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Increasing awareness and exploring customer experience of the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event among trail-running participants

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Abstract

Trail and trail ultra running are a fast-growing sport trend that has experienced huge growth globally in past decades. In Finland, most trail running events are considered small-scale. Arranging small-scale sports events may provide multiple benefits for host locations as increased business opportunities, increased awareness, and increased destination image, and help destinations attract tourism during the low seasons. Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail, a small event organizer that annually organizes multi-sport endurance events for trail runners, mountain bikers, and road bikers in the Kaldoaivi wilderness area in Northern Lapland has commissioned the research. The purpose of the project was to explore the customer experience and examine how the awareness of the event could be improved particularly among the trail running community. The research aimed to detect whether customer experience of Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail participants could be enhanced even further, and whether any tactics or strategies could be implemented by the organization to increase the customer experience and the marketing efforts to maximize customer satisfaction and event awareness. The theoretical framework guided the research process and acted as a foundation.

The research utilized a mixed-method, sequential design approach. As a quantitative method, an online survey was utilized. The survey was created with Webpropol software, the link was shared on social media platforms of the event organization to prior participants of the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event. The data was analyzed and visualized with Microsoft Excel software. As a qualitative method, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with five prior participants of the event via the Microsoft Teams platform. The results were analyzed with thematic analysis. With the findings of both research methods, and the insights acquired from the theoretical framework, development proposals for the commissioner were created. The proposals for development focus on customer experience and added value recommendations, segmenting, targeting, and positioning recommendations, and marketing tactics recommendations. The key implications of the proposals focus on acknowledging the customer needs, effectively addressing them in event design, marketing strategies and tactics, and utilizing targeted content across applicable marketing channels to attract the desired customer segments.

The research provides comprehension of the sports of trail running and ultra trail running, customer experiences, and marketing of small-scale sports events from a customer-centric point of view.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Trail running, ultra running, customer experience, sports tourism, small-scale sports events, sports event marketing

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1   Introduction

Sports tourism is one of the largest growing tourism segments globally. Sports tourism can be divided into segments event tourism, active tourism, and nostalgia tourism. Furthermore, sports tourism can also be segmented into active tourists as sports participants or passive tourists as sports spectators. (World Tourism Organization, n.d; Gibson, 2003, 207; Gammon & Robinson, 2003, 23.) Different sports tourism segments can foster host locations with business opportunities and economic advantages and help them differentiate themselves as a tourism destinations. Sports tourism sector offers business opportunities for numerous kinds of sports-related businesses and different-sized sports event organizers among others. (Richie & Adair 2004, 159; Hernstein & Berger, 2013, 43.) According to the World Tourism Organization (2019, 6-10), sports tourism offers various sustainable development-related benefits. These include not only the physical and mental benefits sports the tourists receive, but also the opportunities the locals receive from being able to participate in active, health-promoting sports related activities.

One of the fastest-growing sports trends is trail running. Trail running is a versatile sport that can be practiced by individuals in all kinds of natural terrains either solo, with a group of friends, or as a part of a running team, either as a leisure activity, as an amateur or elite sports event participant. (Andersen, 2022.) Trail running events are becoming more popular worldwide as well as in Finland. The growth of trail running sports has made trail-running organizations all around Finland differentiate themselves from competitors by offering distinctive running event concepts in unique event locations. There are trail running events that offer different lengths of races starting from less 10-kilometer short races up to ultra distances that may be hundreds of kilometers long and can last for several days. Organizing trail running events can offer many benefits to host locations, as it can boost the destination image, create more business opportunities, and offer solutions for tourism seasonality especially for typically considered low seasons. (Trailrunning Finland, n.d.; Juoksija, n.d; Sobry & Cernaiany, 2022, 180.) Organizing small-scale-scale sports events such as trail running events typically has certain advantages as opposed to organizing bigger events, such as less needed funding, less need for new infrastructure, and easier manageability (Ritchie & Adair, 2004, 156).

For organizations who are hosting trail running events, several areas of research should be investigated to be able to best offer what the customers and potential customers want and need. It is

important to know what the motives for sports participants are to participate in these kinds of events, recognize the target groups, and know how the target groups could be expanded to gain a wider variety of participants by altering event offerings. It is also important to acknowledge how the customers experience their events and how their experiences could be improved which could create more returning customers, recommendations in the form of positive word of mouth, bigger participatory numbers, and ultimately larger market share, therefore these topics are under examination within the scope of this research. (Waśkowski, 2016, 9; Lemon & Verhoefen, 2016, 69; Kaplanidou et al. 2012, 245-246.)

1.1 Background of the research

The thesis project was commissioned by Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail. The organization's focus is organizing ''Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail -The World's Most northern ultra distance event'', a multisport ultra-endurance event held in Northern Lapland, in the Kaldoaivi Wilderness area. The event started as a pilot mountain biking experiment in the wilderness area in 2017, opened to the public in 2018, and has ever since increased its offerings to different lengths of mountain biking, trail running, and road cycling distances (Table 1.) The commissioner has hopes that in the future the event will be in leading positions in Northern Lapland's sport and exercise events scene. The main values that are driving the event organization are respecting the unique nature, offering memorable nature experiences as well as well and creating a well-functioning and safe event for everyone. (Kurki, 2023.)

2023	Mountain biking, Trail running & Road cycling	▪ 18/57/87/142km double distance trail run ▪ 85/130/215 double distance MTB 260 km road cycling	▪ 146 trail runners ▪ 163 mountain bikers ▪ 22 road cyclists
2022	Mountain biking, Trail running & Road cycling	▪ 57 km trail run ▪ 85/130/215 km double distance MTB ▪ 260km Road cycling	▪ 52 trail runners ▪ 118 mountain bikers ▪ 16 road cyclists
2021	Mountain biking, Trail running & Road cycling	▪ 57 km Trail run ▪ 85/130/ 215km Double distance MTB ▪ 260km Road cycling	▪ 71 trail runners ▪ 158 mountain bikers ▪ 31 road bikers
2019	Mountain biking and trail running	▪ 130 km trail run ▪ 130km MTB	▪ 139 mountain bikers ▪ 8 trail runners
2018	Mountain biking and trail running	▪ 130 km trail run ▪ 130 km MTB	▪ 113 mountain bikers ▪ 32 trail runners
2017	Mountain biking	▪ 130 km Pilot experience	▪ Five mountain bikers

Table 1. The participatory numbers (Utsjoen kylälehti Giisa, 2023; My race results 2023; My race results 2022; My race results 2021; My race results 2018; Jokela 2018; Lahtinen 2018)

The event takes place in the Kaldoaivi wilderness area, which is the largest of 12 wilderness areas of Finland, located in the Municipalities of Utsjoki and Inari areas in the Northern Lapland region (Figure 1). The wilderness area on the Finnish side consists of 295 000 hectares and the area continues roadless to Norway, where another 100 000 hectares of Wilderness area are present. (Tynys & Stolt, 2004, 125). The wilderness area is suitable for numerous outdoor recreational activities such as day trekking, multiple days long hiking trips, mountain biking, trail running, skiing in the winter, birdwatching, river fishing, and hunting among many others. (National Parks, n.d.; Metsähallituksen Luontopalveluiden virallinen verkkosivu, n.d.)

Figure 1. Kaldoaivi Wilderness area on the map (Metsähallituksen luontopalveluiden virallinen kotisivu, n.d.)

Kaldoaivi Wilderness area is a remarkable natural attraction for many reasons. The landscapes consist of many water areas such as ponds, rivers, lakes, and streams. The area also consists of 14 mountains of which the highest is 450m tall Alla Gálddoaivi, whose 383 m tall sub-peak Kaldoaivi has given the wilderness area its name. The wilderness area has two separate fell areas: Guor-boaivi-Gálddoaivi Fells appear in the middle of the wilderness area and southern fells near river Tenojoki. The wilderness area landscapes are including majestic river valleys that are deep and steep alongside with gently sloping fells. The wilderness area is partially typical treeless highland with some downy birches but has certain birch forests in the south and pine forests further in the north. The area has many birds and mammals living in the area, such as owls, foxes, and weasels, the area is also a typical reindeer herding area, often reindeer can be seen in the area (Kuznetsov, n.d.; National Parks, n.d.)

1.2   Research problem, objectives, and questions

Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail has established a notable reputation among the mountain biking and road cycling community. However, the commissioner aspires to attract more trail-running participants and enhance awareness also among the trail-running community. The research problem hence is described *''KaldoAivi Ultra Trail wishes to attract more participants and establish a well-known trail running event image among the trail running community''*. The research problem serves as a

starting point for the research which aims to explore trail running motives, event design, customer experiences, and marketing tactics that the commissioners could utilize in their strategies.

The purpose of the project is twofold: To find ways in which event awareness could be increased among the trail-running community, and to examine whether any aspects of customer experience could be improved even further, as these factors could contribute to larger trail-running participatory numbers in the coming events. Research objectives for the research hence are to gain insight into how the organization can receive primarily more national but also international trail running participants in the event, enhance the awareness, maximize customer experience, and cultivate loyalty for returning customers. To address the research problem, the main research question has been formulated as:

"*How can the organization effectively market its ultra trail event to attract primarily more national but also international participants among trail runners?*"

The main research question has been broken down into smaller sub-questions to explore the research scope with a more structured and explorative approach in order to meet research objectives. The research sub-questions are the following:

1. *What are the most important motives for people participating in the trail running and ultra trail running events?*
2. *Which factors affect the customer experience the most?*
3. *What kind of additional services could be added to enhance the customer experience?*
4. *What kind of marketing tactics should be used to increase the awareness of the event?*
5. *What kind of marketing strategies should be used to improve the customer experience?*

2 Sport tourism

2.1 Defining sport tourism

Defining sport tourism can be problematic, as it is a combination of two separate terms that are multifaceted on their own. Neither sport nor tourism has simple definitions, and both can be debated what they consist of. Considering the complexity of the terms, both definitions should be

explored before trying to conceptualize the term sport tourism (Weed & Bull, 2004, 41). Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) describes sport as

> '' *A game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules, for enjoyment and/or as a job''.*

Edwards (1973, 3) suggests that the word sport is drawn from the word *''disport''*, meaning that sport should be a method for one to enjoy oneself and to escape from the challenges and obligations of the day through physical activity. Disport may still be one motivator for many people to participate in sports, however, in present times engaging in sports offers much more complex reasons for people to participate either as participators or spectators of a sporting activity who are seeking to satisfy their physical or emotional needs (Hudson et al. 2002, 2). Iso-Ahola (1982, 252) suggests that all leisure activities, including sports tourism, have in common two motivational components which are related to pursuit and escapism. Through any leisure activity, including tourism and sports tourism activity, a person is most likely to pursue an intrinsic reward such as mastery or competence feelings or escape from regarding a matter for example, one's daily routines or personal hardships. However, most often both motivational factors pursuit and escape occur simultaneously as the person may at the same time seek to accomplish rewards in addition to seeking a way to avoid a matter. Consequently, simply escaping daily routines, such as taking a vacation is not sufficient if a person does not find a sense of accomplishment through their vacation's activities.

Tourism is a phenomenon that can be social, cultural, or economical which involves a person's traveling to a location or country that is outside of one's typical environment either for personal, business, or professional reasons. Tourism often involves activities that create some tourism expenditure. (United Nations, 2010). Having explored a few definitions and issues of sport and tourism it is more straightforward to inspect the concept of sports tourism. Hudson (2002, 28-49) suggests that at the length of history from the ancient Greek, Persian empire, and Roman empires to modern days sport has been an immense motivator for people to participate in tourism and traveling. Countless people have always been interested in traveling to participate or spectate in sports events to satisfy different kinds of physical, emotional, social, cultural, or intellectual needs. Gibson et al. (1998, 49) define sport tourism as

> *''Leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities, or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities''.*

Sport tourism is often categorized into segments of sport event tourism, active sport tourism, and nostalgia sport tourism. Sports event tourism relates to a person traveling to a location to enjoy spectating a sport event, which often are large sports events such as the Olympic Games, Super Bowl, or Formula 1. However, smaller sports events or amateur sports events that involve spectators arriving at a location to view a sports event are also included in the sports event tourism category. Active sport tourism involves a person traveling to a location to participate in a sporting event either as a person who wants to compete in an event or as a person who is seeking to experience sport as a form of leisure. Furthermore, nostalgia sport tourism involves a person traveling to a location as one is seeking to experience a location that is related to a sport such as museums, venues, or sport-related hall of fames. (Gibson, 2003, 207; Ross, 2001, 3.)

Moreover, there are numerous other ways to differentiate sport tourism into categories. In Gammon & Robinson's (2003,23) definition sport tourism has been categorized into two categories of active or passive sport tourism. Active or passive sports tourism is related to whether a person alone or with a group is traveling to a location outside one's typical environment to be involved with competitive or recreational sports activity either as an active participant or as a passive spectator. Additionally, Gammon & Robinson,s (2003, 23) suggest that sports tourism can categorized into segments of hard and soft sports tourism. Hard sport tourism definition consists of those who participate either as spectators or participants in competitive sports events as the main motivation to travel. On the contrary, soft sport tourism definition consists of those individuals who take the journey to participate in sports predominantly for leisure or recreational purposes and the emphasis is to travel with a sport element included.

2.2   The benefits of sport tourism for host locations

World Tourism Organization (2019, 6-10) proposes that numerous advantages lay in sports tourism that can also be beneficial from a sustainability development perspective for locals as well tourists. Sports tourism can promote the well-being of locals who gain an opportunity to live in an area where they may practice sports that promote health and well-being. In addition, the tourists

receive opportunities to participate in sports related activities and can gain both mental and physical benefits from their experiences. Furthermore, sports tourism can offer locals and tourists opportunities to interact with each other which may benefit locals feeling pride in their location and provide the tourists with a more in-depth experience of their travel. Moreover, the strength of sport tourism is that there is potential in sport tourism in almost every location from large to small events, to even small activities.

Higham (2004, 223-234) suggests that sports tourism can have multidimensional benefits to the economy of a host location. Some of the benefits may include the return on investment to the government which has financed sports facilities and constructions. Additionally, sports teams, media, spectators, and often other parties who are participating in sports tourism-related travel generate various amounts of expenditures to local economies. However, due to the subject of interest of this research, the focus is primarily on small-scale scale sports events and the effects these can have on the host locations. Kaplanidou et al. (2012, 237) propose that especially reoccurring sports events may provide positive benefits for the host location in terms of sustainable tourism development as the outcomes may be increased destination loyalty and a greater sense of attachment to the location. However, event organizers should acknowledge which destination and event attributes are positively linked to the destination perception to achieve the highest benefits in organizing reoccurring sports events.

There has been a limited amount of research on how small-scale sporting events and competitions affect tourism, nor the potential that they carry, as most research focuses on large-scale events (Ritchie and Adair (2004, 158). Girginov et al. (2022, 102) suggest that all running events have some tangible and intangible effects regardless of their size. Tangible benefits are factors such as the creation of new job opportunities, improved infrastructure, or new buildings whereas intangible benefits include matters such as strengthening local's sense of community and pride and improved destination image; however, it is pertinent to note that these impacts can happen either planned or occur unintentionally.   Richie and Adair (2004, 159) propose that small-scale sports events have similar economic and destination marketing benefits to the host locations as opposed to larger ones but in smaller proportions. Small-scale sports events offer plenty of potential for tourism development although the probability of success can be dependent on how the motivations and behaviors of the sports tourists are understood by the industry professionals who are

seeking to leverage small-scale sports events. According to Higham (1999), hosting a small-scale sporting event can carry numerous benefits compared to large ones. Some of the benefits are that already existing infrastructure can be used as opposed to building new ones, there are smaller investment requirements, the events can help locations attract tourism in seasons that are typically considered low, on addition that small-scale events are easier to manage. (Ritchie & Adair, 2004, 156.)   Wafi et al. (2018, 270) argue that to maximize the benefits of small-scale sports tourism to a host area, it is beneficial to connect small-scale sports events to areas' other tourism products which could provide additional value to customers but also bring more economic benefits to the area. Wagner et al. (2017, 69) propose that many cities and municipalities have realized the prospective socio-economic benefits of organizing running events, and have considered them in their marketing strategies, while either organizing running events themselves or partnering with running organizations who would bring these events to their location. Mittal et al. (2013, 152) consider that sports organizations would benefit from cooperation with tourism agencies, who could provide help with raising awareness of the sports events, while the sports events would equally be beneficial for the host destination's awareness, image, and activity offerings. Hernstein & Berger, (2013, 43) suggest that hosting small-scale sports events may provide benefits for cities and locations as a form of destination branding, as they can help the locations differentiate themselves from other regions, they may also provide benefits to host location's citizens' pride and help the host location to celebrate and educate tourists about the customs and culture of the local community.

Trail running events are often small-scale sports events, hence the economic impacts are often minor to the host location. Regardless, they provide opportunities to host locations that should be explored. Trail running events can provide many opportunities, especially for areas that are highland geographically. Trail running opportunities should be examined especially in the areas that typically experience low season for instance in locations that usually attract winter sport tourism. (Sobry & Cernaiany, 2022, 180.) Myburgh & Kruger (2021, 16) add to the topic that hosting trail running events can have additional benefits to host locations as they help bring awareness to the area, which might offer opportunities for businesses as the location might gain side opportunities for tourism due to the increased exposure, for new segments such as hiking tourism. McKay et al. (2018, 949) suggest that trail runners are often attracted to events that occur in destinations located in unique and beautiful natural settings, furthermore, these types of destinations can draw both national and international trail-running tourists, also in areas that typically do not yet receive

a great deal of tourism attention. Small towns that are situated in naturally beautiful landscapes should consider creating, promoting, and holding reoccurring sport events such as trail running events as these could have substantial long-standing advantages for the area's residents' lives.

3   Trail running

3.1   Trail running as a sport, with a niche segment of trail ultra running

International Trail Running Association, ITRA (n.d.a). defines trail running races to be pedestrian running races that are open to everyone, and that occur in a natural outdoor setting with no more than 20% of paved roads. The distances of the trail running courses can be anything from a couple of kilometers to ultradistances up to 100 km and beyond. Trail running is predominantly one of the oldest ways to run as it is practiced in a natural setting and does not require specific man-made infrastructure. Trail running is a multi-faceted sport, one can experience running alone, in a group, as a method of personal leisure, or as a participant in sports events. (Trailrunning Finland, n.d.) According to the World Athletics (n.d.), typical trail running terrains include gravel, forests, narrow footpaths, and snowy trails in environments that can include mountains, deserts, and forests. There are no limits regarding length or elevation changes in trail running races, but the courses need to be marked properly and logically. Trail running does not require any specified equipment, yet using hiking poles is often approved and even recommended in certain terrains. Competitions typically require a level of self-sufficiency from runners regarding carrying enough extra energy, beverages, and the most important gear, however, during the course, there are often some aid stations to provide extra fluid and energy. According to Bedkowski (n.d.) compared to road trail running is more diverse as a sport. One of the benefits and attractions of the sport is to bring the trail runner close to nature. Demanding terrains and obstacles require the runner both physical condition and skills to stay coordinated and concentrated. Trail running requires a runner's whole body to perform and use a larger amount of muscle groups compared to road running.

The State of Trail Running 2022 report was conducted in collaboration with the World Athletics analyzing data from 1984 until 2022 concerning the development within the sport. The report shows race results from 127 countries covering close to 117, 000 races making it the most pervasive trail running report the sport industry has ever generated. The report shows that trail running has experienced a huge growth during the last decade as the number of participants has increased

by 231%, whereas compared to the past 20 years the growth has been 2394%, showing that the sport keeps steadily growing its popularity. Compared to all running event finishers, trail runners' percentage is only 15.7% making trail running participation still much less popular compared to regular running event participation. The report data also shows notable facts about the average age of trail runners to be 39.5 years, and the female-to-male ratio is 46% female compared to 54% male. (Andersen, 2022.) Neuvonen et al.'s (2022, 37) study of *Recreational use of nature* revealed that 17,6% of the Finnish population participated in trail or cross-country running in 2020 which shows that outdoor running has been exceedingly popular in Finland in recent years.

UltraRunning Magazine (2013) suggests that ultra running is long-distance running with a standard definition to be longer than a marathon of 42.195 km or 26.3 miles. However, the standard distance of ultra-running races starts from the distance of 50 kilometers, or 31.07 miles. There are several other standard distances for race lengths such as from 50 miles (80.46km) to 100 miles (160.96km). However, there are numerous other lengths of distances and formats such as races that are time-based instead of length, for instance, 24-hour or 48-hour races. Trail ultra running is a particularly challenging field of sport to participate in. Trail ultra running does not only require great overall fitness, but runners face several hardships during the races and while training for the races. Typical challenges may be related to weather conditions, changes in altitude, challenging topography, experienced pain and exhaustion, and muscular injuries. (Rochat et al., 2018, 2.)

Ultra running has drastically faced an increase in popularity globally in recent years. A study conducted in cooperation with the International Association of Ultra Runners (IAU), RunRepeat Magazine's Content Director Paul Rontoo, and Mathematical Analysis Ph.D. Vania Nikolova examined the trends and how the sport has evolved in the past 23 years globally from 1996 to 2019. During the research, data was analyzed from over 15.451 ultra-running events, covering 85% of all ultra-running events held worldwide, and more than 5 million results were examined, making it the most extensive study related to the ultra-running sport. The key findings of the study reveal that participation in ultra-running events is becoming progressively more popular. Data shows that there has been a 1676% growth in participant numbers in 23 years. The study reveals various interesting trends around this sport. For instance, it is becoming increasingly popular among women, as the gender distribution in ultra-marathon races rose from 14% in 1996 to 23% in 2019. Also, ultra runners are becoming more frequent participants in ultra-marathons than before as the

average amount of races a female ultra runner competes in a year has grown from 1.3 to 1.7 comparing 1996 to 2019. (Ronto, 2023.) Apollo et al. (2023, 3) researched gender differences in competitive adventure sports tourism, analyzing sports of ultra-running and mountain climbing and concluded that even though males still represent a larger number of participants rates in these types of adventure sports, it is an ongoing trend that females more often have better success rates at finishing the goal line or reaching the summit.

3.2   Trail and trail Ultra running scene in Finland.

Trail-running event concepts are relatively new, especially in Finland. The popularity of trail running has been also increasing in Finland, as there are approximately 200 trail running events in Finland varying from short 5 km distances to ultra distances. The greater number of the events in Finland are local events or small-scale events, and only the biggest trail-running events may attract several hundreds of participants. The number of people who participate in trail running as a sport can only be estimated. Thousands of people participate in trail running events annually, but if people run on trails for leisure or seldom experience trail running, the number of trail running participants can be estimated to be five digits. (Trailrunning Finland, n.d.; Juoksija, n.d.)

In recent years, ultra-running popularity has specifically increased in different trail-running settings in Finland. There is no official data on the current ultra-running enthusiasts in Finland, but it is estimated that there are a few thousand ultra-runners. The most remarkable ultra-running competitions in Finland are NUTS Karhunkierros, NUTS Ylläspallas, Vaarojen Marathon, and Suomi Juoksu. (Suomen Olympiakomitea n.d.; Ahotu, 2023; Maisematie Marathon, 2021.)

There is a gap in the existing study related to trail ultra running in Finland, albeit it is noticeable that the sport is increasing its popularity globally and in the Finnish market. The size of the most popular ultra-trail running events has been increasing as the demand is annually growing in addition to the most popular ultra-running events are sold out very quickly. According to Lahtinen (2023) Vaarojen Marathon, one of the oldest and the most popular trail running events is sold out during the same evening it is put up for sale. According to STTInfo's press release (2021), the event director of Nuts Karhunkierros Eero Lumme pointed out that ten years ago there was only a handful of runners participated in distances longer than a marathon at their NUTS Karhunkierros trail

running event, whereas in 2022 the number was 1,600 which shows a significant increase in the popularity of participation.

3.3 Understanding the motivation for trail running.

Ryan & Deci (2000, 54) suggest that being motivated refers ''*to one being moved to do something''*. An individual who feels the desire to act on a certain thing can be described as motivated, conversely, a person who lacks the desire to act can be characterized as an unmotivated person. Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed a well-recognized Self-determination theory of motivation. The theory focuses on the principle that human has three basic needs that need to be fulfilled to grow psychologically. These needs are autonomy, connection, and competence. Autonomy refers to one being able to control one's own life and actions, whereas connection pertains to people's need to feel a connection with others. Competence on the other hand refers to one feeling capable of learning the skills and abilities that one needs to achieve the goals that have been set. (Ryan & Deci. (2000, 57.) Their theory suggests that motivation can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. In the simplest terms, intrinsic motivation refers to one being motivated simply because of the enjoyment or pleasure of doing. Intrinsic motivation can be seen as something internal as there is no external reward that drives the motivation. Extrinsic motivation on the other hand refers to one being motivated because carrying out a task or doing something will lead to a desired outcome. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 55.) Intrinsically motivated people achieve their goals out of intrinsic desires to fulfill their natural psychological needs of competence and autonomy at the core of self-determined performance. Contrary, people's behaviors that are driven by external motivation require an instrument between, either positive such as a reward, or negative such as fear of punishment can have different levels of self-determination. (Ryan & Deci, 2020, 65.) Extrinsic motivation can be driven by external rewards or fear or punishment of not achieving what is expected (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 55).

Motivation for people to participate in sports is complex. Ryan et al. (1984, 231) propose that children for example may have very different reasons to play sports as opposed to professional athletes who receive large salaries for their performance. To better understand who the people participate in ultra-distance running and what motivates them, it is important to investigate what current research has found out about the participants of the sport. Waśkiewicz et al., (2018, 32) address that motivation has been extensively studied in sports psychology as comprehension of

what motivates an athlete can result in an athlete performing better during the training sessions as well as during the competitions. Knowing what motivates an athlete is beneficial not only for athletes but also for trainers and sports psychology professionals.

Gerasimuk et al., (2021, 6) propose that motivational factors among runners of different ages. Their research investigated whether the motivational factors of runners of different ages differ from each other while examining different segments of runners; recreational, marathon, and ultra-marathon, and the results present that for younger runners' significant motivational factors lay in competition, gaining recognition, and achieving one's personal goal. Compared to older runners the most important motivational factor was health orientation while motivation turned out to be the least important factor. Simpson et al.'s (2014, 179) qualitative study on the topic of how ultra-marathon runners experience ultra-marathon events pointed out a few principal themes that can be important also while considering the motivations that ultra-marathon runners might have. Five key topics themes were revealed: community, preparation & strategy, management, discovery, and personal achievement. From these major themes, the community was revealed to be the most significant factor, which suggests that people who participate in less popular sports such as ultra running feel connected with fellow sports participants with whom they often share advice and experiences, and with whom they expand their social circles. Furthermore, the personal achievement theme was also the captivating theme of motivation as it often reflects participant's one of the main motives of participation. The findings of the study furthermore presented that for many ultra runners, it was more important to feel satisfaction to be in the race and win oneself as opposed to others. (Simpson et al., 2014, 182.)

Even if women represent a minority in ultra distance participants it is important to recognize that there is a significant increase in the number of women participants. Krouse et al. (2011, 3) conducted a study on the theme of female ultra runners' motivation, goal orientation, coaching, and training habits. The research finding presents that for many women training for the ultra-marathon requires over 12 hours a week of training, the major motivators for female ultra runners were health and personal achievement, whereas social recognition for instance was a much less important driver of motivation.

Petridis & Pèrenyi (2015, 15) suggested that motivational factors for trail runners often are linked to mental relaxation, sociability, and enjoyment which are more linked to leisure and recreation as opposed to road runners who according to the study were more motivated by health and weight-related factors. Petridis & Pèrenyi's (2015, 16) study also suggests that trail runners are also more likely to be motivated by experiencing adventure and that trail runners seek feelings of competence, which is accomplished through systematic training and preparations. The research findings concerning the motives of trail runners are comparable to the research findings of Funk et al. (2011, 264). Their research examined the motives of mass participatory running events with 8k, half marathon, and full marathon running distances, and the main results indicated that MPSE participants are primarily motivated by challenging themselves with pleasurable experiences, while also gaining positive influences on their physical and mental health.

4   Customer experience and marketing

4.1   Customer experience in the core of running events.

All businesses require an understanding of customer experience and customer journey to be successful in the long term. Nowadays customers and businesses interact with each other in increasing numbers of different channels and media with countless touch points, which makes many businesses consider customer experiences in a new way. Many organizations pay extensive attention to all their business functions and use external partners in strategies to maximize the customer experience. (Lemon & Verhoefen, 2016, 69). Pine & Gilmore (1999, 12) suggest that businesses are ''experience stagers'' who cannot solely focus on offering services or products to customers. Still, they must acknowledge that what they offer results in experiences that are filled with feelings that are created together with each customer, hence every customer experience is unique. Customer experience is generated from everything that an organization or business does to ensure that the consumers' needs are met by managing their customer journeys. Customer experience's four main elements are brand, product, service, and price. Customer journey illustrates the experiences the customer has with an organization before, during, and after encountering the service or a product through multiple different touch points. (McKinsey and Company, 2022, 1-2). Mapping the customer journey is a framework that organizations can utilize to assess the different touch points the customer experiences while being in touch with the organizations. Within the framework, different touchpoints are considered through the eye of the customer. The framework helps gain

insights about pain points that the customer might experience and gives the organization insight into where improvements could be needed and additionally can improve the origination's internal collaborations. (Villani, 2019, 83-84.)

The competition among running events is growing rapidly, hence event organizers are facing increasing challenges to main customer retention (Baker et al. 2018, 47). Kallitsara et al. (2022, 276-277) suggest that there are three most important phases in the customer journey of running event participants that play a significant role in the customer's experience of the event. The main stages that organizations should pay attention to are before the event, during the event, and after the event. The main touchpoints before the event consist of information accessibility, ease of registration, event offerings, accommodations, and transportation options. Touchpoints during the event focus on the drinks and beverages during the event aid stations. After the event touch points are related to photos and results. Some of the noted touchpoints are customer-owned such as training and preparation for the event. It is important to acknowledge that touchpoints have different ownerships, some of which are by the organization, some of which by sponsors, and some of which are customer-owned which implies that organizations can only to some extent affect customers' experience of running events. Factors such as proper training and preparations are not commonly considered to be controlled by the running organization, however, they play a crucial part in participants' event experience. Hyun & Jordan (2019, 13) similarly agree that in participatory sports events for athletes, the event experience is not only affected by how well the event service providers perform but also by how well the athlete feels about one's performance at the event. From the sports management point of view, organizations need to recognize this aspect of event satisfaction and find ways to ensure sports participants will the best achieve the goals they have set for themselves, such as by helping participants to have enough knowledge about how demanding is the course design, how different aspects such as elevation changes, terrain, and the weather might affect the performance during the event, and what kind of finish times prior participants have experienced. Du et al. (2015, 699) propose that the perceived service quality of an event has more impact on overall event satisfaction for those individuals who did not achieve the performance goals than for those who achieved their personal performance goals. Hence, the organization's performance and service quality play a bigger impact on those who do not achieve their personal goals, which is an aspect that organizations should keep in mind and find strategies to overcome, such as through exploring ways how the atmosphere at the event could best help participants to achieve their goals such as trough offering pacemakers for those who seek to

accomplish the race at certain times, or by making sure the service elements, atmosphere and other aspects of the events are exceeding the customer expectations to compensate the possible dissatisfaction to individuals who do not accomplish their personal goals.

Du et al. (2020, 444) agree that running event experiences can be negatively impacted by participants' inability to finish the goal line, hence it could be beneficial for organizations to enhance the future running experience of running participants already before the race. Some strategies to increase the experience would include utilizing communication platforms such as social media to bring extra value to customers and provide them tools that could help them achieve better during the running event for instance by offering training-related resources. Furthermore, organizations need to communicate with their customers throughout the year and ask for feedback to match customer expectations of the event with an event design. Event organizations could also benefit from creating social interactions between sports participants as this can be a good way of improving customer experience and customer retention. Some of the suggestions for this could include providing training-related resources or having post-event activation events among the runners. Similarly, Koo et al. (2014, 135) suggest that as event satisfaction is highly impacted by a participant's ability to finish the goal line, therefore running event organizers should focus on providing various lengths of distances such as half-marathons or 5 km for event participants to choose from so that the event participants would best be able to choose a distance that is motivating, meanwhile still achievable to complete. Yamaguchi & Yoshida, (2022, 281) suggest that organizations that host running events should focus on improving participant engagement as this can increase the sense of commitment to an organization to improve customer satisfaction. Some strategies that organizations can adopt include offering smaller running events before the race and running courses designed for different target groups which may result in social ties among runners.

Waśkowski (2016) investigated the topic of the customer experience of marathon running participants in his work through the lenses of experience marketing, a construct also referred to by Pine and Gilmore (1998) as an experience economy. Waśkowski suggests that running organizations to thrive in the market they must come up with innovative ideas for how the customers' expectations are exceeded with surprises and amazements resulting in unforgettable experiences. Waśkowski considers that experience marketing can provide running organizations with multiple benefits for improving the running experience of participants. Experience marketing efforts should focus on

three stages of the event, before, during, and following the event. Before the event the aims of marketing should focus on creating anticipation among the possible participants, this could be done by marketing visualization the aspects such as the course, the medals, and the prior year's materials. During the event, it is essential that the organizations can fulfill the expectations the participants had before the event and possibly even exceed them related to any aspect that can be managed by the event organization such as atmosphere, the course, and the arrangements during the event. Finally, after the event, the organization's effort related to maximizing the experience should focus on creating positive remembrance among the participants such as offering them photos, videos, medals, and other factors that will result in a positive recollection of the event. (2016, 9.) Prior research conducted by León-Quismondo et al. (2023, 9) investigated the most important factors affecting amateur participants' experiences in Spanish running events and indicated that the most important factors affecting the event experiences were related to the ambiance in the event, safety, route design, easy access to collect runner's number tags and information during the race day.

4.2   Marketing of participatory sports events

Kotler et al. (2006, 7) define marketing as

> ''A social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they
> need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others.''

O'Reilly et al. suggest that marketing is highly related to three concepts: exchange, value, and relationship. Exchange is the process in which a seller exchanges a product or service with the price that a buyer is willing to pay, resulting in two satisfied parties. Value refers to the overall tangible and intangible benefits the customer receives from the product or service. Relationship, conversely, refers to the importance of having long-term relationships as opposed to one-time customers. On both a personal and organizational level, the priority in the business is building and maintaining relationships. (2013, 186.) Marketing is highly essential in today's exceedingly competitive business environment, and most often business success is correlated with it. Regardless, of how well a business' abilities to manage other business functions such as financial, operational, human resource, or administration if marketing knowledge and efforts are not sufficient the business is unlikely to find success in the long term. The core of marketing is related to how well a

business can identify the needs and wants of the customer and acknowledge the sufficient demand for their products or services while simultaneously remaining profitable. Marketing professionals' most important duty is understanding consumer wants and needs, furthermore, marketing strategies should inherently be based on these acknowledged needs and wants. (Kotler et al., 2009, 4; Shillbury et al.2014, 6.) According to Beech & Chadwick (2013, 5), sports marketing refers to:

> ''*The application of all marketing-related activities, structures, and thoughts to the phenomenon of sports.''*.

Sport marketing can be divided into two sub-categories marketing of the sport and marketing through the sport. Marketing of the sport considers communicating the offered marketing mix of products, services, or bundles of them to customers who may be buyers of sport-related, sports participants, or spectators. Marketing of the sport is directed directly to the consumer to keep the business running by attracting sufficient demand. Alternatively, marketing through the sport refers to other businesses such as sponsors using sports as a tool to communicate their promotions which are often non-sport related such as fashion or food and beverage related targeted to the consumers of the sports. (Shilbury et al. 2014, 16-17; Hoye et al. 2015, 247-248.) Sports marketing is highly versatile as it is related both to concepts of marketing of sports and marketing through the sport, but it should always be grounded on satisfying the needs of the consumer. Consumers can be sports spectators, individuals who use goods or services related to sport while practicing sport, individuals who buy sport-related merchandise or collectibles, or individuals using sport-related equipment. Sports marketing is often linked to promotional endeavors such as advertising, public relations, and sponsorships, however important part of sports marketing considers strategies related to product and service, pricing, and distribution decisions which are considered in the sports marketing mix. (Hoye et al. 2015, 247; Shank& Lyberger, 2022, 41.) Kaplanidou et al. (2012, 245-246) propose that marketers of sports events should focus on their marketing strategies to advocate activities in which word-of-mouth could be practiced even long after the event is gone. Alexandris, Hover & Ooms (2022) consider that marketing especially in the context of running events has three primary purposes:

1. Promotion of the event's objectives and visions
2. Obtaining participants and pertinent stakeholders

3. Conveying the event's positive experiences so that the audience can be inspired to attend future events. (Girginov et al., 2022, 65)

Yürük-Kayapınar (2020, 150) suggests that marketing of sports events differs from traditional marketing as traditional marketing aims for consumers to purchase an item and to be satisfied with the purchase, whereas in the context of sports event marketing the aim is to inspire customers to participation, initiating the participation in the event, furthermore, creating memorable experiences that will then lead to repeat behavior. In Figure 2 sports event marketing process is visualized, which can be applied to small-scale running event marketing.

Pre-marketing phase
- Assessing the needs and wants of the customer
- Planning the event design
- Examining wether the event has enough potential to motivate sufficient amount of participants

Situational analysis
- Creating a management strategy that enables to accomplish the mission and objectives of the event
- Outlining the work to be done for the event and assessing the resources needed
- Situational analysis such as a SWOT analysis is used to analyze the event's competitive position in the market

Market segmentation
- Market segmentation, targeting the audience and positioning the event
- Outlining event marketing objectives

Marketing mix
- Outlining marketing marketing mix/marketing strategy and choosing the preferred communication channels

Evaluatation
- Evaluation of event marketing effectiveness
- Acquiring marketing research findings
- Receiving participant feedback and measuring the satisfaction of participants.

Figure 2. Small-scale sports event marketing process, (Yürük-Kayapınar, 2020,152-153, adapted.)

4.3   Optimization of online marketing of a participatory sports event.

As covered in the previous chapter marketing is crucial for sports organizations to thrive in the market, and the foundation of marketing is in the acknowledgment of consumer needs and wants

and being able to satisfy them while remaining profitable in the business. Additionally, sports organizations need to keep up with trends affecting their business environments. One of the changes sports organizations and sports marketers need to acknowledge in today's environment and especially in the future is the growth of different segments such as the growth of female athletes, senior citizens, members of the LGBT community, and children. (Crabtree & Zhang, 2022, 7.) However, in this chapter, the focus will be on assessing what kind of marketing tactics are used in the context of sports marketing, especially focusing on the marketing of sports events in digital environments.

4.3.1 Digital marketing

Digital marketing concerns communications that are done through electronic devices, often it is associated with the use of the Internet, computer, or other mobile devices and social media as electronic platforms through which the messages are delivered, and communication is done. Social media, on the other hand, refers to any digital channel or way of communicating digitally that is based on communication between networked groups or individuals. (Smith & Stewart, 2015, 258). Digital marketing is extensively focused on engagement and dialogue between sports consumers and sports organizations, sports brands, or other sport-related parties (Seymour & Blikey 2020, 19). The objective of using social media marketing inherently is to create content that is shared among social media channels, to increase the coverage of the brand and reach consumers (Seymour & Blikey, 2010, 40). When considering the right marketing tactics through digital marketing the first step is knowing your target audience and setting goals about outcomes of marketing. Social media marketing is one of the most effective marketing methods in modern days and well-planned campaigns may provide great outcomes. The use of non-paid advertising, in other words, organic social media can provide great outcomes for instance through setting up content or creating prominent discussion through the presentation of content such as videos that the networked individuals like, comment on, and share. Another advantageous form of social media use could be cooperating with social media influencers or athletes to engage with organizations' content or invite them to sports events for participation. In addition, regarding the use of social media marketing, it's noteworthy that content ought to be constant enough to stay in people's minds but not excessive to irritate the audience. Finally, using e-mail marketing to remind old participants about upcoming events, can be an effective way to get participants to consider rejoining. Furthermore, after the event it can be beneficial to offer participants a memorable recall from the event,

such as through pictures and videos that may help to improve remembrance of the event. Additionally, it is necessary to learn from the experience, listen to the customers how they perceived to event, and ask for feedback on how the event could be improved. (Franco, 2023; Notermans, 2023.) Some of the professionals of event marketing have discussed a few very important techniques of social media marketing that can be highly beneficial for event marketing and used in sports event marketing context. Solaris (2018) suggests that successful event marketing relies heavily on potential marketing techniques:

1. Visual and video content as marketing tools, as many people today do not want to read long content, therefore making short and appealing visuals and videos is essential.

2. Fear of missing out, often called FOMO is an important tactic of campaigning. FOMO focuses on making content that creates a large amount of anticipation among the possible attendees which has a positive impact on their decision to participate.

3. Gamification refers to adding game-like features such as contests, or discounts to the promotion which increases the awareness and engagement of the audience to the event.

4. Being present all year around, as this is important for keeping the event in the memory of consumers, but also as this has an influence on algorithms on search engines and social media channels.

5. Quality over quantity for social media content, as better quality and more likes/re-tweets/shares receiving posts will appear to more people by the algorithm. (Skift Meetings, 2018.)

4.3.2 Visual storytelling

Crespo Dualde (2023, 36) considers that storytelling is a skill of communicating stories through a particular narrative, which can be highly valuable in delivering a message that is suitable to the purpose. Through storytelling methods individuals, and organizations among others can effectively communicate intended messages to targeted audiences in many settings, also in a sports context. Storytelling is one notable marketing technique that includes visualizing a sequence of events through a story. By observing a story, followers create an emotional connection with the story and its elements. Storytelling is a method often used by marketers when creating content linked to a brand. Storytelling, as a part of marketing strategy, may hold benefits way to create and improve engagement with customers and a brand, service, or product, which may positively impact buying behavior. (Bauer et al., 2016, 53; Mavilinda et al. 2023, 293.) Stadler (2023, 188) argue that

storytelling is an especially powerful tool for marketers to use when promoting their sports events, and the storytelling techniques can hold multiple benefits as it can help to raise awareness and attraction, strengthen the image of the sports brand and destination, increase the post-event engagement and increase the word-of-mouth, while storytelling, in this case, may be beneficial for both the event organizer and also the destination.

4.4 Process of segmentation, targeting, and positioning

Marketing segmentation is one of the most familiar terms in the marketing world, and some would say marketing segmentation is crucial for results in sports businesses, also for sports organizations that organize running events. Marketing segmentation refers to dividing one large heterogeneous market into sub-groups, which are homogenous in certain features. These sub-groups are referred to as market segments, each segment can be seen to share similar needs, wants, and reasons for participation or as sports consumers. From a marketing professional's perspective, the purpose of sports market segmentation is to actuate or maintain different segments as sports consumers, with differentiated marketing strategies that are specially targeted to these market segments. (Shillbury et al.,2014, 80.) Segmentation can be executed in various ways. The most common ways to segment are based on demographics, psychographics, or behavior factors. Demographic segmentation is based on demographic factors such as age, gender, or region. Psychographic segmentation is based on psychological factors such as values, lifestyles, skills, or beliefs that lead to decision-making. Whereas behavior-based segmentation can be either based on usage such as, how frequent the buyer is, or benefit-based segmentation which refers to what benefits the segments receive from using the services or products of the provider organization. (Shillbury et at. 2014, 81.) In the context of running events, by segmenting runners into homogenous groups, event planners and marketers may better understand their target audience's demands, modify services to meet those needs, and arrange events to highlight their advantages over competitors. Thus, the segmentation does not only focus on generating a suitable promotional strategy but also supports creating a running event that answers the needs and wishes of its targeted audiences. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that there are constant changes within the running market and trends also affect the profiles of runners, hence it is important to remain alert to the changes and modify the event product and marketing strategy accordingly. (Girginov et al., 2022, 73.)

Getz's (2005) six customer segment questions are beneficial tools for creating an understanding of customer segments in sports events and small-scale sports events. The customer segment questions are: *Where* do the sport event spectators or participants come from; are they local, come from other parts of the nation? *Who* are the visitors from the demographic background such as age, gender, and economic status? *What* do they want from the sports event and what motivates them to attend? *What conditions* are required for their attendance, if conditions such as dates or prices change will they change their mind concerning attendance? How can we *reach* the audience, which channels are needed? Ultimately *How often* are the consumers expected to attend, are they one-time-only customers, or are they likely to return to an event occurring another time? (Yürük Kayapınar, 2020, 154.)

Following the process of segmentation of the customers, the next step is targeting. Targeting refers to analyzing each customer segment, and whether they are profitable enough for the organization to pursue them. Analyzing the segments for targeting is considered with certain questions, such as is the segment large enough to be profitable? Or whether the organization has the potential resources to reach and serve these target groups. Ultimately the next step in the process is positioning, which refers to how the target segment perceives the company, or its product compared to its competitors. With positioning it is aimed to create distinctive and favorable perception in the eyes of a customer which stands out from the competitors. (O'Reilly et al., 2013, 191-193.)

4.5   Marketing MIX

Traditional 4 P's marketing mix was originally proposed by McCarthy in the 1960s and consisted of four principles: product, price, promotion, and place (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 48.) Sports marketing mix can be seen as a sports marketing strategy. In the context of sports marketing the first strategic element is a product. *Product* usually refers to a tangible item or service, however, it can also be the idea pitched to investors or other decision-makers, or behavior known in social marketing that tries to change the way people behave or think about certain topics. Strategies related to products are factors such as branding, licensing, development of new products and services, removal of unsatisfactory ones, and finding new markets. The next strategic element is *price*, which marketers can modify rather easily based on their strategies but should always be based on a framework with the limits of how much customers are willing to pay and how low can the prices

go for the organization to maintain in the business. The third element in the marketing process is *promotion* which refers to strategies and tools for how marketers provide information about their products and services to their customers and prospective audiences, some of these components include for instance advertising, communication with consumers via sponsorships, public relations, personal selling, or promotion campaigns. The last element is *place*, also referred to as distribution refers to strategies for getting the services or products to the hands of consumers such as through online or brick-and-mortar stores. Also, for distribution strategies, it can be considered that can the customer get to the product or service such as if there is a transportation option for sports participants to attend an event. (Shank & Lyberger, 2022, 43; O'Reilly et al., 2013, 194-195.)

Recognizing the motivations of sports participants is an important aspect when it comes to marketing sports events, especially amateur sports events. From a sports marketing perspective, it is important to acknowledge what are the motives for individuals or groups to participate in sporting event activities, and these motivations should be considered when designing a sports event, to create participant engagement based on their motives. Organizations that recognize the motivations of the participants help them customize the communication with targeted segments, help design the event according to the needs of a customer, sustain the subcultures among the sport participants, and in the long run facilitate keeping the sport viable. (Kahle & Close, 2011, 183-184.) Regarding motivational aspects of sports participants' and how these could be used in marketing activities Aicher et al. (2015, 230.) examined the topic of whether local or sports tourists had differences in motivational aspects when it came to participating in a running event. No differences were found in the motivation, however practical implications showed that the main motivators related for both types of sports participants primarily were related to pleasure, appearance, and enthusiasm that the sporting event creates, hence the marketing activities aiming to promote the event should provide marketing content that emphasis on gratification, health, and wellbeing appearance, health benefits that comes from sports participation and exhilaration that these types of sports events bring to people's lives.

4.6 Psychological Continuum Model, PCM in the context of marketing of sports events

The psychological continuum model, PCM is a framework introduced by Funk & James (2021) that provides an understanding of the sports consumer's psychological connection with sport-related

matters and can be applied to different sports contexts such as sports events. The model can be applied to show the process of new target groups becoming enthusiasts of the sports event. The PCM model consists of four hierarchical stages of progress: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance. Starting from the awareness level, optimally proceeding to the highest level of allegiance. (Funk & James, 2016, 247-248.) *Awareness* level consists of individuals becoming aware of the sport-related opportunity, for instance, a sports event due to social agents such as media, friends, or other external forces. At the awareness level, individuals do not necessarily have a desire to participate in the sports context such as sports events but become aware of it and learn about the opportunity. This level can be considered as ''I am aware of the sports event'' The *Attraction* level is reached when an individual becomes more positively encouraged by the sports context. Individual finds that some of one's needs can fulfilled by the activity. Positive emotions appear and an individual might further examine one's opportunities with the event. External forces such as media or recommendations are still driving the emotions meanwhile internal features such as psychological benefits are appearing for instance through socialization. This stage can be considered 'I like the event'. At the *attachment* individual is becoming affected by intrinsic features such as emotional bonds and positive experiences. At this stage, customer loyalty is born. At the highest level of allegiance level, the ultimate psychological commitment and loyalty are born. This stage can be considered as ''I live for this sports context''. (Funk & James, 2016, 249-250.) The PCM model can provide event marketing professionals with a tool to categorize different target groups into different stages and help to direct the correct marketing efforts for different levels of target customers, in the context of sports organizations organizing running events.

1. For the target groups at the awareness level organizations should focus on increasing the event and brand awareness.

2. For the target groups at the attraction level organizations should focus on maximizing the positive experiences and investigate the customer experiences while attempting to get more individuals from this level to proceed higher to the attachment level.

3. For the target groups at the attachment level the organizational focus should be maximizing customer loyalty, at this level, customers are considered loyal, hence the focus among

these customers should be even further strengthening the loyalty proceeding individuals to allegiance level, for instance, through the application of relationship marketing programs.

4. At the allegiance level the highest psychological connection has been formed. Customers at this level feel very strongly about sport and the sport plays an impactful part of their lives. Organizations seeking to maximize the commitment should create sports services that are customized and specialized for this target group and they should investigate new ways how the target group commitment could further be increased such as by offering initiatives that create social commitment with others such as through group activities (Alexandris & Funk, 2016, 337)

4.7   Branding process of participatory sport events

Brand is in simple terms a name that has been given to a service or a product or a range of services or products. Brands are often presented through a combination of features such as symbols, images, logos, or designs that pursue a service, product, or bundle of them to stand out from the competitors. (Kotler et al., 2009, 425.) Building a brand is a process that in the context of sports cannot be underestimated. Building a desired brand is an effective way for organizations to increase their sales either for participants, spectators, or any other consumers related to the sports business. The brand-building process consists of four stages shown in Figure 3.

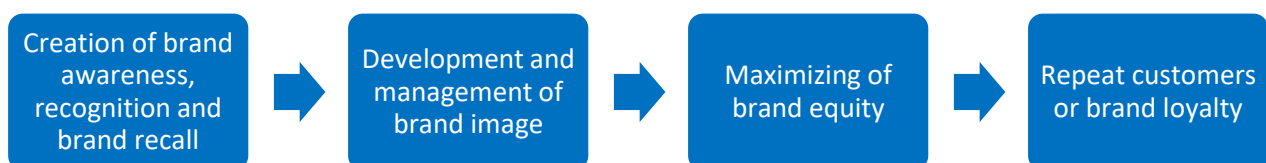| Creation of brand awareness, recognition and brand recall | → | Development and management of brand image | → | Maximizing of brand equity | → | Repeat customers or brand loyalty |

Figure 3. Brand building process, (adapted from Shank & Lyberger, 2022, 344)

The first stage in brand building is to create brand awareness and make sure the brand receives visibility among the targeted customers through brand exposure. Awareness among customers should lead to brand recognition, which implies that a consumer can link some of the brand elements such as the logo to a brand and connect the brand to the category in which it operates in the market. In addition to brand awareness, an important factor in the brand-building process is achieving brand recall. Brand recall refers to consumers being able to name the brand if they are told to list a brand from an example of a certain category, such as running events. A high recall is

not easily achieved if there are numerous competitors, but a high recall ultimately signifies the highest brand awareness level. After awareness has been established, the brand image needs to be developed and managed to ensure that it brings positive associations to consumer's minds. A positive brand image seeks to create brand equity, which could be considered the extra value customers see in a branded product versus competitors. Ultimately the goal of branding is to add brand loyalty through attracting and retaining customers. (Shank & Lyberger, 2022, 343-345; Stavros & Smith, 2020, 61-62.)

Brand is often connected to two important brand-related terms brand identity and brand image. Brand identity refers to aims through which the company or an organization seeks to deliver the brand to the customer through elements such as trough visual or verbal communication which aims to affect customers through positive association. Organizations seeking to differentiate themselves from their competitors should pay attention to delivering the brand through brand identity with all their actions and visuals such as product design, leaflets, and employee behavior. Brand image, contrary, is a subjective perception from the eyes of a customer and refers to what a customer thinks of a brand. (Kotler et al., 2009, 426.)

A brand is often linked to a topic of brand personality which Aaker (1997, 347) defines as *"the set of human characteristics associated with a brand".* Aaker's brand personality framework is based on a theory in which a brand is developed with the idea that the brand needs to have a personality that represents the values of an organization. A brand personality can be divided into five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, or ruggedness. Each dimension represents different features that describe the brand and align with the dimension and the values of an organization. For instance, a sincere brand might be described with words such as honest or joyful, whereas an exciting brand might be described with words such as adventurous or imaginative. Brand personalities need to be formed in a way that they represent the values, purpose, and market positioning of the organization, and that they align with the target customer's personalities and motives. Brand personality is formed strategically and communicated through marketing activities to appeal to the target customers and ultimately have better communication and relationships with the target customers. (Aaker, 1997; Paul, 2023). One of the drivers of building a brand through branding activities is creating customer-based brand equity which Keller (1993, 8) defines as being *"the varying impact of brand knowledge on consumers' reaction to brand marketing.".*

Customer-based brand equity can be achieved by building a recognizable brand that has a desirable brand image that creates positive brand associations in customers' eyes. Creating customer-based brand equity should be integrated into the strategies to create brand identities such as logos, names, and symbols but also be considered and included in the marketing strategies (Keller, 1993, 17.) Berry (2000, 136) suggests that by creating positive brand equity organizations can better benefit from their marketing efforts when done correctly through increasing brand value and meaning that brands hold to the eye of a customer. Even though, brand equity is most often associated with tangible products, the companies offering services essentially benefit from creating strong brands equally as customers' perception of a strong brand has strong effects on what they will be likely to buy. An and Yamashita (2022, 1-2) suggest that focusing on creating positive brand equity can be beneficial for participatory sports events that offer customers intangible experience value. Positive brand equity can be beneficial for sports event organizers and event marketers and understanding the benefits of positive brand equity should be considered in marketing strategies.

Brand associations play an important part in creating favorable brands. Brand associations are mental connections that people have in their mind that are linked to the brand which entail the significance of the brand in the eyes of customers. These associations may come in the form of attributes, benefits, and attitudes. (Keller, 1993, 3-4). Girginov et al. (2022, 77) suggest that running events hold an opportunity for creating positive brand associations in all three forms. For instance, when participants make a mental connection with positive outcomes of a sports event participation with favorable benefitting factors such as health and fitness-related factors, positive benefit associations can be formed. On the other hand, attributes, those specific features that are uniquely related to the event's quality concern how participants' expectations are met from the event quality point of view. Positive attribute associations occur when participants' expectations are met or exceeded and perceived quality is positive. Finally, attitudes are more overall evaluation of the experiences of the participants who have taken part in the event, positive overall experiences create positive brand attitude associations.

5   Research methods & implementation

This research is a mixed methods study concerning customer experience and event awareness in participatory trail running sports events. The study utilizes an explanatory sequential design, in which first quantitative research is conducted, followed by qualitative research which aims to

explore more in-depth the insights gained from quantitative research. In this chapter research design and process are first being discussed. After, research implementation, data collection and analysis of research both methods are discussed.

5.1 Research design and process

In this study sequential mixed research design has been applied with a pragmatic approach, hence the priority has been to utilize methods that best suit the research needs. By implementing more than one research method, this study aims to gain more comprehensive understanding of the research topic and provide more versatile perspective to address research questions and ultimately to meet the research objectives. The sequential mixed research design in this study comprehends utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods in different processes of the research.

First survey research from quantitative methods is utilized, followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews from qualitative methods. This design allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic by benefitting from the strengths of both types of data collection and analysis. The research utilizes sequential triangulation, in which quantitative data is utilized for statistical analysis, and the findings of survey guided the qualitative research which aimed to add more insights and in-depth understanding to findings of qualitative research. Figure 4. represents the research design.

Research strategy
- Mixed research:
  - Sequential design:
    - First quantitatite research: online survey
    - Following by qualitative research: in-depth interviews

Research perspective
- Theoretical framework and previous studies
- Pragmatism, priority in in research is to use methods to best adress research questions
- Mixed research will result more comperehensive research findings

Quantitative research
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Sequential triangulation: Findings of the study function as a quide for qualitative research

Qualitative research
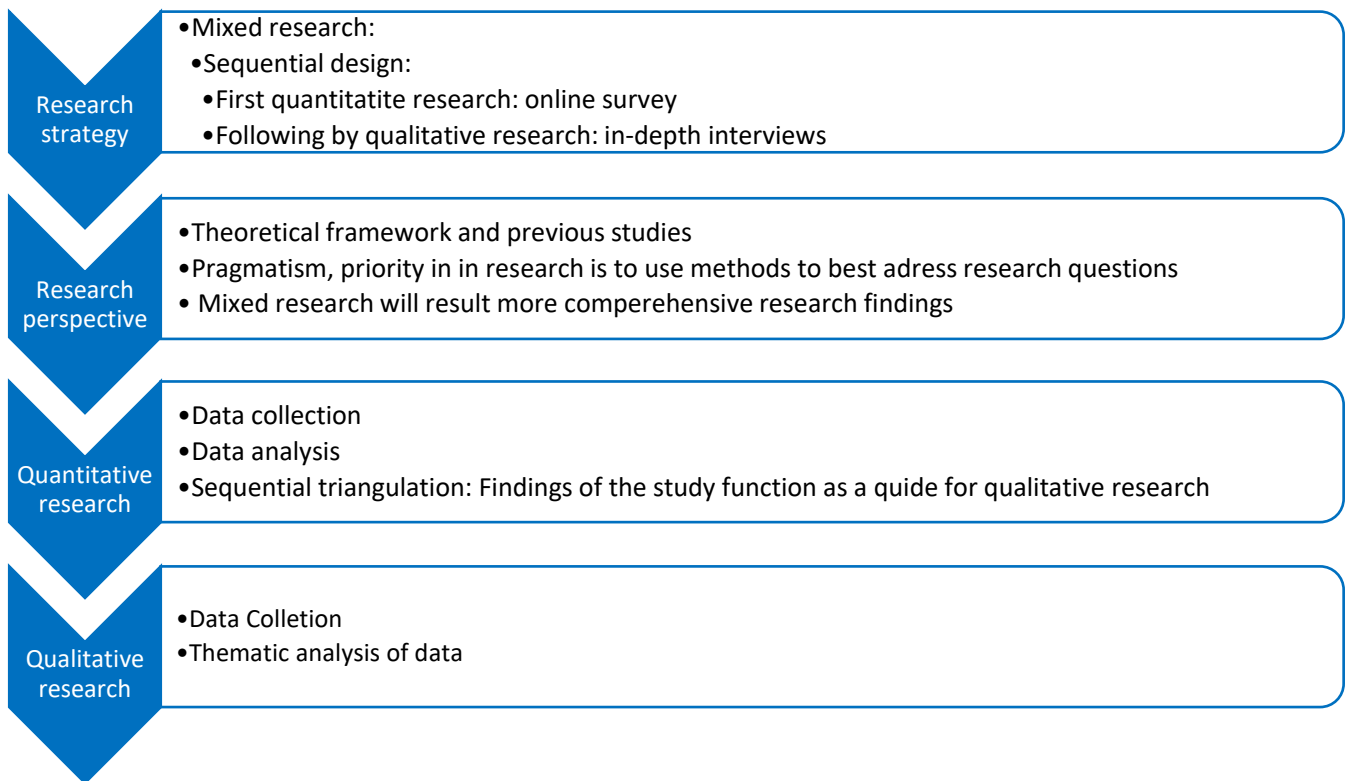- Data Colletion
- Thematic analysis of data

Figure 4. Research design

The research process of this study has started from identifying the research problem, followed by formulation of the research questions and sub-questions, and choosing the appropriate research methods. From this point of view, a literature review was written, survey research was planned, data was collected, analyzed and visualized. From the findings of the survey research, the literature review was modified, qualitative research was planned and implemented, and data was analyzed with a thematic analysis (Figure 5).
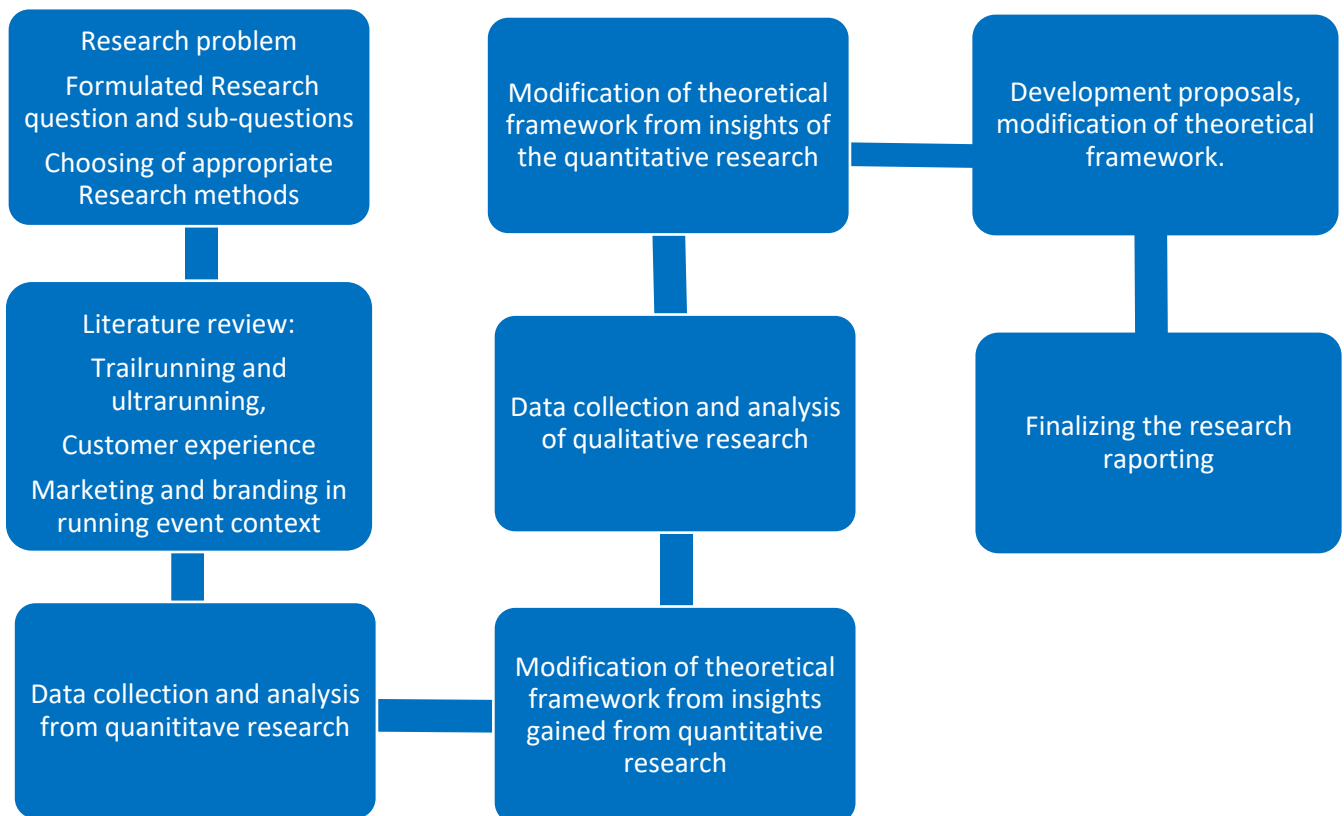
Figure 5. Research process

5.2   Survey research.

The objectives of the research are to gain insights into how the organization can receive primarily more national but also international trail running participants in the event, enhance awareness, maximize customer satisfaction, and cultivate customer loyalty for returning participants. To achieve these research objectives, the online survey seeks to answer questions:

- What kind of characteristics do the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail participants value in trail running events?

- How is the customer experience in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event currently?
- Which social media channels are the most effective for attracting trail runners and potential customers?
- What kind of marketing material is appealing to trail runners?
- What kind of development suggestions do the trail runners have for the event organizers and event marketing?

The interview questionnaire focused on five parts. The first part focused on demographic questions that the participants to gain more understanding of the target groups, the second part focused on questions concerning the trail running hobby of the participants, the third part of the questionnaire focused on the questions related to the respondents' experiences to Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event, the fourth part focused on social media marketing of the Kaldoaivi Ultra trail event and the last part focused on development ideas of the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event. It was intended that this design would help to gain insights from respondents' backgrounds, insights of respondents' hobby of trail running in general, the customer experience of Kaldoaivi Ultra Tail, and ultimately development suggestions would be received via open-ended questions.

The survey was created with Webpropol software, with two language options: Finnish and English. The survey design consisted total of 28 questions. In the survey there were close-ended questions, close-ended questions with an open-ended component to choose ''other, please specify'', open-ended questions, and Likert-scale questions. The survey questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 1. The survey was sent in January 2024 through the organization's social media channels of Facebook and Instagram via a link in which trail-running participants could anonymously answer the questionnaire. The response period was 18.1.2024-1.2.2024. The original response period gained 29 responses; hence it was decided to extend the response period until 4.2.2024 and promote the online survey another time on Facebook and Instagram.

After the second response period, the survey data was transferred into Microsoft Excel software, allowing the responses to be analyzed and data to be visualized in charts. All the respondents responded in Finnish, therefore for reporting the results of open-ended questions needed to be translated manually into English to match the thesis reporting language.

The findings of the quantitative research resulted in the use of the sequential triangulation, method, which Skinner et al. (2015, 325) propose that the results of one research method are needed for planning and implementing the next research method in the context of a mixed research strategy. After the data collection and data analysis of quantitative research, qualitative research was conducted.

5.3 Interview research

To get a deeper understanding of the research topics and to address the research questions, semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as the second research method. Semi-structured in-depth interviews aimed to gather a more in-depth understanding of customers' experience, possible development suggestions, and their perceptions of the marketing efforts of the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail organization. For semi-structured interviews, the preliminary interview questionnaire was formed in Finnish due to being the native language of the interview participants. The interview questions were then translated into English to match the reporting language of the project which can be seen in Appendix 2. The semi-structured interview questions were formed to cover themes; understanding of participants' hobbies as trail runners and the motivations behind the hobby, the customer experience at the Kaldoaivi Ultra trail event, social media usage, and marketing efforts perceived by the interview participants. The structure and questions were preliminary planned to cover the main themes of the research scope, additionally probing questions were considered, to lead the interview.

Five participants of Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail agreed to participate in the interview to share their experiences and ideas which could be used in the research to gain a profound understanding of customers of customer experience, and customer segments. All the interview participants had participated in the online survey and had left their details for contacting them for interviews. The interview participants were informed about the purpose of the interviews, the themes, and the approximate duration of the interviews, but were not given the questions beforehand. The interviews took place in February 2024 and were conducted through the Microsoft Teams platform, the length of the interviews was between 24 minutes to 35 minutes each. The interviews were held in Finnish, as it is the native language of the participants. The course of interviews was casual and conversational, giving the respondent space for free speech and being able to respond to the questions as freely as possible. To obtain the necessary information on the different themes of the

semi-structured interview, probing questions were used in the interview. For the interview, differ-ent profiles of trail-running participants were chosen. For the interview, three females and two males were chosen. Their preferences for trail running event distances were considered, similarly to their experience years of trail running. Furthermore, it was purposeful to get interviews from different age groups. All in all, it was considered an important factor to receive interviews from different trail running profiles. In Table 2. The coding for the interview is described.

Table 2. Coding for interviews

Respondent	Gender	Age group	Years of experience	Preferred running distances
R1	Male	38-42	1-5 years	47-100km
R2	Female	48-52	6-10 years	35-58km
R3	Female	48-52	1-5 years	11-34km
R4	Male	33-37	1-5 years	59-100km
R5	Female	38-42	6-10 years	47-160km

The interviews were recorded for transcription and then translated into English for the project's reporting language. The interview transcripts were then analyzed with thematic analysis, a method that involves analyzing the data through searching for reoccurring ideas, also referred to as themes. Thematic analysis is a method defined by Braun and Clark (2006) as a six-step process that involves first transcribing, familiarizing, and understanding the data. The second, underlining meaningful passages within the transcript data for meaningful codes that represent the content, which could be later considered as part of larger themes. Third, searching for larger important themes that the initial codes can be arranged into. Fourth, revise the themes and choose which ones are the most relevant to the research, and which of the themes could, for instance, be con-joined. Fifth, assigning the names of definite themes. Sixth, finalizing the reporting. (Jason & Glen-wich, 2016, p.33-34). The thematic analysis of this research was conducted with a deductive ap-proach, an approach that Caulfield (2022) consider analyzing data with pre-considered themes that could be found in the data, based on theoretical framework, or previously gained knowledge.

6   Research findings

In this chapter, first, the results of the online survey are discussed, followed by the research findings of the semi-structured in-depth interviews.

6.1   Survey results

The survey received a total of 30 responses, of which 18 were female, and 12 were male. The biggest portion of respondents was aged between 38-42 (23,3%) and 48-52 (23,3%), 43-47 (16,7%), followed by 28-32 (13,3%), 33-37 (13,3%), 53-57 (6,7%), and lastly one respondent 58-62 (3,4%). The survey examined from which region the respondents came from. It was intended to gain insights into where the participants of the event are coming from and to examine whether the event attracts a diverse range of participants from different regions or if it primarily appeals to the local crowd. The largest share of respondents (n=14) came from Uusimaa, the second largest share of respondents came from Pohjois-Suomi (n=3) and Lappi (n=3), and Varsinais-Suomi (n=3), while Pirkanmaa & Keski-Suomi all received the equal (n=2) respondents, and ultimately there was one respondent each (n=1), from Satakunta, Päijät-Häme and Etelä-Karjala. From these results, it can be concluded that a large share of the event participants come from Uusimaa, however the event attracts people from all around Finland in smaller shares.

The employment status of the respondents was examined in the survey through a multiple-choice question. It was designed to gain a greater understanding of the respondents' demographic background. According to the survey results, most of the respondents were in paid employment (n=23), followed by entrepreneurs (n=5), students (n=3), and unemployed (n=1).

In the survey, it was examined how many years respondents had practiced trail running as a hobby. It was intended to learn more about the background of trail runners. According to the survey results (Figure 6), most participants had practiced trail running for 1-5 years (n=15), followed by 6-10 years (n=12), 1 year or under (n=2), and 11-15 years (n=1)
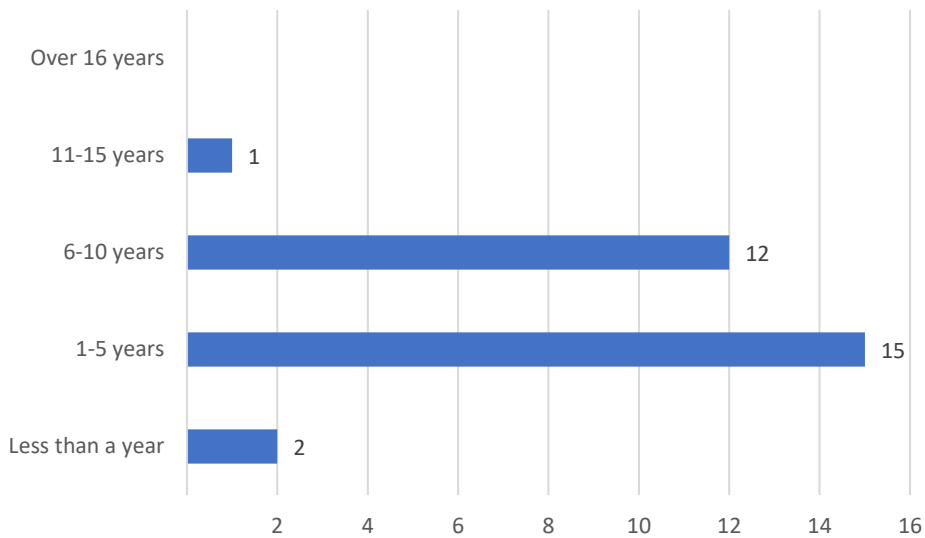
Figure 6. The years the participants have practiced trail running

The survey questioned whether respondents were the only ones in their household practicing trail running or whether their partners or children also practiced trail running. The purpose was to learn more about the trail running behavior of respondents and to consider if many trail runners answer that other people in their household practice trail running, possibly marketing actions and event design could be targeted also to appeal to families as opposed to individuals. Most respondents (n=20) chose that nobody else in their household practiced trail running, whereas five individuals each responded that their partner also practiced trail running (n=5) child practiced trail running (n=5) (Figure 7).
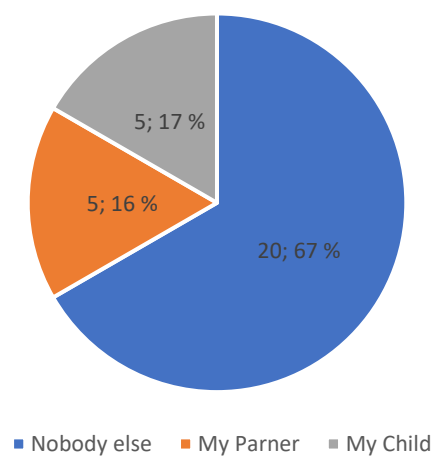

Figure 7. Trail running behavior of respondents' household members

The survey examined whether respondents are members of running clubs, or whether they would like to be or not. The purpose was to gain insights into trail runner's community engagement and trail-running behavior. Being a member of a trail running club may indicate stronger engagement with the trail running community (Trailsport Reunion, n.d.). Most respondents replied that they are not members of the running club and would not want to be (n=17), eight (n=8) respondents are not members of the running club, but would like to be (n=8), and five respondents (n=5) are members of a running club. (Figure 8.)
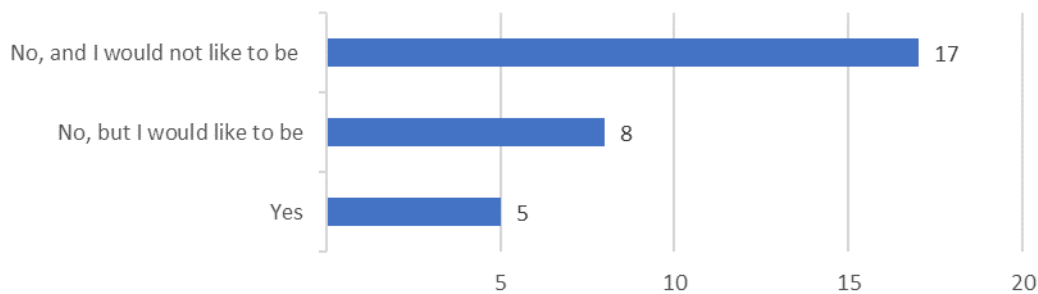

Figure 8. Participants' trail running club member status

In the survey, it was examined how frequent the trail running event participation has been during the last 12 months for respondents. The intention was to examine the engagement level of respondents to trail running events as more frequent participation may indicate a higher level of commitment and a higher level of experience. Most respondents had participated in 1-2 trail running events in the last 12 months (n=18), whereas the second largest share (n=8) had participated in 3-4 events, and one respondent (n=1) in each category of 0, 5-6, 7-8, or over 8 events during the last 12 months (Figure 9).
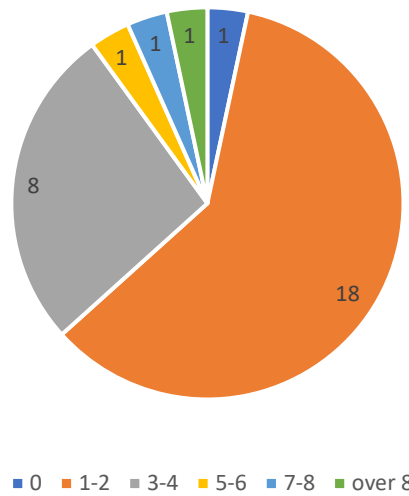
Figure 9. The frequency of trail running event participation in the past 12 months.

In the survey, it was investigated which length of trail running events attracted the respondents the most, and respondents could choose more than one option. The purpose was to explore what the most preferred running distances are, hence, the event organization could consider these distances in the event planning for the following year. The results show that most preferred distances were longer than regular marathons (42,195 km). The three most preferred distances were 47-58km (n=18), 59-70 km (n=16), 71-100 km (n= 14) (Figure 10).
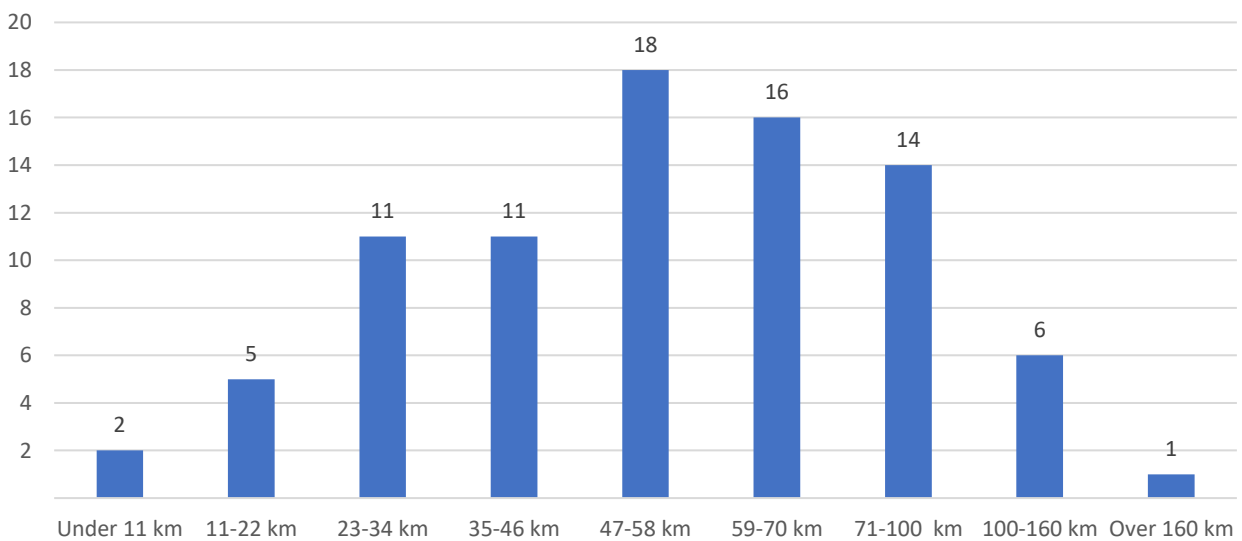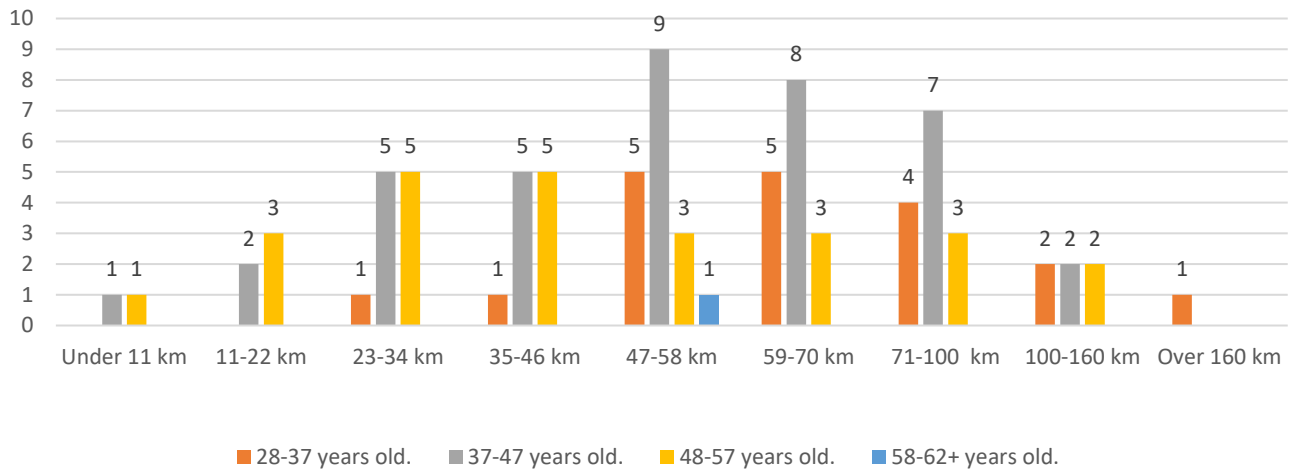

Figure 10. The most preferred running distances

Figure 11. The most preferred running distances by age groups

The responses were further analyzed to see if different age groups had different preferences for trail running distances. According to results (Figure 11), the respondents in the age range 28-37 years old preferred most distances under 47-58km (n=5), 59-70 km (n=5), and 71-100 km (n=4). While respondents in the age range 38-47 years old preferred the distances of 47-58 km (n=9), 59-70 km (n=8), and 71-100km (n=7). Furthermore, in the age range 48-57 years old preferred the distances of 23-34km (n=5), 35-46km (n=5), 11-22km (n=3), 47-58km (n=3), 59-70km (n=3), and 71-100km (n=3).

The survey examined the factors that most significantly influence participants' motives to engage in trail running events (Table 3). To examine these factors 1-5 Likert scale question was applied, with 1 stating no effect, and 5 stating a lot of effects. Challenging oneself was the most impactful aspect of people's participation as it received an average of 4,6. The second and third most important aspect was the length of the running route (4,4) and scenic running route, (4,3). The least impactful aspect was a collection of ITRA points (1,4), which are rewards rewarded for finishing a race that has been qualified by the International Trail Running Association and are considered as proof of a trail running experience to achieve races of a certain difficulty that allows registration for certain international long-distance trail running events (International Association of trail runners, n.d.b). The second and third least impactful aspects were sponsors of event organization (1,7), and ancillary services (2,0).

Table 3. The influence of the following aspects on respondents' participation in trail running events

	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Challenging oneself	0 %	0 %	3 %	30 %	67 %	**4.6**
Length of the running route	0 %	0 %	13 %	33 %	54 %	**4.4**
Scenic running route	7 %	3 %	7 %	20 %	63 %	**4.3**
Versatile running route	0 %	10 %	7 %	40 %	43 %	**4.2**
Opportunity to see and experience new places and connect traveling with trail running hobby	3 %	0 %	10 %	47 %	40 %	**4.2**
Date of the event	0 %	7 %	20 %	30 %	43 %	**4.1**
There is a good amount of accommodation options near the event	3 %	7 %	10 %	67 %	13 %	**3.8**
Event arrangement (e.g. aid stations, event transportation, catering after the event)	3 %	10 %	33 %	44 %	10 %	**3.5**
Sense of community in the event	0 %	24 %	30 %	23 %	23 %	**3.5**
Challengingness of running route	0 %	13 %	57 %	17 %	13 %	**3.3**
The price of participation fee	3 %	10 %	60 %	20 %	7 %	**3.2**
Recommendations / Word of mouth	13 %	40 %	23 %	20 %	4 %	**2.6**
Ease of arrival to the event (e.g. by public transport)	17 %	37 %	30 %	13 %	3 %	**2.5**
Distance from your hometown	30 %	27 %	30 %	3 %	10 %	**2.4**
Ancillary services (e.g. music events after, products sold in the event)	34 %	40 %	23 %	3 %	0 %	**2**
Sponsors of the event organization	50 %	33 %	17 %	0 %	0 %	**1.7**
Collecting ITRA points	77 %	7 %	13 %	3 %	0 %	**1.4**

It was assessed in which Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail participants had participated. The participants could choose more than one option if they had participated in more than one event. The most respondents had participated in 2023, nine participants had participated in a 57 km distance, five participants had participated in 85 km, five had in 18km, and one respondent had participated in the double distance of 85+57km. In 2022, there was one response from a 57 km distance, furthermore, five respondents had participated in 2021 in a 57 km distance. Lastly, one respondent from 2018 participated in a 130 km trail run (Figure 12).
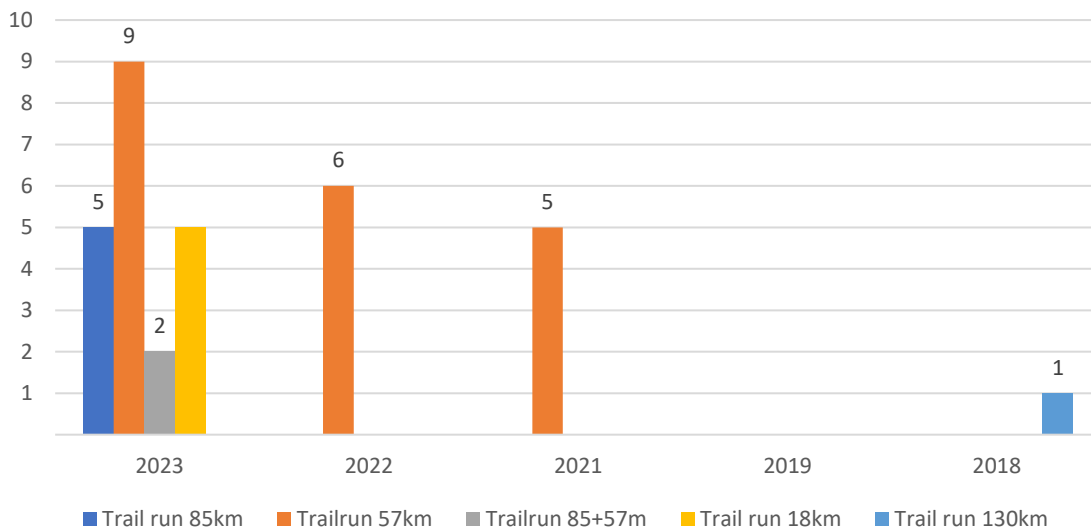

Figure 12. The Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event the respondents participated in

Most of the respondents (n=12) had participated alone, the second largest share had participated with a friend or friends (n=11), followed by a partner (n=6) and with another family member (n=4), nobody participated with a running team or choose other, people specify (Figure 13).
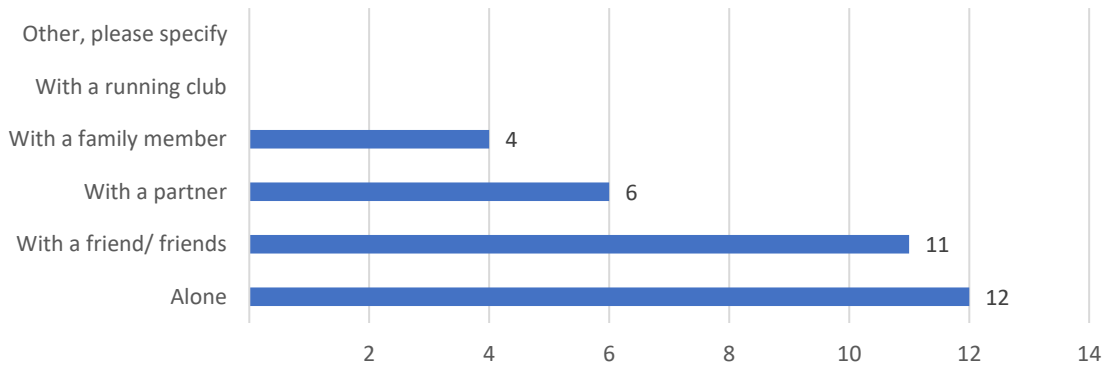
Figure 13. With whom the respondents had participated in the event.

During the event most of the participants stayed in Utsjoki (n=22), followed by Nuorgam (n=4). Other areas (n=1 each) where the respondents stayed were Skalluvaara, Karigasniemi, and their camper car. It was further examined how many days the respondents stayed in the area during the event participation period. The largest share of respondents (n=15) stayed for two nights, the second a largest share stayed in the area for 3 days (n=7), the third largest share stayed for 4 days or over (n=6), and two respondents stayed for one night. No respondents said that they did not stay in the area. From these findings can be considered that the average stay in the area for respondents as active sport tourists was at least 2,5 days. (Figure 14).
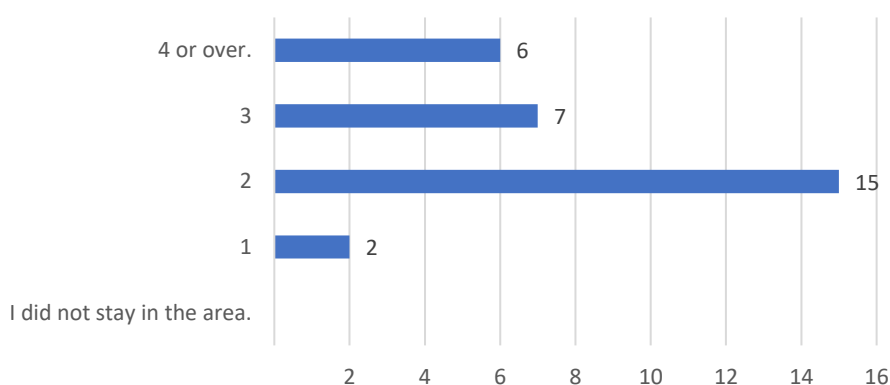

Figure 14. How many nights the respondents stayed in the area

In the survey it was examined with a Likert scale question 1-5 (1 very little, 5 a lot), how well the words fascinating, motivating, encouraging, extraordinary, and challenging described the respondent's experience during the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event, respondents had also an open-ended option to choose from to describe their experience with their own words. From these words, the respondents most felt extraordinary described their event experience. Open-ended questions revealed words of; Inspiring, exceptional, thrilling, and ''I absolutely loved'' (Table 4.)

Table 4. The extent of how the following words describe the respondents' experiences during the event

	1	2	3	4	5	**Average**
Other, which	0 %	0 %	0 %	25 %	75 %	**4.8**
Extraordinary	0 %	3 %	0 %	27 %	70 %	**4.6**
Fascinating	0 %	0 %	33 %	27 %	40 %	**4.1**
Motivating	0 %	0 %	20 %	47 %	33 %	**4.1**
Encouraging	0 %	13 %	17 %	23 %	47 %	**4**
Challenging	3 %	7 %	21 %	40 %	30 %	**3.9**

The survey participants were asked which factors would make other household members participate in the Kaldoaivi Ultra trail event. Respondents could choose from that there are no other people in their household (hence the question would not apply to them), other running distances, special pricing for families, and ultimately respondents could share other reasons in an open-ended response format. The largest share responded (n=10) that there are no other people in their household. The second largest share chose other running distances (n=8), and from these responses, two other running distances were suggested; 20 and 32 km. The third largest share (n=7) responded that special pricing for families could also impact other family member's attendance at the event. Lastly, five respondents (n=5), chose ''other'', and factors that they considered could impact other's family member's attendance at the event were related to aspects such as shorter distances for under-aged people, the joint decision on renewal, and not knowing, or other family members not running (Figure 15).
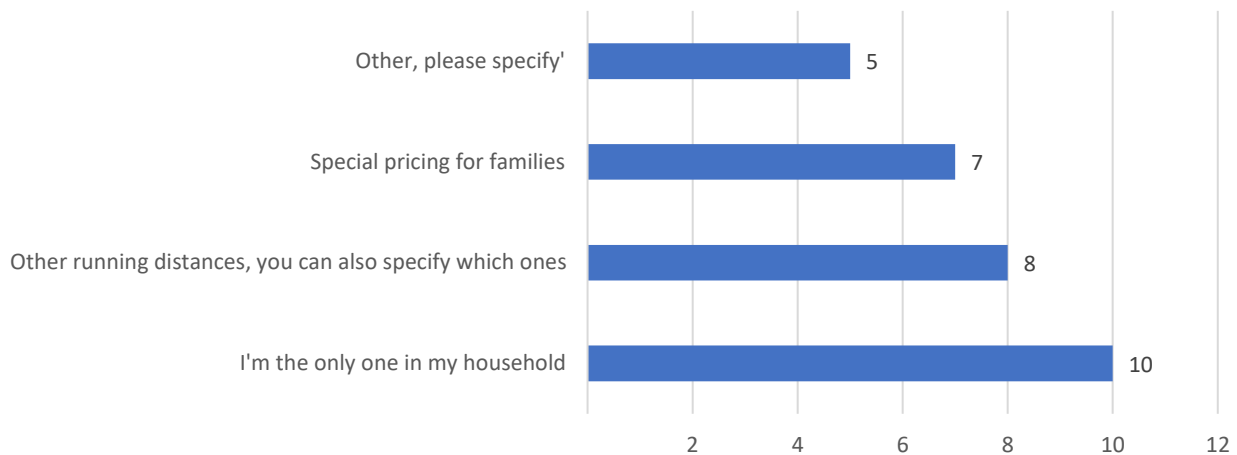
Figure 15. The factors that could encourage other household members to participate in the event.

The survey investigated how remarkably the certain factors had an impact on respondents' partici-pation in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event (Table 5). It was aimed to explore participants' perceptions of what motivated the respondents to participate in the event the most, hence the results could provide the event organization with better customer understanding, which again would provide the event organization information that could be further highlighted in marketing actions as well as the event design. According to the results, the most motivating factors for respondents were challenging themselves, (an average of 4,7), fjell a location (4,6), suitable route length (4,5). As op-posed to the least important factors were the collection of ITRA points (average of 1,3), word of mouth/recommendations (2,1), event's inspiring event marketing (3,0) and the price of participa-tion fee (3,0).

Table 5. The significant impact of the aspects on participants' decision to participate in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event

	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Challenging oneself	0 %	0 %	7 %	20 %	73 %	**4.7**
Fjell location	0 %	3 %	3 %	27 %	67 %	**4.6**
Suitable route length	4 %	0 %	3 %	33 %	60 %	**4.5**
Scenic route	7 %	0 %	3 %	30 %	60 %	**4.4**
Challengingness of the route	0 %	0 %	27 %	50 %	23 %	**4**
The date of the event	7 %	3 %	17 %	47 %	27 %	**3.8**
Small event	13 %	4 %	27 %	23 %	33 %	**3.6**
Improving fitness	7 %	13 %	27 %	37 %	17 %	**3.4**
The sense of community	14 %	20 %	23%	30 %	13 %	**3.1**
Inspiring event marketing	10 %	13 %	53 %	17 %	7 %	**3**
The price of participation fee	7 %	20 %	50 %	17 %	7 %	**3**
Recommendations/ Word of mouth	47 %	13 %	27 %	10 %	3 %	**2.1**
Collection of ITRA points	87 %	0 %	10 %	3 %	0 %	**1.3**

In the survey it was examined with a Likert-scale question how the respondents perceived certain event related arrangements. It was intended to examine in which areas the event organization excelled, and in which areas, points of improvement could be considered. Considering that multiple changes had already been made to the event concept, only the responses from 2023 were taken into analysis (Table 6). The overall customer experience received a mean value of 4,1 out of 5. The highest scores were received by The route and its challengingness (4,4), marking of the route (4,4,), support and encouragement from the volunteers (4,4), and the event organization as whole (4,4). The smallest mean scores received the number of aid stations (3,4) and snacks & beverages at the aid stations (3,5).

Table 6. Event arrangements perceived by the respondents of the 2023 event

	Poor	Fair	Neu-tral	Good	Excel-lent	Average
The route and it's challengingness	0%	0%	10%	38%	52%	4.4
Marking of the route	0%	0%	9%	43%	48%	4.4
Support and encouragement from the volunteers	0%	5%	9%	29%	57%	4.4
The event organization as whole	0%	0%	10%	38%	52%	4.4
The information and communication prior the event	0%	0%	10%	52%	38%	4.3
The event information and communication during the event	0%	0%	14%	57%	29%	4.1
Snacks and beverages at the aid stations	5%	9%	29%	48%	9%	3.5
The number of aid stations	0%	14%	38%	38%	10%	3.4

The most used social media channels by respondents were Instagram (n=26), Facebook, (n=25), and YouTube (n=13). Also, five respondents replied that they use TikTok (Figure 16). The results were further analyzed to examine if different age groups use different social media platforms differently. In all major groups that represent survey participants Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube were the most used social media platforms. The results show that Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube were the most used social media platforms in all age groups (Figure 17).
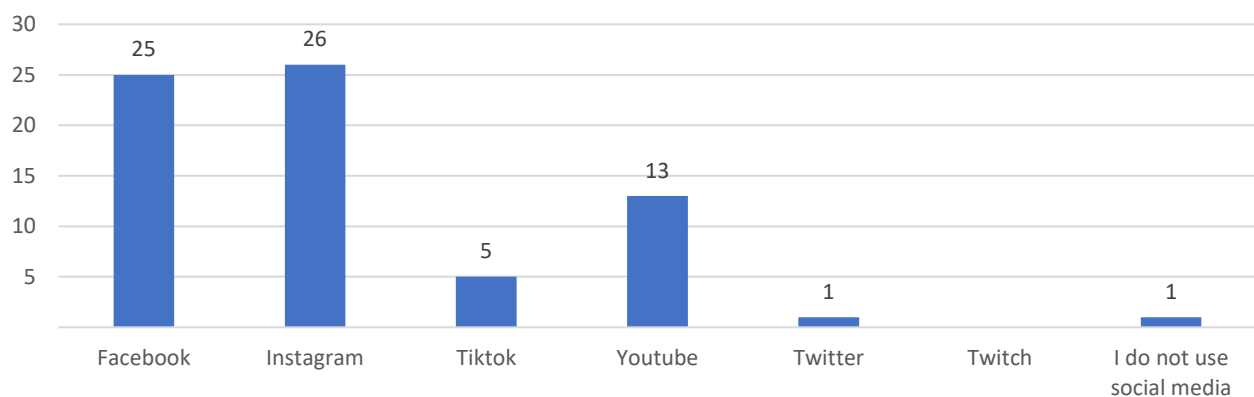

Figure 16: The social media platforms the survey participants use regularly
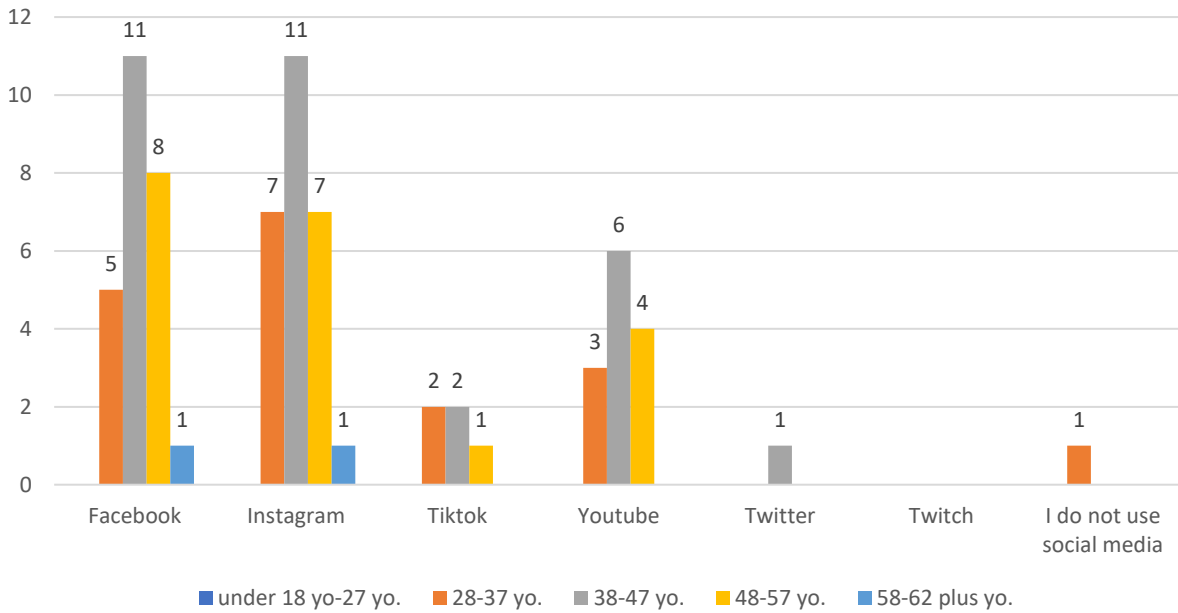
Figure 17. Social media platforms regularly used by different age groups

The survey explored which kind of running-related content appeal the participants. The aim was to gain insights what kind of running related content resonates with the participants, and to assess the potential Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail might have in these types of contents to raise awareness of the event (Figure 18). Respondents could choose multiple content types and choose open-ended option to specify their responses. Most followed running-related content was social media influencers (n=17), Podcasts (n=13), and Blogs (n=10). Open-ended responses gathered responses of Instagram, Juoksija-Magazine and Suunnistaja-Magazine.

Figure 18. The running-related content in social media followed by respondents.

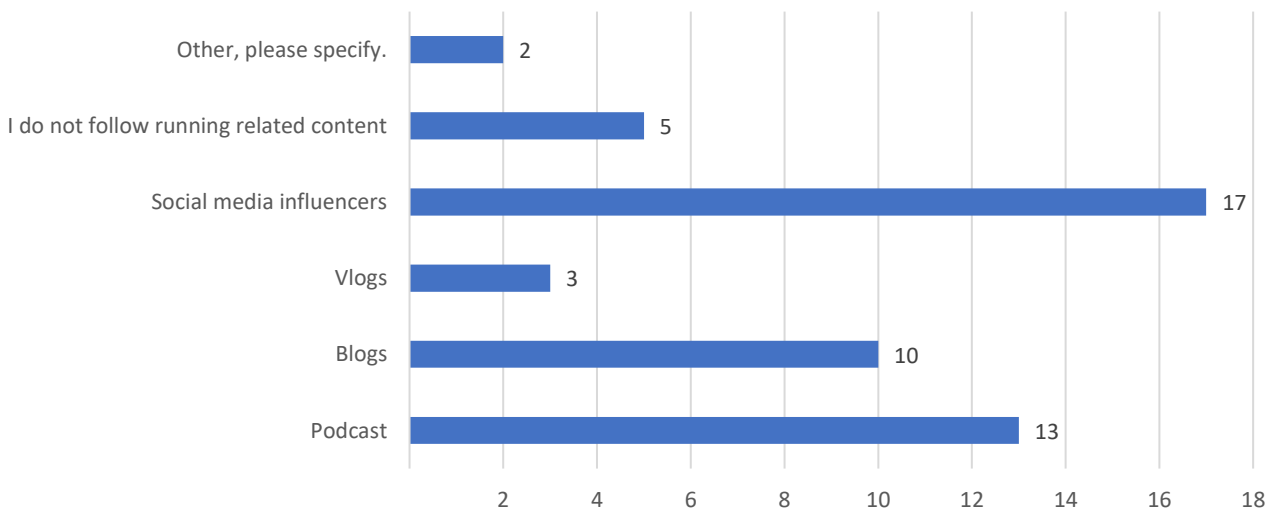The survey investigated where the respondents heard of the event for the first time. It was aimed to explore if the event has gained more visibility in some channels than others and whether some channels have more potential for event awareness. From the responses, on Facebook, the event has gained the most visibility, as largest share (n=12), had heard of the event on Facebook for the first time, second and third largest shares of channels were by recommendations/word of mouth (n=5) and Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail's website (n=4). Seven respondents (n=7) chose the open-ended option which included answers such as hearing from a someone, Internet, trail running calendar, or not remembering. (Figure 19.) It is worth mentioning that none of the respondents chose the option Instagram, or YouTube, which are channels that were the most mentioned when examining which it was examined what social media channels respondents use the most.
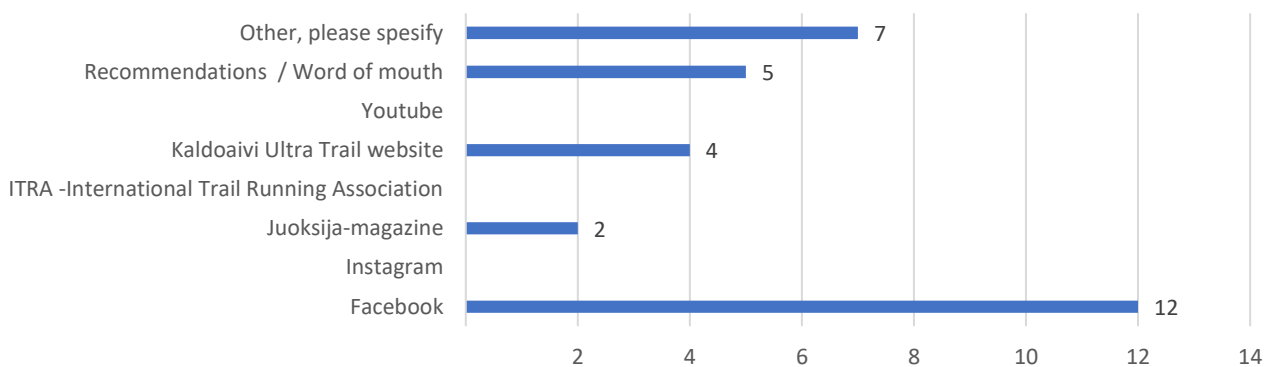
Figure 19. Channels in which the respondents had heard of the event for the first time

In the survey it was examined in which channels the respondents had seen marketing of Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event. It was aimed to identify how much awareness the event organization receives on each social media platform. The results indicate that the largest share was Facebook (n=25), followed by Instagram (n=23), Juoksija-Magazine (n=5), and YouTube (n=4) (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Platforms in which the respondents had recalled Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail marketing actions

In the survey it was examined whether there were any marketing material that attracted the participants the most before the event, through an open-ended and non-mandatory question. The purpose was to gain insights into any specific marketing material that attracted the participants the most, hence more of that kind of content would be beneficial to utilize. Four responses were gathered.

''Some drone video was nicely shot''
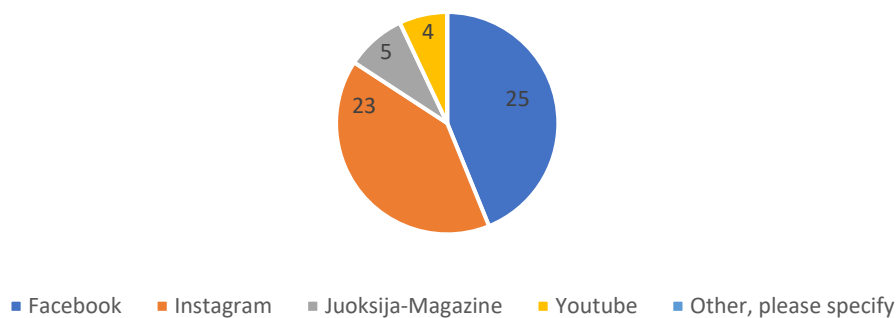*''Videos and pictures on website''*
''Pictures from the route''
''Wonderful wilderness area and Skallovaara''.

However, from these responses it can be considered that the visual elements regarding the route and unique location play an important part in marketing materials that are seen as attractive and related to the event, hence the marketing materials should emphasize highlighting these factors in photos, videos also in general but especially as drone footage.

Development suggestions for marketing

The respondents were asked if they had any development suggestions to improve Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail events marketing through an open-ended and non-mandatory question. The question was designed to gain insights into respondents' perceptions of how event marketing could be improved. These findings emphasize that visibility could be improved, for instance, event marketing could utilize more influencers sharing experiences from the event for example on YouTube or the event could add more visibility in media such as Juoksija-magazine. Also, it might be beneficial to communicate clearly that the event caters to many levels of experience to address any misconceptions regarding the difficulty level of the route or the obstacles that might occur during the route. Also, in these responses emerges a beneficial idea that the event marketing could emphasize experientiality and add for instance teasers from the wilderness area during different seasons to create anticipation among target audiences.

''Get running influencer's event experience to YouTube.''

''I stumbled upon the event by accident and signed up on the spur of the moment. No one I know knew about the event. The visibility could certainly be improved. I had thought the event was only for top runners, but the wonderful surprise was that so many runners of all types and levels took part.''

''Little bits along the way, e.g. about water crossings and how to cross safely as those were the parts I was most worried about and afraid of.''

''Think carefully about the target audience. However, the route is completely flat, so it is also suitable for people who are not particularly keen on tactical trail running. For me, at least, I was also attracted by the location and the possibility of taking part in the crossing of the Kaldoaivi. Without the event, the Kaldoaivi would probably have been missed. The marketing actions should make use of experientiality.''

''It also occurred to me that the different seasons could also be used in advertising and that footage from the route could be shot in teaser style for winter, spring, and also autumn after the event.''

''More visibility, for example, through Juoksija-Magazine''

The factors that the respondents had the most enjoyed about the event participation.

In the survey, it was examined what the participants the most enjoyed about the event in an-open format and non-mandatory question to answer. It was aimed to find the strengths and competitive advantages of the event. The open-ended answers were analyzed and categorized into five themes Small-scale event, The landscape, nature, and route, The organization, Atmosphere, and sense of community & Personal achievement.

There were five responses related to appreciation of small-scale scale events, and few of those responses can be described accordingly.

''A nice small event with stunning scenery. A great route. A suitably small event (cf. Ruka)''

''Definitely about the fact that the event is in a way "intimate". Not a mass event. In those landscapes, I don't want to run in crowds.''

'' Peace of mind, a lovely little event. The rugged beauty of the wilderness. A good atmosphere.''

''The challenge of the route and the self-crossing of the river crossings. I ran the whole way from start to finish, except for the officials and a couple of cyclists who passed me, and it added a real sense of adventure and survival to the experience.''

Another theme was landscape, nature, and the route. 23 responses were related to this theme. Stunning scenery, great route, nature, and surroundings, and unique Northern location were mentioned. Few of those responses are described accordingly.

''About the trip and the scenery, about visiting the place for the first time.''

''Long distance, crossing rivers, crossing the finish line.''

''Unique environment, nature, hundreds of reindeer, and birds along the route''

'' The scenery, a certain loneliness on the way, but still a great spirit of togetherness. Challenging weather''

''In 2018, you could do long stretches on your own, as there was the 130 km race, which unfortunately is no longer organized. A tough, thrilling route with hallucinations and deep river crossings.''
''Scenery, finish line, sauna & other runners''

''The opportunity to see the Kaldoaiv area and visit Utsjoki.''

''Peace of mind, a lovely little event. The rugged beauty of the wilderness. A good atmosphere.''

'' The challenge of the route and the self-crossing of the river crossings. I ran the whole way from start to finish, except for the volunteers and a couple of cyclists who passed me, and it added a real sense of adventure and survival to the experience.''

The organization theme occurred in four responses.

''The kindness and helpfulness of the organizers''
''Milieu and organizers''
''About the nature of the wilderness and the event in general''
'' A challenging and varied route. Well-organized, route signposting, etc. All the competitors had to do was concentrate on the race.''

Furthermore, the atmosphere and sense of community theme are represented in four responses.

''The scenery, the atmosphere, the small crowd''

''Peace of mind, a lovely little event. The rugged beauty of the wilder-ness. A good atmosphere.''

''Milieu and organizers''

''Scenery, finish line, sauna & Other runners

Ultimately the last theme was personal development, which gathered three responses.

''Long distance, crossing rivers, crossing the finish line.''

''I get to show the home crowd my level compared to other runners.''

''For unique landscapes and challenging myself.''

Development suggestions for Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail

The survey question aimed to examine whether there were any development suggestions in the perception of the survey respondents. Question 26 was non-mandatory and open-ended in format. The question gathered 10 responses, which were analyzed and categorized into five themes. These themes were related to services, rewards and product bags, post-run food, factors that respondents felt should not be changed within the event concept, and requests to change the starting time of the race so that the event could be experienced during the night, instead of daytime so that runners could experience running through the night less night.

Services

The theme services gathered four responses. Three of the responses were related to aid stations. Two respondents shared that there could be more aid stations One respondent felt that one aid station during 57 km, which was 40 km away wasn't enough. One respondent shared that there should be even longer distances available, and shorter distances between aid stations and a drop-bag leaving option. Furthermore, one respondent shared that the volunteers should be a little bit more prepared for the questions of the runners.

''Longer distances for trail runners, shorter distances between aid sta-tions, drop-bag option.''

Rewards and product bags

The theme Rewards and product bags consisted of five remarks that handled prizes for the winners and reward bags. Two respondents felt that the sunglasses given were not satisfying. One respondent was satisfied with the initial reward bag given but not the content inside the bag. One respondent considered that winners of the race should get upgraded prizes, hence from the sponsor side better rewards could be given to winners, or on the other hand winners could receive a free entry for next year's race.

'' There should be proper prizes for the winner. The race has several partners, and one would assume that something of their products could be a prize. At the very least you should get a free entry to next year's event. It's not too late to give one away after the fact''

Post- run food

The theme of post-run food consisted of three remarks made about post-run food.

''The post-run food offer could have been a little better.''

''I would have paid a bit more for a better soup. The burgers in the restaurant were less appealing.''

''Diversifying the meal at the finish line.'' '' After finishing line, sausage soup was not good. Better lunch!''

Factors that should not be changed

Theme factors that respondents felt should not be changed. Two respondents mentioned that there were two mentioned that respondents felt they appreciated the small event and the ambiance.

''Keep the event relatively small''
''Keeping the ambiance and small size of the event so it doesn't explode''.

Different starting times for the event.

Finally, there was one suggestion that the event could utilize the night-less night of Lapland and

have the starting time of the event during the evening or night so that people could experience running during the night-less magical night of Lapland.

> *''A Nightless Night could be used for the event. For many, it would be truly exotic to run in the middle of the night in the sunshine. Summer nights in Lapland can be magically beautiful when the weather is just right.''*

Ultimately in the survey it was examined whether the respondents would recommend the event to others. The recommendation rate for the event was 100% of the survey respondents. The respondents could leave reasoning for event recommendation, or non-recommendation, had that been applicable in an open-ended format. Some of the open-ended answers *''Wonderful Fjell Lapland'', ''Unique'', ''Different, challenging'', ''Fantastic, unique location'', ''Fantastic, wonderful experience'', ''Scenery & location'', ''Wonderful experience'', ''An easy event in terms of route and terrain, also for the less experienced. A good opportunity to get to know the northern nature'', ''A great experience'', ''Wonderful event'', '' Absolutely stunning scenery, and a well-organized event all around''.* These results can be beneficial for the event organizers to acknowledge, as these can be seen as strengths and competitive advantages, and these factors should be emphasized in marketing actions.

6.1.1 Summary of Survey Results

The background of the respondents

According to the survey trail running participants of Kaldoaivi Trail Ultra come from different age groups, varying from 28 years until 62 years of age. The largest share of participants is aged between 38-42, and 48-52. Females were presented by 18 respondents, and men were presented by 12 respondents. The participants of the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail running event come from many regions of Finland, however, Uusimaa represents the largest share (n=14), even if the distance to the event location is one the furthest on the map from the event. The event participants typically have participated in trail running hobby between one to 10 years, and the most typical trail runners are the only ones in their households to practice trail running. Most participants participate in trail running events between 1-4 times a year.

Characteristics that the survey participants value in trail running events, and the factors motivating participation.

According to the survey the most preferred running event distances are between 47-100 kilometers long. The most motivating factor that affects respondents' participation in trail running events, in general, is challenging oneself, which is considered one of the intrinsic motivational factors. The second and third most important factors according to the responses are related to event attributes, these attributes are the length of the running route and the scenic running route. Three of the least important factors are collecting ITRA points, sponsors of event organizations, and ancillary services.

The current level of customer experience in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event among trail runners.

In the survey, it was examined how certain experience-related words described the respondent's experience during the event and the most scores received the word extraordinary. Extraordinary is something that could be considered utilized in marketing actions, such as by creating photos, videos, and storytelling materials that emphasize delivering a message that is linked to these factors. In the survey, it was examined which factors were the most important for participants regarding participating in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event. From the results, it can be concluded that challenging oneself was the most important factor, which shows that intrinsic motivational factor plays the biggest role for people participating in trail running events in general, as well as in this specific event. Then again, two other most motivating factors were related to event attributes. Fjeld location was the second most important factor, and suitable route length was the third most important factor. The least important determinants of respondents' participation were the collection of ITRA points, recommendations/ word of mouth, the price of the participation fee, and inspiring event marketing. The mentioned most important motivational factors can provide the organization an opportunity to use them for marketing purposes for instance by attracting old customers through marketing actions that evoke nostalgia for these pleasurable moments. These factors can also be beneficial to highlight in new customer acquisition when these factors are highlighted in marketing actions.

In the survey customer experience of the participants was also under examination, however for the reasoning of applicability only the responses of the 2023 event were analyzed for the report, as the concept had already changed from the previous years, and also because major or the survey respondents had participated in the 2023 event (n=21/n=30), hence the comparisons of different

samples might have been skewed. From the customer experience analysis, it can be concluded that the overall customer experience regards of the measured variables was above good level as the average of total customer experience was 4,1 out of 5. The highest scores were received by The route and its challengingness (4,4), marking of the route (4,4,), support and encouragement from the volunteers (4,4), and the event organization as whole (4,4). On the contrary, the factors that received the lowest scores were the number of aid stations (average of 3,4), and the snacks and beverages at the aid stations (average of 3,5). Therefore, the organization might want to consider adding more aid stations widening the variety of beverages and snacks offered at the aid stations and focus on providing future customers at least the same efforts for other event-related attributes and services to maintain a highly positive customer experience.

The survey also examined what the participants had the most enjoyed about the event. Major themes that impacted the memorable experience were Appreciation of small-scale events, The landscape, nature and route, The organization, The atmosphere, and the Sense of achievement. These themes can be useful for event organizations to acknowledge as they offer valuable information for the participants to experience the event, and themes can be highlighted in marketing efforts to transfer the brand of the event to the target groups.

The survey participants' social media usage patterns and the marketing material that most effectively captures their attention are of interest.

The survey examined the social media usage and preferences of the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail participants. From the results, it can be concluded that the main social media platforms used by the participants were Instagram (86,7%), Facebook (83,3%) & YouTube (44,8%), however, some respondents additionally use TikTok (17,5%). Kaldoaivi Trail Ultra is active on Instagram, as well as Facebook, however, they do not have their own Youtube or TikTok channel which might be beneficial for increasing the awareness of their event and might also offer the potential for their participants to share and link their stories in these platforms. The survey also examined what kind of running-related content the respondents follow online. 58,6% of the respondents follow running-related social media influencers, while 44,8% follow Podcasts and 31% follow running-related blogs. From these results, it can be concluded that there are prosperous opportunities for event organization on these platforms. The event organization could consider cooperating with running

related social media influencers to participate in the event and share their experiences on their social media platforms or blogs. Also, there are several running and trail-related Podcasts online, therefore the event organization might consider cooperating with them, either by sponsoring a podcast and receiving visibility in this manner, visiting a podcast as a guest discussing their event, or cooperating with a social media influencer and a podcast host, so that the social media influencer would share the event experience during the podcast. In the survey, it was examined where participants had heard of the event for the first time. 37,5% of the participants had heard of the event first time through Facebook, while 13,8% had heard from the Kaldoaivi Ultra website, and 17,3% had heard through word of mouth/recommendations. No one responded to Instagram or YouTube, which suggests that both Instagram and YouTube could provide more options for increasing awareness, according to Statista (2023) YouTube is the second most used social media platform globally, and Instagram is the 4th most used social media platform globally. In the survey it was also examined where the respondents had seen marketing of the event, 82,8% had seen marketing actions on Facebook, 75,9% on Instagram, 17,2% on Juoksija-magazine, 13,8% on YouTube, whereas 0% chose the option ''other, please specify''. From these results, it can be concluded that especially on YouTube, there are more options for marketing for instance through influencer collaboration or, the event might want to consider setting up their YouTube channel.

What kind of development suggestions do the respondents have for the event and event marketing?

The survey it was also examined the participants' suggestions on how the marketing could be improved. Some prospective development ideas were suggested, such as having a social media influencer share their running experience on YouTube, getting more visibility for example through Juoksija-magazine, and showing videos about the event route's difficult parts so that future participants are prepared how to overcome natural obstacles such as rivers, and showing teaser videos that are shot during different seasons so that these videos will bring anticipation of participation to the viewers. Furthermore, one development suggestion was made towards clear communication regarding running experience requirements, as one participant reflected that the event could target many experience levels as it is not very technical or has many elevation changes, but these factors should be highlighted to address any misconceptions that some might have.

Also, in the survey it was examined with open-ended questions what kind of development ideas participants had for the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event. From these development suggestions, five themes were identified. Three of the themes were related to customer experiences, these themes were services, rewards, and food served after the finish line. Concerning services number of stations was mentioned four times. And concerning rewards four open-ended answers were related that participants were dissatisfied with the rewards and finisher bags. Concerning post-run meals three respondents felt like they appreciated a different kind of post-run food.

6.1.2   Survey reflections and conclusions

To analyze the survey results even further. It was aimed to create three different customer segment profiles, based on running distance preferences. In Webpropol software the data was further analyzed into three groups by filtering the responses to three segments to gain more knowledge of different running distance preferences and use them as segmentation factors. Three segments were created based on filtered responses. Segment A: Shorter distance trail runners (11-34km), Segment 2. Medium-Ultra distance trail runners (35-70km), and Segment 3. Long-distance ultra trail runners (71-160+km). The further visualizations for analysis of the segments can be seen in Appendix 3-5.

Segment A: Shorter distance trail runners 11-34 km (Appendix 3).

According to survey results, this segment is the smallest one. The respondents who prefer shorter distances, often also prefer the distances medium-ultra distances, shorter distances (11-34km) received 18 votes, while in this segment 16 votes were given for 37-70 km, and 3 votes for 71-160km+. In this segment most participants were from Uusimaa (n=6), but 1 each from Varsinais-Suomi, Pirkanmaa, Päijät-Häme, Etelä-Karjala, and Lappi. According to survey results in this segment, there are more women than men. Shorter distances were attractive to 8 women, and 3 men. According to age distribution, the shorter distances were seen as attractive to ages of 38-42 (n=4), 48-52 (n=3), 53-57 (n=2), 43-47 (n=1), and 28-32 (n=1). In this segment the respondents had practices trail running 1-5 years (n=7), and 6-10 years (n=4). The majority are in Paid employment (n=10), while a small amount 1 each are student or entrepreneur. According to survey results the scenic route and suitable route length were the most impactful factors when determining which trail running event the respondents wanted to with a score of 4,6 each. The second most

important factor was the date of the event and challenging oneself, with a score of 4,5 each. Furthermore, the third most important factor is the opportunity to see and experience new places and connect traveling with trail running hobby, with an average of 4,3. Furthermore, the lowest score (1,4) was received by collection of ITRA points, followed by Sponsors of the event organization (1,8), and ancillary services (2,1).

Determining how different aspects affected participation in Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail even the most important factors for this segment were suitable route length (4,7), challenging self (4,7), followed by scenic route (4,5), and Fjeld location (4,5). The third highest score was a small event (4,1) and the date of the event (4,1). The least impactful factors were the collection of ITRA points, and recommendation/word of mouth, and the third least impactful factor was the price of the participation fee. This segment's most used social media platform is Facebook, followed by Instagram as the second platform and YouTube as the third most used platform. In this segment 1 participant also uses TikTok and 1 Twitter. In this segment, the most popular running-related content is social media influencers (n=6), followed by Podcasts (n=5), and Blogs (n=4).

Segment B. Medium-Ultra distance trail runners (Appendix 4).

According to survey results, this segment is the largest one. In the segment of medium ultra distance 45 votes were given for medium ultra distance distances (35-70km), furthermore (11-34km) received 18 votes, while in this segment 17 votes were given for 71-160km+.

According to survey results, in this segment, the most participants were from Uusimaa (n=12), and Lappi, Varsinais-Suomi, and Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (n=3) each, furthermore to this segment Etelä-Karjala, Keski-Suomi, Päijät-Häme, and Satakunta all received 1 (n=1) participant. It is noteworthy, that in this segment in which trail runners are classified as medium ultra trail distances, 45 votes were given to distances that belonged to the range of 35-70km, but people who preferred these distances also gave 18 votes for distances between 11-34km, and 17 to distances between 71-160+km. These medium-ultra distances were seen as attractive to 15 women, and 10 men. According to age distribution, the medium-ultra distances were seen as attractive to ages 38-42 (n=6), 48-52 (n=5), 43-47 (n=5), 33-37 (n=4), 28-32 (n=3), and 58-62 (n=1) and 53-57 (n=1). In this segment, the respondents had practiced trail running 1-5 years (n=12), 6-10 years (n=10), less than a year (n=2), and 11-15 years (n=1). This shows that in this segment, the participants often have a

relatively lot of experience as trail runners, but also some new trail runners have a high desire to develop for longer races.

The majority of participants in this profile are in paid employment (n=20), whereas in this profile there are more entrepreneurs (n=4), students (n=3), and also one unemployed. This segment scored the highest for challenging oneself to be a prominent factor when determining which trail running event to participate in general (4,6), followed by the length of the running route and scenic running route (4,4 each), followed by the versatile running route (4,2), date of the event (4,2) and opportunity to see and experience new places and connect traveling with trail running hobby (4,2). The least impactful factors were the collection of ITRA points (1,5), Sponsors of the event organization (1,6), and Ancillary services (1,9). It was analyzed how different factors affected this segment's willingness to participate in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event. Challenging oneself scored the highest (4,6), whereas fjeld location scored the second highest (4,5), and suitable route length and scenic route shared the third highest score (4,4). Furthermore, the least high score was received by a collection of ITRA points (1,4), followed by Recommendations/Word of mouth (2,2), and the third lowest score was shared by inspiring event marketing and the price of the participation fee (2,9).

This segment's most used social media platforms are first Facebook and Instagram (n=22 each), followed by YouTube (n=11), and TikTik (n=5). Also, one person in this segment uses Twitter, and one does not use social media. In this segment, most running-related content is social media influencers (n=15), followed by Podcast (n=11), and Blogs (n=19).

Segment C. Long ultra-distance trail runners (Appendix 5).

According to survey respondents, most participants from this segment came from Uusimaa (n=6), followed by Varsinais-Suomi, Keski-Suomi, Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (n=2) each, furthermore, in this segment from Lappi, Pirkanmaa, and Satakunta there was 1 participant from each region. These long ultra distances were seen as attractive to more (n=9) men than women (n=6). According to age distribution, the long ultra distances are the most attractive to people in the age range 43-47 (n=4), followed by 43-52, 38-42, 33-37 (n=3 each), and lastly 28-32 (n=2). In this segment the participants. In this segment the participants had practiced trail running for 1-5 years (n=8), and 6-10 years (n=7). In this segment employment status shows that most that belong to this segment are

in paid employment (n=11), followed by entrepreneurs (n=4), followed by 1 student and 1 unemployed.

When determining the factors that contribute to the participation of trail running events in general this segment scored the highest for challenging oneself (4,5), Opportunity to see and experience new places and connecting traveling with trail running hobby, versatile running route, and length of running route (4,3) each, while the third highest score was received by the scenic running route, date of the event and there is a good amount of accommodations options near the event (4,0) each. The lowest scores were the collection of ITRA points (1,4), sponsors of the event organization (1,5), and ancillary services (1,7).

The factors that affected this segment most in participation in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event were challenging oneself and fjeld location (4,7 each), and suitable route length (4,5), followed by scenic route (4,4). The least impactful factors for participation were the Collection of ITRA points (1,3), recommendations/word of mouth (1,9), and inspiring event marketing (2,9).

This segment's most used social media platforms are Instagram (n=22), Facebook (n=12), YouTube (n=6), and ultimately TikTok (n=3). In this segment social media influencers are the most followed running related content providers, whereas Podcasts come second (n=8), followed by Vlogs and Blogs (n=3 each).

6.2   Interview results

In this section results and reflections of the interviews are described, correspondingly to the themes of literature review, and research questions. The structure of the results does not equate directly with the themes of the interview structure in Appendix Two but rather corresponds to themes that would be the most useful for answering the research questions and give apprehension concerning the most remarkable insights gained from the qualitative part of the study.

6.2.1   Motives for practicing trail running and participating in events.

The qualitative research results suggest that the most important motives for people practicing trail running and participating in trail running events emphasize the importance of challenging oneself, as this was a motivating factor for all interview participants. Furthermore, in Responses of R2, R5, R4, and R5 the appreciation of enjoying nature while running was present. Respondent R1 reflected that challenging oneself is important, and trail running is a much more unique sport compared to road running, and each offers a different kind of route to challenge oneself compared to road marathons, which are always time-based. In regular marathons, the results of different events can be compared, but in trail running events different event's results cannot be compared.

> *And I guess it's a kind of challenging oneself, that's what it is. That's what motivates you. That's probably what it is. It brings a bit of a different challenge than Half marathons or marathons, they are based on just the time. In trail running time and running against it is not so important, because every route is different. Of course, there is route-specific time, and you can run against it, but that's it. It's about challenging yourself.''* (R1)

 Respondent R2 reflected that other important motivators were related to experiencing different sceneries and different places while having a safely arranged environment to do so with correct route markings and provided aid stations. While respondent R2, also considered the fun part of participation in these events.

> *'' Actually, those different sceneries and seeing different places, as I am also not good at orienteering. In trail running events you can see different places and the circumstances are safe, and it is about challenging oneself. And you get to run with a goal in mind, that is actually it. And then, these trail running events are so nice. That is what is motivating. Well, it is about seeing different places. And then, that the route is well designed, so you cannot get lost, even if I may have gotten lost a few times. But it is about the safe circumstances, and then the aid stations. And course new different experiences from different sceneries.''* (R2)

Respondent R4 reflected that trail running, specifically trail ultra running is much about self-development, mental toughness, staying in good shape, and appreciation of time spent in nature. Similarly, respondent R5 considered that trail running is important for self-development, physical fitness, and experiencing nature in changing terrains.

"Well, it is the self-development, and fighting against oneself. And seeing personal development. And then in trail running, especially in Ultrarunning it is at least as much mental as physical aspect. So that you have interesting conversations with yourself along the way. And in overall, maintaining fitness level and spending time in the nature." (R4)

"It is winning oneself, self-development, and taking care of physical fitness. And of course, that you get to be in nature, and in changing terrains." (R5*)*

6.2.2 Challenges interviewees face regarding participation

In the interviews, it was discussed whether trail runners face any obstacles, that may prevent them from participating in trail running events in general. These can be considered as an important issue, as these obstructs might contain factors that the event organizations might be able to find solutions, in general, to be able to attract a wider customer base. The biggest challenges that the respondents considered that have an impact on participation in trail running events are related to practical arrangements. Additionally, respondent R1 mentioned that the received value is important, if the event is in a location far away but doesn't cater for the long distance it is not valuable enough to participate. Additionally, respondent R1 mentioned that practical arrangements such as transportation and accommodation options play an important role. Respondents R3 and R4 shared similar ideas of challenges related to practical arrangements but also pointed out that one big factor that may have a negative impact on participation is related to cost, especially for solo participators. Respondent R5 considered that distance can be a challenging factor, especially as it can be related to not having the opportunity to take enough time off from work.

"It is more about the benefit relationship. For instance, a 10 km race in Helsinki far away from my place of residence, I do not think I would bother to participate in such a short race as the benefit relationship is not good in that. But of course, practical factors have an impact, such as accommodation, and whether can you go there by public transport, or do you need to drive your car. All these factors have an impact on participation." (R1)

"There would be so many events that it would be very cool to go, in wonderful places. But most of all it is that logistic challenge. Especially those events in the North, have started to interest me more. Being in the fjelds is tempting, but that takes a lot of planning and preparation. Planning how to get there, because I don't have a lot of friends who do the same thing, so getting there by yourself takes its arrangements. Another factor was challenging to find accommodation as it is difficult and expensive for solo participators. I would end up staying too far away as there was no option nearby at a decent price for one person. So, these things are mostly related to

practical arrangements and prices. Hence, if the total cost is getting closer to thousands of euros, then it's starting to have a negative impact on participation.'' (R3)

'' Well, the distance is the biggest. The most interesting ones are more far away from Helsinki. So that makes it slower, so far has not prevented participation but you do have to consider more carefully which one to participate, in and where to spend the money. Because these travels do take money. In the beginning, it was more like a question of daring and doubt, as I didn't know too many people from the trail running community. Now I have made friends who run. But at first, it was more like a doubt that if I will make it, how are the aid stations, but that was only in the first events.'' (R4)

"If the event is very far away from my living area, that makes me think more about whether I can go. And if I cannot get more time off from work than a weekend then it is very possible I cannot go.'' (R5)

Respondent R2 shared that one of the most important considerations is own fitness-related abilities, whether one is physically prepared enough to participate in the event, and whether the event has been marketed in a way that the one feels like it is challenging enough but not too far out from one's physical fitness or skills for technical terrains.

"Well, It is about your abilities, for instance knowing that are you capable of going through it, whether are you at the right fitness level, are you surely fit enough. Those play a part. Also, knowing what kind of elevation gains there are, and how challenging is the terrain. Those are the things that make you wonder. And course, how challenging the marketers have marketed the event.'' (R2)

The factors contributing to the attractiveness of Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail

In the interviews, the most important factors that made participants want to choose the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event were discussed. All respondents shared a view that one of the main factors in participating in the event was related to experiencing the real Northern Lapland and experiencing a unique event experience. Respondent R1 shared that he was also inspired to go because the practical arrangements were easily arranged, such as transport through public transport, and the area had all the needed services. Respondents R2 and R4 shared that one of their main motivational factors was related to seeking thrill and adventure from the experience. Furthermore, respondent R4 mentioned one aspect of motivation coming from peer-to-peer persuasion.

''Well of course that as a place it is unique or exotic, as it is so deep in the North. You cannot get much more North in Finland. And of course, there was practical stuff, such as you could find accommodation, there was a shop nearby, and I could go by public transport. That's about it, the practical stull. And it is such an exotic location, and those practical stuff. Even if the area is a small locality, you could find everything that you need.'' (R1)

"Yes, one of the factors that I wanted to go as far as possible to Lapland, and to see the North and what it is like there in the upper part of Lapland. That it is. And I was tempted kind of like a fear. Not really a fear but thinking that it is not for beginners. But it was positive for me. And it was not as hard as I imagined. So, it was kind of like excitement that let's try if I can make it. Let's see if I can go that far to the wilderness area, as it was really in the wilderness compared to Ruka or other places where I have been. And maybe it was the charm or magic that Lapland has.'' (R2)

The first one was definitely adventurous. It was that kind of adventurousness that sounded wild. The crossings of the rivers in which I've seen in the videos on YouTube. Which was actually pretty thrilling. And second, it was kind of me and my friend with whom we talked each other into it. I do not think that I would have done the trip alone, even if we ran completely at different speeds and stuff. We encouraged each other to register and travel together so that was already a big factor in participation. And of course, it is the uniqueness, very different from other events held in the North. As many events in North are kind of mass events, and this one had much fewer aid stations and that kind of stuff that adds to the adventurousness.'' (R4)

Respondent R5 shared that the first time she participated in the event, the most important factor was the persuasion of a family member who initially raised an interest to join the event, but furthermore, the main motivation to participate was the idea to experience how is it to run in that northern area of Finland. However, the first positive event experience from the organizers, whom she considered to carry a very positive and considerate approach motivated her to further participation. Also, the diversity of the route was one main motivating factors.

"I was persuaded by someone who also registered, and I was interested to experience how is run in that northern part. Then, when I participated for the second time the good experiences from the first participation and how the event organizers took all the competitors into account as individuals. And,the diversity of the route there.'' (R5).

6.2.3 Distinguishing factors of Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail

In the interview, it was discussed how the interviewees consider the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail Event to stand out from other trail running events. In all the responses' location was mentioned.

Respondent R1, considered that the location makes the event stand out from the competitors, but acknowledges that the location also carries challenges, such as limited capacity among accommodation options, hence it is not a typical trail running event near ski resorts that can accommodate a large volume of visitors.

> *"It is the location. If I would think that I would arrange or market the event it would be the location. Of course, that brings its own challenges if you compare many other events that are held by in ski resorts for example where there is a lot of accommodation capacity, which Kaldoaivi doesn't have as much in areas around Utsjoki and Nuorgam. But the location is that kind of factor that makes it stand out."* (R1)

R2 reflects that a small event, in a unique location North of Lapland, and little elevation gains make the event different, and especially little elevation gains play a factor in how the event can serve also for not so experienced trail runners. Whereas respondent R3 reflected that the atmosphere and sense of community of the event gave a very positive experience, especially for solo participators.

> *"At least it is a kind of special small event. And you are alone there. That it is not a mass event and of course the location in the North as it is so far in the North. But it may come as a surprise to some people that there is not so much elevation gains, as it is already so high up. So that has been a surprise to some that it is actually quite easy somehow. So, I would kind of recommend it. Well, I do not dare to recommend it, but maybe there is a reason, why it is not recommended for beginners. Maybe that is because it goes in the wilderness area, but otherwise it is kind of good for the beginners as a hiking excursion or trail running event."(R2).*

> *"I do not have that much experience from others, but in my opinion, there was such a nice and supportive atmosphere. And after the run people stayed there to talk with each other and to me that was nice especially, as I was a solo participant traveling alone. And it was nice that there was a kind of sense of community after the run, and that there were many others who had come alone, and I stayed talking with them as otherwise I would have just gone back to the cabin alone. In other events that I have been to, in my experience it has been more like after you've run you just walk to your car and leave, at least it has been like that in the events near the capital area, so it was a different experience in this. I think that in that kind of event that people come from further away, I think that made the event character a little special."(R3)*

Respondent R4, mentioned that the fact that the event is the most northern ultra-distance trail running is one of the distinguishing factors. As well running alone in such an austere wilderness area, without barely facing anyone during the route gives such a strong sense of running alone in

the wilderness, without actually being. Furthermore, respondent R5 shared a similar opinion that the event distinguishes itself from other events by being the most Northern trail running event, in which one truly runs in the wilderness. Additionally, R5 mentioned that the event distinguishes being a small and versatile multisport event, as it also offers a series for bikers.

> *'' Well at least then, it marketed itself as the most northern ultra event if I remember correctly. If that is still correct at least I thought that sounded like very distinguishing factors. And of course, that you run there through the wilderness area felt as if it was as austere route as it can get. Kind of like you are the closest to the experience of being all alone there with your own luck, without actually being.'' (R4)*

> *''It is the fact that it is Finland's most northern event, you run fully in the wilderness area. It is a small and versatile event, and it serves also its own event to the bikers.'' (R5)*

6.2.4 Customer experience in Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail, and development suggestions

The research proposed to see the level of satisfaction among trail running participants and to see in which areas the organization could consider improving their actions, as well as to know which areas the participants felt especially satisfied. In all the interviews high level of satisfaction towards event organization and the arrangements were present. Respondent R1 felt like the event was very well organized, and for a small-scale event, the arrangements were organized in a way that is usually met in large events. Respondent R3, was especially pleased that the information concerning the event day, such as information letters was comprehensive and gave a strong sense of safety.

> *''It was a very well-organized event, in that sense there is nothing to complain about. Rather small event, but in that sense, it felt like the arrangements were such as in a large event but in a small organization. What can I say is that the arrangements were very good, and there is nothing to complain about.'' (R1)*

> *''During the event, I felt that the arrangements from the organization were nicely held. All information was available easily, and all the info letters were good. But I don't yet have so much experience compared to others. And all the information was offered so thoroughly, so that made it feel safe to go. At the location, you knew where to contact and where is everything located.'' (R3)*

However, there were some remarks made regarding development suggestions. One interviewee has suggestions related to running distance development. Respondent R3 who participated in the 2023 18 km distance, felt like the event organization could consider offering a new distance between 18km and the ultra-distance of 57 kilometers, as many trail runners who have participated in 18 km and want to re-register find that the gap between 18 km and 57 km is too long, hence a distance around 30 kilometers would serve them better for challenging themselves for re-registering.

''Because last year I ran 18 km, and I am going again with 18 km, but the next step is 57 km. If there had been some distance in the middle of those distances, I would have been pleased to be able to get the challenge, as a leap from 18 to 57 km is big. 18 km for this kind of amateur runner very basic, run, but then again 57 km in fjelds is much more challenging. So, a shorter distance became available but not the intermediate, and many people that I spoke to after the event agreed with this. Many would want to challenge themselves for intermediate distances if there was an option.'' (R3)

Additionally, Respondent R1, considered that the event route is slightly boring, due to being relatively flat and similar due to the terrain of the area compared to some other trail running events. Hence this is not necessarily a development suggestion as the terrain cannot be changed. However, this factor is something that could be considered in the marketing actions, as this could potentially be a positive aspect to some target groups, as the event could attract trail runners, who are more appealed with less elevation gains, and with a chance to run the route at faster speed.

''Maybe the route was a little boring if I may say so, or very similar all the way. The route was running on an ATV track the whole trip. The last 5 km is on asphalt, otherwise, it is a very similar kind of relatively flat, with no big elevations. Of course, there were few bodies of water crossings then and again which brought their own spice, but they are a small part of the whole route if I consider some negative sides. Of course, those cannot be changed as terrain is what is it. On the other hand, the route is quite easy if a 57 km distance can be considered easy. However, the route is runnable pretty much all the way.'' R1

Furthermore, Respondent R3 felt that the food served at the finish line could have been a little more voluminous, and there was a service break when coffee was not available.

'' It was cold and bad weather, so maybe food could have been just more voluminous. You were offered a very small portion, so maybe it should have been more

voluminous. And coffee was not available. Maybe the service had a stop during that time. So, during that time you kind of had to search that you could get a warm drink.'' (R3)

In addition, one respondent, R4 shared an experience that event route markings especially on longer distances should potentially be marked very well in detail. Respondent R4 participated in the event for few years ago, hence the route markings might not represent the markings of the last event, nor the coming event. However, in this interview, it was pointed out that the importance of route markings, or prior detailed information about the route, especially among participants who do not necessarily have much experience in events that are not marked very frequently, especially as in the Kaldoaivi Ultra trail there is fewer runners or volunteers to face during the route to ask if not sure about the directions, especially during the ultra-distances, hence it is very important for participants to have sufficient skills for using GPS device, such as clocks and also prior knowledge of the route. However, with interview R4 it was also pointed out that this does add to adventurousness and thrill for the event, but it is an aspect to consider and to communicate clearly with the followers before the event, so it does not come as a surprise to participants who may have been used to very easy to follow route markings and facing many other runners.

> *''Well, the route has been marked infrequently, and I think that it was a requirement to carry a GPS device, which I had in my clock. And I understand that the route is less marked than in many other events. But I did a couple of times or more runs with uncertainty about which is the correct direction to go and once I ran about 2,5 kilometers extra loop because I took the wrong direction.''* (R4).

6.2.5 Added services to enhance customer experience

In the interviews, it was discussed whether any services could be utilized to increase the customer experience of Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event participants. Respondents R1, R4, and R5 could not think of any services that could add value to them that could be implemented by Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail. However, a few suggestions were made by Respondent R2 and R3. Respondent R2 discussed that there is a gap in finding accommodation options near their event site as the options are limited, which has an impact on overall customer satisfaction if there is no accommodation very close to the event location, which can also be a constraint for participation. Respondent R2 considered that it might be an idea to see if group accommodations, such as schools or campsites could be

considered to accommodate more participants within the area to provide cheaper options near the event site.

> *'' I do not know how you could easily get more accommodations but something. You could get more people if there is an accommodation challenge. I Do not know how but is there a camping area? When I registered you had to book accommodation very early if you want to get one nearby. And there are some cabins, but very little, and they can be far away if you don't get from that closed area. I do not know if they could utilize for example schools or something. Group accommodations. I do not know if that is possible and if adult people would go for school accommodations.''* (R2)

Respondent R3 considered that transportation options and finding accommodation can be difficult for solo participators both financially and logistically, which are not necessarily something that should be implemented by the organization, but something to acknowledge as there are individuals who would be pleased with group traveling options to participate in trail running events. However, it is noteworthy that Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail does have a closed Facebook page for racers, in which participants can communicate with each other about group accommodations and group transfers, but for the event organization, it might be an idea to promote this group more, as not this community is not known among all participants. Furthermore, Respondent R3 considered that especially for solo participators ancillary activity to make the event more eventful could be nice within the event area which could even further improve the attendance experience, especially for solo participants who have traveled long distances for the event. Respondent R3 considered that for instance street food options might have been nice within the area, as Respondent R3 felt that easy street food options might serve hungry participants and would provide a chance for participants to further interact with each other.

> *''Maybe it could have been more something like easy street food it would have been more appealing. Especially because I think there might have been some hungry people there. ''* (R3)

Regarding services that are offered online, there were other additional suggestions for services that could be useful for trail runner participants. Respondent R2 reflected that it could be useful or offer a chat service, or live stream service closer to the event, in which professionals would answer questions regarding for instance how to prepare for the event, and what kind of gear to choose for the event to know that one will bring sufficient amount, for instance, back-up energy

and drinks, especially in an event that there are very little aid stations provided during the course. Furthermore, respondent R2, considered that it would be useful to have a platform in which trail runner's blogs could be easily found. This recommendation would not be necessarily for Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail, but in general useful for the trail running community who like to find each other's blogs in one place.

> *''Well, maybe something related to gear. Such as a chat service or live stream closer to the event, in which professionals would answer questions. Such as how to prepare, and what gear could be used. Or blogs, in which it is easy to find the experiences of runners in one place. There is a lot of experience from runners, which you could find. But so that you could find them in one place. But yeah, such as a chat at least closer to the event. Before the event, I thought weeks before things like what kind of socks and gear and such and are these things good enough. So It would be useful to know what to bring, as it is a very different kind of event and it has very few aid stations. So, you know that you carry the right stuff and enough but not too much. You need to be prepared, but not too much.''* (R2)

Respondent R4 considered that there are not any services that would necessarily serve him as a trail runner, which could be implemented by Kaldoaivi. However, respondent R4 has experience in general regarding finding trail-running events that sometimes events get missed due to a lack of correct marketing efforts. Respondent R4 mentioned that some other events provide trail running schools and training tips for trail runners, however for respondent considered that those can be useful for some but would necessarily provide added value to oneself.

> *''Not really. Actually, one that I could mention, but it is not related to Kaldoaivi. But related more to overall about finding the events overall. There are a lot of events, but sometimes the events are not marketed enough so they cannot be found, and I miss events due to a lack of knowing what's going on. Some events offer running school training tips and practical tips, but I never used them, and do not really need them. That is of course a personal aspect of what attracts you and what you want to do. There is nothing wrong about that kind of training schools and tips, of course, sometimes you might be able to get some ideas and try some training tips, but I do not really need them now.''* (R1)

Additionally, R3 mentioned that it would be beneficial for participants to get more insights about what can be done in the surrounding area, and whether there are for instance some other trails that can be experienced around the area, and which highlighted spots that are worthwhile to check in the surrounding area. This could also help to promote local businesses and help local organizations as the sports tourists are already visiting the area. This is supported by prior research

by Wafi et al. (2018, p. 270) whose research suggests that the maximum advantages of small-scale sport tourism are formed when sport event tourism is combined with other tourism products as this helps bring added value to tourists but also greater economic benefits to the area. Additionally, Respondent R3 mentioned that there could be content online related to how to train, and prepare for the event, and something that creates build-up and anticipation for the event, such as blogs of inspiring content. Respondent R3 further considered that hearing how other participants of the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail train would be inspiring to hear.

''Well in all, maybe there could be more about how to prepare for the events. Now and then I go to see if there is something new related to the event that has kind of passed my attention. Now that I am waiting for the next event. Maybe something related to preparation for the event, something inspiring build-up for the event. Such as blogs related to summer events, and something inspiring. And maybe about what is around there, like some other trails that could be checked while being there. So more like highlighting the area and surroundings, as you come there for the event, but you could also check the area. I did not know what else I could do while I was there.'' (R3)

''Well, what can I say? Maybe there could be at the web page something like that would help you with the planning for the trip. As it is quite a big step to get there from my starting point. I feel like the trip was a little bit like scratching the surface. So, I think I could have gotten more from the overall experience if I had given a bit more information about what else you can do in the area. I think that could also be a good option for local businesses to do more cooperation as people are already coming there so a lot of fun things could be added to the trip.'' (R3)

Respondent R5 mentioned that what would be useful is that have a very detailed description of the route, the elevation gains, and river crossings. The more detailed the route description is the better a trail runner can prepare for it and help in personal goal setting.

'' Maybe something about how to prepare for the event better. To me, it is like more like more detailed description of the route especially as that is kind of a half-aided route, in a manner that for instance you take water from the river. So more detailed information about the route and the elevation changes, river crossings. I think the more detailed the information the better, makes you feel more trustful to participate. If I remember, there was some information about the route, but maybe not as much as many other events give. I have my personal preferences on how to search for information about the route through an application, in which you can find data from previous year's runners' data, such as how long it took them, what kind of elevation gains and elevation changes there were, and such. That kind of helps to prepare for

*the event and to set goals and kind of lets you know what can happen during the
route. I like to be prepared for the events as a runner. Not everyone is the same, but
for me, it would serve to know more the better about the route and its characteris-
tics. That helps me.''*(R4)

6.2.6 Marketing strategies and tactics that could used to increase the awareness

In the interviews, it was discussed how interviewees consider that Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail could get

more awareness in their marketing actions, especially online and social media. Respondent R1 re-

flects that the event organization could post more actively, as in one's opinion some other trail-

running organizations post more actively, even daily. And to utilize more other year's pictures, and

mention more sponsors in posts, while also utilizing more videos in their marketing actions.

> *''Maybe just be more active. They do make posts but maybe quite seldom. Compared
> to some events that I follow and have started to follow. They are very active and post
> daily. Maybe Kaldoaivi posts a little seldomly if I think of something. Maybe other
> year's pictures could be used more. I am sure there are a lot of good pictures availa-
> ble. And also utilizing more of those. Also, mention sponsors more and use them
> within marketing actions. And possibly use more videos.''* (R1)

Respondent R2, considered that the organization could consider attracting more known trail run-

ners trail runner, also foreign names. The event already attracts some number of Norwegians who

are known to run the routes at fast speeds. Hence attracting tougher national and foreign known

trail runners to the event would help increase awareness of the event. Additionally, respondent

R2 considered that the event should make itself visible on hiking, and nature tourism-related plat-

forms, this would bring awareness, especially among those who are already interested in visiting

Lapland.

> *'' Maybe more tougher trail runners could be Kaldoaivi and then awareness and mar-
> keting through them, it would be good to get some bigger trail runner names. Or get
> other runners from other countries to participate. For instance, there are quite a lot
> of Norwegians in the Kaldoaivi event who would run very fast speeds. So for ad-
> vanced runners, the route is very fast. But through them for example. But maybe for
> new people, who have a crush on Lapland or who want to get to know the area.
> Maybe different hiking platforms, or platforms in general where nature tourism is
> emphasized.''* (R2)

Respondent R4 shared similar thoughts and considered those trail runner social media influencers,

especially the top performers are much followed by the trail running community, hence they

provide a channel to increase awareness of the event. Additionally, respondent R4 considered that trail running in general is much community community-based, and people's peer-to-peer experiences in social media are important factors for attracting participation.

> '' There are many trail runners in social media, whom I follow in social media. In my opinion, when they cooperate with some event, I also get exposed to those events and their marketing. I think it is quite a widespread phenomenon, especially when the top runners get followed a lot on social media. I think trail running as a discipline is that kind of social and community-based sport, therefore everything such as grapevine in social media carries a lot of impacts.'' (R4)

Respondent R2 considered that the event could potentially try approaching younger target audiences more in marketing actions.

> ''Well, I don't really know, to whom that could be marketed better. Maybe to younger people, it could be marketed more. But I do now know how the younger people who participate in trail running know about it. But maybe younger people could be targeted more.'' (R2)

Respondent R3 considered that peer-to-peer shared experience is important for inspiring participation. R3 felt that getting to hear experiences from regular trail runner participants is important, especially for events such as Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail that cater to different experiences and fitness levels, and the event participation can easily sound unrealistic goal to many, but getting to hear real experiences real stories from trail runners may influence positively on participation. Kaldoaivi Ultra could implement these stories in some of its communication channels. Additionally, respondent R3 suggested that the content in social media in general in marketing could be more frequent and more versatile.

> '' Well, I have always enjoyed peer experience, so that for example some people who had been in Kaldoaivi would share their running backgrounds. Because I first felt a little bit like it was a utopistic idea that I could ever run in a place like that. And then I realized that it is not that much different, in a way that it was really a realistic goal for myself. If I consider people who are similar level as me, like people my age and exercise like me, to whom it is a very possible goal. It sounds much more tough than it is. Such as the distance I did, could attract people with shared peer experience and at least I would appreciate that kind of content so that would be nice. Nice to hear about other people's experiences especially as the trail running is still quite a new thing for me. And I kind of would appreciate hearing trail running stories of people, such as how they have, they have started trail running, and such as how one has

developed, how they train, and that kind of thing. That is kind of normal people's sto-
ries. " (R3)

"Well maybe that, when you are waiting for the next event, maybe there could be
more context, more often and it could be more versatile. Maybe that is what I would
appreciate." (R3)

Respondent R5 mentioned that Podcasts are something that she listens to, especially while run-
ning. Hence, Podcasts might provide a tool for increasing awareness of the event for trail runners
who are part of the trail running community, and podcasts might further help trail runners to bet-
ter prepare for long-distance running or events in general.

"Well, I would be interested in Podcasts. I do listen to podcasts every now at then, especially
during running. I don't have any specific content that would interest, but maybe for example
how to prepare well for longer distances, or an event." (R5)

7 Conclusion

As a conclusion of the research, the key findings of the study indicate that currently, the customer
experience of the Kaldoaivi Ultra trail is highly positive. The participants remarkably value the ex-
otic and unique location in Northern Lapland. Many research participants appreciate especially the
small-scale event concept, the organization, and the event arrangements. In the survey, it was re-
vealed that 100% percent of the respondents would recommend the event to others. Some in-
sights emerged from the research suggest that there are few development suggestions from the
viewpoints of some participants, these suggestions concern adding more aid stations, improved
post-food and rewards, and offering a broader range of running distances. Some additional added
value suggestions which emerged from the research imply that more collaboration with local busi-
nesses could be useful for promoting activities that can be experienced within the area as this
could be beneficial for increasing sport tourism experience of the participants. Furthermore, ear-
lier, and more visible promotion of Facebook Racers group could be useful for assisting runners
with event planning for instance with logistic, accommodation and experience sharing purposes,
and to limit possible obstacles that might prevent from participation. Regarding enhancing the
marketing efforts of the organization more visibility could be increased for instance through more

content in running or orienteering-related media, as well as nature tourism-related platforms. The organization might benefit from influencer partnerships, for instance in Youtube, or Podcasts. The marketing content could emphasize more targeted content to different levels of experience to resonate with the audience and clarify any misconceptions. The Chapter 7 focuses on these development proposals in detail, which are created to answer the research questions, but additionally to reflect the theoretical framework.

7.1 Research assessment & ethicality.

In this chapter, it is assessed how well concepts of validity, reliability, trustworthiness & ethical issues are evaluated after the research. Internal validity refers to a measurement or instrument used in the research, such as questionnaire validity, which describes how accurately the variables and data collected reflect the characteristics of the phenomenon under study. It also describes how well the study identifies and measures all relevant variables (Veal & Darcy, 2014, 49). Internal validity in this research has been achieved by creating a survey that is easily understood and ensuring that the questions are not leading. Furthermore, the questionnaire was designed in Finnish and English, to make it possible for non-Finnish speakers to understand and participate. Additionally, the survey was designed not to take too long time to fill to minimize the fatigue of respondents which might occur in case of long-lasting surveys, lastly, the thesis instructor was and giving feedback on the questions before publishing the survey link, to ensure that other viewpoints were considered. Moreover, the online survey was created anonymously, and any identifiable data was not collected hence minimizing the privacy concerns of respondents, with an only exception that people who wanted to participate in the interview could leave their e-mail for further contact, and this part was formed with GDPR protection.

External validity concerns how generalizable and representative the results are if compared to a larger population outside the studied sample (Veal & Darcy, 2014, p.49). The external validity of quantitative research was affected by the survey response rate and representativeness of the sample. From the quantitative research, the survey link was opened 66 times and completed 30 times, and compared to that number response rate was 45,4%. The survey was started 45 times, and the survey was completed 30 times, which gives the survey response rate of 66,6%, which is sufficient. Furthermore, considering the representativeness of the sample, 30 completed surveys is a sufficient response number considering that Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail had 146 trail running

participants in 2023, hence comparing the year's participation number, the responses indicated a 20,5% representative rate of the population. However, it is still noteworthy that the sample size was still rather small compared to some quantitative research. Furthermore, compared to large populations 30 responses is a small sample size, which did have some effect on what kind of data analysis methods could be used. Another worth mentioning aspect concerning possible limitations of the research is that was conducted during the off-season; hence the recall of the research participants might have been different if the research had been conducted directly after the event.

Reliability in research refers to the context of how the results would appear unaffected if the research were replicated another time, or with another sample of research participants. (Veal & Darcy, 2014, 50). The reliability of the research has been achieved by being transparent in each step of the research process and providing clear documentation of the research. During the research credibility and dependability have been achieved by having detailed descriptions of the research and asking for guidance and feedback from the thesis instructor. Lastly, confirmability has been achieved by staying objective in the research, seeking guidance from the instructor, and ensuring the research is guided by the theoretical foundation, furthermore, the research findings are based on transparent research rather than presumptions.

Stringer & Genat (2004) suggest that trustworthiness in research refers to the degree to which research results, in general, can be considered truthful and reliable (Skinner et. al., 2015, 112). Furthermore, trustworthiness in qualitative has been achieved with a high description of each research process, using triangulation of data both through a mixed method approach and utilizing sufficient theoretical sources and prior research. Furthermore, assessing the conducted interviews it can be considered that they succeeded. The interview settings were casual, and the interview times were conducted during times that best suited the participants' time schedules hence enough time was available to cover the topics. During the interviews, the questions were understood by participants, and from the interviews, enough insights were gained into the topics under examination. Considering the interview participants' sample sizes, five samples were sufficient for the purpose and workload of the author, furthermore, the samples gave enough insights from different trail running profiles. The interview findings contributed to answering the research questions and furthermore aided exploring the topics that were initially studied in quantitative research, hence the method was suitable for the research purpose and objectives.

Ethicality was considered during the research process. Informed consent was obtained from research participants in both research methods. During the research participants were informed with the purpose of the research, and acknowledged that their participation was voluntary, additionally they were informed about how the information they provided during the research was used and how the work is published. The participants were acknowledged that they could withdraw from the research at any stage if they wished and knew that they could remain anonymous and unrecognizable from the research. In accordance with Jamk's rules of data management after the thesis process all material in Webpropol is scheduled to expire after graduation, however, the Microsoft Excel files are made to last two years after publishing. Furthermore, during the interviews, the participants were asked for permission for recording and transcription. The recordings related to interviews are dated to disappear from the Teams platform after the research are finished, however, the anonymous written transcriptions are to last two years after the research is published according to JAMK rules. The special attention is paid to keep all the data that is involved in research in safe environments, on personal computer with behind safe passwords.

JAMK's ethical principles for students (2018,11) were followed to provide high-quality research and student standards. Furthermore, APA7 guidelines in referencing were followed to provide readers with accurate references and to give credit to original authors. Moreover, during the research process academic research articles, and books were utilized and found in trustworthy online databases such as Research Gate, Google Scholar, and Jamk's library database Finna. Furthermore, some non-academic articles that were important to the topic were utilized additionally.

To conclude, this research enriches the sports research towards trail running and ultra running, especially as there is limited research conducted in Finland towards the sports in master's degree studies. Furthermore, suggestions for following research could be to investigate the topic on a larger scale, for instance by conducting research that explores similar participants from different events to gain a larger sample size, hence more scientific segmentation could be achieved.

8   Proposals for development

The recommendations are based on the findings of the literature review, conducted an online survey, and in-depth interviews. The proposals are formed to answer the main research question:

R1. How can the organization effectively market its ultra trail event to attract primarily more national but also international participants among trail runners?

And research sub-questions:

RSQ1. What are the most important motives for people participating in the trail running and ultra trail running events?

RSQ2. Which factors affect the customer experience the most?

RSQ3.What kind of additional services could be added to enhance the customer experience?

RSQ4. What kind of marketing tactics should be used to increase the awareness of the event?

RSQ5. What kind of marketing strategies should be used to improve the customer experience?

8.1 Customer Experience and added value recommendation recommendations

This research aimed to detect whether any aspects of customer experience could be improved even further. According to the research, participants of KaldoAivi Ultra Trail perceive the customer experience of the event organization as highly positive, with an overall rating of 4,1/5 (survey results). However, there were a few remarks that could be improved to increase the customer experience even further. The organization might want to consider adding a few more aid stations for the routes, as well as widening the variety of beverages and snacks served at the aid stations (survey results). However, it's noteworthy that all the interview participants R1-R5 were very satisfied with the amount and variety of the aid station and the items provided at the aid stations. Also, another possible pain point discovered from the research from the perspective of a few participants was that the post-run food could be improved, as this was mentioned three times in the survey and one time in the interview. Additionally, the event organization might want to consider having better rewards for the winners, as well as offering more functional finisher bags that align with the values of the event organization, as these were mentioned four times in the survey. Furthermore, it might be beneficial for the event organizer and local businesses to do more co-operation in promoting the surroundings as the event brings sports tourism to the area. The cooperation could be promoted, for instance on the page of the Kaldoaivi Ultra, where there could be links to the tourism options in the surrounding area, or social media posts that encourage people to try other activities experienced within the surrounding area, as this might lengthen the stay of the

participants in the area as well add value to the participants. This remark was recommended by interview respondent R3, furthermore, this is supported by previous work by Wafi et al. (2018, 270.) Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the benefits of small-scale sports events to the location of Kaldoaivi as a sports tourism destination, as prior research by Hernstein & Berger (2013, 43) suggests that small-scale events offer locations an opportunity for destination branding, helps to differentiate themselves from other tourism locations, boost area's residents' pride, and supports the interaction between locals and tourists while also facilitates visitors to learn about the local residents' culture and traditions.

8.2 Segmenting, targeting, positioning.

Event organizers and event marketers running events may benefit from the practice of dividing one large heterogeneous market into sub-groups referred to as customer segments that are based on similarities in certain features. These homogenous sub-groups may share similar needs, wants, and motives for participation. The purpose of segmentation is to better understand the needs of these groups, and to modify their services, products, and marketing efforts to satisfy those needs, as this supports effective promotional strategy as well as to help to create an event that is based on customers' preferences. (Girginov et al., 2022, p.73; Shillbury et al.,2014, p.80). Segmentation is often based on demographic, psychographic, or behavioral factors (Shillbury et at. 2014, 81).

Kaldoaivi Trail Ultra participants represent a vastly wide customer base concerning their demographics, psychographics, or behavior backgrounds, many of which could be considered for segmentation profiles, but as trail runners are a highly heterogeneous group, segmentation can have its' challenges. The small sample size of survey participants makes it even more difficult to generate accurate segmentation profiles, furthermore, there is limited prior research conducted on trail running event participant profiles. Currently, there is little academic research concerning the segmentation of trail running participants, even less for the segmentation, targeting, and positioning of trail running event participants. However, Tonković et al. (2021) have explored the topic within participants in trek and trail races in Croatia to gain a better understanding of the motives and behaviors of event participants. Their study segmented participants into Personal Growth Oriented, Self-Fulfillment Oriented, and Additional Content Oriented segments. Furthermore, a previous study conducted by Hallman & Wicker (2012, 183) explored different runner profiles of road marathon events and identified three marathon runner segments: holidayers, socializers, and

marathoners which were based on key drivers for their intention to re-register to the marathon event. Furthermore, older research conducted by Masters & Ogles (1995) segmented marathon runners from their experience and motivation level into three segments Veteran, Mid-level & Rookie marathon runners. Prior research focuses on motivational aspects of runners' participation and intention to participate in running events to segment them, however in this project for a more targeted marketing content proposal, the customer segments have been segmented for their psychographic segmentation. A segmentation method that Bhasin (2023) refers to dividing the market into segments predicated on psychological factors such as beliefs, values, lifestyle, activities, interests, and opinions.

In this proposal, segmentation is done for the running distance level that they prefer to practice trail running. In the segmentation process Getz's (2005) six customer segmentation questions are used:

1. *Where do the participants come from?*

2. *Who are the participants from their demographic background?*

3. *What do they want from the sports events?*

4. *What are the conditions for their attendance?*

5. *How can this segment be reached?*

6. *How often the segments are expected to visit? (Yürük Kayapınar, 2020, 154.)*

 These segments are considered: short-medium distance trail runners (11-34km), medium-ultra distance trail runners (35-70km), and long-ultra distance trail runners (70-160km+). It is noteworthy, that these segments are based on preferred running distances, but individuals may prefer at the same time from distances that are from more than one segment. The purpose of the segmenting profiles is that organizations should focus on their marketing campaigns more on the targeted content. Keeping in mind that the event has increased the variety of running length distances during the race, hence it is essential to provide marketing content that appeals to different distance trail runners. Furthermore, besides segmentation, targeting and positioning are considered. O'Reilly et al. (2013, 191-193) consider that targeting refers to identifying the segments, then choosing the most applicable segments, after considering whether they are large enough, or

profitable enough, and whether the organization is able of serve and approach them. Lastly positioning concerns the way which, the segment distinguishes the organization's product compared to competitors. By positioning the organization seeks to create a distinguishing and unique image in the eyes of customers.

Segment 1. Shorter distance trail runners, 11-34km (Appendix 3; Appendix 6).

The segment of shorter distance trail runners is the smallest one from the research. 11 survey respondents shared that they like to run distances from 11-34km. Shorter distances are more attractive to women than men, according to the survey results 72% are women, and 28% are men. The shorter distances are attractive to participants from geographically diverse locations in Finland, but most respondents came from Uusimaa. Considering the age distribution shorter distances were most attractive to age groups of 38-42 (n=4), and 53-57 (n=3), furthermore 53-57 (n=2), 43-47 (n=1), 28-32 (n=1). In this segment, the participants typically have experienced trail running 1-10 years. The most important factors for this segment to participate in the Kaldoaivi Ultra trail were related to first challenging oneself and suitable route length, followed by the scenic route and fjeld location, and third small event and the date of the event. The least important factors were determining participation were ITRA points, recommendations/word of mouth, and participation fee. This segment primarily uses Facebook, secondary Instagram, and thirdly YouTube as a channel of social media platforms. This segment primarily follows trail-running related content through social media influencers, secondarily Podcasts, and thirdly Blogs. Hence it can be considered that social media influencers, Podcast and Blogs may offer potential platforms for reaching target groups in this segment. According to survey results, it cannot be estimated how frequent the participants will be for re-registering the event. However, it can be estimated that there will be frequent participation as the customer experience has been highly positive among the participants. Furthermore, during the interview, it was pointed out by one respondent (R3) who participated in a shorter distance trail run in the previous event that the event was a remarkable experience and will re-registering again for the next event and consider the option of annual participation. Hence, it can be considered that among this target group, frequent participation will occur among some participants. However, it might be noteworthy to consider that those individuals who have already participated in shorter distances, might benefit if the event design would offer to medium-length distances such as 34km which would help them to challenge themselves

with a goal that is yet not ultra a distance, as currently, the event design is planned 12km, 18km, 57km, 85 km, and 142 km for the following year. The organization should recognize an opportunity among participants who have already participated in the event, and who are highly satisfied with the event participation, as these are considered as attached target groups. Furthermore, it is important to ask for their feedback concerning development suggestions, examine for instance whether new distances are desired, and continue developing the relationship (Alexandris & Funk, 2016, 337).

In the interview with Respondent R3 from this segment few prospective ideas came about from event marketing could utilize more providing training and preparation tips, as this might also be beneficial for followers who might be motivated to learn for instance how other people train for longer races, as this might also provide them motivation to challenge themselves and register for longer races in the upcoming year. Also, for this segment, it is important to market the event correctly. In the survey a survey respondent had considered that the event is for very experienced runners, hence it is important to highlight in the marketing actions what kind of fitness and experience levels different running requires. For instance, through emphasizing that short distances are feasible challenges to beginners. Furthermore, the promotional activities could highlight factors such as that the event route does not have technical terrain or elevation changes to attract people might see this as an advantage.

Segment 2. Medium-long distance trail runners, 35-70km. (Appendix 2; Appendix 7).

The medium long-distance trail runners are the largest segment. In this category, there were 15 women and 10 men. During the survey, 45 votes were given for distances that were in the category of 35-70km. The medium-long ultra distances are attractive to participants from geographically diverse locations, however, most respondents (n=12) come from Uusimaa, followed by Varsinais-Suomi (n=3), Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (n=3), Lappi (n=3). Considering the age distribution, the medium-long ultra distances are attractive three top highest attractive to ages 38-42 (n=6), 48-52 (n=5), 43-47 (n=5), and 33-37(n=4). This segment typically has practiced trail running for between 1-10 years, but it is noteworthy that two respondents in this segment have practiced trail running for less than a year, which shows that trail runners may have a high desire to develop into longer distance runners. The most important factor motivating to participate in Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail for

this segment is related to challenging oneself, while the second important factor fjeld location. The third important factors were both suitable route length and scenic route. The least important factors for this segment were the collection of ITRA points, recommendations/word of mouth, the price of participation, and inspiring event marketing. This indicates that trail runners are necessarily impacted by event participation fees if they receive value for participation or inspiring event marketing. This segment primarily uses Facebook and Instagram as means of favorite social media channels, followed by YouTube, followed by TikTok. This segment primarily follows trail-running related content through social media influencers, secondarily Podcasts, and thirdly Blogs. Hence it can be considered that similarly as in segment one social media influencers, Podcasts, and Blogs may offer potential platforms for both increasing awareness of the event as well as adding value to those who have already experienced the event.

Related to prospective added services, in the interviews with a representative of segment 2, respondent R2 pointed out that R2 would have been pleased with a service or a live stream before the event, in which event providers could answer questions that participants could have related to the event or preparation for the event as participants from longer distances might important questions to ask, for instance, about the correct preparations, especially as in medium-long distances there are fewer aid-stations than in many other events of similar distances, so preparations are can be quite different compared to them.

 If considering this segment, most often the runners who are attracted to medium-length distances already have experience with different trail running events are likely to recognize the well-organized events, are especially attracted to unique event experiences and locations, and are likely to appreciate the small-event concept. Furthermore, as mentioned in segment 1. The organization should recognize the opportunity with participants who have already participated in the event and have been satisfied with the participation, it is additionally beneficial to ask for customer feedback from this segment and continue to develop the event design and continue to improve the relationship to increase customer loyalty. (Alexandris & Funk, 2016, 337).

Furthermore, in the survey few marketing suggestions were pointed out regarding event marketing, one respondent in this segment pointed out that the route is quite flat compared to many events, hence the event has the potential to be marketed for newcomers in long-distance running. Moreover, relatively small elevation gains and less technical terrains may be a positive factor not only for beginners in longer distances but also for those who are not attracted to difficult terrains.

Another one suggested that the event organization could provide short videos from the route, especially of the different water crossings and how to cross them safely as these might cause concern in some participants.

Segment 3. Long ultra-distance trail runners, 71-160+km. (Appendix 3; Appendix 8)

The Long-distance ultra-distance trail runners are the medium largest segment. In this segment, there are more men than women, as opposed to segments 1 and 2 which were more attractive to women than men. In this segment, there were 9 men and 6 women. In the survey, there were 21 votes for distances in the range of 71-160+km. Similarly, as segments 1 and 2. Long ultra distances are attractive to participants from geographically diverse locations, the most participants from this segment came from Uusimaa (n=6), followed by Varsinais-Suomi, Keski-Suomi, Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (n=2) each. According to age distribution, the long ultra distances are the most attractive to people in the age range 43-47 (n=4), followed by 43-52, 38-42, 33-37 (n=3 each), and lastly 28-32 (n=2). In this segment the participants had practiced trail running for 1-5 years (n=8), and 6-10 years (n=7), hence compared to for instance those trail runners who have run less than a year of trail runners are not attracted to these kinds of long event, at least yet. This corresponds to the findings of the Nurmi study, which revealed that marathoners and ultra-marathoners typically are older, and have practiced running for more years than those, who run shorter distances (Knechtle et al., 2023).

The factors that affected this segment most in participation in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event were first challenging oneself and fjeld location, the second suitable route length, and third scenic route. The least impactful factors for participation were first the Collection of ITRA points, the second recommendations/word of mouth, and third inspiring event marketing. It is important to acknowledge that comparing the study of the different segments, the motivating factors to participate in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event, in all segments challenging oneself was the most important factor for participation, and this is in line with the previously conducted NURMI study, in which it was revealed that there is no difference in motives to run or other associated motives e.g. to compete, to race, exercise motive in different distances of runners, such as ultra marathoners, marathoners, half marathoners, and 10k runners. (Knetchtle et al., 2023,).

In this segment, the most used social media platforms are Instagram (n=15), and Facebook (n=12), followed by Youtube (n=6), and TikTok (n=3). In this segment social media influencers are the most followed running related content providers, whereas Podcasts come second (n=8), followed by Vlogs and Blogs (n=3 each). Hence it can be considered that to attract target customers from this segment, the primary platform would be social media influencers, secondary Podcasts, but also Vlogs, and Blogs. (Appendix 5).

In this segment marketing development suggestions were related to more visibility for instance through Juoksija -magazine and to have influencer's event experiences on YouTube.

To represent some of these findings of the mixed method research, three buyer personas were created to represent customer Segments 1-3 and visualized in Appendix 6-7. These findings are based on some of the common answers of the survey. According to McLachlan (2021), buyer personas are detailed descriptions of people who represent the target audience. Buyer personas are imaginary; however, they are based on the research of either current customers or targeted customers. Utilizing buyer personas can be beneficial for targeting the ideal customers, as they are based on the research, and they represent valuable information such as the needs and pain points of customers.

8.3 Recommendations for marketing tactics.

Influencer partnerships and top trail runners' invitations

Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail could consider utilizing more influencer partnerships in its marketing strategy. Influencers could be used to share their trail running event experience or training experiences, especially for the specific Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event in their online presence, for instance, through their blogs, YouTube channels, or in trail running related Podcasts. This might benefit gaining a wider awareness level, but also bring added value to trail running participants who have already participated in the event and might be interested in hearing how other people have experienced the event, or how they are training for the longer distances to gain some insights and tips from more experienced trail runners. Utilizing influencer partnerships can offer many benefits, Noterman (2023) suggests that some of the influencer partnership advantages are related to strengthening the brand image, increased awareness, and a higher degree of engagement. Furthermore, as respondent R2 suggested in the interview it might be a good idea to invite top trail runners both

from Finland and neighboring countries for the event, as through them the event would gain more visibility.

Group Discounts:

Consider utilizing discounts for groups, for instance, offer discounts for trail running clubs of which a certain number of participants are coming or offer discounts to families. The survey results represented that seven survey respondents, out of 30 stated that special pricing for families would have a positive effect on other household members to participate in Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail. Furthermore, Worlds' Marathon (2018), suggests that offering group discounts may have other benefits than solely increasing the participation numbers as it may help to create a sense of community among the groups that participate together, which may make the experience even more meaningful and could increase loyalty. Group discounts could be for trail running teams, families, or as World Marathon (2018) suggests groups such as corporations or businesses that are seeking to enhance the team spirit outside the workplace through participating in a running event together.

More inclusive services:

For followers, offer training-related content. For instance, how to prepare for the event strategies or workshops. During the qualitative research topic of Podcast was discussed, as one of the respondents considered I am interested in Podcasts, which could consider topics such as how to prepare for long distances, or long-distance events (R5). Furthermore, in another interview, it was discussed that a participant would be interested in hearing stories about how other participants prepare for the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event (R3). These kinds of added value services could be beneficial for customer engagement and provide other participants tips and strategies to improve their event performance which the research suggests has a positive effect on the event performance (Hyun & Jordan, 2019, p.13; & Du et al., 2020,444). Furthermore, in the interviews it was pointed out that Kaldoaivi Ultra could utilize more cooperation with local businesses and tourism opportunities to promote what can done in the surrounding area, this might have a positive effect on customer experience as participants could gain local insights as well as learn from tourism-related activities that could be experienced during the event participation travel, this would also increase the tourism expenditure, help the local businesses and might increase the length of stay.

Gamification:

Organizations could utilize gamification features in their consumer engagement practices. These are referred to by Skift Meetings (2018) as a practice of adding game-like features, such as contests, discounts, or promotions which aim to increase awareness and engagement of the audience with the event.   A way of gamification that could be implemented is to run photo or video contests from footage either from the trail running event or from training sessions related to the event, which could be categorized as the ''most scenic shot'', ''the hardest part of training'' etc. This kind of tactic could be useful for creating hype on social media.

More content that emphasizes experientiality:

Organizations could utilize marketing actions such as teaser videos of the location that are shot during different seasons to create anticipation for the target groups. One survey respondent shared development suggestions for marketing shared an idea:

''It also occurred to me that the different seasons could also be used in advertising and that footage from the route could be shot in teaser style for winter, spring, and also autumn after the event.''

In addition, the marketing actions could focus on experiences, such as visual storytelling. Visual storytelling as a marketing technique can be applied by using a narrative to visualize a series of events which helps followers to form an emotional bond with a tale and its components by paying attention to it. When producing material associated with a brand, marketers frequently employ storytelling as a technique. As a component of marketing strategy, storytelling may be a useful tool for building and enhancing consumer engagement with a business, service, or product, which may have a favorable effect on consumer purchasing behavior.   (Bauer et al., 2016, 53; Mavilinda et al. 2023, p. 293) Through visual storytelling tactics the organization for instance focuses on incorporating the experiences of their trail running participants to share their trail running, and event participation stories on their social media platforms. Stadler (2023, p.188) discusses that storytelling is an especially powerful tool for marketers to use when promoting their sports events, and the storytelling techniques can hold multiple benefits as it can help to raise awareness and attraction, strengthen the image of the sports brand and destination, increase the post-event engagement and increase the word-of-mouth, while storytelling, in this case, may be beneficial for

both the event organizer and also the destination.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The questionnaire questions.

A questionnaire concerning KaldoAivi Ultra Trail event

ⓘ Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

Hey,

I am a student from Jyväskylä Ammattikorkeakoulu. I am studying a Master's Degree Programme in Sport Business Management. I am writing a Master's thesis related to trail and ultra trail running.

My questionnaire concerns customer experience and sports event marketing concerning Kaldoaivi Ultra trail event.

I wish to receive answers to this questionnaire from individuals who have participated in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event as trail runners.
It takes a few minutes to answer the questionnaire. All answers are anonymous, the answers cannot be linked to respondents. Answering is voluntary. The answering time is 18.1.2024-1.2.2024

Kind regards,
Susanna Purhonen

In case you have any questions concerning the questionnaire, feel free to contact me via e-mail: ab7787@student.jamk.fi

Next

ⓘ Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

Demographic questions

1. Age *

○ Under 18
○ 18-22
○ 23-27
○ 28-32
○ 33-37
○ 38-42
○ 43-47
○ 48-52
○ 53-57
○ 58-62
○ Over 62 years of age

2. Gender *

○ Male
○ Female
○ Other / I don't want to answer

3. Home region *

○ Uusimaa

○ Varsinais-Suomi

○ Satakunta

○ Kanta-Häme

○ Pirkanmaa

○ Päijät-Häme

○ Kymenlaakso

○ Etelä-Karjala

○ Etelä-Savo

○ Pohjois-Savo

○ Pohjois-Karjala

○ Keski-Suomi

○ Etelä-Pohjanmaa

○ Pohjanmaa

○ Keski-Pohjanmaa

○ Pohjois-Pohjanmaa

○ Kainuu

○ Lappi

○ Ahvenanmaa

○ Other, please specify [   ]

4. Occupation *

☐ Student

☐ In paid employment

☐ Entrepreneur

☐ Unemployed

☐ Other / I do not want to answer

[Previous] [Next]

2 of 8

ⓘ Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

Questions concerning trail running hobby in general

5. How many years have you practised trail running *

◯ Less than a year

◯ 1-5 years

◯ 6-10 years

◯ 11-15 years

◯ 16-20 years

◯ Over 20 years

6. Does anyone else in your household practise trail running? *

☐ Nobody else

☐ My partner

☐ My children

7. Are you a member of trail running club *

◯ Yes

◯ No, but I would like to be

◯ No, and I would not like to be

8. How many trail running events have you participated in the last 12 months *

○ 0

○ 1-2

○ 3-4

○ 5-6

○ 7-8

○ Over 8

9. Which length of trail running events attract you most? You can choose more than one option *

☐ Under 11 km

☐ 11-22 km

☐ 23-34 km

☐ 35-46 km

☐ 47-58 km

☐ 59-70km

☐ 71-100 km

☐ 101-160

☐ Over 160 km

10. How much do the following aspects impact your participation in a trail running event (1 no effect, 5 a lot of effect) *

	1	2	3	4	5
Distance from your hometown	O	O	O	O	O
Length of the running route	O	O	O	O	O
Versatile running route	O	O	O	O	O
Scenic running route	O	O	O	O	O
Challening running route	O	O	O	O	O
Date of the event	O	O	O	O	O
Event arrangement (eg. aid stations, event transportation, catering after the event)	O	O	O	O	O
Challenging oneself	O	O	O	O	O
Sense of community in the event	O	O	O	O	O
Collecting ITRA points	O	O	O	O	O
Recommendations / Word of mouth	O	O	O	O	O
Sponsors of the event organization	O	O	O	O	O
Ancillary services (e.g. music events after, products sold in the event)	O	O	O	O	O
Ease of arrival to the event (e.g. by public transport)	O	O	O	O	O
There are good amount of accommodation options near the event	O	O	O	O	O
Opportunity to see and experience new places and connect travelling with trail running hobby	O	O	O	O	O
The price of participation fee	O	O	O	O	O

Previous Next

Questions concerning Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event

11. Which Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event have you participated in?

	Trail run 85	Trail run 57	Trail run 85+58	Trailrun 18	Trailrun 130
2023	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2022	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2021	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2019	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. With whom did you participate in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event? *

☐ Alone

☐ With a friend/friends

☐ With a partner

☐ With another family member

☐ With a running team

☐ Other, please specify [   ]

13. In which area did you accommondate during the event? *

○ Utsjoki
○ Nuorgam
○ Ivalo
○ Other, please specify [_____]

14. How many nights did you stay in your chosen accommodation? *

○ I did not stay in the area
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4 or over

15. How well the following words describe your experience in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event? (1 very little, 5 very much)

	1	2	3	4	5
Fascinating	○	○	○	○	○
Motivating	○	○	○	○	○
Encouraging	○	○	○	○	○
Extraordinary	○	○	○	○	○
Challenging	○	○	○	○	○
Other, which [_____]	○	○	○	○	○

Previous Next

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16. What would make someone else in your household want to participate in the KaldoAivi Ultra Trail? *

◯ I'm the only one in my household

◯ Other distances, you can also specify which ones [   ]

◯ Special pricing for families

◯ Other, please specify [   ]

17. How remarkably the following aspects had impact on your participation in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event? *

	1	2	3	4	5
Suitable route lenght	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Challenginess of the route	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Scenic route	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Fjell location	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Collection of ITRA points	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Recommendations/ Word of mouth	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Challenging oneself	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The sense of community	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Improving fitness	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Small event	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The date of the event	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Inspiring event marketing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The price of participation fee	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

18. How would you rate the following aspects in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event? *

	poor	fair	neutral	good	excellent
The route and it's challengingness	○	○	○	○	○
Marking of the route	○	○	○	○	○
The number of aid stations	○	○	○	○	○
Snacks and beverages at the aid stations	○	○	○	○	○
Support and encouragement from the volunteers	○	○	○	○	○
The information and communication prior the event	○	○	○	○	○
The event information and communication during the event	○	○	○	○	○
The event organization as whole	○	○	○	○	○

Previous Next

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(i) Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

Questions concerning the event marketing

19. Which social media channels do you use in general? *

☐ Facebook

☐ Instagram

☐ Tiktok

☐ Youtube

☐ Twitter

☐ Twitch

☐ I do not use social media

20. What kind of running related content do you follow online, you can choose more than one option. *

☐ Podcasts

☐ Blogs

☐ Vlogs

☐ Social media influencers

☐ I do not follow running related content

☐ Other, please specify [   ]

(i) Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

Questions concerning the event marketing

19. Which social media channels do you use in general? *

☐ Facebook

☐ Instagram

☐ Tiktok

☐ Youtube

☐ Twitter

☐ Twitch

☐ I do not use social media

20. What kind of running related content do you follow online, you can choose more than one option. *

☐ Podcasts

☐ Blogs

☐ Vlogs

☐ Social media influencers

☐ I do not follow running related content

☐ Other, please specify [   ]

21. Where did you hear from the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event for the first time? *

○ Facebook

○ Instagram

○ Juoksija-magazine

○ ITRA -International Trail Running Association

○ Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail website

○ Youtube

○ Recommendations / Word of mouth

○ Other, please specify [   ]

22. In which channels have you seen marketing of Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event? *

☐ Facebook

☐ Instagram

☐ Juoksija-magazine

☐ Youtube

☐ Other, please specify [   ]

23. Did any marketing material attract you the most before the event? If yes could you specify.

24. Do you have any suggestions how the event marketing could be improved?

Previous   Next

6 of 8

Development suggestions for the event organization

25. What did you enjoy the most about the event? *

26. Do you have any development suggestions for Kaldoaivi Ultra?

27. Would you recommend the event to others, you can also share why *

○ Yes

○ No

Previous Next

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ⓘ Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

28. I am also planning on conducting theme interviews related to my Master's thesis topic. Should you want to participate in the interview part, you can leave your contact details, such as e-mail address or phone number in the box below for me to contact you. The contact details are handled according to GDPR. Or, you can also e-mail me in case you are interested in the interview: ab7787@student.jamk.fi

Previous Submit

Appendix 2. The interview questions.

Questions related to trail running hobby and other hobbies.

1. What kind of hobbies do you have?
2. Can you tell us a little bit about your trail running background? What made you start trail running?
3. What factors most motivate you to do trail running?
4. What kind of trail running events pique your interest?
5. How do you prepare for trail running events?
6. In your opinion, what factors influence participation in trail running events the most?
7. Can you think of any obstacles to participation?

Questions related to the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event:

8. Can you name one or three of the most important factors that influenced your participation in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail?
9. In your opinion, were there any factors at the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event that exceeded or fell short of your expectations?
10. Did you encounter any grievances or problems on the day of the incident? Would you like to tell us about them?
11. Can you name the factors that distinguish Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail from other trail running events?
12. What kind of additional services would you appreciate from the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event?

Questions related to social media behavior and marketing.

13. For what purposes do you mainly use social media?
14. Do you follow a specific trail running online community or influencer? If so, how could that event leverage these channels in marketing?
15. How would you describe Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail's brand? Can you name any/some words that could describe the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail brand?
16. How do you think Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail's online marketing compares to other sporting events you have attended?
17. How do you think Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail's online marketing compares to other sporting events you have attended?
18. Can you think of ways to make better use of social media to promote your event?
19. Did the marketing of the event accurately reflect your actual trail running experience?
20. What kind of online experiences or online services would you serve as a trail runner? Would you be interested in example hearing of training-related tips/event-related tips for instance through different platforms?

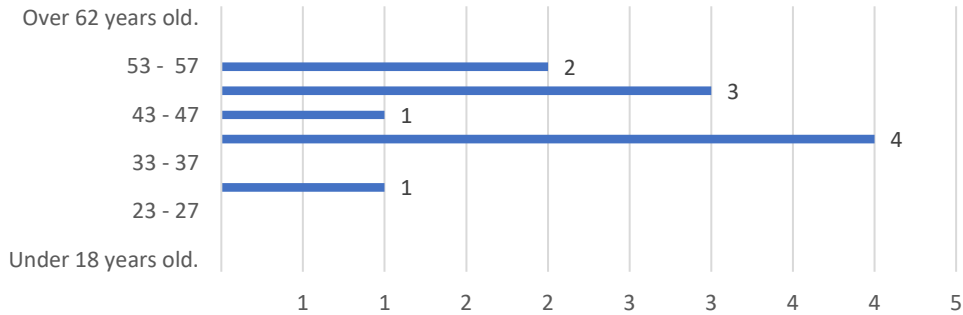**Appendix 3. Segment 1.**

Segment 1. The preferred running distances

3; 8 %
18; 49 %
16; 43 %

- under 11-34km   - 35-70km   - 71-160km+
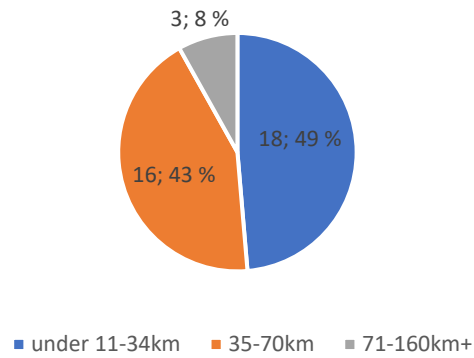
Segment 1. The home region

1
1
1
1
6
1

- Uusimaa   - Varsinais-Suomi   - Pirkanmaa   - Päijät-Häme   - Etelä-Karjala   - Lappi
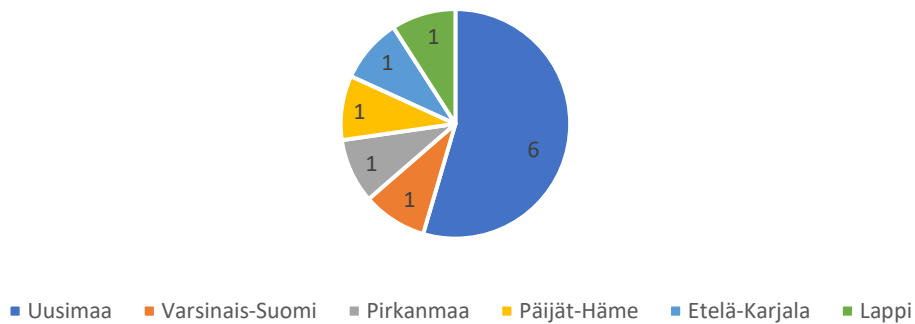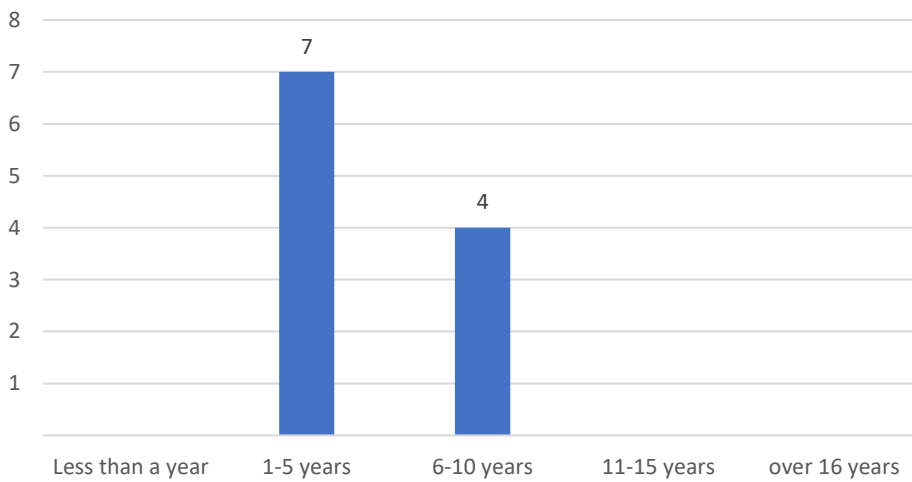
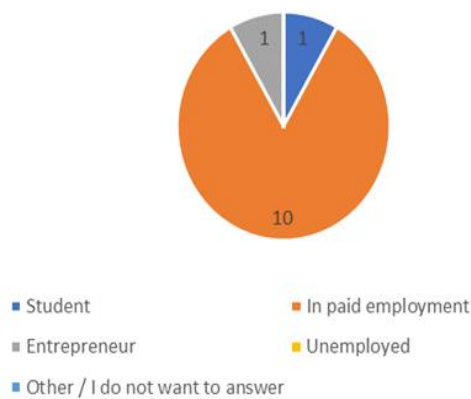Segment 1. Gender distribution

3
8

- Man   - Woman

Segment 1. Age of distribution

Segment 1. Years of experience as trail runners
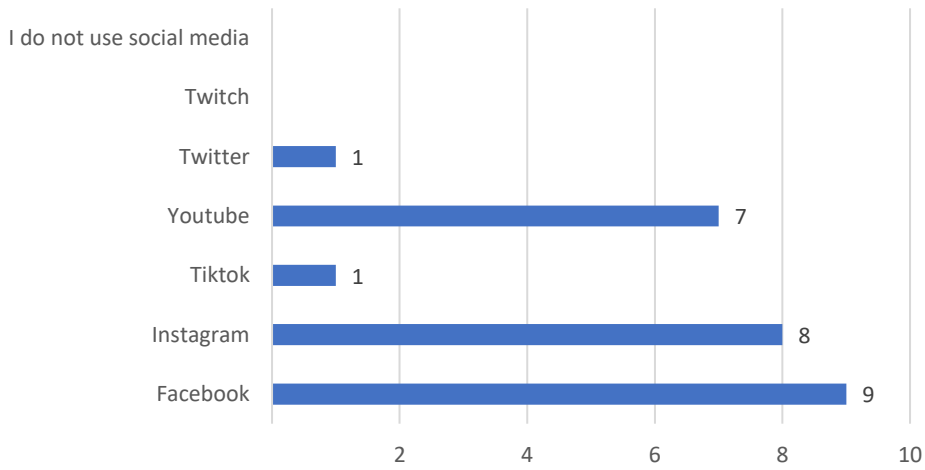

Segment 1. Employment status

Segment 1. The factors affecting participation in trail running events in general	
Length of the running route	4.6
Scenic running route	4.6
Date of the event	4.5
Challenging oneself	4.5
Opportunity to see and experience new places and connect traveling with trail running hobby	4.3
Versatile running route	4.2
There is a good amount of accommodation options near the event	3.9
Event arrangement (e.g. aid stations, event transportation, catering after the event)	3.5
Sense of community in the event	3.3
Challenging running route	3.2
The price of participation fee	3
Recommendations / Word of mouth	2.8
Ease of arrival to the event (e.g. by public transport)	2.4
Distance from your hometown	2.2
Ancillary services (e.g. music events after, products sold in the event)	2.1
Sponsors of the event organization	1.8
Collecting ITRA points	1.4

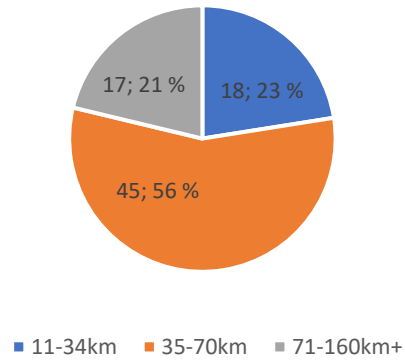| Segment 1. The factors affecting the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event	
Suitable route length	4.7
Challenging oneself	4.7
Scenic route	4.5
Fjell location	4.5
Small event	4.1
The date of the event	4.1
Challengingness of the route	4
Improving fitness	3.8
Inspiring event marketing	3.6
The sense of community	3
The price of participation fee	2.8
Recommendations/ Word of mouth	2.3
Collection of ITRA points	1.2

## Segment 1. The used social media channels

Channel	Value
I do not use social media	
Twitch	
Twitter	1
Youtube	7
Tiktok	1
Instagram	8
Facebook	9

Segment 1. The running related content followed by respondents

Content	Value
Other, please specify	
I do not follow running related content	2
Social media influencers	6
Vlogs	1
Blogs	4
Podcasts	5
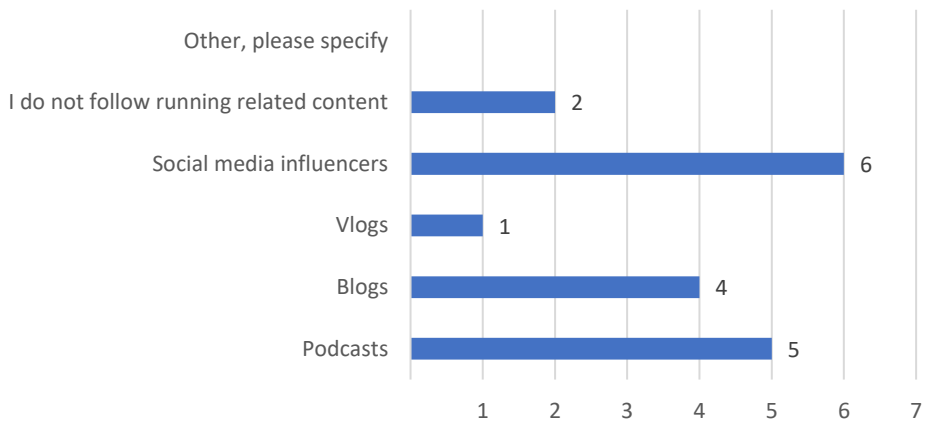
Appendix. 4. Segment 2.

Segment 2. The preferred running distances

- 11-34km
- 35-70km
- 71-160km+

Segment 2. The Home region

- Uusimaa
- Varsinais-Suomi
- Satakunta
- Päijät-Häme
- Etelä-Karjala
- Keski-Suomi
- Pohjois-Pohjanmaa
- Lappi
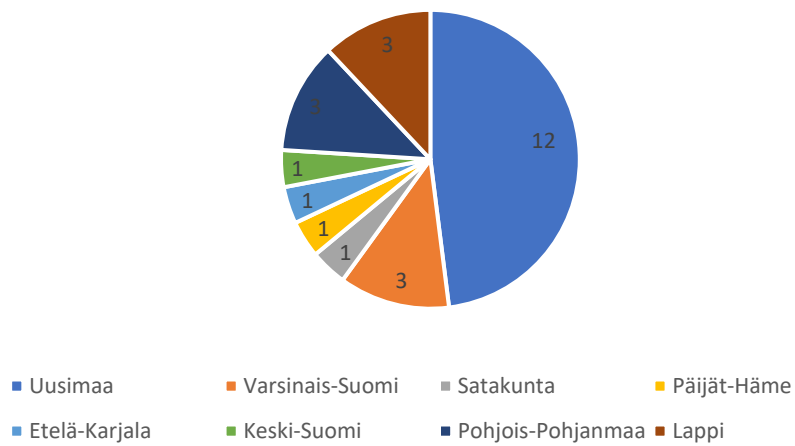
Segment 2. Gender distribution

- Man
- Woman
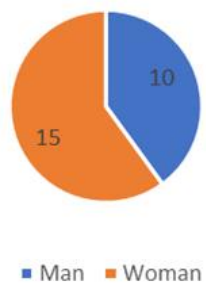
Segment 2. Age distribution
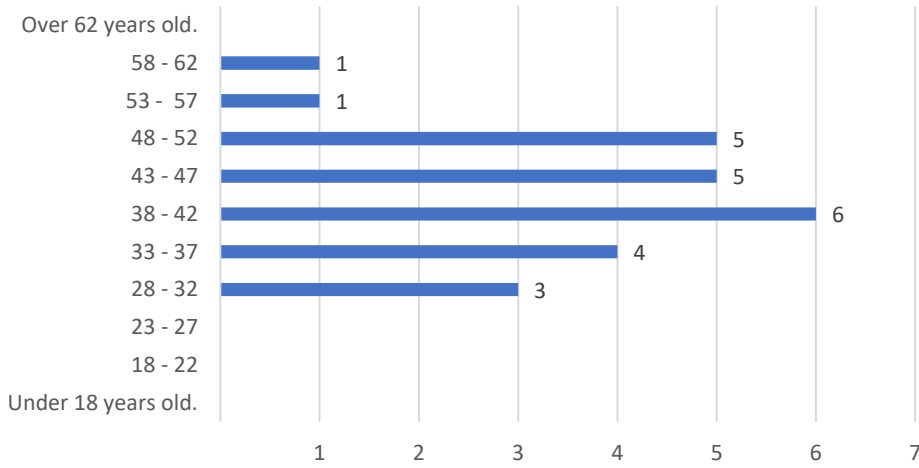
Segment 2. Years of experience as trail runners
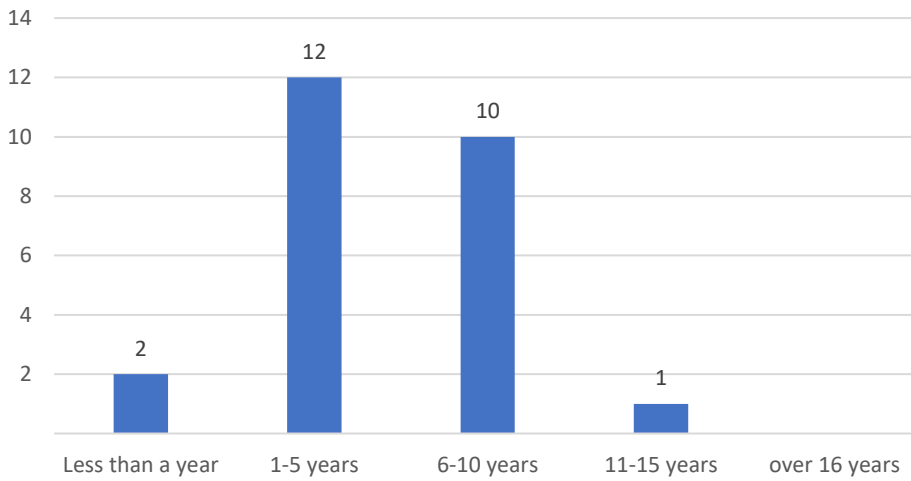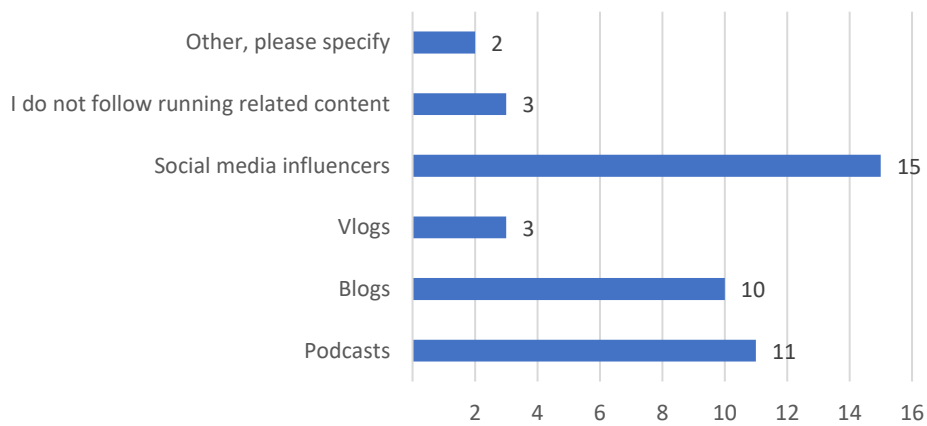

Segment 2. Employment status
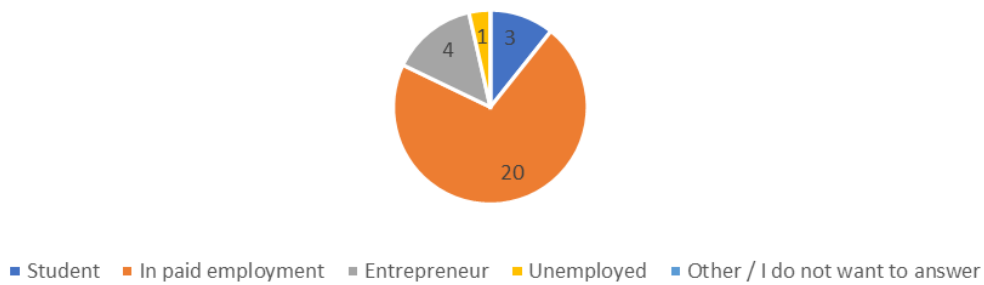
■ Student ■ In paid employment ■ Entrepreneur ■ Unemployed ■ Other / I do not want to answer

Segment 2. The factors affecting participation in trail running events in general	
Challenging oneself	4.6
Length of the running route	4.4
Scenic running route	4.4
Versatile running route	4.2
Date of the event	4.2
Opportunity to see and experience new places and connect traveling with trail running hobby	4.2
There is a good amount of accommodation options near the event	3.7
Event arrangement (eg. aid stations, event transportation, catering after the event)	3.4
Sense of community in the event	3.4
Challenging running route	3.2
The price of participation fee	3.1
Recommendations / Word of mouth	2.7
Ease of arrival to the event (e.g. by public transport)	2.5
Distance from your hometown	2.4
Ancillary services (e.g. music events after, products sold in the event)	1.9
Sponsors of the event organization	1.6
Collecting ITRA points	1.5

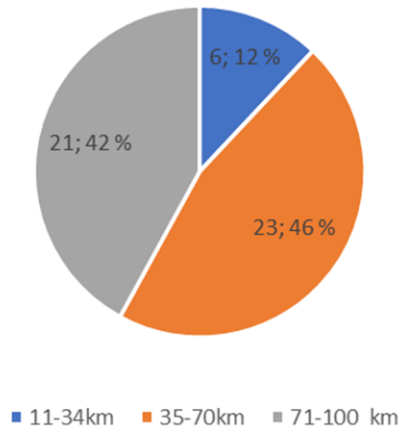| Segment 2. The factors affecting participation in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event	
Challenging oneself	4.6
Fjell location	4.5
Suitable route length	4.4
Scenic route	4.4
Challengingness of the route	3.9
The date of the event	3.8
Improving fitness	3.4
Small event	3.4
The sense of community	3
Inspiring event marketing	2.9
The price of participation fee	2.9
Recommendations/ Word of mouth	2.2
Collection of ITRA points	1.4

Segment 2. The social media channels used
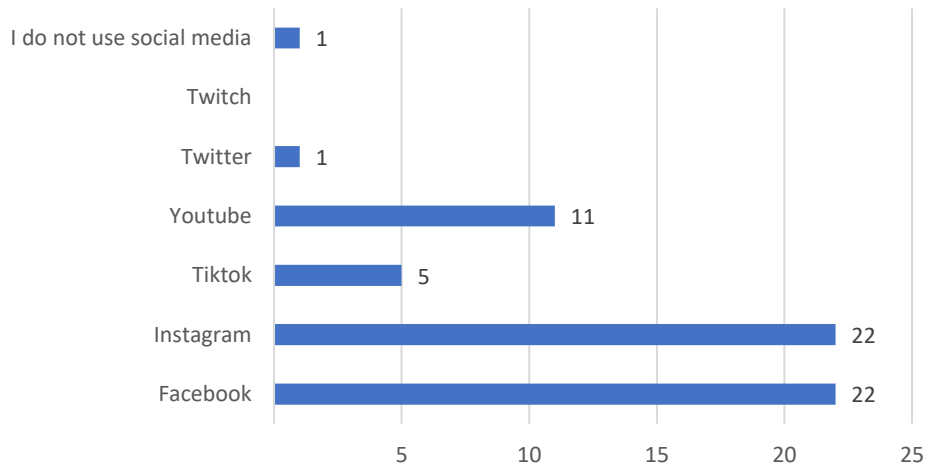
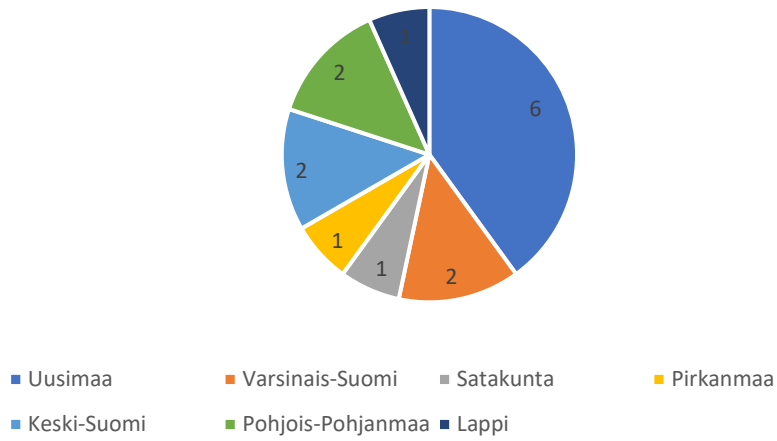## Segment 2. The running related content followed by
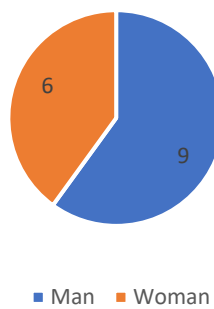
Appendix. 5. Segment 3.

Segment 3. The preferred running distances

- 11-34km
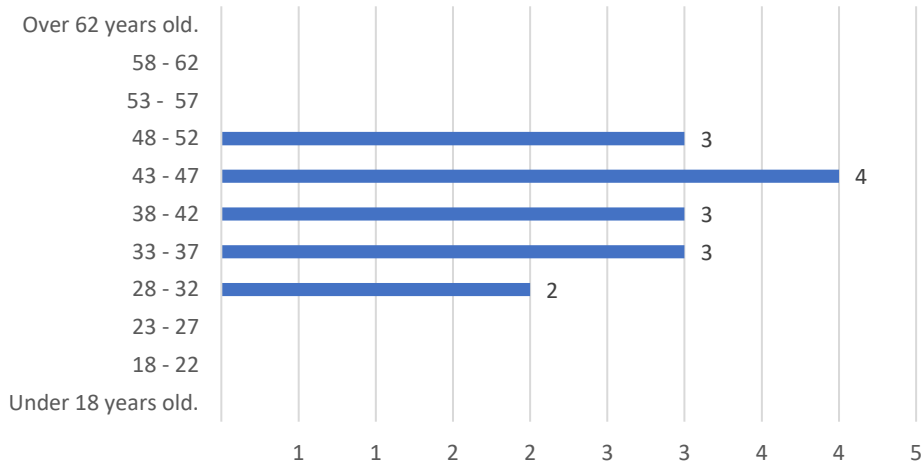- 35-70km
- 71-100 km

Segment 3. The home region

- Uusimaa
- Varsinais-Suomi
- Satakunta
- Pirkanmaa
- Keski-Suomi
- Pohjois-Pohjanmaa
- Lappi

Segment 3. Gender distribution

- Man
- Woman

Segment 3. The age distribution

Age	Count
Over 62 years old.	
58 - 62	
53 - 57	
48 - 52	3
43 - 47	4
38 - 42	3
33 - 37	3
28 - 32	2
23 - 27	
18 - 22	
Under 18 years old.	

Segment 3. Years of experience as trail runners

Experience	Count
Less than a year	
1-5 years	8
6-10 years	7
11-15 years	
over 16 years	
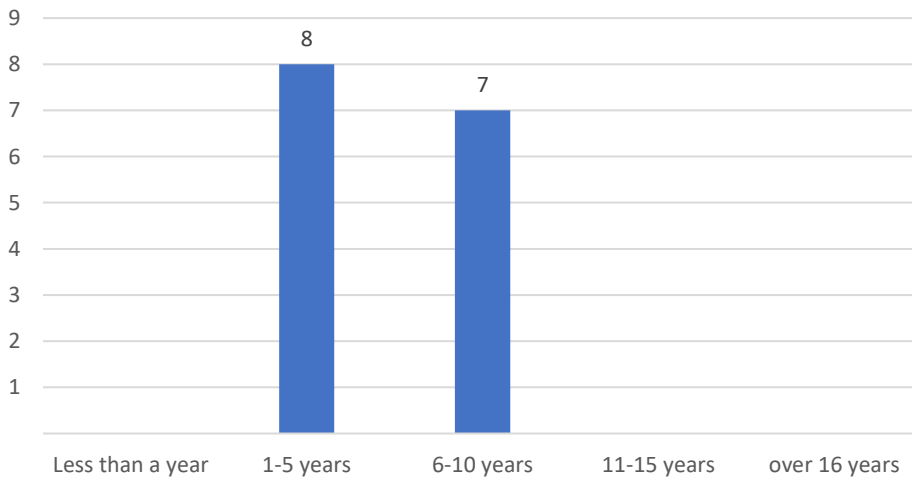
Segment 3. Employment status
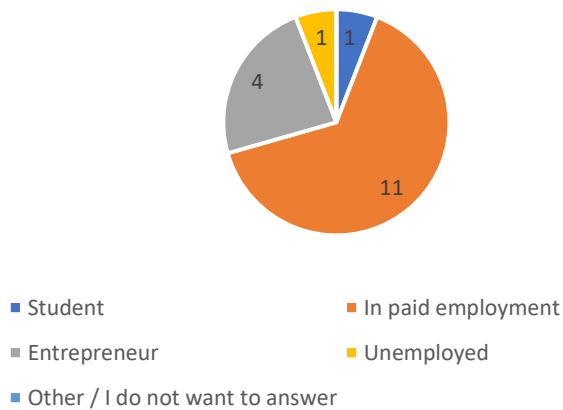
| Status	Count
Student	1
In paid employment	11
Entrepreneur	4
Unemployed	1
Other / I do not want to answer	

| Segment 3. The factors affecting participation in trail running events in general	
Challenging oneself	4.5
Length of the running route	4.3
Versatile running route	4.3
Opportunity to see and experience new places and connect traveling with trail running hobby	4.3
Scenic running route	4
Date of the event	4
There is a good amount of accommodation options near the event	4
Event arrangement (e.g. aid stations, event transportation, catering after the event)	3.5
Sense of community in the event	3.5
The price of participation fee	3.5
Challenging running route	3.4
Ease of arrival to the event (e.g. by public transport)	2.6
Recommendations / Word of mouth	2.5
Distance from your hometown	2.1
Ancillary services (e.g. music events after, products sold in the event)	1.7
Sponsors of the event organization	1.5
Collecting ITRA points	1.4

Segment 3. The factors affecting participation in the Kaldoaivi Ultra Trail event	
Fjell location	4.7
Challenging oneself	4.7
Suitable route length	4.5
Scenic route	4.4
Challengingness of the route	4.1
The date of the event	3.7
Small event	3.5
The sense of community	3.2
The price of participation fee	3.2
Improving fitness	3
Inspiring event marketing	2.9
Recommendations/ Word of mouth	1.9
Collection of ITRA points	1.3

Segment 3. The social media platforms used
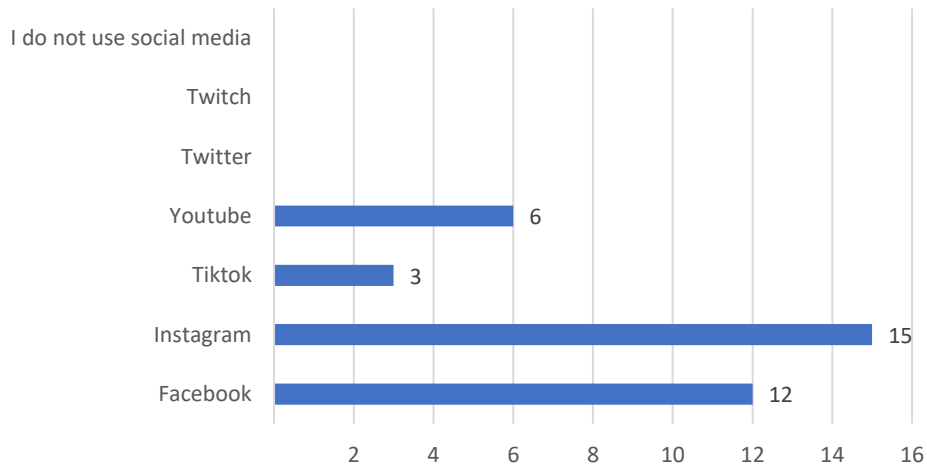
Segment 3. The running related content
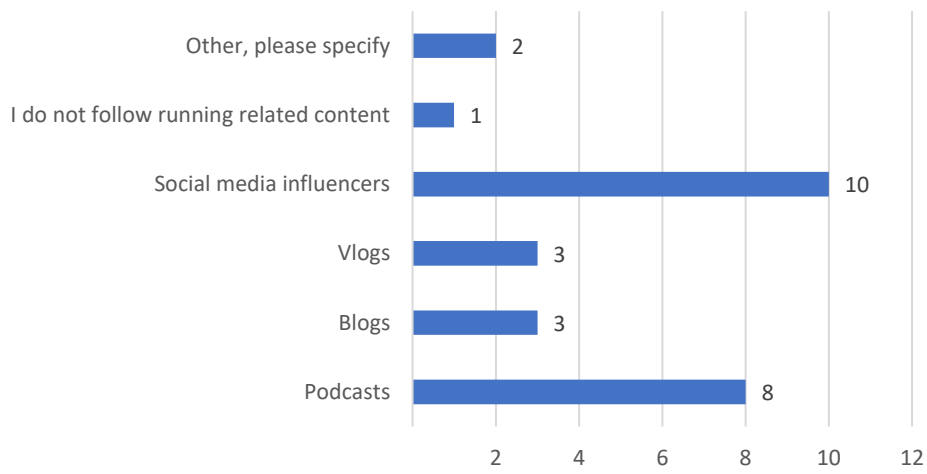
Appendix 6. Buyer persona 1, Segment 1.

Kaija S.

Age: 38 years old.	Country: Finland
Sex: Female	Occupation: Sales assistant
Home region: Uusimaa	

HISTORY OF TRAIL RUNNING HOBBY

- Has practices trail running 3 years. Before has practiced road running for for many years.
- Usually participates 2 trail running event per year.
- Prefers running event with distances of 11-34 km.
- Prefers trail running in small events, in which new locations can be explored, and which offer scenic routes.
- Is the only one in the household trail running
- Not a member of a running club

KALDOAIVI ULTRA TRAIL EXPERIENCE

- 18 km trail run in 2023
- Extraordinary experience
- Highly valued the event organization as whole and how well the route was marked.
- Enjoyed especially the mileau and the nature of Lapland
- Only pain point during the event was that difficulties to find accommodation near by the event site.

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

- Facebook, Instagram & Youtube are the main social media platforms, but also uses Twitter
- Follows training and running related content in social media, and uses social media to learn about new inspiring running events.

MARKETING THAT APPEALS

- Would like to see more running related influencers sharing their event experiences and training related content in Youtube and Instagram
- Attracted to visually striking materials, such as drone footage

WHY KALDOAIVI ULTRA TRAIL

Challenging one-self

Fjeld location

The first time to experience the Wilderness area of Kaldoaivi

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

TRAIL RUNNING   SPENDING TIME IN NATUTRE

Appendix 7. Buyer persona 2. Segment 2.

Mari T.

Age: 43 years old.	Country: Finland
Sex: Female	Occupation: Teacher
Home region: Varsinais-Suomi	

HISTORY OF TRAIL RUNNING HOBBY

- Has practices trail running 6 years. Before has practiced road running for for many years.
- Usually participates on average of 4 trail running event per year.
- Prefers running event with distances of 35-70
- Prefers trail running in fjeld locations, and locations that are rich in beautilfull sceneries
- Also partner practices trail running
- Member of a running club

KALDOAIVI ULTRA TRAIL EXPERIENCE

- 57 km trail run in 2023
- Thrilling and exciting experience
- Highly valued the event organization, the sceneries, and how spacious the event felt
- Felt that the event participation gave a great chance to experience the nature of Lapland
- Enjoyed especially the mileau and the nature of Lapland
- Only pain point during the event was that she would have preferred more aid-stations during the route

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

- Facebook and Instagram are the main social media platforms, but also uses TikTok and YouTube
- Likes to read Blogs, Listen to Podcasts and follow trail running related influencers

MARKETING THAT APPEALS

- Running related influencers sharing their event experiences in Youtube and Instagram
- Attracted to Web-site that were visually attractive and had lots of photos of the route

WHY KALDOAIVI ULTRA TRAIL

Challenging one-self

Scenic routes

The date of the event

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

TRAIL RUNNING   TRAIL RUNNING CLUB'S COMMUNAL TRAINING SESSIONS   CROSS COUNTRY SKIING

Appendix 8. Buyer Persona 3. Segment 3.

Jere S.

Age: 32 years old.	Country: Finland
Sex: Male	Occupation: Student
Home region: Pirkanmaa	

HISTORY OF TRAIL RUNNING HOBBY

- Has practices trail running 7 years. Before has practiced road running, has participated few road marathons and half-marathons
- Usually participates 5-6 trail running event per year.
- Prefers running event with distances of 70-160km+
- Likes to experience different kinds of trail running events, but mostly is attracted to long distances and there is not too many of them in Finland
- Is the only one in household practicing trail running
- Not a member of a running club

KALDOAIVI ULTRA TRAIL EXPERIENCE

- 85+57 km double trail run in 2023
- Highly enjoyed the route, scenarios and seeing wildlife such as reindeer and birds during the route
- Enjoyed how during the route one could just run without facing many participants
- Enjoyed especially the mileau and the nature of Lapland
- Only pain point during the event was that he did not like the finisher bags.

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

TRAIL RUNNING   STRENGTH TRAINING

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

- Facebook and Instagram are the main social media platforms
- Likes to search information of events in social media, and look for recommendation for events or trail running related products. Appreciates grapevine when it comes to peer-to-peer shared experiences

MARKETING THAT APPEALS

- Would like to see running related influencers sharing their event experiences in YouTube

WHY KALDOAIVI ULTRA TRAIL

Challenging one-self

Attraction of Wilderness area and its' adventurouness

Friend had positive effect on decision on participation