



Promoting Destination Brands on Instagram: Lessons from Visit Finland.

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This study aims to illustrate how Destination Marketing Organizations can use Instagram for destination branding purposes. It focuses on Visit Finland's Instagram activity in order to explore the different approaches in the use of this social media platform. Two methods are used: the first one is interviews of two employees of the organization: a Senior Advisor from the International Marketing department; and the Coordinator of Digital Channels. The second one is a content analysis of four Instagram posts that illustrate different approaches used by Visit Finland in the channel. The content analysis considers: the values conveyed in the visual and written elements, the engagement achieved by the post, the owner of the content, and the place where the content is shown to the users. All data gathered from the two methods is compared and related in order to identify patterns and to propose a list of recommendations for the use of Instagram to promote destinations. The findings show that Instagram can contribute to making a destination more popular if it is used to its fullest. To achieve that, DMOs should make sure to: (1) produce interactive and engaging content that makes users feel close to the brand and at the same time is aligned with the destination brand, (2) use different approaches to the channel in order to reach different audiences, and finally (3) use all features available in the platform to be easily found by users. Examples of these three points are given in this study. The findings cannot be generalized to every DMO that wants to do destination branding on Instagram, as only Visit Finland is being analyzed in this study. However, the research serves as a guide of these different practices. It contributes to the field of social media studies by providing recommendations specifically for DMOs, as well as by focusing only on the use of Instagram.</p>	
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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1	Concept definition.....	6
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1	Tourism sector and media.....	7
2.2	Instagram as a platform	9
2.3	Instagram as an advertisement placement	11
2.4	DMOs and the use of social media	11
3	BRANDING AND ONLINE BRANDING: WHAT IS NEW?	16
3.1	Brand Finland	18
4	METHODOLOGY.....	19
5	FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	21
5.1	The interviews	21
5.2	The content analysis	24
5.2.1	<i>User generated content.....</i>	<i>24</i>
5.2.2	<i>Collaboration with influencers</i>	<i>26</i>
5.2.3	<i>Encourage user participation.....</i>	<i>28</i>
5.2.4	<i>Paid ads.....</i>	<i>31</i>
6	ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	34
6.1	Visit Finland's features on Instagram.....	34
6.2	Lessons learned	35
6.3	Recommendations	40
7	CONCLUSIONS	41
	REFERENCES	43
	APPENDIX. QUESTIONS FROM INTERVIEWS	

1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry – hotels, airlines, travel agencies, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs from now on) – has faced remarkable changes in its landscape as information and communication technologies have evolved (Nezakati et al., 2015; Gorlevskaya, 2016). The rise of the Internet and more specifically of social media has revolutionized the tourism business as it has become a source of information for people planning a vacation (to be discussed further in the literature review). This has forced all industry actors to re-think their marketing strategies (Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2015, p.360). This paper will focus on Visit Finland's Instagram activity, in order to explore the different approaches in the use of this social media platform for destination branding. The goal of the study is to illustrate how DMOs can make use of this new advertising landscape.

Visit Finland is the national expert organization responsible for promoting travel from abroad to Finland. It also helps Finnish travel companies to internationalize, develop, sell and market high-quality travel products (Business Finland, n.d.). On the official website, Visit Finland define their responsibilities as follows:

“we aim to boost the number of foreign travelers visiting Finland. To achieve this, we are responding to the travel industry's growth challenges by bringing in required investments, prolonging the travel season by creating new product offerings and opening up new markets and distribution channels. By developing companies' digital readiness and know-how, we strengthen the global competitiveness of the whole travel industry ecosystem. With these measures we improve the profitability of Finnish travel companies and create more full-time jobs to the travel sector”.

Research on the use of social media in the tourism sector is still very limited. Most of the existing studies have explored it from (1) the tourists' and (2) the enterprises' point of view (Munar, 2012 as cited in Uşaklı et al., 2017, p.136), with the majority of them being customer-centric, but little is known about how DMOs utilize social media (Uşaklı et al., 2017, p.136), which is the gap that this study aims to fill. This research wants to contribute to the field of social media studies in two different ways. The first one is by providing examples on the use of this advertising placement specifically by DMOs. The second one is by focusing exclusively on Instagram as a marketing channel. Instagram has played a key role for companies with branding purposes in the last years and it has generated a consumer engagement rate that is about 58 times higher than Facebook and

120 times higher than Twitter (Elliott, 2014 as cited in Zhao et al., 2017, p.243), hence it is worth being analyzed individually. Furthermore, this study also provides DMO's marketing specialists with a body of knowledge on the use of this new advertising channel, and it encourages them to explore the opportunities that the social platform offers.

This research aims to give answers to the below three questions:

1. How does Instagram contribute to destination branding?
2. What are the characteristics of Visit Finland's activity on Instagram?
3. Based on this study's findings, what are key recommendations for a successful DMO presence on Instagram?

The first question is answered in the theoretical part of the study. The other two are answered through data collection: first, I interview two employees from Visit Finland, who are experts in the field of tourism advertising. The goal of the interviews is to get insights about their use of Instagram as advertising channel and the different approaches from their posts. After that, a content analysis is performed on relevant Instagram posts provided by the organization.

The paper is laid out as described in this paragraph. It starts by defining the most relevant concepts of the study. Second, the literature review provides the reader with the relevant context information to understand the study. The topics addressed are the use of different media in the tourism sector, Instagram as social network, Instagram as advertisement placement, and the use of social media by DMOs. Next, I present a theoretical framework on online branding, which also addresses the theme of Finland as a nation brand. Subsequently, I describe the methodology used for this study in depth and proceed to write about the interviews and the analysis of four posts. Finally, the findings of both methodologies are analyzed and related, in order to identify patterns, draw conclusions and provide recommendations on how the channel may best be used.

1.1 Concept definition

For an optimal understanding of this study it is necessary to first define the most significant concepts: DMO, destination branding, social media, platform, online advertisement placement, ads, and engagement.

The acronym *DMO* stands for Destination Marketing Organizations. In her study *Destination Branding in Destination Marketing Organizations* (2001, p.1), Carmen Rae Blain defines DMOs as “organizations that market an entire area. The area may be a country, a province, a region, or a specific city”. These organizations could be Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs), which are local tourism marketing organizations specializing in developing conventions, meetings, conferences and visitations to a city, country or region (Defined Term, n.d.). They could also be government tourism departments or private organizations. According to Blain (2001, p.1),

“one purpose of these organizations is marketing their area to potential visitors with a mandate of increasing the number of visitors to that region. They may also be responsible for marketing the region to potential residents and businesses. The members of the DMOs are usually tourism operators, government bodies, local businesses, and any company that supports tourism. For example, hotels, attractions, gas stations, retail outlets, restaurants, city officials, transportation companies, tour companies, incentive planners, airlines, and local operators are all potential DMO members”.

Destination branding is one of the key concepts of this study. Blain describes it as all marketing activities that aim to create an image of a destination that influences visitors’ decision to visit that place over other alternatives. Blain also claims that these marketing activities can be focused on three different aspects:

“(1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; (2) convey the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; and (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience” (2001, p.13).

Centeno et al. (2009) describe *social media* as a “broad term often used to encapsulate applications that enable increasingly popular social activities, such as blogging, micro-blogging, social networking, photo-sharing and video-sharing” (McCarthy et al, 2014, p.181). This research will look at social media as an additional marketing channel through

which businesses can communicate with current or prospective customers and or interact with them (Gummerus et al., 2011 as cited in McCarthy et al., 2014, p.182).

The term *social media* will often be accompanied by *platform*. A platform is a web-based technology that enables the development, deployment and management of social media solutions and services (Social Platform, n.d.). Some of the most popular social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or YouTube amongst others.

Online advertisement placement, as defined by Farmer et al. (2012, p.1), generally refers to the slots or spaces online that are available for displaying advertisements along with other content.

Ads is a common way to call online advertisements amongst people who work in the field. In this study, the term *ad* will refer to the advertisements that are in social media platforms.

The term *engagement* in this study always refers to user or customer digital engagement. In the academic literature, the definition, dimensionality and operationalization of *engagement* are inconsistent and mixed (see studies in Zheng et al., 2015, p.92). Customer engagement can be understood as a “psychological state that is characterized by a degree of vigor, dedication, absorption and interaction” (Patterson et al., 2006 as cited in Zheng et al., 2015, p.92). It can also be described as a “behavioral manifestation from a customer toward a brand or a firm which goes beyond purchase behavior” (Van Doorn et al., 2010 as cited in Zheng et al., 2015, p.92). When talking about engagement in social media posts, I refer to the number of likes, shares and comments that a post has accumulated.

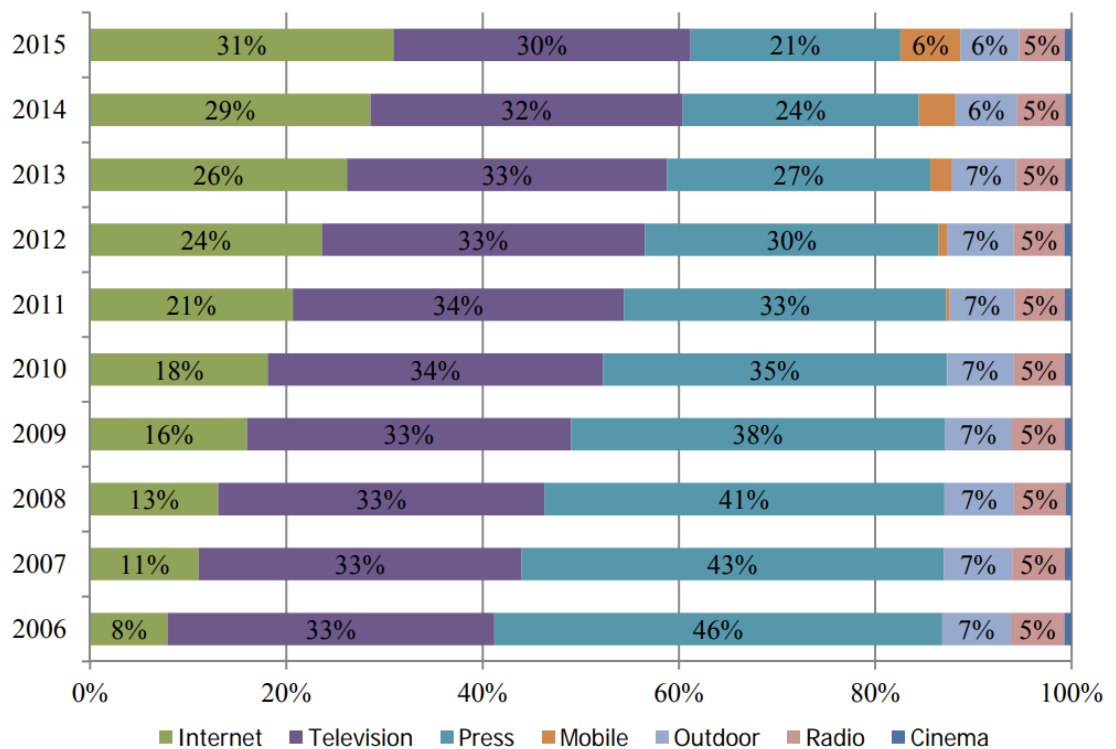
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourism sector and media

The tourism industry relies heavily on advertising in different media. *Advertising* is a generic term and includes most forms of marketing communications, sales promotions

and other elements deployed by marketers to reach target markets (Bhagwat & Debrune, 2008, p.1402). The most relevant advertising channels for the tourism sector are print media, television, the internet (Bhagwat & Debrune, 2008; Morgan & Pritchard, 2013; Yapparova, 2013; Gorlevskaya, 2016), mobile, outdoor, cinema and radio (Gorlevskaya, 2016).

Traditional advertising has been and still is very relevant for the tourism industry. Digital marketing, however, has brought many new opportunities and tools, including social media, email marketing, blogs, video marketing, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and SEM (Search Engine Marketing) (Gorlevskaya, 2016; Poparic, 2018). Digital marketing allows for a much stronger and in-depth analysis that was not possible before with traditional methods (Poparic, 2018). As a result, investment on Internet exceeded investment on television for the first time in 2015. The share of the other media channels also decreased over the last decade, with the exception of radio, which remained stable, as shown in figure 1.



Source: warc.com

Figure 1. Advertising investment by media channel in Europe from 2006 to 2015 (Gorlevskaya, 2016, p.257)

Despite the growth of digital media, television is still the most used after Internet and a key medium for awareness (Gorlevskaya, 2016). Therefore, new media are not completely replacing traditional media to promote tourism products. For a successful marketing strategy, the different communication tools should work together, although there is a focus on innovative and interactive ones (Yapparova, 2013; Gorlevskaya, 2016; Poparic, 2018).

2.2 Instagram as a platform

Instagram is an online photo-album mobile application (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p.1092) launched in 2010. It had gained 100,000 followers and reached one million users exactly two months and two weeks after its launch (Latiff & Safiee, 2015, p.14). It has experienced a quick and remarkable growth since then until today (Osman, 2017), with one billion monthly active users reached in June 2018 (Statista, 2019). Figure 2 shows the evolution of monthly active users since 2013.

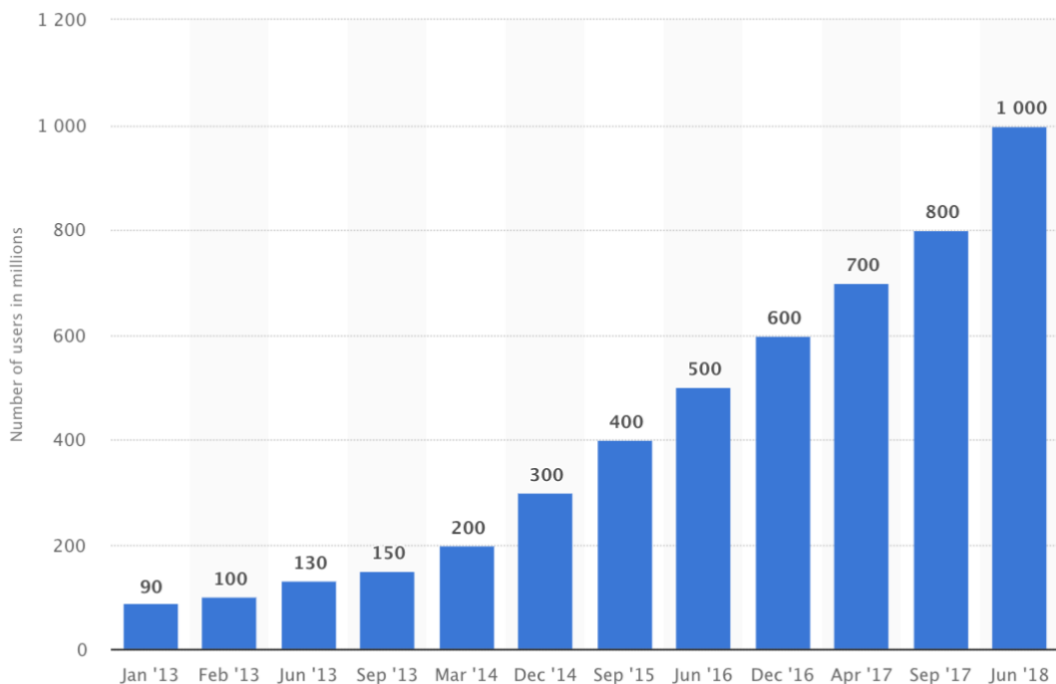


Figure 2. Number of monthly active Instagram users from January 2013 to June 2018 (Statista, 2019)

According to the Pew Research Center, Instagram is the most widely used photo-sharing social media platform (Greenwood et al., 2016 as cited in Valentini et al., 2018, p.363). The most likely users of Instagram are young women aged 18-29 years (see

studies in Virtanen et al., 2017). The app enables users to take pictures, edit them by applying different filters and share them instantly with friends on that same social networking site and others (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012 as cited in Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p.1093; Wolfe, 2016). Instagram, as well as other social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or MySpace, is a platform based on user generated content and it is often used as a hub to find and share ideas, opinions and experiences (Barczyk & Duncan, 2011 as cited in Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p.1092). The platform was initially born as a tool for photo online sharing, but it rapidly evolved into a media for very effective and fast advertising and promotion (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Doolin et.al, 2002; Sweeney, 2000 as cited in Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015).

Instagram is a notably visual platform – posts are picture-based and text is optional. According to Valentini et al.'s (2018, p.362) study on digital visual engagement, “images offer a more direct way of communicating and experiencing human relations and understanding events and situations than text-based communications”. It is its visual nature that makes Instagram unique (Linashke ,2011 as cited in Zhao et al., 2017; Virtanen et al., 2017). When it is used for commercial purposes, however, the copy becomes also relevant, as it completes the commercial message. Although it is usually kept straight forward and short, since advertisers know that users care about the photography or video the most (Linashke, 2011 as cited in Zhao et al., 2017, p.251). Four examples of copy with destination branding purposes are provided in the content analysis. According to Valentini et al. (2018, p.362), “image-based features are most effective in increasing digital visual engagement and positively influencing purchase intentions in visual communications”. Photography and video enhance the companies’ storytelling ability (Virtanen et al., 2017).

The use of hashtags in the text of a post is a common practice on Instagram. By clicking or tapping on these hashtags, users are directed to an Instagram section containing an overview of all the posts that include that hashtag. The use of locations, another common practice, works in a very similar way. Specifying a location in a post allows users clicking or taping on it to go to a page where the place is located in a map and all content that has been located in that place is shown. Both options serve as source of information for users who want to discover more about a certain hashtag or location.

2.3 Instagram as an advertisement placement

Using social media and especially Instagram for promotion purposes is a recent phenomenon, as Instagram has only been available to companies for a few years (Virtanen et al., 2017, p.469). However, previous studies have already supported the efficiency of Instagram as a tool to share product information and drive consumer engagement (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013 as cited in Zhao et al., 2017). Valentini et al. (2018) state that “studies in the advertising and marketing field have emphasized a positive relation between digital media engagement and purchase intention”. In the social media era, engagement is informally measured through likes, shares or comments (Zhao et al., 2017, p.245), and there are also analytics tools for more in-depth information. Phua *et al.*'s (2017) study of consumers' usage of social media platforms concluded that Instagram was the most frequently used platform to follow brands (Virtanen et al., 2017, p.471). Currently there are two ways for advertisers to publish content on Instagram: owned content (also called *organic content*) and paid content (*ads*). Both can be either picture or video-based. The first option refers to those posts created on a brand's official Instagram account, while the second one refers to the so-called *sponsored posts*, which allow advertisers to have their advertisement shown to the desired audience on Instagram (Sloane, 2015 as cited in Zhao et al., 2017). Paid content can include action buttons such as “shop now”, “explore more”, etc. (Zhao et al., 2017, p.243). Ads created by advertisers as paid content are how Instagram makes money (Wolfe, 2016). Since Instagram users' motivation for using the platform is mostly hedonic-oriented (Ohtonen and Karjaluoto, 2016 as cited in Zhao et al., 2017), consumers prefer viewing sponsored content that is consistent with their “mind-set” and portrays symbolic meanings of the brand. This kind of content causes less interruption to users' ongoing media activities and leads to better consumer responses (Zhao et al., 2017). More details on the kind of content that is successful on Instagram will be provided in the following sections.

2.4 DMOs and the use of social media

This section of the literature review showcases two different things: (1) the impact of social networks on the travel industry and (2) the challenges and opportunities that they present to DMOs as advertising channels.

The growing role of social media in tourism is undeniable (Manap & Adzharudin, 2013 as cited in Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2015). Social media respond to the consumers' demand for fast and easy access to information and they influence consumers' attitudes (Bacile et al., 2014; Kimmel and Kitchen, 2014 as cited in Virtanen et al., 2017). Travelers use social media channels throughout the travel planning process, during the trip and after it, in order to share experiences (Nezakati et al., 2015, p.121; Uşaklı et al., 2017, p.137). It has been proved to be especially decisive in decision-making during the pre-travelling (Nezakati et al., 2015, p.124; Kazak, 2016). Holidays and travel experiences are the third most popular topic to talk about in social media (Bertino, 2014 as cited in Lund et al., 2017, p.2) and online content is one of the most important sources of information in tourism (Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2015; Lund et al., 2017; Uşaklı et al., 2017). Travelers wish to help other tourists to minimize risk in their decision-making (Nezakati et al., 2015, p.124). They also admit to making travel decisions based on what has been said on social media (Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2015). As stated by PhoCusWright's Social Media in Travel 2012: Social Networks and Traveler Reviews (Juman, 2012 as cited in Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2015, p.361), 52% of Facebook users said their travel plans were affected by seeing pictures of trips posted by friends. Notably, 52% holds firm for travelers who had already made travel plans and changed some part of their plan after checking out what was being said on social media channels (Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2015, p.361). Thus, social media are a form of modern and digital word-of-mouth (Latiff & Safiee, 2015) – a kind of communication that enables travelers to obtain insights from other travelers (Zehrer et al., 2011 as cited in Nezakati et al., 2015; Uşaklı et al., 2017).

Technology has changed the relationship between the destinations and their visitors. Travelers' reviews, photographs, videos, stories and recommendations are shared online. After, these are found by other potential visitors from all around the globe (Strategic Direction, 2012, p.24; Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2015, p.359). In other words, social media have brought destinations and their visitors closer to each other (Lund et al., 2017). They have given voice to the users, who now can share their stories and co-create destination brands (Berthon et al., 2012; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Lund et al., 2017). This context outlines a new reality: today's destination brands are increasingly the product of a combination of the destination's social media profiles and people's shared tourism experiences in social networks, rather than marketing strategies.

In addition, consumers check various social media platforms to search for other consumers' information to enhance their purchase decisions (see studies in Virtanen et al., 2017). The majority of customers admit that they trust messages including recommendations from acquaintances, friends and family more than *old school* advertising (Kazak, 2016). This makes marketing campaigns more susceptible to criticism (see studies in Virtanen et al. 2017) and moves advertisers towards social media for communication purposes. As a result, as Virtanen et al. (2017, p.468) claim in their paper 'Follow for follow: marketing of a start-up company on Instagram', "different social media platforms have become a natural part of companies' marketing strategies, particularly in small- and medium-sized enterprises". The increased use and changes in technology, hand in hand with the decrease of marketing budgets, are forcing travel advertisers to innovate their communications strategies and the way they promote themselves in the global market (Kirářová & Pavlíčka, 2015). This has resulted in approximately 60% of DMOs having dedicated budgets for social media related activities (Barnes, 2015 as cited in Lund et al., 2017, p.1).

Social media give customers the tools to tell millions of users about their experience of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a brand. However, according to Kimmel and Kitchen (2014), "positive word-of-mouth online is more common and has a greater impact than negative word-of-mouth" (as cited in Virtanen et al., 2017, p.470). The vast amount of information being generated by the users, and the speed with which these messages spread, make it difficult for DMOs to control everything that is being told about destination brands. This is as these are now co-created (Berthon et al., 2012; Lund et al., 2017) through informal conversations by authors that escape marketers' radar (Lund et al., 2017). In order to adapt to this, DMOs have to be reactive as well as proactive. On one hand, they have to be reactive through influencing the existing discourses in social media and imposing their way of interpreting the world, making sure their preferred version of the brand circulates effectively among social media users (Lund et al., 2017). They can do so by acting as curators – identifying great stories online and participating in them (Gensler et al., 2013 as cited in Virtanen et al., 2017, p.470; Lund et al., 2017), joining forces with the tourists as storytellers – as well as by responding to negative stories (Gensler et al., 2013 as cited in Virtanen et al., 2017, p.470). This way they remain agents and preserve their power (Lund et al., 2017). On the other hand, they also have to

be proactive and make an effort to understand what social media have to offer and make the best out of these new circumstances. Some ways to do so are discussed in the next paragraphs.

This new landscape presents several advantages that DMOs can benefit from. First, social channels give tourism industry the opportunity to discover consumers' demands (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011 as cited in Virtanen *et al.*, 2017), which makes it possible to adapt their messages to what they learn about consumers' preferences (Strategic Direction, 2012; Nezakati *et al.*, 2015; Kazak, 2016) both in their actions in social media and in more traditional channels. Second, social channels allow destinations to contact visitors at relatively low cost and with higher levels of efficiency than the ones that can be achieved with more traditional communication tools (Lund *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, DMOs must update their communication strategies accordingly. They need to develop creative and powerful social media strategies to reach potential visitors (Királ'ová & Pavlíčeka, 2015; Lund *et al.*, 2017), bearing in mind that today's consumers engage only with personal, interesting, creative and interactive approaches based on messages that convey empathy and emotions (Berthon *et al.*, 2012; Lund *et al.*, 2017; Valentini *et al.*, 2018). Hedonic content is usually perceived as less intrusive and therefore improves advertising effectiveness (Zhao *et al.*, 2017). This kind of message is easy to transmit when talking about traveling in advertising.

Nevertheless, there are also some challenges that DMOs need to face. As stated by Valentini *et al.* (2018, p.362), "the widespread use of digital technologies and digital contents has resulted in an exponential expansion of information available online, which means that online users' attention is becoming increasingly strained and challenged". To have successful campaigns on social media, it is necessary for DMOs to break the barrier between the online and offline world in order to merge the virtual and the physical, encouraging an action from the audience (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Lund *et al.*, 2017). Some of the schemes that have already proven to work are: a chance to win, celebrity involvement, unexpectedness, competition... (Királ'ová. & Pavlíčeka, 2015, p.360). These practices will prevent marketing activities from being experienced as inauthentic or intrusive (Fournier and Avery, 2011 as cited in Virtanen *et al.*, 2017), which will make destinations more welcome in social media. The Instagram posts that are analyzed later on in this research illustrate some of the above-mentioned techniques.

The most important aspect to understand is that the audience wants to participate in the creation of the destination brand (Lund et al., 2017). Storytelling about places is increasingly important when destinations compete for tourism and economic development, and when they try to convey their culture. It plays a strategic role in defining the reputation of a place and the digital age has made possible new ways to put it in practice (Bassano et al., 2018). Tourists have become storytellers, which is why interactive communication campaigns that involve participants' creativity are successful. Hence, location marketers seek not only people to consume their products but also people to produce the value they want to leverage (Berthon et al., 2012, p.269; Bassano et al., 2018).

Existing studies on the use of social media campaigns in destination branding to date claim that the adoption of the previously mentioned strategies can help travel locations remain competitive in the tourism market (Királ'ová & Pavlíčka, 2015; Lund et al., 2017). By using social channels effectively, the tourism industry can gain notable advantages (Kazak, 2016). Királ'ová & Pavlíčka (2015, p.360) claim that the benefits of using social media can be seen especially in:

- An increase in awareness of destination brand or in people's engagement to it
- Obtaining of global publicity
- Ensure understanding of what the destination offers
- Change in behavior and perceptions where necessary
- Demonstration of destination's success
- Generation of word-of-mouth
- Generation of followers and likes
- Generation of trust and social validation
- Strengthening of the destination image as a favorite destination
- Reach of new specific audiences

Using all the mentioned research as a background, this study will provide illustrative examples of the use of Instagram by Visit Finland to achieve destination branding goals.

In addition, it will establish patterns that apply exclusively to the use of Instagram, differentiating it from the rest of the social media channels.

3 BRANDING AND ONLINE BRANDING: WHAT IS NEW?

The present section provides a theoretical framework for this research. It starts by describing the traditional definition of branding and it subsequently explains how the digital age has made it evolve. The latter leads to the concept definition of online branding.

Branding is an essential component of any effective marketing strategy (Barreda et al., 2016). Smithson (2014) defines branding as:

“A marketing practice in which a company creates a name, symbol or design that is easily identifiable as belonging to the company. This helps to identify a product and distinguish it from other products and services.”

Branding comprises of the definition of the brand values, mission and vision of the company, and its communication to both employees and customers (Barreda et al., 2016, p.189). The creation of a brand image entails much more than just a logo (Blain, 2001, p.9; Melymbrose, 2016) – there are many other elements that contribute to branding, for example branded experiences, product details, product benefits, price details, and packaging, just to name a few (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999 as cited in Barreda et al., 2016, p.183). It is also part of branding to measure how consumers perceive that image and change their behavior (Blain, 2001, p.12) as per the company’s interests. Branding aims to cause a memorable impression on customers, and it helps them to know what to expect (Smithson, 2014). Simply put, Branding is a way to distinguish a brand or company from all the others (Blain, 2001; Smithson, 2014).

An important part of the branding process is developing a brand identity (Blain, 2001). Brand identity can be defined as “a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create and maintain” (Aaker, 1996 as cited in Essamri et al., 2019, p.366). To be effective, a brand identity has to resonate with customers (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000 as cited in Ghodeswar, 2008, p.5). An essential component of a brand’s identity is the brand’s values. In his article ‘The search for value: How to define clear brand values for your company’ (2017), Couchman claims that while logos,

products, websites and digital marketing campaigns can change over the years, there is one thing that always remains the same over time: the values that a brand conveys.

Values reflect a company's ideology, what really matters not only to founders and customers, but also to co-workers, shareholders, investors and all parties involved in it (Forbes Agency Council, 2015; Couchman, 2017). Core brand values, along with an appropriate brand communication strategy, help shape the culture and community of a brand (Couchman, 2017), ensuring that it connects with customers in a meaningful way (Melymbrose, 2016; Couchman, 2017). Some examples of values could be being thoughtful with customers or caring for the environment (Couchman, 2017). These could be executed by having the best customer service in the market place and creating only sustainable products respectively. A brand's most powerful audience is the people who relate to its values (Melymbrose, 2016). During the content analysis performed in this paper, I analyze the values conveyed in Visit Finland's Instagram posts, which helps identify how the DMO is using the social channel for branding purposes.

So, what is new in online branding? According to Edelman (2010), the Internet has changed the traditional idea of branding. He argues that today's consumers connect with a myriad of brands through new media channels and they evaluate many of them, often expanding the pool before narrowing it. After having bought a product, they can publicly promote it or criticize it, collaborate in the brand's development or challenge it. As a consequence, traditional branding strategies have become obsolete. The digital age offers many more touch point options for brands to interact with customers than they had in the past, and marketers need to find the moments to best influence them during their decision journey. Now brands must consider not only the traditional media they used to pay for, but also the so-called *own media* (those channels that the brand controls, such as websites or social media profiles) and *earned media* (customer-created channels around the brand, such as communities of brand enthusiasts). Especially the last two have started to receive bigger shares of the total marketing budgets. Edelman (2010) concludes that the phenomenal reach, speed, and interactivity of digital touch points makes it essential to pay close attention to how the customer experiences the brand, in order to ensure a good brand perception.

The Internet is a powerful branding tool for many businesses, as it offers numerous ways to promote a business online (Barreda et al., 2016). As we have already addressed in the literature review, the way people interact with businesses and brands has changed in the digital era. Especially through social media, companies can build relationship with their customers and interact with them, developing a so-called *virtual brand community* (Cheng et al., 2018). Virtual brand communities help gather customers who are interested in the brand, and they are a valuable channel to distribute advertising messages of products and services (Lee et al., 2011 as cited in Cheng et al., 2018). People participate in virtual communities because they want to connect to other people with similar interests, and because they enjoy being co-creators of the brand (Cheng et al., 2018; see studies in Essamri et al., 2019). Virtual brand communities help enhance the relationship between the brand and its consumers, which results in a higher loyalty intention (Barreda et al., 2016; Hajli et al., 2017; Cheng et al., 2018), one of the ultimate objectives of branding.

Online branding is particularly important for companies that do not have a tangible product (Barreda et al., 2016, p.180), like DMOs, which are the focus of this study. This is why including this theoretical framework is relevant for this paper.

3.1 Brand Finland

Due to the increased competition to attract tourists and investments, it has become necessary to market places. As a result, destinations are thought of as brands that need to be distinctive and enhance their image in order to succeed (Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011). According to Valaskivi (2016), the aim of nation branding is to represent the country in a particular way, through professionalized promotional practices which circulate from country to country and context to context.

In 2006 Finland started a national strategy for tourism, based on the development of a country image. Four strengths were identified in that moment, called *the 4 Cs*: Finland is creative, contrasting, credible and cool. In their study *Co-creating a Nation Brand "Bottom Up"* (2011), Hakala & Lemmetyinen state that "every place has its special characteristics: the key is to find them and make people aware of them". The researchers claim that Finland's characteristics as a brand are: innovation and technology, production

of national products that represent high-quality modern design, places where you are surrounded by silence and pure nature, as well as security and reliability. Furthermore, in the study *The Role of Visual Identity Guides and Brand Books in Country Branding – How to get Inspiration from Finland and Estonia* (2019), Papp-Vary also adds the characteristics: sympathetic, human and unconventional. Related to the last one, authenticity is also a recurrent characteristic in the *Finnish Country Image Communication Workbook* (Valaskivi, 2016). Lastly, there are some elements that are often directly related to Finland, contributing to shaping the brand. The most common ones are: sauna, reindeer, the original Santa Claus and aurora borealis (Papp-Vary, 2019, p.205-206).

Finland makes use of different communication channels to build its brand. A good example of this is the website Visitfinland.com, which includes high technological solutions like an animated map with the most popular attractions that users can interact with. This emphasizes Finland as a technological and design-oriented nation.

4 METHODOLOGY

The study at hand uses two different methods – interviews and content analysis. The interviews are purely qualitative, whilst the content analysis combines both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. The research follows a six-phase approach: (1) interview design, (2) interviews to two employees from Visit Finland, (3) analysis of the data gathered in the interviews, (4) content analysis' thematic analysis design, (5) content analysis of posts and (6) findings.

For these two methods, a non-probability sampling approach is used. More specifically, a purposive sampling – I only analyze or interview those Instagram posts or people within Visit Finland that have been chosen for meeting certain criteria that is useful for this research's purpose. Considering the goal of this study, it would not make sense to consider a random sample. In the case of the interviews, it is necessary to interview people who are directly related to their advertising campaigns and the use of Instagram, as any other people within the organization do not necessarily know something about the matter. As per the Instagram posts, it makes more sense to deliberately choose posts that illustrate different approaches for the use of this channel. Furthermore, the

study will be instrumental, as the analysis of the specific case will highlight and provide insights on the use of Instagram for other DMOs.

The interviews are performed with a Senior Advisor from the International Marketing department and the Coordinator of Digital Channels from Visit Finland. As already stated in the introduction of this paper, the goal is to get insights about Visit Finland's use of Instagram as an advertising channel. The aim is to get a deep understanding about what benefits they see in the channel, the different approaches from their posts, the results that their activity in Instagram is driving and how the channel is contributing to Visit Finland's branding goals. An interview is the best methodology for this purpose because it allows us to speak directly with the decision makers and executors of the Instagram posts, who are the most reliable and direct source of information. To allow for a more dynamic conversation with the interviewees, the interviews are semi-structured. The questions can be categorized in three different blocks: (1) Visit Finland as organization, (2) global communication strategy, (3) activity on Instagram¹. The interview with the Senior Advisor from the International Marketing department is conducted in person, whilst the one with the Coordinator of Digital Channels is conducted via email. Participants are informed of the nature of the study, consent for use of data is required and the interviews are transcribed. The data gathered through this method is described in the next section, Findings & Discussion, helping to draw conclusions subsequently.

An in-depth content analysis, the second method, is performed on four different posts. Based on the data gathered during the interview with the Coordinator of Digital Channels, four different approaches of the use of Instagram for branding purposes are identified. The posts to be analyzed are chosen by Visit Finland to illustrate each of the categories. The elements of the analysis are:

1. Elements of the post: visual content (image or video and its author) and the values conveyed by it, as well as the text (message, tone of voice, the use of hashtags and mentions). Also, the engagement of the post (likes or views) is identified. This theme is mainly qualitative, based on the latent coding. It helps us to understand what Visit Finland really wants to say with their messages.

¹ See questions in Appendix 1

However, the analysis also contains a quantitative approach when identifying the engagement and who owns the visual content. The image ownership is relevant for the analysis because it reveals whether the DMO is producing that content or is relying on other parties for it.

2. Place where the post was posted: Visit Finland's own profile, someone else's profile through a collaboration (for example with an influencer or a travel institution) or promoted ad appearing on user's feed. This theme is purely quantitative. This information is relevant for this study because it helps us identify the different kinds of posts that Visit Finland is using and where they can be seen by the users.

The goal of the content analysis is to identify patterns in the use of Instagram for advertising purposes by this DMO, as well as to highlight the different ways that it can be used for branding purposes. This method is the most appropriate to take a close look at the Instagram posts and identify its characteristics.

Due to the qualitative nature of the methods used for this research, there are ethical considerations that need to be addressed. This paper consists of an interpretation of the subject of study and, despite striving to conduct this research as objectively as possible, the researcher cannot remove oneself completely from the research process. This applies particularly to the analysis of data – when interpreting the answers gotten from the interviews performed and when analyzing the values conveyed in the messages from the chosen Instagram posts. These two exercises are influenced by the researcher's expectations and values and therefore there is a certain level of subjectivity.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 The interviews

The first interview was based on questions related to Visit Finland's evolution and global communication strategy. Mervi Holmen, the interviewee, is Senior Advisor from the International Marketing department. She informed me that Visit Finland was created in 2008 with the main purpose of making Finland known to the world as destination. As she stated, "Finland was and still is a very unknown destination, and we had to create

awareness and tell that there is a country called Finland, what kind of country it is and what you can do here”. The main marketing activities from the organization are regular content generation for website and social media, Public Relations, branding, B2B marketing, as well as traditional marketing in some countries. The relevance of each of them depends on the specific country where the organization advertises, but the main global focus is on digital. Visit Finland is present on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. In most of the countries the most important global social media channels are Facebook and Instagram. Some countries also have other local social media networks that are relevant for Visit Finland as advertising channels, like WeChat in China or Vkontake in Russia. Regarding branding activities, which are the main focus of this study, every year there is one main brand campaign that utilizes all communication channels in use, including Instagram. Holmen, who coordinates the global campaign, described it as “a bigger effort to reach a global audience through advertising, but also by bringing media attention and viral effect”. Talking specifically about Instagram, it starts to be used in 2014 with the name @ourfinland, mainly to contribute to Visit Finland’s branding effort, as it “is very important for the *dreaming* stage” of consumers. According to Holmen, the channel is equally useful to get new followers and to keep existing ones engaged. “The engagement rate in Instagram is very high”, she stated. The social network’s main advantages are that “it is visual, mobile, authentic, current, communal and open to the whole world” and also “it allows to collaborate with top photographers and influencers”. The organization wants to attract “modern humanists, who can be young or older, who want to come to this kind of destination”. Talking about how Instagram contributes to achieve Visit Finland’s main goals, Holmen shared that one of them is “to reach people who want to travel responsibly and go to destinations that are not meant for mass tourism”. The target group “comes usually from bigger cities, their everyday life is quite stressful, and they have already traveled a lot and seen Rome, Paris and so on. They are seeking new destinations”. Instagram is a useful mean to find people with this profile. The social network is “a great channel for the organization at the moment”, but they know they must also stay alert to new digital trends and channels. When asking her if Instagram limits the reach of consumers to only young ones, Holmen claimed that “Instagram is for everybody”.

The second interview, on the other hand, was focused on the management of the Instagram channel and its use by Visit Finland. The interviewee, Noora Uusitalo, is part

of the Marketing and Communications department, and she coordinates the digital channels, including Instagram. According to her, the goal of Visit Finland's Instagram activity is to support the organization to achieve its goal of "inspiring people to get excited about Finland, to know more about us as a destination and to travel here one day". Based on Uusitalo's answers, the Instagram practices executed by the organization include the following types:

- Using user generated content (UGC from now on)
- Collaborating with influencers
- Encouraging user participation (although this one is "more predominant on Facebook")
- Running paid ads

A description of these four practices and their characteristics is provided in the content analysis.

When monitoring post success, the main indicators are the amount of likes and comments that each of them got. The type of post that usually drives the best results for Visit Finland is using UGC. This involves using pictures that other Instagram users have posted on their profiles and credit them. Regarding collaborations with influencers, which is a common practice for companies on Instagram nowadays, Uusitalo claimed that they "have been satisfied with the results driven by all the influencers campaigns that have been done". When asking her if there is an Instagram campaign that stands out in her mind, she highlighted an *Instagrammers only* media trip done in 2015, which used the hashtag #Kaamos2015. "We had only around 10.000 followers back then. The participants really put Finland on the map. It started a snowball effect – our followers started growing from that day on and we started getting more and more requests from influencers". In March 2019, Visit Finland's profile on Instagram has 269.000 followers. In addition to the use of UGC and the collaborations with influencers, paid ads are also worth a mention amongst Visit Finland's activity, as their main goal is to "drive traffic to the website and get new followers to the Instagram account". The organization has a social media-dedicated budget, which is spent for "social media ads, salaries for freelancers in charge of social media coordination and influencers, for example".

The upcoming section includes the content analysis of the four chosen Instagram posts. The posts illustrate what was discussed during the two interviews and provide the readers

with a visual reference to the four different Instagram practices that were described in the current section.

5.2 The content analysis

As previously described in the Methodology section, posts have been selected based on the four different approaches used by Visit Finland and analyzed using the key elements discussed.

5.2.1 User generated content

The first post of the analysis – shown in figure 3 –, illustrates the category of UGC. In the post, Visit Finland is featuring a picture that was previously posted by another Instagram user – @leviniglut – in its Instagram profile. This means that the visual content is not owned by Visit Finland. However, it is being showcased for being aligned with the values that Visit Finland wants to convey and for being a picture taken on a touristic location in Finland – Levi. The post has 22.213 likes in March 2019, and it is amongst the top 10 Visit Finland’s most liked posts in Instagram.



Figure 3. Screenshot of a post from @ourfinland, illustrating the use of user generated content (2019).

As per the analysis of the visual elements, it is identifiable that the picture features a special hotel room. The room belongs to Golden Crown Levin Iglut, a family owned glass igloo village in Levi, in the northern region of Finland, Lapland (Levin Iglut, n.d.). The room is decorated with a noticeable Nordic interior design style, characteristic of Finnish private houses and tourist accommodations. The part of the room that is visible in the picture has no walls, but glass (hence the name of the accommodation), which makes it easy to identify the forest in the background. The perspective of the picture emphasizes the view that can be enjoyed from almost every corner of the room. The sky is blue, emphasizing the quietness and the beauty of the nature in the area. The color blue is also relevant for Finland as a brand, being, together with white, the official colours of the country. The values conveyed are:

- Connection to nature through the possibility to look at the landscape and the feeling that you are so close to it.
- Quietness and privacy, as the picture shows no other igloo around and only nature. No other people are visible.
- Uniqueness, since the room has glass walls, which makes it extraordinary.
- Exclusiveness, because it is not a typical hotel room and it offers outstanding views.
- Good taste through high quality and modern interior decoration.

The author of the image is the Instagram profile @leviniglut, which is also a tourism Instagram profile. By re-using content from other tourism profiles, Visit Finland keeps drawing the users' attention towards Finland whilst favoring other tourism organizations from the country. This contributes to Visit Finland's ultimate goal – making Finland known to the world.

The text used is “Perfect for cozy aurora gazing. Photo by @leviniglut #VisitFinland #OurFinland”. It makes a reference to one of the main tourist attractions from Finland – aurora gazing. This generates interest and makes users want to learn more about the accommodation. The written elements of the post are concise and clear, as is a common practice for Instagram. There is only one idea being communicated. Even when it is not obvious because it sounds similar to a slogan, it is also informative – it lets the users know about one activity that can be done in that place. The adjective *cozy* tells the users what kind of accommodation it is: warm, intimate, and comfortable. The tone of voice is friendly, not too formal or business-like. Visit Finland gives credit to the

Instagram user that originally took the picture, @leviniglut. Crediting the author of the picture that is being re-used is a common practice amongst Instagram users when the image being used is not owned. The text also includes two different self-explanatory hashtags – #VisitFinland and #OurFinland – which usually identify Visit Finland’s activity in social media. The post also highlights the location: by clicking on “Levi, Finland” the user is directed to a map that shows where the place is. This is a relevant element when speaking of destination branding.

The post at hand was posted by Visit Finland’s in its own Instagram profile, @ourfinland, on 7 November 2018. This allows the users to see the post not only when it appears in their feed, but also at any time that they visit Visit Finland’s profile and scroll down to see all posts.

5.2.2 Collaboration with influencers

The second post of the analysis illustrates the category of collaboration with influencers. This post is published on the influencer Jack Morris’ Instagram profile – @doyoutravel –, who has been chosen by the organization for a collaboration. Morris has been traveling around the world since 2012, which has allowed him to produce engaging content in, and about, many different destinations. He is a professional *instagrammer*, and helps brands or companies promote their products on Instagram (Do you travel, 2017). The influencer has 2.700.000 Instagram followers in March 2019, which means that collaborating with him brings a lot of visibility for Finland as a country and Visit Finland as a profile. The earlier increases the chances of attracting tourists. The latter increases the chances of getting new followers to the Instagram profile. The post has 182.428 likes in March 2019.

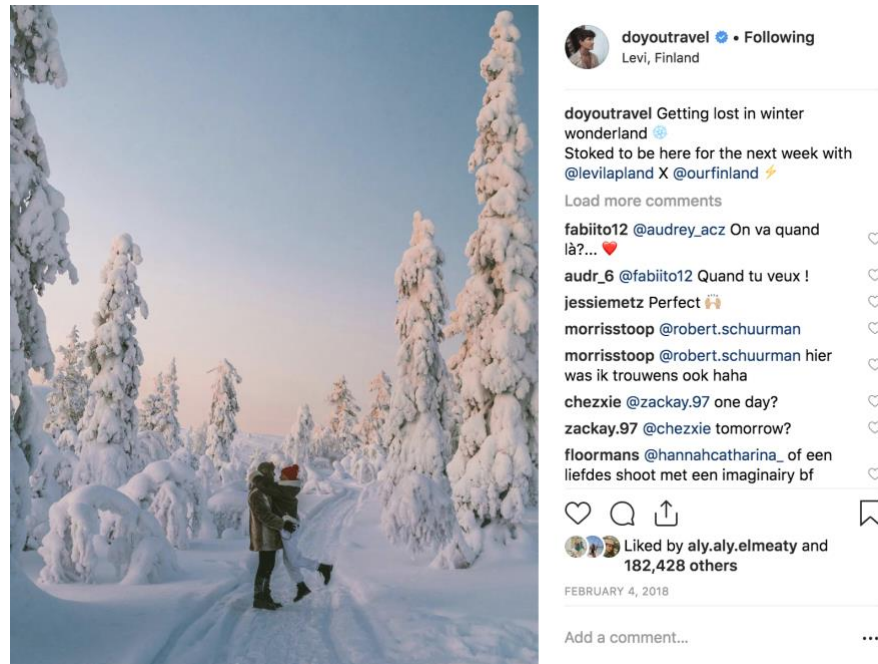


Figure 4. Screenshot of a post from @doyoutravel, illustrating a collaboration with an influencer (2019).

Starting with the visual elements, this post's image features a couple in what can be recognized as a very cold place, as shown in figure 4. The landscape is typical from the Finnish winter – the trees and the ground are covered in snow. Cold colors are predominant. The color blue is used in the same way as in the previous post, and it is again meaningful as it represents Brand Finland. The two members of the couple are wearing very warm clothes, which emphasizes the cold transmitted by the picture. No other people can be seen in the photo. The values conveyed are:

- Connection to nature through the possibility to walk around the landscape with no signs of other people or buildings.
- Quietness and privacy, as the picture shows only two people in a very large area.
- Uniqueness, since not many tourist destinations offer such white scenery to visitors. Finland is differentiating itself from places with rainy winters or no winters at all.
- The beauty of winter. Finland is the perfect place for winter lovers and this picture helps to attract them.
- Adventure. There is a path whose end cannot be seen. The two people from the picture are on a journey.

- Romanticism with an original twist. This romanticism is emphasized by the red cap that the woman is wearing, which immediately catches the user’s attention for being the only outstanding color amongst the cold palette. In many cultures, red represents love. Finland is also a destination for couples that seek a different kind of romantic experience.
- Happiness, as shown by their posture, holding each other.

The image is owned by Jack Morris, who posts it on his Instagram profile.

The text is “Getting lost in winter wonderland. Stoked to be here for the next week with @levilapland X @ourfinland”. The text used is concise and clear, but it contains two strong concepts: *winter wonderland* and to be *stoked*. The earlier defines Levi, Finland, as an ideal place for all the winter lovers amongst his followers. The latter shows how excited the influencer is about exploring the destination, which gets his followers also excited (*stoked* is a colloquial term for ‘excited’ or ‘thrilled’). The text also has an introductory character: it is informing the users that more content on the topic of the trip in Finland is to come throughout the next week. This keeps them curious and engaged. The tone of voice is young and casual, close to the users who will read the message. Two mentions are included – @levilapland and @ourfinland –, who are the two tourism organizations involved in the collaboration with the influencer. These two mentions make it very easy for @doyoutravel’s followers to visit the profiles from the other two parties. This is what brings awareness and traffic to Visit Finland’s profile. The post also highlights the location: by clicking on “Levi, Finland” the user is directed to a map that shows where the place is.

The post was posted by @doyoutravel on his own Instagram profile, on 4 February 2018. This serves as almost permanent advertising for Visit Finland, since all followers or other users visiting @doyoutravel’s profile are able to see this post and identify where he traveled and the organizations that he has collaborated with for the showcased trip.

5.2.3 Encourage user participation

The third post of this analysis illustrates content that encourages user participation. This post is part of Visit Finland’s 2019 global marketing campaign, called *Rent a Finn*. This campaign aims to connect visitors traveling to Finland to actual Finns,

so that they can learn how Finnish people reach their happiness. According to the data gathered in the interviews, it is a common practice for Visit Finland to support the annual global campaign, which each year has a different topic, through posting related content on Instagram. This helps them reach more people and attract their attention. The post is talking directly to @ourfinland's Finnish followers, asking them to participate in the annual campaign. The likes of this post cannot be analyzed, as this content was posted in Instagram Stories, and that placement does not offer the users the possibility to like the content. However, Visit Finland provided data showing that this post got 23.000 views. More details on the Stories placement are provided later in this post's analysis.

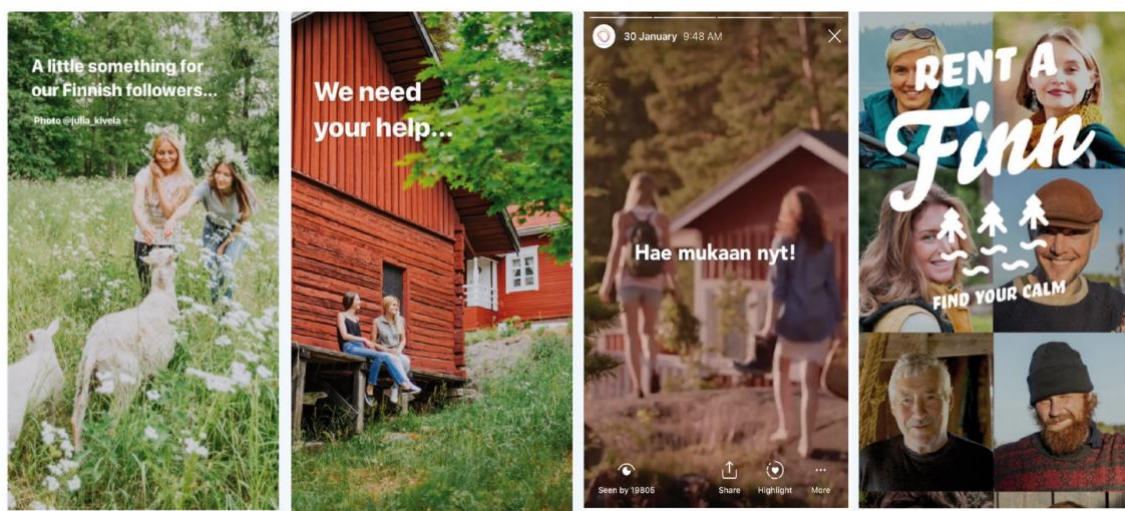


Figure 5. Screenshot of a post from @ourfinland, illustrating how to encourage user participation (2019).

This post consists of a combination of three pictures and one video, as shown in figure 5. The first element is an image that shows two young women wearing flower crowns, a typical symbol of the Finnish summer. Their clothes are light, indicating a warm time of the year. They are in the forest, surrounded by grass, flowers and trees. They interact with two sheep, trying to stroke one of them gently. The two sheep are seen from behind and they seem comfortable in that situation. The second element is another image that also shows two young women wearing light clothes. They are sitting by a Finnish traditional red wooden house and look at something that is outside the image, with a relaxed attitude. In the background one can see another house of the same design. Trees and grass are also visible in the picture, which indicates that the area is surrounded by nature. The third element is a video, which will be described in detail in the upcoming subsection – 5.2.4. Paid ads – as Visit Finland is using it both as organic (as in the post at

hand) and as paid content. The fourth and last element is another image. It shows six portraits of Finnish people, with a friendly attitude. They look at the camera, smile and look happy. The background behind them is not easy to recognize but one can affirm that all of them are outdoors. The values conveyed in all these visual elements are:

- Connection to nature and the pleasure it provides.
- Quietness, as all activities show rather private situations, either with only one person or with a small group of people. There is no crowd.
- Uniqueness, showing what makes Finns' lives different and the particular nature of the country.
- Adventure, directly related to being so close to nature: kayaking, camping...
- Relax. There is no sign of stress in all visual elements.
- Happiness, by featuring people who smile and are having a good time.
- The beauty of quietness, as none of the places shown are full of people.
- Fun away from busy places.
- Welcoming attitude, shown mainly by the man that opens the video, as well as other people who smile to the camera.

The first image used is not owned by Visit Finland. The author is the Instagram user @julia_kivela, and Visit Finland gives her the credit by mentioning her in the picture. The other two images and the video, on the other hand, are owned by the organization.

The text from these four different elements can be analyzed as a whole: “A little something for our Finnish followers... We need your help... According to the UN, Finland is the happiest country in the world. Our secret is our connection to nature. We’re looking for regular Finnish people to share their nature experience with our visitors. Rent a Finn. Find your calm. Apply now!”. Finally, the closing image shows again the slogan “Rent a Finn. Find your calm”. The text clearly encourages followers to participate in the campaign. First, it starts with an attention-seeking beginning that makes Finns feel proud of themselves. It subsequently moves forward to a more informative part that explains the purpose of the post. It closes with a call-to-action that asks users to apply for participation. Finally, the slogan of the campaign is shown one last time. Although the slogan – “Rent a Finn. Find your calm” – is actually addressed to the tourists, not the Finns, Finnish people feel curious too, since they are being mentioned and referred to as

people that can be *rented*. This innovative way to use the concept of renting catches people's attention and makes them want to find out more. The tone of voice of this ad's message is friendly. Visit Finland wants to sound approachable and close to the audience. This is noticeable in the use of forms like "our secret" or "a little something for our Finnish followers". There are no hashtags used in this post. Only one mention is used to credit one image's author.

The post was posted in @ourfinland's profile, more specifically as Instagram Stories. Unlike Instagram feed posts, content posted in Instagram Stories is only available for 24 hours. During that time, the followers can see it in their stories feed, as well as find it by going to @ourfinland's profile. After, it is deleted, and it cannot be accessed by the followers anymore.

5.2.4 Paid ads

The fourth and last post of the analysis illustrates the category of paid ads or paid content. Although the post that will be analyzed also encourages the user's participation, which is the Instagram practice that was analyzed in the previous subsection, in this case the focus is on the post's characteristics as paid content.

This kind of practice is very different to the ones analyzed before. When running paid ads, the organization chooses images or videos and the audience that should see the content, and the advertiser – in this case Visit Finland – pays the advertising channel – in this case Instagram – for every time that the content is shown to a user amongst the chosen audience. This kind of post appears in the users' feed in between other posts from Instagram profiles that those users are following. This paid content can be identified through the tag *sponsored*, which appears right under the profile name as illustrated in figure 6. The main difference between the posts analyzed so far and this one is that this content is not shown to all the followers from a certain Instagram profile, but to users that belong to a given audience. This audience is defined by Visit Finland for meeting certain criteria, in this case being Finnish, as this is the group of people the organization wants to reach. Since this is an ad based on a video, the number of likes is not visible. This post has 29.158 views in March 2019.

As in the previous analysis, the post at hand is also part of Visit Finland’s 2019 global marketing campaign, called *Rent a Finn*. With this ad, Visit Finland is encouraging Finns to participate in the campaign by opening their homes and welcoming tourists to learn how they approach life and search for happiness (Rent a Finn, 2019). This is the reason why, in this specific case, the organization chooses to show this paid content only to people living in Finland.

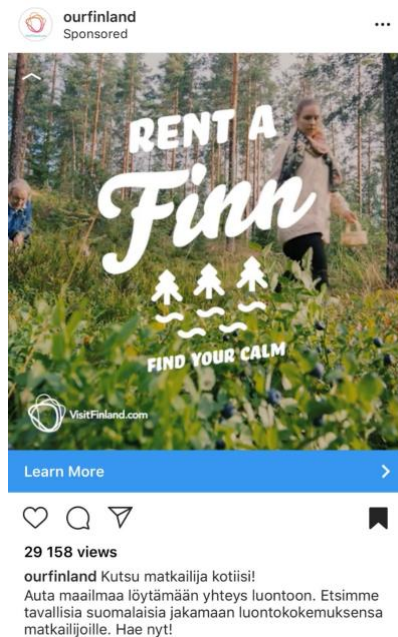


Figure 6. Screenshot of a post from @ourfinland, illustrating the use of paid ads (2019).

The visual element of this post is a video that plays automatically when the user reaches the content while scrolling down through the feed. The video starts with a man saying “hey” to the viewers, which serves as an introduction for everything that follows. Several Finnish people in different typically Finnish situations are featured: doing a barbeque with friends in the woods, walking through the forest and picking fruits, jumping into the water, riding a bike, canoeing, heading to the summer cottage and watching the sunset by a lake. All featured people look happy and relaxed. The background music is friendly and lively. The values conveyed in this video are the same as in the previous post analyzed, since most of the content is same. The values are:

- Connection to nature. Nature is present throughout the video and is as important for it as the people. It is represented by people getting slowly into the water...

- Quietness, as all activities show rather private situations, either with only one person or with a small group of people. There is no crowd.
- Uniqueness, showing what makes Finns' lives different and the particular nature of the country.
- Adventure, directly related to being so close to nature: kayaking, camping...
- Relax. There is no sign of stress in all visual elements.
- Happiness, by featuring people who smile and are having a good time.
- The beauty of quietness, as none of the places shown are full of people.
- Activities that keep you active and relaxed at the same time.
- Fun away from the busy places.
- Welcoming attitude, shown mainly by the man that opens the video, as well as other people who smile to the camera.

The video is owned by Visit Finland, as it has been created by the organization for advertising purposes.

As per the text elements, the slogan “Rent a Finn. Find your calm” is present throughout the entire video, as well as Visit Finland’s logo. As stated in the analysis of the previous post, the slogan makes the audience feel curious thanks to the innovative use of the concept of renting, applied to people. Right under the video one can see the call-to-action “learn more”, which encourages users seeing the video to click on the ad and find out more about this campaign that promotes their country as a destination. Those users who click are directed to the website <https://rentafinn.com/>, where they can read about how to participate. In addition, the text of this ad is in Finnish, since it is addressed to Finnish people, and it can be translated into English as follows: “Invite a traveler to your home! Help the world connect with nature. We are looking for ordinary Finns to share their nature experiences with travelers. Apply now!”. The message is clearly asking for the audience’s action. It also makes Finnish people feel proud of themselves, which encourages them to participate and share their lives with potential visitors. The tone of voice used is once again friendly, close to the audience and creative, as the message asks Finnish people to do something extraordinary. Neither hashtags nor mentions are used in this ad.

This paid content post was created by Visit Finland's Instagram profile – @ourfinland – to be shown in the chosen audience's feeds. This means that it is not permanently available in @ourfinland's profile or any other. Users cannot decide to see this video. Instead, as mentioned earlier in this subsection, users are chosen to see it in their feed as they meet certain criteria specified by Visit Finland, the advertiser. Although the organization has already used its Instagram profile to send the message of the Rent a Finn campaign to the followers, by means of paid ads it is also shown to people who don't follow @ourfinland, being able to reach a broader audience.

6 ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section offers an analysis of the findings. It also provides a list of recommendations based on the learnings gathered.

6.1 Visit Finland's features on Instagram

According to interviewee Mervi Holmen, Visit Finland's International Marketing Senior Advisor, the organization decided to start using Instagram to contribute to shape Finland's brand abroad and make the country known to people around the world. Therefore, the organization's posts always aim to reflect Finnish culture. The main Finnish cultural threads being conveyed in the posts are:

- Trust in people. This is shown by 2019's global marketing campaign – *Rent a Finn* – which encourages Finns to invite travelers to their own homes. There are not many countries in the world where a risky idea such as bringing unknown people to your most private space could be successful.
- Passion for nature. Nature plays always a main role in the images and video analyzed, and there is a tendency to feature nature rather than people. All posts show a beautiful landscape and, when there are people in the picture, they look happy and enjoy themselves being outdoors, in contact with animals, enjoying the nature around them.
- Active life, especially outdoors. Finnish society loves being active. Three out of four posts show walks, adventure days out in the forest, kayaking and fruit picking, amongst others.

- Quietness. Finland is a quiet country compared to other more popular destinations. This is shown in the posts, which feature small groups of people in silent and relaxing locations.

However, there are also some threads from Finland as a country that are not shown in the analyzed posts:

- The posts that show Finnish people portray rather homogeneous groups, which does not show the reality of the country. According to migration statistics in Finland in 2017 (when the latest report was issued), over 350.000 inhabitants in Finland come from foreign backgrounds, around 100.000 of them having been born in the country (Väestöliitto, 2019).
- Furthermore, these posts also show only good weather conditions, omitting part of the reality of Finland being amongst the coldest countries in the world. In addition, the only post that shows the Finnish winter features a clear and blue sky.

There is consistency in the values communicated across all four posts, even when each of them illustrates different uses of the Instagram channel. This spreads a strong and clear image of the country, which is one of the organization's main goals. The values highlighted are aligned with the image of the country that, according to Holmen, Visit Finland wants to communicate to the rest of the world – Finland is a place for modern humanists, and for people searching for a destination that is not meant for mass tourism. In all posts, the DMO talks about an experience that is different: a truly white winter, a daily life that is very close to nature, places away from the crowd. These values are supported by section 3.1 Brand Finland from the literature review, where the destination is also defined as unconventional, natural, pure, secure and authentic.

6.2 Lessons learned

Based on the data gathered in the interviews and the content analysis, there are some lessons that should be taken into consideration when using Instagram as an advertising channel for DMOs. These are described below.

First of all, it can be stated that despite the variety of social media channels available for branding activities, both globally and locally, Instagram is still a very popular one. For Visit Finland it is one of the two most relevant channels across all countries where the organization advertises, mainly due to its high engagement rate. Instagram contributes to destination branding by adding a new current and strong communication channel to DMOs' strategies. The platform allows for more dynamic and interactive content to be shared with the audience, making users feel an active part of the brand. It offers DMOs a successful way to be discovered and engaged with, which ultimately enhances the destination brand value.

There are two main ways to use Instagram as an advertising channel. The first one is as a stand-alone channel, having content generated specifically for it, as well as its own communication goals. The UGC post and the collaboration with an influencer illustrate this use. The second use is as complementary channel, in order to support broader campaigns that are being advertised also in other media platforms – for example radio or television –, with one common goal. The paid ad and the post encouraging user participation are examples of this second use. In addition, in terms of audience, Instagram can be used both to get new followers and to keep existing ones engaged. This study analyzes posts that illustrate both practices: the collaboration with an influencer and the paid ad aim for Visit Finland to get new followers, whilst the use of user generated content and encouraging user participation aim to keep existing followers engaged through interesting content.

When monitoring posts success, the main indicators for Visit Finland are the amount of likes or views and the comments. Therefore, when looking at the different approaches that DMOs can use for Instagram, conclusions are drawn based on the engagement achieved by each of them, focusing on the amount of likes or views only. The collaboration with an influencer is the practice that got the highest number of likes, with over seven times more than the other image posts. This kind of action allows destinations to be seen by influential people's followers, which is a way to broaden the audience. This practice is useful when the DMO's profile does not have a lot of their own followers yet, as it helps to increase the number, as mentioned by interviewee Noora Uusitalo. On the other hand, organic content posted in the DMO's own profile – both as user generated content or encouraging user participation – got around 20.000 likes and an

average of 22.000 views respectively. The difference in the number of likes is substantial compared to the influencer post. However, one should keep into consideration that, when creating organic content, that content is only shown to users that already follow the profile, as well as some of the users that actively search for any hashtags or locations used in that specific post. Therefore, it is expected that the engagement will be lower than with influencers or paid ads.

Nevertheless, both using UGC and encouraging user participation stimulate users' activity and make them feel involved with the brand, which improves their opinion about the destination. Lastly, the use of paid content has generated more views than the organic content about the same campaign – *Rent a Finn* – which shows that in this case, paid ads continue to reach more people. In addition, people reached by the ads will most likely be users who do not follow Visit Finland's profile at that moment, and this helps the DMO to get new followers or to at least be seen by new people. Based on these lessons, it can be concluded that each of the four posts' engagement cannot be directly compared to the other's, since they are not addressed to the same audience and serve different purposes within the one common goal: making the destination known. Nevertheless, this analysis gives DMOs an idea of who can be targeted with each approach, as well as the scale of their potential engagement. For a complete presence in the channel, organizations should aim to combine at least some of the different practices, as they complement each other.

It is also worth mentioning that the analyzed posts have proven the use of hashtags is an advisable practice. Visit Finland benefits from this practice in three ways: the first one is by taking interested users who click or tap on its hashtags to a page that serves as a very attractive and visual source of information, as shown in figure 7. The visual power of the page is emphasized by the high quality of the images. The second one is that by using hashtags, the DMO also increases its chances to be found by users. The third and last one is that the organization can use hashtags to monitor all the content that is being posted about their location, since the page shown in figure 7 includes both posts generated by Visit Finland itself and by other users. As described in the literature review, if that content favors the brand, the organization can benefit from it by reusing it as UGC. If the content, however, harms the destination's image, the DMO can react and influence the story that is being told. This refers to the co-creation of brands that is repeatedly mentioned in the literature review.

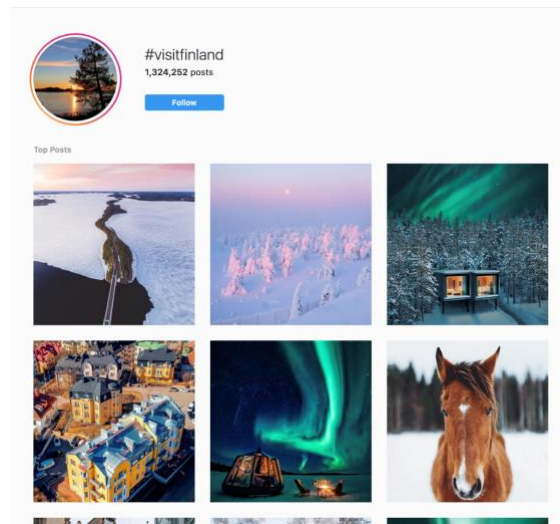


Figure 7. Screenshot of an Instagram page dedicated to all content using the hashtag #VisitFinland (2019).

One last proof of the advantages provided by hashtags is that, in the Instagram profile description, Visit Finland encourages users to use the hashtag #VisitFinland for a chance to be featured in the DMO's profile.

The analyzed posts have also proven that another useful practice is specifying a location in each post. This option is especially interesting for DMOs since they promote places and the location takes interested users to a map, which improves the discovery experience. This is shown in figure 8 below. The same way as with hashtags, Visit Finland benefits from the use of locations in three ways: first, it allows the organization to take engaged users to a space where they can see many other posts about that location. This could potentially make them feel even more encouraged to visit it. Second, it increases the DMO's chances to be found by users who are looking at content posted about that location by others. Third and last, this practice also allows Visit Finland to monitor what is being posted about the place and find interesting content that can potentially be reused as UGC.

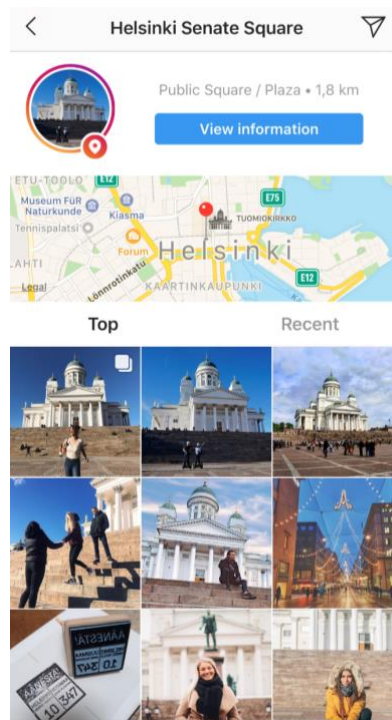


Figure 8. Screenshot of an Instagram page dedicated to the location Helsinki Senate Square and all content using it (2019).

To conclude, it is also relevant to address the characteristics of the content posted on Instagram. As stated in the literature review, Instagram is a notably visual platform, and user's motivation for using the platform is mostly hedonic-oriented. Therefore, Images or videos posted by organizations in this channel are generally tasteful, inspirational and carefully selected. This also becomes especially relevant for DMOs, who can use this characteristic to their advantage and show very appealing content of the destination, catching the audience's attention. A good supporting example of this is provided in this study: Holmen claims that Instagram is a helpful channel to stimulate people who are in the *dreaming* stage, which is why all four analyzed posts show a beautiful and unique landscape. When selecting images or videos for Instagram, it is also common and accepted to use other users' content too, as long as they are properly credited, as shown in the content analysis. This last practice, in addition, encourages users to post about a destination and use the right hashtags so that their content has a chance to be found and reused, which keeps them engaged with the brand. The text used in the post, on the other hand, plays a less important role, but it also tells about the destination's personality and contributes to it. Also, if correctly chosen, it is a good complement to the image or video and completes the overall message being sent in the post, therefore, it should not be underestimated.

6.3 Recommendations

This last subsection presents a list of recommendations, based on the lessons previously described. For practitioners wishing to use this platform for destination branding, the following points should be taken into consideration:

- Consistency plays a key role for communicating a convincing image of a destination to the rest of the world. In order to be consistent, it is necessary to define the values that the destination wants to convey and stick to them. There should be consistency not only across all posts in the channel, but also across Instagram and all the other channels that the DMO is using for destination branding: other social media, website, global campaigns, traditional marketing...
- Following with the previous point, posts should talk about values and themes that are directly related to the destination brand. This is the best way to reinforce it. In Visit Finland's case, for example, nature plays a main role in most of the posts, and characteristic elements like saunas, auroras or reindeers are recurrent.
- It is advisable to use several Instagram practices (the four categories analyzed in this study serve as guide). Since each of them are addressed to different audiences and show different types of content, they are not exclusive but complementary.
- Success on Instagram very much depends on the content. Images and videos need to be selected carefully – they have to be visually appealing and engaging. Hedonic content usually has a better reception and improves effectiveness. Unlike other products that can be tried and checked in a store before buying them, the decision to travel to a destination or another is mainly based on the pictures that people can find on the internet. Therefore, images used in Instagram are especially decisive for DMOs.
- The use of hashtags and locations helps organizations to be found by users. This is also especially relevant for DMOs, since today's travelers use social media channels throughout the travel planning process and they are decisive for decision-making. Therefore, the easier it is to find a DMO's content, the more chances the destination has to be chosen.

- Both influencer collaboration and paid ads are beneficial when the DMO wants to reach people that are not following its profile yet. Especially the first one seems to increase the number of followers significantly.
- Today's destinations are co-created, and users like it that way. An effective way to keep users engaged and make them feel part of the brand is encouraging them to participate in campaigns or to share their pictures, as well as re-using their content in the DMO's profile.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This study provides an overview on the different approaches that can be used to do destination branding on Instagram. It contributes to the field of social media advertising by expanding the body of knowledge about the use of Instagram as an advertising channel exclusively in the tourism industry. It offers a theoretical framework for those departments that manage or could potentially manage Instagram activity within the organizations.

However, this research presents some limitations. Since the method used is a content analysis performed in posts of different nature, they cannot be fully compared, and one cannot determine that one approach is more successful than the others. Future research could study any of the four analyzed approaches more in depth, as each of them works in its own way, beyond the general best practices of the channel highlighted in this paper. In addition, the findings cannot be generalized to every DMO that wants to do destination branding on Instagram, as only Visit Finland is being analyzed in this study.

This research's findings show that Instagram can contribute to make a destination more known and popular, as well as to project a consistent image of that destination to the rest of the world. Social media are a form of modern word-of-mouth that serves as a source of information for travelers, and therefore it is relevant for DMOs to be present in them. Destination brands are now co-created by DMOs and users from the Internet sharing their experiences, and Instagram provides DMOs with a tool to be more participative and successful in this new reality. This research gives recommendations to use it to DMO's advantage. These can be summarized as: producing interactive and engaging content that makes users feel close to the brand and at the same time is aligned

with the destination brand's values, using different approaches to the channel in order to reach different audiences, and finally using all features available in the platform so that content can be easily found by users.

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APPENDIX. QUESTIONS FROM INTERVIEWS

Questions for interview with Mervi Holmen, Senior Advisor from the International Marketing Department at Visit Finland.

1. When was Visit Finland created?
2. With which purpose was Visit Finland created?
3. What social media marketing channels do you use at Visit Finland?
4. Currently, what is the most relevant one for the organization?
5. When did Visit Finland start using Instagram as an advertising channel?
6. Why did you decide to start using it?
7. Does Instagram have any advantages over more traditional channels?
8. Is there an Instagram campaign that stands out in your mind? Explain why.
9. How does Instagram contribute to achieve Visit Finland's global goals?
10. What would happen if you suddenly stopped Visit Finland's activity on Instagram? What would be the consequences?

Questions for interview with Noora Uusitalo, Coordinator of digital channels at Visit Finland.

1. What is your role within the organization and your responsibilities?
2. What is the name of your department? What does it take care of?
3. Do you have a designated budget for social media campaigns?
 - If yes, what kind of actions do you cover with that designated budget?
4. What is the main goal of your Instagram activity?
5. Do you do any collaboration with influencers on Instagram?
 - If yes, can you mention the influencer that drove the best results?
6. In this research I am studying both the use of organic content and promoted ads on Instagram. Do you also make use of paid ads?
 - If yes, what is the main value of this kind of content for Visit Finland?
7. Do you do any contests or other similar actions to encourage Visit Finland's followers' participation?
8. When monitoring your Instagram posts' results, what are the main indicators that you look at to consider a post successful?

9. Amongst the different types of posts that you do, what is the one that drives the best results?
10. Is there an Instagram action, campaign or individual post that stands out in your mind? Explain why.
11. What would you tell to a DMO that is not using Instagram as advertising channel?