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DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Case: Zilivonkkelis Lp

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<p>The main purpose of the thesis is to provide the commissioning company with a development plan on how to utilize social media effectively in order to better serve the company as well as the consumers. Therefore, in the theoretical part, social media is being examined from two different points of view – as a phenomenon and as a communication channel.</p> <p>The empirical part includes a description of the two methods of research conducted. These methods are a survey with a questionnaire and a benchmarking analysis with an electronic interview as well as an observation analysis. The main purpose of the questionnaire is to examine the utilization of social media within the current customers of the company. Therefore, the questionnaire was placed in the premises of the company in order to be within the grasp of the consumers visiting the company.</p> <p>In the benchmarking analysis two small sized tourism companies have been selected as the objects for the analysis. The main aim of this analysis is to examine the utilization of social media within these two companies in order to provide the commissioning company with a set of behavioural patterns for the future performance in social media.</p> <p>The main result gained from the questionnaire is that a majority of the current customers are utilizing social media. In addition, when considering the most utilized social media channels among the consumers, Facebook and YouTube are the top two. Furthermore, the level of activeness in social media among the consumers is between interested and quite active.</p> <p>The main result gained from the benchmarking analysis, on the other hand, is that social media has a potential to offer certain benefits for small sized tourism companies. In addition, it provides a set of common guidelines on how to be active in social media. Apart from these aspects, the benchmarking analysis offers information about the utilization of personality as well as different promotional tools.</p> <p>Based on the results of the conducted research, it is suggested that the commissioning company should focus actively on two social media channels (Facebook and a blog) and provide an additional channel for additional content (i.e. YouTube). In addition, it is suggested that pictures should pose as the prominent part of the uploaded content. Apart from these aspects, the company should portray personality through this chosen content as well as actively participate in social media. In addition, the company could utilize a guestbook as a mean of promotional tool. The final operational guideline combines all of these above mentioned factors together. It is suggested to invest in the modern technology, in this case a smartphone or a tablet, with which the company is able to perform more efficiently and effectively in social media.</p>	
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PREFACE

The process of developing, conducting as well as writing this thesis has been long and extensive. There have been certain challenges to overcome and certain barriers to conquer. However, there are few people I would like to thank for pushing me forward and motivating me to continue with this journey.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my mother who has been helping me, encouraging me as well as motivating me throughout this entire process. At any point when I felt like quitting, she reminded me what lies ahead: graduation and receiving my very first degree.

Another person to whom I would like to show my appreciation is my thesis supervisor. With her assistance, I was able to finish this thesis. She gave me a lot of good ideas, tips and advice all of which I would have not thought of myself.

Lastly, I would like to thank my class mates. For them being in the same situation as I was, they were able to familiarize with the situation and therefore, support, motivate as well as encourage me forward. In addition, this thesis culminates the four years I have spent with these people who I am proud to call my friends!

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1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is widely visible in the world of today. More and more people are creating accounts on Facebook and Twitter in order to maintain a relationship with friends and family as well as to follow celebrities within one's interest. Similarly, more and more people are utilizing blogs as a way of expressing feelings, frustrations and opinions. No longer can it be seen as a rarity when viewing a growing amount of businesses as well as corporations participating in social media. Furthermore, increasing number of consumers are utilizing social media as a channel to learn more about the different brands, products and services as well as to share experiences before, during and after the consumption of the products and services.

Due to this increasing level of social media utilization, the commissioning company – Zilivonkkelis Lp - has subscribed a research on the investigation of the different possibilities as well as advantages offered by social media. For being a small sized tourism business, Zilivonkkelis Lp has a potential to benefit from social media extensively. In addition, since social media is present as well as highly visible and apparent in today's society, it is not sensible or even advisable to refuse to participate, involve or engage in social media. Furthermore, in increasing number of cases, social media is a place in where the consumers as well as competitors are.

As a result, the thesis is aimed to examine these possibilities by attempting to provide the company with a development plan of the effective utilization of social media in order to better serve the company as well as the consumers. The thesis attempts to incorporate two aspects: the utilization of social media within the current consumers of the company as well as the utilization of social media within small sized companies in the tourism sector. By combining these two aspects, a set of operational guidelines is attempted to construct in order to assist the commissioning company to better harness social media for the efforts of better serving the company as well as the consumers.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Since the utilization of social media is the main interest within the thesis, social media as a phenomenon needs to be examined. Therefore, in this segment social media is introduced as well as defined, the most common social media channels classified and the importance of social media for small sized tourism businesses explained.

2.1 What is social media?

When discussing about social media, it is important to understand of what it actually consists. However, defining social media is not easy. One of the main characteristics of social media is being a global phenomenon (Scott & Jacka 2011, 38). Since social media is mainly located in the online world (i.e. the Internet), it has the opportunity to reach people around the entire world. In addition, social media can be characterized as a verb (Agresta & Bough 2010, 23). Rather than being a tangible object, social media is an affair which one performs and executes. In other words, social media is a method of communication where the consumer is not only receiving information, as he would be in the traditional media (e.g. TV, radio, print, etc.), but he is also sharing it (Agresta et al 2010, 23).

2.2 Importance of social media for small sized tourism companies

Social media plays an important role within the tourism industry. There are several reasons for this kind of statement. One of these reasons is that most of the tourism products are services which cannot be seen, touched or tested in advance. In other words, they are intangible goods which cannot be evaluated prior to consumption. Another reason is that the goods in the tourism industry can be classified as high-risk purchases which increases the importance of reference group evaluation in the decision making process. Thirdly, the tourism industry can be seen as a highly competitive domain in which the online interpersonal influence (i.e. word-of-mouth, references as well as recommendations) has an opportunity to provide a set of vital competitive advantages for a company. As a result, the importance of interpersonal influence is ought to increase as well as to become a vital component of the online social media marketing strategy. (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan 2007, 458.) It is worthwhile to state that social media provides a diversity of tools for the consumers to share their experiences after participating in the tourism services and therefore, decreasing the threshold for the co-consumers to engage in these tourism services as well.

Zilivonkkelis Lp is one of these tourism companies that can benefit from social media. For instance, it is a small family-owned business which operates in Suomussalmi (Zilivonkkelis 2013a). This might signify that the resources (i.e. money, time, personnel, etc.) for traditional marketing are limited as well as inadequate. In social media, however, this particular scarcity of resources might not be seen as an obstacle. Furthermore, the remote location of the company might affect the efforts of traditional marketing. This denotes that there might be a certain level of scarcity among services within the region. In addition, the co-operation as well as collaboration between different companies might not be possible.

In addition, Zilivonkkelis Lp offers sled-dog expeditions as well as excursions as part of their services. These tours include both short (e.g. one or two hours) as well as long (e.g. a half or a full day) outings. (Zilivonkkelis 2013a.) Apart from these tours, the company offers different camps as well as lectures during the weekends in the summer time for the dog enthusiasts. In addition, the company organizes hiking tours to the surrounding environment with the sled-dogs as well as familiarization visits to the kennels. (Zilivonkkelis 2013b.) Since the selection of services within the company is relatively diverse, one might argue that the selection of experiences can be seen vast as well. As stated earlier, the interpersonal influ-

ence among consumers is vital as well as crucial within the tourism industry (Litvin et al 2007, 458). Furthermore, these gained experiences assist the consumers of the company to share them further along to family and friends, which in return might increase the awareness as well as visibility of Zilivonkkelis Lp. As a result, social media has the opportunity to ease the process of experience sharing.

2.3 Typology of the most common social media channels

There are several ways to categorize the different social media channels. One of such manners is to divide them into social networking sites, blogging sites, review and rating sites, media sharing sites as well as forums and discussion sites. However, these mentioned categories are not an absolute or complete listing of the existing channels. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 157; 159-165.)

Three of these latter classifications are examined in the following chapters. These categorizations are the social networking sites, blogging sites as well as media sharing sites. These categories can be seen as the three most common as well as most vastly utilized sites within social media today. Therefore, they have been selected for closer examination.

2.3.1 Social networking sites

The main idea behind the social networking sites is to be connected with the people around oneself. This can be executed by creating a friend base with which one can share information in several different forms (e.g. videos, articles, links, games, etc.). There are some advantages for companies who decide to utilize these channels. For instance, companies have an excellent opportunity to increase their online reputation as well as the exposure of their business. In other words, the created profile page of a company within the social networking sites provide a chance to monitor the conversations as well as the thoughts and opinions of the consumers about the company, learn more about the consumers and offer them valuable content in return. Facebook, Google+ as well as LinkedIn are examples of these kinds of social networking sites all of which are examined next. (Ryan et al 2009, 162-163.)

Facebook

Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. According to Facebook (2013), their mission is “to make the world more open and connected”. In other words, Facebook is a tool with which one can share his life with family and friends as well as stay connected to

them. In addition, it enables the user to learn more about the affairs of the world as well as to share and manifest the subjects and issues in which he is interested. (Facebook 2013a.)

As an individual, the user can create a profile in which he can post status updates as well as pictures and videos of his choice. Should the user wish to generate a group, he can set up a group page and operate it as the administrator of the page. For this reason, he is able to either keep the membership open for everybody or maintain it as a private and an invitation or a request of membership only. Third page category is a fan page. This is very similar to the profile since it is operated by a managing person who posts comments, links or pictures. The page will have fans who like the page and therefore, follow it. All the posts on the fan page will show up on the wall of the followers. This method of handling a Facebook account is the most suitable for companies, of all sizes. (Agresta et al 2010, 214.)

There are four categories into which these different fan pages can be classified. These are brands, services, people and stuff. The brand category includes, for instance, products, websites and sport teams whereas the services category includes different organizations, stores, restaurants or hotels. For the people category, one can classify politicians, government officials or celebrities into. The stuff category, on the other hand, includes music, series, movies and games. (Zarrella & Zarrella 2011, 41.)

Google+

Google+ is a social media channel in where the user has an opportunity to share as well as receive updates and posts from real people (Google+ 2013a). In addition, it offers a chance for the user to participate in conversations with people who share similar values, interests as well as standards (Google+ 2013b). For businesses, on the other hand, Google+ provides an opportunity to bond with the customers by sharing thoughts, links, photographs as well as advertisements. In addition, it offers certain tools for companies to incorporate the consumers into the conversations, to begin a video conference with them as well as to create and maintain a set of different circles of customers based on their interests. (Google+ 2013c.)

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional network founded in 2002 which assists its users to be more connected with the diversity of professionals around the world in order to construct the users to be more successful as well as productive in their lives. This denotes that the users have an opportunity to access the variety of content within LinkedIn. This content includes, for instance, people, jobs, news, updates as well as insights to the professional world. (LinkedIn 2013a.)

For companies, LinkedIn provides an opportunity to locate colleagues within the industry in question as well as to maintain a relationship with them. Apart from this, LinkedIn offers for companies a chance to discover new insights as well as novel ideas for future business opportunities. In addition, it provides an opportunity to share as well as receive advice from the colleagues and other professionals within the network. (LinkedIn 2013b.)

2.3.2 Media sharing sites

Media sharing sites allow their members to upload and share photographs and videos as well as comment and discuss about them. However, there are also a set of alternative media sites which provide a tool to upload, share and discuss about other kinds of media, such as presentation slides. All of these media sharing sites – nonetheless - offer for their users an ideal and idyllic mode for a rapid distribution of the digital media content. In addition, they provide an opportunity to obtain insights about the preferences (i.e. the likes and dislikes) of the consumers by analyzing the popularity of the items. (Ryan et al 2009, 160.) YouTube, Flickr and Instagram are all media sharing sites. They are examined next.

YouTube

YouTube is a media sharing site in which the user may keep in touch, inform as well as inspire other users around the world (YouTube 2013a). Within YouTube, the user has an opportunity to share, watch, discover as well as comment on different kinds of content, mainly videos (YouTube 2013b). However, there are certain guidelines on how the content can be constructed. For instance, the videos which are uploaded cannot be shocking, pornographic,

mean, disrespectful or hostile. Instead, the user should act as part of the community by having fun, sharing opinions and thoughts as well as searching videos of issues that interests as well as inspires him. (YouTube 2013c.)

Flickr

According to Flickr (2013), the site has two main goals for the online photograph management and sharing process. One of these goals is to assist the user to make his photographs available for people who matter to them. The other goal is to provide novel tools on how to organize as well as arrange these photographs and videos. For companies, Flickr can provide a social media channel through which they are able to sell as well as promote the business by sharing photographs of the location, the operations as well as the activities.

Instagram

Instagram is another media sharing site which assists the user to share pictures as well as images of his choice. This particular channel incorporates two main characteristics; instant images with the possibility to telegram. This denotes that the user is able to snap a picture with the application on the phone no matter the location or time (i.e. instant) and afterwards, share it with others (i.e. telegram). For companies, the utilization of Instagram might be slightly challenging since it requires an application which can be downloaded for free from the Apple App store or Google Play store. (Instagram 2013.) In other words, this would require the company to invest on a smart phone or a similar device in order to be fully equipped to utilize this particular social media channel.

2.3.3 Blogging sites

Blogging sites can be divided into two different classifications; blogs as well as micro-blogging sites. Blogs are channels through which one can report about local news, offer own opinions, share experiences as well as dissolve frustrations or distribute passions. In return, the other bloggers might read the writings, comment on them or follow them loyally. For companies, however, the blogs offer an opportunity to reach out to the consumers as well as

to build connections as well as relationships with them. In other words, it enables a company to create a personal and unique voice for their business. In addition, it provides a channel for the consumers to acquire additional information about the company as well as to get answers to troublesome questions. (Ryan et al 2009, 164-165.)

Micro-blogging sites, such as Twitter, on the other hand, are sites where the communication as well as the interaction is nurtured via short messages up to 160 characters. One of the reasons a company should engage to the micro-blogging sites is the opportunity to communicate with the consumers. These sites offer an alternative communication tool to the cluttered and full e-mail inboxes. In addition, the participation within these sites has the potential to improve the online exposure of a company since they are entering in front of the audience and solidifying their expertise among the community. In order to achieve this goal, the company must assist, learn as well as listen to the consumers by answering questions, providing interesting content (e.g. news, advice, etc.) as well as directing the followers to useful and related blog posts and articles. (Ryan et al 2009, 166-167.)

Blogs

A blog can be described as a personal journal. In other words, it is a website on which one can constantly write and post articles and texts as well as pictures or videos. The readers and followers of the blogs have then the opportunity to comment on these texts, create links as well as send e-mails to the blogger. There are millions of different kinds of blogs which means that one can create a unique as well as a personal blog. In other words, there are no rules or limitations regarding the design and layout of the blogs. (Blogger 2013.)

Twitter

According to Twitter (2013), Twitter is a network which functions in real time. It is also called and titled in some occasions as a micro blogging forum since it combines together conversation channels and blogs, e-mails as well as instant messages (Haavisto 2009, 6). It is said to be a channel with which one can find “the most recent stories, ideas, opinions and news about the subjects all of which the follower is interested in”. It is up to the consumer to find the most intriguing as well as interesting accounts and afterwards follow the conversations. Should the consumer decide to participate in the conversations he is most keen

about, he has the ability to write short messages, which are called tweets. These messages can only be 140 characters long. However, these tweets can include pictures, videos, links as well as written messages. (Twitter 2013.)

For businesses, Twitter offers an opportunity to create, for example, different campaigns, increase the awareness of the products and services as well as to maintain relationships of communication with the consumers. In addition, the companies cannot afford to stay away from Twitter. This is for the mere reason that consumers – as well as competitors – are both utilizing Twitter. (Haavisto 2009, 43.)

2.4 Two common characteristics of communication within social media

The communication in social media has certain characteristics which are worthwhile to acknowledge as well as recognize. Two of these characteristics – interaction and communality - are examined within this chapter.

2.4.1 Interaction

Being an interactive medium is one of the main characteristics of social media (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 38.) Moreover, since social media is an interactive medium, it requires certain standards of operations. One of these operations is giving space. This means that the given text, whether it is a question, an opinion or a simple thought, should be written in a brief and concise manner. Should the writing be too long and overwhelming, the readers might lose an interest in the subject since they have no space to process the information or consider the text. (Kortesuo et al 2011, 44.)

Another standard of operation is related to the actual writing style. This signifies that the produced text should not be imperfect or incomplete. To avoid confusion, this does not mean that the writing style should be sloppy, negligent or careless. It implies that the text should not be perfect and all-inclusive in a sense that it contains no room for thoughts, opinions or answers. In other words, it is hard for the readers and followers to add any comments to this kind of writing style. (Kortesuo et al 2011, 44.)

A third operation to take into consideration when being interactive in social media is to be provocative. It is advisable to provoke the conversations, merely by teasing the participants. However, this should not be executed with an angry or aggressive manner so that the reader would not perceive the text as insulting or upsetting. A fourth aspect is to focus the stated question to one particular person. One reason to act in this way is to activate the participants within the conversation. It is researched that the inquired and asked questions rarely remain unanswered. In addition, collective questions should not be asked. In this kind of questions, it is normal for the participants to wait for the others to provide an answer to the stated question rather than answering it by themselves. (Kortesuo et al 2011, 45.)

One of the common mistakes in social media texting is to utilize a corporal language (i.e. jargon). This means that the company in question is producing text with a high number of professional words and phrases which are unfamiliar to an average reader. Therefore, it is advisable to use easy language which is understandable to all kinds of readers. The final standard of operation in social media is to provide the readers with a quick answer. Should the participant receive a rapid reply to his comment or question, illustrates that the company values his opinion and is interested in him. Prolonging the reply is a definite eradicator of the conversation. (Kortesuo et al 2011, 47.) To conclude, all of these aspects assist the user of social media to be interactive in the conversations.

2.4.2 Communalinity

Apart from being an interactive medium, social media is a community. This signifies that the entire content within social media is produced mainly by the users and operators. This process, thereafter, creates a sense of community. In addition, the produced content is important as well as significant for the advocates of social media since each one of the participants of the content creation bring an additional meaning to the content from their own point of view. The main purpose is to gather different kind of information from a variety of users with different topics and subjects. In this sense, the function of community is the process of creating content together as a community. (Korpi 2010, 6.)

One of the tools social media provides for its advocates is the possibility to comment as well as remark the content produced by the co-users. Furthermore, this specific opportunity to respond might increase the sense of communalinity since it enhances the feeling of performing as well as acting together. For the companies, however, this communalinity can be further explored as well as exploited by focusing on the User Generated Content (UGC). This can be implemented by creating a competition or any kind of similar event where the users as well as operators are asked, for example, to share a picture of themselves with the product or service of the business. Once uploaded, the co-producers of the social media have the opportunity to comment, like or further distribute this picture. This process of participation increases the sense of belonging and, therefore the sense of communalinity. (Korpi 2010, 6; 19.)

3 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

In this segment, social media is examined as a communication channel. It is evident from the previous chapter that social media is an interactive medium. In addition, as being interactive, social media incorporates communication. Furthermore, the communication within social media provides an opportunity for a company to communicate about the products and services of the company as well as the company in general. Apart from this, it allows the company to communicate with the consumers as well as other professionals within the industry in order to gain insights, opinions, thoughts, advice, support as well as guidance. Therefore, in the following chapter social media is being examined from this point of view.

3.1 Social media as a phenomenon

In social media, there are certain trends that can be detected. For example, social media can be seen as an environment in where a company can better connect, communicate as well as crane with consumers. Therefore, social media can be depicted as a customer service channel which provides an additional mean of better serving the consumers (Kortesuo et al 2011, 21). This can be executed by listening as well as observing the conversations among the consumers in social media. In addition, it is worthwhile to include the consumers into the developing process of the offerings of a company. Furthermore, the received feedback should be incorporated with the daily operations of a company. (Kortesuo et al 2011, 21.)

In relation to the above situation, another trend of social media is that it has an opportunity to provide a vast selection of novel routes and opportunities for a company to better communicate with the audience (Brown 2009, 21) as well as to highlight the existence of the company. Similarly, social media has influenced the consumer behaviour (Ryan et al 2009, 15). One of these influences is that consumers have transformed from mere consumers into “prosumers”. This denotes that online consumers have influenced the shift in power from the producers to consumers by getting involved into the development process of products and services. (Ryan et al 2009, 16.)

3.2 SWOT analysis of social media communication

SWOT analysis in general analyses a current situation of a company. It is designed to evaluate the overall strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) and threats (T) of a company. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008, 52.) These are the features from which the analysis is conducted. In addition, the strengths and weaknesses are part of the internal environment of the company whereas the opportunities and threats are part of the external surroundings (Kotler et al 2008, 53). When considering these aspects from the point of view of positive and negative, the strengths and opportunities are commonly seen as positive aspects of the analysis, whereas the weaknesses and threats are seen as negative aspects (Kotler et al 2008, 53).

Since social media is a global phenomenon (Scott et al 2011, 38) rather than a company with managers, employees and customers, the common aspects of SWOT analysis cannot be examined within social media. Certainly, the following analysis can attempt to review the different internal competencies and capabilities of social media, all of which it offers for companies within their communication efforts. In addition, it can attempt to scan the external properties of social media, mainly the customers operating within social media. With the assistance of these two aspects, the analysis of the internal strengths and weaknesses as well as the external opportunities and threats can be executed.

3.2.1 Strengths

One of the inner strengths of social media is its easiness as well as fastness. These two factors are interrelated to the information sharing process. In other words, social media enables the user (e.g. companies, individuals, groups, etc.) to create, distribute as well as comment any kind of content and information within social media. In addition, the user is able to syndicate the content across multiple channels simultaneously. For this reason, social media can be seen as one of the most powerful mediums of our time. (Agresta et al 2010, 26.) On the other hand, the fastness as well as easiness of social media can be seen in relation to availability. This denotes that all of the social media channels are within the reach of the advocate whenever he has an access to the Internet. Therefore, in the technological world of today, it can be stated that the utilization of social media is not dependent on time or location. (Leino 2010, 136.)

Social media can be seen as an interactive medium (Kortesuo et al 2011, 38). Therefore, all of the users have an opportunity to obtain new ideas and thoughts and gain fresh and current information from each other as well as share and acquire different opinions (Säteri 2011, 3). Similarly, the communality of social media can be seen as an advantage. The members of a particular community within a social media channel (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) have an opportunity to exchange thoughts as well as opinions about a variety of issues. In addition, they can express themselves as well as their personality through the social media communities. (Leino 2010, 136.) For companies, on the other hand, this creates an additional opportunity to measure the actions as well as the needs and wishes of the consumers by exploring and analyzing the discussions about the business as well as the information sharing process of opinions and thoughts about the offerings provided by the company. This might provide beneficial knowledge for the future development of the products and services. (Leino 2010, 136.)

Apart from these aspects, there are several opportunities for companies within social media all of which can be seen as strengths. For example, building networks as well as increasing the visibility as well as availability of the company can be classified into these opportunities. In addition, social media has a chance to provide novel communication channels for businesses as well as possibilities to gather feedback from the consumers and to gain better image of them by creating and developing a customer profile base. (Säteri 2011, 4.)

3.2.2 Weaknesses

One of weaknesses of social media is the lack of control. It can be stated that social media is overly vast as well as wide to fully maintain the control and order when promoting the preferred and desired message of a company. (Agresta et al 2010, 29.) Since social media can be seen as a community (Korpi 2010, 6), it is reasonable to state that the members of this particular community have a desire to communicate with each other as well as share their different experiences of life. No company can deny this fundamental right from the members of the community. Therefore, the level of control diminishes as well as weakens.

Another reason for the lack of control could be the increased time people spend online in today's world. For this reason, they are less likely to come across with written or heard ad-

vertisements in where a company is able to portray a desired message without an undesired interpretation by the consumers. (Agresta et al 2010, 29.) In addition, the negative publicity of a company might increase due to the growth in time spend online (Säteri 2011, 4). In other words, the consumer has more time to express his frustrations as well as inadequate experiences with a certain business. In addition, social media provides a vast selection of different channels and tools with which the disappointed consumer can share the opinions as well as thoughts and views.

Other challenges social media provides for the companies might be the possible damages to the image of the company or the possible leaks of sensitive information of the operations of the business. In addition, social media can be relatively unpredictable and fickle (Säteri 2011, 4). All of these aspects should be recognized as well as acknowledged when taking a decision to participate in social media.

3.2.3 Opportunities

According to Dalene and Pete Heck (2013), 92 % of consumers state to trust the earned media - which includes aspects such as word-of-mouth as well as recommendations from family and friends – more than the other forms of advertising. In addition, the online reviews are stated to be trusted as a form of advertising by 70 % of consumers. (Heck & Heck 2013, 5.) Based on these figures, one might argue that social media is perceived to be one of the most popular means of information seeking when determining the decisions to consume. This can be reasoned with the fact that social media is widely being utilized to share and distribute personal experiences. Furthermore, these experiences might assist the readers as well as the followers of social media to better comprehend the products and services which are being depicted. However, one must bear in mind that these perceptions are individual as well as subjective which, therefore, might lead the reader into inadequate conclusions.

The decision making process of consumers can be divided into four stages; awareness, interest, desire and action (Korpi 2010, 98). Within all of the latter stages social media has an important role. For example, a certain product or service enters into the conscious awareness of a consumer when he first takes a notice of the product or service (Korpi 2010, 101). This

process can either occur by accident or due to a purposeful search. By actively communicating and promoting the product or service of a company, especially in social media, as well as enthusiastically performing within it, the company has an opportunity to increase the awareness of the consumers and therefore, influence the further stages of the decision making process. Furthermore, within the interest and desire stages the consumer begins to investigate, compare as well as further examine the different possibilities among desired products and services. In this case, the opinions of the co-consumers within social media might be essential. For example, when considering a possible purchase, the consumer might rely on these comments as a recommendation as well as endorsement. Similarly, once purchasing and consuming the product or service, the current consumer might have a need to share this particular experience with others. (Korpi 2010, 102-103.) In addition, social media provides an excellent opportunity for the consumers to execute this desire.

Social media channels are utilized among consumers for various reasons. According to the annual Social Media Report (2012) by Nielsen, 70 % of social media users participate in hearing the experiences of others, 65 % learn more about different brands, products and services, 53 % compliment brands, 50 % express concerns and complaints about brands and services and 47 % share money incentives. These figures should be seen as an opportunity for the companies to develop their communication channels to better represent and reflect the needs of the consumers. For example, it could be advisable to have one social media channel in where the consumers could share their experiences, no matter the nature of them (i.e. negative or positive). In addition, it could be suitable to have one social media channel in where the consumers could acquire more additional information about the company apart from the knowledge gained from the official web pages.

3.2.4 Threats

One of the threats a company might face in social media is the transition of power from the company to the consumers. This denotes that a company should place the consumers in the centre of an attention and consideration since the consumers begin to possess more power as well as to hold more authority. (Säteri 2011, 3.) In order to be able to merge into this particular alteration within the structure of power, the company should interact directly with the consumers. In addition, the company should gather as much information about the con-

sumers as possible in order to be able to tailor the offerings of the company to be more suitable for the needs and desires of the consumers. Another important aspect is to listen to the consumers carefully by focusing on the feedback as well as the online conversations. With these tools, the company can better understand the consumers as well as adapt to the changing pattern of power. (Agresta et al 2010, 30-31.)

There are two generations among the consumers; the generations Y and X. The generation Y represents the young adults who have born and grown during the so called Information Age. The generation X, on the other hand, represents the ageing population. (Jones & Fox 2009, 3.) In addition, there are certain differences between the utilization of social media among these two generations. The younger generation is more likely to seek entertainment through different videos, online games and virtual worlds. Moreover, they are more likely to, for instance, read and write blogs as well as to utilize social networking sites by creating and maintaining a profile. However, this particular utilization of social networking sites can be better described as maintaining a relationship with family and friends as well as communicating with them through instant messages. The generation X, on the other hand, utilizes social media – and the Internet in general – for searching information, emailing as well as buying products. In addition, they are keener to search information about health, religion as well as governmental issues. (Jones et al 2009, 7-8.)

According to the statistical centre of Finland (2013), the distribution of ages among the population of Finland is in the shape of gyrostat. This signifies that there are relatively less people among the two extreme ages; the young and the old. Furthermore, the main focus of ages, in the end of 2011, is in between of these two extremities. In relation to the utilization of social media, this age distribution may cause certain limitations and hardships for companies within social media. Since the majority of the population is within the generation X, the utilization of social media is in minority. In addition, this particular generation is, in most cases, the decision maker of the family whereas the younger generation have the role of riding along. However, the companies in social media should consider changing their promotional and communicative motives and goals to better suit the interests and comforts of the younger generation in order to influence the decision making of the adults, to some extent.

3.3 Most common misconceptions of social media

Social media communication involves many misconceptions among companies (Scott et al 2011, 46). One of the most fundamental misunderstandings is the cheapness of social media. Even though the cost of entry to the world of social media is relatively low (i.e. completely free), it does not erase the fact that it consumes other resources. It deprives time as well as effort both of which a small company might not possess. In addition, it requires a large amount of content creation, ideas and opinions. (Scott et al 2011, 48.) This process can be quite stressful and demanding as well as time consuming.

Another misconception among companies in social media is the longevity of social media participation efforts (Scott et al 2011, 46). The main goal of social media communication is to build consistent and long-lasting relationships with the consumers. Therefore, it is not enough to merely create an account, a page or a blog within the social media channels. It is vitally important to be engaged as well as involved in these channels by producing content.

Thirdly, the social media participation is labour-intensive. This signifies that the most critical component of involvement efforts is an adequate strategy (e.g. how to be active, how to operate, how to communicate, etc.) rather than the different tools and channels of social media. (Scott et al 2011, 46.) In other words, it denotes that social media obliges engagement, involvement, sustainability as well as perseverance from the company operating within it.

To conclude, social media communication as well as participation does not produce instant results with little resources. It requires a relatively large amount of endeavor and aspiration as well as commitment. In addition, the phenomenon of social media is not merely a passing fad. Apart from existing, social media has the chance to develop as well as expand in the future. Furthermore, the efforts of social media participation should not be outsourced. This signifies that a company should not hire an outside company (i.e. an advertising agency) to maintain the utilization of social media since the desired message of the company can be best explained by the company itself. (Agresta et al 2010, 64.)

3.4 Basic behavioral patterns in social media communication

Whatever social media channel might be utilized by a company, it needs to be fostered as well as looked after. It requires commitment and constant maintenance. It is expected by the followers to have regular announcements, broadcasts as well as company updates. It is also advisable to post information about the upcoming events, special offers and promotions. (Agresta et al 2010, 215.) Therefore, it can be stated that social media participation requires and incorporates certain guidelines of action and performance. These guidelines are examined in the following chapters.

3.4.1 Norms and standards

There are certain norms for the user of social media to follow. Firstly, being real, relevant and valuable is important within social media. It is anticipated from the administrator of the account to display himself fully to the public without hiding or concealing anything. This includes speaking directly about oneself and/or the company that one is representing. One should not be afraid to show all the different aspects of life as well as the business. Another vital rule for the user is not to be “a hit-and-run conversationalist”. This means that once the conversation has been started, one should not drop out from it. Yet again, it is all about the commitment not only to the account but to the followers and advocates as well. (Agresta et al 2010, 221.)

Thirdly, it is appreciated to be transparent as well as open-minded. It is recommended to utilize all the various tools among the social media channels comprehensively in order to tell about oneself. For example, it should be endorsed to utilize the tools to customize even the background of the different accounts. (Agresta et al 2010, 193.) In addition, it is important to have an avatar (i.e. a profile picture). Should one decide not to utilize an avatar, this might communicate to the followers that one has no true interest in the account. (Haavisto 2009, 38.) In other words, the user should show his personality not only through the words and writings but also through the design as well as the profile picture of the account.

In addition, the administrator of the account should generate an interesting voice for himself (Agresta et al 2010, 194). This means that one needs to be present as well as an active user of

the account. For this reason, it is worthwhile to avoid the instant, automated messages. Instead of this, one should take the time and effort to personally write the messages. Finally, one of the most vital and essential part of social media is to build a community. This process comprises the procedure of seeking individuals who share the same values and interests as oneself. (Agresta et al 2010, 194.) However, the user should keep in mind when seeking for followers that the amount of advocates is rather insignificant. It is not necessary to add followers in the hope of receiving new ones. The most beneficial practice is to be active and add other users with prudence. (Haavisto 2009, 40-41.) In addition, it is important to engage in a dialogue with these individuals as well as actively follow them and their conversations with others (Agresta et al 2010, 194).

3.4.2 Behavioral manners to avoid irritation among followers

There are number of behavioral manners which irritate as well as antagonize the followers and advocates. Firstly, even though it is desirable for the administrator of the account to fully display him in front of the followers, as mentioned earlier, it is not desirable for the followers to read posts and status updates which narrate the smallest and tiniest details of the life of the writer (e.g. what he had for breakfast, where he is heading at that particular moment, etc.). This also relates to the administrators who share excessively about their private lives. (Haasio 2009, 63.)

Adversely, the persons who do not share a single detail of their lives but follow others extensively can similarly raise irritation among the advocates. Another behavioral manner which irritates the followers is a user who gathers a hundred-headed crowd of friends half of which he does not know personally. In addition, the followers do not appreciate the constant requests for different applications (e.g. tests, games, etc.). Furthermore, they do not value a user who adds relentlessly links to the shocking news of the day. (Haasio 2009, 63.)

Similarly, posts as well as status updates that are meant to harvest pity and attention are not highly valued among the followers. In addition, should the user decide to upload pictures or photos of others, he should ask permission from the person in question in order to avoid irritation among the advocates. Finally, the writer of the posts and status updates should be extremely careful with his grammar since the mistakes and errors in spelling and grammar is

another manner that annoys the fellow users and followers. (Haasio 2009, 63.) In order to act as well as behave efficiently and effectively in social media, a company should take a notice of these aspects of behavioral manners.

3.4.3 Goals of content creation

It is advisable for the administrator of the account to take an interest in the content he produces for the account since it is an effective and easy manner of differentiating one from the competitors as well as keeping the followers engaged and entertained (Zarrella et al 2011, 151; 153). First stage is to establish certain goals for the uploaded content. The setting of these goals depends on the needs and wishes of the user. The desire of engaging the existing followers, attracting new advocates or selling the products and services offered by the business should be incorporated into the content. In addition, these goals influence the frequency as well as the topics and subjects of the posts and updates. (Zarrella et al 2011, 155.)

3.4.4 Frequency of posts and updates

Most followers in social media expect to read a post from the writer of the account at least once a day. Certainly, there are persons who prefer higher amount of updates as well as persons who prefer lower amount of updates. However, the advantage of posting relatively frequently is that a bigger audience of users has an opportunity to receive it in their newsfeed. In addition, it is advisable to consider the time differences as well as the behavioral patterns of the writer. For instance, the administrator should ponder and observe the most appropriate time for the posts (e.g. in the morning, afternoon or early evening, etc.) in order to reach a larger amount of viewers. In relation to the behavioral patterns of the writer, one should reflect on the use of language as well as the manner with which one handles a subject. (Zarrella et al 2011, 157.)

Should one decide to post an update once a day, it denotes that one should be able to create and produce a relatively large amount of content per week. Therefore, the user should develop a content strategy. This signifies that the topics as well as subjects and content patterns should be maintained standard and united. As a result, the followers know what to ex-

pect each week - or even each day – which preserve their interest as well as engagement to the account. (Zarrella et al 2011, 159.) In order to retain the standard topics and patterns, one should consider utilizing a content calendar. The main purpose of this calendar is to illustrate the days of the week one should add novel content for the followers. In addition, it assists the writer to keep a record of the previous posts in order to prevent repetition. (Zarrella et al 2011, 161.)

3.4.5 Opportunities in social media to foster relationships

Creating networks is an important part of social media. The social media channels allow the user to build as well as maintain relationships with the other professionals of the industry. (Haavisto 2009, 48.) One of the advantages of this particular feature is the possibility to learn from others as well as gain new perspectives and ideas for the future posts for the followers. In addition, once the company has established an active and working account, it is advisable to promote it (Haavisto 2009, 49). By performing this, the company increases its awareness among the followers as well as provides the entire content of the account open and accessible to all. This can be executed by adding a link of the account to the company website as well as to the business cards, brochures and other distribution channels (Haavisto 2009, 49).

For the businesses and companies seeking to increase the awareness as well as the responsiveness of the consumers and to build long lasting relationships with the consumers it is advisable to take certain guidelines into consideration. Social media offers a fine opportunity to awaken the interest of the consumers by posting variety of offers, competitions and virtual coupons or by organizing a lottery among the followers (Haavisto 2009, 45). Another key issue is to provide the consumers with additional information, preferably without requiring for it. This kind of information can include, for example, specific tips, jokes or recipes related to the industry or profession. Should the company develop a new product or service, new websites or even transfer to a new location, it should inform and notify the followers about these issues. With this procedure, the company can create supplementary value for the customers. (Haavisto 2009, 46.) As a result, the customers might sense the caring and effort the company is attempting to deliver.

Through the different social media channels, the company has a desirable opportunity to monitor the conversations carried out upon the company. In addition, the company has a chance to react promptly to these conversations. Should the followers possess a negative feedback or a certain problem, the company can offer assistance, support as well as solutions to these particular issues. It is also vital to take the constructive criticism into account while analyzing the conversations. It is fairly possible that the consumers have opinions, thoughts as well as feelings about the products and services as well as about the development opportunities. Therefore, it is essential to listen to and learn from these conversations and afterwards, like discussed above, inform the customers about the successful development process or the possible failure within the development practice. (Haavisto 2009, 47.)

3.5 Reputation management in social media

There is a fair chance that the feedback a company receives over social media, with all the opinions, thoughts and ideas of improvement as well as the views of development, is not invariably positive. This might be due to a genuine complaint, a simple misinterpretation or even a deliberate rumor (Ryan et al 2009, 194). No matter the situation, the company should react quickly in order to minimize the damage of this sort of criticism. In many cases the issue is the lack of response, or an inappropriate response, rather than the negative statement itself. However, there are certain affairs one can take into account when dealing with and addressing these negative responses. (Ryan et al 2009, 194.) Some of these affairs will be examined next.

Before diving fully into the conversation of the negative feedback, the administrator should investigate the statement a little further. It is advisable to define whether the proclamation is indeed a legitimate concern or a malicious gossip or even a simple misunderstanding. By defining this, the user can create a plan of action on how to deal with the issue. Once this background check is completed, the user may participate in the conversation. However, it is desirable to engage positively. This denotes that the user should not hide the truth, especially if a mistake has taken place due to the actions of the company. It is more beneficial to be honest, open as well as forthcoming about the issue. (Ryan et al 2009, 194.)

Moreover, should the negative feedback be inflicted by a misunderstanding, it is important to illuminate all the facts and different aspects of the situation in order to assist the other members of the community building their own opinions about the matter in hand. In addition, being professional as well as courteous is advisable. When presenting comments and reclamations, a person might be offended or slightly upset. Therefore, it is vital to keep calm as well as to be professional and respectful. One should avoid overacting. Instead, it is desirable to bear in mind that the received feedback can turn out to be more beneficial as well as valuable in the future as one might have believed at that particular moment. (Ryan et al 2009, 195.)

Another affair one should consider when addressing negative feedback, is to add additional as well as supporting information about the issue to the company website. In addition, it could be advantageous to link this supplementary information to the original conversation in

order to provide all the aspects and issues relating to the matter. Finally, should the feedback be malicious and spiteful intentionally, one should encounter it regardless. One might need to ask the writer to remove the offending statement or clarify the remarks. Should none of these actions gain results, one might need to consider legal proceedings. (Ryan et al 2009, 195.)

4 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

The thesis is commissioned by Zilivonkkelis LP. When commissioned the thesis, the company were keen to explore the different means of social media which could be then further utilized in the marketing efforts of the company. Therefore, the main research problem of the thesis evolved to be the development of the utilization as well as the consumption of social media within the company. In general, the thesis aims to provide the company with a set of different tools in order to operate effectively within social media for the purpose of better serving the company as well as the customers.

The main research problem is bilateral. On one hand, the thesis aims at discovering the most common habits of social media utilization among the current customers by ducting a survey (i.e. a questionnaire). On the other hand, it aspires to determine the most effective as well as useful methods of performance. This is examined by benchmarking few companies which are similar to Zilivonkkelis LP and which are utilizing social media with competence. Both of these approaches will be examined in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaire is a tool with which material can be aggregated in a scientific research. This particular tool is incorporated within quantitative research methods which aim to gather quantifiable information for the matter under investigation. In addition, questionnaire can be characterised as a standardized method which signifies that the questions and inquiries are presented identically to each respondent. Apart from this characteristic, questionnaire is answered by a target group which constitutes as a sample of a wider group. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 191; 193.) In relation to the research in the thesis, the target group of the conducted questionnaire is the current consumers of Zilivonkkelis Lp.

Certainly, questionnaire has certain advantages within a research. One of these advantages is the ability to gather a vast and wide research material. In addition, questionnaire is an efficient method with which the researcher is able to economize the time as well as the effort consumed within the research. With the assistance of modern technology, the responses can

be easily transferred to a special programme for further examination and analysis. (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 195.) For these reasons, questionnaire is chosen to be one of the research methods in the thesis.

However, questionnaire has certain disadvantages as well. One of these hindrances is the uncertainty of the honesty and integrity of the respondents. It cannot be known for certain whether the respondents have answered the questions in the questionnaire truthfully and carefully with a thought. In addition, it is challenging to control the level of misunderstanding within the respondents in regard to the questions within the questionnaire. (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 195.)

As part of the research problem, a questionnaire is conducted. Like mentioned earlier, the questionnaire is directed to the current customers of the commissioning company. Furthermore, the main purpose of this executed questionnaire is to examine the utilization of social media within the current consumers as well as their utilization of social media in the acquisition of information about the company.

The questionnaire encompasses 13 questions, three of which are open-ended questions. In addition, it is divided into three sections: the background information, the acquisition of information and the use of social media. In the first segment (i.e. the background information), the main aim is to elicit the demographics of the current customers. This incorporates the gender, age as well as the home town of the customers. The significance of the second segment of the questionnaire - the acquisition of the information - is to examine from where the current customers have obtained the information about the existence of the company. The main interest is to examine whether the information has been acquired from the traditional marketing channels, such as magazines, newspapers, brochures or tourism information centres or from social media.

In the final section (i.e. the use of social media), the customers are asked to reveal their habits as well as behaviours within social media. This includes questions about the utilized social media channels, the activeness of the customers within social media as well as the knowledge and interpretation about the existing methods of social media channels utilized by the company. The complete design of the questionnaire is depicted in Appendix 1 (in Finnish) and Appendix 2 (in English).

The questionnaire is placed in the premises of Zilivonkkelis Lp. This denotes that once the customers are within the company grounds, they have a chance to participate in the survey by answering the questionnaire and returning it to the owner. One of the reasons is to have the questionnaires within the grasp of the customers in the hope of increasing the motivation to answer them. Another reason is to ease the answering process by providing ready printed leaflets which can be perceived to be easier for the customers to answer. In addition, the questionnaire has merely two pages with a majority of multiple choice questions which can also be seen as a easing factor in the answering process.

The questionnaires are in place from 25th of February until 15th of April. This signifies that the questionnaires are in place for seven weeks. These weeks include two of the national winter break weeks as well as the Easter holidays.

4.2 Benchmarking analysis

Another method of research conducted in the thesis is a benchmarking analysis. For this investigation, two different companies have been selected from the tourism sector. Both of these companies are relatively similar to the commissioning company through size, location and resources. This denotes that the companies are situated in a rural area and the ownership is limited to one or few people. Moreover, the main purpose of the benchmarking analysis is to analyse the utilization of social media within these businesses as well as to build a development plan on how to behave, act and perform in order to best serve the company as well as the consumers.

Furthermore, the benchmarking analysis is divided into two different methods. One of these methods is an interview which is conducted with the companies via e-mail. The other method is an observation analysis in which the different social media channels utilized by these two companies are being examined through the Internet. Both of these methods are further explained in the following chapters.

4.2.1 Electronic interview with the companies

Interview, in general, can be classified into the qualitative research methods (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 205). This signifies that rather than gathering quantifiable information, an interview seeks to gather more detailed, elaborate and in-depth material. One of the assets of interviews is the ability to control as well as regulate the information gathered by directing the respondents throughout the interview (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 205). This process is in place since interview can be seen as a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 207).

On the other hand, conducting an interview, which occurs face-to-face, consumes relatively large amount of time. Moreover, the interviewer is required to possess a certain amount of expertise when engaging in the role of an interviewer. In addition, the interviewee might cave in for socially acceptable answers. This denotes that the respondent might wish to present himself as a good citizen or as a civilized and cultural person and therefore, influence the results of the research. (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 205-206.)

However, interviews can be classified into three different categories: structured interview, theme interview and open interview (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 208-209). From these three categories, a structured interview is chosen as another research method in the thesis. In general, a structured interview incorporates a form which includes a set of questions all of which are predestined (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 208). This denotes that the order of the questions is decided beforehand and the questions are presented in that particular order (Hirsijärvi et al 2009, 208).

This particular form of interview, on the other hand, is altered in the thesis to represent an electronic interview which is conducted through e-mail. With the assistance of this kind of interview, a more objective image of the utilization of social media within these two companies in question is compiled and assembled. The main interest is to clarify the process of involvement and engagement in social media, the utilization of resources for the creation of content (e.g. how, who, when, where, etc.) as well as the effects and outcomes of the participation in social media.

Like mentioned earlier, the questions within the interview are sent to the companies via e-mail. The executed interview is mainly in the form of a separate document which is handed to the companies within an e-mail. This document includes an introduction to the research conveyed in the thesis as well as an explanation of the structure of the interview. Apart from these, the actual interview questions are listed in the document. In addition, after each question there is a section for the answers. This is clearly marked in the document.

When examined the questions within the interview, one can state that there are 14 short questions which are further divided into three segments. These segments are the cause and effect, the utilization as well as the participation. Within the first segment – cause and effect – the company representative is asked to give an answer to questions which attempt to discover the reasons to join in social media, the benefits gained from it as well as the satisfaction of this particular decision. In the second part – the utilization – the company representative is asked to answer to questions about the utilization, activeness as well as situations in which the updates are executed and certain time periods when updating the different accounts is not possible or achievable. The third segment – the participation – examines the engagement as well as the involvement of the company within social media conversations as

well as the reactions to negative feedback over social media. The complete design of the interview is depicted in Appendix 3 (in Finnish).

4.2.2 Observation analysis of the different utilized social media channels

In general, observation is utilized to gather as well as assemble material in a scientific research. This particular method is designed to reveal whether people act as they state to act. In addition, observation is an advisable method when examining an individual as well as his interaction with others. Furthermore, observation is advisable when investigating texts, objects, pictures, nature or environment. (Vilkka 2007, 37-38.)

There is diversity among the different types of observation. For instance, observation can occur as monitored, participated in, activating, experience based or even hidden (Vilkka 2007, 43-44; 46; 48; 53). In the research of the thesis, observation with mere monitoring is chosen as the third method of research. Within this kind of observation research, the observation occurs from outside the object under examination (Vilkka 2007, 43). This denotes that the researcher does not participate in the actual action of the subject under observation. Therefore, the main aim is to learn by watching. Furthermore, the observation is structured as well as pre-organized and the objects of interest are pre-set. (Vilkka 2007, 43.)

In the thesis, the main activity within the observation analysis is to observe as well as examine the utilization of different social media channels all of which the two companies are exploiting. When observing these social media channels, the aspects within interest are, for example, the amount of updates and posts within a certain time period, the content, the outer design, the time span for responds and answers as well as the activeness within each social media channel.

All of these social media channels are examined and observed within one day. However, the main focus in the observation analysis is the previous month which, in this case, is March. As a result, the amount of updates and posts, for example, are counted within this particular time frame. Similarly, this issue is taken into account when examining the content within the different accounts. In addition, the utilized social media channels of the two companies are observed through the eyes of the researcher. Therefore, this method is utilized as an additional source of information. Moreover, the observation analysis attempts to depict the utili-

zation of social media in progress within the two companies. As a result, the method of interview attempts to discover the company point of view to the matter of social media utilization whereas the method of observation analysis attempts to determine the consumer point of view of the utilization of social media within the two companies.

5 ANALYSIS

Within this chapter, the results and outcomes from the two previously mentioned methods of research will be examined and further explained. The analysis begins with the examination of the questionnaire and continues with the examination of the benchmarking analysis.

5.1 Questionnaire

After being in place for seven weeks, the questionnaire aggregated merely eight responds. One of the main reasons for the lack of responds might be that the company did not have a large amount of customers during this specific time period. This is stated by the company representative. Another reason might be the lack of effort when promoting as well as motivating the customers to answer the questionnaire. It is stated by the company representative that a larger group of customers were forgotten to provide with a questionnaire which might have an effect on the amount of responds. However, the company representative attempted to cope from this mistake by sending the questionnaires via e-mail in hope of receiving the responds missed in the first encounter with the customers.

The amount of responds is not sufficient to construct a valid statistical presentation of the utilization of social media among the current customers. However, these eight responds can assist to conclude certain trends and currents within the utilization of social media among the customers. In addition, when analysing the results in a textual manner, the outcomes are represented by the amount of responds. On the other hand, when analysing the results in a graphical manner, the outcomes are presented by percentages. In addition, due to the lack of responds, the graphical presentations are conducted with Excel since it provides graphs which are easier to comprehend and more pleasant to the eye. To conclude, in the following paragraphs the results gained from the conducted questionnaire are examined and further analysed.

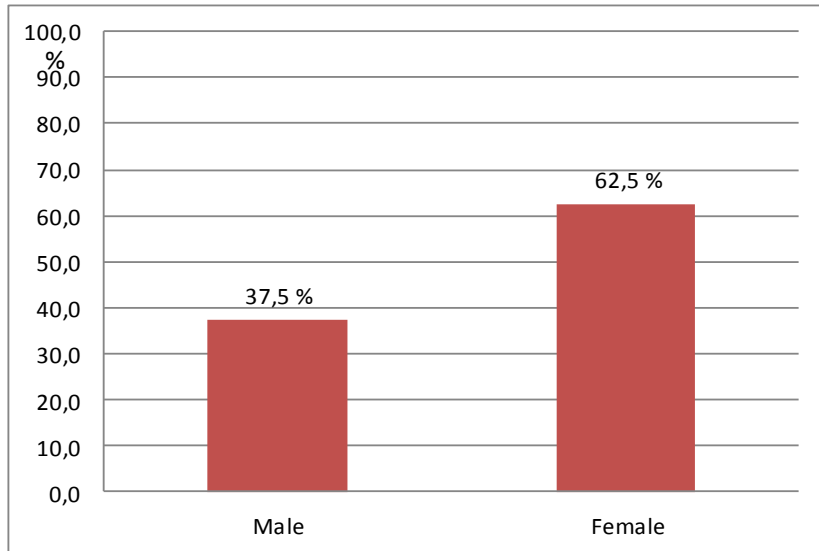


Figure 1. Distribution of gender among the respondents (n=8)

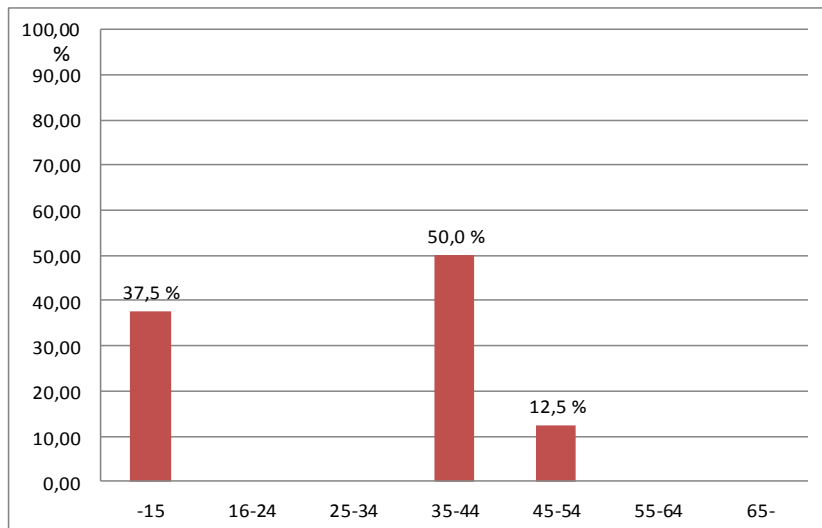


Figure 2. Distribution of age among the respondents (n=8)

Should the demographics of the current consumers be examined first, one can state that the majority of the respondents are women. This can be seen in figure 1. In addition, when examining the age of these female respondents, two of them answered to be 15 years old or younger, two stated their age to be between 35 and 44 years old and the fifth respondent answered her age to be between 45 and 54 years old. The distribution of gender among the age groups is represented in figure 3.

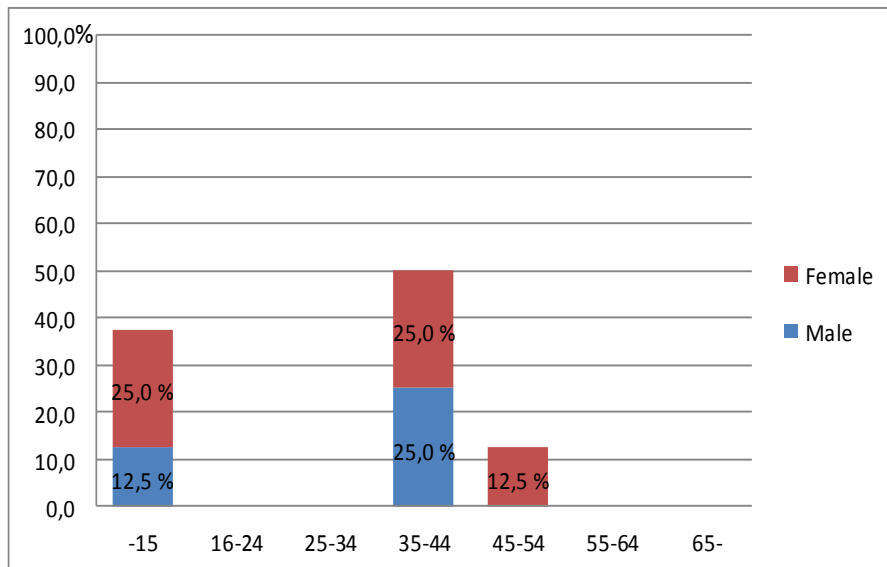


Figure 3. Distribution of age between the male and female respondents (n=8)

To conclude, the majority of the female respondents can be classified into the generation X (i.e. the elder generation). From the male point of view, there are three males among the respondents. Two of the respondents stated their age to be between 35 and 44 years old and the third respondent answered his age to be 15 years old or younger. Similarly to the female respondents, the majority of the male respondents can be classified into the generation X. See figures 1 and 3.

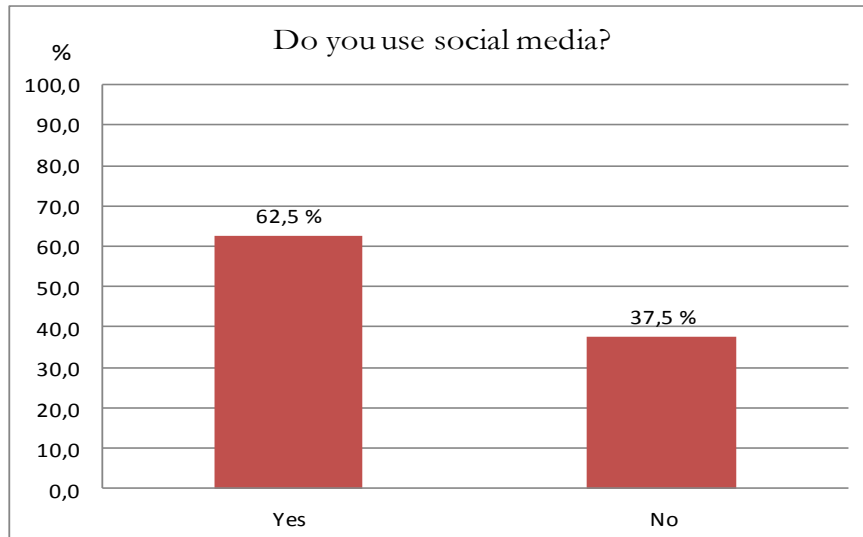


Figure 4. Utilization of social media among the respondents (n=8)

Since the main aim of the questionnaire is to examine the utilization of social media among the current customers, it is worthy to continue the analysis by examining the two questions relating to the utilization: “do you use social media” and “if you use social media, which of the following channels do you utilize?” From the eight respondents, five answered to utilize social media. The distribution can be seen in table 4 above.

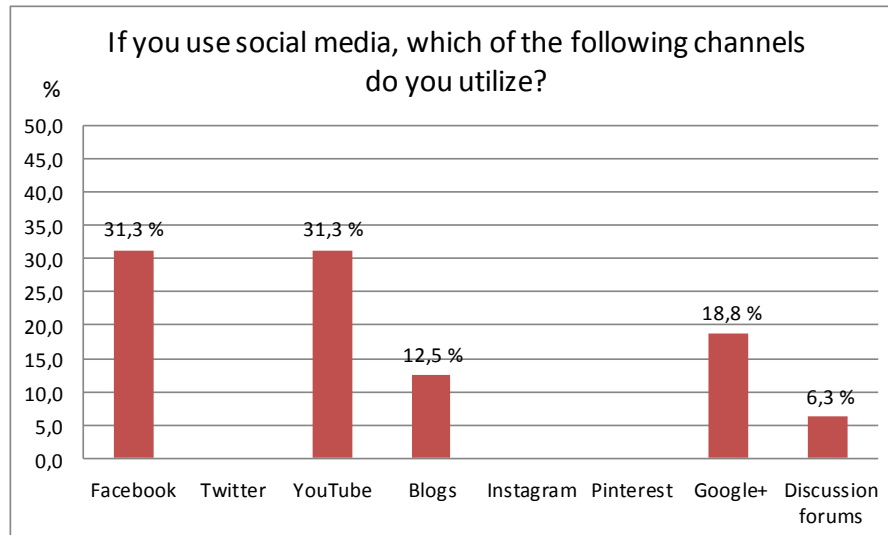


Figure 5. Utilization of social media channels among the respondents (n=8)

On the other hand, when analysing the utilization of different social media channels among these five representatives, the main interest within the consumers is among five channels. These channels are Facebook, YouTube, Google+, blogs as well as discussion forums. The distribution of utilized channels can be seen from figure 5.

However, the first two channels – Facebook and YouTube – are the most popular channels among the respondents. As one can see from the figure 5, approximately one third of the respondents answered to utilize both Facebook and YouTube. In addition, the third most popular channel of social media is Google+. From the same figure, one can see that one fourth of the respondents stated to utilize this particular channel. Apart from these three channels, blogs is stated to be utilized by one eighth of the respondents and the discussion forums are stated to be utilized merely by one respondent which represent approximately 7 % of the respondents, as can be seen from figure 5.

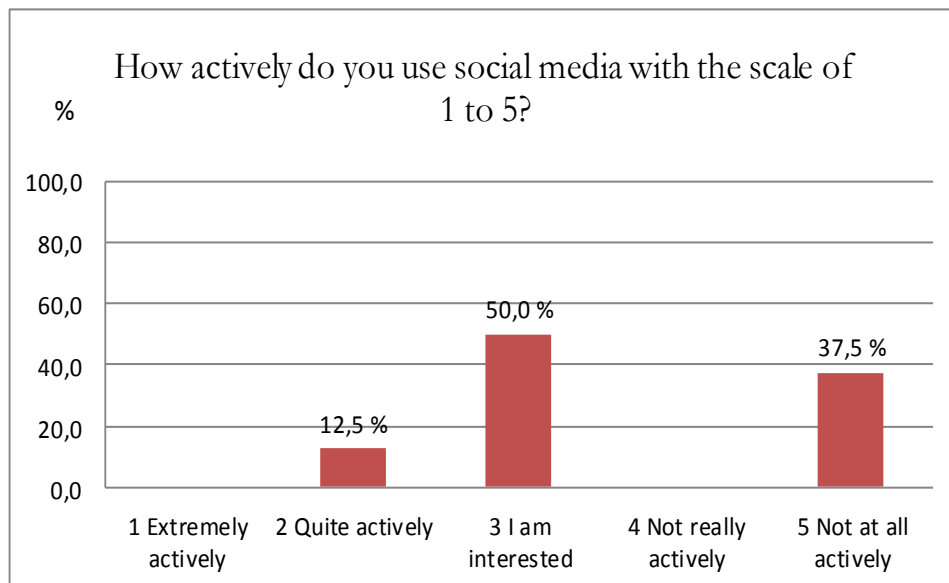


Figure 6. Level of activity in the utilization of social media (n=8)

In addition, the questionnaire is designed to discover the activeness of social media utilization by requesting the respondents to evaluate their level of activity in social media within a scale from extremely active to not at all active. Furthermore, this scale has five levels. Apart from these two mentioned levels above, it includes the aspects of quite active, interested as well as not really active. From the five respondents who stated to utilize social media, four of them responded to be interested and one stated to be quite active in social media. The distribution of activeness among the entire selection of respondents can be fully seen in figure 6.

As a result, one might state that the utilization of social media among the customers is relatively active which might signify that the customers do not merely possess an account in social media but they also participate as well as engage in those accounts. In relation to the activeness to utilize social media, the three respondents, who stated not to utilize social media, responded to be not at all active. See figure 6. The main reason for this kind of behaviour is stated to be that they do not have time or interest to participate in social media. From the demographics point of view, those two respondents who stated not to have time for social media are from the older age groups (i.e. between 35 and 44 as well as 45 and 54). This lack of time is understandable since these respondents can be classified into the working population.

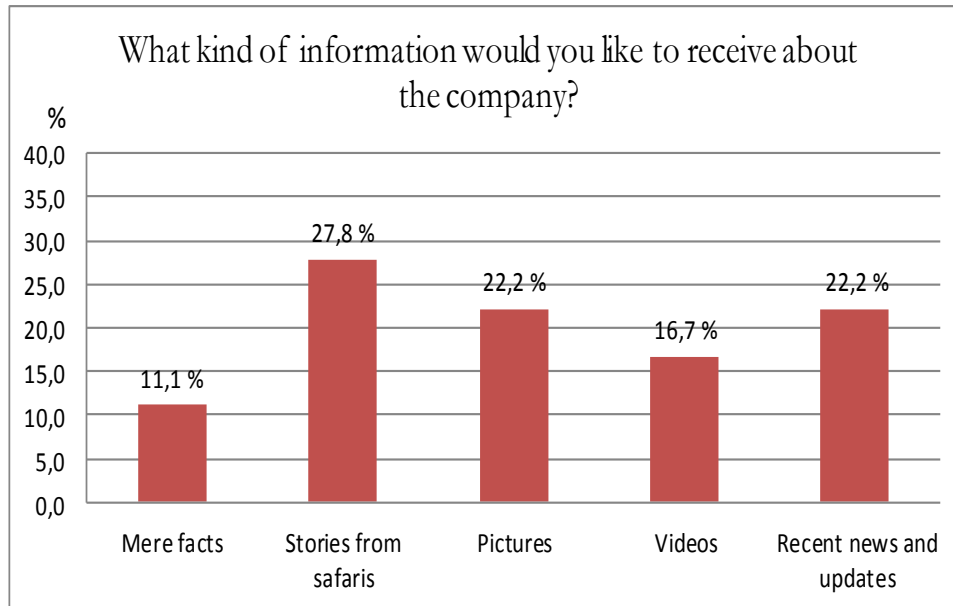


Figure 7. Nature of information desired to receive about the company (n=8)

After asking the respondents to evaluate their activeness of social media utilization, the questionnaire continues with a question about the nature of information (e.g. facts, stories, pictures, videos, news, etc.) the respondents would like to receive about the company. Among the eight respondents, the main kind of information desired to receive would be stories from the safaris. The amount of respondents to choose this alternative is five. In addition, pictures as well as recent news and updates are the second most popular kind of information desired. Furthermore, videos are selected by one fourth of the respondents and mere facts are chosen by 10 % of the respondents which counts for two respondents. The distribution among these different kinds of information desired can be fully seen in figure 7 above.

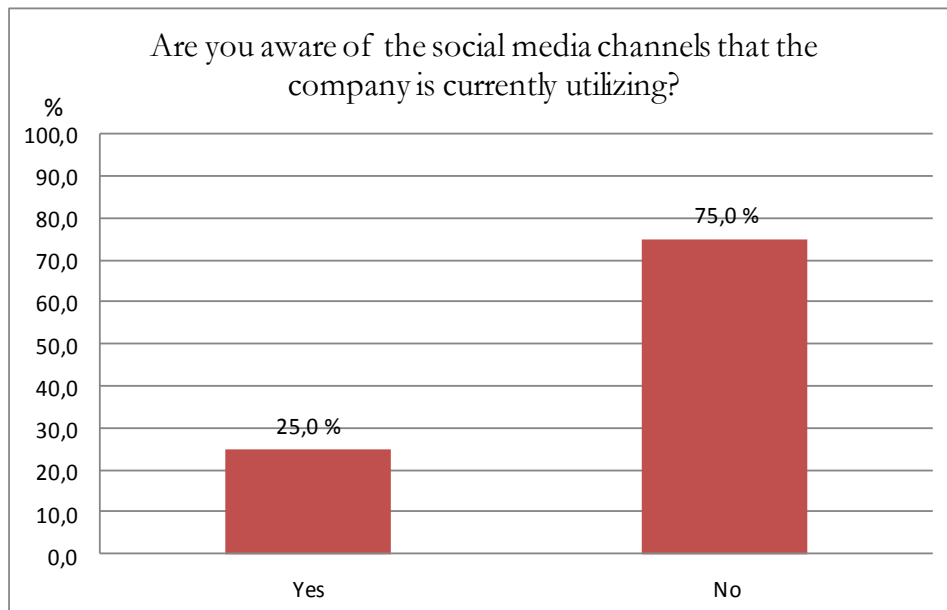


Figure 8. Awareness of the social media channels utilized by the company (n=8)

Another interesting as well as intriguing aspect observed from the questionnaire is that six out of eight respondents are not aware of the social media channels the company is currently utilizing. See figure 8.

In addition, the respondents were asked to provide their own opinion of the utilization of social media channels of the company within an open-ended question in the end of the questionnaire. This last question is answered among those who stated to be aware of the current utilization of the social media channels. Within these answers, the respondents stated that the company should utilize social media more effectively. Furthermore, it was stated that it cannot be compared since the respondent do not have knowledge about much (in relation to social media) but that he would like to choose the company through the web pages on the Internet.

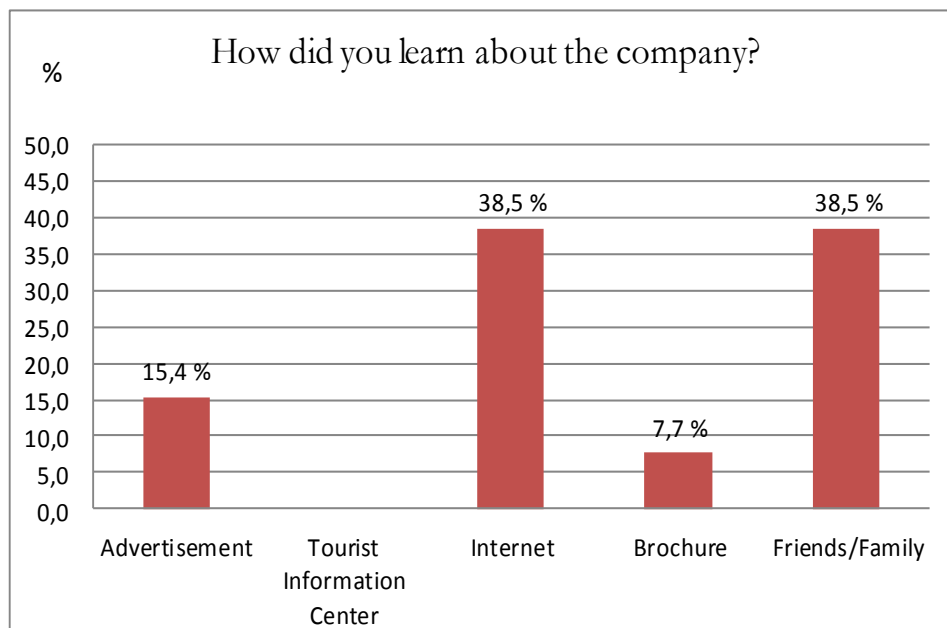


Figure 9. Sources of information about the existence of the company (n=8)

In the second segment of the questionnaire – the acquisition of information – the main purpose is to examine from where the current customers gained information about the existence of the company. Among the multiple choices, there are different alternatives from both the traditional as well as social media marketing. When analysing the results, it can be distinctively stated that the most popular source of information about the existence of the company is friends and family as well as the Internet, as can be seen in figure 9.

This can be largely explained by the fact that all of these respondents stated their hometown to be Suomussalmi. In addition, in two of those responds, it is explained that the company is situated within the same town or close to the place they live. Another popular source of information is the Internet. Five out of eight chose this particular alternative as their source of information. Furthermore, when asked to separate the specific source within the Internet, four out of five stated the source to be the company website. In terms of the other sources of information, merely two out of eight respondents stated the source to be an advertisement on a newspaper and one stated the source to be a brochure. From these results, it is possible to conclude that in most of these cases, the source of information is Internet as well as a word-of mouth. The traditional marketing can be seen to have a minority position within the acquisition of information about the existence of the company.

5.2 Benchmarking Analysis

After conducting the benchmarking analysis, certain behavioural patterns within the social media channels can be exemplified with both of the observed companies. These patterns include, for instance, the activeness, popularity and synchronization between the different channels, the nature of content as well as the outer design of each site. In the following chapters, these patterns are examined and further explained. Prior to the analysis, a short description to the companies is provided.

Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd

The first of the two companies within the benchmarking analysis is Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd. This family hotel was founded in 1924. It has been in operation through four generations in Enontekiö, Lapland. According to their business idea, the company provides accommodation, alimentation as well as other tourism services for consumers by organizing a memorable vacation in Lapland with all the amenities so that the consumers would return, preferably with their friends and family, to experience the magic of Lapland again. Apart from this, the company offers supplementary facilities for consumers. These facilities include, for instance, a tepee, a sauna, a gym, a small library as well as a corner for souvenirs. In addition, the accompanying amenities include a wireless Internet, a public computer, a set of different games and toys as well as a widely known buffet. In relation to the topic – social media – the company utilizes five different channels. These channels are Facebook, Twitter, a blog, YouTube and Google+. (Hotelli Hetan Majatalo 2013.)

Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp

The other of the two companies is Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp. This company is administrated and managed by one person in Enontekiö, Lapland. Among the services and products offered by the company are different experience expeditions and treks together with a diverse selection of activities (e.g. snow shoeing, hunting, mushroom picking, ice fishing, etc.) as well as some traditional Lappish delicacies. Apart from these services, the company offers cleaning utilities as well as herbal saunas in the arctic hills. As for the utilization of social media, the company utilizes three different social media channels: Facebook, Twitter and a blog. (Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp 2013.)

5.2.1 Electronic interview with the companies

The interview questions were sent to two different companies. However, only one of these companies took the time and effort to answer these questions. This company is Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp. Therefore, the analysis of the utilization of social media within the tourism sector is merely based on one company. Furthermore, the reader should bear in mind that the aim of the interview is to provide the thesis with a concrete and existing example of the utilization of social media within a small sized tourism business. In the following paragraphs the answers to the questions within the three segments of the interview (i.e. cause and effect, utilization and participation) are examined and further explained.

According to the company representative, the reason to participate in social media is for it being a modern as well as a fast communication tool. This is inquired in the first segment which is cause and effect. In addition, social media has offered certain benefits for the company. For example, the company representative points out, that through social media the company has received orders for product deliveries as well as purchases of the programme services and cottage rentals. Furthermore, the company has been satisfied as well as content to the decision to participate in and engage social media since the owner has received job offers as well as other contacting efforts through social media. In addition, from the first segment – cause and effect – it is apparent to witness the reason with which the company has chosen the social media channels it is currently utilizing. This reason is relatively straightforward. The company representative states that the main reason is the easiness to utilize the chosen channels as well as the user friendly functions they provide.

The owner of the company is the person who is responsible for the utilization of social media within the company. This is apparent from the answers in the second segment which is the utilization of social media. In addition, she states that the social media channels are updated once a week through a laptop. The computer seems to be the only device the company is exploiting when posting as well as updating the social media accounts. When required about the time during which the social media accounts are revised, the company representative states that she is the most active in social media late in the evening or at night. Furthermore, the place in where the company representative states to be the most active in the utilization of social media is her home. This denotes that she merely updates her status in the different social media accounts when she is at home. However, there are certain times when

the utilization of social media has been decreased. For instance, during the summer as well as whilst on a vacation, the utilization of social media has lessen.

In the third segment, the company representative provides insights to the participation in conversations within the social media channels. Firstly, the company attempts to follow the conversations, as well as the different social media channels utilized by the company, in a daily basis. However, the company representative states that the company attempts to participate in these conversations few times a week. The reasons for this kind of behaviour (i.e. participating in the conversations few times week even though following the conversations daily) are not apparent among the answers to the interview questions. Nevertheless, when asked about the attitudes towards negative feedback over social media, the company representative states that it is constructive criticism and therefore, important.

5.2.2 Observation analysis of the different utilized social media channels

In this section, the results of the observation analysis are explained. The analysis of these results begins with Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd and continues with Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp.

Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd utilizes five different social media channels. These channels are Facebook, Twitter, a blog, YouTube and Google+. One might argue that the latter order depicts the popularity of the channels within the company. One reason for this might be that the company has provided a bigger amount of content to Facebook and Twitter than it has to the three other channels. When observing the fan page of the company on Facebook, one could count that there are approximately 40 posts updated during March (in 2013). Similarly, there are about 40 tweets posted on the Twitter account during March (in 2013). However, the reason for the amount of updates and tweets to be relatively similar might be that these two accounts have been synchronized together. In other words, when one posts content on Facebook or Twitter, the same content appears on the other account as well. This procedure of synchronization is examined furthermore later on.

Another indication of the higher popularity of these two channels (i.e. Facebook and Twitter) might be that the updates and tweets are the most recent. On Facebook as well as on Twitter, the most recent posts are from the previous day whereas in the blog, YouTube and Google+, the latest posts are from a month ago or even several months ago. In addition, in relation to the other channels, Facebook and Twitter have more followers than the other three channels. For example, in the front page of the Facebook account of the company, one can observe that 466 people have liked the page, 111 are talking about the page (and therefore about the company) and 331 were there. On Twitter, on the other hand, one can notice from the front wall that the company has posted 576 tweets and 20 people are following the tweets of the company. In comparison, on YouTube the company has merely one subscriber. However, this relatively low number does not include the persons who have seen the videos provided on YouTube. There are 1009 displaying times for the uploaded videos.

Should the observation of Facebook be concentrated on and viewed firstly, the general content should be taken into at closer consideration. Like mentioned previously, there are approximately 40 updates posted during March. From these posts half are pictures and one fourth is short and concise comments, reminders as well as descriptions of the current day. Apart from these posts, the company posted around eight updates about news (e.g. news about the past as well as upcoming events, about the weather and air traffic) and two short videos about the operations of the company. The uploaded pictures depicted either the nature and landscape or the activities and operations of the company. In addition, all of these pictures included a short text to explain and describe the picture in question. For example, one of these pictures is a spectacular image of the northern lights which the house master witnessed and immortalized while warming up the hut for a group. Since the business is operating in the northern part of Lapland, it is advisable to upload pictures about the beautiful, pure and remarkable nature which can be classified as an asset for the company. However, none of these pictures are highlighted to cover a bigger part of the page in order to have higher coverage as well as exposure among the readers. Furthermore, the company posted a picture to honour and respect the day of women which can be seen as an evidence of caring for the followers as well as wishing them luck and welfare, equally.

With the posts of news, the company took an effort to provide additional information to the followers as well as possibly arouse their interest for the upcoming events. For instance, one of these links to news is a brochure conducted by Flybe (i.e. the Finnish airline company).

Within this brochure, there is a six page article about Enontekiö that depicts the municipality and its nature as well as the possible activities in which one can participate. Furthermore, the company posted some links to the news about upcoming events. These events included, for example, the Saami Freestyle Race 2013 as well as the Days of Maria in Heta (i.e. Hetan Marianpäivät). Moreover, these provided links directed the reader to the websites of these events from where one could gain more information about the events as well as the schedules and important dates. In addition, there is a link to Yle (i.e. a Finnish broadcasting company) and to the Saami news in which the event of the Days of Maria in Heta is shortly presented and displayed.

It is said that a picture speaks more than a thousand words. In the case of Hotelli Hetan Majatlo Ltd, the company has certainly taken this expression seriously. One indication is the 11 albums of photographs they have created within their fan page on Facebook. Apart from the timeline, cover and profile pictures, these albums include topics such as the guesthouse, the winter as well as the summer in Enontekiö, the 85th anniversary of the company and the miscellaneous pictures throughout the years. Should these albums and pictures be attempted to analyse, one might argue that they include a diverse selection of subjects and themes. This signifies that the pictures depict people and animals, landscape and natural phenomena as well as facilities and nature. In addition, they vary from old to new, summer to winter and from bright to dark. Furthermore, one might argue that the intention of these images is to portray what cannot be explained or illuminated by words. On the other hand, they might play a role in providing information about the operations of the company as well as their facilities and services, such as in the album of the guesthouse. Another aim could be to motivate and encourage the followers to contact the business when considering a place for the upcoming holidays and vacations. To potentially assist the advocates in their decisions, the company has selected mainly pictures which include a set of satisfied and smiling faces of the customers as well as a relaxed and tranquil atmosphere within the nature.

When considering the general outlook of the information section, the company has utilized the space efficiently. In other words, they have inserted a map with the most important contact information, a short description of the business as well as some basic knowledge about the history, offerings and location of the company. In addition, they have a selection of links to additional sites (i.e. the supplementary social media channels and the most common means of public transportation sites). These writings are both in Finnish and English which

provides an opportunity for the foreign travellers to comprehend as well as take an interest in the company.

The second social media channel utilized by the company is Twitter. Like mentioned earlier, when observing the Twitter account together with the Facebook account, one can witness that these two accounts are synchronized. In other words, the posts and updates added to Facebook or Twitter will simultaneously appear on the other account as well. By conducting the synchronization, one might argue that the company can economize the effort and time utilized to the maintenance of these two accounts. In addition, one can take note that the company utilizes a different profile picture on Twitter than it does on Facebook. This could signify that the two accounts are not completely synchronized and they are attended as well as participated in. Moreover, the company has comprehended the meaning as well as importance of the limitation for the written characteristics (no more than 140 signs) since all of the posted tweets are relatively short. They include either a plain link to the Facebook writings or a link with a short description. The final point to witness from the Twitter account of the company is the chosen depiction of the business underneath the profile picture which is both in Finnish and English.

Another social media channel the company is utilizing is a blog. However, this channel is not as widely utilized as Facebook or Twitter. When analysing the writings of March – as done with the previous two social media channels – there is merely one article posted during this period of time. Instead of writing the item by themselves, the company has posted a text written by a customer. The topic for this text arises from the spring holidays. The writer narrates about the experiences of the group while visiting Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd. Apart from the actual text, the writer has included a set of outdoor pictures underneath the writing. By utilizing an article written by a customer, the company provides a different point of view for the readers. Instead of promoting the business with their own words and perceptions of the company, they allow the customers perform it on their behalf. The very same tactics is being utilized on Facebook as well. The company has inserted few posts of their guestbook which means that the text uploaded is written by the customers rather than the company representatives. In the blog, there are two comments within the article, one of which is from the company itself. However, from these comments one can view the time utilized to respond. In this case, the responding time is a one day. Even though the time to

respond might be relatively long regarding to the appropriate etiquette, they have taken the time and effort to answer to the comment.

The two last social media channels utilized by the company are YouTube and Google+. To the YouTube account the company has inserted nine short videos. These videos vary in length as well as in content. The shortest clip is merely ten seconds whereas the longest is three and a half minutes. The topics, on the other hand, vary from an introduction to driving directions and to a presentation of a buffet. These videos have only one subscriber but they have been displayed altogether 1009 times. Moreover, none of the videos is commented. This might be explained by the fact that the account is relatively new. It was founded in 27th of July in 2012. On the Google+ account, on the other hand, is merely pictures about the company as well as the surrounding nature. The amount of the pictures is relative higher than on Facebook. Instead of 50 pictures, these albums can include 200 or more photographs. In this sense, the account is utilized to display more images of the company. Apart from this utilization, the account is not overly active. In addition, there is not a lot of information (apart from a map and one sentenced description of the business). Even though these two social media channels are not utilized actively, passionately or overpoweringly, both of them provides additional and supplementary information and content (in the forms of pictures and videos) to the consumers. That might be the main reason for these channels to be utilized by the company.

Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp

Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp utilizes three different social media channels. These channels are Facebook, Twitter and a blog. As in the case of Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd, this latter order of the channels can be stated to depict the popularity of the channels within the business. However, the line between Facebook and the blog is quite thin. For instance, on Facebook, there are only three posts during March, five posts during February and 18 posts during January. On the blog, on the other hand, there are two updates during 2011 (when the blog was founded), one during 2012 and 5 during 2013. In the case of Facebook, the velocity of writings is decreasing whereas in the case of the blog the velocity is increasing. For this kind of behaviour, there can be several different reasons. With the mere observation of the sites in question, one cannot determine these reasons. It could be that the author and administrator

of these sites find the blog more beneficial or pleasant to maintain. On the other hand, the decline of posts on Facebook could be related to the limitations of time or effort.

The blog is examined first. Like stated earlier, the blog was founded in 2011 which indicates that it is relatively new and young. In addition, the author has stated right from the start that she will write when she has the time or the matter. By performing alike, the author is making a promise as well as clarifying her attentions to the followers. However, this kind of manifest is relative vague and ambiguous. In addition, the readers cannot really predict when there would be time or certain issues to write about and post. They might need to verify the site several times for any novel writings which, over time, might demotivate the readers to return. However, this is not a current issue within the company since the blog do not have any readers. Nonetheless, this is a matter any author of a blog should take into consideration.

Should the design of the maintained blog be under observation, one might state that it is relatively easy and straightforward to comprehend as well as utilize. There are five different tabs in the beginning of the blog as well as four buttons in the sidebar. With these tools, the reader is able to navigate through the blog and to gain more insights. For example, within the five tabs, one can discover a straight link to the web pages of the company, a short description of the products and services, a preferable schedule for the offerings as well as contact information together with a brief portrayal of the owner. In addition, to construct a workable and practical blog page, the administrator uses an animation tool. This signifies that once clicking the different options within the tabs bar, the choices open by sliding from the bottom to cover the previous sheet. Moreover, when navigating through the sidebar, the icons of the buttons reveal themselves by sliding in the open. The different articles posted on the blog open to a separate window by blacken the rest of the page and revealing the article. Furthermore, the exposed window is easy to close simply by clicking the closing button in the right up corner rather than clicking the previous button and getting lost in the pages.

One of the weaknesses of the blog might be the lack of textual content. This denotes that the author prefers pictures as well as images rather than the verbal communication. On the other hand, this phenomenon might be related to the promise the administrator made when opening the blog; posting articles and writings when she has the time or matters to do so. There are few articles within the blog in which the author has utilized more textual content. In addition, while reading through these writings, one might witness the local accent the au-

thor is utilizing within the text. It can be stated that this occurrence of Lappish pronunciation creates another dimension to the content. In other words, it might be perceived as unique, exquisite as well as different. Moreover, it has the opportunity to make the blog real as well as authentic which, according to the etiquette of social media, is a vital characteristic of any social media channel.

Next, the utilization of Facebook will be examined. As analyzed with Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd, Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp also utilizes the information tool box on Facebook efficiently. This signifies that one can discover a map with all the necessary contact information (i.e. address, phone number, e-mail address and a link to the websites). In addition, one can take notice of the short description as well as a general knowledge of the company. Within these two items, the administrator has included an explanation about the products and services of the business as well as a brief portray of the owner as well as the company. In addition, the information tool box contains the knowledge of the year of involvement which is 2010. When considering and further analyzing this piece of information (i.e. the grounding year), one might state that one of the reasons for the lack of participation and content creation might be the lack of knowledge and ability as well as expertise to utilize this kind of social media channel efficiently. Should there be a shortage of time or possibilities for the company to participate in social media, one might face difficulties as well as hardships to acquire the necessary knowledge and know-how. Therefore, the engagement as well as involvement in social media might be rather low.

On the other hand, when analyzing the content on Facebook, one might count that there are approximately 26 posts during the year of 2013 (i.e. during January, February and March). From these posts, around half is pictures and the other half is updates in the form of short writings as well as news. Should the pictures be examined first, one might state that a majority of the pictures is images about the landscape, nature, snowshoeing activity, northern lights and the wintry sun. It is relatively straightforward to conclude that the images uploaded are attempting to portray one of the assets the company possesses which, in this case, can be stated to be the location within the Northern Lapland. In addition, this particular location with its nature can be declared to be slightly different for the nature around the other parts of Finland. One reason for this can be that the northern atmosphere creates a different setting for the environment. On the other hand, when analyzing the other half of the posts - short writings and news - one can state that a majority is providing information about the

newly renewed web pages, the maintained blog sites as well as the products offered. Apart from these aspects, the writings and news includes an article of flights being initiated to Enontekiö, a link to the association of entrepreneurs as well as a short description of the safety plan which is being created and implemented. In addition, there are notes published within the page which provides insights to the different activities.

Twitter, on the other hand, is not as widely utilized as Facebook. One indication of this might be that there are merely four tweets posted on the account during the year of 2013 (i.e. during January, February and March). Based on the information gathered from the account, one might state that a personal account is being incorporated together with a professional account. This can be seen from several issues. Firstly, the name of the account is Sari Keskitalo which signifies a private person. The company, however, is mentioned and referenced merely with an address to the company website. Secondly, the posted tweets discuss more about personal than professional issues. For example, one of the tweets posted during February is designated to a cousin of the husband of the administrator. When browsing through the other tweets, one can witness that a minority of them is related to the business and Enontekiö in general. Finally, instead of utilizing a picture of the business as a profile image, the administrator has chosen a facial picture of oneself. In addition, there is a link among the tweets that directs the followers to the personal blog of the administrator. As a result, by incorporating personal and professional account in this case, the administrator sends out a mixed signal for the followers and possible consumers of the services and products. Since there is a link on the website of the company to the Twitter account, one might be expecting an account of a company rather than a person. Even though the process of incorporating a personality to the account is in accordance to the social media etiquette, one should consider changing the ratio of these two aspects (i.e. personal and professional) into having a majority of the account as professional and a minority as a personal.

6 OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

According to the conducted research, participating in social media is worth the effort since a majority of the consumers seems to be involved as well as engaged in social media. This is apparent in the results of the executed questionnaire. On the other hand, as viewed from the electronic interview with Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp, social media has a potential to offer certain benefits for companies. Hence it is worth the effort to participate in social media. However, these benefits are dependent on the subjective interpretation as well as perception of the company about the advantages of social media.

The awareness of the current utilization of social media channels of the company seems to be on a relatively low level among the consumers. According to the questionnaire results, most of the respondents stated not to be aware of this particular utilization of social media channels. In addition, most of the respondents stated to utilize the company website as a source of information to find more about the existence of the company. Therefore, the company should consider improving the company website by placing the links for social media channels in a visible as well as detectable position within the web page. By executing this, the company has the opportunity to spare the consumers from confusion and misunderstanding. Another manner is to be active as well as energetic within social media since that feeling of enthusiasm might transfer to the consumers as well.

One of the most apparent as well as noticeable observation during the process of selecting small sized companies for the benchmarking analysis is the lack of utilization of social media among small sized businesses. A majority of the companies are merely utilizing Facebook as a mean of social media participation. In addition, the representation of the channel within the company websites is, in some cases, confusing or even non-existent. It is questionable whether the companies lack of interest and motivation or simply time. However, there are certain issues which a company should consider when designing or developing the utilization of social media. These aspects are being examined in the following paragraphs for the benefit of the commissioning company by conducting a development plan. This plan includes certain directions of development all of which the commissioning company should take into consideration when developing the utilization of social media.

6.1 How to select channels?

The first issue the company should settle on is the amount of social media channels in which the company participates. Between the two companies under observation in the benchmarking analysis, the amount of social media channels varied. One of the companies (i.e. Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd) utilizes five different channels whereas the other (i.e. Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp) utilizes merely three different channels. During the analysis, it was evident that should the company operate within too many channels, the level of activeness as well as interaction fluctuated as well as weakened. Even with a less amount of social media channels in place, the participation as well as engagement varied. Therefore, it can be suggested that the company should select two to three social media channels to participate and engage in. Within these channels, the company should consider to have one or two active accounts and one account for an additional content (i.e. photographs, videos, memoirs, etc.).

Based on the executed questionnaire, these two active channels should be Facebook and a blog. However, the final selection of these channels should be based on the personal wishes as well as interests of the company as can be viewed from the answers within the electronic interview with Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp. It is stated by the company representative that the social media channels were chosen based on the easiness to utilize them rather than the participation of the consumers. Nonetheless, the preferred social media channels of the consumers should be taken into consideration when selecting the social media channels.

Another issue supporting the selection of Facebook and a blog as the two main social media channels is the fact that the consumers selected stories from the safaris, pictures as well as recent news and updates as the most popular means of information which they would like to receive about the company. In other words, in Facebook the company is able to share short current news and updates whereas in a blog the company can share stories as well as pictures from the safaris within longer articles.

In the case of additional account for additional content, however, the company should consider utilizing YouTube since it is one of the most utilized social media channels among the customers. In addition, through this specific channel the company can provide additional information for the consumers in a form of videos. According to the conducted questionnaire, videos are indeed the third most popular mean of information the consumers would

like to receive about the company. Since this particular mean of information is not as popular as the other means, the company should consider placing it in the additional channel for additional content.

6.2 How to specify content?

Once the channels of preference have been selected, the company should begin to consider the nature of the content to be posted as well as downloaded. During the benchmarking analysis, it was possible to observe that the majority of the utilized content of the two companies is pictures. The topics among these images, however, varied considerably. They included themes such as nature, landscape, activities, natural phenomena as well as people. It can be stated that the sky is the limit for the imagination for the taken photographs.

However, all of these pictures have a certain aspect in common; they all depict subjects which can be seen as assets of the company. Therefore, the commissioning company should consider pictures and images as a prominent part of the posted content. One reason to proceed in this manner is a simple saying. According to this phrase, a particular picture has an opportunity to speak more than a thousand words. In other words, one picture can capture any unique, memorable or individual moment. Another reason is the possibility to sell and promote the products and services of the company without being too aggressive or even annoying. In many cases, the consumers might not even consider the images as a mean of selling and promotion. They simply might enjoy the overall atmosphere of the picture or be mesmerized by it. However, in order to capture these unique moments, the company should consider purchasing a suitable piece of technology (e.g. a small digital camera, a smart phone, a tablet, etc.) with which the capturing of these moments can be executed relatively easy no matter the time or location.

Another important as well as vital type of content the commissioning company should utilize is news. Both of the companies under observation in the benchmarking analysis utilize links to news efficiently. In addition, all of these links included a small picture related to the news providing a motivational aspect to click on it. The commissioning company should be relatively active on searching as well as posting news in the form of links. These reports of the current events should be related – in certain level – to the business, its products and services or the location in which it is performing (i.e. Suomussalmi). By performing in this manner, the company provides additional value to the consumers by building an easily accessible and reachable as well as widely available platform for news and updates. Therefore, the consumers do not necessarily need to bounce between different sites and podiums to find the issue which is right in front of them.

The type of content the two companies within the benchmarking analysis are lacking is the spontaneous, impulsive and unstructured posts. These updates include, for example, the instant thoughts and feelings while sitting with the consumers in the middle of the nature or the sudden opportunity to share the magnificent and spectacular view on the top of a mountain while hiking with the customers. These posts have a possibility to increase the attention as well as the awareness of the followers since the updates are not expected or anticipated. Once again, the company should consider investing to a camera or a smart phone. With these appliances (merely with the smart phone), the company is able to access the social media accounts immediately no matter the location. In addition, it is able to post as well as update these instant thoughts, feelings or pictures without losing a track of the sentiment and idea.

6.3 How to represent a personality?

As previously seen in the case of Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp, combining a personal and professional account might not be the most efficient mean of administrating a social media account. Should one discover on the web page of a company a link to a social media channel, it is fairly possible to assume that the account of the particular channel is being utilized by the company not an individual. Even though it is advisable to display the personality behind the company, it should be associated and interrelated with the business. There are several means of executing this strategy.

One of such means is to portray the personality through the content. Whether the company decides to post photographs, videos, comments or news, it is acceptable to utilize humour or a possible accent. In addition, to demonstrate the passion and enthusiasm of the company as well as its representatives, it is suitable to utilize strong and powerful words and phrases. With this kind of vocabulary, the company has an opportunity to endorse the image of seriousness as well as genuineness. Another mean of representing the personality of the company is truly being oneself. This signifies that should the administrator of the account prefer utilizing informal, relaxed and casual language, certain emoticons or sarcastic expressions, he should be able to proceed in this manner. It might merely suggest that he is being true, real, honest as well as transparent all of which are part of the social media etiquette.

Furthermore, portraying personality might benefit the company, at some extent. This can be witnessed from the electronic interview which is conducted with Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp. The company representative states that it has been beneficial for the company to be involved in social media since it has brought job offers as well as other contacts for the company representative. As a result, it is reasonable to state that social media facilitates the easiness to approach a person or a company. Therefore, when being true, honest as well as upcoming about the business and the matters it represents as well as showing passion and enthusiasm, has an opportunity to ease the contacting efforts from current and forthcoming

customers, possible business partners and employers as well as other parties all of which might provide benefits and reimbursements for the company. The portrayal of personality, however, can be associated with the general behaviour in social media as well. How one acts and performs in social media might have a considerable effect on the output the other users of social media perceives, observes and interprets.

6.4 How to be an active participator?

Since social media is an interactive, communicative as well as vivid community, one of the crucial aspects of social media is the level of activeness. Both of the two companies under observation in the benchmarking analysis are portraying a sufficient level of activeness. Certainly, the two companies could be more involved as well as engaged to their choices of social media channels. However, one key aspect of activeness can be seen to be the minimization of the amount of visits to the account of social media channel prior to receiving a respond. In other words, should the advocate be required to attend to the account more than once before acquiring an answer, it might decrease the level of motivation as well as interest to follow in the future.

Furthermore, as in the case of capturing unique images and posting spontaneous updates, investing to a piece of technology - preferably to a smart phone or an tablet - could improve the amount of activeness within social media as well as reduce the amount of time and effort spend to the utilization of social media. This denotes that the representative of the company has an access to the different accounts no matter the time or location. In addition, the time span for responding is decreasing. With these devices, the company representative can take a minute or two to respond to the followers and therefore, create additional value for them by showing to care.

Another issue that should be considered when attempting to perform actively in social media is the timing of participation as well as the updates and posts in social media. The electronic interview with Enontekiön Tunturivilja Lp uncovers the time when the company representative is the most active in social media. This time is late in the evening or at night. It is questionable whether this procedure is functional. On one hand, this particular time might be the most suitable for the company. However, it can be seen slightly belated date since most of the consumers might not share the need to be active in social media at that particular time. Therefore, the interactive nature of social media might suffer.

However, should the commissioning company desire to maintain a durable relationship with the consumers, it is worth the effort to organize and arrange the visits in social media to different stages. For instance, it is advisable to visit the different accounts in the morning to view the possible posts uploaded during the night. In addition, this might be functional since

the followers might be checking their accounts before starting their work. Another suitable time to visit the social media accounts could be the lunch time. During this particular time, the company might not be the mere visitor in the accounts since they are not the only persons having lunch. The third, and even the fourth, visit might be suitable to time to the early evening or late evening since these might be the times when, especially, the working population might be the most active in social media.

Visiting social media channels more than once a day has an opportunity to increase the level of activeness perceived by the followers. In addition, this process should be incorporated with certain evidence in the form of posts and status updates as well as responds to comments and questions. In this manner, the followers can witness the activeness through the evidence and therefore, be motivated to follow more actively. However, the final decision about the timing of the participation as well as posts and updates should be based on the wishes and capabilities of the company.

6.5 How to utilize customer perception as a promotional tool?

One noteworthy tool to operate an account within social media is to create a guestbook. This kind of communication tool is in place with Hotelli Hetan Majatalo Ltd as being evident during the benchmarking analysis. They have a tangible book within their premises into where the guests as well as consumers can write feedback and personal experiences as well as opinions of the company and its offerings. Parts of these writings are then transferred not only to the web page of the company but onto the Facebook account as well.

As a result, with these kinds of texts, the company is able to sell and promote their products and services without being too aggressive or annoying by portraying the customer point of view rather than the company point of view. However, the commissioning company should be careful with the choices of publishing should it decide to utilize this kind of marketing tool. In other words, the company should not merely select the positive and admiring texts as well as writings since it is not realistic to have exclusively flattering feedback. Therefore, the company should be open as well as honest about the received feedback. Moreover, should the company be exposed of lying, this kind of procedure might be perceived to be more beneficial tactics.

In addition, the utilization of a guestbook can provide the consumers with a mean of sharing their experiences. According to the results of the conducted questionnaire, word-of-mouth is relatively vivid among the consumers. When asked to select the sources of information required about the existence of the company, a majority of the respondents selected friends and family as one of the sources. Therefore, it might be beneficial for the company to create channels with which the consumers can share their experiences online (i.e. in social media) through the process of word-of-mouth.

6.6 How to benefit from blogging?

There is a set of certain suggestions worth to mention about the process of writing and maintaining a blog since not only has it certain benefits but the current customers of the commissioning company are utilizing blogs relatively widely. Firstly, one of the benefits of writing a blog is to express feelings, emotions as well as characteristics of the company in a more excessive manner that one could execute, for example, on Twitter with the limitation of 140 characters. In addition, there are certain special limitations on Facebook regarding a long and overwhelming articles. However, no matter the benefits, the two companies under observation in the benchmarking analysis have not yet comprehended this aspect of a blog.

Another benefit of a blog is the possibility to express the company point of view. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for the guests as well as consumers to agree or disagree with the opinions of the company as well as share ideas not only with the author of the blog but also with the other followers. However, in order to have this kind of effect, the author needs to be consistent as well as structured with the posts. By performing in this manner, the administrator avoids making vague promises to the followers as well as ensures the return of the readers. In this sense, the commissioning company should consider posting an article once or twice a month. In addition, it should utilize the blog as a reporting tool about the recent happenings as well as activities. Should they need to inform or update the followers, it should be executed through Facebook or Twitter rather than the blog since they might be faster as well as more widely utilized and followed channels.

6.7 Compounding factor - technology

All the above mentioned issues can all be incorporated together by a simple factor - technology. Social media is a phenomenon which operates online. Furthermore, the technological innovations of today have an opportunity to provide assistance as well as support in the procedure of actively participating, engaging and contributing in social media. As mentioned in the previous chapters, technology (in this case smartphones, tablets and importable cameras) can assist as well as accommodate the company with a diversity of issues. For instance, it has the opportunity to assist the company in the creation of content by allowing an access to the different social media channels no matter the time or location. As a result, the level of activeness perceived by the followers might increase. In addition, it assists the company in producing pictures, videos as well as spontaneous posts, merely with one device. Furthermore, it has the opportunity to capture the unique moments with which the company is able to promote the company as well as sell the products and services. To conclude, it is advisable for the commissioning company to consider investing in this kind of technology in order to better serve the company as well as the consumers.

7 CONCLUSION

During the research, certain problems arose. One of these problems was the lack of responses gathered from the questionnaire. This was a setback for the analysis of the results since from the eight responds received it was not possible to conclude a valid statistical information about the utilization of social media among the current customers. Another difficulty arose during the conducted electronic interview. Since merely one of the two companies decided to participate in the research, it diminished the validity of the results. Should the other company been willing to participate, it would have provided more depth to the research as well as to the results and therefore, to the conducted development plan.

However, despite of these problems, the research provided certain insights to the utilization of social media among the current consumers of the commissioning company as well as among the small sized tourism businesses. With the help of these results, it was possible to conduct a development plan for the utilization of social media for the commissioning company. This plan included guidelines on how to select the social media channels, what kind of content should be utilized, how the portrayal of personality in social media can benefit the company, how to utilize social media as a promotional channel as well as on how to maintain an efficient and workable blog.

Apart from these aspects, one of the main features when utilizing social media effectively as well as efficiently is technology. With devices such as a smart phone or a tablet, the user of social media has an opportunity to access all the different accounts no matter the location or time. In addition, he is also able to take pictures, film videos and post spontaneous posts anywhere in the world. Therefore, one of the main directions for the commissioning company to develop is to invest in this kind of technology in order to better serve the company as well as the consumers.

During the research, it came apparent that social media has a potential to offer certain benefits for small sized companies. Among these benefits are the possible interactions with future employers, consumers as well as business partners. Apart from this, social media has the opportunity to offer the companies a functional channel for promotional purposes. This denotes that through pictures, videos or textual content, the company can promote the products and services without coming on too strong or in an aggressive manner. These reasons

are merely one part of the vast selection of motives companies should take into consideration when deciding to participate, engage and involve in social media. This decision is not to be taken lightly but with deep and profound consideration.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 Questionnaire for the current customers in Finnish

APPENDIX 2 Questionnaire for the current customers in English

APPENDIX 3 Questions of the electronic interview in Finnish

Tämän kyselylomakkeen käyttötarkoitus on kartoittaa Zilivonkkelis Ky:n asiakkaiden sosiaalisen median käyttöä sekä sen hyödyntämistä tiedon hankinnassa. Kysely toteutetaan osana opinnäytetyötä, jossa tutkitaan sosiaalisen median käyttömahdollisuuksia yrityksen markkinoinnissa.

Kyselyyn vastaaminen tapahtuu nimettömänä. Vastaanotetut vastaukset analysoidaan ja tulokset julkaistaan ainoastaan osana opinnäytetyötä. Kysely koostuu 13 lyhyestä kysymyksestä, joista kolme on avointa. Monivalintakysymyksissä on mahdollista valita yksi tai useampi vaihtoehto, riippuen vastaajan omista kokemuksista.

Suuri kiitos etukäteen yhteistyöstänne!

Saara Heikkinen
Kajaanin
Ammattikorkeakoulu

- b) Minä en omista tietokonetta
- c) Minulla ei ole kokemusta sosiaalisesta mediasta
- d) Muu, mikä? _____

10. Mitä tietoa haluaisitte saada enemmän yrityksestä?

- a) Faktatietoa
- b) Tarinoita safareilta
- c) Kuvia
- d) Videoita
- e) Uutisia ja kuulumisia
- f) Muu, mikä? _____

11. Mitä kanavia pitkin haluaisitte saada tietoa yrityksestä (esim. lehtimainos, esite, Facebook, blogit, jne.)? Luetelkaa kaikki itsellenne mieluisimmat kanavat.

12. Oletteko tietoinen yrityksen käyttämisestä sosiaalisen median kanavista?

Kyllä _____ / Ei _____

13. Jos olette tietoinen, mitä mieltä olette yrityksen tämänhetkisestä sosiaalisen median käytöstä, kanavista ja niiden mahdollisuuksista?

Kiitos osallistumisestanne kyselyyn!

The main purpose of this survey is to examine the use of the social media as well as its utilization in the acquisition of information with the current customers of Zilivonkkelis Ky. The survey is carried out as part of a thesis which researches the possibilities of the social media in the marketing efforts of a company.

All the answers will be anonymous. The received replies will be analyzed and the results will be published merely as part of the thesis. The questionnaire consists of 13 short questions, two of which are open-ended questions. In the multiple choice questions the respondent has the possibility to choose one or more choices from the selection.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation!

Saara Heikkinen
Kajaani University of Applied Sciences

Background Information

1. Gender male _____ female _____
2. Age a) -- 15 b) 16 - 24 c) 25 - 34 d) 35 - 44
 e) 45 - 54 f) 55 - 64 g) 65 --
3. Home city _____

Acquisition of Information

4. How did you learn about the company?
a) Advertisement
b) Tourist Information Center
c) Internet
d) Brochure
e) Friends/Family
f) Other, what? _____
5. If you answered **c) Internet** to the previous question, could you please specify from where you found the information (e.g. company webpages, the municipality of Suomussalmi, the tourist information center, etc.).

The use of social media

6. Do you use the social media? Yes _____ / No _____
7. If you use the social media, which of the following channels do you utilize?
a) Facebook
b) Twitter
c) YouTube
d) Blogs
e) Instagram
f) Pinterest
g) Google +
h) Discussion forums
i) Other, what? _____
8. How actively do you use the social media with the scale of 1 to 5?
1 Extremely actively
2 Quite actively
3 I am Interested
4 Not really actively
5 Not at all actively
9. If you answered **5 Not at all actively** to the previous question, could you please specify the reason?
a) I do not have time
b) I do not own a computer

- c) I do not have any experience of the social media
- d) Other, what? _____

10. What kind of information would you like to receive about the company?

- a) Mere facts
- b) Stories from the safaris
- c) Pictures
- d) Videos
- e) Recent news and updates
- f) Other, what? _____

11. Through which channels would you like to receive more information (e.g. advertisement, brochure, Facebook, blogs, etc.)? Please, list all the channels that are attractive to you.

12. Are you aware of the social media channels that the company is currently using?

Yes _____ / No _____

13. If you are aware of the different channels, how do you feel about the current use of the social media channels and their possibilities?

Thank you for participating in the survey!

Sosiaalisen median käyttö yrityksen markkinoinnissa

Tutkimus osana opinnäytetyötä

Haastattelu koostuu 15 lyhyestä kysymyksestä, joiden tarkoitus on kartoittaa sosiaalisen median käyttöä yrityksen markkinoinnissa. Haastattelukysymykset ovat jaettu kolmeen eri osaluokkaan: syyt ja seuraukset, käyttö sekä osallistuminen.

Vastausaikaa on perjantaihin **19.4.2013** asti.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Saara Heikkinen
Kajaanin Ammattikorkeakoulu
13.4.2013

HAASTATTELUKYSYMYKSET

SYYT JA SEURAUKSET

1. Miksi päätitte lähteä mukaan sosiaaliseen mediaan?

Vastaus:

2. Millä perusteella valitsitte sosiaalisen median kanavat, joita nykyään hyödynnätte?

Vastaus:

3. Oletteko tyytyväinen tekemäännne päätökseen lähteä mukaan sosiaaliseen mediaan?

Miksi, miksi ette?

Vastaus:

4. Millaista hyötyä mielestänne on sosiaalinen media tarjonnut yrityksellenne? Voisitteko ystävällisesti antaa esimerkkejä?

Vastaus:

KÄYTTÖ

5. Kuka yrityksessänne hoitaa ja ylläpitää sosiaalista mediaa?

Vastaus:

6. Kuinka usein päivitätte tilaanne sosiaalisen median kanavissa?

Vastaus:

7. Millaisten työvälineiden avulla päivitätte tilaanne sosiaalisessa mediassa?

Vastaus:

8. Mihin aikaan päivästä olette aktiivisimmillaan sosiaalisessa mediassa?

Vastaus:

9. Missä ollessanne päivitätte tilaanne sosiaalisessa mediassa useimmiten? Kotona, työssä, vapa-ajalla, jne.?

Vastaus:

10. Onko tapauksia tai aikoja, jolloin sosiaalisen median käyttönne on jäänyt vähemmälle? Vai pyrittekö aktiivisesti olemaan mukana sosiaalisessa mediassa kaikista tapauksista huolimatta?

Vastaus:

OSALLISTUMINEN

11. Kuinka usein seuraatte eri sosiaalisen median kanavianne?

Vastaus:

12. Seuraatteko aktiivisesti tilapäivityksienne aikaansaamia keskusteluja?

Vastaus:

13. Kuinka usein otatte osaa näihin keskusteluihin?

Vastaus:

14. Miten suhtaudutte negatiiviseen palautteeseen sosiaalisessa mediassa?

Vastaus:

Kiitos osallistumisestanne tutkimukseen!