



MASTER THESIS

DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGY FOR WINE TOUR TRAVEL AGENCIES WITH A FOCUS ON INFLUENCER MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

In the past few years a digital revolution has been taking place and is still ongoing. This revolution has changed how companies communicate with their audience, but for smaller companies in the wine tourism industry adapting to the rapid changes has become a challenge. This thesis was written based on the reality of Pagus Wine Tours, a wine tourism company located in Verona, Italy. , which was established in the year 2000 as a cultural association known as “Pagus” and became Pagus Wine Tours in 2013.

The aim of the paper is to guide the company to understand the meaning of influencer marketing, the benefits and challenges thereof, how it works and how to go about including it into their current marketing strategy. Furthermore, it provides the company with more information on the different types of social media networks, their usage in different countries, the different categories of influencers and how they are currently being utilized.

The methodology used consisted of a combination of the authors experience and secondary research on the topic. Also, to gain a better insight on influencers, the company invited wine influencer Wine.Gini and food and travel blogger LunchForOne as guests on full day tours. The results of the visits were a combination of positive and negative, however it also indicated when utilized correctly, influencer marketing can overall provide positive results

The markets which were researched for the paper are part of the top source markets of Pagus Wine Tours. These markets were chosen according to the company's 2019 Google analytics, from January 1st to May 19th as well as from bookings which were made during the same time period.

The conclusions confirm that social media marketing cannot be improvised. In order to reach success in terms of seeing a return on investment, it is important to create, manage, monitor and measure campaigns which fit into the current marketing strategies of the company.

Keywords: influencer, social media marketing strategy

List of abbreviations

CH: Switzerland

CPE: Cost per engagement

DK: Denmark

FI: Finland

IM: Influencer marketing

NO: Norway

PWT: Pagus Wine Tours

ROI: Return on investment

SE: Sweden

SM: Social media

SMI: Social media influencer

SMN: Social media network(s)

TA: Target audience

UK: United Kingdom

US: United States of America

UTM: Urchin Tracking Module

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Paper structure and internship duties

Influencer marketing has in the recent years become a hot topic especially in the wine and travel sectors, however in general the wine industry lags behind the fashion, design and food industry when it comes to digital marketing (Kim, 2018). This paper intends to be a guideline for business owners to become more comfortable with the phenomenon of Influencer marketing (IM).

The paper is divided in 7 sections, sections 1-3 focuses on information which the business owner needs to know in order to understand how IM works such as the definition of IM, the different types of influencers, how they are being utilized and which social media networks are currently the most used in IM. The research methodology in section 4 explains how this information was gathered as well as the information used in following sections. Section 5 is the practical section, and provides the business owner with information on how to go about creating their own influencer marketing strategy by offering advice such as how to find a suitable influencer for his brand/product, how to pitch their idea to an influencer and how to manage the results. The results and discussions regarding the experience that Pagus Wine Tours (PWT) have had with influencers is presented in section 6 and the conclusion is presented in section 7.

The main activities and duties of the author whose internship was conducted at PWT in Verona, Italy was to develop an IM strategy. During this time, the author had the responsibility to research and contact wine and travel influencers. After receiving the proposals of some the influencers, it was decided to rather target those influencers whom were attending the VinItaly wine exhibition which takes place in Verona every year. This decision was made due to not having a budget in place to invite influencers, pay for their services, travels and accommodation. Considering that they would already be in Verona, it would be cheaper to host them on a tour than if they had to travel to Verona to experience a tour with PWT. The other responsibilities of the author included updating the social media networks (SMN) daily, assisting the guides on their tours, assisting in the office by handling consumer requests and complaints, booking the wineries to be visited, creating quotes and handling invoices.

1.2 Company description

Founded in the year 2000, Pagus was originally established as a Cultural Association with the aim to promote the history, wines and the art of the Valpolicella wine region through historical and artistic tour offers. The idea behind the creation of Pagus came from a thesis which was

written by the current owner, Mr. Davide Canteri for the University of Verona with the topic related to “The production of wine and the extraction of stone in Valpolicella during the Roman times”.

In 2013 the Association became “Pagus Wine Tours” (PWT). The aim to promote the history, wines and art of Valpolicella remained, however the focus shifted from locals to tourists. PWT has expanded over the years and today it offers wine and gastronomic tours not only in the wine regions of Verona (Valpolicella, Soave and Lake Garda), but also in the nearby wine regions such as Prosecco, Franciacorta and Trento. Today PWT works with over 70 wine producers with the majority being small family wineries presenting tourists the opportunity to be guided by the winemakers themselves or by a family member.

The company currently offers 13 different group wine tours and 11 private tours, which ranges from half to full day. The latest addition is a private tour which starts off with a horse riding lesson to a selected winery and ends with a wine tasting in the cellar. Lunch is included in both private and public full day tours. All the lunches take place at locally owned restaurants where guests have the option to try local food and, in some cases, experience the pasta making process before lunch. Apart from the group and private wine tours, PWT also offers customized tour packages on request which can include anything from accommodation, activities and dinner reservations. The other tours and services which PWT offers are four Italian cooking classes which all take place in different regions and event organizing services.

PWT prides itself on providing quality service to its consumers, for example for its “Walk and Taste Verona tour”, it chooses to make use of external guides whom are certified and knowledgeable about the city in order to provide a tour at its best quality. Furthermore, for all their public tours they only accept a maximum of 8 people per tour, which allow the guides to provide clients a personalized experience. All the guides are certified and as local as the wines themselves, therefore the guests receive an authentic experience.

2 PROPOSAL TO BE DEVELOPED

In the past 5 years, SMNs and users have doubled in size (Chaffey, 2019). Along with this rise came many marketing obstacles such as the power of sharing information and the “noise” generated by all the information now available on SMN and on the world wide web. The power of sharing information and interaction has transferred from companies to consumers (Hellberg, 2014), therefore the usage of media has further shifted from broadcasting to interactivity (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009). Social media (SM) was supposed to make brands more powerful, but instead it has empowered consumers (Fournier and Avery, 2011).

According to Little (2015) consumers are more likely to trust a referral from their personal network 92% more than advertisements when it comes to making purchasing decisions. With this shift in information sharing and all the “noise” generated, companies have been experiencing difficulties in reaching out to consumers. All the “noise” has led many online users to activate AdBlock, an online tool which blocks unwanted advertisements, on users’ computers to avoid advertisements perceived as annoying or ones they have a lack of interest in from appearing (Dinesh, 2017). In 2016 there was a 30% increase in AdBlock with over 615 million devices making use of the tool. This has over the years caused major damage for online marketing considering that the predicted total revenue lost due to users utilizing AdBlock was \$6.6 billion in 2014 (Cortland, 2017). This figure will most likely increase over the coming years, placing strain on digital advertising. As a result, IM is being used as a solution to cut through the “noise” in order to communicate a brand, product or service to the right audience. The function of IM is to convey a message through the voice of an individual who the target audience (TA) trust and like.

Although a solution has been identified, many companies are not yet comfortable or familiar with IM. The works developed under this proposal means to serve as a guideline for companies in the wine tourism business with similar operations to PWT to know what to ask, what to do and what to seek before committing to an influencer.

3 STATE OF ART

3.1 What and who are influencers?

Fedberg (2011) defines social media influencer (SMI) as an independent third-party promoter who influences their audience’s attitudes with the use of Twitter, blogging, Instagram and other forms of SM. Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014) also highlighted that influencers are third parties, who can shape the opinions, actions and attitudes of consumers though sharing content on SM which later influences their purchasing decisions.

Keller and Fay (2016) refer to influencers as everyday consumers who are turned to for their knowledge, insights and advice, because they are more likely to seek information and share ideas on the products they are consuming. The sharing of the information takes place through SM platforms otherwise known as digital or electronic word of mouth.

According to Fastenau (2018), Influencers are consumers who hold the power to affect the decision-making process of others, due to either their real or their perceived authority as well as their knowledge, position and relationship. IM is a form of SM marketing in which the focus is placed on specific individuals instead of a whole segment (Mathew, 2018).

Gerardo (2017) states that a big misconception about influencers is that they are individuals with a large amount of SM followers, but it is not the case. Nowadays are more likely to believe IM over traditional marketing, because influencers promote brands through their personal lives which makes them more relatable with the everyday consumer. In conclusion, influencers serve as a connection between brands and their consumers (Little, 2018).

3.2 Influencer characteristics.

Apart from the specific attributes of each type of influencer, there are some fundamental characteristics which all influencers should have. In their book titled “The Influentials” Keller and Berry (2003) as cited in Elli (2017) described that “the influential” needs to have an ACTIVE profile:

- A: Ahead in adoption
- C: Connected (socially and electronically)
- T: Traveller
- I: Information hungry
- V: Vocal
- E: Exposed to media

The term “ACTIVE” describes SMI best, because they are always engaging in different situations. They are leaders by nature and are always striving for innovation and constant progress. They are vocal about their experiences with certain brands, products or services and are always seeking new information. Furthermore, they are usually open minded and enjoy travelling. SMI are ahead in adoption, are exposed to media, express their voice through media and have a powerful list of followers.

According to Ebrahimi (2015). there are the attributes known as the three Rs’ which all influencers need to have in order to be successful The three Rs’ are:

Reach – It is the ability to deliver content to the TA, but it also refers to the number of followers the influencer has on their social sites.

Relevance – It describes compatibility and similarity between the influencer’s values and the brand’s image. It can either be about the audience which the influencer reaches or about the content they create. When selecting an influencer to work with it is crucial to ensure that the influencer shares the same values, culture and demographics as the brand’s TA. Because IM is a consumer-focused marketing strategy, the consumer must be the center of

all efforts. And the more relevant the influencer is to the brand and to the TA, the more engaged the followers will be.

Resonance – The ability to influence a desired behavior from an audience as well as the degree of engagement of the influencer's audience with the content that he/she creates.

3.3 Influencer categories.

According to Wagner (2018) and Quey (2018) influencers can be divided in the following categories:

3.3.1 Celebrities

Celebrities were the first and original influencer marketers however, it is referred to as endorsements (Newberry, 2018). Some would argue that endorsements cannot be considered as IM, because endorsements attach the fame of the person to the brand or product whereas with IM the influencer is used to build a positive image of a product or brand in the minds of their followers. Furthermore, influencers are considered to be specialists in their field which is related to the brand or product they are promoting, whereas with celebrity endorsements, the celebrity is usually not a specialist in the product which they are promoting. For example, a fashion or a real estate brand using Cristiano Ronaldo to increase their brand awareness, even though he is no expert in any of the fields (Geppert, n.d). Kamins (1989) defined celebrity endorser as an individual who is known to the public for his or her achievements in areas other than that of the product endorsed. Celebrity endorsements are not meant to be interacted with, but only to be seen and heard. The message behind the brand or product is often less important than the face of the celebrity. Celebrity endorsements are utilized for products and brands which have a high price production cost margin and a large customer base. In short, they are used for nationally and internationally marketed products rather than local or niche market products (Khatri, 2006).

3.3.2 Bloggers

Blogs are considered online diaries or journals which are mainly used for informal communication to share personal experiences, suggestions, opinions etc. Blog entries usually appear in reverse chronological order and are frequently updated by writing new entries (Burnett, Simon and Pedersen, 2011). Most blogs allow for two-way conversations, because the reader can comment on the blog, the writer can respond to it and others may join the conversation. Because of their versatility such as the possibility to add photos in between the texts, blogs are a perfect tool for storytelling. When making use of a blog, the company can either write blogs on their own website or get articles about them published on relevant blogger

sites. Wine related blogs can take many forms depending on their content. The content can specifically focus on wine reviews, food and wine travel experiences, wine education, specific wine regions, wine and culture or a combination of all (Tach, 2010).

3.3.3 Industry experts and thought leaders

It includes journalists, industry experts, professional advisors and academics. This category of influencers gains followers and respect, due to their positions, qualifications or expertise on certain topics. They further gain respect due to where they work (for example journalists working for the BBC, Forbes and the New York times are known worldwide). They are expected to “cut through the “noise” and share something which is considered worthy of reading. Joy (2017) defines thought leaders as an individual who is an authority in a specific field with expertise which are sought after and often rewarded. They possess the ability to contribute to conversations on what is currently happening, but they are also able to predict what may happen in the future. Most importantly they know how to inspire and influence others to act.

3.3.4 Micro influencers

Micro influencers are what one would consider as everyday people who have become known for their knowledge and involvement of a specific niche. Because of their practical involvement they are very specific about their posts and therefore they only appeal to smaller markets. Micro influencers are considered to have less than 30 000 followers. Due to their small following base. The focus shifts from the number of followers to their engagement rates unlike celebrity influencers. Micro influencers are the fastest growing and the most engaging category in the IM industry (Echezarraga, 2019). They have further proven to be more authentic in what they share in comparison to macro influencers. According to Anderson (2019) the benefits that micro influencers have over other categories of influencers are the higher engagement rates, because they are able to connect and interact with their followers more frequently through responding to comments, likes and follows. The other benefits are affordability, higher conversion rates, and appealing niche markets.

For the purpose of the study further focus will be placed on micro influencers and bloggers.

3.4 The benefits of influencer marketing.

Although IM is a relatively young industry, many big companies have received satisfying results. Around 80% of marketers stated that they found IM to be very effective and 89% stated that the return on investment of IM is the same or even better than traditional marketing and plan to increase their budget for IM by 65% in 2019 (Asano, 2019).

As mentioned in section 2, the power of sharing information and interaction has shifted from companies to consumers and 92% of consumers trust referrals more than the brand itself. However, with all the content on SM and online, it can be difficult to get the message across to the TA. In this case influencers have the upper hand, because they already have a follower base which trusts them. People usually only follow influencers who communicate about topics in which they are interested thus making it easier to reach them. Being able to filter out the “noise” for potential consumers is one of the powers of IM, it further shortens the decision-making process for consumers which further leads to action taking place faster as illustrated in annex A1.

Unlike with traditional marketing, once an influencer posts about a product or service, their followers can immediately access the website or SMN of the advertising company. This makes IM a great tool to drive traffic to the company’s website and lead to the increase of brand awareness (figure 1). Furthermore, IM allows for two-way conversation. Through comments the followers can engage with each other which can also help lead to an increase of sales.

An influencer can only influence their followers to a certain extent, once the follower which turns into a potential client decides to access the company website or SMN, it should be interesting enough to draw and keep their attention. However, it is not always easy for companies to create attention grabbing content themselves or it can get expensive to pay an external company to do so. In such situation’s influencers can also be used as content creators (Huff, 2017).

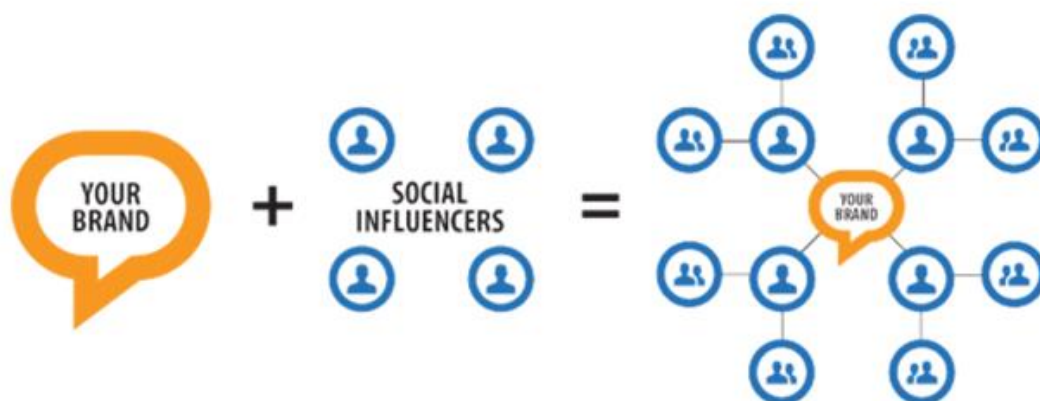


Figure 1: How influencer marketing increases brand awareness (Haran, 2018).

3.5 Challenges and risks of influencer marketing.

Because IM is a recent industry, there is not yet much literature available on the challenges and risks it holds, but as with any type of marketing there are always perceived risks and challenges. In 2019 Asano conducted a survey with over 160 marketers asking them about the main IM challenges which they are facing in 2019. Spotting fake followers was at the top of the list, followed by the changes in social algorithms, the rising costs of IM, reducing the time spent managing campaigns, brand safety and alignment, building a strong creative strategy and staying up to date with SM trends in order to stay always relevant. IM relies greatly on the influencers themselves, therefore it is very important that the right brand is matched with the right influencer and assure that they share the same objectives, ideas and work culture. If not, it can be a major risk for the company (Elli, 2017).

3.6 How are influencers currently being utilized?

Influencers can be utilized in various ways: borrowing the reach and or the audience of the influencer, offering influencers monetary compensation or by offering products and services of the company in return for exposure in the form of blog posts, Instagram posts and stories. Borrowing the reach of an influencer is somewhat the same as sponsored advertising, the company searches for an influencer who has a follower base which matches the TA of the company. The company then pays them to advertise being the simplest form of all. Overall IM can be either earned or paid (Biaudet, 2017). Companies need to remember however that an influencer is meant to influence its audience, but in order to do it they first need to build trust. Therefore, companies also need to build relationships with the influencer, because the better they know and believe in the product, the better they can advertise it. The relationship and trust can be reached by creating a partnership with the influencer, for example, offering them services and products and involving them when a new product is launched. Influencers should not be thought as marketing tools, but rather as social relationship asset.

3.7 Influencer marketing platforms.

IM platforms are online tools which offer a variety of functions that are useful for both the influencer and the marketer. These platforms offer a direct way for brands to connect and work with influencers and vice versa. There are currently over 36 IM platforms. The top platforms include Upfluence, Famebit, Scrunch, HYPR, PopularChips, TapInfluence and Lefty (Dogtiev, 2019).

Most IM platforms offer the following functions:

Search and discovery: It is the most common function which is offered by all IM platforms. This function allows the marketer the option to search for influencers by adding filters in order to find their desired influencer profile. The filters which can be applied in the search include searching by the demographics of the influencer, by platform, by follower count and by the topic of the influencer such as food, wine, travel, among others..

Compensating influencers: A function used to handle the payment process of multiple influencers. It allows for transactions made with PayPal, tax compliance and other electronic payments gateways.

Reporting and analytics: A function which helps analyze the impact of influencer campaigns. It provides reports on information such as the reach, views, ROI calculations, URL tracking and real-time analytics.

Promotion and amplification of the content of an influencer campaign: A function which helps to reinforce the impact created by a campaign through paid advertising on SM.

Contact & contract management: A function which provides companies with the contact information of the influencers, allows them to communicate directly with influencers, negotiate payment and hire them for campaigns.

Campaign content management: A function which allows companies to create competitions, giveaways, hashtags, @mentions, manage texts and graphics for multiple campaigns.

3.8 Types of social media networks.

In order to identify which SMN are more feasible, one first needs to understand what the main purpose of each network is as they do not all function the exact same way or have the same purpose.

Hootsuite, a SM management platform which companies can use to manage most of their SMN altogether, categorizes SMN which can be used to influence the consumer purchase in the following categories.

3.8.1 Social networks

Examples: LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook

These networks are used to connect with people; they are built around users and everything that is important for them. It is one of the most versatile social networks categories, because

users can participate in live discussions, upload multimedia content, share thoughts etc.. Therefore, SM are sometimes referred to as “relationship networks”. Through these networks, companies can conduct marketing research, reach a TA using advertisements and engage with followers.

3.8.2 Media sharing networks

Examples: Youtube, Instagram, Snapchat

These networks allow the users to apply of a combination of visual content such as videos and photographs. Text is not the main factor in these networks.

3.8.3 Discussion forums

Examples: Quora, Reddit, Dig

These networks are used to find, share and discuss information, news and opinions. Companies can use these networks to conduct marketing research by starting discussions on certain topics. Discussion forums are one of the oldest forms of SM. Many people make use of these sites to stay updated with current discussions. Unlike social networks, discussion forums allow people join the discussions anonymously which gives them more confidence to be honest.

3.8.4 Bookmarking and content curation networks

Examples: Flipboards, Pinterest

These networks are used to share, save, discuss and discover content and media. Companies can utilize it to help drive website traffic, customer engagement and brand awareness.

3.8.5 Consumer/social review networks

Examples: TripAdvisor, Yelp, Zomato

These networks are used to find, review and share information about brands, products, services as well as travel destinations and more. Networks such as TripAdvisor are more versatile, because bookings and payments can also be done using the network. They also provide deserving companies with high rankings with the TripAdvisor award of excellence. Many companies, especially in tourism, depend on it for their marketing, because reviews are a type of content which adds value to many websites and online services.

Knowing what consumers are saying and feeling towards a brand enables the company to understand the consumer’s experience from their point of view and thus identify what works

and what doesn't. Both bad and good reviews should be taken seriously and responded to in a respectful manner.

3.8.6 Blogging and publishing networks

Examples: Tumblr, WordPress

These networks are used to discover, publish and comment on online content. They give brands and people the tools to publish content which can be shared and usually commented on. Many companies make use of WordPress to create and run their website, but influencers also make use of it to create their blog accounts. Tumblr on the other hand is used for microblogging. These networks are very useful for companies who make use of content marketing.

3.9 Social media networks popularity by country.

The demographics of consumers, especially their country of origin and age, is very important to marketers. With this information they can adapt the marketing strategy to better reach the desired audience. For IM this is also important, because it helps the business owner to make a more successful decision when searching for a suitable influencer.

According to Kemp (2017), 3.028 billion people actively use SM – that accounts for 40% of the world's population. However not all SMN are equally utilized in different countries.

In this section the study will focus only on the SM usage in the US, UK, and the Nordic countries, the most important markets for PWT as it will be letter explained. In 2017 Werliin conducted a study titled "Apps & Social Media Usage in the US, UK & Nordics 2017" and in 2018 Smith and Anderson conducted a study on the use of SMN in the US. The findings were as follow:

US: As illustrated by annex A2 the study by Smith and Anderson found that Facebook is used by 80% of the population and YouTube by 64%, being the most dominant SMN in the country, followed by Twitter 41%, Instagram 39% and Pinterest 31%. The study also found that from 2016 to 2018 Facebook and YouTube have been stagnating whilst Instagram and Pinterest have been experiencing growth. These results are also supported by Werliin's (2017) study on SM.

UK: In the case of the UK, the study illustrated that Facebook representing 76% and YouTube 59% are also the most used SMN, but they are followed by first WhatsApp

48% and then Twitter 40% and Instagram 32%, with Pinterest falling behind Snapchat and LinkedIn.

DK: Facebook represents 80% and YouTube 55% followed by LinkedIn, Instagram 29%, Twitter and then Pinterest. In the case of Denmark, LinkedIn ranks higher than Instagram unlike in the US and UK.

NO: Facebook takes the top position with 85%, however in second place is Snapchat and YouTube both with 60%, followed by Instagram 49%.

FI: It is the only country where YouTube does not rank under the top two SMN. Facebook takes the higher position with 75%, but in second place is WhatsApp 69% then followed by YouTube 66%, Instagram 35%, LinkedIn, Twitter and Pinterest.

SE: Facebook representing 78% and YouTube 57% followed by Instagram 52%, Snapchat, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and then Twitter and Pinterest.

When comparing all the markets, as illustrated by figure 2 it is evident that Facebook is the most used SMN. In the case of the UK, US, DK and SE, the results are quite standard with YouTube being the second most used SMN. However, in NO Snapchat is used just as much as YouTube and in FI WhatsApp is used more than YouTube. Instagram is mostly used in NO and SE. In DK LinkedIn is a powerful SMN ranking in third place after Facebook and YouTube.

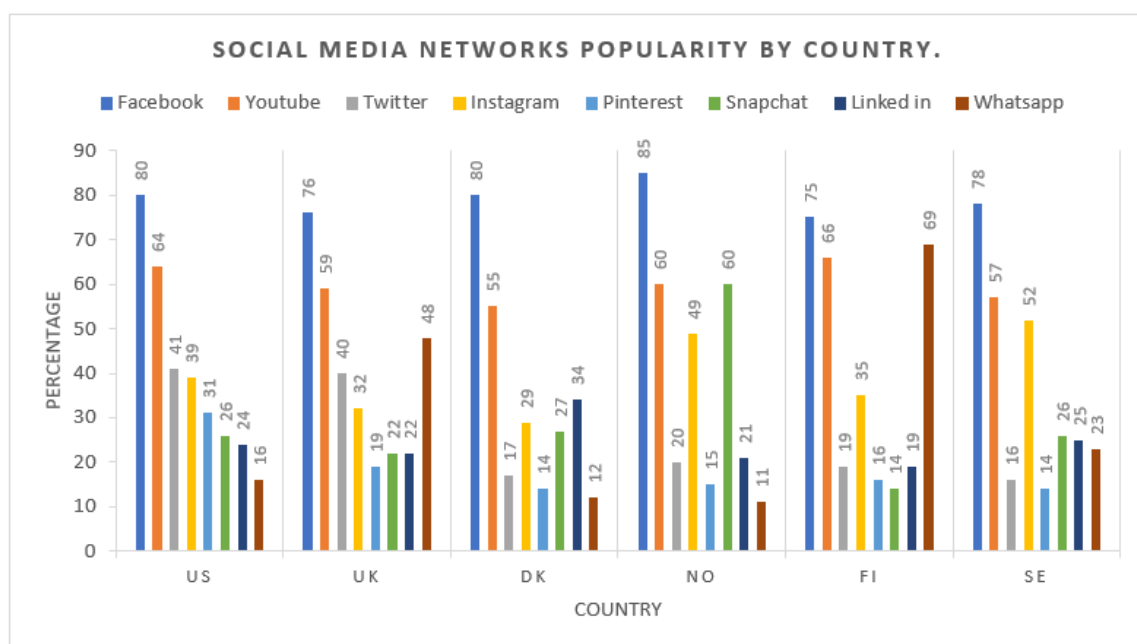


Figure 2: Social media networks popularity by country. (Adapted from: Werliin, 2017).

3.10 Devices used by potential consumers for social media.

Responsive web design is important when considering a marketing style which is dependent on the internet, because it can either enhance or hinder the potential consumer's experience. Responsive web design refers to the ability of a website to adapt to different devices on which it is displayed (laptops, tablets, computers, smart mobile phones, etc.) without losing any quality (Bader and Hammouri, 2016). This is especially very important when considering the company website and SM campaigns. When a user enters a website, he/she wants to have a user-friendly interface which is easy to navigate and get to where he/she wants to be on the website.

Many researches that were focused on the use of SMN were also focused on the device which was used to access the SMN. For the purpose of the study the focus was placed on computers, tablets and mobiles. The results presented are from the study of Werliin (2017).

US: Facebook, YouTube and Pinterest were mostly accessed through a computer; however, Twitter and Instagram were dominant on mobiles mobile phones. Overall the usage of tablets was lower than with computers and mobile phones.

UK: Opposite to the US, Facebook and Pinterest were accessed mostly by mobile phone, YouTube however only had a 1 % difference in usage between the computer and mobile phone. Twitter and Instagram showed the same results as in the US with mobile phones being dominant.

DK: Facebook and Pinterest are almost equally used on the computer as on the mobile phone. YouTube is mostly used on the computer and Twitter and Instagram are mostly accessed by mobile phone.

NO: Facebook is primarily accessed on the mobile phone, but YouTube is primarily used on the computer. Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest dominate the usage of mobile phones.

FI: Facebook is equally accessed with both the mobile phone and the computer; YouTube is mostly accessed with the computer. The remaining SMN Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest are accessed with the mobile phone.

SE: All SMNs except for YouTube are primarily accessed on the mobile phone, however in the case of YouTube the usage differs by about 1%.

Across all the Nordic countries YouTube, is mostly used on the computer, however in Sweden it is superior to the mobile phone by only 2%. In the other countries the differences are larger. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest are mostly used on the mobile phone, but in the case of Denmark it is only 3% superior to the computer and in Finland it is used equally on the computer as with the mobile.

3.11 The use of social media networks to follow brands and companies.

SM is daily used for a variety of reasons such for entertainment, to keep contact with friends and family, to follow the news, to strengthen professional networks and to follow brands and companies. The research conducted by Werliin (2017) illustrated in figure 2 presented the following findings. In Finland, Twitter is the most dominant SMN used to follow brands and companies. It is also the most dominant when compared to the other countries. There are few similarities in the US and UK with regards to the usage of Twitter and Pinterest. Denmark, Finland and The US have the highest usage of Instagram in this case. Norway and Sweden illustrate the lowest rankings across all the SMN. Overall Twitter was illustrated to be the most used SMN to follow brand and companies.

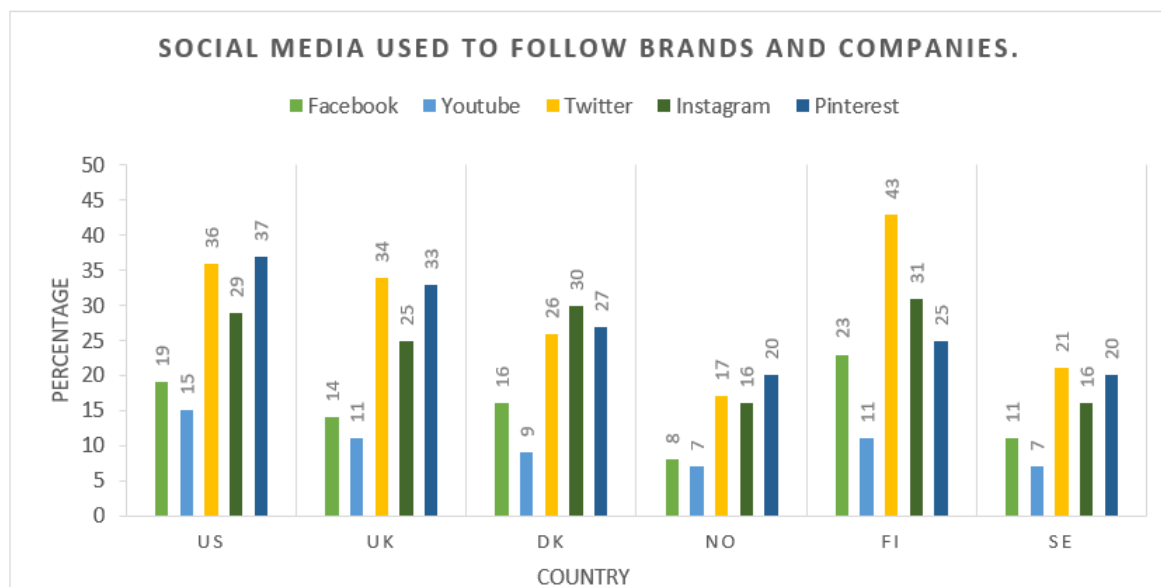


Figure 3: Social media used to follow brands and companies 2017, (Adapted from Werliin, 2017).

3.12 The source credibility theory

It is important to keep in mind the source credibility theory when making use of IM. The source credibility theory describes how an audience develops attitudes and perceptions about the speaker (the influencer) during the communication process (Alexander, 2011). According to

the theory which was created by Carl I. Hovland and Walter Weiss in 1953, there are three important dimensions of credibility: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. If one of the dimensions is missing, it can affect the degree to which messages are accepted by consumers when they are looking or following third party opinions about a brand or product. Ohanian (1990) created a model for the source credibility theory. The model provides an analysis of each dimension to help marketers understand it better.

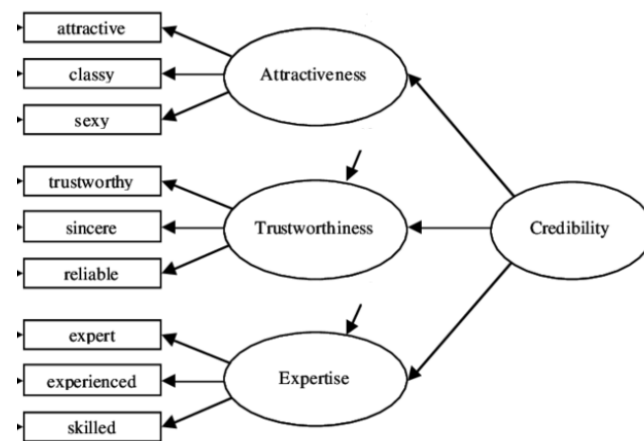


Figure 4: The Ohanian model of source credibility, (Ohanian, 1990).

4 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Research methods are divided into two primary approaches: quantitative and qualitative. For the development of this thesis, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used.

Quantitative research is an objective research method of which the findings are presented by means of statistics. It is used to measure variables such as opinions, behaviors and attitudes. This approach is commonly used when the population size is large. The data for quantitative research is gathered by means of structured methods such as questionnaires and interviews. (Monfared and Derakhshan, 2015).

Qualitative research is largely investigative research that is conducted to gain a better understanding of fundamental variables such as opinions, reasons and motivations. It is more subjective, and the data is mostly collected by observing the study sample. In qualitative research a small number of people are studied in-depth by means of unstructured or semi-structured methods such as focus groups and interviews (Monfared and Derakhshan, 2015).

4.1 Quantitative research

A large part of the data was collected by analyzing the google and web analytics of the webpage of PWT.

Kaushik (2007) defines web analytics as: *“The analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from your website and the competition, to drive a continual improvement of the online experience that your customers, and potential customers have, which translates into your desired outcomes (online and offline)”* page 4s.

Google analytics is a type of web analytics application which helps to analyze the traffic of a given website. It provides real time analysis and statistics that users have with the website. Google analytics can currently present quantitative reports on the behavior of the visitors such as the number of new and returning visitors; the demographics of the audience, for example their location and their browser language setting; and the type of technology they used to access the webpage and how they managed to reach the website (Shivar, 2018). Google analytics enables companies to make better decisions based on data and, with this data, marketers can justify in which areas more money needs to be spent for marketing purposes, determine the types of content that will be more feasible and where this content should be made available (Chande, 2015).

With this information on hand it was possible to better identify which types of SM platforms (depending in popularity by country) as well as which type of influencers would be best to reach the TA.

4.2 Qualitative methods

The researcher further made use of the following qualitative methods to gain more information and insight on IM.

4.2.1 Inviting influencers and bloggers.

Wine influencer Wine.Gini and food and wine blogger LunchForOne were invited to join a tour with PWT. Wine.Gini was chosen, because she has been ranked as one of the top wine influencers to follow by The Wine Gallery in 2018, Joanie's Wine Blog in 2019 and AVMilano in 2017. She was available during the period of VinItaly which took place between the 7th to the 10th of April in Verona. On the other side, LunchForOne contacted the owner of the company requesting a tour in exchange for a blogpost and posts and mentions on her SM networks. Thus, PWT decided to work with LunchForOne, because its main market is

Germany, a market which could be interesting for PWT to tap into especially, because they are currently one of the top tourist markets in Verona (Riello, 2018).

4.2.2 Attending Vinexpo Bordeaux 2019.

During the Vinexpo the researcher attended a conference on the topic of Wine Journalism in digital times. The focus of the conference was to discuss whether wine bloggers and wine rating websites are replacing quality wine journalism as well as to predict the direction in which wine journalism will be moving to.

4.2.3 Visit to Wine2Digital.

Wine2digital is a company based in Verona, Italy and their aim is to develop wine in the digital world. During VinItaly 2019, a yearly wine exposition held in Verona, Wine2digital offered various events related to the digitalization of wine. One of the events was “Hire me influencer” which was structured as a speed dating event, where 17 Italian wine influencers received a few minutes to communicate with wine makers and other wine professionals. At the end of the event the wine professionals could decide whether they would like to hire an influencer or not. The author visited the offices of Wine2Digital and had the opportunity to communicate with the managing director as well as to some of the employees regarding the topic of wine influencer. In 2018 Wine2Digital released a book called “#nofilter – 12 Q& with 9 Italian Wine Influencers” which was used in this study.

4.2.4 Italian wine podcast interviews.

The Italian wine podcast has a category of interviews which was held with 9 Italian wine influencers. These interviews covered the topics of what are wine influencers, how wine influencers would define themselves, how they got into the business, the approaches to IM, etc.

5 DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARKETING STRATEGY

As previously mentioned, IM can be very effective if well planned. The main aim of this strategy is to help the business owner to overcome the challenges of IM by having access to a comprehensive guide to create an IM strategy. Some of the challenges are:

- Identifying the most suitable influencer for the brand.
- Knowing where the IM campaign corresponds with the company’s overall marketing strategy.

- Measuring the effectiveness and success of the IM strategy.
- Getting started with a campaign idea.
- Building a relationship with the right influencers.

5.1 Determine the influencer marketing goals.

Marketing objectives are goals which are set by a company when promoting their products and services to potential consumers. These goals must be achieved by a specific time. Each company that decides to incorporate IM into their marketing strategy generally have different goals they wish to reach. The future goals of PWT for using IM are to:

Build brand identity: Getting more people to see the company's personality and identity.

Brand awareness: Getting more people to know about and recognize the company.

Engagement: Getting more people to comment, like and share the SM content.

Audience building: Increasing the amount of people who follow the company and subscribing them.

Sales: Increasing the sales of the product/service which is being advertised.

Because PWT did not have a budget in place for IM and as it was their first time working with influencers, the main goal was to experience how it is to work with influencers before investing rather than the above-mentioned goals.

5.1.1 The SMART method

Before creating a campaign whether with or without an influencer, the marketer needs to set realistic goals for the campaign. This can be done by using the S.M.A.R.T goal setting method (Locke and Latham, 1991).

Specific

Be specific about what the company wishes to achieve, for example increasing sales by 15% or increasing conversions from SM by 10%. The 5 "W" questions must be asked here; What does the company want to accomplish? Why is it important? "Who is involved? Where is it located? Which resources are needed?

Measurable

The goals should be measurable, if it cannot be measured, it cannot be improved. This can be achieved by setting a benchmark before and after the campaign in order to compare the outcome and by continuous tracking of the results. A measurable goal should ask questions such as: How much? How many? How will it be indicated once the goal has been accomplished?

Attainable/ Achievable

The goals need to be realistic and achievable for it to be successful. In order to assure that the goals are achievable, the following questions should be asked: How can this goal be accomplished? When considering the resources such as financial and human, how realistic is this goal?

Relevant

Make sure that your IM goal is related to your overall strategy, campaign and business objectives. The following questions should be asked: Is it the right time for this campaign? Is it applicable in the current environment? Have the correct people been employed to reach the goal(s)?

Time based

A goal or objective cannot be reached without a deadline. The deadline should however also be attainable and realistic and answer to the following questions: What can the company do within a certain time frame such as one month from now? When will the campaign be launched and end?

5.2 Identify and define the target audience.

Before one can start looking for influencers, it is important to first outline the details about the actual TA for each campaign. Depending of the goals of the campaign, it should be created a TA persona with information on their demographic and psychographic segmentation. Once all the necessary information about the TA is known, it will be easier to identify who they follow and which SMN they use. TA analysis is important because it will enable the business owner to have a more cost-effective IM strategy, be more competitive as a small business by targeting the right niche, create personalized content for the right people and increase the number of consumers through better conversion rates.

5.3 Identify the influencer and pitch to them.

5.3.1 Influencer identification

One of the first steps to creating an IM strategy is to identify the most suitable influencer not only for the campaign, but also for the type of consumers which the business owner is seeking to reach. As explained in section 3.3 there are various types of influencers and in many cases, they can overlap, for example a blogger can also be a micro influencer at the same time, besides many influencers make use of more than one type of SMN.

The qualities which should be highlighted when searching for an influencer includes being an expert or opinion leader in their field, knowing how to produce suitable and interesting content, understand the value of his/her work, knowing about and understanding the company as well as the product/service which is being offered and having a sufficient amount of relevant followers matching the TA of the campaign (Biaudet, 2017). Furthermore, the budget plays a big role in choosing the right influencer, because not all influencers charge or ask for the same type of benefits or compensation.

With the search function of SM platforms explained at 3.7 it is easier to find the right influencers, because specific filters can be applied. Overall it is very important to establish partnerships with people who understand and can relate to the brand.

5.3.2 Pitch and brief the influencer.

Once the right influencer has been identified, the next step is to pitch to them. The purpose of pitching is to communicate with them what is expected and what they receive in return. This step is very important in the IM strategy, because it can help the business owner to identify whether the influencer is interested in the brand or if he/she is only interested in the compensation on offer, this relates to the source credibility theory (Baker, 2018).

The first step is to take the time to become acquainted with the influencers' SMNs before making any contact. As with any other form of marketing, it is never a good idea to begin a campaign unprepared. The influencer should be studied and this involves observing behavior, activity, language as well as getting to know their work. It will help to understand their personality, values, interests and whether they are experts in their fields or not.

The next step is to put an offer together. The offer must be based off what has been learned about the influencer, the campaign requirements and the budget. It is recommended to create personalized compensation offers for each influencer, because it helps to avoid overcompensating some influencers or undercompensating top performing influencers.

The last step is to begin the outreach. The outreach can be done through email or through sending direct messages on SM platforms or networks. It can get difficult to create the perfect outreach message and to negotiate with influencers, however many influencer platforms have an option to automate the process of outreach and to customize outreach templates. In the outreach message it is important to introduce the company and the brand with a short description. In two sentences it should be explained why they are being contacted and why they were chosen. Then, information about the campaign should be added, highlighting the goals and the benefits of working on it. The message should end with an offer to converse about the specifics and attach more information about the company, which can be through links to the SMN or website.

5.4 Create campaigns

Once the influencer has been chosen, is it time to start a campaign. The business owner has the choice to either inspire, hire or use a mixture of both. The influencer can be inspired to share the content of the company on their own, they can be paid to promote the company's products and services or a situation which uses both options can be created (Kosaka, 2019).

The following are options for creating a campaign.

Contests and giveaways: This one of the most common campaign options, because of the simplicity thereof and the mutual benefits it brings. When running a giveaway campaign, the influencer asks the audience to enter their emails, like a post, write a comment and tag a friend or answer some questions for a contest. Thereafter the winner is selected. This is a good option to improve brand awareness.

Gifting: Giving free products/services to an influencer in exchange for a review, mention, blogpost, story etc. This option is also known as product seeding. It further helps build relationships with the influencers in the long term.

SM account take over: Allowing an influencer to take over the company's SMN accounts for a certain amount of time is a good short-term tool to drive the influencer's followers to the account, increase brand exposure or to create anticipation for upcoming events.

Co-creation of content: This involves partnering with an influencer to create content to be featured on the company's, the influencer's and a third party's websites and SMNs.

Brand ambassadors: It can be attained by forming long term relationships with influencers to mention and promote the brand, products and services in exchange for free products, exclusive offers or being featured by the brand for an ongoing period.

Sponsored content: As mentioned before, a lot of “noise” has been created on the world wide web, which needs to be cut through in order to reach the TA. Partnering with influencers who can produce and promote SM content is the best way to cut through the “noise”. This is done by paying to be featured on an influencer’s blog or SMN. In this case either the business owner or the influencer can create the content.

Discount/promo codes: Providing an influencer with a unique code which offers discount to those who use it to make a purchase.

Affiliate agreement: Providing a unique code that gives influencers a percentage of each sale they make. This method encourages the influencer to actively support the product, because they receive a benefit every time a sale is made.

Guest blogging: This can be done in two ways. The first option is to accept guests posts on the company’s blog and the second is to submit posts to websites and blogs which relate to the travel, food or wine industry.

5.5 Manage, monitor and measure the campaign and results.

It is important to track and measure the results in order to determine if the desired goals were reached or not. The best way to do this is to make use of metrics. There are a large variety of metrics which can be used to measure certain aspects a campaign (De Vivo, 2017).

5.5.1 Measure the reach and brand awareness of the campaign

In any campaign reaching the desired result is very important, because it is needed to calculate the ROI of the campaign. It is essential to know how far the message has travelled and how many people potentially saw it. The higher the reach of the campaign, the more potential sales it can generate. To examine influencer reach the following key performance indicators can be used:

Traffic data: The amount of traffic which is driven by the influencer to the company website.

Impressions: The number of times the message has reached the TA.

Followers: The number of followers the influencer has.

This data can be obtained from the SMN profiles as well as tools which can read social metrics such as page views, site users, time spent on the site and website traffic.

5.5.2 Measure the engagement of the campaign.

In IM, engagement rate is used to measure the level of interaction an influencer receives on his content. It is possible to measure the number of engagements and to calculate the Cost Per Engagement (CPE). CPE can be calculated by dividing the total spent by the number of engagements. Influencer engagement can indicate the loyalty of the consumers and is a powerful way too track long term ROI. To measure the engagement, the following aspects should be considered:

Likes and reactions: SMN such as Facebook have recently modified its algorithm to provide greater weight to reactions. Reactions require a little bit more effort than a simple like and it provides some information on how potential consumers feel about the product. The reactions currently include love, like, happy, surprised and angry.

Clicks: It indicates the interest levels of the TA. People will not click on something they have no interest in and curiosity drives clicks, therefore it is also important to have interesting content.

Comments: This creates very useful engagement as it can start conversations between users and sometimes it is used to gain more information about what is being advertised. For example, if some information is missing about the product/service people will usually put it in the comments.

Mentions: It is a great key performance indicator because it shows that the content is being shared and discussed.

Shares: It can be an indication of quality and likeability. People will not share a post unless they think it is of interest to them or to those, they communicate with on their SMN. In order to have more people sharing the campaign posts, it is important to have content that will attract more than just the influencers' followers. As cited by Pulizzi (2012) according to Scott Stratten there are three circles of content sharing, the first circle represents the people who are closest to the user, in this case closest to the influencers, they share the content because they know and trust the influencer. The second are the friends of those who are in the first circle, they see the content on a regular basis, because the first circle connections share it. Those in the

third circle are considered the “Holy Grail”. This is because if the third circle shares the content, they do it because it is interesting or because they feel that it is worth sharing.

The CPE metric helps to understand how consumers react to the brand and not only to the products and services. This means that CPE is not only about generating immediate sales, but also about building consumer relationships.

There are many applications such as BuzzSumo which can provide the business owner with an overview of how the campaign is doing. It is easy to use, one should copy the URL of the post into the online application and it will generate information on the engagement over different SMN. This can also be used to analyze the posts of competitors.

5.5.3 Calculate the growth of TA.

Once the suitable influencer has been identified and the campaign has been launched, it is important to keep tracking the demographics of those being reached by the campaign in order to assure that it is reaching the right audience. This can be done by being updated with the Google analytics demographics report. This key performance indicator can allow the marketer to make changes, if needed, and to maximize ROI whilst the campaign is running.

5.5.4 Quantify social leads.

Although it is important having a higher visibility rate and a more engaged TA, it is even more crucial to always keep ROI in mind. One of the goals of IM is to generate leads which can turn potential customers into buyers. To maximize ROI it is necessary to identify the marketing channels which are generating more leads. For example, if more leads are generated through Instagram, better and updated quality information should constantly be created for Instagram.

To measure this ROI, Google analytics offers very useful content. The steps are: opening the google analytics of the website using “Go to Acquisition and then Overview” to see the traffic channels. Next, in the list of traffic channels (Social, Organic Search, etc.), click “Social”. This will open a list of the SMN, from which one can evaluate which SMN are generating the most leads from the campaign.

5.5.5 Analyse the Origin of Sales.

Sales are the biggest ROI companies expect from their IM campaigns. Once the business owner knows from where the most sales of the campaign are being generated, he/she can focus on that area to maximize the ROI. Using promo codes, affiliate links and Urchin Tracking

Module (UTM) parameters are a good way to analyze whether an influencer is generating any sales and if they fit the campaign goals. UTM parameters are tags which are added to a URL, and when the link is clicked the tags are sent to Google Analytics and tracked. UTM parameters can be used to research how much traffic came from a particular Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. post instead of from referrals in general. With UTM the Google analytics campaign URL builder, one can add UTM parameters to URLs to track influencer campaigns on Google analytics. This will provide data about the sites where the advertisements appear, the name of the campaign, which keywords are used, and more.

Promo codes can be used not only to track an influencer's sales, but also to track the future purchases of those who purchased using the code. Each influencer can be provided with a promo code which their followers can use to receive a discount price.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Currently the biggest problem PWT is facing with their SMN is to get and keep people engaged. Part of this problem is due to a lack of interesting content to keep people interested in following the company even if they are not currently interested in making a purchase.

As explained in section 5.1, because PWT did not have a budget in place for IM and as it was their first time working with influencers. The main goal of working with Wine.Gini and LunchForOne was to experience how it is to work with influencers before investing in a social media marketing strategy. Both influencers did not have a formal written agreement on what is expected from them, all the communication was done through email and private messages on Instagram.

The results of working with Wine.Gini were positive, because the posts on the Instagram page of PWT in which she was tagged, reached an average 517 followers of profiles of which 17% were not previously following the company's Instagram. In general, the posts on PWT's Instagram only reaches about 9% of people who were not following the account. This proves that the collaboration works, but more would have to be done in order to fully measure the ROI.

The results of working with blogger LunchForOne were negative. After the tour, PWT had to contact her several times to get information on when she was planning on making a post. After a few attempts she posted on her Instagram story, however a post has yet to be made on her blog. A mistake of PWT was to not properly research the blogger beforehand, because it was later discovered that her last post on Instagram was made in the beginning of 2018, although it was part of the original agreement.

These results suggest that without the usage of the proper tools such as influencer platforms which can help to find influencers and create and monitor campaigns, it is difficult to analyze the true impact of working with an influencer. Such investments are crucial to development of a successful IM strategy.

The Google analytics of PWT from the 1st of January to the 19th of May indicated the following: most clicks on the website are from potential consumers located in Italy, US, UK, Switzerland and Canada. However, when reviewing the bookings made in during the same time period, the top consumer countries were the US, UK, SE, NO and to a lesser extent DK, FI and Switzerland. This indicates that many Italians and Canadians access the PWT website, but do not necessarily make any bookings.

If PWT decides to someday explore into the Italian market, especially Italians travelling to Verona from other parts of Italy, a suggestion would be to collaborate with an influencer. As an example, in 2018 Italian wine influencer Adrea Albagi known as Cor_Vino was in partnership with the Signorvino wine shop which is one of the most well-known wine shops in Verona. Andrea had his own corner in the shop where he would exhibit three wines chosen by him every month. Each month he had to choose the wines according to a theme and each wine was also accompanied by his personal story about the wine. This approach helped those who enjoy wine, but do not always know which wines to choose, with the help of a professional and his story, it makes the decision-making process easier (#nofilter- 12 Q&A with Italian wine influencers, 2018).

PWT however does not sell wines, but they sell experiences. A suggestion for PWT to enhance their social media is to conduct interviews with a fun approach or an influencer can be sent to get to know the winemaker. These interviews can be about getting to know the winemaker, the family and the business. The influencer can then create content based on their experiences, thus providing potential consumers with a taste of what they can expect when they book an experience with PWT. Overall any influencer marketing campaign idea needs to have a budget in place and analyzed beforehand for it to be successful.

7 CONCLUSION

The digital world is always evolving changing and there is nothing any business owner can do about it other than to adapt to it and stay updated with the trends. Because the wine tourism industry is so versatile, it can appeal to many, however in most cases such as the case of PWT those who consume the wine tourism products are often located in various countries, making it difficult to communicate with them. For this reason, it is essential to make use of professionals such as influencers to get the message across. As with any style of marketing, investing into it is important to reach the desired outcome. By using the right tools such as influencer marketing platforms to find influencers and create campaigns the desired outcome can be reached. These tools also save the marketer time and money by helping to avoid influencers who are not authentic. Many may think that managing SM campaign is easy, but as with any other form of marketing, one cannot simply improvise and hope for the best. With the right guidance, it is possible to have a successful IM strategy and thrive within the digital world.

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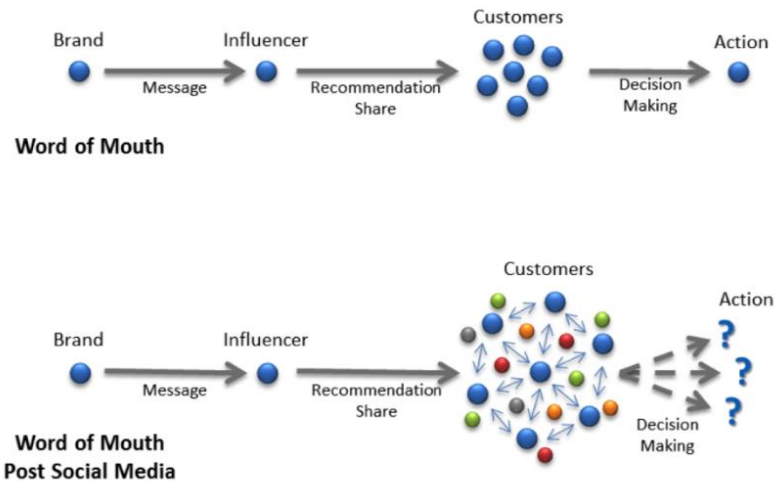
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ANNEXES

A1: How influencer marketing helps to accelerate the decision-making process, (Brown and Fiorella 2013)



A2: The usage of social media networks in the US (Smith and Anderson 2018).

Majority of Americans now use Facebook, YouTube

% of U.S. adults who say they use the following social media sites online or on their cellphone

