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CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA
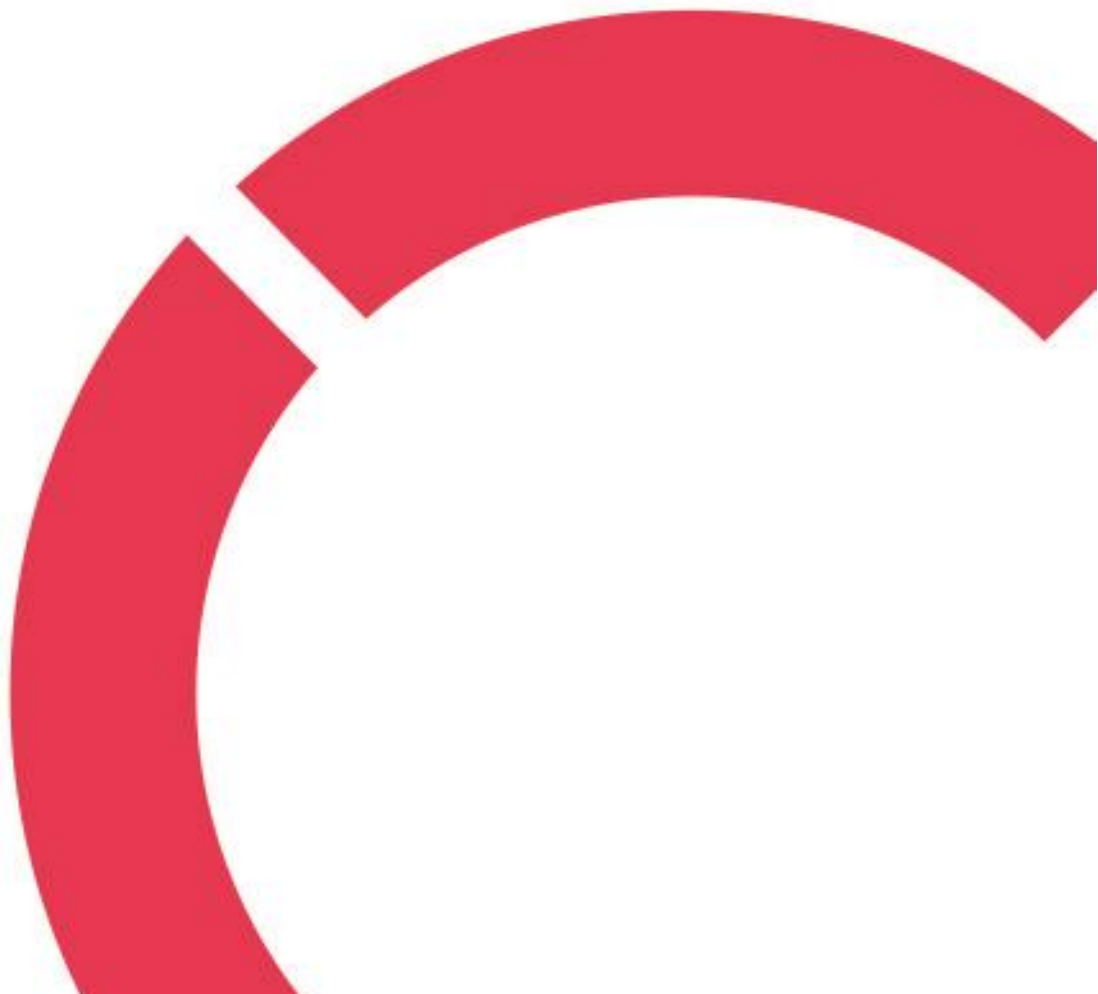
Case Study: Scandic Grand Central Helsinki

ABSTRACT

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Over the years, there has been a great improvement in technology, making communication and other online activities easy and fun. Many people started engaging on social media on a daily base either by shopping, researching, or for entertainment. With the increase in the online presence of people on social media, it became important for

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how companies use social media and other marketing factors to engage with their customer hence promoting the growth of their companies. The study also seeks to examine potential risks and challenges related to customer engagement on social media and possible solutions.

many companies to showcase their business on these online platforms to easily reach out to their audience. However, the efficient use of social media for customer engagement remains a complex and dynamic challenge.

The research started by highlighting the history and evolution of social media and gave detailed explanations of social media in the marketing context, portraying marketing theories like the marketing mix, marketing segmentation

, and the hierarchy effect models and social media itself as a marketing tool.

This research examined a successful case study and best practices from Grand Central Scandic Hotel Helsinki that provides a practical insight into implementing

effective social media engagement strategies. The thesis also highlighted the effectiveness and data-driven benefits of social media customer engagement, and how businesses leverage these platforms effectively to build stronger relationships with their customers, foster brand loyalty, and drive business growth in the digital age.

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Key words Customer engagement, marketing mix, market segmentation, marketing theories, marketing tool, Social media marketing, 4Ps,

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

BBS   Bulletin Board Systems

CBBS   Computer Bulletin Board Service

IRC   Internet Relay Chat

MTN   Mobile Telephone Network

SERP   Search Engine Result Pages

ABSTRACT

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

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1 INTRODUCTION

The drastic increase in customers´ expectations has lured businesses to strive over the years to meet up with their customer satisfaction and needs. In today's business world, there has been a rapid growth of competition which is alarming. Companies have as their objective to improve efficiency and maximize profit at a low cost. It is therefore important for them to update and try new marketing strategies. It is essential to note that many companies were before involved in the traditional way of engagement to display their marketing strategies such as face-to-face interactions, phone calls, and traditional marketing to reach out to their customers.

Social media has increasingly become the world´s most used digital platform linking people across geographical regions through communication and sharing of information. There is no doubt that there are various types of social media platforms with their unique features and purposes, and it has an influence on the community. These platforms are blogging, social networking sites, discussion forums, image sharing, bookmarking, interest-based networks, sharing economy networks, shopping networks, and publishing websites.

With the renovative rise of technology and the endless increase in customers' expectations, it is therefore important for many companies to dive into this trend. The coming of smartphones and the internet revolutionized how people communicated and consumed information. The number of online users continuously increased thereby pulling companies to the digital landscape to maintain the competition level and stay useful.

This action was later reinforced due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the restriction of contact interactions, many businesses were forced to restructure their business strategies from in-person to remote technology. Companies were compelled to focus more on digital tools to maintain customer engagements thereby paving the way for the use of social media to easily carry out their engagements.

Across the world, there are billions of active users on different social media platforms daily. With these billions of active users on social media platforms it is a goldmine environment for most companies as they could easily reach out to their target audience.

Also, these platforms give space for companies to showcase the products and services they offer. Companies can easily create awareness and cause the exposure of their products or services by creating campaigns building brand awareness, captivating visuals, engaging content, and strengthening brand loyalty.

Social media being a powerful tool that aligns with other marketing theories, permits companies to easily reach their consumers through its marketing strategies. Social media equally complements marketing theories by making use of the four Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion), marketing analysis, market segmentation, and customer behavior and relationship marketing (K. Phillip 1967).

Given the above explanations, this research focuses on suggesting an assimilated, upgraded, vital, and assessable structure/strategies for businesses to easily manage customer engagement on social media and advance our perception of engagement amongst several actors that are progressively contributing to the success of social media marketing activities. This research explores the factors that influence customer engagement on social media and proposes strategies through which companies can effectively operate with customers through social media and other marketing tools. To achieve an appealing result, a case study was used to get relevant information. The said company makes use of social media platforms like Facebook, and Instagram to carry out campaigns, promotions, and advertising. The following thesis will start by briefing on the evolution of social media followed by elaborating on marketing theories. A detailed explanation of how social media influences the interaction between companies and their customer are elaborated. It will also expatiate other marketing strategies used by business bodies to effectively engage with their consumers while bringing out challenges they face and possible solutions.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE MARKETING CONTEXT

Social media is defined as the production, consumption, and exchange of information through online interactions and platforms (Marketo 2010, 5). Social media is a platform that enables users to communicate and exchange knowledge across digital networks. Examples of such platforms are Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, and YouTube just to name a few. According to (Dollarhide 2023.) these social media platforms allow users to be able to interact with each other to improve online communities and share content. The increased level of usage of social media rose to 93% believe that businesses need these online platforms to keep their online presence steady (Dollarhide 2023).

2.1 History and evolution of social media

The history and evolution of social media can be traced back to the 1970s with the discovery of the Bulletin Board System (BBS) also known as the Computer Bulletin Board System (CBBS) which operated as a computer server equipped with software that permits its users to be able to use a terminal application to link to the system. In the following year, thousands of BBCS started disappearing because many of its providers faced financial problems (Rheingold 1993).

By the 1980s new network named FidoNet was created. Its functions were to facilitate communication and it could also permit the exchange of private and public messages through networks BBSs. This equally had text-based platforms that permitted its users to communicate through message boxes (Jones 1999). A real-time communication platform was established between the late 1980s and early 1990s called the IRC (Internet Relay Chat). This allowed its users to be involved in conversations through various channels. (Rheingold 1993). Its primary motive was to enable group chats between users across their computers and permit two users to have private chats.

By 1997, SixDegrees.com known as the first modern social network site permitted users to create profiles, list friends, and interact with one another. It allowed its users to send messages, post comments, and make friends (Boyd & Ellison 2007). This platform could not stay its time due to internet infrastructure limitations.

By 2002, a new platform known as Friendster came in and gained popularity in Asia due to the mass audience it was able to reach (Boyd & Ellison 2007). In 2003, Myspace was launched and rapidly took over as the most popular platform, especially amongst artists and bands (Boyd & Ellison 2007). In 2004 came the birth of Facebook by Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates. This was more of a real-time platform connecting and expanding its users (Boyd & Ellison 2007). Twitter was then launched in 2006, introducing microblogging and short status updates, permitting real-time communication, and sharing of information (Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng 2007). In 2010, Instagram was launched, and it allowed its users to share photos as a core feature and gained popularity faster, especially among youths (Movich 2017). Snapchat was created in 2011, bringing its unique feature at the time which was filters, and this platform could also enable its users to message each other (Daguay). In 2016, TikTok was formed, and its popularity grew fast as it enables users to create short-form videos and editing tools (Hootsuite 2020).

2.2 Marketing theories

Highlighted as the primary reasons that render the marketing mix a potent concept, it simplifies the perception of marketing, facilitating the segregation of marketing from other facets of the company, which, in turn, enables the delegation of marketing responsibilities to specialists (Kotler P. 1967). In other words, these are guides that help companies or businesses understand their customer behavior to implement effective marketing strategies to outgrow their competitors. Furthermore, the constituents of the marketing mix possess the capability to alter a company's competitive position (A. Twin, 2023).

The marketing mix concept additionally offers two noteworthy advantages. Firstly, it serves as a crucial tool for understanding that a substantial portion of the marketing manager's role involves striking a balance between the advantages of their competitive strengths within the marketing mix and those of their competitors. Secondly, the marketing mix sheds light on another facet of the marketing manager's role (Goi 2009, 57). Marketing theories give an overview of valuable concepts that assist businesses in having a comprehensive understanding of customer behavior, building new efficient strategies, and forming successful marketing campaigns. These theories are the marketing mix (the 4Ps), Market Segmentation, Targeting, and positioning (STP), The Hierarchy Effects Model, Diffusion of Innovation Models, and Relationship Marketing. All these concepts work as guiding principles for businesses and marketers to make the right decisions and obtain their goals (Kotler 1967). The following paragraphs elaborate on the various marketing theories.

2.2.1 Marketing Mix (the 4 Ps)

As mentioned above, the Marketing Mix (the 4Ps) is a marketing concept that when well managed can lead to effective marketing (Kotler 1967). This involves production, price, promotion, and distribution for the practice of exchanging goods and services to get to a target market. According to Riaz (2011), mixed marketing can be defined as a marketing tool such as price, place, production, and promotion that can be controlled by a company and used to obtain a desired to response on the target market. Businesses making use of these tools are liable to get a mastery of their customers and maintain good relationships (McCarthy, 1960, 50-56). To better understand the marketing mix, a detailed explanation of the 4 Ps is given as follows.

The 4P´s Marketing Mix

FIGURE 2: Marketing Mix (the 4 P´s)
Source: Aquil Ahmed 2020

A product is described as a physical good or service provided to a customer that is willing to pay. It comprises of the material goods like clothes, groceries, furniture, and non-material products like services that users can purchase (Singh 2016). According to Kotler, a product "is what can be offered to the market, to get attention, to be the acquisition of used, and can satisfy wants and needs" (Kotler 1967).

One of the most relevant marketing mix tools is the price. Scientists regard it as an item that plays an important role in structuring customers' perception and purchase decisions which is a fair assessment of the product (Ehmke, Fulton, Lusk, 2016, 55). Overall, price is the determinant factor of the product's quality and purchasing power.

Place, also known as distribution, is described as the procedure and techniques through which products and services get to the customers (Martin 2014). It comprises the service provider, intermediary, and the service user. For effective customer engagement, companies need to structure a good marketing means to align with the company's objectives (Dang 2015.)

Promotion is also another marketing mix tool that enables good customer engagement when properly utilized by companies. It increases the customer's awareness of the products thereby bringing more sales and developing brand loyalty. There exist different forms of promotion tactics, one of which is sponsorship which comprises coupons, refunds, bonuses, awards, samples, and contests that will lure customers to purchase these products (Kotler, Amstrong 2009.)

2.2.2 Market Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning

Target marketing is the act of planning, implementing, controlling, and directing marketing efforts interconnected with Segmentation and positioning. Jointly, they all assist businesses in cantering their marketing strategies and give importance to specific customer segments (Rudani R.B. 2009).

Market segmentation is the act of partitioning the market into different groups of buyers that have common features and needs. This tool allows businesses to know and direct their marketing strategies to properly engage with the right customers (Engel. Blackwell, & Miniard. 1995, 90-112). Features like geographical areas, income, and psychological aspects are taken into consideration thereby complementing the goods with the customers' needs. For a company to satisfy its customers, it needs to pay attention to a particular number of well-defined buyers. This will help the company have a better understanding of what the customers need and want, thereby maximizing cost, improving profitability, and giving room to effective marketing strategy (Rudani, 2009, 91.)

Targeting marketing involves dividing the market into different segments base on demographics, behavior, and psychographics. These factors could be age, gender, and income. Businesses will easily

understand their target audience when segmenting the market to tailor their business strategies to meet customers` needs and wants. Targeting is usually done by evaluating the market segments by measuring the attractiveness of the product to its customers and selecting the segments by quantity (Kotler et al. 2009.)

According to Phillip Kotler, product positioning comprises three processes such as to identifying potential competitive advantages (like durability, reliability, guarantee, warranty, regularity, prestige, and status), building positioning strategies, and communicating the company's positioning (Rudani, 2009, 109-111.)

2.2.3 The Hierarchy Effect Model

The hierarchy effect model is a marketing tool that elaborates on how before customers decide to buy a product, they must have passed a series of steps. There are six steps that the customers pass before making a purchase. The processes are awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and lastly the purchase (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995, 62-78). The customer goes through a series of phases before getting to its final stop (Kotler & Amstrong, 2018, 245). The effect of advertising sequentially goes a long way through stages of cognition, affect, and conation, according to Lavidge and Steiner´s 1961 Hierarchy Effects Mode (Lavidge & Steiner 1961). After learning about the product in the cognition stage (awareness), consumers move on to the affect stage, which is when attitudes and feelings are formed. In the end, during the conation stage, customers are inspired to act, choosing what to buy.

2.2.4 Brand Equity Model

Brand equity is an important marketing tool that helps customers understand the value and perception of a product. Brand equity is influenced by factors like brand awareness where the consumer can acknowledge a certain brand (Aaker, 1991, 67-88). Also, recognizing the quality is important as it will persuade the customer to purchase premium quality products (Keller, 1993, 57.)

2.3 Social media as a Marketing tool

A marketing tool is a guide that enables companies to make use of their social media platforms to promote their products, services, and brands. Social media has greatly transformed the way people and companies interact and do business. It has influenced the economic and political affairs all around the world. Companies enhance their business operations by implementing better social media strategies which make them stand out. For this to be successful, the companies need to implement different marketing theories. With the 21st century seeing the dawn of social media, it has surpassed every other form of communication and has caused great change in the way of life of many (Saravanakumar & SugantaLakshmi 2012.)

Companies that operate using social media platforms must implement certain theories in other to acquire a great extent in the expansion of their brands. Like e-commerce, social media is fast becoming a top site companies rely on for their brand exposure and customer acquisition. E-commerce has been a major part of modern-day business operations and social media plays a very vital part in it.

All the social media platforms have monitoring teams that set guidelines for users to ensure strict performance and protect customer privacy. For instance, Twitter (now called X) has set a restriction mode called microblogging. This form of blogging ensures that users do not post voluminous content on their Twitter handles (Saravanakumar & Suganta Lakshmi 2012). Hotelier companies use Twitter to post about their events and promotions. Other social media platforms also set strict restrictions on the content that their users post. They make sure that all their users follow the media´s privacy policies. Users who do not adhere to the media's privacy policies can be blocked and even have their accounts deleted.

The major need for social media by most companies is for marketing purposes. It links companies to their customers. In a nutshell, many companies are looking for lasting engagement with their customers and social media acts as the bridge between them (Evans 2010.)

Social media has been of great importance to many companies. This is because it plays a vital role in the marketing department. Some of its roles are promoting website traffic, increasing brand visibility, and audience engagement, enabling real-time communication, influencers collaboration, and targeted advertising (Golan and Zaidner 2008).

One of the most important components of an all-encompassing digital marketing strategy is social media brand visibility. A brand's online presence can be improved by consistently and purposefully posting on social media platforms. Consistent posting helps a brand build a strong online presence on social media. Maintaining a consistent posting schedule and variety of content helps consumers remember and identify the brand, building familiarity and trust. (Bampo et al. 2008.) This enables the brand to communicate its identity, offers, and values to a wider audience.

Here's a more thorough breakdown of how this procedure operates. Users who find content about a company are likely to click on the company's links to find out more. When businesses share relevant content on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X, the company website receives clicks and traffic as a direct result of this sharing activity (Golan and Zaidner 2008) Also, companies that frequently advertise campaigns, discounts, and special offers encourage their users to visit the company's website to take advantage of the offers by including links in these promotional posts that lead to relevant landing pages or product pages. Companies need to use branded hashtags, generated, and disseminated by companies to encourage user engagement. Users can often find related content by clicking on these hashtags, which take them to a specific landing page or section of the website (Chu 2011, 40.)

3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND IT'S IMPACT ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Social media has been on a fast-developing scale over the last decade. It has had a great impact on the world´s economy and societies. Since the dawn of the internet age, there have been many different social media platforms that keep developing. Some of them include Facebook, X, Instagram, Viber, Tik-Tok and many more. Some of these platforms have seen great success since their implementation while others have not really gotten that much viral, and some are mostly efficient only in certain parts of the world.

Due to the massive presence of internet users around the world, most businesses have seen social media to be a very reliable and efficient medium to reach out to customers and develop their businesses. This however has worked very well for most companies. The hospitality industry has been particularly successful with the introduction of social media.

3.1 Factors influencing customer engagement on social media.

There exist many factors that have influenced customer engagement on social media (Smith, 2020. 45). Audience and brand are unique therefore it is essential to examine, analyze and adopt strategies to maximize engagement These factors are explained in the paragraphs below.

Content being one of the factors that influences customer engagement on social media helps in drawing the audience's attention to a particular brand. Even by presenting yourself to new people, showcasing a relevant image across meaningful content, or assisting with matters through materials, your content always must be what they need (Johnson & Jones 2022). It is important to know the needs and interests of a company's audience to know the kind of content to post. (Johnson 2018, 26.)

Furthermore, time refers to when the brand decides to post updates. Time of response also has an important impact on customer engagement. It is important to note that when the brand posts content about its product, it should choose when its audience is more active to get more views likes, and comments. Companies should also be ready to quickly respond to customers' inquiries via post or inbox (Smith, 2020). The faster customers get answers to their inquiries or comments the more it makes them fee important to that brand (Brown 2019, 28.)

Interactive activities engaged by companies with their audience such as quizzes and puzzles make it fun and draw the audience's attention. The level on which two or more bodies communicate with each other via message or other communication channels that are synchronized is known as interactivity (Lium & Shrum 2002). It was discovered that brands that make use of puzzles and polls on social media are more likely to receive likes and comments (Smith & Johnson 2020). Also, a post with only text is not regarded as interactive but a post by a brand with visuals or a link to that post makes it interactive because users can click on it, and it gives them more insights into what they are looking for (Fortin &y Dholakia 2005). A high level of engagement is more likely generated from interactive information (Coyle & Thorson 2001.)

Visualization is an important factor in customer engagement. Product information is also an important factor in customer engagement on social media. Usually, when a brand updates its pages with information on a new release of products, dates, and descriptions, it attracts customers to interact and increases their interest in such products (D. Vries et al. 2012). In that light, the quality and digital content of a product easily draws its audience's attention (Davis, 2017, 15.)

Studies have shown that entertainment influences customer behaviour and as such it is a positive tool for engagement on social media. Posts that are designed to entertain are more likely to draw the public's attention (Raney et al, 2003.)

Consistency keeps the audience updated. When a brand continues to maintain its posting timetable, it keeps its audience informed and involved (Wilson, 2018, 42). Tuten and Solomon, (2017) discovered that brands that post on social media consistently have gained a high level of brand loyalty and customer engagement. Companies with a feeling of importance to the customers give them more reasons to stay connected to this brand.

The level on which a company's post arouses different thoughts is known as vividness (Steuer, 199). The quality of a link, status update, or video is usually reflected by the sharing moves taken by the page administrator (D. Vries et al., 2012.)

To add to the above, personalization also promotes customer engagement on social media. Customizing content and answers to customer inquiries promote customer-to-brand relationships (Roberts, 2019, 91). This action easily attracts the customer's attention and motivates them to interact. Content

that addresses the customer directly inspires them to give more attention and time to engage. In sum, personalization promotes an all-around customer experience by facilitating interactions. Personalized recommendations and offers take care of customer preferences, improving the likelihood of conversion. (Infosys, 2018).

3.2 Challenges and risks of customer engagement on social media

Even though social media marketing comes with a lot of benefits, it also has some risks and challenges. The following paragraphs will cite and explain some risks and challenging factors of customer engagement in social media marketing.

Many companies have faced the risk of receiving negative feedback and damage to their reputation. Brands usually receive negative comments, complaints, and unpleasant reviews from users. These displeasing reviews could lead to the damaging of the company's reputation and image (Smith, 2020, 45). This tends to influence the decisions of other customers by discouraging them from engaging with these companies, hence trust is lost (Johnson, 2019, 32). Also, customers who were already in the process of purchasing a product might change their minds about getting this product (Clark, 2020, 74). In today's digital world, negative feedback about a certain brand usually goes viral very easily. As it spreads, many people get to know about the situation (Roberts, 2021, 42).

While engaging with brands, users usually face the problem of privacy and data security because they share their personal information and ideas with companies. This information sometimes gets exposed on social media or by pirates. This usually occurs when the data security systems of the companies are not strong enough to prevent hackers (Jones, 2019, 45). Moreover, privacy breaches and legal issues usually arise because of customer´s data being shared by the brand without their consent (Smith, 2020, 37).

Most companies that do not monitor their social media platforms might be exposed to trolls and cyberbullies. Therefore, monitoring their platforms frequently is essential (Brown, 2020). It is important to maintain communication on their platforms to keep positive customer engagement interaction and avoid wrong or negative information from going viral. The increase in forgery and spam on social media platforms has caused a great challenge to many companies and their brand reputation.

Customer engagement on social media sometimes becomes challenging because sticking to social media policies is usually crucial and could otherwise lead to violations, hence loss of accounts or loose the privilege of advertising, preventing brands from connecting with their customers properly (smith, 2019). These policies usually comprise community standards, content, and advertising actions. Failing to respect these policies could result in the company's image damage thereby affecting customer engagement. Companies need to study, know, and follow these policies to safeguard the company's image. It is difficult for companies that face difficulties in respecting policies to create authentic links with their customers (Smith & Kidder, 2010, 72).

3.2 Solutions or strategies for good customer engagement on social media

As explained above, there exist many risks and challenging factors when engaging with customers on social media, nevertheless, there are strategies that companies can adopt to remedy the situation. These strategies, also known as solutions, will be elaborated on the following paragraphs.

Companies need to create meaningful content that matches their audience's expectations. Creating informative, entertaining, or educative content with unique perspectives it increases the rate of engagement (Johnson & Batey, 52.)

It is also important for companies to have two-way communication with their audience by having quick responses to comments, mentions, and messages. It helps build a strong bond and sense of connection. Important interactions with customers may improve trust and loyalty (Smith & Taylor, 2014, 86).

Making good use of social media tools to monitor discussions and feedback for customers helps leave out and combine the company understand the customer's choices and direct their strategies accordingly. Listening to and answering feedback from customers promotes strong relationships and enhances customer satisfaction (Li & Bernoff, 2011, 72.)

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This research comprises a theoretical and practical framework where several books, journals, reports, research publications, e-books, dissertations, and articles were examined to carry out the theoretical framework. A phone interview was carried out and first-hand information was obtained to effectively elaborate the study.

4.1 Research Methodology

The methods and techniques through which this study research is carried out describe the methodology. Acquiring results highly depends on primary and secondary data (Taylor, Bogdan & De Vault 2015). Research methods are simply techniques or strategies that are put in place to collect the required data to align with a certain topic to provide a better and more comprehensive understanding (University of Newcastle Library Guides 2022). There exist four ways of carrying out research, which are interviews, giving out questionnaires to correspondents, personal observations, and all that comprise primary data collection and interrogation of literature databases.

In this research, the qualitative research approach was carried out through an interview to obtain firsthand information from experienced personnel with more than 2 years of working experience in the field and personal experience.

4.2 Data Collection

Data collection is the assembling of numerical and non-numerical information obtained from a survey or interview and analysis to derive answers for research (Pedamkar, 2022). It is carried out through several means, most especially interviews, questionnaires, or observations. Questionnaires are distinguished by either closed or open-ended questions or sometimes both at the same time depending on the research type and results expectations.

Taking into consideration the purpose of this study, an interview was organized with the manager of Scandic Grand Central Helsinki. The interview questions were a total of 16 questions.

The main aim of this interview was to have a comprehensive understanding of how Scandic Grand Central Helsinki makes use of its social media and handles it to effectively engage with its customers. On the other hand, the hotel expects results from this research to help them get an insight into effective strategies to increase customer interaction and build brand loyalty online.

5 CASE STUDY: SCANDIC GRAND CENTRAL HOTEL HELSINKI

Scandic Grand Central Helsinki is a hotel that opened its doors and started operating on the 15th of April 2021. The hotel is located at the heart of the city of Helsinki near the railway station and other cultural attraction areas like the Kaisieniemi park. There are good accessible connections to go any part of the city and out of the city. Having local and long-distance trains coupled with the metro and buses. Belonging to one of the largest hotel operators in the Nordics, the hotel's management keeps seeking more suitable locations for its projects with the old historical Grand Central being part of this expansion. The building was designed by Eliel Saarinen with its timeless elegance and classic style decor. Operated by Scandic, a hotel management company, the hotel is rated 4.5. The hotel is unique in its genre and provides first-class experiences coupled with a relaxed atmosphere for an amazing stay at the most accessible location in Helsinki (Tohology Hospitality and Tourism 2021.)

PICTURE 1: Overview of Scandic Grand Central Helsinki
Source; Matkablogi-travel blog Est 2015

This hotel offers about 491 air-conditioned and styled rooms with beautiful views of the city and railway station. However, depending on each room, they all have a variety of different attractive views. From the rooms, you can see and admire the beautiful courtyard, the city buzzed by the station, the beautiful National Theatre, the Atheneum Art Museum, and the green Kaisaniemi Park.

The rooms have their original charming style with wide windowsills that go from the ceiling to the floor, providing a full-height view of the city. It also has panned windows and thick walls. These modern rooms are light, spacious, and bright with ceilings of height. The rooms are categorized into 8 different types Standard, Classic Double, Classic Family, Superior, Superior Family, Superior Plus, Junior Suit, and Suit rooms. These room sizes usually range from about 13-45 meters square depending on the type of room. The room comprises of an indulgent rain shower in the bathroom with adjustable beds and armchairs with black curtains, connection rooms, Wi-Fi, desk and chair, FACE Stockholm hand wash, shampoo, shower gel and conditioner, hair dryer, iron and iron board, mini bar, non-smoking, safety box, TV, Wardrobe, and wooden floor (Tohology hospitality and tourism 2021).

PICTURE 2: Suit Room

Source: Tohology hospitality and tourism 2021

There is a cozy lobby and lounge area suitable for working and relaxing at the hotel. The hotel has a restaurant and bar that provides a warm and stylish environment for meetings and for chilling. There is an impressive and spacious Grand Ballroom banquet hall that provides a distinctive set for grand or small events. (Tohology hospitality and tourism 2021

Scandic Grand Central Helsinki has many parking spaces in their garages. The availability of a modern and well-equipped gym and wellness centre in the hotel with a cozy yoga room is provided for the well-being of its customers. For customers who love outdoor exercise, there are bicycles and walking poles available for them to use and feel at home. From the hotel, there are connections to the airport, and there the available trams that can transport people from the hotel to the harbor in a minimal time of a few minutes (Technology Hospitality and Tourism 2021).

5.1 Interview Data Analysis

Regarding the interview carried out with the General manager of Scandic Grand Central Helsinki Hotel on the 21st of November, the interview session aimed at acquiring information on how the hotel makes use of social media platforms to improve their day-to-day customer engagement activities. These findings will also be useful to other companies that make use of social media platforms to engage with customers and other marketing tools. A 35-minute interview on the phone was granted for this research, which was highly appreciated.

In the interview with the general manager of Scandic Grand Central Helsinki, pleasantries were exchanged. The researcher started by providing an overview and purpose of the interview and how the insight of the interview from the general manager will benefit this research as mentioned above.

Satu Järvelä is the manager´s name, working as the general manager of Scandic Grand Central Helsinki, and has the responsibility to ensure the hotel´s effectiveness and efficiency in all departments. According to Satu, there are a total of 70 members of staff in the hotel. When asked about the number of rooms the hostel has, the respondent said there were a total of 491 rooms in the hotel which comprises suite, standard, classic double, classic family, superior family superior, superior plus, and junior suite rooms.

When the general manager was asked about the use of social media platforms in the running of the hotel, it was affirmed that the hotel makes use of social media platforms and went on to state them as Facebook and Instagram with Facebook being proficient. The next question asked was about the frequency with which the hotel makes use of its social media platforms. The respondent stated that these platforms are used once per week, where the hotel makes use of customers' post with the hotel's hashtags on this post and post them on the hotel's social media accounts. This is because of the number of inflow and outflow of customers weekly in the hotel.

During the interview, the manager was asked how long the hotel has been using these platforms, the response was that the hotel has been using social media platforms for two and half years now and have been very efficient over time.

It was mentioned that the hotel does not make use of paid search advertisements. Since they already carry out promotional campaigns, especially on their social media like Facebook and Instagram, there was no need for Scandic Grand Central Helsinki Hotel to engage in paid search advertising.

The researcher asked how successful these social media platforms have been to the hotel, the response was that apps like Facebook have helped in building the hotel's brand awareness and promoting engagement with customers, the respondent also proceeded by explaining how the use of Facebook advertising has enabled the hotel target specific demographics and reaching a greater number of audiences. Their Instagram account has enabled them to provide real-time updates and respond to customers' inquiries and complaints promptly. The success Instagram has brought to the hotel is that it helped showcase the hotel's aesthetics, designs, and amenities to the world and inform about events and promotions.

The researcher was prompted to know what category of guests use social media platforms the most as the hotel is prominent in hosting both international and local guests. Answering this, the general manager affirmed that the hotel has a good number of both local and international guests daily and that both categories of guests frequent the hotel's social media platforms. However, they receive more data from international guests through feedback and comments. This could be common because most foreign guests get in contact with the hotel online unlike local guests who could come as walk-in guests.

Considering the aim of the thesis, the researcher was also eager to know the kind of content the hotel shares on its social media handle. The manager´s response was quite impressive as the respondent mentioned that they shared customers' feedback, promotions, room prices, room availability, and pictures of general areas like conference halls. The feedback and promotions certainly attract more customers to the hotel.

The next question was to know how often the hotel runs social media campaigns or contests to engage with customers. Social media campaigns are a vital part of the hotel's marketing strategy, the hotel advertises its room types as well as offers discounts on rooms for certain categories of guests. "Customers get in contact with the hotel through their social media platforms, said the general manager. Such campaigns, however, are mostly carried out in the low season.

In the following question the interviewee was asked about the hotel's responses to customers' inquiries or feedback from their customers on social media platforms. The manager explained that Scandic

Hotels have a third-party company called "Somewelho" which handles all their feedback and reviews from their customers. However, feedback and comments are always highly regarded by the hotel`s management, thus the contracted company responds to customers' inquiries through email contact, phone and sometimes directing them to the hotel's website.

Furthermore, the general manager was asked if there are any upcoming changes or strategies related to social media customer engagement that the hotel is planning to establish. At first, there was hesitation to answer this question, but then the respondent was explicit with her answer and affirmed that the hotel will be organizing interactive campaigns that will comprise contests, polls, and live question, and answers sessions to make the social media platforms more dynamic. The respondent also went further to talk about content diversification to grant a wider comprehensive view of their property and services by showcasing the behind-the-scenes and highlighting staff members to create a personal bond with their guests.

The researcher proceeded with the next question which was to know if the hotel is considering adding other social media platforms. To the respondent´s knowledge, there have been no plans yet to include other social media platforms. The marketing department had not thought about it until the question was asked. The respondent said maybe it would be an option in the future.

The previous question prompted the interviewer to ask if there have been some challenges the hotel has faced in terms of marketing. The manager mentioned that during the outbreak of the Covid19, there was a decline in the number of guests due to travel restrictions. The respondent went further to explain that even the promotional prices implemented by the hotel did not have much effect on the company's growth. It was also said that with the establishment of new hotels besides the Scandic Grand Central Helsinki hotel, monitoring their competitors and adjusting to more efficient marketing respectively was quite challenging.

It got to the last part of the interview where the interviewer asked the general manager if there was other information that something could be added about the hotel's use of social media for customer engagement. She mentioned that the hotel is owned by Scandic which is a company that manages the hotel, and the management always works on innovative ideas and strategies for the hotel's growth so artificial intelligence and social media are at the top of their list. The hotel's use of social media is not only limited to its customers. It organizes activities that create great interaction with the hotel staff. It showcases some of the extraordinary performances that the staff offer to satisfy their guests.

5.2 Improved social media marketing plan for Scandic Grand Central Helsinki Hotel

Social media nowadays has become a very predominant part of our daily lives. Most internet users in one way or the other make use of social media. Companies now see social media as a vital medium to reach a wide range of both customers and potential customers, most especially companies that deal with sales of products and services such as in the case of Scandic Grand Central Hotel. The hotel gives its customers updates on their latest developments and services. Below are some updated suggestions for Scandic Grand Central Helsinki to competition race in the market.

Since the hotel manager mentioned plans to implement Artificial intelligence tools for their marketing, this research proposed the use of Blue Sky. This is a marketing tool that enables companies to improve their marketing strategies. With this App, Scandic Grand Central Hotel Helsinki will be able to connect with its target audience and create engaging content and promotions. It will be able to get customer reviews and feedback about their experiences at the hotel.

In addition to Blue Sky, the hotel can also make use of apps like TikTok. This app is progressively gaining massive users across the world. From the interview session with the hotel's manager, it was understood that the most used social media platform for the hotel is Facebook, however, being a Facebook user alone does not guarantee that their services would reach most potential customers. The short, artistic videos that makeup TikTok's format are a perfect fit for the hospitality industry's demand for visually appealing content. With the use of TikTok, Scandic can create captivating films that showcase the hotel's distinctive architecture, opulent lodgings, and lively neighborhood which will increase the brand's visibility and awareness. The hotel can improve the discoverability of its content among TikTok's diverse user demographic by integrating popular hashtags and music. They can equally launch challenges on this app like urging viewers and customers to share their experiences while they were lodging in Scandic. For example, Scandic Grand Central could invite viewers and previous visitors to submit user-generated videos narrating their special hotel experiences. The hotel might think about providing eye-catching rewards for the most imaginative or well-liked submissions to encourage participation.

Introducing a branded challenge could encourage a surge of participation from users, maybe with a specific hashtag like #ScandicGrandCentralHelsinkiMemories. In addition to promoting a feeling of camaraderie among users, this is also an effective way to produce user-generated content by offering

real testimonies and firsthand accounts. Scandic Grand Central Helsinki can reach a wide and varied global audience by naturally increasing the visibility of its brand by using TikTok's trend-driven culture. By strategically and artistically utilizing TikTok, the hotel can reinforce its brand identity and draw in a fresh group of prospective customers by positioning itself as a trendsetter in the hospitality sector.

Also, advertising is a very important part of business. As a proposal, the hotel can engage in several different forms of advertisements. Some of such advertisements could include programmatic advertising. In this form of advertisement, companies purchase digital ads in the application of real-time data analysis.

They may also engage in paid search advertising, which is a system of marketing whereby companies that want to advertise their products or services pay search engines to place their adverts in the (SERP). This type of advertisement works in such a way that when a user enters a search term in Google or other similar sites the most relevant result that appears carries an advert by the side. Other types of advertising that the hotel could make use of may be display advertising, this form of advertisement can be in video, or audio and they typically appear in the form of banner ads. Video ads are rampant and most effective as they are usually seen popping up when a user plays a video on any of the social media platforms be it YouTube, or Facebook. Such ads appear either from the beginning of the video or somewhere in between. There is high anticipation for video ads that appear on mobile phones.

As a proposal, the hotel should get digital ads, paid search, and video advertising which pops up for users who search on these platforms. This way, the hotel's advertisement video may pop up and interrupt people's use of the platform. Facebook and similar social media platforms permit paid adverts to their users. This way, it will be possible to get attention from social media users and this may subsequently increase the hotel's visibility to the public.

6 CONCLUSION

This research was motivated by how the rapid growth of social media marketing has helped many companies to massively increase their brand visibility hence improving their marketing strategies at minimal cost. This encouraged companies to get involved in social media platforms. Customer engagement on social media has a variety of advantages that are significant in building brand success and promoting strong and lasting relationships with customers. One of these advantages is based on the ability of the company to maintain direct and interactive relationships with its customers. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok allow real-time interactions and facilitate quick responses to inquiries and comments. These platforms act as effective tools that permit companies to showcase their products, share updates, and create relevant content. With the massive user base that Facebook has, it enables many companies to reach out to a large audience and foster the visibility of their brand. It allows companies to actively interact with customers through messages and comments on posts. Also, businesses can direct their advertisement to a specific target thanks to its advertising tool. Sites like TikTok, allow companies' content and brand names to easily go viral. With authentic and creative content on TikTok, it is easy to showcase a brand's name and personality and make it go viral. With influential partnerships, Instagram permits businesses to pull influencers' followers and obtain visibility to a great number of audiences. The speedy nature of Twitter enables real-time engagement with customers. Each of these platforms has marketing advantages.

Scandic Grand Central Helsinki Hotel makes use of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram in their weekly marketing activities. This research proves that customer engagement on social media has significant benefits to the hotel in so many aspects. The impact of Facebook for instance in building the hotel's brand awareness through content creation such as, but not limited to using customers' posts about the hotel, customer reviews on Facebook, insight into the hotel's room categories, promotions, and campaigns. Also, through this platform, the hotel can target both a specific demographic audience and reach a larger audience. Instagram on its part and the role it plays in providing real-time updates, and quick responses to both customers' inquiries and complaints cannot be underestimated. With the use of Instagram, Scandic Grand Central Helsinki Hotel achieved outstanding record-label success which not only showcases the hotel's aesthetics, designs, and amenities but exposes the hotel to the world and a greater audience. In summary, the exposure of the hotel to the world through these platforms has enabled them to gain even more guests both local and international.

Considering the fact that the hotel has benefited from using both Facebook and Instagram handles to effectively engage with customers, they could benefit even more by including TikTok as an additional social media handle. As mentioned above, TikTok provides a unique and effective means to engage with younger audiences. Creating authentic and fun content of stunning rooms, presentation of food at the restaurant, showcasing historical parts of the hotel, and other exciting activities create a connection with their audience. Based on personal experience, TikTok can make simple content reach millions of audiences increasing Scandic Grand Central Helsinki brand awareness. Also, by using popular TikTok trends and challenges, they can attract more audiences and increase the number of incoming guests to a greater extent than it was before. The adoption of a new artificial intelligence tool like the Blue-Sky app could also be highly efficient for the hotel. Customers can see Promotions displayed by the hotel and give feedback through this app. It enables the company to target the right audience.

Aside from the above social media suggestions, the Scandic Grand Central Hotel Helsinki could have a competitive edge in the market. In effect, the 4Ps are vital in business governance as they help companies to segment their operations. The hospitality business is quite competitive, price could be a vital tool to emerge top from competitors. Most companies study the prices set in place by their competitors and use this observation to regulate theirs. The hotel makes use of the price model to attract customers and keep them close. The price model, however, can be devastating to the company's returns if it is set too low and does not meet the expenditures. A company identifies first the line of operation that it wishes to embark on. In this case, the hospitality industry is a service provider, and this serves as their product. The research carried out about the Scandic Grand Central Hotel and the interview session with the general manager, shows that the hotel renders high-standard hospitality to its guests, and they have availability for guests with different income levels. This is understood as the hotel has different room types equipped with facilities that match the room standard, a fancy restaurant with delicious meals, a well-equipped gym, and a sauna. The location of the hotel is pivotal to its success as it is in the heart of the city of Helsinki with different mediums of accessibility. In establishing a business in the hospitality industry, the place of operation matters. The hotel is just next to the Helsinki Central railway station which has a direct link to the Helsinki-Vantaa airport. Customers from abroad do not have to bother much about transportation to the hotel. Also, several bus and tram connections bring customers right to the hotel's entrance. The hotel runs certain promotions, especially during down-business periods which attract customers. These promotions could be in the form of gift cards, regular-customer discounts, and gym memberships. these promotions preserve customer loyalty.

Business operators need to know their customers and segment the market in which they operate. This helps them to channel their goods and services to the right customers. The hotel, however, understands the need to meet the satisfaction of its customers. In this regard, the hotel can create memorable experiences for their guests by providing offers or packages that target different categories of customers such as family packages, couples, or business travelers, and provide them with specific amenities that fit their desired needs, such packages could comprise of discounts on the room class or the number of rooms booked.

To sum up, this thesis explored how social media is changing and how that has a significant impact on business strategies, with a particular emphasis on customer engagement. Technology's all-pervasive influence has not only made online activities and seamless communication possible, but it has also made social media an exploring platform for a variety of uses, from research and shopping to entertainment. This study highlighted the importance of authenticity, responsiveness, and strategic content creation in fostering meaningful connections with customers through an examination of the hotel's social media practices. The hotel's initiatives, such as interactive campaigns, promotions, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and personalized interactions, demonstrate a customer-centric approach that goes beyond traditional marketing strategies.

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Interview Questions

Prepared questions

1. What is your name and position at the hotel?

2. How many employees work for the hotel?

3. What is the total number of rooms in your hotel?

4. Does the hotel make use of social media in its operations, if yes which ones?

5. How often does the hotel use this social media platform (daily/ monthly)?

6. How long has your hotel been using social media for customer engagement?

7. How successful has the social media platform(s) been to the hotel?

8. Does the hotel make use of paid search advertisements? If yes, which ones?

9. What category of guests mostly use the hotel´s social media platform (Local/ international/ both)?

10. What type of contents do you primarily share on your social media platforms (promotions, feedback, hotel room prices)?

11. How do you measure the effectiveness of your social media engagement efforts? (comments, share, likes and website traffic)?

12. How often does the hotel run social media campaigns or contests to engage with customers?

13. How do you respond to customer enquiries or feedback on social media platforms?

14. Are there any upcoming changes or strategies related to social media customer engagement that your hotel is planning?

15. Are there any plans of using other social media platforms in the future?

16. Is there anything you would like to add about your hotel´s use of social media for customer engagement?

17. What are your expectations regarding my research?