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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING
SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING
COMMUNICATION TACTIC

Case Gina Tricot Ltd

Business Economics

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämän opinnäytetyön aiheena on sosiaalisen median tehokkuus markkinointiviestinnän keinona. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää onko Gina Tricot onnistunut välittämään sosiaalisen median kautta tietoa asiakkailleen niistä asioista joista he haluavat. Sen lisäksi tavoitteena on ollut selvittää kuinka asiakkaat kokevat Gina Tricotin markkinoinnin ja sosiaalisen median toimenpiteet.

Case yritys Gina Tricot esitellään aloituskappaleessa. Teorettisessa osuudessa keskustellaan sosiaalisen median markkinoinnista sekä käsitellään muutosta perinteisestä outbound –markkinoinnista inbound –markkinointiin.

Empiirisessä osuudessa määritellään tutkimusmenetelmät sekä paljastetaan tutkimustulokset. Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeen avulla. Tutkimus suoritettiin kymmenessä eri Gina Tricot -myymälässä ja kaiken kaikkiaan tutkimukseen vastasi 127 henkilöä.

Tutkimustulosten perusteella havaittiin, että sosiaalisessa mediassa on kolmenlaisia käyttäjiä: aktiivisia, puoliaktiivisia sekä passiivisia. Tulokset myös osoittivat, että sosiaalinen media on tehokas markkinointiviestinnän keino. Tehokkuutta voidaan kuitenkin parantaa tietyillä osa-alueilla. Yhtenä haasteena voidaan nähdä asiakasuskollisuuden parantaminen sosiaalisessa mediassa.

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this thesis was to discover whether social media is an effective marketing communication tactic for Gina Tricot or not. The objective was to find out how customers experience Gina Tricot's marketing and social media activities and whether social media accounts are able to serve customers as aimed.

The case company Gina Tricot was presented in the introduction chapter. The theoretical study focuses on social media marketing and on the transition from traditional outbound marketing to inbound marketing.

In the empirical study the chosen research methods is explained and the results of the research are revealed. The data was collected by implementing a survey that was conducted in ten Gina Tricot stores. All together 127 responses were gained.

The results of the study revealed that there are three types of users in social media; active, half-active and passive. Overall the results show that social media is an effective marketing communication tactic. However, efficiency could be improved in certain areas. Engaging with customers in social media can be seen as one of the challenges.

Keywords Social media, marketing communications, social media marketing, Gina Tricot

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis came into being in collaboration with Gina Tricot, which is an international fashion chain. The thesis focuses on finding out whether social media is an effective marketing communication tactic for Gina Tricot in Finland. The aim of this chapter is to give an introduction to the topic, explain the research problem and the objective of the research and also go through the structure of the thesis shortly.

Due to the emerging social media, marketing communications has been under revolution during the past decade. Social media and search engine marketing have replaced traditional marketing communication channels such as TV, radio and advertisements. Instead of marketers reaching out for customers through mass media, customers come to marketers via word-of-mouth referrals, social media and search engines. (Juslén 2009, 131-135)

According to We Are Social (2015) report, over 2,08 billion people worldwide have social media accounts. The average time spent on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter is 1.72 hours per person per day. This represents approximately 28 % of all online activity. (We Are Social 2015; Mander 2015) The figures show the marketing potential that lies in social media. It also indicates that companies are not competitive without social media. Marketing in social media offers companies a great chance to increase brand awareness, share information, built customer relationships and to learn more about what customers want and need.

Earlier, engaging with customers online was an advantage but nowadays it is a requirement for success. This is due to smartphones and tablets that have enabled social media to be part of people's daily lives. Customers' needs and desires also change all the time and therefore it is vital for companies to adjust their online marketing strategies constantly. (Goldman 2013, 16; Vinerean et al. 2013, 77)

Although the effectiveness of social media has been studied in general a similar kind on research as the one carried out in this thesis has not been done concerning

Gina Triocot in Finland. This topic was chosen because I have been working in Gina Tricot for four years and have seen how social media has affected marketing at Gina Tricot. The feedback received from customers during the years have made me to question whether social media marketing is as efficient as it could be. The competition of winning customers' trust has got tougher and therefore it is vital for the company to know how they are doing in social media. It helps the company to improve its efficiency in social media when they know what works and what does not.

"We don't have a choice on whether we do social media; the question is how well we do it." (Smith 2011, 145)

1.1 Research problem and objectives

The aim of this study is to discover how customers in Finland experience Gina Tricot's marketing and social media activities and whether the social media accounts are able to serve customers as aimed. The study also seeks to find out whether social media is an effective marketing communication tactic for Gina Tricot or not.

This study focuses on answering the following questions: Do customers follow Gina Tricot in social media? How well do Gina Tricot's customers get information through social media? Is there a need for more localized social media activities? Is Gina Tricot able to convey the things they want to customers in social media?

1.2 The structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into five chapters. The first chapter gives an introduction to the thesis. In addition, it includes an explanation of the research problem and objectives and an introduction to the case company Gina Tricot.

The second and third chapters of the thesis focus on the theoretical framework of the study. First, outbound and inbound marketing will be discussed to give the reader a better understanding of how marketing communications have changed

during the past decade. The second part of the chapter focuses on social media and social media marketing.

The fourth chapter deals with the research methodology of the study. The research and data collection methods are discussed. The validity, reliability and limitations of the research are also revealed.

The chapter five focuses on the empirical findings of the research. An analysis of the results and conclusions is made. Recommendations are made based on the findings and suggestions for future research are given.

1.3 Introduction to the case company Gina Tricot

Gina Tricot is an international fashion chain that was founded by Jörgen and Annette Appelqvist in 1997 in Borås, Sweden. Today it consists of 180 stores in Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Germany. In addition, the online store supplies to 28 different countries across Europe. (About Gina Tricot)

With the annual turnover of SEK 2 billion (2013) and over 2000 employees, Gina Tricot is one of the fastest growing fashion chains. The main target group of the company are “international, fashion-conscious and diverse women”. The collections are designed for women of all ages and they include everything from clothes and accessories to lingerie, make-up and jewellery. (About Gina Tricot)

In June 2014 Nordic Capital acquired the majority of the shares. Although Gina Tricot is no longer a family-owned company, the founders are still actively involved in the business and own a significant amount of shares. (News Nordic Capital, 2014)

In Finland there are 24 stores in 16 different cities. The first store was opened in November 2007 and since then the company has been growing nationwide. Currently there are around 300 employees and in 2013 the annual turnover of Gina Tricot Finland was around EUR 30 million. (Finder 2015)

1.4 Gina Tricot in social media

Gina Tricot can be found from four different social media channels: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube. The role of social media as a marketing communication tactic is to give an inside look of what happens in the company. Social media serves both as an information channel and as a source of inspiration. Through social media the customer will get to see what happens for example in the design and marketing department and get information about new products and campaigns. (Rantanen, 2015)

Currently the head office administers the social media accounts. The countries or stores do not have their own accounts. English is used as the main language when communicating but occasionally country or store specific news are told in the country's native language. (Rantanen, 2015)

2 THE NEW ERA OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

During the past decade there a big revolution has taken place in marketing communications. Marketing communications have changed from traditional mass media and sales and product oriented marketing towards more integrated marketing. Integrated marketing communications can be defined as “a process for managing the customer relationships that drive brand value“. (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker 2004, 7) The key developers of integrated marketing communications are information technology, the Internet and World Wide Web, globalisation and the need for businesses to become more customer driven and customer-focused. (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker 2004, 12)

In comparison to the traditional marketing, the new marketing supports two-way communication. Instead of companies reaching out for customers, customers will reach out for companies. This is also known as inbound and outbound marketing. (Karjaluoto 2010,10-17; Juslén 2009, 131-133) In the following chapter, the differences between inbound and outbound marketing will be discussed. In addition, word-of-mouth marketing and search engine marketing will be explained. These two marketing methods together with social media are key drivers of the new marketing.

2.1 What are inbound and outbound marketing?

Outbound marketing, known as traditional marketing, has been used for decades. Outbound marketing is one-way communication between the marketer and customers. The role of the marketer is to push the products and services to the customer even though the customer does not need or want them. Most used outbound marketing tools are newspapers, magazines, TV and radio advertisements, exhibitions and email and phone marketing. (Juslén 2009, 131-132; Mashable)

In turn inbound marketing, which can be called the new marketing, is based on two-way communication between the customer and the marketer. The aim of inbound marketing is to gain customer’s interest and trust without buying it.

Inbound marketing is based on customer's willingness to receive information. Customers come to the marketer when they need and want information. Social media, search engines, referrals and Internet-pages are tools used in inbound marketing. A marketer's job is to provide content that fulfils customer's needs and make the process of finding information through search engines effortless. (Juslén 2009, 133-134; Weber 2007, 32-35)

The inbound marketing model is the opposite of traditional outbound marketing. The revolution of the Internet has affected customer's media behaviour which in turn shows in the growth of inbound marketing. People have become more reluctant towards advertisements. It has become harder and more expensive to get messages to customers via mass media. Instead of relying on what is said on TV or in the newspapers, customers trust more the information coming from a friend, a family member or another consumer. This is called word-of-mouth marketing. (Juslén 2009, 131-135)

Outbound marketing does not guarantee that the right target audience will receive the message. Inbound marketing enables approaching the right target group in a more cost-effective way. Due to search engines and social media the marketer has the possibility to collect valuable information about consumers. In addition, the marketer has an opportunity to build stronger relationships and increase the brand awareness among consumers. (Juslén 2009, 138-140)

2.2 Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing

Word-of-mouth, known as WOM, refers to consumer-to-consumer (C2C) marketing. WOM is a genuine conversation between people. In turn, word-of-mouth marketing refers to business-to-consumer-to-consumer marketing. Here the marketer put's out a message worth talking about. It becomes word-of-mouth marketing when the consumer spreads the word to another consumer. (Seranovitz 2006, 3-5)

Castronovo and Huang (2012) claim that word-of-mouth marketing is a more effective tactic to influence consumer's purchasing decisions than traditional

advertising channels. The Internet combined with interpersonal relationships can be seen as influencing factors in this revolution. (Castronovo and Huang 2012, 118) Seranovitz (2006) point out that word-of-mouth is not a new phenomena; instead it has always existed. New marketing communication channels such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter, have made it easier for consumers to spread the word out. Instead of communicating with friends and family, people can reach thousands of people with just one post. (Seranovitz 2006, 5-6)

Although word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most effective marketing communication tactics, at the same time it is the hardest to control. According to Whitley (2014) 64 % of marketing executives claim it to be the most effective marketing tool, but only 6 % admit mastering it. This is due to consumers' enormous power. Consumers can decide whether to talk in a positive or negative tone, or whether to talk at all. Seranovitz (2006) states that word-of-mouth marketing is about great customer services, not always about marketing. Great customer service makes consumers talk about the company in a positive way, which results in customer loyalty and increased profit. (Whitley 2014; Seranovitz 2006, 6-7)

2.3 Search engine marketing

In addition to WOM, search engine marketing is also a key element in inbound marketing. The aim of search engine marketing (SEM) is to increase visibility in search engines and thereby gain more visitors to websites. SEM is the fastest growing digital advertising tactic due to its cost-effectiveness and ability to measure results. (Karjaluoto 2010, 133)

Search engine marketing consists of search engine optimization and paid search advertising. Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to getting more traffic to the website without paying anything. The key to success requires knowledge of SEO policies. In contrast, paid search advertising means that the company pays for every click that leads the user to the website. Figure 1 shows the difference between SEO and pay per click (PPC). (Karjaluoto 2010, 133-138; Suomen Yrittäjät)

The parts marked with yellow and red boxes are paid advertisements. When the user clicks the yellow box, the company pays for the click. According to Karjaluoto (2010), search engine advertisements accounts for over half of the total profit coming from internet advertisements. The search result below the yellow box is the result of search engine optimization. Right and relevant key words guarantee the high ranking in the search results. (Karjaluoto 2010, 133)

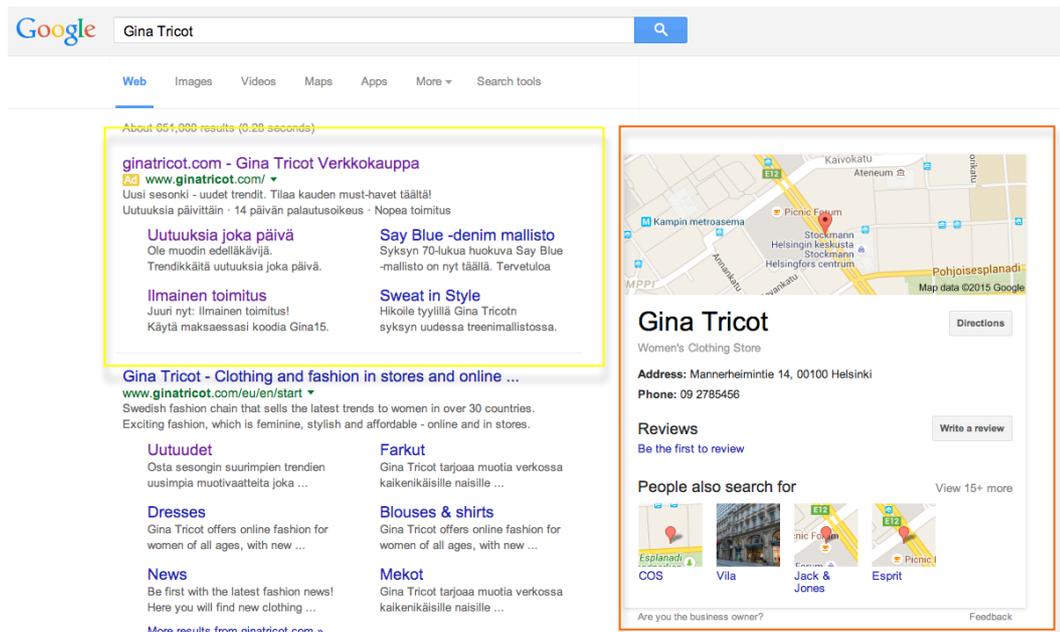


Figure 1. Search results for Gina Tricot (Google)

Today, the importance of search engine marketing is tremendous. Karjaluoto (2010) points out that over 90 % of the internet's users use search engines for finding information and only 10 % of these users bother scroll through more than the first page of the search results. Therefore, it is essential for the company to focus on SEO and SEM. (Karjaluoto 2010, 133)

3 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

In the following chapter social media as a term will be defined. A brief look into the timeline of social networking will be made. The various social media platforms will be explained and social media marketing will be discussed. In addition, the affect of social media on consumer behaviour and consumer engagement will be revealed. The future trends of social media will conclude the chapter.

3.1 Definition of social media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as:

“A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 61)

Parsons (2013) defines social media as online tools where user can share its opinions, content, perspectives and insights. Social media is about connecting people and organizations and building relationships between them. (Parsons 2013, 27) Juslén pinpoints that the term social media is, however, universal. It can be a general definition for services that publish and distribute content, forums, social networking sites, virtual world and services that classify information. (Juslén 2009, 116) According to the research by Ebrand (2015), an online service can be called as a social media platform, when there is a conversation possibility, user can communicate with other users and when there is a possibility to read and comment on other users' content. (Ebrand 2015)

As the name suggests, social refers to interaction between people and media in turn to information and channels through which it is shared and transmitted. Social media differs from other communication methods due to the users' ability to be more than receivers. Through social media users can comment, like and share the content with others. We Are Social (2015) reported that over 2,08 billion people worldwide have social media accounts. From 2014, the number of active

social media accounts has grown 12 %. (Jyväskylän Yliopisto; We Are Social 2015)

3.2 History of social media

The roots of social networking go back over 40 000 years when people made primitive images on cave walls. The Neanderthal networking, Roman Forum, town criers and newspapers have also had a remarkable role in the growth path of social networking. However, social media as we know it today was born in the 21st century. (Bennett 2013; Bennett 2014)

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that the era of social media began in the late 1970s when Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis founded Usenet. Usenet made it possible for internet users to post public messages worldwide. According to Bennett (2013) Usenet, AOL, CompuServe and BBS created the basis for Web 2.0 and Google. The term Web 2.0 was founded in 2004 to describe the new way of using World Wide Web. It meant that the content and applications were no longer created by individuals instead they were modified by all users collaboratively; Web 2.0 made users its co-developers. For example Wikipedia has made it possible for users to create new content and modify what has already been published. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 60-61; Bennett 2013)

Although there have been various social networking platforms before, the development of mobile technology can be seen as one of the key drives in the growth path of social media. Smart phones have enabled people to be online all the time and be in interaction with others through various social media sites.

3.3 Social media platforms

There are several social media platforms. The time spent on a certain social media platform depends on the demographic group. Ebrand (2015) reported that the most popular social media platforms among young people are YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. Comparing the most popular social media sites of the 13 to 17 and 18 to 29 year old people, it can be noticed that at the moment younger people prefer various messaging applications such as WhatsApp,

Messenger, Kik messenger and Snapchat over Pinterest, Twitter or LinkedIn. However, there was not that big differences on the time spent on social media between these age groups. (Ebrand 2015; Goldman 2013, 45)

In the following chapter the most relevant social media platforms will be reviewed and examined. In addition, for some of the platforms the best time to post figures will be revealed. As it will be noticed, companies can get more out of the posts if they release them during a certain time. Knowing the best times to post a message will increase reachability and efficiency.

Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social networking site with over 1,4 billion registered accounts and over 936 million active users worldwide at the moment. Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes and Eduardo Saverin. In only two years Facebook grew from college's networking site to a worldwide platform where users can communicate with each other. (Facebook 2015)

For companies Facebook provides a platform where to target new and existing customers, and to create a two-way conversation with them. Facebook provides the best tools to target the right customer segment. Through Facebook companies can increase brand awareness by advertising or creating their own profile where information can be shared. (Castronovo and Huang 2012, 123; Someworks)

It has been studied that 86% of the posts are made during the work week and the best days to do it are Thursday and Friday. The most shares will be gained at 1 pm and most clicks around 3pm. (Patel 2015)

Instagram

Instagram is an online social networking site where users can share photos and videos with each other. Compared to Facebook, Instagram has been designed as a mobile app and therefore adding pictures from the computer is not possible. Instagram was founded in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. However, it

was acquired by Facebook in 2012. With over 300 million users Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms. (About Instagram 2015)

Instagram is a free application for both consumers and companies. Through Instagram companies can advertise products for free, share an insight look on what is happening in the company and increase brand equity. According to a case study, Mercedes-Benz was able to increase the number of site visits by 580% by using advertisements in Instagram and Facebook. Instagram has taken a new advertising service to use, which enables marketers to buy advertisement space. However, this scene is not yet available in the Nordic countries. (Business Instagram 2015; Kokalitcheva 2015)

In Instagram the best day to post a picture or video is Monday. To receive the most likes the picture should be posted between 3 to 4 pm local time. (Patel 2015)

Pinterest

Pinterest is a visual and social bookmarking site. Registered users can upload and share media content such as images and videos with others. Instead of pressing like –button, users pin things to save them on their personalized boards. These are called pinboards. (About Pinterest 2015)

Pinterest was founded in 2010 by Ben Silbermann, Paul Sciarra and Evan Sharp. According to the latest statistics Pinterest has over 72 million users and 85 % of them are female. The aim of Pinterest is to help users to discover things they want to plan, do or buy. Pinterest connects people through their interests, hobbies and passions. For companies it provides a tool where they can share their interests and values with consumers. (DMR 2015; Business Pinterest 2015)

The statistics show that the best day to pin is Saturday and best time is at 8 pm to 11 pm local time. For fashion and retail the peak time to post is Fridays at 3 pm. (Patel 2015)

YouTube

YouTube is a video-sharing website which was founded in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim. One year later Google acquired it. YouTube has over one billion users and is the second most searched site after Google. Every day people spend hundreds of millions of hours on YouTube and every minute 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube. (YouTube Statistics 2015; Castronovo and Huang 2012, 123)

YouTube is a forum where people connect, inform and inspire others. In addition, it provides a platform for companies to advertise and share video content with consumers. According to Castronovo and Huang (2012), it enables consumer engagement through user-generated content. Currently there are over million advertisers using Google Ad platforms, and majority of them are small and medium sized companies. (About YouTube 2015; Castronovo and Huang 2012, 123)

Twitter

With over 316 million monthly active users and over 500 million tweets send by day Twitter is one of the most known social media sites. Twitter is a free micro-blogging site, where the users can send and read short messages also known as tweets. It was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Evan Williams and Biz Stone. The difference to other social networking sites is that the messages are limited to 140 characters. Users can participate to the conversation through re-tweeting and using certain hashtags. (About Twitter 2015)

According to Castronovo and Huang (2012), Twitter is a great place to build relationships with customers and key stakeholders. Companies can either buy advertisement space or create their Twitter account where they can share information and express their opinions. Advertising on Twitter is efficient when a company wants to, for example, get more traffic on their website. (Castronovo and Huang 2012, 124; Someworks)

According to the statistics the best days to post are from Monday to Friday in business-to-business (B2B) purposes and from Wednesday to Sunday in business-to-consumers (B2C) purposes. The best click-through rates (CTR) will be gained at 12 pm and 6 pm. The highest amount of re-tweets were made around 5 pm. (Patel 2015)

LinkedIn

LinkedIn differs from other social networking sites due to its purpose. LinkedIn is the largest professional networking site with over 300 million users. It was founded in 2002 by Reid Hoffman. The aim of LinkedIn is to help professionals to network with each other and at the same time make them more successful and productive. When joining LinkedIn the member will create a professional profile that includes information such as job experience, educational background, personal information and interests. The same applies for companies except that the outlook of the profile is slightly different. (About LinkedIn 2015)

For companies LinkedIn provides an excellent platform where to seek for new talents, increase brand awareness and build relationships with both other companies and individuals. (Castronovo and Huang 2012, 124)

In LinkedIn, the statistics show that the best days to post are from Monday to Thursday. Most clicks and shares are received on Tuesday between 10 and 11 am. The best time to make posts were from 7 am to 8 am and from 5 pm to 6 pm. (Patel 2015)

Blogs

A blog is a personal online diary. Whoever can start a blog and it can be either private or public. Public blogs can be read by anyone and the reader has also the opportunity to comment the blog posts. In addition to text a blog can contain links to other internet –pages or blogs, photos, videos and other electronic content. (Juslén 2009, 113)

Companies have two options; they can either establish their blog or make collaboration with a blogger. A business blog is an effective tool for the company to get a message out for their customers. The company has also the power to decide what kind of content to publish and what kind of messages to forward. (Castronovo and Huang 2012, 123)

A blogger is a person who blogs. Collaboration can be a post about a company's products or services or an advertisement on the blog. Most often companies send free samples to bloggers who then write about them. According to Castronovo and Huang (2012) the objective of a blog is to drive WOM recommendations, build relationships and increase loyalty. When the buzz begins, the blog can be considered successful. (Castronovo and Huang 2012, 123)

3.4 What is social media marketing?

Social media marketing is a form of Internet marketing and refers to the process of achieving marketing communication and branding goals through social media sites. Social media marketing includes activities such as sharing content, videos and images. The aim is to create content that attracts attention and encourages the reader to share it with others through social media platforms. (WordStream)

Social media marketing is usually based on a company's social media strategy. Parsons (2013) pinpoints the importance of having a communication strategy for each social media tool that the company uses. It is vital to be active, interesting, humble, less formal and honest. Being present is not enough, instead the company must figure out how to attract readers and how to communicate with them. It is important to think beforehand what the company wants to achieve and what kind of a message to send out to readers. In addition, each social media network has a different purpose and target group and therefore it is vital to choose the right tools. The company cannot adapt the same strategy for all, instead it must personalize its message for each network. As Solomon stated (2008), companies must think globally but act locally because the cultures and the needs and wants are different in every country. The same strategy will most likely not work everywhere. (Parsons 2013, 29; Solomon 2009, 199)

According to Castronovo and Huang (2012), the most common social media strategy goals are to build loyalty, increase sales and build awareness. Various analytical tools can be used to measure these goals. Mostly the analytical tools are specialized in certain type of information. For example, Google Analytics focuses on detailed reports of the visitors' characteristics while Gr.aiderss.com provides information about how many times posts are shared on social networking sites. When measuring the success of building loyalty the time spent on site repeat visits, followers and recommendations and reviews can be used in the analysis. While measuring the success of building awareness the volume of followers, web traffic and referrals and search volume trends are suitable indicators. (Castronovo and Huang 2012, 124-125)

Social media brings together different like-minded people. People enjoy contributing, creating and joining communities. Being socially connected fulfils needs of belongingness. According to Whitley (2014), 92 % of consumers believe recommendations coming from friends and family over other forms of marketing. WOM is one of the reasons why to use social media marketing. It helps to increase the brand awareness, drives traffic to websites and thereby improve search engine rankings. In addition, social media marketing encourages the interaction between consumers and brands in a cost-effective way. When it is done right it will also enhance the reputation and the image of the brand. (Whitley 2014; Tuten 2008, 19-20, 25-26)

3.5 Social media and consumer behaviour

Social media has had an impact on consumer behaviour. It has influenced consumer behaviour from finding information to post-purchase behaviour. Before consumers did not have similar kind of platforms as social media where to express their feelings after buying the product and testing it. Now the threshold to tell others about the experiences is smaller. In addition, consumers have the power to spread the word to thousands of people instead of telling about products and services to just friends and family. Therefore, post-purchase customer service has become more vital than ever. (Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu & Tichindelean 2013, 67)

The purchase process can be divided into five stages. Figure 2 shows how the process starts from problem recognition and ends to post-purchase behaviour. The process itself has not changed but social media has brought a twist into it.



Figure 2. Purchase process (Rohan Academic Computing)

In social media a consumer is under peer pressure and more prone to various kinds of temptations. Recognizing a need might not be the first trigger. The decision to purchase is more likely to be influenced by others' recommendations and experiences. For instance, the consumer might buy a product that was recommended in a blog although they have no specific need for it. Moreover, information search has become easier due to search engine marketing and social media. Consumers also acquire more information than they used to. Decisions to purchase can be made faster because information and recommendations can be found online. (Ioanās & Stoica 2014, 295-296; Simonson & Rosen 2014, 37-38)

Social media has also enabled a continuous access to product information. Consumers do not have to spend all their time in stores, instead they can skim through companies social media pages to find out about new products and what's happening in the stores. Forbes and Vespoli (2013) found out in their research that companies are able to influence future purchases by encouraging users to post on different social media platforms. (Ioanās & Stoica 2014, 296-297)

At the moment some of the social media platforms such as Facebook have launched "buy" buttons. This feature enables consumers to buy directly from the company without leaving the social media site. This invention will be a new turning point in the history of consumer behaviour and social media. This will help companies to increase their sales and make shopping easier for consumers. It will be remained to see how it will change consumer behaviour in the future. (Griffit 2015)

3.6 Customer engagement via social media

Customer engagement can be defined as encouraging customers to interact with the brand and share experiences of the brand with others. According to Sklar (2013), 80 % of the customer engagement opportunities are either missed or mishandled by companies. Every lost opportunity is a loss in the revenue. Social media has provided an excellent tool for companies to engage with customers and build communities. (Chan 2014; Sklar 2013)

Before engaging with customers, the companies must engage with their employees. Sklar (2013) states that everyone in the company is responsible for recognizing a customer engagement opportunity and acting on it. Another important thing is to find the customers from social media and add them to the network. However, finding them is not enough, instead the company must also interact with them. High level of interaction with customers will build loyalty and make customers feel themselves special. Engaged customers will become advocates who will endorse the brand to others. Social media provides a great platform to endorse the company because thousands of people can be reached by one post. (Rogers 2014; Sklar 2013)

Goldman (2013) points out that few years ago engaging with customers online was a competitive advantage but now it is a requirement for success. According to Goldman (2013), one of the main reasons for companies to fail in engaging is that they do not think enough about the customers' needs and customer behaviour. In addition to sharing content with customers companies must also listen, understand and communicate with customers. Customer engagement is about managing two-way communication with customers and not just about publishing content on the social media sites. (Goldman 2013, 16, 45, 52-53)

Although the aim of customer engagement in social media is to share information and experiences and participate in conversations, companies must avoid spamming too much. If customers get overloaded with information, they will most likely un-like or un-follow the social media site. For example, Facebook has made it easy for users to decide what they want to see on their newsfeed and from

whom. Therefore, it is vital to plan carefully what will be posted and when. (Goldman 2013, 52-53; Rogers 2014)

3.7 Future trends of social media

Social media is under constant development. In the future social media platforms that focus on imagery, messaging and video will keep growing. According to Ebrand (2015), mobile messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat and Kik Messenger have increased their popularity during the past two years. In addition to video platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo it has been forecasted that live video streaming sites such as Merkaant and Periscope will hit through. (Ebrand 2015; Carson 2014)

In the future marketers will have to focus more on personalization and using the right metrics. Instead of investing on new platforms more time will be spent on figuring out what is working and what is not and where and how to reach customers. In addition, companies must focus more on their visual brand language. Due to the popularity of applications such as Instagram and Pinterest the role of visual elements has become important. It has been noticed that usually the posts with pictures do better than the post without images. If the company wants to create a strong brand online more emphasis must be put on creating and adapting a visual social media strategy. (Carson 2014)

As mentioned earlier one of the emerging trends will also be the ability to make purchases directly without leaving the social media site. The “buy” button will most likely be found soon from different social media platforms. This will remove one of the key dilemmas in social media marketing: how to get customers to the companies’ website and buy. (Griffit 2015)

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the following chapter various research and data collection methods will be revealed. In addition, the reliability, validity and limitations of the research will be discussed.

4.1 Research methods

There are two main types of research methods, qualitative and quantitative methods. The selection of the research method is the most concrete part of the research process. Therefore, it is important to understand the main features of various methods to be able select the most suitable one. (Creswell 2003, 153)

Qualitative research focuses on understanding the respondent's point of view. The observations and measurements are made in natural settings and the approach is more rational and interpretative. The data is usually collected through interviews and observations and the sample is much smaller than in quantitative research. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 109-110) Although the sample is small the results give a deeper understanding on the topic and the researcher is more likely to get new insights. (Creswell 2003, 181-183)

In comparison to qualitative method, quantitative research focuses on collecting numerical data to explain the phenomena. The data is collected through surveys and the sample size is much bigger than in qualitative research. The questions are designed in such a way that they can be handled and analysed statistically. Compared to qualitative research the approach is much logical and critical. (Mäntyneva, Heinonen & Wrangé 2008, 32; Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 110)

Mixed methods research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. It provides a more holistic understanding of the research problem. (Creswell 2003, 208-209)

In this thesis the quantitative method is used to gather a broader understanding of customers' thoughts of social media's effectiveness. The questionnaire is printed out on a two-sided paper and it is structured into five parts: demographics, buying

behaviour, marketing communication, multiple-choice questions and open questions. Although the survey includes three open questions, the research method will not be classified as mixed method research because the questions are optional and many of respondents also left them unanswered.

4.2 Data collection

According to Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005), “data sources are the carriers of information”. There are two types of data, primary and secondary data. The choice of which data to use is highly dependent on the research problem and information needed. Additionally, it is important to figure out how to collect the data, from whom and in what way. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 91)

Secondary data refers to information collected by others. It must be noticed that the data might have been collected for a different purpose. Therefore the researcher must always question the reliability of the information. The aim of secondary data is to help the researcher to understand, solve and explain the research problem. Sources of secondary data are books, articles, statistics, and research reports. In some cases the secondary data is enough to solve the research problem and no primary data is needed. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 91-102)

When the researcher is not able to get an answer to the research problem from secondary data, primary data is needed. The data collected by the researcher herself is called primary data. Primary data is always unique because it has been designed to find out the answers on a particular research problem. Compared to secondary data primary data is more consistent with the research objectives. Primary data can be collected through surveys and interviews, observations and experiments. It must be noticed that the data collection methods depend on the research method. There are different approaches for qualitative and quantitative methods. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 102-104; Creswell 2003, 185)

In this thesis both secondary and primary data are used. The thesis begins with a theoretical review on the subject. The data used was collected from books, academic journals and online data sources. The secondary data works as the basis

for the primary data. The collection of the primary data began in April 2015 and lasted until the end of June 2015. The primary data was collected through a survey that was conducted in ten different Gina Tricot stores. The stores are located in Espoo, Helsinki, Kokkola, Tampere, Turku and Vantaa. Instead of printing the questionnaires out and leaving them into the stores, I decided to visit each store and collect the data. I was able to get 127 responses out of 150, which was the original target. Due to the limited amount of table space in the stores I decided to ask the questions from the respondents and to fill in the answers. This method also attracted more customers to participate in the survey.

4.3 Reliability and validity

The aim of reliability is to measure the consistency of the results. The research is better and more reliable when fewer errors occur. Reliability is strongly related to quantitative research. The larger the sample, the better the reliability. Reliability can also be determined by repeating the research or making a parallel research. If the reliability is good the results should be the same. Possible factors of errors can be poor definition of the research problem, poor survey, wrong target group or badly conducted sampling. These factors can decrease the reliability of the research. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 34; Kumar et al. 2002, 265)

In this research a questionnaire is used as a research method. The questionnaire was conducted in ten stores and the respondents were chosen randomly. I asked the questions from the respondents and filled in the answers. This means that the influence of the interviewer was not at minimal although the structured questionnaire was followed. In addition, in some cases the respondents who were friends with each other were interviewed successively which means that the responses of the other one might have influenced the other ones responses. However, the sample size of the research (127 responses) was relatively big and guaranteed a better reliability for the research. In addition, academic sources such as books and academic journals were used to ensure the reliability of the theoretical framework. A better reliability could have been reached by conducting the survey in social media where the right target group is. However, this was not possible in this research.

In comparison to reliability, the validity of the research aims to find out whether the research was able to measure what was intended to measure. When the theoretical framework is consistent with the empirical findings, the validity of the research is good. High validity can be reached when the research process and the decisions made are defined as precisely as possible and when the empirical findings support the theoretical framework. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 34; Kumar et al. 2002, 265)

Before the questionnaire was conducted, a literature review was done to create a better understanding of the theoretical background. The literature review was also used when conducting the questions for the survey. This ensured that the results gained from the survey were in line with the theoretical framework. The questionnaire was also tested and reviewed many times to make sure that it was able to measure what was intended to. The results indicate that the research is consistent because the questionnaire was able to answer the research questions and the survey is in line with the theoretical framework.

4.4 Limitations

One of the limitations of the study was time. Due to time limitations I was only able to visit 10 out of 24 Gina Tricot stores in Finland. This means that the results give only an overall picture of social media's effectiveness as a marketing communication tactic. However, the stores were located in six different cities which ensured the geographical scope for the research. In addition, the research was conducted only in Finland, which means that the results cannot be used to evaluate the effectiveness of social media in other countries.

The survey was also carried out during a specific date and time, which meant that I was not able to reach the most active customers all the time. In addition, some of the customers did not want to participate in the survey even if they were active followers. One of the limitations was also that the survey could not be conducted in social media and, therefore, the rate of active followers was lower than expected.

Despite the limitations the research is able to give an overall understanding of whether social media is an effective marketing communication tactic for Gina Tricot in Finland.

5 EMPIRICAL STUDY

In the following chapter the results of the survey will be revealed and a deeper analysis will be given. Recommendation and suggestions for future research will conclude the chapter.

5.1 Results of the survey

The results of the survey are divided into five parts: demographics, buying behaviour, marketing communications, multiple-choice questions and open questions.

5.1.1 Demographics

At the beginning of the survey the respondents are asked to tell their age, where they live and what their life situation is. Figure 3 demonstrates that 52,8 % of the respondents are 18 years old or younger. The second biggest age group that covered 32,3 % of the total are 19 to 24 years old. Remarkable is that none of the respondents are 31 to 36 years old. Few of the respondents were older but mostly they are under 30 years. The average age of the respondent is 20 years and median is 18 years.

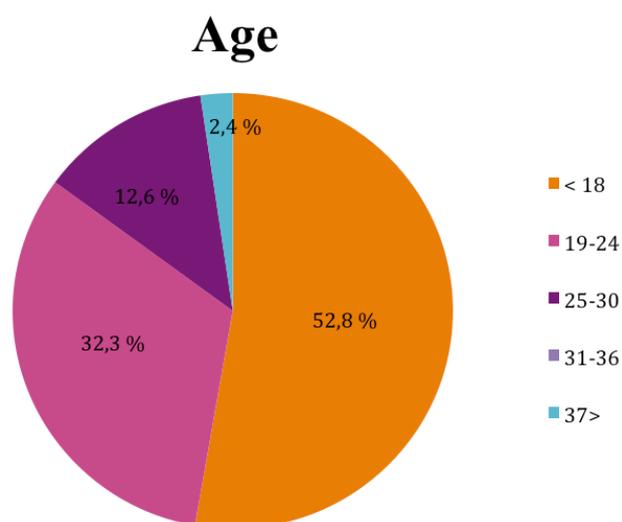


Figure 3. Age of the respondents

As mentioned before, the survey was conducted in six different cities: Espoo, Helsinki, Kokkola, Tampere, Turku and Vantaa. However, the variety of locality of the respondents was significant. Figure 4 shows that the results support the basis of the research. Most of the surveys were carried out in Helsinki region and therefore nearly 50 % of the respondents came from this area. The second biggest group, others, counts for 19,7 % of the total. Others include 25 different cities around Finland. The results indicate that 40,9 % of the respondents came from another city than where the survey was made.

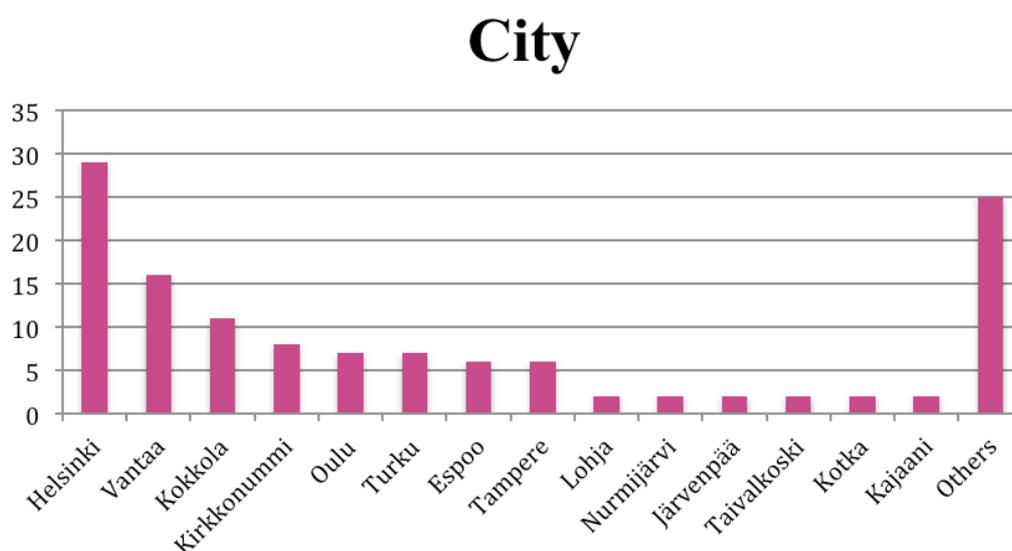


Figure 4. The city of the respondents

The life situation of the respondents is in line with results of Figure 4. Most of the respondents were 18 years or younger, which means that they are still in primary or high school. As Figure 5 shows, 63,8 % of the respondents is students, 31,5 % in work life and only 4,7 % is unemployed. However, some of the unemployed said that they is either starting a new job soon or going to school in the autumn.

On the basis of the study, an average respondent was 20 years old student from Helsinki region. It must be noticed that most of the surveys were done in Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, which explains their predominance of this area in the results.

Life situation

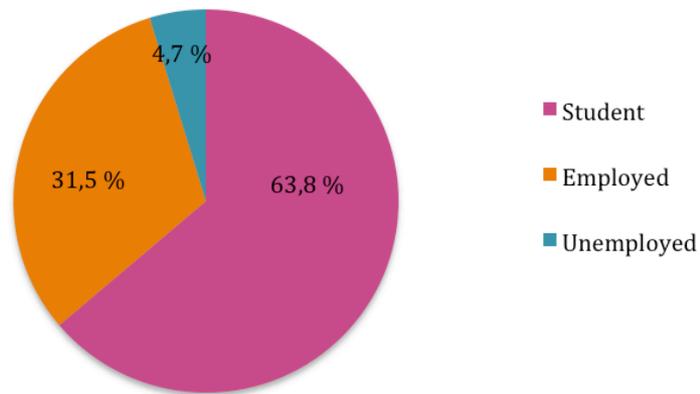


Figure 5. Life situation of the respondents

5.1.2 Buying behaviour

In the survey respondents were asked how often they visit Gina Tricot stores and whether they have made purchases from Gina Tricot's online store. Figure 6 indicates that over 59 % of the respondents visit the store few times in a month.

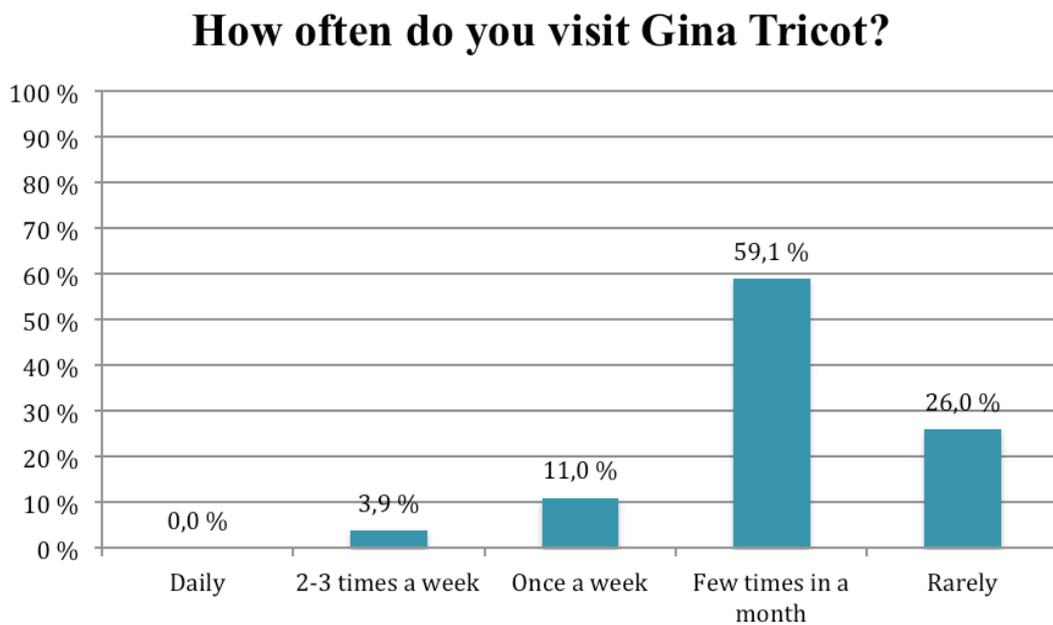


Figure 6. How often respondents visit Gina Tricot

As Figure 4 revealed a significant proportion of the respondents came from a town where there is no Gina Tricot store. This supports the fact that 26,0 % of the respondents visit the store rarely. Some of the respondents visit the stores more actively, however, none of them visit the store daily.

In addition to 22 stores in Finland Gina Tricot has an online store which delivers to 28 different countries. Figure 7 shows that only 22,8 % of the respondents had purchased items from the online store. Most of the respondents who answered no said that they visit the website often but prefer to buy items from the stores. The ones who had made purchases said that the experience was overall good and easy. However, one of the respondents did not have such a great experience as others. The respondent had returned some of the products and had difficulty in getting the money back. It took several weeks before the problem got solved. After this experience the respondent has not ordered items from the online store.

Have you made purchases from the online store?

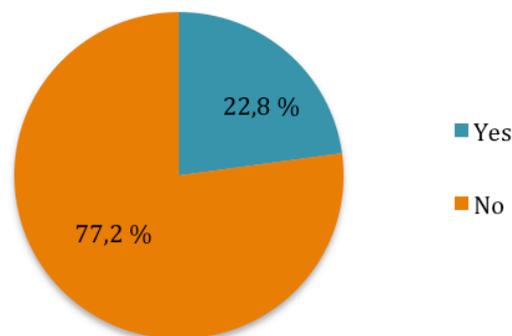


Figure 7. Purchases from Gina Tricot's online store

5.1.3 Marketing communication

The aim of this part of the survey was to find out which social media channels the customers use, whether they follow Gina Tricot in social media or not and which of the marketing communications channels are most effective for the company.

First, the respondents were asked to name the social media channels they follow. The alternatives were given but the respondent had the possibility to name others that were not listed. More than one option could be chosen. As the Figure 8 shows Facebook, Instagram and YouTube were the most used social media platforms among the respondents. It was surprising that only one of the respondents named a site that was not a ready given. This social media site was Bloglovin'. Snapchat, which is one of the fastest growing social media sites' was not mentioned and neither were other mobile messaging applications such as WhatsApp. These were not mentioned as alternatives because advertising is not yet possible in some of the mobile messaging sites.

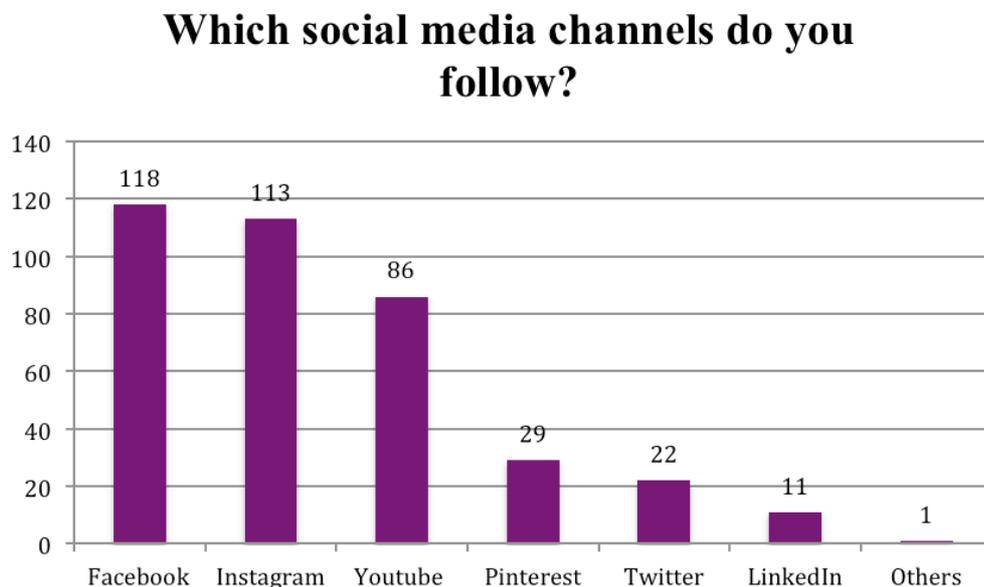


Figure 8. Social media channels

Figure 9 shows that the results are in line with the findings made by Ebrand (2015). Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are the most popular social media sites

among the respondents. It must be noticed that the share of 25 years and older was much smaller, which means that Figure 9 does not tell the whole truth. Nonetheless, it shows the relation to other variables. For example, the share of 25- to 30-year-old respondents who are in LinkedIn is much higher in relation to other age groups. This proves that LinkedIn is more common among adults. The results also show that younger people are more anxious to use several social media platforms. People aged 18 or younger were born into the era of technology, which means that they easily adapt to the changes happening in social media.

Age vs. social media channels

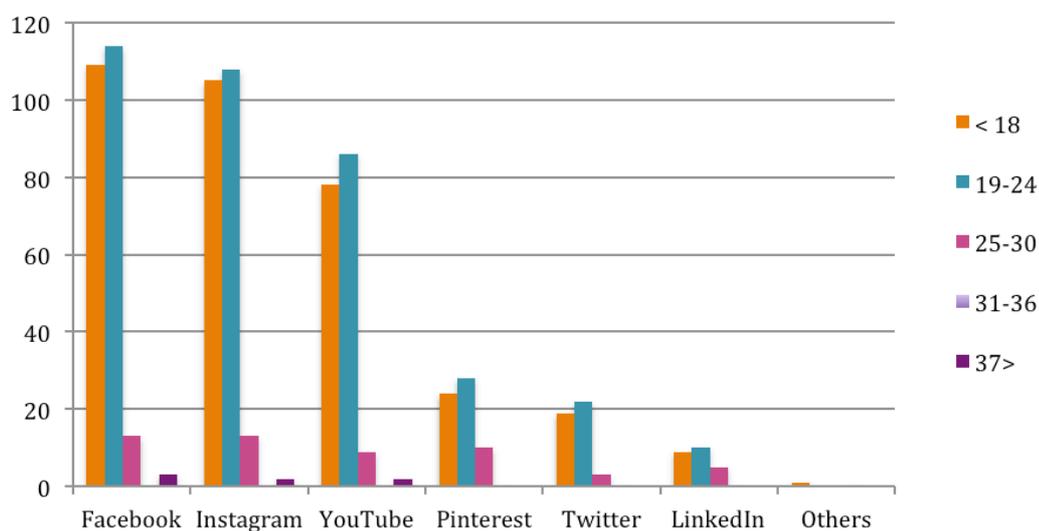


Figure 9. Age vs. social media channels

The respondents were also asked how often they use social media. All of the respondents, except one, answered that they use social media daily. The respondent who did not use social media daily chose the option 2 to 3 times a week. This result leaves nothing unclear: social media is part of people's daily lives.

Gina Tricot uses four different social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest. With over 200k followers in Instagram and over 420k in Facebook it could be assumed that most of the customers follow the company in social media. However, this was not the case. According to the results, only 31,5

% of the respondents followed Gina Tricot in social media. Some of the respondents followed only one channel, others several.

Which of the Gina Tricot's social media channels do you follow?

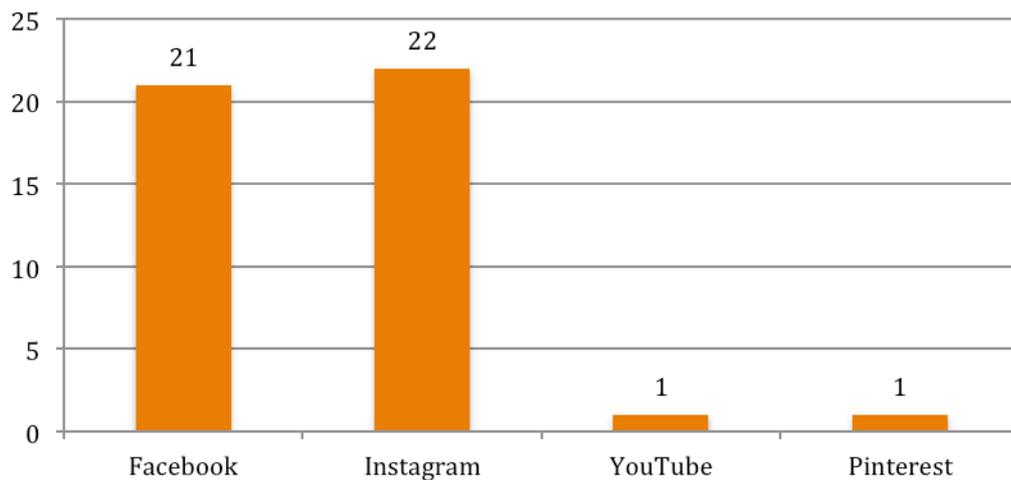


Figure 10. Gina Tricot's social media channels

Many of the respondents said that they do not follow Gina Tricot or other companies in social media because they do not want their newsfeed to be full of advertisements. Many of the respondents asked during the survey if it counts as following if they visit the site frequently. Although most of the respondents did not actively follow Gina Tricot's social media sites, they still had an understanding of what was going on there.

The respondents were asked to name the channels from where they get and where they would prefer to get information concerning Gina Tricot's products, offers, campaigns, etc. More than one option could be chosen. Figure 11 shows that advertisements have been the most effective tactic to reach customers. The stores and website are also useful tools for communicating with customers. In addition, the respondents have received information via social media, friends and family and blogs. The results show that WOM referrals play a key role also in Gina Tricot's marketing communication.

Where do you get the information concerning products, offers, campaigns etc.?

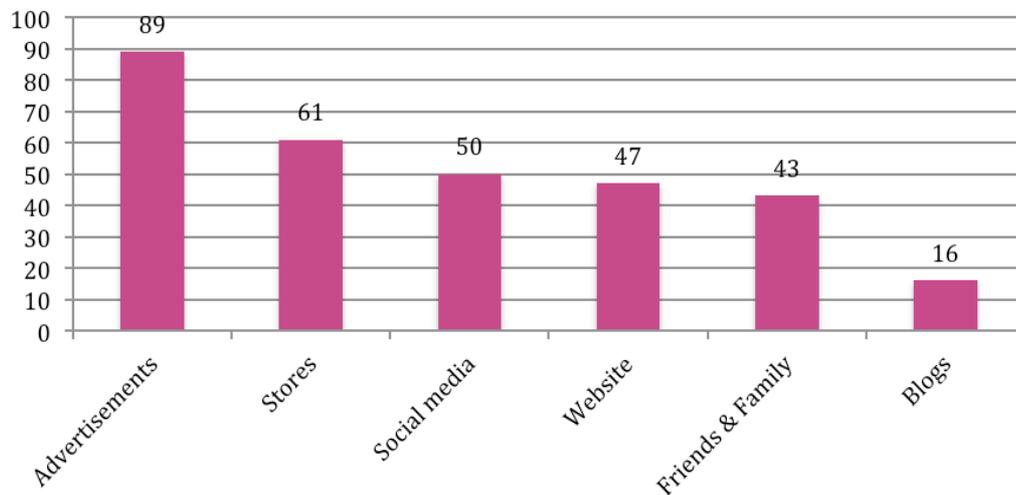


Figure 11. Sources of information

In addition, the respondents were asked to name the channels from which they would prefer to get the information. As shown in Figure 11 it can be noticed that most of the respondents prefer social media over advertisements. In Figure 12 the results also show confrontation between inbound and outbound marketing. The respondents prefer to find the information out themselves, instead of marketers pushing it to them. However, some of the respondents prefer also outbound marketing tools such as direct email or post and advertisements. This indicates that in some cases customers prefer the communication to be one-way. Few of the respondents said that especially when it comes to discount sales or other offers direct marketing is preferred.

Where would you prefer to get the information?

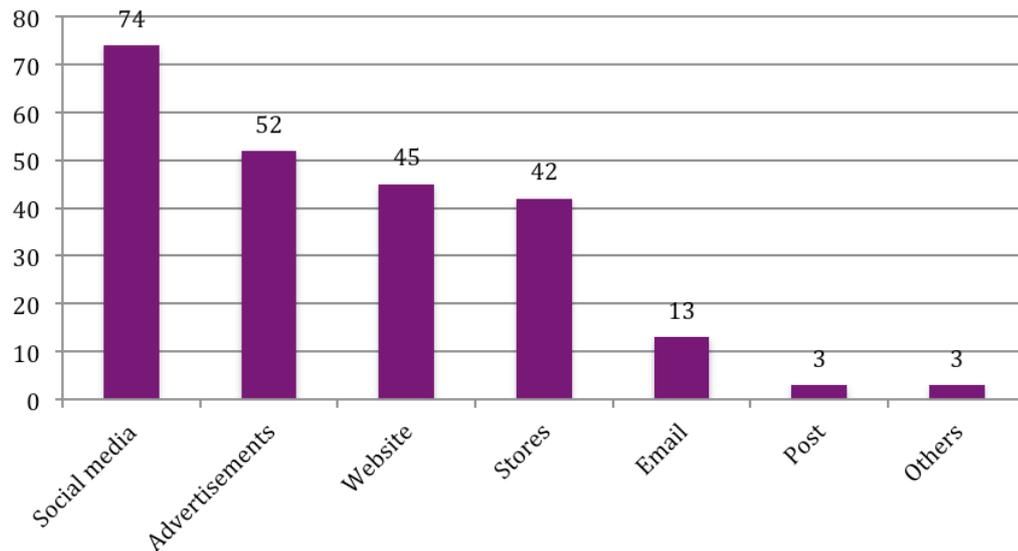


Figure 12. Preferred sources of information

Interesting results were gained while comparing the results shown in Figure 11 and 12 to whether the respondent follows Gina Tricot in social media or not. Figure 13 shows that there is not that much deviation between the answers of the respondents who follow and who do not follow Gina Tricot in social media.

Where do you get the information concerning products, offers, campaigns etc.?

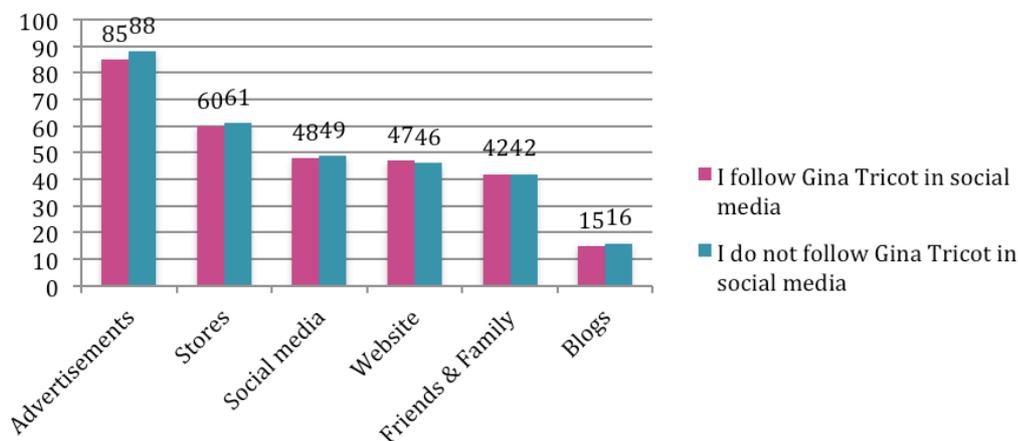


Figure 13. Whether the respondents follow Gina Tricot in social media vs. sources of information

What is most surprising is that the ones who do not follow Gina Tricot in social media get information through it. This supports the fact that many of the respondents visit Gina Tricot's social media sites frequently but do not follow them. Some of the respondents might get the information from advertisements shown in social media. In addition, if a friend of a respondent likes, comments or shares a post by Gina Tricot this will most likely pop up on the respondents' newsfeed.

When the respondents were asked to name the channels from which they would prefer to get information, there was not a big difference between the answers of the respondents who follow Gina Tricot in social media and those who do not. However, Figure 14 shows some surprising results concerning social media. The results indicate that a big share of the respondents who already follow Gina Tricot in social media did not name it as a source of information although the respondents would prefer to get the information from there. Either the respondents do not get enough information from social media or then they do not pay that much attention to the posts.

Where would you prefer to get the information?

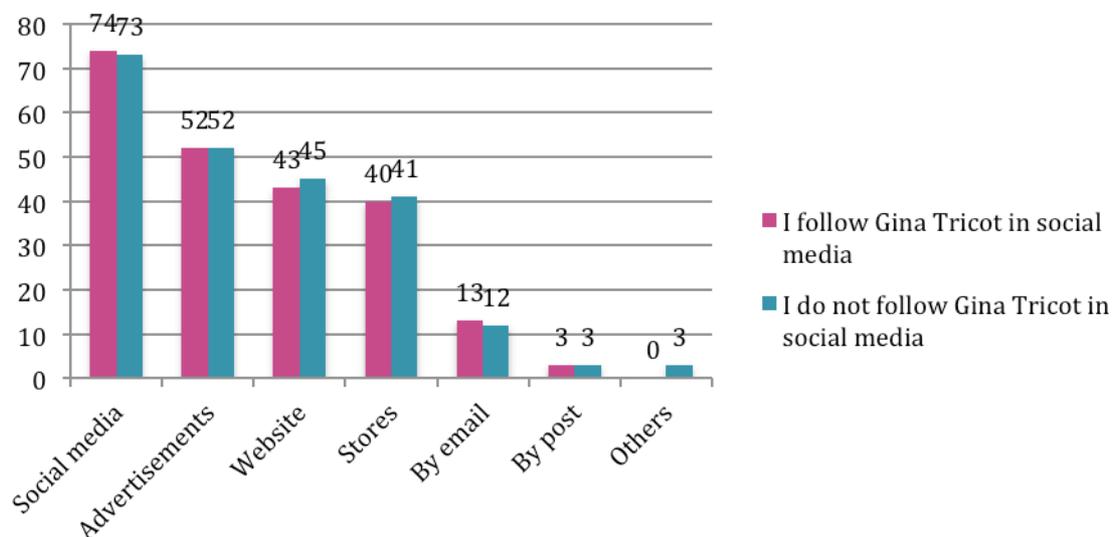


Figure 14. Whether the respondents follow Gina Tricot in social media vs. preferred sources of information

Overall the results indicate that the differences in the answers between the respondents who follow Gina Tricot in social media and who do not is not as big as could be assumed.

5.1.4 Multiple-choice questions

The fourth part of the survey deals with how well customers get information about Gina Tricot's products, offers, campaigns, collections and customer evenings in social media. The respondents could choose their answer from five alternatives. The alternatives were: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=I do not agree or disagree, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree.

First the respondents were asked to describe how well they get information about Gina Tricot's products in social media. Figure 15 shows that over 55 % of the respondents agree with the statement. Only few of the respondents feel that they do not get enough information concerning products. However, 8,7 % thought that

Gina Tricot shares really well information about products in social media. Around 29 % of the total did not agree or disagree with the statement.

From social media I get information about products

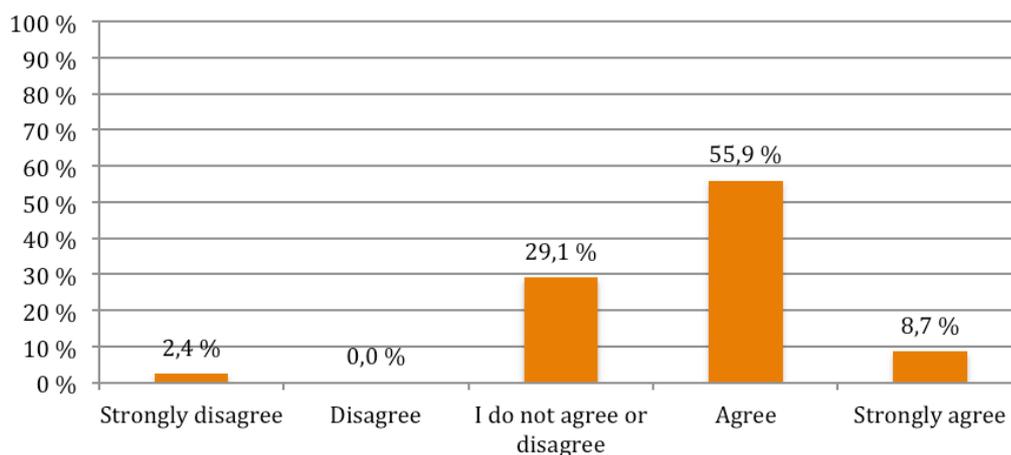


Figure 15. Information gained about products

In comparison with Figure 15 the results are really similar. Gina Tricot aims to deliver new products to stores every weekday. Figure 16 indicates that social media is a useful tool to communicate with customers about the new products.

Around 46 % of the respondents agree with the statement and 18,6 % feel that the information flow of new products works out really well. However, 27,6 % of the respondents do not agree or disagree with the statement. Overall these results show that customers receive information about the products in social media. It must be taken into account that some of the respondents might have felt that it is hard to tell the difference between these two statements.

From social media I get information about new products

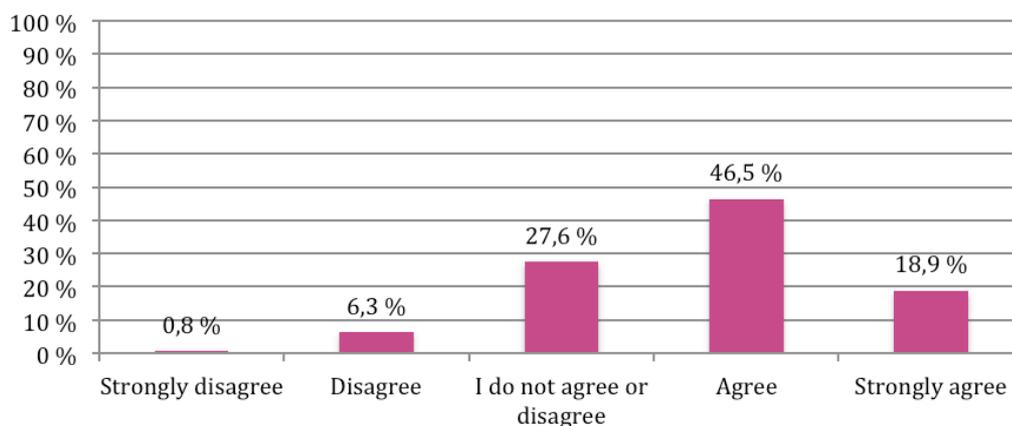


Figure 16. Information gained about new products

In addition to finding out how well customers get information about products the aim was also to find out how well Gina Tricot communicates via social media about offers and campaigns. Some of the respondents asked the interviewer to explain the difference between these two terms. Offers refer to discount sales or other special price and product offers offered to customers. Campaigns do not refer to any price offers, instead the aim of a campaign is to advertise new products. Campaigns are shown in window displays and the products are placed closed to the entrance. Usually the campaigns change every two weeks and there might also be advertisements running on TV.

Figure 17 and 18 show the similarities between the two statements. In Figure 17, the majority of the respondents do not agree or disagree with how well they get information about campaigns. However, 33,9 % of the respondents agree with the statement and only 17,3 % disagree.

From social media I get information about campaigns

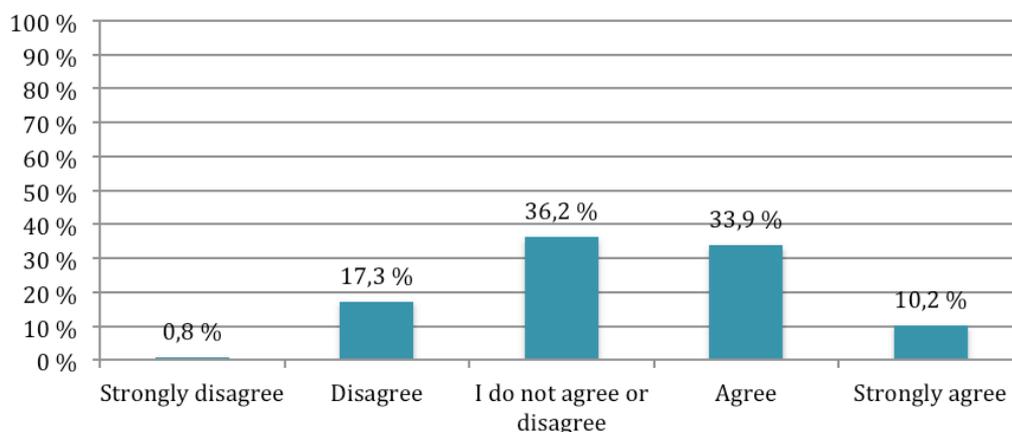


Figure 17. Information gained about campaigns

As shown in Figure 18, the majority of the respondents think that Gina Tricot informs about the offers adequately. Nearly 16 % of the respondents strongly agree with the statement. The number of respondents that disagree with the statement is approximately the same as in Figure 17. However, 31,5 % of the respondents do not agree or disagree with the statement.

From social media I get information about offers

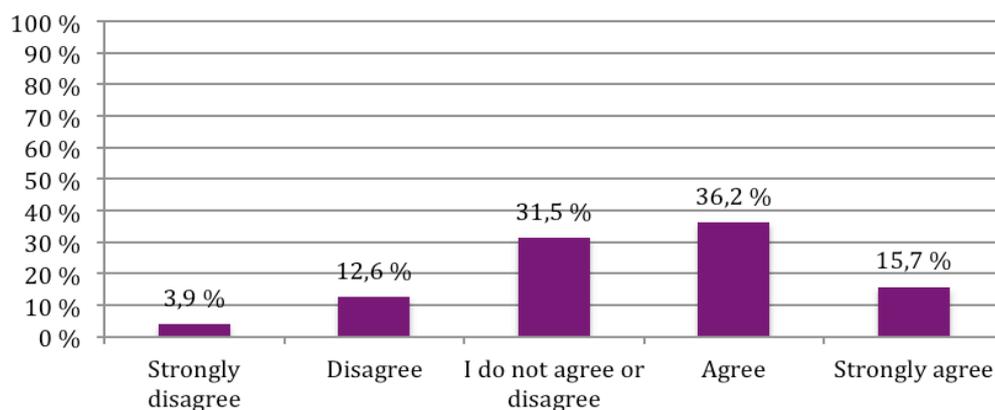


Figure 18. Information gained about offers

Every now and then stores arrange customer evenings. During customer evenings customers can get discount from the selection, in addition to goodie bags and styling tips. The events are arranged during the opening hours and the duration is usually a couple of hours. Invitations are given to customers in the stores and the event is usually advertised in social media.

Figure 19 shows that most of the respondents had never heard about Gina Tricot's customer evenings. Only a few had heard about them in social media.

From social media I get information about customer evenings

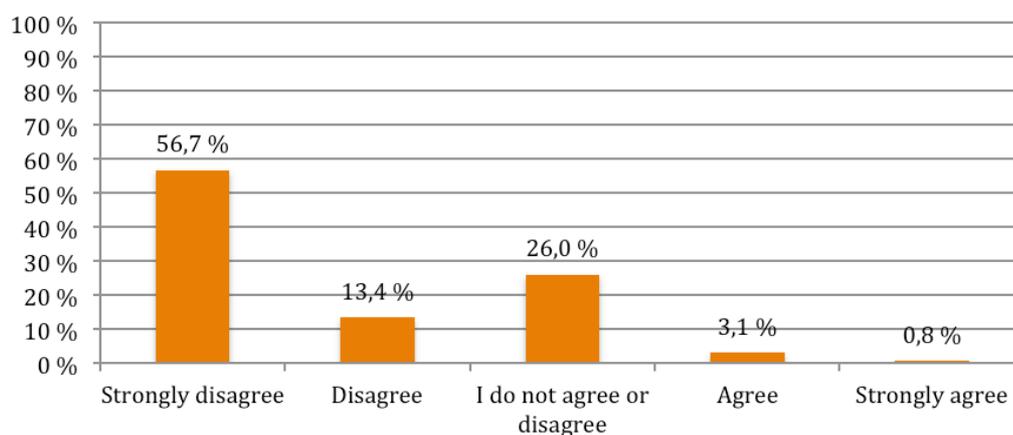


Figure 19. Information gained about customer evenings

The results of Figure 19 are a little bit worrying because most of the respondents do not have a clue that Gina Tricot organizes these types of events. The aim of a customer evening is to give additional value to customers. This goal will not be reached if customers are not even aware of these. It must be taken into account that it is optional for stores to arrange customer evenings. Some of the stores might be more active in arranging them than others. In addition, the invitations are given only in the stores, which means that if the customer does not visit the store regularly they are more likely to miss the event.

Customers were also asked how well they get information concerning the stores selections. Gina Tricot has different sized stores around Finland. Some are really

small and do not have all the products in the selection while other stores have a broader selection. According to Figure 20, 38,6 % of the respondents feel that they get enough information concerning the selections and 33,1 % had a neutral response. However, one fourth of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Most of the respondents who disagreed said that they get information about the selection in social media but not store wised. Customers who visit smaller stores said that it is hard to know whether all the colours of some certain products can be found from the store or not.

From social media I get information about the stores selections

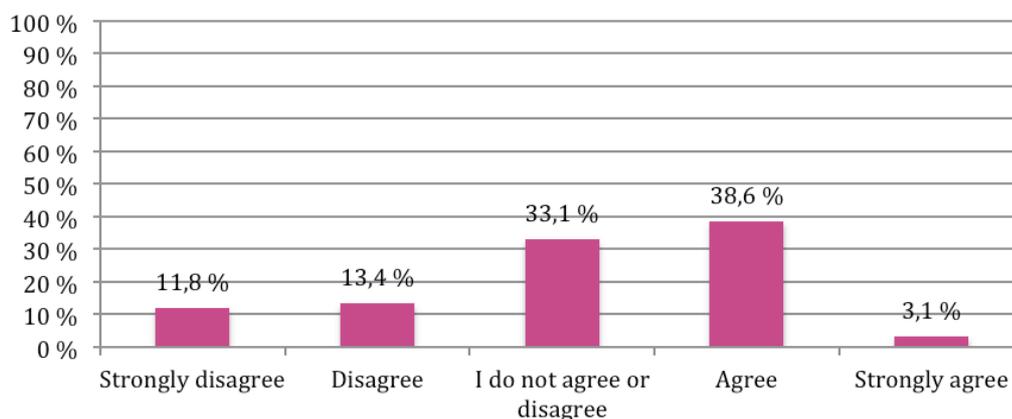


Figure 20. Information gained about stores selections

In the multiple-choice section of the survey the respondents were asked how well they understand the content in social media when the language is English, and whether they get inspired by social media.

Due to the fact that Gina Tricot has only one account in each social media channel, the language is mostly English. News concerning Finland might be told in Finnish, but overall it is in English. Figure 21 shows that 66,9 % of the respondents do not have any problems understanding the content in a foreign language. Only a few of the respondents find it a little bit difficult to understand what is said.

I understand the content when the language is English

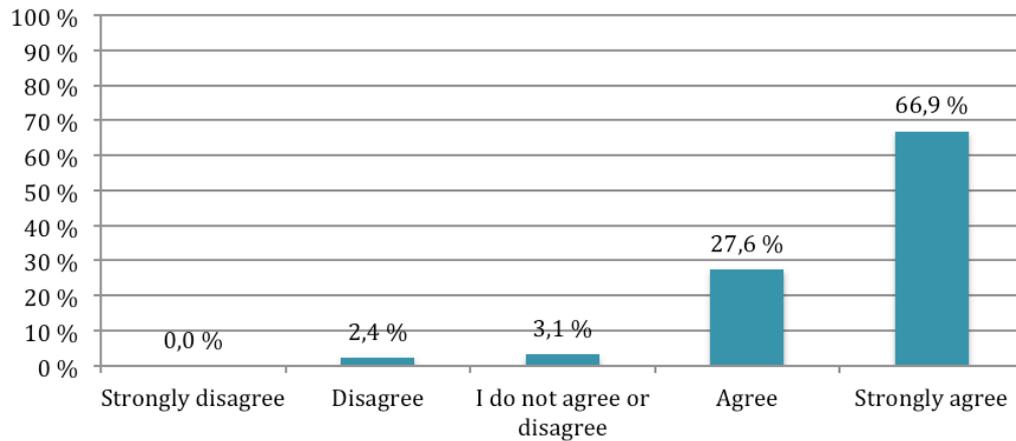


Figure 21. Understanding of the content when it is in English

As mentioned in the beginning, one of Gina Tricot's aims in social media is to be a source of inspiration. The results indicate that 33,1 % of the respondents strongly agrees and 52% agree with the statement. Figure 22 indicates that social media is a source of inspiration for customers.

I find inspiration from social media

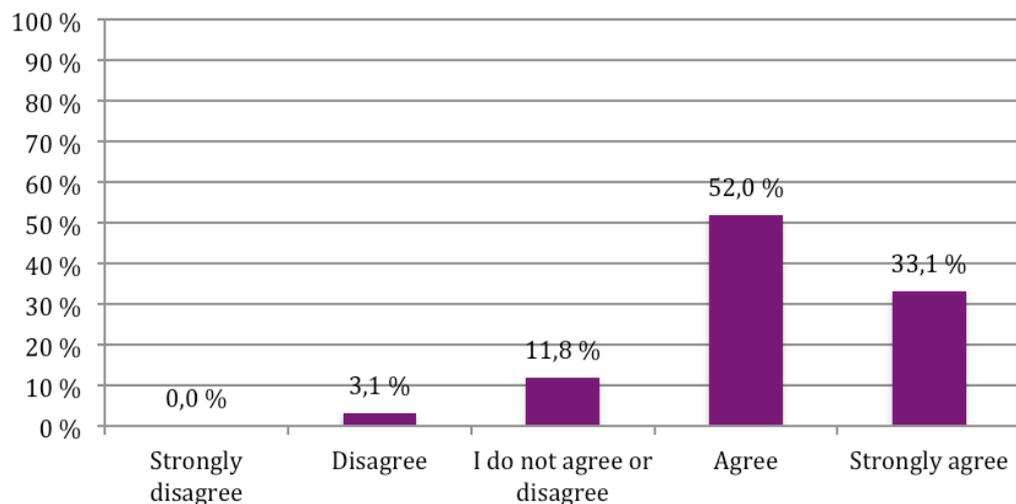


Figure 22. Inspiration

When comparing the multiple-choice questions to whether the customer was following Gina Tricot in social media or not, some dissimilarities were found. Table 1 shows the results for respondents who follow Gina Tricot in social media and Table 2 shows the results of those who do not. All together 127 respondents answered to the survey and 40 of them follows Gina Tricot in social media and 87 do not.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	I do not agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
About products	0,0 %	0,0 %	22,5 %	65,0 %	12,5 %
About new products	0,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	62,5 %	27,5 %
About campaigns	2,5 %	12,5 %	30,0 %	40,0 %	15,0 %
About offers	5,0 %	5,0 %	20,0 %	52,5 %	17,5 %
About customer evenings	57,5 %	7,5 %	27,5 %	5,0 %	2,5 %
About stores' selections	12,5 %	5,0 %	22,5 %	52,5 %	7,5 %

Table 1. Customer follows Gina Tricot in social media vs. how they receive information in social media

Table 1 shows the results of the respondents who follow Gina Tricot in social media. Compared to Table 2 it can be noticed that respondents who follow Gina Tricot actively were more satisfied with the information flow than the ones who do not follow Gina Tricot. This is, of course, logical because the active followers receive all the posts on their newsfeed and the passive ones do not. For example 27,5 % of the ones who follow feel that they receive information about new products really well. Compared to Table 2, the rate was only 14,9 %.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	I do not agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
About products	3,4 %	5,7 %	32,2 %	51,7 %	6,9 %
About new products	1,1 %	9,2 %	35,6 %	39,1 %	14,9 %
About campaigns	2,3 %	19,5 %	39,1 %	31,0 %	8,0 %
About offers	3,4 %	16,1 %	36,8 %	28,7 %	14,9 %
About customer evenings	56,3 %	16,1 %	25,3 %	2,3 %	0,0 %
About stores' selections	11,5 %	17,2 %	37,9 %	32,2 %	1,1 %

Table 2. Customer does not follow Gina Tricot in social media vs. how they receive information in social media

From Table 1 and 2 it can be noticed that the ones who do not follow Gina Tricot had more neutral answers compared to the ones who follow Gina Tricot in social media. However, the statement concerning customer evenings was similar in both tables. Even the ones who follow Gina Tricot do not get information about customer evenings. This shows a gap in the information flow. Overall the results are positive because as it can be seen from Table 1 the respondents are aware of what is happening. Also, the results in Table 2 indicate that customers who do not follow Gina Tricot in social media still receive information concerning products, offers, collections and campaigns in social media.

5.1.5 Open questions

The respondents were asked if there is something they would prefer to get more information about in social media and whether social media has changed their image of Gina Tricot as a company. Over 55 % of the respondents left the question concerning improvement suggestions unanswered. The ones who answered had similar kind of responses.

The results show that over 61 % of the ones who answered the questions said that they would like to get more information about offers. This supports the results of Figure 18, because the respondents did not have clear opinions whether they receive enough information about offers or not. Many of the respondents also mentioned new products, collections and outfit tips as things they would like to hear more about. Some of the respondents said that social media should be

personalized by country. Respondents also seek for more store specific information about products and customer evenings. The results of Figure 19 show that over 56 % had never even heard about customer evenings. This indicates that more information should be shared about it. Few of the respondents also felt that Gina Tricot's social media sites could be more inspirational.

"It would be great if the prices of the products shown in social media would be mentioned."

"I would like to learn how to combine clothes so that it would not be too expensive but still fashionable."

"It would be interesting to know which products are the best sellers. Gina Tricot could make a post of the best sold products of the week or month."

One of Gina Tricot's aim in social media is to give an inside look of what happens in the company. The respondents were asked if social media has affected their image of the company. Over 88 % of the respondents feel that the image has not changed, but the rest, 11,8 %, thought that the image has changed into a more positive direction.

According to the respondents, the brand is more international than they had thought. Social media has helped customers to get a broader and diverse picture of the company. Gina Tricot's Instagram got compliments, however, one said that the content feels quite distant and does not correspond fully with how the respondent sees the brand. Overall the feedback was positive.

"The brand has not got stuck, instead kept just growing."

"My image has changed to a more positive direction because of blogs."

"I found out about the company in social media. I got a good picture about it and decided to visit the website."

The aim of the research is also to find out whether there is a need for country or store wised social media accounts. All of the respondents, except one answered to

this question. Over 80 % of the respondents agree that there should be country or store specific social media accounts. Only 19,8 % of the respondents disagreed. The respondents is asked to justify why Gina Tricot needs localized social media accounts.

The first thing that pop out in the interviews was the language. The respondents would prefer that the posts to be in Finnish and not in English. As it was revealed in Figure 21, most of the respondents understand the content although it is not in Finnish. However, the respondents said that they would feel closer to the brand if the language was in their mother tongue. They also felt that a localized account would be clearer, more interesting and easier to approach. Many of the respondents took competitor Bik Boks' social media accounts' as examples. Customers feel that they get more out of the store specific accounts, especially concerning the collections. For example all the products that are advertised do not come to each store at least not in every colour. However, one respondent reasoned that in the region of Helsinki it would be better to have one account instead of several. A country or a store specific social media account would bring the company closer to the customers. As one of the respondents said, it is good to be there where the customers are.

At the end of the survey the respondents were asked if they would follow their local stores' social media account if there were one. From the respondents 81,1 % said yes, 14,2 % no and 4,7 % left the question unanswered because they did not know. It was surprising that although some of the respondents said no to the idea of having a country or store specific social media accounts they would still follow the account if it existed.

5.2 Conclusions

The aim of the study was to find out how the customers in Finland experience Gina Tricot's marketing and social media activities and whether the social media accounts are able to serve customers as planned. The thesis also focused on discovering whether social media is an effective marketing communication tactic for Gina Tricot or not.

The results show that 31,5 % of the respondents follow Gina Tricot in social media. Compared to the sample size the share of followers was surprisingly low. However, some of the respondents visit Gina Tricot's social media pages frequently. The reason why they do not follow the sites is that they do not want to get spammed. This is in line with Goldman's (2013) findings; companies must avoid overloading customers with information. (Goldman 2013 52-53)

On the basis of the researcher's observations during the survey three types of users could be discovered: active, half-active and passive. Active users are the ones who follow Gina Tricot in social media and see the posts on their newsfeed. Some of the active users follow only one social media account, others several. Half-active users do not follow Gina Tricot in social media but occasionally visit the social media pages to get some information and inspiration. Half-active users are interested in the brand but do not want to get information daily from the company. Passive users do not follow or even visit the social media sites frequently. However, passive users can be regular customers; they just do not want to get too engaged with the brand.

When investigating whether customers get information through social media or not it could be noticed that active users were more satisfied with the amount of information received than passive users. However, the results revealed that passive users still receive information through social media. Either the information is gained from advertisements or then they get it when a friend likes, comments or shares Gina Tricot's post. This shows that Gina Tricot is able to share information with their customers in social media, even if they do not follow their social media pages. However, the customers felt that the company could share more store specific information. The results also showed that social media is not the best channel to gain information from. This indicates that more can be done to improve the effectiveness of social media as a communication channel.

One of the aims was also to find out whether there is a need for localized accounts or not. On the basis of the research it can be concluded that there is a need for country or store specific social media accounts. Customers felt that a localized account would be easier to approach. In addition, it would help to build two-way

communication with customers. This would most likely bring customers closer to the brand and help Gina Tricot to engage with them.

Gina Tricot aims to give an inside look of what happens in the company and to share inspiration. According to the research these goals have been reached. Overall the results indicate that social media is a useful and effective marketing communication tactic for Gina Tricot. It allows continuous interaction with customers around the world. However, in some areas the efficiency can be improved.

5.3 Recommendations

One of the key things for Gina Tricot is to think about is how to engage its customers in social media. One solution could be to create country wise social media accounts in those countries where the company has stores. This would enable Gina Tricot to share more relevant information of the country and to publish content in the native language. In addition, the number of followers would be easier to control and it would help engaging customers with the brand. A country specific social media account would be easier to control than a store specific because the head office of each country could administer it.

To make social media marketing even more effective an emphasis should be put on information sharing. The results showed that customers want to receive even more information via social media, especially concerning offers, customer evenings and stores selections. This will be challenging because, on the other hand, customers do not want to get spammed too much. One possibility would be to reconsider the roles of each social media platform. As mentioned in the theoretical framework each platform serves a different purpose.

One way to increase the effectiveness of social media is the “buy” buttons. This would also be an excellent chance for Gina Tricot to gain more profit and to increase brand awareness. However, it is yet hard to tell how customers will react to this new service because it has not been available for that long. One advantage is, however, that the followers are young. This means that they are

more likely to adapt new services like “buy” buttons more easily than the older generations.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

In the future a similar kind of research about the effectiveness of social media could be carried out. Instead of conducting it in the stores the research could be conducted online and the link to the survey could be shared through Gina Tricot’s social media sites. This would guarantee that the respondents already follow the company in social media and therefore the results would be more thorough and accurate. In addition, the survey could be conducted in all the countries where Gina Tricot has stores. It would be interesting and useful to compare the results and see the similarities and differences in the responses.

Another interesting research area is the impact of social media on consumers’ buying behaviour. The results already indicated that WOM referrals and social media play a key role in the buying decision process. It would be beneficial to see that how, for example, Gina Tricot’s collaborations with bloggers affect on the buying behaviour. Gina Tricot has recently done a lot of collaboration with bloggers and therefore it would be interesting to see how customers have experienced it. As the results showed some of the respondents said that blogs are a source of information. In addition, some of the respondents felt that the image of the company has improved as a result of reading blogs.

If Gina Tricot decides to open country specific social media accounts it would be beneficial to do a similar kind of research again and see if the results have changed. It would be beneficial to see whether the customers gain more information and whether the relationship towards the brand has become closer. In the future a research of the social media users in Finland could also be made. Some researches have been done and most of them were two or three years old. Social media changes all the time and therefore more relevant information is needed of its users. However, it is likely that studies have been made but the results are not available for everyone.

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APPENDIX 1. Survey in English.**QUESTIONNAIRE****1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

AGE _____ CITY _____

LIFE SITUATION: STUDENT / EMPLOYED / UNEMPLOYED

2. BUYING BEHAVIOUR**HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT GINA TRICOT?**

DAILY 2-3x A WEEK ONCE A WEEK FEW TIMES IN A MONTH RARELY

HAVE YOU MADE PURCHASES FROM OUR ONLINE STORE? YES NOIF YOU ANSWERED **YES**, HOW DID YOU EXPERIENCE IT?**3. MARKETING COMMUNICATION****WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS DO YOU FOLLOW?**

FACEBOOK INSTAGRAM TWITTER PINTEREST YOUTUBE LINKEDIN

OTHER? _____

HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

DAILY 2-3x A WEEK ONCE A WEEK FEW TIMES IN A MONTH SELDOMLY

WHICH OF THE GINA TRICOT'S SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS DO YOU FOLLOW?

FACEBOOK INSTAGRAM YOUTUBE PINTEREST

WHERE DO YOU FIND THE INFORMATION CONCERNING PRODUCTS, OFFERS, CAMPAIGNS, ETC.?

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS WEBSITE FRIENDS BLOGS STORES

SOMEWHERE ELSE? _____

FROM WHERE WOULD YOU PREFER TO GET THE INFORMATION?

SOCIAL MEDIA BY EMAIL ADVERTISEMENTS WEBSITE STORES BY POST

SOMEWHERE ELSE? _____

QUESTIONNAIRE

4. MULTIPLE-CHOICE

SELECT 1-5 (1=STRONGLY DISAGREE, 2=DISAGREE, 3=I DO NOT AGREE OR DISAGREE, 4=AGREE, 5=STRONGLY AGREE)

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA I GET INFORMATION OF

- PRODUCTS	1	2	3	4	5
- NEW PRODUCTS	1	2	3	4	5
- CAMPAIGNS	1	2	3	4	5
- OFFERS	1	2	3	4	5
- CUSTOMER EVENINGS IN MY STORE	1	2	3	4	5
- THE SELECTIONS IN STORES	1	2	3	4	5
I UNDERSTAND THE CONTENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA (LANGUAGE)	1	2	3	4	5
I FIND INSPIRATION FROM SOCIAL MEDIA	1	2	3	4	5

5. OPEN QUESTIONS

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT IN SOCIAL MEDIA?

HAS YOUR IMAGE OF GINA TRICOT AS A COMPANY CHANGED DUE TO SOCIAL MEDIA?

SHOULD GINA TRICOT HAVE COUNTRYVISED OR STOREVISED SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS?

YES NO

IF YOU ANSWERED **YES**, WHY?

WOULD YOU FOLLOW YOUR STORES OWN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT IF THERE WAS ONE?

YES NO

APPENDIX 2. Survey in Finnish.

KYSELYLOMAKE**1. TAUSTATIEDOT**

IKÄ _____ PAIKKAKUNTA _____

ELÄMÄNTILANNE: OPISKELIJA / TYÖELÄMÄSSÄ / TYÖTÖN

2. OSTOKÄYTTÄYTYMINEN**KUINKA USEIN ASIOIT GINA TRICOT MYYMÄLÄSSÄ?**

PÄIVITTÄIN 2-3x VIIKOSSA KERRAN VIIKOSSA MUUTAMAN KERRAN KUUSSA HARVEMMIN

OLETKO ASIOINUT NETTIKAUPASSAMME? KYLLÄ EIJOS VASTASIT **KYLLÄ**, MILLAINEN KOKEMUS SE OLI?

3. VIESTINTÄ**MITÄ SOSIAALISEN MEDIAN KANAVIA SEURAAAT?**

FACEBOOK INSTAGRAM TWITTER PINTEREST YOUTUBE LINKEDIN

MUU? _____

KUINKA USEIN KÄYTÄT SOSIAALISTA MEDIAA?

PÄIVITTÄIN 2-3x VIIKOSSA KERRAN VIIKOSSA MUUTAMAN KERRAN KUUSSA HARVEMMIN

MITÄ GINA TRICOT:N SOSIAALISEN MEDIAN TILEJÄ SEURAAAT?

FACEBOOK INSTAGRAM YOUTUBE PINTEREST

MISTÄ KOET SAAVASI TIEDON TUOTTEISTA, TARJOUKSISTA, MYYMÄLÖIDEN VALIKOIMASTA JNE.?

SOSIAALINEN MEDIA MAINOKSET NETTISIVUT KAVERILTA/TUTULTA BLOGIT

MYYMÄLÖISTÄ MUUALTA? _____

MITÄ KAUTTA MIELUITEN HALUAISIT SAADA TIEDON?

SOSIAALINEN MEDIA SÄHKÖPOSTI MAINOKSET NETTISIVUT MYYMÄLÄT

KIRJEITSE MUU? _____

KYSELYLOMAKE

4. MONIVALINTAOSIO (SOSIAALINEN MEDIA)

VALITSE 1-5 (1=TÄYSIN ERI MIELTÄ, 2= ERI MIELTÄ, 3=EI SAMAA EIKÄ ERI MIELTÄ, 4= SAMAA MIELTÄ, 5=TÄYSIN SAMAA MIELTÄ)

SOSIAALISEN MEDIAN KAUTTA SAAN TIETOA

- TUOTTEISTA	1	2	3	4	5
- UUTUUKSISTA	1	2	3	4	5
- KAMPANJOISTA	1	2	3	4	5
- TARJOUKSISTA	1	2	3	4	5
- PAIKKAKUNTAKOHTAISISTA ASIAKASILLOISTA	1	2	3	4	5
- MYYMÄLÖIDEN VALIKOIMISTA	1	2	3	4	5
YMMÄRRÄN SOMEKANAVIEN SISÄLLÖN (KIELI ENGLANTI)	1	2	3	4	5
LÖYDÄN INSIPRAATIOITA SOMEKANAVIEN KAUTTA	1	2	3	4	5

5. AVOIMET KYSYMYKSET

MISTÄ HALUAISIT SAADA LISÄTIETOA SOSIAALISESSA MEDIASSA?

ONKO KÄSITYKSEKSI GINA TRICOT:STA YRITYKSENÄ MUUTTUNUT SOSIAALISEN MEDIAN KAUTTA?

PITÄISIKÖ GINA TRICOTILLA OLLA MAA -TAI MYYMÄLÄKOHTAISET SOSIAALISEN MEDIAN TILIT?

KYLLÄ EI

JOS VASTASIT **KYLLÄ**, MIKSI? _____

SEURAISITKO LÄHIMYYMÄLÄSI SOSIAALISEN MEDIAN TILIÄ, JOS SELLAINEN OLISI?

KYLLÄ EI