Statista 2021g.) In 2019, the tourism and travel industry employed 334 million jobs worldwide. The main sector of the tourism industry, leisure tourism, was 4,6 billion USD in 2019 when the business tourism spending was 1,2 billion USD in 2019 (Statista 2021i). The number of international tourist arrivals worldwide in 2019 was nearly 1,7 billion when before COVID-19, it was only 402 million in 2020 (Statista 2021j).

According to the Statista Research Department, the world's leading online travel agencies (OTAs) in 2021 include Booking, Expedia, Airbnb, Ctrip, TripAdvisor, and Trivago. As of 2019, Booking was the biggest OTA with the highest revenue of 15 billion USD. The second biggest OTA was Expedia, with a revenue of 12 billion USD in 2019. Aside from market leaders Expedia and Booking, other big OTAs include Airbnb with revenue of 4,8 billion USD in 2019 and TripAdvisor with revenue of 1,5 billion USD in 2019. (Statista 2021h.) Booking, Expedia, and TripAdvisor are major partners of Etraveli Group. Already

a partner of Booking.com – ETG was acquired by Booking Holdings Inc. on November 23rd, 2021. Booking Holdings and CVC Capital Partner, ETG's owner, agreed acquiring the company for approximately 1.63 billion euros. (Etraveli Group 2021d.)

The impact of COVID-19 on the global tourism

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) states that the COVID-19's impact on global air transport made 2020 the worst year on record for the industry. The IATA's World Air Transport Statistics publication showed that 1.8 billion passengers flew in 2020, a 60,2 percent decrease compared to the 4.5 billion who flew in 2019. The industry-wide air travel demand (measured in revenue passenger-kilometers, or RPKs) dropped by 65,9 percent year-on-year. The publication stated that compared to 2019, international passenger demand decreased by 75,6 percent when domestic air passenger demand (RPKs) dropped by 48,4 in 2020. (Russell Publishing Limited 2021.) "Air connectivity declined by more than half in 2020 with the number of routes connecting airports falling dramatically at the outset of the crisis and was down more than 60 percent year-on-year in April 2020 (Russell Publishing Limited 2021)." According to the publication, the industry passenger revenue fell by 69 percent to 189 billion USD in 2020, and the total net losses were 128 billion USD (Russell Publishing Limited 2021).

The Director-General and CEO of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Willie Walsh, highlighted the impact of the government's actions to slow down the spread of COVID-19. Commercial aviation decreased significantly in April 2020, when around 18,000 aircraft were parked, representing 66% of the world's commercial transport fleet, as governments closed borders or imposed strict quarantines. (World Air Transport Statistics 2021). Mr. Walsh also stated that the transport industry faced the greatest regression in employment, when more than one million jobs were declined in 2020 compared to 2019 (World Air Transport Statistics 2021). According to Statista Research Department, the United States was measured with the highest revenue loss of roughly 147 billion US due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic from January to October 2020 (Statista 2021f).

In 2021, the industry started to face rapid growth when the expansion of vaccination programs was launched. With the support of government actions, Airlines contributed to helping the industry repair itself for the sake of the global economy and job creation. During the pandemic, the aviation industry carried out repatriation flights and delivered life-saving medicines and medical supplies to fight the COVID-19 virus. Due to the rise of medical issues, governments started to reduce their border restrictions throughout 2021.

The growth of vaccination programs is helping the aviation industry since governments allow more border crossing if the passenger has the full vaccination against the COVID-19 virus. The CEO of IATA point out strong recovery in domestic markets where vaccinations have taken hold and the pandemic is receding. (World Air Transport Statistics 2021.) According to Statista Research Department, the United States was measured with the highest revenue loss due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic from January to October 2020 (Statista 2021f).

2.2 The impact of Digitalization and Social Media on business models

In today's challenging and ever-changing business environment, the digitalization growth strategy can be a crucial factor for e-commerce organizations in order to become successful, gain a competitive advantage, and maintain their market position. The consumer demand for new digital content and product and service offering is growing continuously. There have also been changes in the customer experience requirements, which means that companies must develop and penetrate flexible digital marketing strategies to keep up with the rapid shifts in the environment. (Ricciardi 2020.)

"Social media channels have quickly become the backbone of business strategies and are key to building meaningful connections with customers to drive long-term brand loyalty (Meredith 2020)." With an effective social media strategy, brands can gain real-time insights into the audience's preferences and test their visual strategy to optimize digital marketing and online selling. Social media is a perfect launchpad for storytelling, new initiatives, and product or service launches. Providing visuals that inspire the audience for a specific or desired action is something that companies should ensure. Companies that understand what resonates with their target audience are paramount in fostering an engaged community on social media. Organic social media marketing can leverage robust engagement and conversion opportunities for brands. Visually appealing content is a critical component in creating meaningful connections online and ultimately increasing revenue. The new era of e-commerce has made social media marketing a business-critical operation. (Meredith 2020.)

Social media is a virtual platform where users can publish, create, and share information, ideas, content, and news, connect, interact, communicate with people worldwide, and consume data from different sources. Interaction can take many forms on social media. However, the common types include sharing links to interesting content produced by third parties, publishing profile updates, sharing and commenting on photos, videos, and posts. (Charlesworth 2017, 5.) Social media enables users to join online communities with

similar interests, express themselves and develop virtual profiles to inform other users about their lives and activities, even share their location data. It can help find job opportunities, market and advertise products or services and increase brand awareness, among many other things. "Social Media are digital media that encourages audience participation, interaction and sharing (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, 238)." It is safe to say that social media is one of the most valuable and efficient communication tools in today's digital era.

Various digital and social media marketing forms are used in today's marketing methods, such as online marketing, including websites, online advertising, email marketing, online videos, blogs, and mobile marketing. Digital marketing targets specific individual consumers and customer communities or segments to build strong long-term customer relationships and increase customer engagement and community. (Armstrong, Kotler & Opresnik 2016, 458.) Today, Social media marketing activities include promotion and branding, customer service, relationship management, retailing and commerce, and marketing research. The top priorities for businesses using social media marketing include increasing brand awareness and brand building, acquiring new customers, introducing new products and services, retaining current customers, and identifying new business opportunities. Social media marketing is a valuable method that enables marketers to access consumers inexpensively. It provides various ways to interact and engage with consumers at different stages in the purchase cycle. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 20-21 & 31.)

2.3 Statistics of the global digital population and social media

According to Statista Research Department, as of October 2020, the global digital population has almost 4.66 billion active internet users, encompassing 59% of the worldwide population. Northern Europe is the first ranked region with a whopping 95% internet penetration rate among the people. Also, UEA, Denmark, and South Korea have the highest internet usage rate globally. On the opposite side is North Korea, with a non-existent virtual usage as of 2021. (Johnson 2021.)

Globally there are 4.15 billion active mobile social media users as of January 2021 – 91% of all global digital users gain access to the internet by mobile phones. As smartphone usage and internet access are expanding, social media use shows no signs of slowing down. The high usage rate of smartphones and other mobile devices makes *mobile marketing* one of the most powerful social media marketing methods. It has become critical for most brands and companies to be competent (Armstrong & all 2016, 472.)

In 2019, the region with the highest number of internet users was Asia, with more than 2.3 billion. The second highest was approximately 728 million users in Europe. Now China, India, and the United States have been ranked ahead of all other countries. Currently, China has more than 854 million internet users. (Johnson, 2021.)

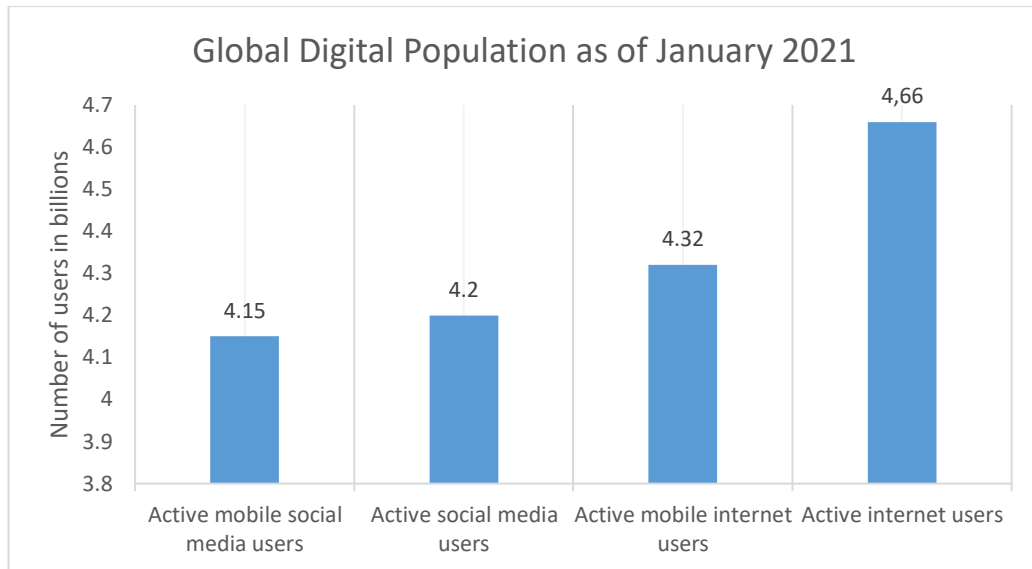


Figure 3 Global Digital Population 2021 (Johnson 2021)

In 2020, there were 4.14 billion active social media users globally (Johnson 2021). In January 2021, the average global social media penetration rate was 53.6%. The global social network penetration rate was highest in Western and Eastern Europe, with 79%. The second-highest ranked region was Northern America with 74%, followed by Southern America and South-eastern Asia with 72%. According to Statista Research Department, the lowest region was Southern and Central Asia, Western, Middle, and Eastern Africa as the lack of internet access and mobile devices. (Tankovska 2021a.)

2.3.1 Leading social media networks

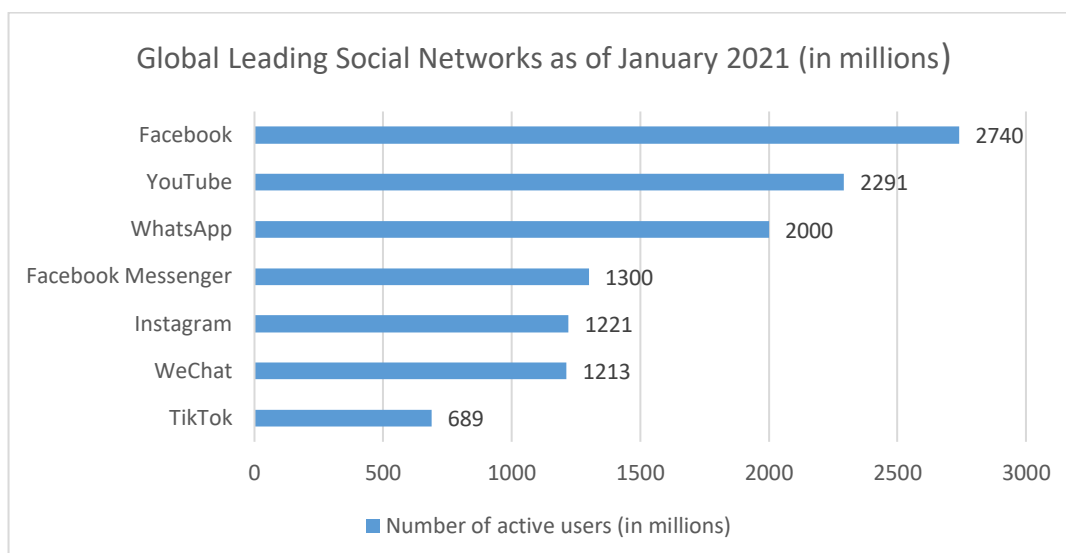


Figure 4 Global leading Social Networks in 2021 (Tankovska 2021b)

With the highest number of active users in January 2021, the most popular social networks are Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. The first-ever social media site to gain one billion active users is Facebook. Currently, Facebook has more than 2.74 billion monthly active users, nearly one-third of the global population. (Tankovska 2021b.) Furthermore, 98.3% of the users access the platform on mobile phones. Facebook videos drive the most ad clicks on the platform (Needle 2021). In recent years, the company's reputation has come under significant investigation. User trust towards the company's handling of private data has decreased after uncovered data breaches in 2019. Facebook is the core company, with three other major platforms, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger. Facebook is the owner of the four most important social media sites that have acquired over one billion monthly active users. (Passport 2020, 12.)

Facebook Messenger, a multi-platform instant messaging application, was founded in 2011. It is one of the leading social media platforms worldwide, with 1.3 billion active monthly users (Tankovska 2021b). Facebook Messenger provides international and effortless customer reach for business users. The application offers instant messaging opportunities and additional services such as multiple games, location sharing, sending money, and video calls. Also, Facebook Messenger has a track record of data privacy concerns. (Passport 2020, 13.)

The second leading social media site, YouTube, currently has 2.29 billion active users (Tankovska 2021b). The video streaming platform serves 91 countries with user-submitted TV and music services. YouTube provides its users with various categories, topics, and educational content, appealing to all age and demographic groups. According to the 2019 Mobile Internet Phenomena Report, 33% of global mobile internet traffic

comes from YouTube users. In 2019, YouTube Fashion was launched to offer more beauty and fashion content and provide a suitable platform for fashion influencers. (Passport 2020, 21.)

WhatsApp, the instant social messaging app, has 2 billion active users and is the third most used social media platform worldwide. It allows users to send instant text and voice messages, videos, images, and live locations. (Tankovska 2021b). "The app's end-to-end encryption and ability to send messages over Wi-Fi have made it popular worldwide (Passport 2020)". WhatsApp is evolving continuously and creating new features to become a *super app*. Super app is typically an all-in-one solution app that provides multiple features and services for its users, such as messaging, calling, posting pictures, buying and selling service or products, and ordering an Uber (Passport 2020, 9). The company has a new platform, WhatsApp Business, which includes online selling features, such as product catalogs where consumers can communicate with businesses and complete purchases directly from the app with a single text message. (Passport 2020, 20.)

As of January 2021, Instagram, the photo and video sharing app, has 1.22 billion users. Instagram is the fifth most used social media site in the world. (Tankovska 2021b.) According to Statista, the leading countries based on Instagram audience size as of January 2021 are the United States and India, with 140 million users. The second country with the most-used Instagram users is Brazil, with 99 million users, followed by Indonesia with 85 million. The United Kingdom has 31 million Instagram users and Germany 26 million. In 2019, there were more than 500 million daily active users of Instagram Stories. (Tankovska 2021c.)

Instagram's key strengths comprise its commercial potential for advertisers and influencers. The company is continuously developing features to transform the app to become more e-commerce and marketing responsive. 83% of Instagram users use the platform to discover new products or services, and 87% said they took a specific action, such as a purchase, after seeing product information (Needle 2021). Instagram now holds Checkout and Shopping features. It has also included IGTV and Reel features, allowing more video content and perhaps competing with video streaming sites, such as YouTube and TikTok. Instagram's continuous development increases rapidly its already high engagement and interaction level. Instagram has great growth opportunities with the rise of social commerce in key emerging markets and becoming a super app shortly. (Passport 2020,14.)

One of the most used professional and business-oriented network sites, LinkedIn, has grown its active users in recent years. Currently, LinkedIn consist of 722 million members, and 76% of them are outside the U.S. (Newberry 2021.) The company allows its users to

connect and build professional relationships and networks. Users build online resumes to the site and search and apply for job opportunities with them. LinkedIn also provides companies a platform to find suitable employees through recruitment posts. According to Hootsuite and We Are Social, LinkedIn's 59.9% of users are between 25 and 34. The virtual recruitment will continue after the COVID-19 pandemic, likely benefiting LinkedIn and providing multiple growth opportunities. Since LinkedIn offers a context in which people expect and seek out business-related content, 96% of B2B content marketers use the platform for organic social marketing. (Newberry 2021.)

2.3.2 Social Media Marketing Benefits

Social media marketing presents many advantages but also several challenges. Social media allows marketers to create targeted brand content, interact with potential and new customers, improve customer relationships, and gather crucial customer feedback to increase customer satisfaction. Social media is also a platform with vast reach and engagement possibilities. Marketers can efficiently share relevant and convenient content about their important brand activities, including new collection launches. Companies can find new potential consumers anytime and anywhere. Social media's usage growth has allowed marketers to use *real-time marketing* to engage and interact with customers more efficiently, for example, through Instagram Direct messaging or Facebook messenger. Real-life marketing allows companies to join current customer conversations and learn about trending topics and methods and use them when creating marketing content. "Perhaps, the biggest advantage of social media is their *engagement and social sharing capabilities* (2016, 470)." (Armstrong, Kotler & Opresnik 2016, 470.)

Social media can also be very cost-effective since it offers many free tools and platforms that do not require extensive marketing resources, such as traditional marketing (Armstrong & all 2016, 470.) Marketing through social media helps companies cut marketing costs without sacrificing results. Most of the results come from investing time in creating and publishing engaging and relevant content and interacting with customers and followers. Social media also enables marketers to measure and track their activities with various insight analytics, which helps them learn which methods work and become more effective in future operations. Another cost-effective method is partnering with social media influencers to increase outreach and expand the customer base. Influencer marketing is a modern and powerful method to gain new customers since Influencers have a loyal fan base who trust their recommendations. Typically, companies can exchange products or services for a sponsored post. Organizations can also use retargeting ads to generate targeted traffic. Targeted traffic refers to website visitors who

actively look for products, services or information, and are eventually willing to make a transaction. Retargeted ads will generate quality traffic and create better conversation rates. "Retargeting is an essential audience-building mechanism" (Digital Marketing Institute 2019) that can be a way to make a significant difference in the organizations marketing and selling operations. (Digital Marketing Institute 2019.)

According to the Social Media Industry Report 2020, the leading social media marketing benefits include increased exposure, increased traffic, generated leads, developed loyal fans, improved sales, grew business partnerships, provided marketplace insights, and increased thought leadership. The 86% of surveyed marketers indicated that social media marketing's first significant benefit was increased business exposure. The second major benefit was increased traffic by 78%. According to Social Media Examiner, these two significant benefits have remained top two spots for the last six years. (Social Media Examiner 2020, 7-8.)

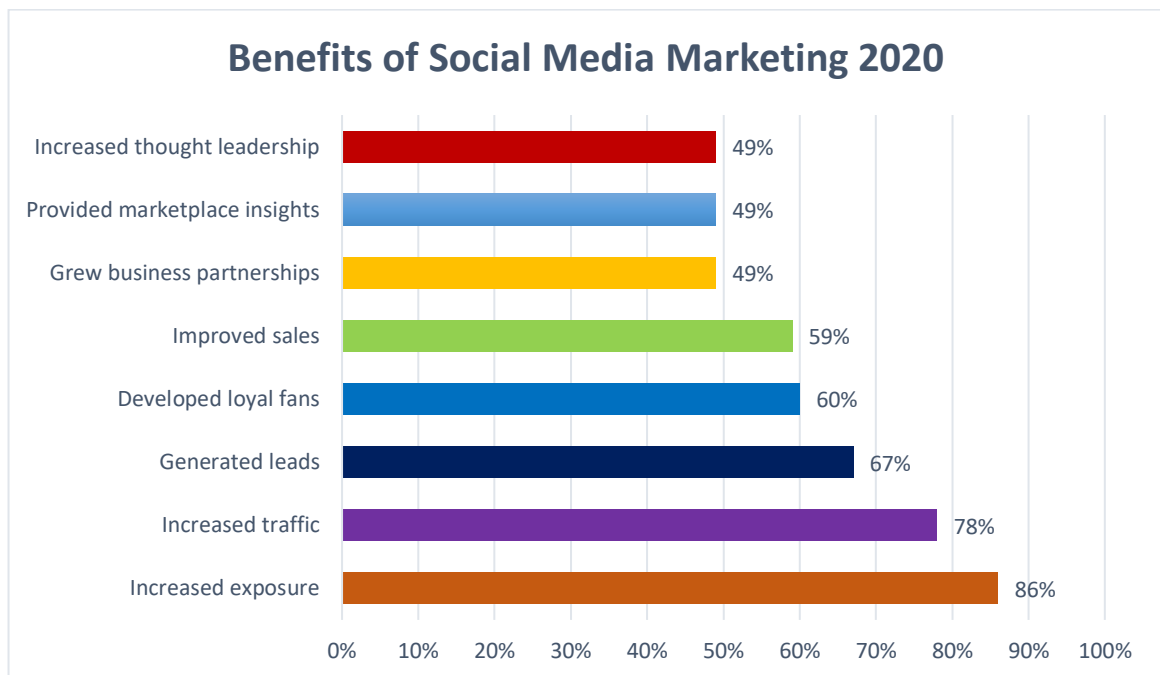


Figure 5. 2020 Social Media Marketing Industry Report (Michael A. Stelzner 2020, 7)

2.3.3 Social Media Marketing Challenges

Despite the potential of social media marketing, marketers worldwide still face various challenges when building effective social media strategies. Social media management requires much time and effort to maintain its audience satisfied and engaged. Sprout Social, a social media management company, conducted a research where they surveyed more than 1000 social media marketers to learn about their social goals, challenges, and expectations. In the research, about 47% of marketers say developing social strategies

that support overall business goals is their number one challenge. 22% of surveyed marketers worry if their brand's social strategy is ineffective. The social marketers' most significant challenges include identifying and understanding the target audience, securing budget and resources for social media, publishing content, measuring return on investment, and monitoring the competition. Marketers also face challenges in demonstrating social's business impact to other departments and aligning the social strategy with other parts of the business. (Sprout Social 2019, 7-19.)

According to Influencer Marketing Hub, the five most significant social media marketing challenges include defining marketing goals, identifying the right platform, understanding the target audience, declining organic reach and engagement rates, and increasing ad costs. When the company cannot define goals well enough, it can be hard to measure the marketing performance and demonstrate its value to stakeholders. Identifying the right platform might also be challenging since there are so many options to choose from, and new ones are developing rapidly. All channels are different in terms of features and user groups. Not finding the right platform the target audience uses and investing in the wrong ones can exhaust the marketing budget. Also, the importance of understanding the target audience is crucial to be successful in the field. The decline of organic reach and the rise of ads' prices can cause difficulties in balancing between the marketing goals and budget. Companies must measure which social media marketing tactics work best for their audience to build a loyal follower base and increase organic traffic and engagement. (Influence Marketing Hub 2020.)

2.3.4 Leading online marketing channels among Marketers

Today's digital age has fundamentally changed how marketers do their jobs. Various independent and commercial social channels are changing and growing vastly, which means marketers must adapt to new online marketing trends and possibilities efficiently, faster than ever before. On the other side, social media channels are learning and developing new ways to make their platforms suitable for marketing content to benefit all stakeholders, such as company owners, users, buyers, and sellers. (Armstrong, Kotler, & Opresnik 2016, 467.)

As of January 2020, the leading social media marketing platforms are Facebook, with a 94% usage rate by marketers worldwide, followed by Instagram with 76%, and LinkedIn with 59%. Twitter and YouTube are ranked fourth, both with a 53% usage rate. (Statista 2021d.). According to the 2020 Social Media Marketing Industry Report, their significant findings indicated that one in ten marketers will be decreasing their organic marketing on

Facebook in the upcoming years. However, 70% of marketers are using Facebook ads, and 58% plan on increasing their use in the next 12 months. Facebook Live is the leading live video platform among marketers and was used by 38% of marketers in 2020. (Social Media Examiner 2020, 5.)

Instagram's popularity is rising among marketers, and 67% are planning to increase their organic activities over the next 12 months on the platform. Also was found out that marketers are not interested in doing marketing on messenger bots. Only as few as 13% of marketers worldwide are using bots, and only 25% of marketers are planning on increasing their bot activities in the upcoming years. (Social Media Examiner 2020, 5.)

YouTube's popularity is rising among marketers when 69% of marketers plan on increasing their use of YouTube videos. A significant 73% of marketers said they are interested in learning new tactics on the platform. 55% of marketers are using YouTube, which makes it the most popular video channel. What was interesting to see is that most marketers ignore TikTok. According to the Industry Report, only 5% of marketers were using TikTok in 2020, and a considerable high rate, 74%, of marketers do not plan on using the platform in the next year. Nevertheless, a significant 30% of marketers are interested in learning more about the platform. (Social Media Examiner 2020, 5.)

2.3.5 Organic Marketing

Two marketing categories fall into *organic and paid marketing*. Organic marketing is best used to educate and convert customers and followers, drive traffic to business websites and channels, enable authentic interaction and communication and develop a brand voice. It involves activities without the use of paid advertising or paid marketing support. Marketers who focus on organic marketing channels, such as social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing, have started to use phrase *Inbound marketing* "to describe the combination of these channels in their roles and responsibilities (Fishkin and Høgenhaven 2013)". Inbound marketing is another name for organic and earned marketing, which are all about earning interest and attention. Organic marketing includes strategies to attract customers with useful and relevant content and to add value in each stage of the buyer's journey. Inbound and organic marketing is about customers finding the company through different channels or websites, such as blogs, search engines, and social media. According to Salesforce, Organic marketing tactics are natural, authentic, value-based, and cultivated over longer periods of time. With organic marketing, companies can ultimately build loyal traffic and high-value brand equity. The main activity involves activities to engage, interact and educate the target audience. (Thiefels 2018.)

The organic marketing cycle includes valuable content creation, social media engagement, natural link building, and mobile optimization. For organic marketing to be a success, it requires time and constant commitment. However, it enables organizations to gain long-term benefits by increasing customer acquisition and customer retention rates. (Chester 2020.) To analyze the organic marketing success, organizations should track and measure regular traffic and organic traffic, leads or sales, and the content formats—this way, the company will understand which methods work most efficiently towards the business goals. (Thiefels 2018.) Effective and well-planned organic marketing generates stable traffic sources to the organization's website and eventually turns website visitors into potential consumers (Green 2020).

Instead of pushing products or services using paid advertising or promotions, companies should provide value that could increase *word-of-mouth marketing*. A company that shares value with its audience and followers can more effortlessly make them understand the primary business purpose. Such effort can be achieved by developing organic social media posts. Organic posts that are communicative can help people understand what the business stands for and increase trust in the brand. Effective organic marketing can build and maintain a genuine and authentic audience, drive site traffic, optimize content for social media and search engines, and cost-effectively boost engagement and awareness. (Weller 2020.)

2.3.6 A successful Organic Marketing Strategy

A successful organic marketing strategy comprises creating *evergreen* content, optimizing content for SEO, being active on social media channels, and engaging and interacting with customers and followers. Also, writing guest posts on other websites that link to a company's site and ensuring that all the created content is mobile-friendly helps develop an effective organic marketing strategy. Evergreen content indicates the type of content which always stays relevant, sustainable, and helpful. Content that is evergreen will provide value to brands and their websites. Such content consists of how-to guides, tutorials, reviews, tips, and listicles. (Chester 2020.)

One of the most powerful organic marketing methods is to optimize content for search engines, such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo. Optimizing SEO content comprises strategies that will make the company's website rank higher on search engines and gain organic traffic (Chester 2020). These strategies include making a list of content topics, making a list of long-tail keywords based on the topics, building pages for each topic and setting up a blog, blogging weekly to develop page authority. Creating a link-building plan,

compressing all media before putting it on the website, staying current on SEO news and practices, and measuring and tracking its content's success can boost the organic marketing effort. (Fortin 2020.)

SEO falls into three types, On-page, Off-page, and Technical SEO. On-page SEO focuses on the "on-page" content optimization for gaining more website traffic and higher ranking for specific keywords. 57% of marketers say on-page content development was the most effective SEO tactic (Barell 2019). When Off-page SEO focuses on inbound links or backlinks, links pointing and directing users to the company's website from elsewhere on the internet. Backlinks "represent a vote of confidence" from one site to another (MOZ 2021) and help to build trust in a search engine's eyes. The more backlinks the company website has, the higher the search engine ranking it will gain. (Fortin 2020.)

Technical SEO focuses on a website's functionality, technical issues, and architecture, for example, the website's codes and loading speed. (Fortin 2020.) According to Google's research from 2018, 53% of mobile users leave a website that takes longer than three seconds to load. Developing a website that works seamlessly on all devices and is holds fast page loading speed is critical in order to rank the website higher on Google's search engine results. Companies that focus on page speed are paramount in having a successful company and a website that converts. According to a recent study by Google stated that as page load time goes up, the chance of a consumer bouncing from the website increases drastically; thus, getting website speed under two seconds can increase traffic and revenue. The recommended website load time is three seconds or less. (Patel 2021.)

Companies that are active on their social media accounts will have a better possibility to gain organic traffic. Compelling, relevant, and active *content marketing* is a powerful method to keep followers connected and involved with the company. (Chester 2020.) Content Marketing Institute defines content marketing as "a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience – and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action (Content Marketing Institute 2021)." Presence in different social media platforms helps the company reach a wider audience and attract organic traffic (Chester 2020).

The goal of organic marketing is to boost engagement and gain organic traffic to the company sites. Such results can be gained by joining groups and pages and engaging with various discussions within its niche. This method will allow organic posts about the brand, without "pushing" company products or services, as in traditional advertising (Weller 2020). Also, directly reaching out to customers and followers is an excellent

method to establish customer relationships and improve communication. Companies need to post comments, address concerns, answer reviews, and discuss topics that align with the organization's values and mission. Successfully improving interaction and showing interest towards followers and customers can be done by engaging webinars and providing live Q&As (question and answers). Another great way to boost organic marketing efforts is to write guest posts on other reputable and relevant websites. Including backlinks to the company's site from the guest posts will improve the overall traffic, boost audience reach and bring more leads to the business. This way, the company will establish authority in its specific niche and display its expertise. (Chester 2020.)

Marketers desiring to improve organic marketing efforts must consider that over 52% of all internet traffic comes from mobile devices. Companies should ensure that all provided content must be optimized for mobile users. Content that is not visible across different devices and is low-loading, and does not respond on every page, can negatively affect a company's site traffic. Developing mobile-friendly content that gives today's impatient customers a seamless experience is crucial to enhance organic marketing and be ahead of the competition. (Chester 2020.)

2.3.7 The differences in organic and paid marketing

According to Salesforce, paid and organic marketing complement each other well. Both paid and organic marketing can be used to drive engagement, acquisition, and conversion. Paid marketing is mostly for boosting sales-oriented actions and usually needs more significant marketing resources than organic marketing. Using only a paid marketing strategy is artificial and shallow, while organic marketing builds value and an authentic connection with customers. Not every company can use paid marketing or does not even have the resources for it. However, every company must embrace an organic marketing strategy to build a loyal customer base and ultimately increase leads and sales. (Thiefels 2018.)

Businesses that only include paid marketing strategy, without educational, engaging, and informative content, can quickly lose the mindshare (i.e., how well people know or recognize a company or a brand) of their customers (Thiefels 2018). Without organic marketing, companies "lose out creating an emotional connection, which has become the number one driver of positive brand experience today." Also, with no engaging organic content, consumers have fewer ways to connect with the brand, and according to

Salesforce, early-stage educational content makes consumers 131% more likely to purchase. (Thiefels 2018.)

2.3.8 Social Media Trends 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic and economic collapse era have significantly affected social media usage and its marketing trends. The widespread use of the internet, the rise of digitalization, and the global pandemic have made social media critical to marketing. Since the pandemic started, the digital landscape has been changing and pushing consumers to spend more time on social media. It has also changed the way how marketers do their jobs. Understanding the most significant marketing trends in 2021 is key to becoming successful in the challenging business environment. (Moorman & McCarthy 2021.)

Understanding the target audience and taking advantage of social listening

According to the 2021 Social Media Marketing Trends Report by HubSpot and Talkwalkers, the ultimate trend is *“the consumer is king”*. To be successful in today’s challenging business environment, consumers need to be at the center of the social media marketing strategy. Understanding the target audience - their needs, behaviors, motivations, and conversations will provide crucial insights. Companies should take decisive actions based on consumer insights to survive obstacles and turn the knowledge into brand success. Brands should focus on community building and audience intelligence. (HubSpot and TalkWalker 2021, 55.) To understand the consumers better, companies should perform *Social Listening*, which is a way to track the company's social media platforms, mentions, and conversations related to the brand. Social listening will provide many insights and discover new opportunities to act. (Tran 2020.) According to Hootsuite’s Social Trends survey, 66% of respondents say social listening has increased in value for their organization over the past 12 months. (Hootsuite 2021, 48.)

SEO’s drive for organic visibility

Social Media Examiner has gathered 2021 social media marketing trends from influential marketing professionals. One of their predicted trends is SEO’s drive for organic Instagram visibility. In Instagram marketing, all marketers should take advantage of SEO and Instagram Reels. Using relevant keywords on posts’ captions will help Instagram identify what is being shown or discussed in the content. This method helps people to find companies and their products or services by searching specific keywords. (Jenkins 2020.)

Video Marketing and live streams

The rise of video marketing has changed social media. People are looking for more entertainment in the form of videos. Competing with popular video-streaming platform TikTok, Instagram added a new feature, Reels. Reels are entertaining short-form videos, from 15 to 30 seconds. They are a great way to attract followers and build an organic target audience. Another predicted trend of 2021 is that Reels ignite organic Instagram exposure. Social media marketing is moving towards video content marketing, especially short-form videos. Starting from Stories and regular picture posts, Instagram is exploding for Reels. Marketers should now use short-term videos for entertainment and attracting more consumers, and ultimately gain loyal followers. (Jenkins 2020.)

Sprout Social's most important social media trends for 2021 include the increase in live streams' popularity. The need for social distancing has made live streams a must during the era of a global pandemic. Educational services offer Zoom lessons, companies use Google Meetings for conferences, and live concerts turned into live streams. Naturally, there is also an increase in the use of live streaming features on social media. Consumers are getting more used to interacting with brands live through different social media channels. Sprout Social's survey found that 40% of consumers want to see more live videos from brands. (Zote 2021.) The most crucial video and live content channels for marketers are Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. (Social Media Examiner 2020, 29.)

Humanizing the brand and being authentic

The CEO of Social Media Examiner highlighted that 2021's smart marketing includes being transparent, authentic, and even vulnerable. Innovative businesses will understand that in order to create sales, consumers must feel connected to the brand and its purpose and values. (Jenkins 2020.) Creating strong relationships with consumers is one of the most important marketing trends in 2021. *Conversational marketing* should be used in order to humanize the brand and become authentic. Conversational Marketing is a powerful marketing method for engaging customers through conversations, such as chatbots, online discussions, and social messaging. (HubSpot & Talkwalker 2021.) "Conversational Marketing is helping companies bridge the gap from the physical to the digital world and create personal relationships at scale (Hubspot 2020, 46)." Brands that are personified in a way that reveals whom they stand for and what they stand for will increase the connection between consumers and the company (HubSpot & Talkwalker 2021). "Revealing the human side of the brand (Jenkins 2020)" is a key for intelligent marketing.

The impact of a socially conscious audience

The socially conscious mindsets and expectations of younger and more diverse generations are changing modern brand building. Brands are shifting towards purpose-driven and socially responsible capitalism due to public pressure. The impact of socially conscious audiences has forced organizations to engage more with important topics, such as mental health, climate change, social justice, inclusivity, and racism, or face becoming irrelevant (Hubspot & Talkwalker 2021, 47). Purpose-driven companies will undoubtedly be more successful in the future than brand-driven ones. (Hootsuite 2021, 42-43.)

Nostalgic and old-school marketing

Nostalgic or old-school marketing is back in 2021. Marketing professionals are switching back to a more straightforward way of engaging with target audiences. During COVID-19 and times of distress, people want to think about happier times – and cope with nostalgic mechanisms. (Goldman 2021.) Old-School marketing tactics include, for example, newsletters and podcasts. During the pandemic, people look for relevant information and educational content. Also, old-school communicating is coming back. The importance of a voice in communicating is increasing. There are more voice searches, voice notes, and even voice Tweets. Old-school marketing is a trend for delivering quality content that fulfills the consumers' information voids with easily accessible tools. Old-school marketing will help companies build great user experiences promptly with comfortable and already familiar methods. (Hubspot & Talkwalker 2021, 32-35.) Micro-targeting, micro-influencers, and small data are also part of nostalgic marketing and can provide multiple connection points with target audiences – with a high engagement level and maximum impact.

The Rise of Social Commerce

Social Commerce will continue to grow since more people are buying through social media platforms. Social commerce is a powerful method to simplify and shorten the customer journey, reducing abandonment transactions. In multiple social media channels, such as Instagram and Facebook, users can find buy buttons, social media storefronts, and shoppable posts. (Zote 2021.) In-app purchasing features reduce the traditional steps of converting a user to a consumer (Jenkins 2020). Social media has a significant impact on consumers buying decisions – 54% of social browsers use social media to research products before purchasing (Beer 2018). will choose that brand over a competitor (Zote 2021).

2.3.9 The SOSTAC® Framework

Social Media Marketing is evolving continuously, and so are the marketing strategy frameworks. There are numerous theories and frameworks available that explain how to build an effective social media strategy and manage social media successfully to support business objectives. For this case study, the SOSTAC® model by PR Smith is used to create effective organic social media marketing solutions that benefit the company's business operation by increasing website traffic and generating sales. The SOSTAC model was developed in the 1990s to support structuring business and marketing communication plans. The Framework has been adapted by its author specifically for creating a digital marketing plan. SOSTAC is a six-step framework that stands for Situation, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Action, and Control. The SOSTAC model is summarized in Figure 6.



Figure 6. The SOSTAC MODEL (PR Smith Marketing 2020)

The first step of the SOSTAC model is a Situation Analysis, which studies the business's current marketplace with a SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis helps identify an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to business competition or project planning. Examining how the company, in this case, Etraveli's demarked brands GoToGate, FlightNetwork, and MyTrip, are perceived and what is the brands' perception. "Brand perception is what customers believe a product or service represents, not what the company owning the brand says it does. Brand perception comes from customer use, experience, functionality, reputation, and word of mouth recommendation – on social media channels as well as face to face. (Qualtrics 2021.)"

The situation analysis answers “*where are we now?*”. It includes a customer analysis to identify who is the ideal customer, their behaviors, needs, likes, and demands. Situation analysis also examines the company’s internal capabilities and resources. It evaluates the current KPIs and business performance indicators in order to understand the marketing opportunities and the market position. Researching the leading competitors and understanding how they do their business and marketing is essential in this analysis phase. Also, knowing the primary industry trends is key for building a competitive advantage. The better the company understands these factors, the better is their marketing for the target audience. (PR Smith Marketing 2020.)

The second step is for analyzing the marketing Objectives. The phase examines where the company is going and where do they want to be. Companies will plan their mission and vision, customer acquisition, retention, and customer satisfaction targets. Also, analyzing how the organization could provide added value to its ideal consumers is part of the objectives phase. In this phase, the company includes objectives for sales, market share, and customer service. (PR Smith Marketing 2020.)

After the objectives have been determined, the company will start planning its marketing *strategy*. In the strategy phase, the company answers, “*how can the company meet its objectives?*” And “*What is the strategy for the objectives?*” The company will identify segments, target markets, objectives, and positioning. The company will decide what kind of strategy, tools, methods, and activities they will implement in order to achieve the stated objectives. (PR Smith Marketing 2020.)

The fourth step is *Tactics*, which implements the details of the strategy phase. *How exactly can the company get there?* During this phase, the company plans its methods to achieve the main goal by using the digital or e-marketing mix (product, place, promotion, price, process, people, physical evidence, productivity). The e-marketing mix includes the communications mix and social networking. The communication mix describes how to company will interact with current, new, and potential consumers and keep them engaged with the brand. (PR Smith Marketing 2020.)

The fifth step is Action, which is for deciding the marketing projects responsibilities and structures, and the processes and systems. This phase will answer *how the resources are divided among the marketing team*. Companies will plan *who does what and when*, for example, using a Gant Chart or another type of scheduling plan. The company also decides if they desire to use an external agency for the marketing plan or work with internal resources. (PR Smith Marketing 2020.)

The final step of the SOSTAC model is Control, which is about measuring the marketing plan's performance. *How can the company monitor performance?* The company will analyze the KPI's, 5Ss, and web analytics, how the analytics have changed and evolved. The company can also do usability testing, mystery shopping, customer service surveys, and site visitor profiling. The section is for measuring and tracking the performance and examining what is working for the company and what must be changed or improved. Conversation optimization is one of the most important factors that should be analyzed. The company will analyze if the marketing objectives are met or not. Controlling marketing might be the most crucial activity for gaining greater marketing results in the future and learning from mistakes. The controlling can be performed as frequently as needed in order to change the plan swiftly for optimized results. (PR Smith Marketing 2020.)

2.4 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and customer retention are crucial factors to improve business profitability. The essential factor in creating customer satisfaction is the customer experience around the company's product or service. It all comes down to how the customer experiences the brand – and how the brand makes the customer feel. Customer satisfaction highlights “how a product or service and overall experience either falls short, meets, or exceeds customer expectations (Patel 2021)”.

What is Customer satisfaction? And Why should companies measure it? According to Hubspot's author Alex Birkett, Customer satisfaction is a measurement a company “uses to quantify the degree to which a customer is satisfied with a product, service, or experience.” If a company measures customer satisfaction, it can identify the satisfied and, most importantly, unsatisfied customers. It makes the process of identifying and controlling the factors that cause unsatisfied customers easier and more efficient. Measuring and analyzing a company's customer satisfaction index is the first step that leads to control and, eventually, to improvement. Finding problems and improving them might help companies not only to increase satisfaction but to increase their customer loyalty index, business performance, and, finally, increase revenue growth. (Birkett 2021.)

Companies are very interested in knowing about their customer satisfaction index since the better it is – the better the company is at retaining customers. The more satisfied the customer is, the slighter possibility there is to lose them. It is cheaper for the company to not lose the customer in the first place since the longer the customer stays as a loyal customer, the more likely they are to remain in the following year. Long-term customers give more profit to the company than current short-term customers. According to a survey

conducted by Mainspring and Bain & Company, a repeat customer spends 67% more than a new customer (2021). For retaining customers long-term, companies use *Relationship marketing*. “The emphasis on retaining customers is based on the idea that it is more expensive to acquire customers than to retain them. Relationship marketing has been described as attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships. (East, Wright & Vanhuele 2013, P 33-34)

2.4.1 Customer loyalty

According to the Zendesk Customer, experience trends report 2020, 80% of customers will switch companies after just one poor service experience. In the Customer experience report, the data is collected from 45,000 companies across 140 countries using Zendesk. Measuring customer satisfaction is a key to improving business performance unlearning about the company’s current stand, and most importantly, operating more efficiently in the future. Since today’s highly competitive business environment and economic uncertainty makes business growth more difficult, “customer loyalty can help drive the success of a business.” The better the customer experience index is, the greater it drives loyalty. “74% of all customers feel loyal to a particular brand or company, and 52% of customers report going out of their way to buy from their favorite brands (Zendesk Customer experience Trends Report 2020, p 6.)” (Zendesk Customer Experience Trends Report 2020, p 1-6.)

Loyalty is influenced by each part of the experience that customers have with the company, from the sales funnel, quality of the customer service, marketing promotions to pricing models, and naturally to the experience with the actual products or services. Price was counted as the most important attribute which makes customers feel loyal towards a brand. The second most important attribute was customer service. (Zendesk Customer Experience Trends Report 2020, p. 5). Understanding the reason behind the loyalty towards a brand or a company is crucial. Zendesk’s Report’s author highlights it like this: “Loyalty is tied to a customer’s ongoing choice to do business with you, refer others to you, give you the benefits of the bought, and have the sense of a positive relationship with you (Zendesk Customer Experience Trends Report 2020, p. 8).” The reason behind customers choosing a company over its competitors depends on the experiences the customer has faced within the sales funnel, the quality of the product or service, or customer service. (Zendesk Customer Experience Trends Report 2020, p. 8.)

According to Zendesk’s Customer Experience trend Report, the most important aspect of a good customer service experience is that the consumer can resolve the issue quickly and that there is support available continuously every day regardless of the hour. The

most frustrating aspect of a bad customer service experience is long hold/wait times while interacting with an agent and an automated system that makes it hard to reach a human agent (Zendesk Customer Experience Trends Report 2020, p. 8.)

2.4.2 Measuring Customer Satisfaction

To incorporate customer satisfaction measurement into the company's customer success comes down to gathering customer feedback via surveys and customer data. To measure customer satisfaction, the organization must first take a step back and ask why they are doing the customer survey and what the company will benefit from the gathered data. Defining the main goal is also crucial in order to get the most out of the customer data and information. The business goals may incorporate profit maximization, growth, increase in sales, brand awareness, or simply improve customer satisfaction. The second step is to outline a plan to achieve the goal. Before starting to collect the customer data and analyze it, the company must outline the actions that have to take before the data collecting phase. The third is when the company's stakeholders will choose the type of the customer satisfaction survey and discuss its design and the type of metrics that will be used to measure customer satisfaction. Metrics that can be measured are, for example, customer satisfaction score (CSAT), which tracks on average, how satisfied or unsatisfied customers are with the company's product or services, or the customer success program. Another metrics is Customer Effort Score (CES), which asks customers to gauge the ease of their experience. One of the most efficient ways to reduce unsatisfied customers is by reducing frustration and disloyalty by making all the customer experiences as low effort as possible. CES is a metric that tracks how easy it is to do business with a company. Another good customer satisfaction metric is the Net Promoter Score (NPS), which calculates how many consumers would recommend or promote the company's products or services to other possible customers. This metric does not only track customer satisfaction but also tracks the level of customer loyalty towards a brand. NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters or recommenders. The metric "is often used as a more general indicator of customer loyalty and brand devotion (Birkett 2021)." (Birkett 2021.)

The fourth step for measuring customer satisfaction is to customize the survey's layout and questions. The company must decide if they will use quantitative or qualitative survey methods or mixed-method. The fifth step is to determine where the company will share the survey and who is the target segment. After sending out the survey and collecting the data, companies must analyze the information and customer insights. The sixth step is to ultimately for deciding, what will be done about the dissatisfied segments. The company

must further investigate what the reason behind the dissatisfaction is and what the objectives are to change the situation better and to improve the situation. (Birkett 2021.)

2.4.3 How to improve Customer Satisfaction

According to Birkett, there are multiple ways to improve customer satisfaction, such as asking for customer feedback, educating customers, and providing answers. It is very important to make it easy and effortless for customer complains about characteristics they are unsatisfied with. If customers can't complain to the customer service feedbacks, they will do it in another worse way, such as in social media. Due to this, it is crucial for company success to offer customer support and invest in customer feedback tools. It is also crucial for providing answers to customer questions as soon as possible. (Birkett 2021.) According to an Econsultancy survey, 79% of customers say that they prefer live chat because of the immediacy it provides. Zendesk also highlighted the importance of the live chat feature during online shopping. 44% of customers said that having a live chat when online shopping was one of the most important features a company can offer to boost customer satisfaction, and 63% said they were more likely to return to a website that offers live chat as opposed to one that does not.

Companies that want to improve their customer satisfaction should also leverage social media since it provides a lot of insights on product and service feedback and experiences. In social media, companies can, for example, proactively collect customer feedback and measure customer satisfaction by offering live chats or Q&A sessions, where customers can ask questions or express dissatisfaction. Another way to improve customer satisfaction is to research what the company's main competitors are doing and what it is working for them. Understanding what the competitors are doing right or wrong can teach organizations a lot about the customer segments, industry, and products or services. (Birkett 2021.)

3 Research Methods

This chapter explains the research process of the thesis and its design. The research design “is a set of advance decisions that make up the master plan specifying the methods and procedures for collecting and analyzing the needed information (Burns, Alvin & Bush 2013, 98).” This chapter also illustrates the sampling selection, data collection, and analysis and finally discusses the reliability and validity of the thesis objectives. The research process examines *secondary data* that is collected from the theoretical literature, articles, reports, and company websites and commissioning company’s previous surveys (Burns & all 2013, 103), and then continue to collect *primary data* by conducting a questionnaire for the company’s current customers (Burns & all 2013, 70).

3.1 Research Design

The figure 6 Research Design below explains the overall thesis' research process. The process is a single-phase design with five different steps. The research design uses a single data collection technique, which in this case is a questionnaire. The single data collection technique is also known as a mono-method quantitative study. (Saunders & all 2019, 178.) In the thesis process, secondary and primary data are required to collect information for the research’s main objectives. The relationship to investigative questions is rather simple and efficiently planned. The new (primary) data is collected by developing a questionnaire (Saunders & all 2019, 338) that answers the investigative question (IQ) one, two, and three. The fourth IQ can be answered according to the data that is collected from the first three IQs. The IQs one to three will finally develop organic social media marketing solutions and recommendations to ETG’s brands and give insight into customer satisfaction. The fourth IQ then helps to answer the thesis’ main research question “*How ETG can utilize organic social media marketing in order to drive traffic to their website and to generate sales*”.

The meet the objectives of the thesis, the author undertakes a further analysis of data that was collected initially for some other purposes. This kind of information is also known as secondary data. (Saunders & all 2019, 338.) The author will analyze raw, compiled, and structured secondary data, which is collected by using search engines such as Google to research relevant and suitable reports, articles, literature, and books. Raw data is mainly information that has not to have any previous processing when compiled data has been summarized in some way and finally structured data, which is mainly easy to process and well-organized data. (Saunders & all 2019, 341.) The author also uses the commissioning company’s website and their database to collect previous data about customer satisfaction and buying preferences. The secondary data also includes the theoretical

framework, which includes three different topics that consist of customer satisfaction, organic social media marketing, and the travel industry. The research data focused on understanding exciting travel industry insights and trends and highlighting the effect of COVID-19 on tourism and traveling in general. It also discusses important social media marketing trends and activities and multiple marketing methods that can be helpful in developing social media marketing recommendations for e-commerce businesses, particularly for an OTA.

Single-phase research design

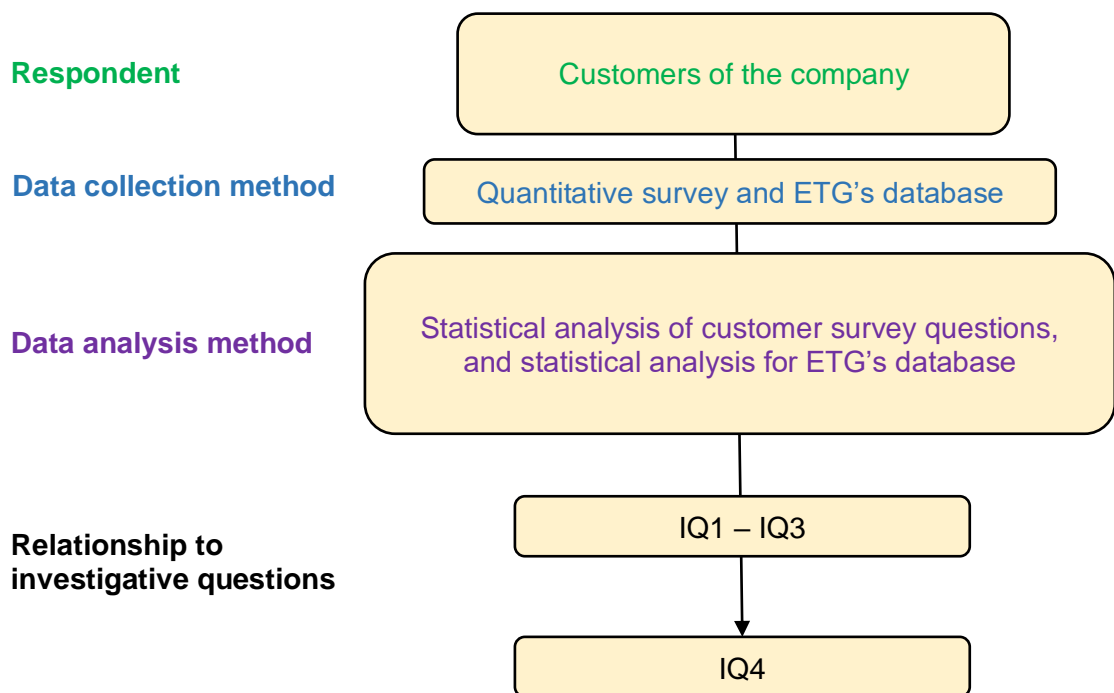


Figure 7. Research design

3.2 Data collection method

A quantitative research method is used for data collection for the case study. Quantitative research “examines the relationship between variables, which are measured numerically and analyzed using a range of statistical and graphical techniques (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, 178).” For more advantaged data management and statistical analysis, an online software Qualtrics XM survey is developed. The survey aims to answer the investigative questions one: *What is ETG's customer needs and preferences currently during the COVID-19 pandemic?*, and two: *Which social media channels should ETG use in their social media marketing?*, and also party the third investigative question: *What organic social media marketing content and activities could attract potential customers to*

ETG's website? The author ensured that the data is quantifiable, or it can be transformed into quantitative data, which means it is recorded as numbers. Quantitative analysis techniques will help the author analyze to interpret the numerical data, create tables and graphs to show the survey results, and enable comparisons of previous secondary data and the collected primary data. (Saunders & all 2019, 564.) The initial analysis explores information by using both tables and graphs (Saunders & all 625). After understanding and analyzing all the collected data, the author can answer the thesis's research question and finally build suitable organic social media marketing solutions and recommendations for the commissioning company.

The questionnaire was shared with the respondents internally through ETG's email lists on the 13th of October 2021, and the author waited for responses until the 20th of October 2021. The survey consisted of structured multiple-choice questions in order to ensure it was effortless and uncomplicated to fill out. The multiple-choice questions were used to make sure the response rate would be as high as possible. The survey was developed in English and therefore sent out to countries where English is the official language and to locations where it is often used and practiced. The respondents of the questionnaire were current customers of the commissioning company, particularly from the demarked brands GoToGate, Flight Network, and MyTrip. The survey was sent internationally into multiple regions such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Europe, and Canada. In Europe, it was sent out specifically to the only Netherlands, while in other locations, it was sent out throughout the whole country. The survey was answered by a total of 78 respondents.

In order to collect the latest data about the discussed thesis topics and industries, the author will use mostly theoretical articles and reports from websites, company pages, and newspapers rather than books and literature. The lack of printed literature that covers COVID-19's effects on the economy, traveling industry, and the changes in digitalization, in general, has affected the data collection. The primary data collection was conducted by developing a quantitative questionnaire.

3.3 Data analysis method

The secondary research data included text and pictures, which were analyzed by using a content analysis method. "Content analysis method is a specific analytical technique of categorizing and coding text, voice and visual data using a systematic coding scheme to enable quantitative analysis (Saunders & all 2019, 573)." The primary data from the questionnaire were analyzed by using quantitative and statistical methods with online software Qualtrics XM and Microsoft Excel.

3.4 Reliability, Validity, and Relevance

The author planned a research method and design that sustained the thesis objective to provide relevant, valid, and reliable research data. The research method and design supported in mitigating multiple risks of gathering irrelevant data for the commissioning company. During the secondary data research phase, the author used mostly theoretical and research articles and reports from reliable sources rather than printed books and literature. The industries that this thesis focuses on, social media and digital marketing, are fast developing and swiftly changing. Due to this fact, printed literature and books discussing these topics might contain outdated information and data. Also, data about COVID-19's effect on the travel industry is not fully understood and analyzed yet. Therefore, the main secondary data sources are articles and reports. Articles and reports were gathered from respected and well-known sources to ensure reliable and valid data collection. Also, by using the latest data available from multiple articles and reports, the author guaranteed that the collected data was relevant and up to date.

In the primary collection phase, the author used the company's email lists to send out the questionnaire to respondents to ensure the answers came from current customers. The author developed the questionnaire by using basic terminology to avoid question bias. The survey structure was simple and effortless, which guaranteed that all respondents finished the questionnaire. The questionnaire results gathered relevant and reliable data for investigative questions one, two, and three, which supported the main research question of the thesis.

4 Results

This chapter introduces the questionnaire results of the research. The first section explains the respondents' background and statistics. The second, third, and fourth section highlight the three themes of the questionnaire, which includes traveling-related data, customer satisfaction-related aspects, and social media-related data. Each survey question is carefully thought out and developed in order to support the investigative research questions and ultimately help find answers for the main objective of the thesis: *“How can ETG utilize organic social media marketing to drive traffic to their website and generate sales?”*. During this chapter, the author analyses and concludes the combined results of the questionnaire. The full questionnaire can be found at the end of this thesis report in the appendices.

4.1 Statistics of the respondents

This questionnaire was distributed to the respondents by the commissioning company's email list, meaning most of the respondents are current customers of the company. The first five survey questions were developed to gather general information about the respondents, such as their age group, gender, flying-related preferences and needs, and how many times they make traveling-related bookings or reservations a year (prior COVID-19). The respondents were from the email lists of ETG's brands GotoGate, FlightNetwork, and MyTrip located in Australia, the UK, the US, Canada, and the Netherlands. 63% of the respondents have made a purchase from at least one of the before mentioned and demarked brands when 16% have visited the company's website. A total of 81 responses were received through the survey. A median respondent was a male aged between 41 to 65. 66% of the total respondents were male, and 30% were female; others were non-binary/third gender or preferred not to say. The biggest respondent age groups were people, who were 41-65 years old with a total of 48,2%, and people aged 26-40 with a total of 34,5%. It was interesting to notice that the median respondent was a male from a higher age group. Almost half of the respondent makes travel-related bookings or reservations five or more times a year prior to COVID-19, while 23,7% of respondents said they make bookings or reservations 3 to 4 times a year. The statistics of the respondents are summarized in Figure 8.

Statistics of the respondents

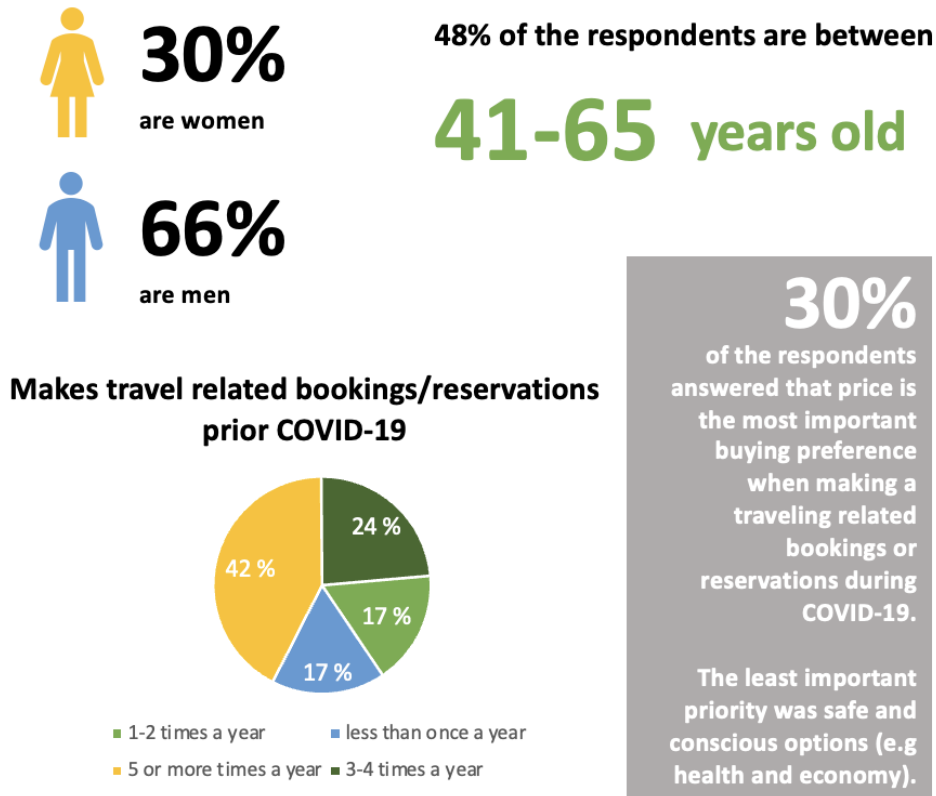


Figure 8. A summary of the statistics of the survey respondents

Since the respondents' group comprised mostly middle-aged males, the survey's social media-related results do not provide comprehensive information regarding social media usage and demands. The difference in social media usage and trends between generations is critical; thus, the author highlights the importance of utilizing the theoretical framework to gather comprehensive data for each research objective. The social media recommendations are built based on the questionnaire results, but also secondary data is utilized to provide efficient solutions and, most importantly, to avoid generation and gender bias.

4.2 Traveling related data

The fifth and sixth survey questions: "Where do you search for information about travel destinations?" and "What are your traveling related priorities and needs during COVID-19 pandemic?" aimed to answer the IQ1: "What are ETG's customer needs and preferences currently during the COVID-19 pandemic?". 39% of the respondents said that they use search engines such as Google and Bing to search travel destinations, while 36% use metasearch engines. These metasearch engines are also known as flight or booking comparison sites, such as Skyscanner or Momondo. Only 7% of respondents use social

media to search flight destinations when another 7% use recommendations from friends and family. A total of 3,3% of respondents use traditional media, blogs, vlogs, or podcasts when searching for a traveling destination. The low rate of social media usage in terms of researching flight destinations can be an impact on the middle-aged median respondents.

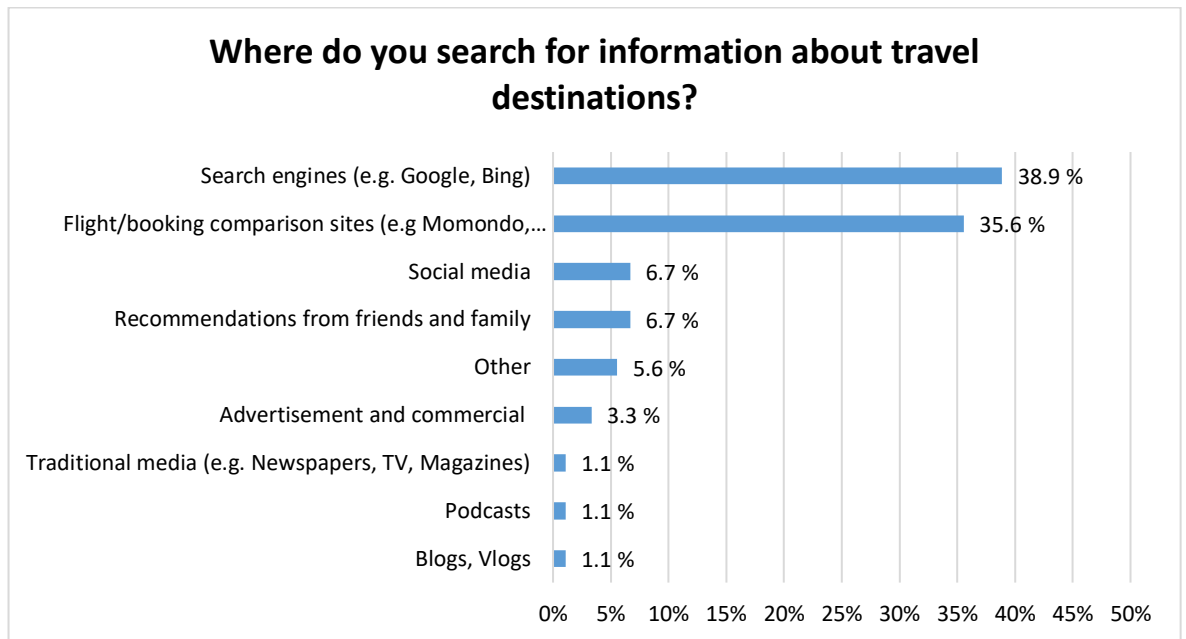


Figure 9. Research platforms for travel destinations

The survey results highlighted the importance of the *price* of the product or service when 30% of the respondents said it is their most important buying preference while making travel-related bookings or reservations. The second most important buying preference or need is the *convenience of traveling* (20,17%), for example, the flight duration or taking a direct flight. The survey results indicated that only 11% of the respondents think safe and conscious choices (e.g., health or economy) are important factors when traveling during COVID-19. It was interesting to notice that even though the virus is considered a serious health concern worldwide by authorities. The price and convenience of traveling were considered more important than safety. Even customer service, ticket flexibility, and cancellation policies came before safety when listing the buying preferences and needs. The third most important factor was ticket flexibility, with a total of 14%, when traveling during the pandemic. The traveling-related customer priorities, preferences, and needs during COVID-19 are summarized in Figure 10.

Traveling related customer preferences and needs during COVID-19

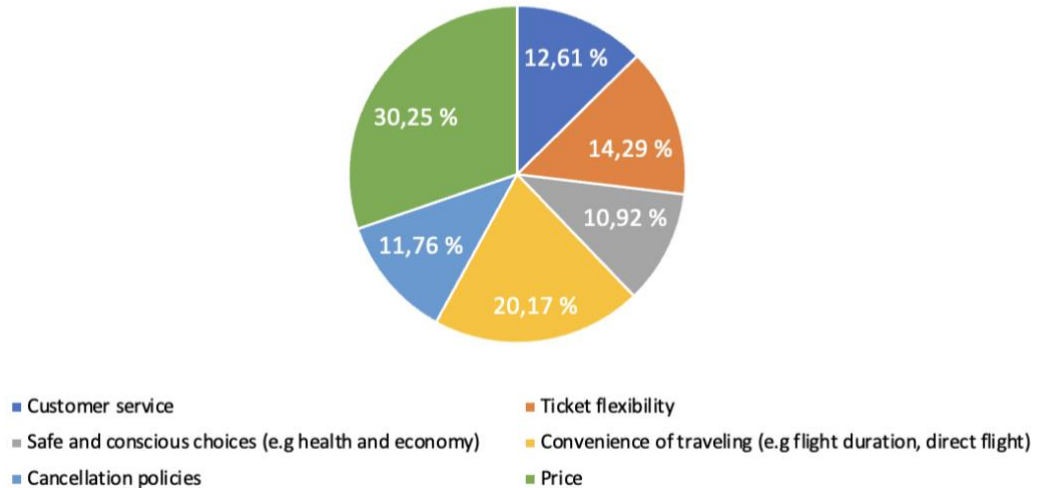


Figure 10. Traveling related customer preferences and needs during COVID-19

4.3 Customer satisfaction related data

The survey questions seven and eight, “Which of the following brands have you heard about?” and “What kind of interaction you have had with GotoGate, Mytrip, and/or FlightNetwork?” were developed to gain data about the relationship of the respondent towards the company and its brands. When survey questions nine and ten, “How many times have you purchased from one or more of these brands since January 2020?” and “What factors impacted your decision to purchase from one or more of these brands again?” aimed to answer the company’s customer satisfaction aspect and buying preferences. Around 38% of respondents said they’ve had made at least one purchase from one or more of the demarked brands since January 2020. The current customers are satisfied with the prices they offer and the good products and services. 34% of respondents said they are “very likely” to purchase again from one or more of the brands, and another 34% said they are “likely” to purchase again. Around 16% of respondents were “neutral”. Respondents who answered that they are going to *unlikely* or *very unlikely* to purchase again from these brands were asked another question “why would you not purchase from these brands again?”. Customers who answered they will “unlikely” or “very unlikely” purchase again from the demarked brands answered they were most unsatisfied with the *customer service*. Another reason for the unsatisfied customers was *previous unpleasant experiences* with one or more of the brands. 25% of respondents who said they are *unlikely* or *very unlikely* to purchase again from those brands have had unpleasant experiences. Figure 11 summarises the reasons behind unsatisfied customers ETG’s brands GoToGate, FlightNetwork, and MyTrip.

Why would you not purchase from these brands again?

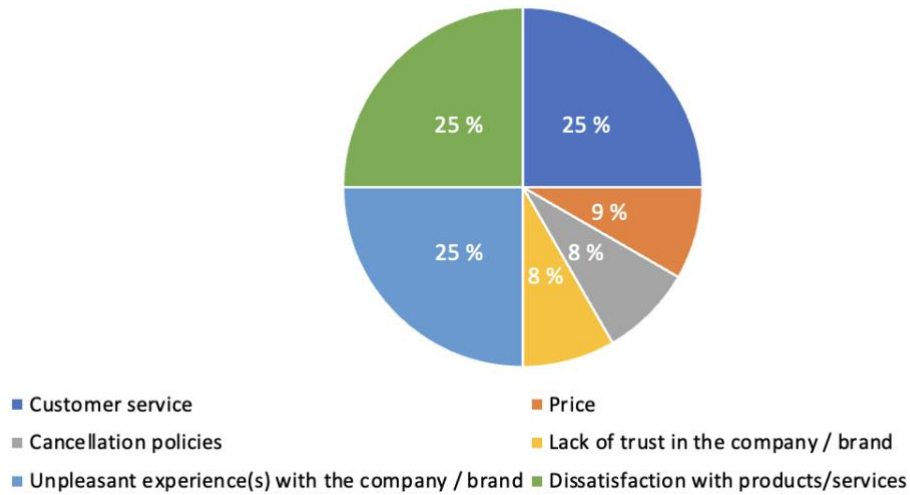


Figure 11. Unsatisfaction index according to respondents

4.4 Social media related data

The social media-related section implicated that 77% of respondents use social media in their daily life. Survey questions 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 were developed to understand the current consumers' social media usage and interests. The survey's social media-related questions aimed to answer IQ2 "Which social media channels should ETG use in their social media marketing?" and IQ3 "What organic social media marketing content and activities could attract potential customers to ETG's websites?" The most used social media platform within this respondent group is Facebook (30%) when the second used platform is Instagram (22%). Almost 20% of respondents also use YouTube. The survey indicated that the most enjoyed content on social media is educational, entertaining, and inspiring, all equally interesting. 34% of respondents enjoy educational content, and the same amount enjoys entertaining content. Entertaining content is, for example, industry news, infographics, how-to guides, pro-tips, and facts. When entertaining content is, for example, interesting and amusing videos, pictures, and memes, and inspiring content can be encouraging or motivating stories or interviews. All the social media content themes, educational, entertaining, and inspirational, were almost equally interesting to the respondents. (Relph 2021.)

The most enjoyed content on social media

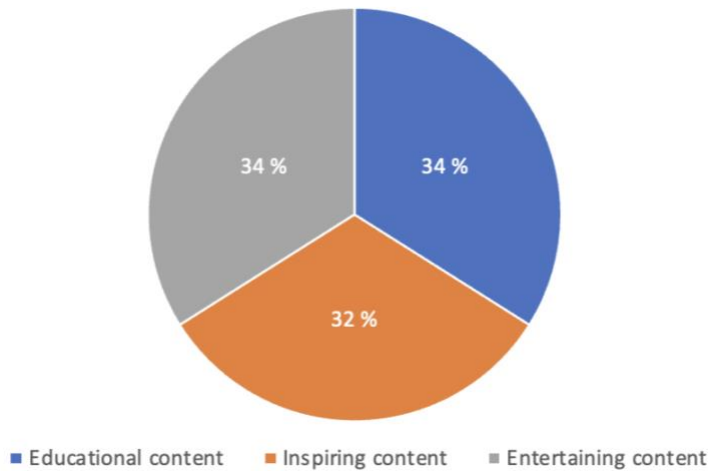


Figure 12. Content-type on social media

Of all respondents, 40% said they would enjoy the content that informs them about *flight or booking offerings*, when the second most interesting content idea was *affordable ways to travel*, with a total of 21%. The third most interesting content idea was *exclusive destination ideas* (11%), and the fourth was *tips and traveling-related recommendations* (10%).

The survey's two final questions: "*Do you use social media to research products/services?*" and "*Do you purchase products and/or services through social media?*" aimed to give information regarding the current consumer's social media usage in terms of *social commerce*. More than 37% of survey respondents said they *sometimes* use social media to research products and/or services, while 31,4% said they *often* use social media to research products/services. The rest of the respondents answered they *never* use social media for product/service research purposes. A total of 26% answered they *often* purchase products/services from social media when 26,5% said they *sometimes* purchase through social media. This indicates that social media usage in terms of social commerce is growing within middle-aged generations, in this case within Gen X and Boomers 1.

5 Recommended organic social media marketing solutions

In this chapter, the author's recommendations for organic social media marketing solutions for the commissioning company are presented. The recommendations are constructed by using the secondary data gathered from the theoretical framework as well as the primary data from the questionnaire results. Since all the commissioning company's demarked brands have similar characteristics, such as target audience and product offering, same social media marketing tactics, methods, and solutions can be utilized to all of them. The author will utilize the SOSTAC® Framework to support the organic social media marketing recommendations and will apply current social media marketing trends to provide relevant and valid solutions that are effective and competent in today's challenging and ever-changing digital environment.

5.1 Utilizing the SOSTAC® Framework

The SOSTAC® Framework is a six-step framework that stands for Situation, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Action, and Control. The first phase in the framework is a *Situation analysis* that examines ETG's demarked brands, GotoGate's, FlightNetwork's, and MyTrip's current performance and marketplace opportunities with a SWOT analysis. Also, this phase is for analyzing the company's customer insights and customer perception. The customer perception examines how the brands are seen in the eyes of consumers. Situation analysis also includes competitor benchmarking. Situation analysis answer a question: "*Where are we now?*". This phase also includes a competitor analysis. The questionnaire results provide lot of data for the situation analysis. For example, it implicated that most of the company's current customers are satisfied, since almost 70% of the survey respondents said that they are *very likely* or *likely* to purchase again from the demarked brands, therefore the brands' consumer perception is mainly positive. The respondents highlighted that they are very satisfied with the prices and the product/service offering.

The questionnaire result stated that the least satisfied the respondents are with the customer service. If the outsourced customer service, is the biggest problem that affects the customer satisfaction, social media marketing will not help alone solving the issue nor improve the satisfaction rate. If the commissioning company aims to improve their customer service, and finally the customer satisfaction, they should strengthen their customer service skills, by including more customer service trainings, going through every touchpoint in the customer lifecycle and making sure the right skills are demonstrated

consistently. (Survey Monkey 2021.) The theoretical framework stated multiple methods to improve customer satisfaction, such as asking customer feedback, educating customers, and providing quick answers to customer questions and issues. The theoretical framework highlighted the importance of giving consumers the possibility to give feedback effortlessly, since if they cannot complain to customer service feedback platform, they might do it in another worse way, such as in social media. Companies that want to be paramount in customer satisfaction and loyalty, must offer customer support and invest in customer feedback tools. In this case study, the author saw that many of the survey respondents tried to complain and give feedback through the questionnaire. This implicates that the company is not giving simple and effortless way for consumers to give feedback or ask questions. Another important factor that was discovered during the secondary data research phase, was that 79% of customers prefer live chat because of the immediacy it provides, especially during online shopping. When 44% of customers said that having a live chat, during online shopping was one of the most important features a company can offer to boost customer satisfaction. 63% said they were more likely to return to a website that offers live chat as opposed to one that does not. Thus, live chat customer support platform is a crucial tool for the company to consider in order to improve their satisfaction rate.

The secondary data showed that, companies that desire to improve their customer satisfaction, should also leverage social media. Social media provides a lot of insights on product and service experiences and opinions and offers a proactive way to collect customer feedback. In multiple social media channels companies can measure customer satisfaction by offering live chats or Q&A (question and answer) sessions, where customers can ask questions and express dissatisfaction.

The questionnaire results implicated also important data about the buying preferences and needs which is part of the situation analysis. The results stated that for respondents the most important factor, when making a traveling related booking or reservations, is the *price*. One interesting notice from the results is that *safety* was one of the least important factors when traveling, even though COVID-19 is considered as a serious health concern worldwide by authorities. The respondents also highlighted the importance of the *convenience of traveling*. The commissioning company must take the before mentioned consumer preferences and demands into consideration while implementing a social media strategy.

As stated earlier, the situation analysis includes a competitor analysis, so the author highlights critical characteristics of the main international competitors of Etraveli Group, concentrating on the demarked brands, GotoGate, FlightNetwork and Mytrip. The main

competitors include global online travel agencies Expedia, eDreams, Lastminute Group, Trip.com and Kiwi.com. The author recommends the Etraveli Group to perform a competitor analysis that includes the main competitors features, sales tactics and results, market share, differentiators, and their pricing strategy. Also, to learn more about social media marketing opportunities in the travel industry, the company should analyze the competitors' digital marketing methods and strategies. How is their social media presence and content strategy? What about their social media strategies, go-to platforms, and level of engagement on them? By performing a SWOT analysis ETG can learn about the competitors' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. (White, 2021.) Since ETG is also interested in improving their customer satisfaction they should also examine the main competitor's customer service strategies and tools, customer feedback possibilities, and research their customer reviews, to understand how the competitors have adapted to the current customer needs and preferences.

After the situation analysis, the author recommends the company to take a deeper look at analyzing the marketing *objectives* and to define the business vision. The objective phase is for answering: "*where we want to be?*". Since ETG's brands do not have any previous social media marketing operations and are not present in any social media platforms, they must determine their digital marketing goals for each platform. The company representatives gave the author a social media marketing objective, which is to increase the brands' customer satisfaction and most importantly to research if organic social media marketing would benefit the companies' overall business operations. The commissioning company wants to know, if organic social media marketing could help to generate more website traffic and finally increase sales. During this analysis phase the company must include objectives for sales, market share, and customer service. As the questionnaire result implicated, the company has had difficulties with customer satisfaction caused by poor customer services experiences. The author thinks the most important objective to tackle by these demarked brands, is to decrease the negative customer service experiences. The brands should consider additional customer service trainings, for example performed quarterly basis.

The third phase of the SOSTAC framework is *strategy*. This phase implicates the segmentation and targeting, positioning and marketing mix, engagement, and content strategy. The strategy phase answers "*How we get there?*". The ETG's brands' segmenting, and targeting will be mostly same in each brand. As the theoretical framework stated, the travel market is separated into two main categories: business and leisure. The market is further divided into domestic and international travel. The Leisure travelers can be classified according to the type of trip taken, income and age. They can be classified for example, people who focus on adventure, special-interest, rest and

relaxation, honeymoons and/or sightseeing. Another group is people with high-income and high educational level. Third group is budget-conscious and sustainable travelers, when fourth group is families, students, groups with mutual resemblance and seniors. The business travelers are simply people who travel for occupational and business purposes. (Bplans 2021.) The brands can concentrate their targeting into these, before mentioned, five consumer segments. The company's strategy comprises organic social media marketing tactics and methods, and current social media marketing trends are also utilized.

The questionnaire results provided information regarding the content strategy. The results provided lot of data on how the brands should market its services and products on social media. The content strategy comprises of utilizing content marketing by generating creative, educating, and relevant content in different forms such as videos, infographics, photos, webinars, podcasts, articles, and blog posts. The company should concentrate their marketing to the social media platforms the current customers use the most, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Since, the respondents median age was higher than expected, the author recommends the company to utilize the thesis' secondary data, when planning the main platforms and methods to do their social media marketing. The secondary data states that the leading social media channels among marketers worldwide are Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, as of January 2020. According to the theoretical framework, a significant finding indicated that one in ten marketers would be decreasing their organic marketing on Facebook in the upcoming years. However, 70% of marketers are using Facebook ads and 58% plan on increasing their use in the next 12 months. Facebook Live is the leading live video platform among marketers and was used by 38% of marketers in 2020, when Instagram's popularity is rising among marketers, and 67% are planning to increase their organic activities over the next 12 months on the platform. YouTube's popularity is rising among marketers when 69% of marketers plan on increasing their use of YouTube videos. It was interesting to notice that most marketers ignore TikTok. Only 5% of marketers were using TikTok in 2020, and a considerable high rate, 74%, of marketers do not plan on using the platform in the next year. In conclusion, according to the secondary data observations and primary data results, the author recommends the company to concentrate its social media marketing operations into Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

The fourth phase in the SOSTAC framework is *tactics*. This phase highlights the *details* of the strategy phase. The organization plans its detailed activities and methods to achieve the main objectives by using the digital or e-marketing mix. Also, specific KPIs are decided for each tactic during this phase. This case study's tactics are organic social media marketing methods, strategies, and activities. Also, the current social media

marketing trends are utilized during this phase. The first tactic is to provide engaging and interacting organic content, which makes the consumers feel more connected to the brands. Customers who are interacting with the business are more likely to purchase a good or a service. The company will plan what kind of content they will produce and which tools to use to promote it for optimized results. The author will recommend the demarked brands to include educational, entertaining, and inspirational content themes, to their social media strategy, since those seemed to be all equally interesting themes according to the questionnaire results. The questionnaire results implicated that the respondents are most interested in how-to guides, industry news, infographics, interesting and amusing videos or photos. Also, inspirational stories or interviews, were very interesting to the respondents. The most interesting social media topic was about flight or booking-related offerings, when the second most interesting topic was affordable traveling tips. The author recommends the brands to start by producing and publishing content about traveling related recommendations, providing tips and how-to guides for more affordable holidays trips, and informing their social media followers about exclusive traveling destinations. The theoretical framework highlighted that social media content should aim to be *evergreen*, which is a type of content that continuous to stay relevant, sustainable, and helpful. Also, the brands could produce inspirational content, for example, by interviewing and collaborating with travel influencers.

The importance of being active and present on multiple social media channels is also crucial since it is a powerful tactic to gain organic traffic and reach wider audience. Another organic marketing method is joining groups and pages and engaging with various discussions within the company's niche. As the secondary research implicated, this method allows organic posts about the brand, without "pushing" company products or services, as in traditional advertising. Also, directly reaching out to customers and followers is an excellent method to establish customer relationships and improve communication. Companies need to post comments, address concerns, answer reviews, and discuss topics that align with the organization's values and mission.

Another tactic for organic social media marketing strategy is *Influencer Marketing*. The brands could collaborate with relevant and suitable travel influencers, such as Murad Osmann or Chris Burkard. Osmann is one of the top travel influencers by Forbes and he is followed by 3,6 million people on Instagram. (Forbes 2021.) Another inspirational travel influencer is Chris Burkard, who is known for his signature landscape photos that are taken from above. The travel influencer and professional photographer, author, and speaker, is one of the world's most-followed travel influencers, with also 3,6 million followers on Instagram (Chris Burkard s.a). Influencer marketing can be another cost-effective and organic method to gain more brand awareness and engage with new

possible consumers. GoToGate, FlightNetwork, and MyTrip could, for example, exchange products or services, such as flights and hotels reservations with the influencer for a sponsored post. The influencers could, for example post about diverse destinations, traveling tips, flight offers, and sustainable ways to travel. The company could use discount codes and affiliate links, which both help the brands to track influencer performance, sales attributes and provide information needed to evaluate the marketing campaign. Influencer marketing campaigns are very powerful ways to sell products/services with exclusive offers that help in generating leads and commissions through the influencer's loyal and large audience base.

The author recommends the company to use social media to search inspiration for their content strategy. Social media provides lot of content, material and data that can be utilized in order to idealize and plan new ideas and topics for the company own social media channels. Good inspiration sources are for example, famous travel influencers, bloggers and especially the National Geographic Travel Instagram profile, which has more than 44 million followers. The brands could also start their own traveling blogs to give added value by educating their consumers about different cultures, countries and provide travel industry infographics.

Another powerful and efficient organic social media marketing tactic are optimizing content for SEO, being active on social media channels, and engaging and interacting with audience and followers. As the theoretical framework stated, powerful SEO strategies include making a list of content topics, listing long-tail keywords based on the topics, building pages for each topic and setting up a blog and blogging weekly to develop page authority. Also, creating a link-building plan, compressing all media before putting it on the website, staying current on SEO news and practices, and measuring and tracking its content's success can boost the organic marketing effort. Marketers say that *on-page* content optimization, is one of the most efficient SEO types. The on-page SEO focuses on gaining more website traffic and higher ranking for specific keywords. Also, making sure the content that is created is mobile-friendly helps developing an effective organic marketing strategy. Off-page SEO focuses on inbound links or backlinks, that are links pointing and directing users to the company's website from elsewhere on the internet. The company could develop guest posts on other reputable and relevant websites, that provides evergreen content including backlinks to their own site, which will improve overall traffic, boost audience reach and bring more leads to the business. This method allows the company to establish authority in its specific niche and display its expertise. Therefore, it is vital that the company uses SEO in their organic marketing, and includes information about the brands' offers and service, but also detailed destination guides, how-to guides for sustainable traveling, and other information that leisure and business travelers might

find helpful. The companies that contain the most detailed information in their websites, are the ones that enjoy a higher ranking in search engines.

As stated in the theoretical framework, marketers desiring to improve organic marketing efforts must consider that over 52% of internet traffic comes from mobile devices. Organizations should ensure that all provided content is optimized for mobile users, since people are use smartphones on daily basis to purchase and research products and services. Also, making sure the page speed is as fast as possible, because impatient mobile users leave a website that takes longer than three seconds to load. Low-loading content can negatively affect company's site traffic. Producing mobile-friendly material is another tactic the author recommends the brands to utilize in their social media marketing. Mobile-friendly material gives today's impatient customers an effortless experience on the website and improves customer satisfaction. Effective website performance and content will enhance organic marketing and gain competitive advantage.

According to Google, 77% of online shoppers are more likely to purchase from companies whose mobile sites or apps allow them to make purchases quickly. When, 40% are more likely to spend more than planned when they identify the shopping experience to be highly personalized. (Google 2021.) Due to this, it is critical to investigate the commissioning company's website speed and effectiveness, to attempt to make the website speed under two seconds which can drastically increase traffic and revenue. Improving the load time by 0,01 second can boost conversation rates by 8% (Google 2021). Simple tactic to increase website loading speed is by shrinking bulky content such as images and improving poorly designed coding. The recommended website load time is three seconds or less. (Patel 2021.)

The author analysed the ETG's brands' websites' www.gotogate.com, www.mytrip.com and www.flightnetwork.com effectiveness with Google's PageSpeed Insight tool and Test My Site mobile site tester. Most of the brands' websites had similar issues. All the websites had poor performance rates according to the Google's PageSpeed Insight tool and Test My Site. For example, GoToGate's core Web Vitals assessment is *failed*, meaning there is space for many improvements that the company should consider in order to develop better website experience and finally increase their website traffic. The mobile site page speed is 4.8 second in United States on a 4G connection. When the desktop page speed is 8.3 seconds in United States on a 4G connection. The recommended fixes by Google are reducing JavaScript execution time and enabling text compression to minimize total network bytes. Another recommendation is to personalize the site experience to each user to keep them engaged with relevant content. ETG should run website experiments to see what resonates best and to become accessible from

anywhere by launching the mobile site from consumer's home screen for quick and easy access – even offline. Reducing the customer journey, the steps that consumers must take to make a purchase, is critical for developing seamless payment and website experiences. In Figure 13. one can see GoToGate's performance summary from Google's Test My Site tool.

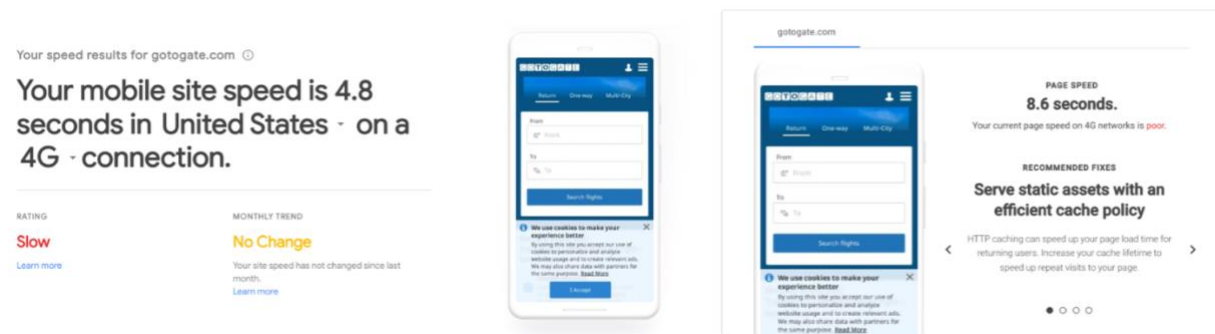


Figure 13. Screen Capture of GoToGate's website and mobile site speed and performance analysis from Think with Google. (Google 2021.)

After the tactics phase, is the *Actions* and *Control* phase, which includes deciding the marketing plan's structure and process and budgeting the operational resources. For this phase, the authors recommend the company to use a project management tool Gant Chart, which assists the management with complex project planning. The Gant Chart helps in scheduling the marketing process and budgeting. After the whole marketing process has begun, the management should include consistent monitoring and tracking for the marketing performance. They must examine main KPIs, such as conversion through social media, impressions and other significant web analytics. The control phase will guide ETG for future evolvement. The company should also perform customer service surveys during the control phase, to acquire insights of the social media marketing performance and customer satisfaction.

5.2 Utilizing 2021 Social Media Marketing Trends

According to multiple social media trends reports, understanding the target audience and taking advantage of social listening was one of the most important factors in order to be successful in today's competitive business environment. *Social Listening* gives organizations many insights and it can help discovering new opportunities or pinpoint operational characteristics that consumers are unsatisfied with. Another predicted trend is *SEO's drive for organic Instagram visibility*. The trends highlight the importance of using

SEO in Social Media Marketing, especially in Instagram marketing. Marketers that develop efficient keywords helps Instagram identify what is being shown and that way helps people to find the company or brand. If the commissioning company decides to start Instagram marketing for its brands, using specific and relevant keywords is a must for organic growth.

The social media reports also highlighted the rise of *video marketing* and *live streams*. During the difficult times of a global pandemic, people are looking for more entertainment in the form of videos. The rapidly growing and expanding, now world-wide known, video-streaming platform TikTok, is a good example of people wanting to see more video content than ever before. The world leading social media platform, Instagram, developed a new feature, Reels, to compete with TikTok. Short-form videos, such as TikToks and Reels are very trendy and extremely efficient methods to spread brand awareness, grow organic target audience and inform consumers about products or service in an innovative and entertaining way. The social media reports also predicted that Instagram Reels ignite organic Instagram exposure. Therefore, the author advice the commissioning company to produce entertaining and educating short-form video content for their social media marketing strategy. The video content can be for example, how-to guides on how to pack sustainably, exclusive travel destination guides, and tips to consider when traveling during COVID-19.

As the theoretical framework stated, *humanizing the brand* and *being authentic* is another crucial trend in 2021. Innovative marketers will humanize the brand by making their operations transparent and authentic, and this way connecting with consumers and creating strong relationships. For humanizing the brand and becoming authentic, the author recommends using *Conversational marketing*, which is a method to engage consumers through conversations on social media. This method helps ETG to build relationships, engage with the target audience, and make customers feel they are heard and appreciated. (HubSpot & Talkwalker 2021.) Another method is to take the consumers behind the scenes, by posting content on social media about the company's offices and showcasing employees working hard. Showing who are the people working behind the company's logo, gives customers a connection to an actual person. (Casella, 2021.)

The secondary data also highlighted the fact that today's audience is *socially more conscious* than ever before. The expectations of younger and more diverse generations have a huge impact on modern brand building and marketing. The socially conscious audience is pushing organizations to engage and make a difference in important topics such as racism and social justice. Companies that want to be relevant and innovative, should then become more purpose-driven and take action to make a difference. The

commissioning company ETG, should also push its operations towards purpose-driven business model and marketing. The author recommends the brands to find a cause both the company and consumers are passionate. For example, by helping travellers to become more sustainable and economically friendly, and to fight together against the climate crisis, could be a relevant cause for the commissioning company.

Another social media marketing trend, is *nostalgic and old-school marketing*. In 2021, marketers are going back to old-school methods, meaning using more straightforward way of engaging with the target audience. The stress that COVID-19 has brought up has impacted the consumer thinking and wanting them to remember more happier times, the prior pandemic time, thus coping with nostalgic mechanism. Nostalgic marketing tactics include newsletters and podcasts, and old-school communicating, such as voice notes, voice searching, and voice messages. The importance of voice in communicating is increasing. The brands could use traveling podcast where they provide traveling and tourism related tips and ideas and discuss about exclusive traveling destination. As shown in the questionnaire, exclusive destination ideas are interesting to the respondents and the target audience.

The *rise of social commerce* is also a current social media trend in 2021. Social commerce is a method to simplify the customer journey and reduce transaction abandonment. For example, Instagram and Facebook, have developed in-app purchasing features, such as buy buttons, shoppable posts and social media storefronts to increase social commerce. The theoretical research data stated that social media has a significant impact on consumer buying decisions. More than 50% of social browsers use social media to research products before making a transaction and as the thesis' primary data stated, more than 37% respondents said they *sometimes* use social media to research products/services, when more than 30% said they *often* use social media to research. A total of 26%, questionnaire respondents answered they *often* purchase products/services from social media. The percentages indicate the significance of social commerce in social media marketing. The commissioning company should take advantage of this trend by utilizing social media marketing, into their business strategy, since the method simplifies and shortens customer journey, and helps them with generating more website traffic and finally increasing sales.

6 Conclusion

This final chapter concludes the key findings of the thesis, the author's recommendations, the reliability, validity, and relevance aspect, as well as reflection of learning and further research ideas.

6.1 Key findings

The thesis's main objective was to research how the commissioning company Etraveli Group's demarked brands GotoGate, FlightNetwork, and MyTrip could utilize organic social media marketing in order to drive traffic to their website traffic and to generate sales. The author created a set of investigative questions to support the main thesis objective.

The quantitative online survey was developed to answer the investigative questions one, two, and three. The first investigative question, "*What are ETG's customer needs and preferences currently during the COVID-19 pandemic?*", was answered when respondents said the most important traveling related preferences and needs are *price, the convenience of traveling, and ticket flexibility*. It was interesting to see that the least important factor was *safe and conscious* options, even though COVID-19 has brought up a lot of concerns about the safety of traveling, in terms of spreading the virus further or catching the virus during a flight.

The second investigative question, "*Which social media channels should ETG use in their social media marketing?*" was also answered during the online survey. The respondents said they use mostly Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Also, the theoretical framework stated that the global leading social networks as of January 2020, were Facebook and Instagram. Therefore, the authors recommend the company to concentrate on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube as their main platforms for their social media marketing operations.

The third investigative question, "*What organic social media marketing content and activities could attract potential customers to ETG's website?*" was answered by the online survey and by utilizing the organic social media marketing theory. The main recommendation included developing a strong content strategy, utilizing influencer marketing and building a SEO strategy that ensures website optimization. The content strategy was developed by using the questionnaire results, where respondents stated they are mostly interested in educational and entertaining social media content. How-to guides,

industry news, infographics, amusing videos or photos are considered educational and entertaining content. According to the online survey, inspiring content, such as inspirational stories or interviews, were also very interesting among the respondents. Especially, content that informs about flight or booking-related offerings or affordable traveling tips. In addition to providing educational and entertaining content to their target audience, ETG should consider, influencer marketing, social listening, conversional marketing and optimizing content for SEO. Engaging, and interacting actively with consumers on various social media platforms, proving mobile-friendly content, and ensuring website speed were also recommended. The author also highlighted the importance of implementing current social media trends to the organic social media marketing methods.

The fourth and final investigative question “*What recommendations can be made to ETG in order to initiate their organic social media marketing?*” supports the main research question of the thesis. The IQ4 and the research question is answered by making recommendations based on the previous IQs, the survey results and the theoretical framework. The research question was answered by utilizing the SOSTAC Framework and the current social media marketing trends in subchapters 5.1 and 5.2. The author recommended multiple methods to initiate organic social media marketing for the commissioning company’s demarked brands. The recommendations included, utilizing the SOSTAC frameworks six steps, starting from the situation analysis to understand the current marketplace opportunities and customer segment. Also, performing a competitor analysis to gain insights about the travel industry and its consumer demands is crucial. Developing relevant objectives for the market share, sales and customer service was the second step of the SOSTAC. Utilizing an efficient strategy for the company, and most importantly measuring and controlling the marketing performance are also critical factors before initiating the organic social media marketing.

The research question: “*How can ETG utilize organic social media marketing to drive traffic to their website and generate sales?*” is answered in chapter 4 and 5. The author recommended multiple organic social media activities and methods, such as SEO and Influencer marketing. As the theoretical framework stated, powerful SEO strategies include making a list of content topics, listing long-tail keywords based on the topics, building pages for each topic and setting up a blog. Also, creating a link-building plan, compressing all media before putting it on the website, staying current on SEO news and practices, and measuring the company’s content success can boost the organic marketing effort. The author recommended to concentrate on *On-page* SEO strategies. The on-page content optimization is one of the most efficient SEO types, which focuses on gaining more website traffic and higher ranking for specific keywords. Also, making sure the

content strategy is mobile-friendly helps developing effective organic marketing strategies. Choosing the right social media platforms for ETG's business and optimizing the content on those channels was also recommended for improved website traffic and sales. Also, producing content with right hashtags provides greater reach. The author also recommended the company to join social network groups and communities in their niche to communicate and build relationships with their consumers. The groups and communities are important traffic sources for the website.

Humanizing the brand and being authentic was another significant social media marketing trend and recommendation to consider when desiring to improve website traffic. Innovative marketers will humanize their brands by making their operations transparent and authentic, and this way connect with consumers, and finally create strong relationships. Creating strong relationships and retaining customers is a cost-effective solution to increase sales than obtaining new short-term customers. Long-term customers give more profit to the company than current short-term customers.

ETG, should push its operations towards a purpose-driven business model and marketing. The brands should find a cause that is in line with their business mission and valued, both by the company and by its consumers. The cause can help the brands to connect and develop loyal relationships with socially conscious consumers. The social media reports also highlighted the rise of *video marketing* and *live streams*. During the difficult times of a global pandemic, companies must provide entertainment to their consumers in the form of videos. Also, understanding the target audience and taking advantage of social listening is one of the most important steps to take in order to be successful in today's competitive and digitalized business environment. Social listening provides many insights and can help discover new opportunities or pinpoint features that consumers are unsatisfied with. Engaging and interacting with consumers in real-time can also help boosting website traffic and finally increasing sales.

6.2 Reliability, Validity, and Relevance

The thesis reliability, validity and relevance were discussed in chapter 3. The goal was to perform effective risk management in order to provide reliable, valid and relevant research results and data. The author ensured reliable and relevant results, by obtaining data from well-known, trustworthy, and respected sources from multiple theoretical literatures and research articles. The author gathered data by using numerous research sources, to ensure the collected data is reliable, accurate and equivalent on each source. The industries that the thesis framework comprised, social media and digital marketing, are

fast developing and swiftly changing. Due to this, printed literature and books discussing these topics might contain outdated information and data, thus mostly online sources were used to ensure up-to-date information. Also, data concerning COVID-19's effect on the travel industry is not fully understood and analyzed yet. Therefore, the main secondary data is gathered from articles and reports from respected and well-known sources. As stated in the chapter 3, the research method and design supported in mitigating multiple risks of gathering irrelevant and unreliable data.

The primary data collection was obtained by developing an online survey for current B2C customers by using the company's email lists. The author avoided question bias by creating the questionnaire by using simple and general terminology. The survey structure was simple and effortless, which guaranteed that all respondents finished the questionnaire. The questionnaire answers were analyzed first manually than by using reliable tools, Qualtrics XM and Microsoft Excel, to safeguard accurate and valid results.

6.3 Recommendations for Companies

This subchapter provides recommendations to companies interested in the thesis objective based on the findings of the research. The recommendations are made based on the results of the questionnaire and examination of the key findings.

The first recommendation is for companies to examine and measure their customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. As implicated in the secondary data, improved customer satisfaction is a step closer to growing customer loyalty and finally increasing profitability. Performing customer satisfaction surveys on a monthly basis could improve the company's overall business performance and gain a competitive advantage. Also, providing easily accessible feedback forms and customer service chats can increase satisfaction significantly. Providing fast reply's to concerns, issues and questions are also critical in improving consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Building customer loyalty and making old consumers happy is more cost-effective than acquiring new consumers.

The second recommendation is to analyze the social media opportunities and challenges in the company's marketplace. Companies wanting to use social media to generate website traffic and to increase sales should use current social media marketing trends and utilize a digital marketing framework to plan and executive an efficient social media strategy. Organic social media marketing is best used to educate and convert customers and followers, drive traffic to business websites and channels, enable authentic interaction and communication and develop a brand voice. Digitalization has improved the opportunities of social media marketing and social commerce in every industry.

6.4 Recommendations for Further research

This subchapter introduces recommendations for further research on the main thesis topic. The research could be focused on a specific continent or a country to obtain social media recommendations on a market basis. Then, the social media marketing recommendations and solutions would obtain more detailed data for a specific market and customer segments. In further research, the commissioning company could choose only one brand to concentrate on to ensure efficiency and comprehensive social media marketing recommendations.

Analyzing and examining the commissioning company's competitors' marketing operations could also provide very interesting data and information that ETG can utilize in their business model. Comprehensive competitor analysis provides important industry and market trends and could provide insights into consumer demands. Analyzing the impact of COVID-19 on the travel and tourism industry is crucial in order to continue building effective marketing recommendations during the time of a global pandemic. Since the travel industry has faced a lot of challenges during the pandemic, consumer buying preferences and behavior will evolve continuously; thus, it is important to understand the target audience and analyze consumer data more competently.

If the commissioning company decides to use the author's recommended solutions for social media marketing, then further research could then analyze and measure the marketing performance. Further research could improve possible strategic pain points in order to develop the marketing performance and finally generate more website traffic and increase sales.

6.5 Reflection on learning

This thesis process was educational and interesting but also very challenging to the author. The most challenging step in the process was defining the project and topic scope as well as the demarcation. Another aspect that was challenging to the author was time management. She struggled to find enough time to work on the thesis while working full-time. Developing a comprehensive theoretical framework also took more time than expected. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the thesis process significantly. Since the campus, library, and many public spaces had limited opening hours, the author had to write most of the thesis from home. Also, utilizing library source material was more difficult during the pandemic.

Overall, the thesis process developed and expanded the author's existing theoretical knowledge about social media marketing. Conducting this research, the author had an opportunity to explore more about the marketing industry, especially the digital marketing industry, and to learn how to utilize the obtained knowledge in practice. Working with a commissioning company helped the author to integrate the theory and research into a real-life business situation. Expanding the knowledge and skills set about social media marketing helped the author also perform better during her internship.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Online Questionnaire

Q1. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

Q2. What is your age group?

18-25

26-40

41-65

65+



Q3. How often do you make travel related bookings/reservations prior COVID-19? (e.g flight bookings, hotel reservations)

Less than once a year

1-2 times a year

3-4 times a year

5 or more times a year

Q5. Where do you search for information about travel destinations?

Search engines (e.g Google, Bing)

Social Media (e.g Instagram, Facebook, YouTube)

Flight / booking comparison sites (e.g Momondo, Skyscanner)

Recommendations from friends and family

Blogs, vlogs (video blogs)

Traditional media (e.g Magazines, Newspapers, TV)

Podcasts

Advertisement and commercials

Other (please specify)

Q6. What are your traveling related priorities and needs during the COVID-19 pandemic?
(choose the 2 most important)

Price

Cancellation policies

Customer service

Convenience of traveling (e.g direct flights, flight duration)

Ticket Flexibility

Safe and conscious options (health and economy wise)

Q7. Which of the following brands have you heard about?

GotoGate

MyTrip

FlightNetwork

None of the above



Q8. What kind of interaction have you had with GotoGate, MyTrip and/or FlightNetwork?

I am a customer / I have purchased from at least one of these brands

I have visited these brands' websites

I have received email(s) about one or more of these brands

I have seen commercials or advertisements from one or more of these brand

Other (please specify)



Q9. How many times have you purchased from one or more of these brands since January 2020?

0

1

2-3

4 or more



Q10. What factors impacted your decision to purchase from one or more of these brands again?

Price

Cancellation policies

Customer service

Good products / services

Trust in the company / brand

Past positive experience(s) with the company / brand

Good recommendations from family or friends

Good online reviews/rating

Other (please specify)

Q11. How likely are you to purchase again from us?

Very likely

Likely

Neutral

Unlikely

Very unlikely



Q12. Why would you not purchase from these brands again ?

Price

Cancellation policies

Customer service

Dissatisfaction with products / services

Lack of trust in the company / brand

Unpleasant experience(s) with the company / brand

Bad criticism from family or friends

Bad online reviews / ratings

Other (please specify)

Q13. Social Media Related Questions: Do you use social media?

Yes

No



Q14. Which social media platforms do you use the most?

Facebook

Instagram

YouTube

SnapChat

TikTok

Twitter

Other (please specify)

Q15. What type of content do you enjoy the most on social media?

Educational content (e.g industry news, infographics, how-to guides, pro-tips and advice, facts)

Entertaining content (e.g interesting and funny images, videos, memes)

Inspiring content (e.g interviews, stories, videos, inspirational ideas, images)

Q16. Which of the following traveling related content you would be interested in?

Exclusive destination ideas and tips

Flight or booking offers

Traveling pro tips and how-to guides

Facts about culture/country

Travel podcasts

Traveling related recommendations

Affordable ways to travel

Other (please specify)

Q17. Do you use social media to research products and/or services?

Often

Sometimes

Never



Q18. Do you purchase products and/or services through social media?

Often

Sometimes

Never

