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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MEANS OF TOURISM MARKETING

Text Analysis of Finnish Tour Operators' Visibility in Social Media

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ABSTRACT

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<p>The topic of this thesis was to investigate the use of social media as a marketing tool by Finnish tour operators. The purpose was to conduct a research of the four biggest Finnish tour operators, Aurinkomatkat, Finnmatkat, Tjäreborg and Lomamatkat, concentrating on finding out to what extent they appear in different social media channels, and what kind of impact this has on the companies. In the research, the chosen social media channels were Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube and Google+.</p> <p>The research was carried out using qualitative methods and more precisely text analysis. Text analysis was chosen because it is a useful and sensible method of research when analyzing websites and their contents.</p> <p>The results showed that three of the companies, Aurinkomatkat, Finnmatkat and Tjäreborg, are using social media in a professional and effective way for their marketing, whereas one of the companies, Lomamatkat, still has things to improve. It was also found that the communication between the customers and the tour operators is crucial for gaining reliability among the consumers.</p>		

Key words

Marketing, package tours, qualitative research, social media, text analysis, tour operators, tourism

TIIVISTELMÄ OPINNÄYTETYÖSTÄ

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<p>Tämän opinnäytetyön aiheena oli suomalaisten matkanjärjestäjien sosiaalisen median käyttö markkinointivälineenä. Tarkoituksena oli tutkia millä tavoin neljä suurinta suomalaista matkanjärjestäjää Aurinkomatkat, Finnmatkat, Tjäreborg ja Lomamatkat esiintyvät yhteisöllisessä mediassa ja millä tavoin se vaikuttaa kyseisiin yrityksiin. Sosiaalisen median kanavista osaksi tätä tutkimusta valittiin Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube ja Google+.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa käytettiin kvalitatiivisia menetelmiä, tarkemmin sanoen tekstianalyysiä. Tekstianalyysi valittiin tutkimusmenetelmäksi koska se on hyödyllinen ja järkevä menetelmä Internet-sivujen analysointiin.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa saatiin selville, että kolme matkanjärjestäjistä, Aurinkomatkat, Finnmatkat ja Tjäreborg käyttävät sosiaalista mediaa ammattitaitoisesti ja tehokkaasti markkinoinnin edistämiseksi, kun taas Lomamatkoilla on vielä parantamisen varaa. Selville saatiin myös, että yrityksen ja asiakkaiden välinen viestintä on elintärkeää luotettavuuden saavuttamiseksi kuluttajien keskuudessa.</p>		

Asiasanat Kvalitatiivinen tutkimus, markkinointi, matkailu, matkanjärjestäjät, pakettimatkat, tekstianalyysi, yhteisöllinen media

ABSTRACT
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1 INTRODUCTION

Marketing trends have changed radically in the past few years. The internet has become a central marketing tool for companies all over the world. The latest trend that seems to be here to stay is social media marketing. Social media offers businesses a great chance to use the word-of-mouth as an effective way to gain customers. This is why many tourism companies have chosen to invest in social media marketing. For its current nature, social media marketing was chosen to be the topic for this thesis.

This thesis starts with a theoretical framework. The concept of tour operation will be discussed starting with the history of tour operation and explaining how the business works. After this a brief history of tour operators in Finland will be presented, along with the introduction to some of the biggest Finnish tour operators.

After the introduction to tour operation, the basics of tourism marketing will be gone through. The marketing theory is a very important part of the thesis to gain an overall understanding of how the tourist's decision making process develops and how tourism companies and more specifically tour operators structure and carry out their marketing plans. There will also be a glimpse on online marketing at the end of the chapter, which leads the reader to the next topic, very fundamental in this thesis, social media. The phenomenon will be defined and some of the most popular social media channels will be introduced. The chapter will be sealed with adaption of social media into marketing.

This thesis also contains a research part. The research is going to be carried out by comparing four leading tour operators from Finland and how these tour operators use social media for marketing purposes. These tour operators are Aurinkomatkat, Finnmatkat, Tjäreborg and Lomamatkat. Since social media consists of thousands of different channels, the research will be narrowed down to analyzing the chosen tour operators' visibility on six well-known social media sites, including the social networking providers Facebook, Google+ and Twitter, picture sharing sites Pinterest, and Instagram, as well as video sharing service YouTube.

The research method that was chosen for the research part of this thesis is qualitative text analysis. Text analysis was a natural choice for this research for its relevance when analyzing the content of websites. Before starting the actual analysis, the concepts of qualitative research and text analysis are presented and the formation of a research question is explained, following with an implementation of the actual research in this thesis. The research is carried out by analyzing the visibility and details of each tour operator channel by channel. After completing the analysis, conclusions will be given to finish the report.

2 TOUR OPERATORS

The demand of organized trips is met by companies that plan, organize, sell and often also operate their own tour packages. These companies are called tour operators. Tour operators offer tourists a safe way to travel and enjoy new places and sights with the support of an on-site guide. Tourists have it easy and carefree to travel and get everything in one purchase. (Cook, Yale & Marqua 2010, 89-90.)

This chapter is divided into three parts that discuss the history and development of package tours and tour operators, explaining how tour operation works and how tour operation has developed its way into an important part of the tourism business in Finland. At the end of this chapter, the four biggest Finnish tour operators are introduced and described.

2.1 History of package tours

In the 1800s, trains were still very slow compared to modern trains, but back then, rail travel was the only means of transportation used for longer trips. Travel agents were the ones booking tickets to customers. However they were responsible only for booking rail tickets, which was changed by Thomas Cook who was the first to introduce charter transportation and tour packages starting from the early 1840s. (Bhatia 2012.)

As time passed and transport modes developed, tourism professionals started to negotiate with hotels for bulk buying hotel rooms, which meant buying a big quantity of room bookings at the same time and therefore getting a discount. This was when organizing packages including transportation and accommodation became more popular. As ground transportation developed, tour operators started to transport customers not only to and from, but also within the destination, for example for sightseeing purposes or any short trips in the destination. (Bhatia 2012.)

Due to the Industrial Revolution, the standard of living rose to the level where the working class people were able to travel in the early 20th century. This led to a boom in the tourism industry – tour operators became more and more important, and new hotels, ships and

trains were built to meet the increasing demand. When jet aircrafts started to operate, tour operators started to use air travel and were able to expand their area to far-off, exotic destinations in time. (Bhatia 2012.)

2.2 The tour operation business

Tour operators – sometimes called packagers or tour wholesalers – offer consumers their selection of tourism products that form complete packages of holiday services in destinations selected by the company. These services can include for example transportation, accommodation, possible day trips, sightseeing tours and meals. Most often holidays organized by tour operators are not longer than one to two weeks in length and include only one destination, but exceptions occur, such as trekking tours and other tour packages where tourism services in several locations are included. (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2008, 389.)

Tour operators can be divided into four different groups which are mass market operators, specialist tour operators, domestic operators and incoming operators. Mass market operators concentrate on mass tourism destinations. They often own their own charter airline and their tours are divided into two seasons, winter and summer. Specialist tour operators offer tour packages which all have a unifying factor, such as same type of accommodation or transportation, same theme or same country of destination. Domestic operators sell domestic customers tour packages taking place in their own country. Incoming operators organize and sell trips to incoming tourists taking place in a specific country or area, but some of them may organize only accommodation for a foreign tour operator or work as a guide service for other tour operators. (Bhatia 2012.)

Tour operators aim to create packages that can be sold to the consumers with a compatible and attractive price while at the same time making enough profit to run the business. This is assured by the concept called ‘bulk buying’, which means that the tour operator buys a large number of e.g. hotel rooms and airline seats to get discounts and be able to offer their packages to consumers at an attractive price. Other things often bought in bulk are airport transportation, taxi transportation and local entertainment that can be sold to the customers in advance or on site. The tour packages are sold to the public using different types of

marketing tools, such as paper form (leaflets and brochures), TV advertising or online advertising. (Cooper et al. 2008, 389; Page 2009, 297-299.)

2.3 Tour operators in Finland

Finns have developed a great interest towards leisure travel over time. However, travelling became common only after the war times. In the 1950's Finnish citizens needed a visa to travel to many countries, which prevented many people from travelling. The ones to get to travel were mostly people with an academic career, such as teachers, or other professionals who needed common knowledge in their jobs. (Youtube 2013b.)

In Finland, the demand for holiday packages including transportation, accommodation, food and sightseeing was first met by Aurinkomatkat starting from 1963, and was soon followed by Finnmatkat and Tjäreborg during the following years. The main purpose of starting tour operation businesses in Finland was to make it simple and easy for Finnish people to go on a holiday. Because of the lack of sufficient language skills in the 60's and 70's, the guides often had a language study background and played a very important role helping the tourists to survive by running errands in the destinations. (Youtube 2013b.)

During the 70's and 80's, package holidays became more common when the working class started to have more disposable income and this way afford to travel. New trendy destinations were offered for Finns in Asia, including Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives. (Finnmatkat 2013e.)

In the 2000's South American destinations, such as Brazil and Venezuela became available for Finnish tourists. The Internet started to play a big role in tour package marketing and is now the main channel of sales and marketing for all the biggest tour operators in Finland. Nowadays, Finns buy approximately one million package holidays a year, most of which are purchased online. (Finnmatkat 2013e, Youtube 2013b.)

In the following subchapters the four biggest Finnish tour operators are introduced and described. These four tour operators will also be the ones examined in the empirical part of this thesis.

2.3.1 Aurinkomatkat

The first tour operator that was chosen for the empirical part of this thesis is Oy Aurinkomatkat – Suntours Ltd Ab. Founded in 1963, the company celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and is the oldest tour operator in Finland. By passenger numbers, Aurinkomatkat is the biggest tour operator in the country with over 300,000 annual passengers. Aurinkomatkat is a part of the Finnair group and thus the majority of the company is owned by the Finnish state. Aurinkomatkat also has a subsidiary company in Estonia by the name of Aurinko OÜ, selling tours from Tallinn and Helsinki. For flights, Aurinkomatkat uses mostly Finnair, both charter and route flights, but they may also use other airlines' route flights when needed. (Aurinkomatkat 2013b; Aurinko 2013)

Through Aurinkomatkat it is possible to book flights, accommodation and cruises separately as well as in packages. In addition to traditional package holidays, the company offers group trips, active holidays including e.g. skiing, golf, trekking, diving or marathon activities, packages including only the flights and the accommodation, and tailored packages for customers that want to build their own package holiday. It is also possible to rent a car, buy a travel insurance (Eurooppalainen), book a private swimming pool, a honeymoon package or private airport transportation, and order a holiday greeting in the form of flowers, fruits, soft drink or champagne. (Aurinkomatkat 2013a.)

2.3.2 Finnmatkat

The second tour operator in the empirical analysis is Oy Finnmatkat Ab. It is the second biggest Finnish tour operator, sending approximately 277,000 tourists abroad every year. Along with Fritidsresor in Sweden and Star Tour in Norway and Denmark, Finnmatkat is a part of TUI Nordic, the biggest tour operator in Nordic countries. Furthermore, TUI Nordic belongs to TUI Travel PLC. (Finnmatkat 2013c, Finnmatkat 2013d.)

The journey of Finnmatkat started in 1964 when Vingresor was founded. Four years later the name of the company was changed to Vingmatkat. In 1973 Finnair bought the company and a year later the name of the company was changed to Finnmatkat. In 2000 Fritidsresor bought Finnmatkat and Preussag AG (later TUI) bought Fritidsresor, which made Finnmatkat a part of the biggest tourism group in Europe. (Finnmatkat 2013e.)

Finnmatkat offers a variety of packages in beach resorts and cities. Group holidays, adults' holidays and family holidays are separated. They also offer honeymoon packages, all inclusive holidays, active holidays, car holidays, cruises and "TEMA" tours concentrated on a specific theme. A new and interesting option is a voluntary package where the customer purchases an ordinary holiday package to Thailand and gets a chance to spend a part of their holiday volunteering by working for a project for protecting sea turtles. (Finnmatkat 2013a, Finnmatkat 2013b.)

2.3.3 Tjäreborg

Tjäreborg, the third tour operator included in the analysis, is a Finnish tour operator and a part of the Thomas Cook group. When the company was founded it employed less than 20 people, but since then it has grown to employ 51 people in Finland and about 80 people abroad in the destinations as tourist guides, for instance. Tjäreborg takes about 190.000 Finns abroad every year, which makes it the third biggest travel agency in the country. (Tjäreborg 2012.)

The three most visible employees are the chief executive officer Jan Wedin, information manager Arja Pucilowski and sales manager Peter Kåla, who has worked for Tjäreborg for the last six years. According to Mr. Kåla, the annual turnover of the company is around 135 million euros. Since Tjäreborg is a big travel agency on a national scale, it is listed in many different registers, such as the register of package travel companies, trade register, register of employers, basic information register of the taxation office, prepayment register and VAT register. (Tjäreborg 2012.)

The Thomas Cook Group, the parent company of Tjäreborg, is a leading tour operator group on a global scale. The business was started by a man of the same name in the UK in

1841, when he introduced new rail routes inside the country. He slowly broadened his business by taking British tourists to Paris, to the Alps and other new destinations in the following years. (Tjäreborg 2012.)

Moving the business to his son and later grandsons, it was able to develop and has now turned itself into the most significant tour operator group in the world. Among Tjäreborg, some of the members of the present Thomas Cook Group are Thomas Cook, Ving, Sunset, Airtours, Neckermann, Condor Airlines, My Sunquest and Direct Holidays. (Tjäreborg 2012.)

Tjäreborg has suitable services for most customers, since they offer everything from all-inclusive tour packages to only flights or only hotel. The different categories of their services are package tours, TjäreborgFlex, flights only, hotel only, golf trips, combo trips, group and meeting trips, and trips to Disneyland Paris. TjäreborgFlex is a concept that allows the customer to make a package that suits them the best. These trips can be either beach or city packages. The concept combines the independency of travel to the comfort and safety of a package tour. The customer chooses the destination and Tjäreborg helps them to find a suitable hotel, flights and other arrangements. The combo trips are also an interesting choice since they allow the customer to stay in several hotels and destinations during the tour. This way it is possible to combine for instance a beach holiday to a city break. (Tjäreborg 2012.)

2.3.4 Lomamatkat

The fourth tour operator in the research is going to be Lomamatkat Oy. Lomamatkat is a Finnish tour operator that ranks 4th on the national list of tour operators with its 60,000 annual customers. Lomamatkat is a part of a tour operator group called Primera Travel Group that operates in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. The headquarters of the group are located in Sweden. Lomamatkat has altogether 58 retailers, of which the biggest one is a Finnish travel agency called Matka-Vekka. Matka-Vekka also belongs to the Primera Travel Group. (Lomamatkat 2013.)

Lomamatkat offers holiday packages to Southern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and South America. Most of the flights included in Lomamatkat package tours are operated by Primera Air – an airline owned by the Primera Travel Group. At the moment, Primera Air offers over 70 destinations from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, Asia and the Atlantic. (Lomamatkat 2013, Primera Air 2013.)

3 MARKETING TOURISM PRODUCTS

Tourism marketing differs slightly from marketing regular goods. The biggest difference is that, unlike most products, tourism products are 'intangible', which means that they are not physical products that one can hold in their hand. Another special characteristic is 'inseparability' which means that a tourism service is often produced and consumed simultaneously and takes place in the premises or equipment of the producer of the service, for example in an airplane or in a hotel room. The third characteristic is that since tourism products, e.g. a hotel room for a holiday, is booked for a specific date, it cannot be consumed any other day but the day it is booked for. This means tourism products are often 'perishable' and it is impossible to store them – if they are not consumed in the right time, they do not exist anymore. (Middleton, Fyall, Morgan & Ranchhod 2009, 46-48.)

To understand the tourism marketing process, it is essential to understand what elements affect the consumer's decision making process. Hence, consumer behaviour and motivation is explained in the next subchapter.

3.1 Consumer and tourist behaviour

Consumer behaviour is one of the most important terms to understand when working with marketing. It can be defined as the process of choosing, purchasing and consuming a product or a service that meets one's needs. This applies to both, groups and individuals. It is necessary for a company to understand consumer behaviour in order to carry out effective marketing campaigns and to attract the right customers. In the end, marketing always focuses on getting the consumer's attention for getting them to make a purchase. (Swarbrooke & Horner 1999, 5-7.)

For the decision making process to happen, the potential tourist has to have something to motivate them to seek for tourism products. Hereby, motivators are necessary for an actual purchase to happen. Motivators are the factor between the consumer's needs and the decision to act to fulfill the need. When talking about tourist behaviour, motivators can be divided into two different groups, which are motivators that make a potential tourist go on

a holiday, and motivators that make the tourist go on a specific type of a holiday at a specific time in a specific destination. Motivators are sometimes shared, for example in the situation of taking a holiday with company. Though, it is rare to have completely the same motivators as your fellow travellers, which often adds challenge to choosing the right holiday for everyone and compromising so that everyone will enjoy the holiday. (Swarbrooke & Horner 1999, 53-56; Middleton et al. 2009, 80.)

Motivators are different for every individual tourist, but most often the main ingredients of motivation are the same for everyone. The consumer's own personality and lifestyle usually are the first factors to determine what kind of a trip is suitable for them, along with their self-image as well as the image they want to give of themselves to others. Past tourism experiences of the potential tourist, both good and bad, and especially the opinions and experiences of the consumer's family, friends and other people surrounding them, also have a strong effect on the choice of destination and holiday type. (Swarbrooke & Horner 1999, 55; Middleton et al. 2009, 82.)

Consumers are exposed to thousands of media messages and advertisements each day. Obviously it is impossible to pay attention to all of them, and that is when perception is needed. Perception is the concept where the consumer's mind filters received information, keeping only the information that is familiar and interesting for the consumer. This is used in marketing by using familiar elements with a surprising turn that makes the advertisement easier to remember. (Middleton et al. 2009, 86-87.)

Experiences and learnt things are the elements from which consumers' beliefs and attitudes arise. Attitudes are slowly developing and affected by the surrounding people and culture. Since attitudes often are strong and relatively hard to change, companies usually prefer to market their products to match with the consumers' existing attitudes. (Middleton et al. 2009, 87.)

Understanding tourist behaviour is crucial in marketing tourism products and services and in knowing how the decision making process works and how to attract the consumers. This helps tourism providers to target their marketing to the right kind of people by segmentation. In the following subchapter tourism market segmentation is introduced.

3.2 The tourism market segmentation

Market segmentation is a process where a company organizes both its current and potential customers into groups and chooses to target their marketing towards those groups whose needs and interest meet best with the products or services the company is marketing and trying to sell. As consumers have become more demanding, it has become rather difficult to mass market products, in other words to direct the marketing to the whole public, which is why market segmentation is needed in order to narrow down the target group.

(Middleton et al. 2009, 97.)

Most businesses have several segments to concentrate on in their marketing. Some segments are important for their location, other segments are potentially interested in the product itself. Segments change, grow and decline over time, due to fluctuating trends, along with the developing technology and the increasing immigration. (Middleton et al. 2009, 99.)

The cheapest way of marketing a product is to aim the marketing to everyone. This will allow the lowest possible price for the product. However, segmentation is necessary also for these mass products, to make the marketing process easier by targeting different campaigns to specific segments. (Middleton et al. 2009, 99-100.)

In the tourism business, companies most often have several segments to deal with but in different times of the year. Some tourism companies have their services so specified by location or the nature of the product that they can market them to specific segments only, and in this case it is necessary to modify the products to be able to market them to more segments. This will make the marketing process more cost-effective and help to increase the turnover of the company. (Middleton et al. 2009, 101.)

3.3 Marketing tour packages

Tour packages can be marketed either directly by the tour operator itself or by a third party, e.g. a travel agent or other distribution intermediaries. One of the major advantages and the main element making tour packages popular over time is that they have always had

a low price. When an individual customer buys the same tourism services and forms the same kind of a package that a tour operator is selling, the price will be much higher. This is because tour operators use bulk buying. In other words they buy many hotel rooms or airplane seats at the same time from a B2B source, which lowers the price of a single room or seat remarkably compared to a private customer buying their services for example at a travel agent or online. (Middleton et al. 2009, 431.)

Tourists and especially first time tourists have learnt to value the knowledge of tour operators on choosing good hotels and other services at the destination. For a private person it can be difficult to find good quality services, so they like to rely on the tour operator to do it for them. In addition, if some element(s) of a holiday bought from a tour operator does not meet the expectations of the customer, they will get compensation from the tour operator. The feedback a tour operator gets from customers help them to improve their packages and to retain their customers as well as gain new ones. (Middleton et al. 2009, 431.)

3.4 Online marketing

The internet has without a question grown to become the most used channel for tourism marketing today. When tourism products are sold online, consumers have easy access to them and can do the bookings easily from home any time suitable for them. Online marketing is wider than marketing through brochures, since in a brochure the number of pages is limited and therefore they are able to carry less information than a website. Online the consumers have access to more photos and videos to visualize the destination and its services, which helps the consumers to choose the right services for them to have a successful holiday. (Middleton et al. 2009, 259-260.)

Consumers can compare prices more easily on the internet, because more options are available online than for example at a travel agency. Flight and cruise or ferry bookings are easy to make by searching connections on the transport company's website and choosing the suitable one. Flight and hotel booking search engines allow consumers to search for services from several different providers on the same webpage and compare prices easily.

Tickets can most often also be downloaded and printed from home. (Middleton et al. 2009, 260-261.)

Without advertising, company websites are hard to find among millions of other websites on the internet. This is why additional advertising for instance on TV or newspapers is needed to raise awareness of the website's existence. Companies can also buy advertising space online on another website used by potential customers, in the form of a side banner or a pop up window. However, especially popup windows are often considered disturbing and even annoying and that is why they are not always the best advertising option. Investing on visibility in search engines is another way to attract visitors to the website. Companies pay search engines, e.g. Google, to show their website among the first in the search. (Middleton et al. 2009, 262-264.)

4 SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING

The social media, earlier known as Web 2.0, is taking over in online marketing. Every day more companies join Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels to gain online visibility and attract more customers, free of charge. In this chapter the social media concept is discussed and different social media channels are introduced, after which the use of social media in marketing is described.

4.1 Defining social media

The beginning of social media takes place long before computer science. People have always had the natural urge to communicate with other people around them. This need combined with the modern information technology has formed an extremely powerful communication tool that has opened up new doors for online marketing. (Soininen, Wasenius & Leponiemi 2010, 26.)

Social media can be viewed as the modern version of word-of-mouth. It takes the decision-making process back to what it used to be a long time ago when one's family, friends and acquaintances and their experiences were the main factor helping to form one's opinion on different things. It allows people to share content and to communicate and hold conversations with each other online. Instead of a one-way communication used in most media channels, two-way communication is the base and the meaning of social media. (Sigala, Christou & Gretzel 2012.)

Anyone can join a social media website and decide to share content, for example their personal views on a specific topic. The community gets the shared information in real time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the number of people that one is able to reach out to through social media is bigger than ever. By linking different social media channels to each other, huge networks of people can be created, which companies have learned to take advantage of when marketing their products. (Soininen et al. 2010, 27-30; Sigala et al. 2012.)

4.2 Popular social media websites

Social media consists of hundreds of different websites and online communities. Some of the most popular ones will be introduced in this subchapter. The chosen websites will also be a part of the text analysis later on in this thesis.

Facebook was founded in 2004 by a 23-year-old psychology student named Mark Zuckerberg from Harvard University. The purpose of Facebook was to gather the students of Harvard to one website. The website extended to cover all the American universities and from 2006 other people were able to join. The current aim of Facebook is to let people share content and this way connect with each other. The main elements on Facebook are apps, games, pages, groups and naturally the user profiles. The groups are joined, unlike pages that can only be “liked”, which means that the user clicks a “Like” button and this way subscribes to the page. (The Guardian 2007; Facebook 2013.)

Twitter is a microblogging service. The users can publish short posts called “Tweets” on their own profile and also on other users’ profiles by tagging them in the post. In addition to text, Tweets can also include photos, videos and links. (Twitter, 2013b.)

Pinterest is a website where one can register either by making a new account or using the existing Facebook account. The meaning of Pinterest is to make it easy for people to gather pictures, recipes, articles and other small pieces of information and keep them in order and easily accessible in their Pinterest profile (Pinterest 2013c.)

Instagram is a website where users can upload their photos and add captions to them from the computer or from the mobile phone on the go. The photos can then be posted on Facebook or Twitter from Instagram. (Instagram 2013.)

Youtube is a video service founded in 2005 and is nowadays owned by Google. In YouTube the users can upload videos and view them as well as the videos of other users. The videos can be commented on, liked and added to playlists that the users can create for themselves and for the public. (Youtube 2013a.)

Google+ is a social networking website for both individuals and companies. It is a way for individuals to stay in touch with their family and friends, and for companies to keep in touch with their customers while finding new ones. The idea of Google+ is relatively similar to the one of Facebook. Hangouts are a video conference style service in Google+ which allows people to have group video calls for free. +1 is a way for the users to tell by one click that they find a post interesting. (Google+ 2013a, Google + 2013b.)

4.3 Social media as a tourism marketing tool

These days, for companies to appear modern, they have to engage in social media. Most large companies, especially the international ones, are highly visible in the social media. For these companies social media is an effective way to build a two-way communication bridge with their customers. However, social media is only considered as a complementing element, an addition to the already existing marketing efforts of a company, instead of something that would entirely replace the old ways of a company's marketing. (Evans & Bratton 2012.)

Probably the main reason companies want to try out social media as a means of marketing is the fact that the word-of-mouth in social networks is one of the fastest and most effective ways to spread information to large groups of people. Social media allows a company to get closer to their customers than ever before and to listen to what they have to say. Both positive and negative feedback is received through social media, and this feedback helps companies improve their marketing strategies in the right direction. (Agresta & Bough 2010 3-8.)

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Research is a way to answer questions that lack an answer. Without a research question there is no research. Research questions always intend to create new information and knowledge. They have to be sensible and not too philosophical, so that they can be at least partly answered through data collection and analysis of the data. (Smith 2010, 8-9.)

Research can be divided into two groups, qualitative research and quantitative research. While quantitative research answers questions based on numbers and is often conducted in the form of a questionnaire, qualitative research intends to answer what people think and how they feel about specific subjects. (Smith 2010, 109.)

Considering the depth of research, there are three different levels of research. Descriptive research is the most simple type of research and answers the question what exists. Explanatory research continues from descriptive research and answers why things are as they are. Evaluative research is used to study on if a programme or policy has been effective or successful and what could be done differently. (Veal 2006, 3-5; Smith 2010, 11.)

5.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research concentrates on gathering much information from few sources, unlike quantitative research where usually a limited amount of data is gathered from a large group of people. It aims to create an overall understanding of a specific person or topic. (Veal 2006, 40.)

In the empirical part of this thesis a qualitative research is carried out. The characteristics of qualitative methods meet better the needs of the research question than those of quantitative methods. Qualitative research can be conducted in several ways, including in-depth and informal interviews, participant observation and text analysis which was chosen to be the research method used in the research of this thesis. Text analysis is introduced in the following subchapter. (Veal 2006, 40.)

5.2 Text analysis

When text or graphic content is to be researched on, content analysis is a relevant choice. Text analysis concentrates on what information can be found in the source, how the message is delivered and by whom. Both the actual content and symbolic content are analysed. Text analysis can be done on its own or as a part of a bigger research, e.g. a case study. (Smith 2010, 201; Ritchie, Burns & Palmer 2005, 191.)

Text analysis can be done on any kind of data, including texts, TV programmes, websites, photographs and advertisements. Because there are no factors between the researcher and the content, the results of a text analysis often reflect the researcher's real feelings and opinions, which are called naturalistic data. The content can be divided into two groups, 'manifest content' and 'latent content'. Manifest content means the actual text and images in the content, whereas latent content means what was meant by the text, what the message behind it is. (Smith 2010, 202-206.)

The first step to conduct a text analysis is to think and decide what one wants to achieve with the research. It can be a hypothesis or optionally one or a few research questions that will be answered. After the objectives have been decided, one needs to define the key concepts around which the research concentrates on. Then it is time to create a sampling frame to make it easier to choose which texts or content is going to be included in the analysis and which will be left out. After the prework is done and the texts to be researched on have been selected, they can be reviewed and analysed. (Smith 2010, 209-210.)

5.3 Research question

A research question is the question that a research is based on. A research starts from a question that needs to be answered. It helps the researcher focus on his or her topic. To start forming a research question, the general subject of the research has to be decided. The subject should be something that interests the researcher and motivates him or her to proceed with the project. (The Writing Center at George Mason University 2013.)

Often the chosen topic of the research is more or less familiar to the researcher in advance, but it is good to search for information on the topic before choosing the final research question. This preliminary research will help the researcher to narrow down the topic and help to form the question around which the research will concentrate. Another thing to consider before the question formation is made, is who the audience of the research will be and what they could possibly be interested in. (The Writing Center at George Mason University 2013.)

After going through these steps the researcher can start forming the final question. The research question should be clear and answerable and remain the same during the rest of the research process to keep the research clear and sensible. The question ought not to be too easily answerable, so that the research would have a meaning and preferably create new information. (The Writing Center at George Mason University 2013.)

5.4 Research implementation

The research question of the research in this thesis was formed by the help of preliminary planning and research on the chosen topic. The suitable topic for the research and thesis was found from current topics (social media) and the author's own interests (tour operation). Two different research questions were chosen to guide the author through the research. The first questions was "to what extent the four biggest Finnish tour operators, Aurinkomatkat, Finnmatkat, Tjäreborg and Lomamatkat, appear in the social media" and the other question was how their visibility in the social media affects them.

The chosen research questions will be intended to be answered through research and analysis of the profiles of these four tour operators in different popular social media websites, including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Youtube and Google+. These social media channels were chosen for their popularity and after discovering in the preliminary research on the topic that the chosen tour operators are more or less visible on these websites.

The research was decided to be carried out through qualitative methods, because the desired outcome of the data collection is to have a good amount of information from few sources. More precisely, the research will be carried out through text analysis. Text

analysis was chosen, because it is the easiest and most suitable means of research for analyzing websites and their content, including for instance images and text. In a text analysis process, naturalistic data will be created, which will allow the researcher's views and opinions to show through the findings.

6 TEXT ANALYSIS OF FINNISH TOUR OPERATORS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

In this chapter the four biggest tour operators in Finland, including Aurinkomatkat, Finnmatkat, Tjäreborg and Lomamatkat, and their visibility in some of the most popular social media channels will be analysed.

6.1 Official websites

The analysis starts on the tour operators' official websites to see if the companies have linked any social media channels on their websites.

On the webpage of Aurinkomatkat, the reference to social media can be seen instantly when opening the front page. There are three symbols in the upper right corner that include links to the Facebook page, Twitter page and a blog of Aurinkomatkat (see APPENDIX 1). The links are marked with symbols only and no text and they are the same colour as the background color of the website, which may make it difficult for users that are not familiar with these symbols to know what they stand for.

When first opening the website of Finnmatkat, no signs of social media linkage can be seen. After scrolling past the booking search, discounts and recommendations, nearly at the bottom of the page on the left side, three links can be found. The biggest one suggests the visitors to like the page of Finnmatkat on Facebook, the second one is a red button to YouTube and the third one is the Twitter link with a white little bird on light blue background (see APPENDIX 2).

In the case of Finnmatkat, the website of Tjäreborg does not have any reference to social media channels at first sight either. When scrolling down, there appears a panel at the end of the page where five different social media links are introduced. The link to Facebook encourages the customers to use the customer service on Facebook. The same is stated in the link to the company's Twitter profile. The Pinterest link encourages the customers to get inspired by the photos posted by Tjäreborg in their Pinterest profile. The link to

Tjäreborg's YouTube profile advertises the company's videos of their destinations (see APPENDIX 3).

The Lomamatkat website is similar to the ones of Finnmatkat and Tjäreborg with no signs of social media links at first but further down on the webpage two relatively large and visible links can be found. These links are for the Facebook and Twitter profiles of Lomamatkat (see APPENDIX 4).

6.2. Facebook

Aurinkomatkat has three different pages on Facebook. The biggest page is of the entire company and the two other ones are for the company's travel agencies in Helsinki and in Turku. The two offices' pages have only a couple of posts and have been inactive for over a year, but the main page of Aurinkomatkat is active and has 163,212 likes, of which most are from FB users in Helsinki and of the age groups 13 to 17 and 35 to 44 years. The cover photo on the front page, with the number 50 pictured as a beach in blue water, refers to the 50th anniversary of the company this year. The page is updated nearly daily with discounts and new photos and information of the company's destinations that are current. Some posts inform the public of specific hours when there is a representative answering their questions about specific destinations. Aurinkomatkat also posts up-to-date information about strikes that may affect their customers. Links to lotteries and competitions are added on the page for the fans to participate in. In some posts Aurinkomatkat asks the customers to post their own holiday photos and memories from their Aurinkomatkat holidays. The company also pays attention to remembering special days, such as father's day on Facebook.

Finnmatkat also appears on FB with an application and a page since January 2008. On the FB page Finnmatkat has 144,438 fans, mostly from Helsinki and from the age group of 35 to 44 years old. On the page they post tips and photos from the destinations and especially the hotel rooms. Many of the photos concentrate on the luxurious details in the accommodation facilities. A lot of information on holiday discounts can also be found. Also Finnmatkat has professionals answering people's comments and questions. Many posts by Finnmatkat include questions for the fans, asking for instance which is more important, the accommodation or the destination. This way they increase the

communication with the public. The application of Finnmatkat on FB has over 100 monthly users. In the applications the users can see the selection of destinations and accommodation options of the company, search for information through the application's search engine, view the newest discounts, check holiday prices, make bookings, view holiday videos and visit the official website of Finnmatkat.

Tjäreborg is also active on FB with 113,980 likes on their page. The cover photo of the page pictures three Tjäreborg employees in a beach settings, each holding a sign with the times and weekdays when there's a professional answering the public's questions and comments on the FB page. Under the cover photo there are links to the company's Pinterest and Instagram profiles. Many of Tjäreborg's posts concentrate on the employees and customer service, for instance photos of guides waiting for guests at an airport. Almost daily there is a new discount posted on the page. Also a lot of destination pictures are shared. Tjäreborg also has an application called Tjäreborg Matkaradio linked to their FB page. Matkaradio is an online playlist filled with casual holiday music that FB users can listen to free of charge.

Lomamatkat also runs a Facebook page. They have gathered over 41,000 likes, most of which are from people in the age group of 35 to 44 years old. Many of the pictures on the page are related to family, as they include for instance couples or adults with children on a holiday. The posts of Lomamatkat include discounts, links to other social media channels, such as Twitter, travel tips and exceptions in the programmes, such as cancellations. The Facebook page of Lomamatkat seems to be more seldom updated than the other tour operators' pages, nevertheless, once a week at least.

6.3 Twitter

Aurinkomatkat has a Twitter profile with 620 followers. The background picture of the profile is a photo where the bottom of the photo is blue ocean and the upper half of it is light blue sky. The header photo is of similar style, with palm leaves and a similar background as in the background photo of the profile. The profile picture is the logo of Aurinkomatkat, an orange sun with the text "aurinko" in white inside it. Aurinkomatkat has made altogether 537 tweets which include travel and destination tips, current discounts

and offers, questions and gallups to the followers, some photos from different destinations, news related to Aurinkomatkat and retweets related to topics that might interest the followers of Aurinkomatkat. Aurinkomatkat follows 177 other Twitter users, including other tourism companies, such as airlines, other tourism related profiles and also profiles of its own followers.

Finmatkat appears to have two different Twitter accounts. The active one is the main one and has 5,947 followers. The background of the profile is of light blue color. In the header photo a deck is pictured at a Mediterranean looking beach setting with luxurious looking white sunchairs and sunshades on each side of the deck. Finmatkat has made 667 tweets so far and seems to tweet a lot of photos. Their tweets also include information on the company's services, new offers, questions to engage the followers of the page and destination tips. Other users' tweets can also be seen with a tag to the profile of Finmatkat. Finmatkat tweets on a regular basis, several times a week. Their other profile is related to a gift card lottery that took place in 2010, and the profile has been inactive after the lottery ended.

Tjäreborg has altogether six different Twitter profiles. There are five profiles for last-minute offers from different Finnish cities, including Helsinki, Turku, Oulu, Tampere and Kuopio. The main profile has 3,910 followers. The background photo has a young couple at the lower right corner and the rest of the photo pictures a sunny beach with palm trees. In the header photo there is a happy-looking little girl holding her nose while playing and running in splashing sea water. Tjäreborg has made 1,485 tweets and seems to tweet several times a day on topics, such as new destinations and services, recent offers and discounts and special food and accommodation. They also write a lot of answers to their followers and ask different holiday related questions from them. Tjäreborg follows 158 Twitter users, including tourism and news related profiles, as well as their own followers' profiles. The five other profiles that aim to share the cheap last-minute deals are also updated several times a day. Having the deals divided by departure city in different profiles makes it really easy for the customers to follow deals suitable for them.

Lomamatkat has 61 Twitter followers. The background photo of the profile is a beach with white sand and a light blue sky. On the left hand side of the background picture there is an information box with the company's logo, official website, Facebook URL, Twitter URL

and customer service phone number. They do not have a header photo but the profile photo has palm trees and the company logo on a light blue background. Out of the four tour operators, Lomamatkat has been in Twitter the shortest amount of time, since February 2013. Lomamatkat has 21 tweets and the frequency of tweets changes from a few tweets a week to only one tweet a month. The tweets include mostly holiday offers and information on new destinations.

6.4 Pinterest

Three of the chosen four tour operators, everyone except Lomamatkat, use Pinterest in their marketing. Tjäreborg is the most active one with 538 actions, followed by Aurinkomatkat with 466 actions and Finnmatkat with 153 actions. Aurinkomatkat has the most folders, 20, whereas Finnmatkat has 18, and Tjäreborg has 14.

Aurinkomatkat concentrates on their destination countries and cities, different holiday types and also food in their Pins. Finnmatkat has Pins divided by activities and destinations. They also have competitions intended only for Pinterest users. Tjäreborg shares Pins about restaurants, hotels, flights, destinations and different holiday types.

6.5 Instagram

The search engine of Instagram helped to find profiles of all of the four tour operators. All of them seem to be more or less active in uploading photos to their profiles. The least activity can be seen on Lomamatkat with only 6 posted photos and 12 followers. The most active of the four tour operators is clearly Tjäreborg with 688 photos and 787 followers. Finnmatkat has the second most active profile, which makes Aurinkomatkat the third one.

6.6 Youtube

Aurinkomatkat has 44 videos uploaded on their YouTube channel. The channel has 71 subscribers among YouTube users. The videos of Aurinkomatkat are related to the

destinations that the company offers. They have also uploaded some TV commercials, both old and new ones. This year they have also uploaded several videos related to the 50th anniversary of the company, including a TV documentary on the company's development throughout the years. On the YouTube channel of Aurinkomatkat there are links to the company's other social media profiles, including links to Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Pinterest.

Finnmatkat has gathered 98 subscribers on their YouTube channel. The channel is mostly filled with videos from the resorts that Finnmatkat is in cooperation with. The videos are partly divided into playlists according to different segments, for instance videos for families and couples are in different playlists. Other playlists consist of destination classification and for example one playlist is dedicated to the TV commercials of Finnmatkat. Finnmatkat has uploaded altogether 96 videos on their channel.

Lomamatkat is the last one of the four tour operators having joined YouTube. They have uploaded five videos on their channel and have just four subscribers until now. All the five videos are TV commercials of Lomamatkat.

6.7 Google+

Aurinkomatkat has built their Google+ profile to be almost identical with their Facebook profile. The recent posts have the same content as the ones on Facebook. Nevertheless, Aurinkomatkat is the most popular one of the four tour operators in Google+ with 99 followers and 243 +1 clicks.

The Google+ profile of Finnmatkat seems to be private, and therefore the information available is very limited. The only information than can be seen is the number of followers (66) and the amount of +1's (135).

Lomamatkat is followed by 16 people and +1'd 36 times so far. As in the other social media profiles of Lomamatkat, the content focuses almost only on discounts and offers. In addition they have shared one of their TV commercials from YouTube and advertised their profile in Instagram.

Tjäreborg has gotten 137 +1's and is in the circles of 63 Google+ users. Much of the content is the same as on Tjäreborg's Facebook page, but the Google+ profile seems to be updated less frequently than the Facebook profile. Tjäreborg has shared many of their YouTube videos on Google+. They have also announced open job vacancies through their profile.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to get an overall picture of the social media marketing of the chosen tour operators, and to see its impacts and think about what the companies are doing right and what could be done better. Qualitative research and text analysis ended up being a good and clear research method for the topic.

In the research it was found out that out of all the social media channels analyzed, Facebook appeared to be the most popular one in terms of frequency and amount of information shared, as well as the number of people reached out to. By the number of accounts or profiles, Twitter was the leading channel. Surprisingly, on YouTube the companies' channels were not very popular, having fewer subscribers than for example on Twitter. Considering the number of people following the tour operators, of the channels included in the research the photo services Pinterest and Instagram were the least beneficial channels for marketing. The popularity of the tour operators on Facebook and Google+ goes hand in hand with the size of the tour operators. Aurinkomatkat has the most likes and subscriptions on these two websites, followed by Finnmatkat and Tjäreborg, while Lomamatkat has the lowest number of subscriptions.

In most of the social media channels, Tjäreborg appears to prefer having their employees in the spotlight. They also seem to show most interest in communicating with their customers through social media. With daily full time social media customer service, the company is a clear pioneer among the Finnish tour operators in this field. Aurinkomatkat and Finnmatkat have a lot in common in the way they appear in the social media. They both seem to be very active and professional in the social media and also keep in touch with their customers to some extent. Lomamatkat seems to have the biggest need for developing and investing in their social media marketing strategy. Lomamatkat is in general still behind the other three tour operators. Most social media profiles of Lomamatkat are still young and fairly inactive. Also, Lomamatkat was the only one of the tour operators not appearing in every social media channel included in this research.

However, the amount of commitment to social media from the side of the tour operators was very surprising in a positive way. Although today, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

are a part of the marketing strategy of nearly all large companies, it was impressive to find out the extent and especially the variety of the visibility of these companies in different social media channels.

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