

AFTA: Practices for social media marketing

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<p>This research is concerning the social media practices for the Association of Finnish Travel Agencies, AFTA. The aim is to investigate the social media practices of AFTA's member companies and how AFTA could benefit from this information to create social media practices for AFTA. This research evaluates the different social media channels and which would be the most useful for AFTA by also taking into account AFTA's objectives.</p> <p>The goal of this research is to give comprehensive proposal for social media practices for AFTA and to give insight on the social media practices of the member companies. In addition, aim of this research is to give development proposals for AFTA's social media practices and to evaluate which social media channels would be ideal for AFTA. AFTA's main objectives for social media is to increase awareness and inform their members and keeping them updated.</p> <p>The theoretical part includes introduction to business communication and social media. The current social media trends and social media content marketing is discussed and four social media channels are introduced. These social media channels are: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.</p> <p>The empirical part consists of the research and data collection method and the benchmark of the following associations: PAM, EK and the Finnish Association for Fair Tourism. Furthermore, semi-structured interviewing was applied in this research by four company representatives and a social media expert.</p> <p>Qualitative method and thematic analysis are applied in this research. The data is analysed by using inductive reasoning. The research started in July when the meeting with the commissioner took place. The scope of the research was defined in the meeting and the deadline for this thesis was agreed to be at the end of December.</p> <p>Findings of this study are presented in the chapter of development proposals. This study concluded that Facebook and Twitter would be the most useful social media channels for AFTA. PAIBOC-analysis is conducted in order to identifying the audience and a social media content analysis is presented to demonstrate the possible content on Facebook and Twitter.</p>	
Keywords Social media, marketing, tourism, Finnish travel agencies, AFTA, SMAL, information share	

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1 Introduction

The first chapter is the introduction which gives an overview of the research. The research problem, objectives and the structure of the thesis are also explained in this chapter. The commissioner, the Association of Finnish Travel Agencies, is introduced and the aims for AFTA's social media involvement are provided in this chapter.

1.1 Aim and research problem

The commissioner of the thesis is the Association of Finnish Travel Agents, AFTA. The objective of the study is to shed light on the current social media marketing practices of the member companies. This is done in order to create development proposals for the association, to improve their current social media marketing practices and to inform AFTA about how their member companies are using social media.

AFTA is eager to know which social media channels are considered useful by their member companies and which ones are not found to be effective for marketing purposes. Through this study, the association is seeking to find out what kind of content their member companies are putting on social media and how Finnish travel agencies are applying social media marketing in the competitive and changing tourism industry.

The aim of this study is to estimate the benefits and disadvantages of different social media channels and deliberate the future information share and communication practices of AFTA. This research was also aimed to examine the ideal social media practices for the association. AFTA is interested to learn how their member companies are affiliating social media for marketing purposes. Additionally, AFTA desires to receive information about the type of content their member companies are looking from AFTA through social media and what improvements could be made about AFTA's current information share and communication practices.

Objectives of this thesis are to assess which social media channels could be adopted by AFTA, which social media channels would be the most beneficial and what kind of content could be posted on social media by AFTA. The association is currently involved with LinkedIn which will be taken into account in this research. The association has previously considered Facebook and Twitter as potential communication tools. The research aim and scope of the study was discussed and defined during the meeting with the CEO of the Association of Finnish Travel Agents, Heli Mäki-Franti.

The main limitation of this study was to make the distinction between the association's objectives for social media engagement compared to their member companies' objectives. As an association, AFTA does not have the goal of reaching as many consumers as possible to increase revenue, in turn, the association does want to reach people interested in the industry. This particular concern was taken into consideration while conducting this study and while interviewing the member companies' representatives. Furthermore, a benchmark was conducted to get a broader understanding of how associations are using social media. Moreover, social media expert Lasse Rouhiainen was interviewed in order to get opinions of how AFTA could affiliate social media from a professional's point of view.

AFTA's member companies target their marketing for consumers, therefore, the member companies have a commercial aspect in the companies' social media behaviour. Furthermore, the marketing objectives of the member companies differ from association's objectives. AFTA's objectives for communication and social media involvement are to share information with their member companies, to promote cooperation between travel agents, assure good and fair practices among the industry in Finland. Anyhow, marketing is important so that Finnish travel agents are aware of AFTA's services, help, information, knowledge when it comes to conducting a travel agency business in Finland.

One limitation of this study is that the tourism industry is currently facing changes. This is due to the fact that online travel agencies are increasing their market share over traditional travel agencies. The changing tourism industry is resulting in an increase in social media marketing and the popularity of different social media channels is constantly changing. This variety in social media trends leads to a questions whether other social media channels should have been included into this study, for example, Instagram, Periscope and Snapchat.

The personal aim of this study is to conduct an academically valid research and to acquire experience in collecting and analysing qualitative data. The author also aims that the language used for this study is written cohesively and coherently by using extensive academic vocabulary. Furthermore, the student expects to gain more knowledge about social media channels and how they are used among travel agencies in Finland. The author is aiming to get insight on the chosen data analysis and collection methods which are the following: semi-structured interviewing, benchmarking and thematic analysis. The student also presumes to develop personal interaction skills while conducting interviews for this study.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis consists of the theoretical framework and the empirical part of the thesis. The first chapter is an introduction which offers insight on the research problem and objectives. The research methods and the Association of Finnish Travel Agencies are also presented in the first chapter. Whereas, the second chapter involves communication through social media through the following topics: business communication, current trends in social media marketing and social media and content marketing. Additionally, four social media channels are introduced in the second chapter: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

The third chapter explains the chosen data collection methods which are qualitative researching, semi-structured interviewing and benchmarking. Additionally, the data analysis method of this thesis is thematic analysis and this method is explained in the third chapter. Furthermore, the findings of the study are represented in the fourth chapter of the research. The findings of this study are divided into two sections: interviews and benchmarking. The thesis process and findings are analysed at the end of the research.

1.3 Research methods used

Qualitative research method can be used for understanding behaviour, opinions and emotions from the participants' point of view. Qualitative research method is also used to identify different processes and to understand interaction among people. Therefore, qualitative research method was chosen for this study due to the fact that it was aimed to understand the member companies' social media practices and to evaluate the interaction between the member companies and AFTA (Hennink et al. 2011, 10).

Semi-structured interviewing was chosen as a method for this study based on the fact that the commissioner desired to get information about how their member companies are applying social media. Furthermore, interviewing was considered to be the ideal method to get suggestions and aspirations about AFTA's social media operations from the member companies' representatives. The interviews were also planned to investigate what kind of content AFTA could post on social media and through which social media channels. In addition, interviewing was chosen as a method to detect development proposals for AFTA's current communication and information share with the member companies.

A Benchmark was conducted in order to obtain extensive insight on how associations can benefit from social media and to get an overview of which social media channels are commonly used by Finnish associations. Benchmarking was also aimed to investigate the chosen associations' social media content and to gather practical proposals for AFTA. The associations selected for the benchmark are: PAM, American Society of Travel Agents and The Association of Swedish Travel Agents and Tour operators.

The research started with a meeting with the commissioner in July. The aims of the research were defined during the meeting and the deadline was determined to be in November. Semi-structured interviewing was selected to be the data collection method for this thesis based on the research problem.

1.4 The Association of Finnish Travel Agencies

The association of Finnish Travel Agencies, AFTA, is founded in 1940 and consists of approximately 160 travel agencies. The total sales of AFTA's member companies was 1.9 billion euros. AFTA commissions yearly event of MATKA Nordic Travel Fair in Finland, which is the biggest travel fair and tourism related event in the Northern-Europe (AFTA 2016).

The aim of the association is to assist its members with legislations, public authorities as well as with domestic and international organizations. In addition, AFTA's mission is to promote the industry of travel agencies' and tourism in Finland. The association monitors the legal rights of the member companies, operates in order to maintain the good business practices within the industry and promotes cooperation with other companies involved in the industry. AFTA will help their member companies, for example, by taking initiatives, informing, negotiating, contacting companies and authorities (AFTA 2016).

AFTA's aim for the use of social media is to engage and share information with their member companies, to attract potential members and raise awareness of the benefits that comes along with the membership of the association. AFTA is currently involved with LinkedIn when it comes to social media. Nonetheless, the association has consider opening at least a Facebook and a Twitter account. The information share is currently done through email newsletters which are sent on a regular basis. The association also shares media releases and statistics through their web pages (AFTA 2016).

2 Communication through social media

This chapter introduces business communication and social media from the tourism industry's viewpoint. Furthermore, the main social media and digital trends are represented in this chapter. Discussion about content marketing and social media is also included in the chapter two. The four social media channels are introduced at the end of the chapter and these social media channels are: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

2.1 Business communication

Business communication is used by companies for multiple reasons. Nevertheless, business communication is mainly applied by companies for sending and interpreting messages about products and services. Business communication can also help with building a positive company image, to obtain and share information and to gain new relationships through business communication. Business communication can be divided into informal and formal communication and it can be either written or oral. The elements of the communication process are as following: the message, the sender, the receiver, the channel and the feedback (Means 2010, 6-8).

“Communication is the process used to send and interpret messages so they are understood” (Means 2010, 4).

Communication is important for companies because it is an opportunity to have an influence on conversations, way of getting more involved and closer with specific matter, solve problems, increase productivity, make decisions and have a greater engagement with employees and potential customers (Bovée & Thill 2014, 42-43).

The effectiveness of business communication can be improved with these following five tips: the information provided should be practical and involve facts and the presentation of the communication should be implemented in an efficient manner. Possible expectations and responsibilities should be clearly stated and easily understood. Arguments and recommendations should be compelling to readers and this way making the reader aware of the possible benefits of communication. Communication can be conducted in a professional manner: “Professionalism is the quality of performing at a high level and conducting oneself with a purpose and pride” (Bovée & Thill 2014, 43).

Successful communication can be divided into six phases: sender has an idea, encoding the idea, transmitting the message, receiver gets the message, decoding the message and sender receives feedback (Thill & Boée 2005, 18).

*“Effective messages are practical, factual, concise, clear and persuasive”
(Bovée & Thill 2014, 43).*

The audiences can be separated into five categories in an organisational setting. First one being the primary audience which are the ones your message is primarily targeted. Other audiences are the secondary audience, the initial audience, a gatekeeper and a watchdog audience. The secondary audience might help with the message or be asked to comment on it. The initial audience are the ones receiving the message first or even are the ones who initially asked for the message. A gatekeeper can have an impact on the message, for example, secretary. Whereas, a watchdog audience does not have an impact on the message (Locker & Kaczmarek 2007, 19).

Communication barriers can be distinguished into two categories: external barriers and internal barriers. Internal barriers are, for example, personal experiences, educational background and other biases affecting communication. Nonetheless, these communication barriers can be avoided by preparing audience analysis which helps with taking into consideration the characteristics of the receiver, for example, age, attitude, gender, interests and concerns. Other way of avoiding communication barriers is to observe the sender's duties. The sender is responsible of analysing and understanding the receiver and the environment, select a channel for the communication, select symbols that are easily understandable and encourage feedback (Means 2010, 11-12).

Business communication can face cultural differences. People from different cultures can have different values and assumption compared to one another. Other example of cultural differences are language barriers and body language, including facial expressions and gestures (Means 2010, 40-41.) The ethics of business communication involves honesty, confidential information kept confidential, avoiding plagiarism and taking privacy and electronic rights into consideration (Means 2010, 53-57).

2.2 Social media

Social media is defined as following:” Website and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or a mobile

phone” (Cambridge Dictionary 2016). Whereas, social media marketing is:” methods for advertising products, services, or brands using the internet, by attracting the interest of groups of people who discuss them, make suggestions about them, etc. online” (Cambridge Dictionary 2016).

“Social media, or Web 2.0 as it is usually called, are fundamentally changing the way travellers and tourists search, find, read and trust, as well as collaboratively produce information about tourism suppliers and tourism destinations” (Sigala et al. 2011, 1.) Social media has enabled sharing, storing and retrieving information online (Sigala et al. 2011, 73.)

*“Social media represents two-way communication between consumers”
(Sigala et al. 2011, 73).*

Social media can also be defined by using the tripartite structure by the Technical Research Centre of Finland: content, people and technologies. This definition emphasizes the role of the people generating content on social media. Furthermore, Pekka Erkkola has extended this definition and brought the idea of social media being a process where people are able to generate and consume content. Erkkola also gave another meaning for social media which is that social media is a phenomenon which changes the structures of production and distribution (Pönkä 2014, 35).

The users of social media can be separated into six categories: contented users, functional users, information seekers, social user, technological user and active users. Contented users are using social media less than the other types of users. Contented users are also more satisfied with less content and information on social media. Functional users are focusing their use of social media on more practical issues and they use social media for finding information. Functional users are not using social media for keeping in touch with people as much as the other types of users. Information seekers are mainly using social media for gathering information and for following news and current topics online. Social users are using social media for socializing with other people, for example, relatives and friends. Technological users are more interested in games and devices and they are usually males. Active users are engaged in many social media channels and are using them actively, for example, through mobile phones (Pönkä 2014, 40-41).

The importance and impact of social media has increased during the last decade and the amount of social media applications is booming. Therefore, the roles and behaviours of

travellers and the social network interaction has changed in the tourism industry. Travel and tourism companies are in the situation of redefining their businesses in order to fulfil the emerging expectations and needs of the travellers (Sigala et al. 2011, 1-7).

Social media has become increasingly important for the tourism industry due to the intangibility of the evolving tourism products in the market. Studies has also shown that people are more likely to consume information than generating it. (Sigala et al. 2011, 73-78).

The development of internet technologies has resulted in increasing contribution of information share online, for example, through blogs, tweets, reviews, comments and updates. Consequently, tourism enterprises are trying to find the ideal procedures which will help the companies to handle the increasing volume of social media (Sigala et al. 2011, 74.)

“Placing the phenomenon into an appropriate theoretical context that better describes the complex and dynamic relationships inherent in social media will help enhance our understanding of it” (Sigala et al. 2011, 74). Nevertheless, it could be stated that theoretical frameworks might not be effective when studying social media. This is because many social media channels have been created without deep understanding of social media theories. In turn, it is possible to analyse data through social media platforms and companies are able to get instant feedback from their customers. However, theoretical frameworks are not supposed to be forgotten even when studying social media considering that theories can help companies with interpreting online data and discovering new opportunities within the industry (Sigala et al. 2011, 75).

Social media has many benefits and a study has shown that marketers involved in social media at least two years agreed that new partnerships were formed. The three most significant benefits of social media marketing were found to be increased exposure, increased traffic and development of loyal fans. The benefit of increased exposure was detected by 89% of the respondents, whereas, increased traffic was 75% and the development of loyal fans 68%. The weekly commitment for social media was six hours or more by 63% of the marketers (Stelzner 2016, 19).

Social media is a key contributor for businesses and it has been studied that 90% of marketers considered social media being important for businesses. More experienced marketers were found to spend more time on social media compared to others. More than a half of the marketers with a two or more years experienced with social media marketing were spending six or more hours on social media activities. The sales numbers were increasing

after two years of involvement with social media marketing. Furthermore, leads generation was studied to happen with six hours of weekly involvement with social media marketing. Loyal followers are built within a year after starting social media marketing. More than half of marketers who have invested at least 2 years in social media marketing report that new partnerships were gained.

"A significant 89% of all marketers indicated that their social media efforts have generated more exposure for their businesses. Increasing traffic was the second major benefit with 75% reporting positive results" (Stelzner 2016).

The two biggest benefits of social media marketing are increasing exposure and increasing traffic. The other benefits are the development of loyal fans, marketplace insight, generation of leads, improvement in search rankings and grown business partnerships. Furthermore, Social media can help with understanding peoples' attitudes and perceptions (Stelzner 2016).

The International Tourism Research Centers has concluded that 88% of tourism business representatives are actively using social media and the recommendations that are given through social media are trusted by 70% of consumers. Studies has shown that 57% of travel-related website visitors read traveller-written reviews and 40% of online travellers visit social networking sites to influence destination selection (Jashi 2013).

There are ways to measure social media activities in tourism. The first one being Customer Influence Effect which measures the influence between social media users in a specific network. The second one is Customer Influence Value which is based on the monetary gains and losses of social media campaigns. Lastly, Stickiness Index which identifies the users who are actively engaging with company's products and services by discussing about them on social media (Jashi 2013).

2.3 Digital trends in tourism

The tourism industry is currently facing changes and the internet has becoming increasingly popular. Therefore, the question about the future of Face-to-Face agents will remain uncertain. Studies has predicted that the future of travel agents will be even more involved with technology (Amadeus & Oxford economics 2010, 30).

“Agents are likely to reinvent their role as bespoke travel advisors and as a trusted source of information” (Amadeus & Oxford economics 2010, 4).

Visual online travel content has become increasingly important for travellers. A study has shown that 78% of the respondents valued images and the content with images got 94% more views compared to content without images. In the United States, two out of three consumers told that they watch travel videos online when they are planning their trip. In addition, travel videos have more than doubled on YouTube since 2014. Mobile-optimization in travel digital content has also become a trend: “Mobile’s share of visits to travel sites grew by 48% in 2015” (MDG Advertising 2016, 4).

Study conducted by Michael Stelzner has found that Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube were the four most commonly used social media channels. Facebook was most commonly used by 93%, while Twitter was the second most popular by 76%. LinkedIn was used by 67% of the participants and Youtube came forth by 53% (Stelzner 2016, 23).

“51% of the respondents conveyed scepticism towards new social networks and only 6% of marketers adopt new social media platforms on a regular basis” (Stelzner 2016, 52).

The research by Stelzner shows that the use of Facebook among marketers has increased 67% since 2015. Therefore, Facebook is keeping the leading role of most important social media network for marketers. Nevertheless, the study showed a significant difference between B2B in comparison to B2C. Facebook is dominating within B2C by 66%, while LinkedIn is the most commonly used by 40% in B2B and Facebook comes second with the share of 37%. Twitter was used by 15% and YouTube 4% in B2B. On the contrary, Twitter was 11% and Youtube 4% in a B2C context (Stelzner 2016, 30).

The most important social platform was Facebook by 55%. LinkedIn was the second popular by 18% and Twitter the third with the share of 12%. YouTube and Instagram both had the share of 4% in importance. The importance of Facebook increased by 2%, while LinkedIn and Twitter showed decrease in importance (Stelzner 2016, 29).

The social media platforms from which marketers would like to learn more about were Facebook by 73%. LinkedIn by 61%, Twitter by 59% and YouTube by 58%. The percentage of Facebook did grow from 68% in 2015 to 73% in 2016. It was also demonstrated that the interest of learning more about Facebook was more common in the B2C context. On the

other hand, B2B marketers were more interested in learning about LinkedIn than B2C marketers (Stelzner 2016, 39).

The use of Twitter among marketers has declined from 66% in 2015 to 61% in 2016. Similarly, the use of LinkedIn has declined from 66% in 2015 to 61% in 2016. The increase of video content on YouTube was planned to be conducted by 63% of the marketers. Social media marketing has also been considered becoming more difficult in the last 12 months (Stelzner 2016, 32).

2.4 Social media and content marketing

The most important content for marketers was found to be blogging by 38%. Visual content consisted of 37% and videos 21%. Nevertheless, the importance of blogging has dropped by 7% since 2015. Blogging was considered to be more important for B2B than B2C. Visual content was more important for B2C compared to B2B. The most commonly used content was visual content by 74%, while blogging reached 68% and video content 60% (Stelzner 2016, 46).

“Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action” (Content Marketing Institute 2016).

Content marketing is often conducted by companies to engage potential customers. Nevertheless, Schaefer’s article “Does every business need content marketing? A reality check” pointed out that content marketing is not always effective and might in fact spend resources and there is no single marketing strategy that works for every business. Schaefer concluded that the content effort of businesses is becoming less effective thus not making as considerable difference as projected in advance (Schaefer 2016).

Marketers have been studied to be planning on increasing the use of video content and more than a half of marketers stated that they are planning on increasing visual content on social media. The most important content for marketers was found to be blogging by 38% of the respondents. Nevertheless, the importance of blogging has declined from 45% in 2015 to 38% in 2016. Visual content and videos were also found important (Stelzner 2016, 46).

Content republishing was done by 32% of the respondents via Facebook and republishing was conducted by 25% of the marketers on LinkedIn. The marketers informed that they would like to learn more about video content, blogging, visual images, live videos and podcasting (Stelzner 2016, 50-51).

Slide shares were found to be used 15% more often in B2B compared to B2C. LinkedIn was also utilized 28% more commonly in a B2B context. Nevertheless, B2C marketers were more focused on Facebook by 8%. The study deduced that B2B marketers are more engaged on LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+ and SlideShare compared to B2C (Stelzner 2016, 28).

The top social media marketing trends dominating 2016 are stated by Forbes in their recent article. Quality has become increasingly important over quantity, therefore, less has become more. Instagram and Snapchat has become more popular and livestreaming is a growing trend. Personalization in content marketing is booming and the app functionality has become boarder. Furthermore, new applications are changing the social interaction, for example, Snapchat (Forbes 2016).

The cycle of key steps for successful social media marketing adapted from Gretzel includes four steps: attract users, engage users' interest and participation, retain users and build loyalty, learn about user preferences and provide relevant, customised information to users (Jashi 2013).

2.5 Social media Channels

The following social media channels are introduced in this subchapter: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. These channels were chosen because these social media channels are the four most popular social media channels based on recent studies. Notwithstanding, Facebook is indicated being the current most popular social media channel.

2.5.1 Facebook

Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes and Eduardo Saverin in 2004. Facebook is considered to be the biggest social media network and it offers the possibility for organizations to practice organic and paid marketing. Facebook also offers the possibility to reach new customers (Juslen 2013, 17).

Facebook had 1.32 billion users worldwide in 2014 and 2.3 million in Finland. The most important features of Facebook are the profiles of the users and the following of the content posted on timelines. The publicity of the content can also be changed according to one's wish. Facebook enables creating a page for different groups and events (Pönkä 2014, 84-94).

There are numerous ways to conduct marketing through Facebook. Nevertheless, a few tips for successful Facebook marketing could be stated: Facebook should not be used by using direct and hard-sell tactics, Facebook advertisement should have a clear goal and strategy, content should be posted on a regular basis, the Facebook page should be promoted and the use of pictures and videos should not be underestimated (Queensland Government, 2014).

The creative use of Facebook video has become a trend, for example, the use of Facebook live function, Facebook 360 videos and sharing articles through the function of instant articles on Facebook. This function will make publishing, creating sharing articles faster and more efficient. Content shared through instant articles is also easily measurable and trackable (Smith 2016).

Social media marketing industry report has shown that 36% of the respondents agreed that their Facebook marketing is effective and 10% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement. On the other hand, the effectiveness of Facebook marketing was uncertain for 35% of the respondents. B2B marketers were more unlikely to disagree with the statement in comparison to B2C marketers. The report also informed that 23% of the respondents detected a decline in traffic on Facebook within 12 months. Nevertheless, 39% of the marketers were unsure whether a decline was taken place (Stelzner 2016, 10-11).

The top ways B2B marketers are currently using Facebook are: the use of high-quality images with simple heading, the use of Facebook live, the generation of audiences with Facebook ads, the use of instant articles and sharing videos through Facebook (Sweeney-Burke 2016).

According to Rouhiainen, the eight benefits of Facebook live videos are: greater transparency and credibility, novelty and surprise factor, consumers prefer live content, lower rate of abandonment than traditional videos, the convenience of sharing live videos on Facebook, you will be featured as an expert when using live videos over traditional videos and live videos are faster to create than normal videos (Rouhiainen 2016).

2.5.2 Twitter

Twitter is used to create and share ideas and information instantly by using short messages, tweets. Twitter is technically simple, therefore, it enables efficient communication and the following of the other users. Twitter users often use these following types of content on Twitter: tweets, retweeting, links to blogs or web pages and replies to other user's tweets. It is also possible to add pictures (Pönkä 2014, 97).

“Twitter has become a popular method for tracking and directing the consumer's attention to travel related products and services” (Sigala et al. 2011, 210).

Twitter is currently expanding dramatically and it has 313 million active users worldwide and 1 billion unique visits monthly to sites with embedded tweets. In Finland, Twitter had 300 000 active users in 2014. Twitter offers various solutions for businesses, for instance, targeting, analytics, ads supports, Twitter ads and blogs. Twitter is a tool which can help with discovering current trends and issues, increase brand awareness and to connect with potential customers and influencers (Twitter 2016).

There are procedures to increase traffic on one's Twitter account, for example, by using hashtags through which people interested in the same topic are able to find tweets concerning the subject. Twitter also enables mentioning a company or a person by using hashtags. This helps getting attention of a specific group or person. In 2015, Twitter introduced the Twitter polls feature which is an effective way to engage audience. The importance of pictures should also be taken into consideration on Twitter. Tips for making a picture on Twitter appealing to audience is to use attractive colours and contrast, headlines, elegant typography, easily understood icons and symbols and interesting texture. It is also effective to engage people on Twitter by posing questions and by bringing perspective and afterthoughts on a specific matter. Retweeting is found to be an easy way to keep one audience updated and engaged (Feldman 2016).

When replying to someone's tweet it will be shown also to sender's followers unless the reply or mention is not sent through Twitter's private message. This public-private feature enables and encourages conversation between users and followers (Pönkä 2014, 98).

2.5.3 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is focused on establishing new business contacts, hereby, the users of LinkedIn can recommend and find new potential employees and employers through LinkedIn. Users can add their resumes on LinkedIn in order to enhance networking with other users (Pönkä 2014, 109).

LinkedIn had 186 million monthly active users globally in 2014 and 288 000 registered users in Finland. Networking can be done by contacting a single person on LinkedIn or by joining different groups comprised with people involved within the same industry of interest (Pönkä 2014, 109).

LinkedIn has an important role in today's marketing. LinkedIn has more than 450 million members and 106 million monthly visitors. The revenue of LinkedIn in the United States has grown dramatically from 638 million US dollars in 2015 to 933 million US dollars in 2016. Only 13% of LinkedIn's users do not use Facebook and 59% of the users do not use Twitter. It has been studied that 94% of the B2B marketers distribute content on LinkedIn and 80% of the social media leads come from LinkedIn (Social Media Today 2016).

The top users of LinkedIn have been noticed to post content three to four times per day and posting 20 times per month has been noted to reach 60% of one's audience. The most popular topics in LinkedIn's articles were concerning career management, workplace psychology and talent management. According to 60% of LinkedIn users, articles about industry insights were found to be interesting, therefore, the users would like to read more about this particular topic. The most ideal time for posting content on LinkedIn during weekdays has been studied to be the timeline between eight in the morning and six in the afternoon (Social Media Today 2016).

2.5.4 YouTube

YouTube has 128 million unique average monthly users around the world and Mike Stelzner considers video content being the fastest growing phenomenon in social media marketing. YouTube is the most popular video service on the internet and it enables sharing and watching videos online. Users are able to subscribe other YouTube channels and this way following the upcoming content of the user. YouTube videos are often linked and shared on different social media channels and web pages. YouTube videos can be posted

as public or private. YouTube had over billion month users in 2014 and approximately two million in Finland (Pönkä 2014, 115-117).

The use of popularity of video content and livestreaming has increased dramatically and it can be considered as a current trend in marketing. Furthermore, YouTube content is often posted on Facebook and through other social media channels. Video content is a powerful way to: introduce the company, inform and spread messages, reach and engage customers and potential customers, promote events and products and to explain services. The average viewing session has risen 50% since 2014 (Litsa 2016).

It has been reported that there were more than 17,000 channels on YouTube and more than 100,000 subscribers in 2015. One of the reasons why YouTube has become popular is the increasing use of smartphones and tablets which enables watching videos online. It has been studied that 87% of online marketers use video content in their marketing (The Guardian 2016).

Video format has been estimated to reach 90% of internet traffic within the next few years. Therefore, companies are applying video marketing strategies as a part of their marketing process. The tips for a video marketing strategy are to define the goal of video, define the audience, planning the video process and concept, create a list of themes that could be in the company tutorials and to record a video about frequently asked questions (Rouhiainen 2016).

3 Research and data collection method

This chapter presents the research aim and objectives and the chosen research and data collection method. The aim of this research is to give practical development suggestions for AFTA's social media marketing. The data collection method used in this thesis is qualitative research and the analysis is conducted by using inductive thematic analysis. The method of semi-structured-interviewing and benchmarking are discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Research aim and objectives

The target of the research is to understand member companies' practices and how AFTA could use this information by improving their marketing, information share and communication on social media. The object is to give practical suggestions for AFTA's social media practices based on the findings from the benchmark and interviews. Additionally, the target of this study is to give insight about the member organisation's social media practices and to give comprehensive evaluation for the future social media proceedings for AFTA. The target is also to assess which social media channels AFTA could start using and which social media channels would benefit AFTA when taking into account the previously mentioned aims for the association's social media practices.

Qualitative research approach was chosen for this thesis based on the nature of the research question. This research is aimed to indicate the member organizations' social media practices and apply this information in order to assemble the future social media practices for AFTA. A benchmark was also conducted due to gain trustworthiness and to get an understanding of how associations are using social media. Thematic analysis and inductive reasoning were used on the grounds that the interviews answers could be used applied when outlining AFTA's social media practices.

This project started in July with a meeting with the commissioner and discussion about the content of the research and the schedule of the project. The research project started in August and the semi-structured interviews was scheduled to take place in September. The research was decided to be finished in December. The phases of the project are as following: meeting with the commissioner and deciding the scope of the research, scheduling and conducting interviews with the member companies' representatives, conducting the benchmark, transcription of the recorded interviews, analysing and coding the data and analysing the results of the study and the research process.

This study is aimed to give social media proposals for AFTA based on current social media trends. Therefore, one limitation of this study is lack of literature which consists of updated and current trends in social media marketing. Hence, articles were used for this research in order to obtain the topicality of the research.

3.2 Qualitative research method

This research is based on qualitative research method which can provide valuable insight and understanding through different social processes. According to Barbour: "Qualitative research can make visible and unpick mechanism which link particular variables, by looking at the explanations, or accounts, provided by those involved" (Barbour 2008, 11). "Qualitative researchers are expected to demonstrate trustworthiness through internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Fuchs et al. 2012).

"The word qualitative implies and emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meaning that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency" (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 13.) Qualitative research is aimed to answer and explain different social processes with the emphasis on analysing and measuring different variables and their relationships (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 13).

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are commonly considered to have fundamental differences. Nonetheless, both of these methods' purpose is to shed light on a particular phenomenon. Qualitative method can be used with a view to identifying issues and explaining them, to study how people understand particular concepts and also considering the impact on their daily lives. Qualitative method is useful when trying to understand illogical behaviours and provide explanations for particular research problem (Barbour 2008, 12-13).

Qualitative research method is commonly used for gaining in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon. Whereas, Qualitative research method allows generalization of the results from the samples and the main purpose is considered to be the quantification of the data. Sample selection is often smaller in a qualitative research compared to a quantitative research. Additionally, qualitative data analysis is non-statistical and the findings are often descriptive (Atlas 2016).

One limitation of this study is the use of one data collection method, alias semi-structured interviewing. Hereby, the method of triangulation is applied to improve the trustworthiness of this thesis. Nevertheless, the research is able to offer information by answering the research problem. Benchmarking was also conducted to receive information about how associations are commonly operating on social media.

3.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviewing was applied in this research. "Interviews are one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research method" (Mason 2012, 63.) Interviewing is often used for evaluating and assessing the interviewer, to test hypothesis, to sample opinions and to gather data (Cohen et al. 2011, 411).

Qualitative interviewing and semi-structured interviewing require detailed planning, even though the interview is not fully structured. Interviewer has to make sure that the interview generates relevant data (Maison 2012, 67).

Interviewing in the social sciences requires interviewer and interviewee and at least these two factors will create the reality of the interview to take place. Nevertheless, one limitation that could be brought forward is that the interview is affected by personal characteristics of the both parties, for example, gender (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 48).

Quality of the data is one of the issues when it comes to interviewing, therefore, the purpose of the research should be clearly defined (Marshall and & Rossman 2006, 102.) Another problem with interviewing is the following: "interview depends on to great extent on the actual interview situation and how it goes off." (Flick 2006, 153.) The interviewer's behaviour for semi-structured interviews has not been specifically defined and it is highly dependable of interviewer's situational competence. This ought to require training interview situations and gaining more experience (Flick 2006, 153-154).

Interviewer should not let their subjective theories to affect the research. Therefore, the interview must be supported by methodological aids, for example, different types of interview questions, or using structure laying technique to validate their communication. The interview could contain many topical areas by asking open questions and confrontational questions. The interview questions should be designed to meet the aim of the research. Furthermore, the interviewer should cover the research question in many aspects by asking different interview questions in order to sustain validity (Flick 2006, 155).

The questioning might also be too deep and personal for the interviewee which results in avoidance of answering and misapprehensions might occur from communication between two parties. (Cohen et al. 2011, 410).

3.4 Benchmarking

The method of benchmarking was conducted in this research. The aim of benchmarking is to gain new ideas which could be applied in a company, for instance, how to increase sales or improve social media practises. Benchmarking also supplies a broad view of the industry that is studied (Reh 2016).

“Benchmarking is the process of comparing your own organization or operations against other organizations in your industry or in a broader marketplace” (Reh 2016).

Benchmarking often evolves these following process: defining the subject, defining the process in detail, selecting the measures, selecting the comparison set, collecting the data, assessing and identifying the differences and analysing them (Reh 2016.) Nevertheless, the theory of benchmarking has been derived from Deming’s four stages. These stages are: plan, do, check and act (Pyo 2013).

The method consists of the two parties: the benchmarker and the benchmarkee. The notion of benchmark is traditionally based on the assumption that there must be a gap between the benchmarker and the benchmarkee. Hereby, the gap is studied in order to analyse the differences and to gain new ideas and development proposals (Pyo 2013).

Benchmarking can be divided into process-based and results-based benchmarking. Process-based benchmarking is related to a particular process, for example, effectiveness. Whereas, results-based benchmarking is concerning broader issues, for example, customer satisfaction (Wöber 2002, 5).

3.5 Data collection and thematic analysis

The data was assembled for this research through semi-structured interviews, literature, articles and a benchmark. Semi-structured interviewing was used because this method can provide deeper understanding of the phenomenon than structured interviewing might be able provide. This method was found to be the best data collection method for this

study because the commissioner wanted to obtain information about their member companies' social media practices. Therefore, a couple of the member companies' representatives were interviewed (Norman 2003, 74).

The data collection method used for this research is triangulation and the data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews and from the benchmark. Whereas, secondary data was gathered from statistics, literature, articles and webpages.

The research method of triangulation is conducted when more than one research methods are implemented in a one study. This is done to obtain more extensive understanding of phenomenon being studied. This study consists of two primarily method of interviewing and benchmarking. Triangulation is also applied when using more than one analysing methods in a research. Nonetheless, thematic analysis is used in this study. The method of triangulation offers different aspects and assists with overcoming the possible weaknesses of using only one research method. The method is applied in this research in order to obtain reliability and validity of this research (Veal 2006, 107).

The high detailed description of the important aspects of the research is provided in order to ensure the validity of the research. Furthermore, the idea of holism is considered to gain validity. Other themes to increase the trustworthiness of the research are credibility, transferability, uniqueness and dependability (Cohen et al. 2011, 182).

Trustworthiness of this research is improved by the following methods: having enough data from the interviews and the benchmark, the author consecrated on objectivity when conducting the research and the large amount of literature and articles utilized in the theoretical part of the research. Previous research findings about social media and the resent findings about social media trends were examined to gain trustworthiness for the study.

The interview questions were designed for member companies' representatives from the following companies: Tjäreborg, Matkapojat, KILROY and Visit Turku. Additionally, a social media expert, Lasse Rouhiainen, was interview to gain information from an expert's point of view. All of the chosen questions were open-ended questions. The interview questions were framed based on the research question with an emphasis on the social media channels and social media content. Additionally, a few questions about AFTA's current communication and information share were added in order to get an idea of the perceptions and opinions of the respondents. The five interviews were held during September

and October. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to make the data easier to be analysed and coded. The interviews were conducted in Helsinki.

The data gained from the interviews were analysed by using thematic analysis. This form of analysis is the most common in qualitative research and it is used for identifying patterns from a specific dataset. Thematic analysis is theoretically-flexible and it can be used for answering different types of research questions within different frameworks. This method of analysis can be used for questions which are related to people's experiences. In this research, thematic analysis is approached inductively. Inductive way of reasoning is defined as following: "Inductive reasoning is when coding and theme development are directed by the content of the data" (The University of Auckland 2016).

The benchmark includes three associations which are: PAM, EK and FAFT. The associations were chosen based on the relativity to the Finnish tourism industry and service industry in Finland. Thereby, the associations are having similar interests, aims and target groups compared to AFTA. The content of these chosen associations were also expected to be similar to what AFTA could post on social media on the grounds that these associations are operating in the same industry. The associations for the benchmark were chosen in September. The benchmark was conducted by studying the social media content of these associations. The social media content was calculated and analysed from the time period of 26.8.-26.9.2016. The next phase was to calculate the data from the chosen time period. Afterwards, the data was analysed and the table was formed.

4 Findings of the study

The findings of this study will be presented in this chapter. The findings evolve the interviews and the benchmark. The five interviews are summarized and quotes are given to pinpoint the interview findings. The three association that were chosen for the benchmark are PAM, EK and FAFT.

4.1 Interviews

The head of sales of Matkapojat Oy in western and eastern of Finland, Lauri Laakso, was interview in 16.9.2016. He informed that Matkapojat Oy has divided the social media marketing responsibilities among the company's different departures and the company is currently active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. For personal purposes Lauri Laakso is mainly using Facebook. For professional purposes Laakso finds Facebook to be most

useful to share news and information. Laakso added that companies are often using Facebook for marketing purposes, for example, by conducting competitions (Laakso 2016).

Laakso follows SMAL through email newsletters sent by SMAL. Laakso finds newsletters to be effective and useful way for getting information regarding the industry. Laakso has multiply times search for information through SMAL's web pages. The information was mainly regarding legislation in the industry in Finland and information about other business operators in Finland (Laakso 2016).

Laakso would like to have more information through various social media channels. Laakso proposed that AFTA could have a closed Facebook page for travel professionals and also a page for everyone to see. Twitter account could also be useful tool to share information quickly. According to Laakso, the information shared on Twitter could have an emphasize on the current issues around the world. Laakso pointed out that email newsletters are often to be a slow way of sharing information compared to Twitter (Laakso 2016).

Laakso suggested that AFTA could share information regarding travelling from the customer's point of view, information about different events among the industry and information for travel professionals regarding legislation (Laakso 2016).

"I do think that AFTA's communication and information share is functional but it could also be useful for AFTA to share information through Facebook and Twitter" (Laakso 2016).

Krista Kauhaniemi, social media manager of Tjäreborg in Finland, informed that Tjäreborg is using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Kauhaniemi is also using these same social media channels. Kauhaniemi stated out that Facebook is currently the most important social media channel and generates most revenue and likes through advertisements and posts compared to Tjäreborg's other social media channels. Kauhaniemi wanted to highlight the importance Facebook and believes the popularity of Facebook is not in decrease. Kauhaniemi informed that employees who follow AFTA via email considers email newsletters being a good way to share information and fulfils its purpose. Nevertheless, Facebook could offer new ways of sharing content and people could be more engaged with the association through Facebook (Kauhaniemi 2016).

“AFTA’s is followed through email newsletters in our company and this is found to be a great way of communicating. Anyhow, Facebook could still be a great asset for AFTA” (Kauhaniemi 2016).

The Marketing Manager for KILROY in Finland, Christina Herrera, uses Facebook and Instagram for professional purposes, both organic and paid. This is done in order to get event attendances, raise awareness and gain website traffic and leads. Herrera uses Facebook and Instagram also outside work. Herrera considers Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter being useful for SMAL and the content could involve information about upcoming trainings and events (Herrera 2016).

“I think that Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter could be the most useful social media channels for AFTA. The information could be mainly practical, for example, promoting events and sharing current news” (Herrera 2016).

The web editor of Visit Turku, Ryyppö Maija, informed that Visit Turku is mainly concentrating their marketing on Facebook and Twitter. The most useful social media channels Ryyppö found most useful for professional purposes was Twitter and LinkedIn. The social media channels that Ryyppö recommended for AFTA was Facebook and Twitter. Nevertheless, Ryyppö added that Instagram could also be a useful addition to SMAL’s social media plan. According to Ryyppö, the possible content on AFTA’s social media channels could be concentrated on practical information, for example, announcements of the events AFTA is involved with, news about the industry and its current employment rate and introducing the different jobs in the industry in Finland could also be interesting (Ryyppö 2016).

“It could be interesting to hear about the different job opportunities within the tourism industry in Finland and this way engaging people on social media. Current news and upcoming events and trainings could also be promoted on social media” (Ryyppö 2016).

Social media marketing expert, Lasse Rouhiainen, founds Facebook being the most important social media channels for businesses. In addition, Instagram and Snapchat are becoming increasingly popular among young people. For AFTA, Rouhiainen recommends Facebook, the use of Facebook advertising and Facebook videos. The use of live videos has become a trend in social media marketing, for example, Facebook 360 videos.

“The best thing for AFTA to use in their social media content would be: Facebook Live Videos, video tutorials and the use of nice and professional pictures” (Rouhiainen 2016).

The interviews supplied the information that the member companies are considering the email newsletter as an effective way of communicating. Nevertheless, the companies did express interest in following AFTA on social media, for example, through Facebook and Twitter.

Summarising the findings from the interviews AFTA should consider:

- The use of Facebook and Twitter
- Sharing informative content and news
- The use of videos on Facebook: Facebook 360 and Facebook live videos
- Keeping updated about upcoming events and trainings
- The use of professional pictures

4.2 Benchmarking

This chapter includes benchmarking of three different associations: PAM, EK and The Finnish Association for Fair Tourism. Benchmarking is often conducted by companies in order to identify the best practises. This is done by evaluating and studying other companies' practises and considering which of them could be found useful and taken into practice. Benchmarking is widely used in many industries to improve companies' operations. One method of benchmarking is comparing competitor's services and products with your own company. This approach of benchmarking could gain insight on the variance between prices and services (Smith 2010, 177-178).

“Service Union United PAM is the trade union for people working in private service sectors” (PAM 2016.) The union has approximately 230 000 members from service sector and helps its members with negotiating with pay levels and agreements (PAM 2016).

PAM is active on Social media through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. PAM's cover picture on Facebook announces that when getting five members for PAM one will receive a gift card for a grocery store. PAM also shares practical and informative releases and articles from their web pages. The union has its own online news paper and the content is shared also on Facebook and Twitter. The twitter page consists of discus-

sions and articles, videos about current issues in the industry and the content is informative and professional. On the other hand, the content on PAM's Instagram page has memes and pictures including questions. This is done in a professional manner even though the content is more entertainment value compared to PAM's Twitter page (PAM 2016).

The confederation of Finnish Industries, EK, is a confederation for all organizations in Finland. EK's aim is to promote domestic and international cooperation between organizations, communicates with policy-makers, provides training for counselling for companies and coordinates the labour market policies. EK has 27 member associations and about 16 000 member companies (EK 2016).

EK is engaged in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and Flickr. EK also has a blog and the content is shared on social media. The Facebook page consists of articles about conducting business in Finland. EK has posted their questionnaires on Facebook and pictures from different events. EK covers all the industries in Finland, therefore, the content varies from different industries (EK 2016).

The Finnish Association for Fair Tourism, FAFT, is an association which advocates ethical, environmental and sustainable practices within the tourism industry in Finland. The association also encourages people to make ethical choices when travelling. The association was founded in 2003 (FAFT 2016).

FAFT does marketing via Facebook and they also have a blog. The blog posts are concerning sustainable tourism and tips for travellers how to do environmental choices when traveling and the impact of tourism on tourism generating areas. On Twitter, the association shares their blog posts and articles about sustainability and tourism (FAFT 2016).

The results of the social media benchmark are presented in the table 1. The data was collected from the chosen associations' Facebook and Twitter pages. The posts and tweets which were published during the time period of 26.8.2016-26.10.2016 were calculated and analysed in this benchmark. The associations which were examined are PAM, EK and FAFT. The information gained from the benchmark was divided into five segments: frequency of posting content, timing, description of content, reactions and comments and page likes and shares.

Table 1. Benchmark of associations

Period of two month 26.8.-26.10.2016 Facebook and Twitter	PAM	EK	FAFT
Frequency of posting content	103 posts on Facebook and 82 on Twitter.	41 posts on Facebook and More than 500 on Twitter.	26 posts on Facebook and 15 on Twitter.
Timing	Average: Morning-afternoon.	Average: Morning-afternoon.	Average: Morning.
Description of content	News, articles from PAM's online news- paper called PAM, promotional con- tent, promoting training events and seminars.	News from the web page and blog, web releases, introduc- ing people working for a member com- pany, events and current articles.	News. articles from the web page and blog, current arti- cles around the world, tips how to minimize the im- pact of travelling, news about current trends.
Reactions and comments	Average 60 likes on Facebook per post. High Variety in en- gagement (likes and shares) Aver- age 1 comment per post.	Average 5 likes and shares per post on Facebook and Twitter, few comments.	Average 9 likes per post. Few com- ments. Average 2 shares on Twitter per post.
Page likes and Followers (26.9.2016)	22 969 page likes on Facebook 2 582 followers on Twitter.	1 192 page likes on Facebook 17 900 followers on Twitter.	1 100 page likes on Facebook and 694 followers on Twitter.

The benchmark showed that the content is usually posted between morning and evening. Nevertheless, the timing did vary rather dramatically and a specific pattern was not detected. PAM has the highest amount of Facebook likes. Nonetheless, EK has considerably more followers on Twitter than PAM or FAFT. PAM was posting content more often on Facebook than the other association. Anyhow, EK was more active on Twitter due to the high amount of retweets by EK.

EK has introduced a couple of their member companies' employees on Facebook (Figure 1.) The post is link to EK's blog on their web page. This could be useful also for AFTA to engage with their members by introducing a few of their member companies and employees. EK has a news room on their web page and the content is often published through various social media channels.



Figure 1. EK's post on Facebook

The Association of Fair Tourism uses Facebook, for example, by sharing articles about current trends and the future of fair tourism. The Association of Fair Tourism introduces Afghanistan as a future tourism destination (Figure 2.) SMAL could also post current issues and trends within tourism industry in Finland. FAFT is actively promoting events and seminars on Facebook, for example, the World Tourism Day.



Figure 2. FAFT's post on Facebook

PAM uses Facebook to inform their members, for example, by writing informative pullet points for summer employees (Figure 3.) This kind of content is posted in order to advocate their members' rights as employees and this supports PAM's objectives as an association. PAM actively share content from their online newspaper called PAM. Furthermore, PAM has published video content to promote their winter event and how the tickets can be purchased. Similarly, AFTA could benefit from taking video content as a part of their social media practices.



Figure 3. PAM's post on Facebook

PAM uses Twitter as a tool for sharing practical information, for example, information about the new opening hours of shops in Finland and how the opening hours will impact the employees working in the customer service industry. PAM often uses pictures and the

content on Twitter varies from sharing opinion pieces to informative statements and questions (Figure 4.) This method of posting short and informative sentences and questions on Twitter could also be implemented by AFTA.



Figure 4. PAM's tweets

EK is active on Twitter and they often retweet news and articles. EK uses Twitter also for promoting events, for example, event for immigrants who want to become entrepreneurs in Finland (Figure 5.) Occasionally, EK uses pictures on twitter, from example, from seminars and events. In addition, EK is very actively retweeting other people's content on Twitter. This function could also be used by AFTA on Twitter, for example, EK has retweeted an article which informed that Finland was ranked as one of the top countries based on energy reporting.

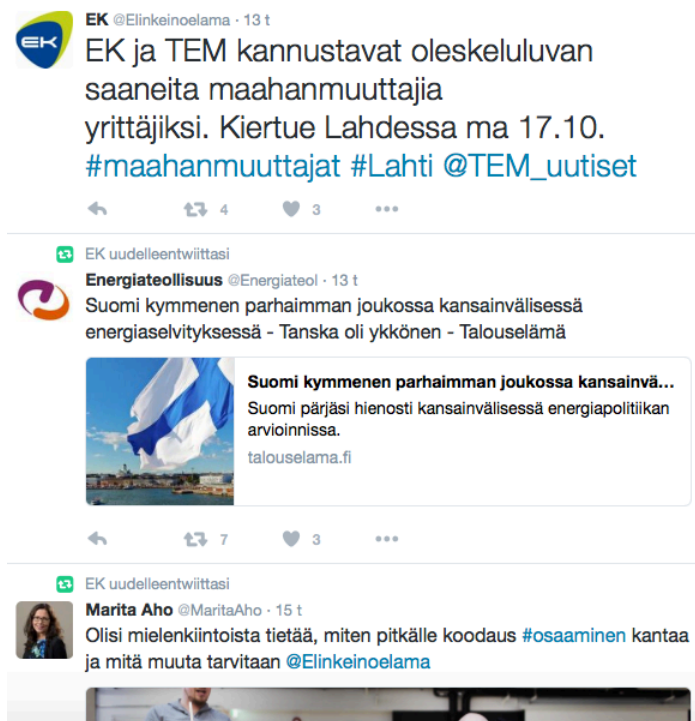


Figure 5. EK's tweets

The content of associations that were benchmark is rather similar to one another on Facebook. The content was mainly links to articles and news and content from the associations' web pages. The associations also promoted events and the benefits of being a member. On Twitter, the associations were actively keeping their members up dated by sharing and retweeting news and current articles.

Based on the benchmarking AFTA should consider the following:

- Sharing and using pictures
- Sharing practical information, for example, about upcoming events
- Posting content between morning and afternoon
- The use of video content
- Sharing news and articles about the industry
- Sharing content similar to what is informed on the web page and through email news letters
- The use of short and informative sentences
- The use of hashtags on Twitter
- The use of retweet function on Twitter
- Approximately 5-10 posts and shares on Facebook per week
- Approximately 5-20 tweets and retweets on Twitter per week

5 Development proposals

This study concluded in development proposals which are provided in this chapter. The development proposals are based on the findings of this research gained from interviews, literature and the benchmark. The main finding of this study is that the participants considered that AFTA could benefit from the utilization of Facebook and Twitter. The email newsletters were found to be a convenient, interesting and useful way of sharing information. The content that the participants considered being most desirable was: the use of pictures, use of videos, sharing practical information and articles about the industry and sharing stories about the member companies and employees. PAIBOC-analysis conducted in order to analyse the aspects of social media communication of AFTA and AFTA's audience on social media (Table 2).

Table 2. PAIBOC-Analysis (Bovée 2014)

PAIBOC

Purpose: The purpose for social media marketing is to increase awareness of the association, engage with current members and potential members, inform, to keep up-dated

Audience: People interested in the travel agency business in Finland, member companies and their employees, people working within the industry

Information: Relevant information and news about the current issues in the industry in Finland, sharing articles and studies/figures about the industry, press releases

Benefits: engage and inform their members, gaining new members, raising awareness of the association, convenient communication and information share with the members

Objection: AFTA is involved with LinkedIn and not yet with other social media channels

Context: Social media: LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter

This study suggests two social media channels which could be the most useful for AFTA and these social media channels are Facebook and Twitter. The table 3 represents the suggestions for AFTA's Facebook and Twitter practices which is divided into three segments: timing, content and audience.

The social media content analysis takes into consideration the functions and trends on Facebook and Twitter, for instance, Facebook 360 video and Facebook's instant articles

which could be beneficial for AFTA. In addition, the use of polls and infographics is also recommended as a part of AFTA's social media content.

The audience for AFTA's social media channels are defined as people who are interested in the travel agency business and people who are working or involved in the travel industry. The audience on Twitter is estimated to include more travel professionals than the possible Facebook page.

Table 3. Social media content analysis

Facebook	
Timing	Morning – afternoon
Content	Video content, the use of pictures, Facebook 360 and Facebook live videos, Facebook advertisements, sharing current articles and news, the use of Facebook instant articles, infographics and polls
Audience	People interested in the tourism industry, people working within the industry and people who are interested in conducting business within the industry
Twitter	
Timing	Morning – afternoon
Content	Sharing news and articles about the industry, retweeting, the use of pictures, the use of hashtags, the use of Twitter polls and infographics, Twitter advertisement
Audience	Audience is more concentrated on the people working and conducting business within the industry, tourism professionals

The findings suggest that Twitter content should be more straightforward, informative and professional compared to Facebook content. The content on Twitter is often affiliated with

current topics and news about the industry and mainly designed for professionals within the industry. Whereas, Facebook content posted by associations and companies is found to include more entertaining content compared to Twitter, for example, the common use of pictures and videos on Facebook.

The social media content proposals for AFTA are provided in the table 4. And this table consists of long-term and short term proposals. The long-term content is the content which could be implemented on a daily basis. Whereas, the short-term methods are more detailed suggestions for the social media content that could be posted irregularly on social media and it is mainly based on the use of video content. The long-term suggestions are related to promoting events and sharing information, for example, press releases.

Table 4. Social media content of AFTA

Long-term social media content

Sharing press releases, for example, the sales of travel agencies in Finland in 2016
Sharing studies and articles about the industry, for example, the current situation of travel agencies and the future of the travel agency business
Promoting upcoming events, for example, Matka travel Fair
Promoting AFTA's services: training and consulting
Promoting campaigns, for example, the campaign of package travel
Instructions for the potential members, for example, how to become a member
Sharing pictures, for example, from a seminar
Informing about incidents and happenings around the world concerning the tourism industry
Informing about the events and projects AFTA is involved in, for example, Travel Finland 2016
Sharing statistics, for example, about the top destinations of the winter season 2016-2017
Creating a poll, for example, asking where people would like to travel next

Short-term social media content

Introducing member companies by interviewing representatives
Sharing an informative introduction video about AFTA and its services
Answering the most common questions by the members in a video format
An introduction video for the content of the member portal, for example, explaining the topics that are found on the portal: press releases, law, logo bank, the register of Travel assistant and the register of Tour leader
Introducing AFTA and the work duties by interviewing the employees
Introducing the different job opportunities within the travel agency business

Example of weekly social media content is supplied in the table 5. This weekly example was created to present more practical suggestions for what the weekly social media content could be involved with. This example week was designed for the month of Christmas and the weekdays are from Monday to Friday and the timing is separated into morning and afternoon. The list of possible sources for retweeting and sharing is furnished at the

end of the table 5. Moreover, the list contains different associations, organisations and authorities which are related to the tourism industry.

Table 5. Example of weekly social media content of December

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8-12	Facebook and Twitter: Promoting the Nordic Matka Travel Fair of 2017.	Facebook and Twitter: Post and tweet from a seminar		Sharing a picture of the season: related to Christmas and winter, for example, picture of a winter landscape	
12-17	Sharing content from SMAL news: for example: about Christmas holidays and travelling	Twitter and Facebook: Sharing an article from Helsingin sanomat: Lonely planet raised Finland to the list of the top countries to visit 2017	Twitter: Sharing content from the pages of Finland's ministry of interior	Retweeting an infographic related to tourism industry, for example, how many people are travelling for Christmas	Sharing content from another association's pages, for example, IATA

List of possible sources:

ASTA, FAFT, EK, PAM, Amadeus, Finland's ministry of interior, ministry for foreign affairs, Team Finland, UNWTO, IATA, ECTAA, GBTA, UFTAA, WTTC, USTA, SMY, MaRa, TTR, ETOA, ATTA, NTA, ICAO, SBTA, SRF, PATA and member companies' social media channels.

The table 6 presents the proposal for the main structure of the social media content for AFTA. The table includes the main content which could be posted annually on social media by AFTA. The content consists of press releases which are published annually, for example, the yearly sales of the industry in Finland. Additionally, a few examples of the annual travel fairs and events for AFTA has been listed in the table.

Table 6. The main structure of the social media content

Promotion of the Matka Nordic Travel Fair
Press release: Yearly Sales of the industry in Finland
Press release: The market share of leisure package travel trips by plane
Press release: The outbound trips in winter/summer
Content from yearly seminars and events: Travel Finland, WTM London, Balttour business forum and travel trade fair, TOUREST, EMITT- tourism and travel fair in Istanbul

The main social media development proposal for AFTA which is presented in this chapter is the use of at least these two social media channels: Facebook and Twitter. The content for social media is suggested to be affiliated with the content published on the web page, for instance, by sharing press releases and statistics.

The social media content analysis provides long-term and short-term content for AFTA. The long-term content is the content which could be posted on a regular basis on Facebook and Twitter, whereas, short-term content includes more detailed suggestions of content which could be posted more irregularly.

The example of the weekly social media content and the list of the possible sources for social media content are provided in order to delineate the most suitable content for AFTA in a more detailed manner. The table of the main structure of the social media content presents the five main topics of the yearly content. This main social media structure is presented to clarify AFTA's social media concept and to outline the most important aspects of AFTA's annual social media content.

6 Discussion

This chapter includes discussion about the research and the research project. The results and trustworthiness of this research will also be evaluated. Furthermore, ethical viewpoints and the conduction of the thesis process is discussed in this chapter.

Validity is considered as a requirement for a research. Validity has been considered to be a demonstration or measurement of the given hypothesis and this way ensuring the validity of the research. However, the definition of validity has extended to signify the depth, honesty, scope, richness of the data, the objectivity of the researcher and the use of triangulation in the study. There are many forms of validity, for example, content validity, evaluative validity, theoretical validity and systemic validity (Cohen et al. 2011, 179).

“Much qualitative research abides by principles of validity that are very different from those of positivism and quantitative methods” (Cohen et al. 2011, 180).

The main aspects to justify the validity of this research are that the method of triangulation was used in this research and data is analysed inductively. The other points to justify the validity are that the data is presented in terms of the respondent rather than the author and the amount of the samples is adequate to analyse the findings. The methodology that is applied in this research is considered to be appropriate to correspond with the aims of the research. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted by avoiding leading questions (Cohen et al. 2011, 201).

The trustworthiness of the research was proved by giving a description of the social media trends and by examining the previous research findings. The sampling for the benchmark was done within a specific time frame in order to ensure random sampling of the associations' social media content (Shenton 2003).

A research is reliable when the same study can be demonstrated in a similar context and with a similar group of participants as the study was conducted the first time. The results should be similar to the previously presented findings (Cohen et al 2011, 201).

Ethical viewpoints of this research are that the honesty of the research was maintained when analysing and reporting the findings. Furthermore, the objectivity was kept by avoiding bias in data analysis. Carefulness and integrity were also taken into consideration when conducting this research. Additionally, the objectivity was taken into account by carefully planning the interview questions in advance (Resnik 2015).

The results of the study are demonstrated in the chapter of development proposals. The study does outline the social media content and the social media channels which could be useful for AFTA. The results are based on the interviews and the benchmark of this study.

Tips are also given what AFTA could take into account when doing communication and information share through social media. The benchmark does compare the content of the three chosen associations and the results are presented in a table. In addition, a few posts and tweets are presented and analysed to illustrate the social media content of these associations. The interviews are summarized in a detailed manner and quotations are given to outline specific themes. The results are considered to answer the research question and filling its purpose by giving detailed suggestions and information about social media for AFTA.

The research process was conducted as planned and according to the given schedule. The research was carried out professionally and the data collection and analysis were conducted within the academic framework of qualitative research method. The research process included the planning of the research concept, aims and methods, familiarizing with the literature and sources within the framework of the research, conducting the interviews and the benchmark, analysing and coding the data, writing process and analysing the research project and the results.

The author has gained a deeper knowledge about the current social media trends. The author also got experience from conducting semi-structured interviews and a benchmark. The research process has been a learning experience for the author and it enabled the professional development and growth. Other skills the author has obtained from the research process are: content marketing and social media marketing process, academic writing skills and the thematic analysis process. The author gained a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative research method and how to conduct a qualitative research. The author considers that the personal aims for this research were reached.

Further research could be implemented about the evaluation of social media content of AFTA, for example, Facebook or Twitter. Another evaluation can be done in the future whether more social media channels should be included in AFTA's social media plan, for example, Instagram and YouTube.

In conclusion, the main trends within the social media marketing are highly concentrated on video content and livestreaming. Therefore, this study recommends the use of video content on Facebook. Furthermore, Twitter content is propounded to include short and informative messages about the tourism industry and upcoming events.

This study resulted in social media development proposals in AFTA and the main suggestion is to add at least Facebook and Twitter as a part of AFTA's social media marketing. The content which AFTA could post on social media could mainly be involved with the information given on the web page as the following: press releases, events, seminars and fairs and other practical information.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions for member companies

Interview questions on social media and AFTA

Semi-structured interview

- 1) Could you please describe your work duties and the relation to information share and social media marketing
- 2) How does your company use social media?
- 3) Describe how you use social media privately
- 4) Describe how you use social media for professional purposes
- 5) Which social media channels do you find most useful/least useful for professional purposes?
- 6) How do you follow the information from AFTA at the moment?
- 7) And what kind of content?
- 8) Have you searched for information through AFTA? If yes, what kind of content were you looking for?
- 9) How do you find AFTA's communication to be like?
- 10) And information distribution to be like?
- 11) What's good and what could be improved?
- 12) Which social media channels do you recommend for AFTA and why?
- 13) What kind of content would you find useful? And not useful?
- 14) Other information

Appendix 2. Interview questions for Lasse Rouhiainen

1. Could you please describe your work duties and the relation to information share and social media marketing
2. Could you describe how you use social media for professional purposes
3. Which social media channels do you use privately
5. Which social media channels would you find currently the most useful for professional purposes
4. Which social media channels would you recommend/be the most suitable for the association for Finnish travel agents to use and why?
5. What kind of content the association could post and through which social media channel?
6. Would you kindly describe the current trends in the field of social media marketing
7. Which factors/tips would you find important for the association to consider when doing their communicating and sharing information on social media?
8. Additional information

