

**Estonian Business School**

**Department of Marketing and Communications**

**ONLINE MARKETING FOR START-UP AND SMALL  
COMPANIES: GETTING THE WORD OUT THERE**

Bachelor's Thesis

by

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Tallinn 2017

I herewith declare that I have written the Bachelor Thesis independently. References have been indicated for the all publications, claims, opinions and different sources by other authors.

May 25, 2017

...../ Liis Usin

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## **ABSTRACT**

Usin, L. Online Marketing for Start-Ups and Small Companies: Getting the Word Out There. Bachelor's Thesis, Estonian Business School, Tallinn 2017, 55 pages, 4 figure, 41 references, in English.

MARKETING, SMALL COMPANY, START-UP, BEGINNING, STRATEGY, IDEAS, EXPERT RECOMMENDATIONS, WEBSITE, FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM,

The aim of the thesis is to affirm and explain the importance of using online media for business purposes for start-ups and small companies. More precisely how social media and company's own website work together holistically and what are the benefits of each of them. The study provides insight from the concept to making it happen.

In order to achieve the aim of the thesis, an in-depth interview was conducted to gain knowledge from marketers who are working at the agency and have experience in doing online marketing for a small company, either for work or for personal brand.

The findings confirmed that before creating an online presence, a company should know their own brands concept, essence and goals. The stress has been put on the importance of strategy of every company. If the strategy is set, then comes the communication, how, where, when and through what channels is it best for the brand to communicate with their audience. Recommended communication channels are Facebook first, then Instagram and anything else that fits with the objectives of the company. Websites were considered to be an important part for the business, as those represent the company. The importance of understanding the holistic approach has also been highlighted since all has to work as one entity. Instagram, Facebook and the website were explained in more detail as those were the chosen media channels for the study as well.

# INTRODUCTION

In the recent decade, online and social media have become inseparable parts of everyday lives. People keep spending an exceeding amount of time on their smartphones, desktop computers, and tablets, being connected to the Internet almost 24/7. Facebook and Instagram are the most popular places for connecting, communicating and spending time. Therefore, this has changed the way marketing is done, as there has been a move from billboards and newspapers to digital, online and social media. Businesses have moved online as well, because it is important to be where the potential customers are. Traditional media is still considered to be an important part of marketing. It has become more important to be involved in the lives of customers, and being connected with them. In order for a business to stand out and be successful, they have to understand the essence of those online channels as well as their own objectives.

The aim of this thesis is to study the importance of using Facebook, Instagram and a company's' website for small businesses and start-ups in the most effective and strategic way for marketing, how to create a holistic marketing approach and using marketing ideas from people in the industry. The focus is to offer ideas and viewpoints to a young company that has decided to take advantage of online media possibilities, to help understand the approach and strategic importance behind an online media marketing from the perspective of people working on the field. More precisely the way social media and a company's own website work together holistically and the benefits of integrating Facebook and Instagram for a business.

First part, the theoretical framework discusses and reaches the conclusion about the need for companies to be online. The definitions, and pros and cons of digital, online and social media have been brought out. The company's objective, goals, and the reasoning behind choosing the online media channel through which to achieve the aims. Second part of the thesis brings a closer look into the qualitative research, sample group selection, principles

of compiling the interview guide, data collection and data analysis. This will provide the design for the research conducted. The third part is the results, discussion, recommendations, limitations of the study and future research. The thesis ends with the conclusions about the whole study.



# **1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In Estonia, there are around 1.3 million people (Statistics Estonia 2017) and the Internet users penetration rate is around 91% (Internet Live Stats 2016). Estonia is definitely above the average level in Internet usage in the EU and in the world. There were about 66% of people who were participating in social networking sites in 2016 (The Statistics Portal 2016). Facebook user count in Estonia has reached up to 0.6 million people and this users growth has been forecasted till 2021 to still increase (The Statistics Portal 2015), not to mention the increasing number of users and the popularity of Instagram. Facebook and Instagram are one of the most famous social media networking sites in Estonia and in the world in general (The Statistics Portal 2017). Estonia is a great place for any kind of digital, online and/or social media marketing, because of the already high Internet usage rate and possibility of reaching a lot of people.

## **1.1 Digital, Online and Social Media**

To give a better understanding of the thesis, below are the differences between digital, online and social media, the definitions and general overview of its pros and cons. Besides those three marketing techniques there are more, such as traditional media marketing, field marketing etc., but for the purpose of this thesis the author has brought out only the above mentioned three marketing channels.

According to BusinessDictionary (2017), digital media can be text, graphics, audio and video, any content in digital form, that can be found on the Internet or on a computer. In other words, using digital media for marketing can be anything from digital billboards to show video commercials to pedestrians, to advertisements on different sites on the Internet, to commercials heard on the radio. It is everything that can be digitised and used as a channel to communicate with the potential customers.

As digital media can be found anywhere, there are also several pros and cons to using it. The marketing expert Gaille notes that some of the benefit of digital marketing can be the low cost, depending on which medium is being used and what is the marketing objective. It is a way to advertise to mass media, to target different demographics at the same time, it creates brand awareness and also a higher level of brand loyalty. From the cons side digital marketing may not be costly, but consumes a lot of time, marketers spend many hours creating content, campaigns, etc. Digital content is able to attract a greater number of people but could also create negative public reactions. Once the campaign is out there, the company has very little control over what happens next. This might be a good thing, if the campaign goes viral and gets a lot of exposure. It is difficult to determine the return on investment, since it is difficult to quantify how many people were affected by the advertisement, especially if the advertisement ran on the radio, for example. Not to mention the noise that is surrounding us to even notice a specific advertisement (Gaille 2016).

**Online media**, also referred to as **Internet media**, is part of digital media. It is music, photos and video which is distributed all over the Internet. Online media can be non-copyrighted or copyrighted content which is provided either freely or for a fee (Business Dictionary 2017). In other words, online media is the part of digital media that is connected to the use of live Internet. It includes the world wide web, websites, blogs, search engine marketing, smartphones, mobile online platforms, email marketing, online banner advertisement and Social Media.

The Online media marketing is happening where the Internet is accessible or where there is a connection to the web. In today's world, many of us are connected to the Internet 24/7. There are several pros and cons to online marketing. It is similar to digital media marketing in the sense that it can be really cost efficient, if managed correctly. The most powerful tool of online marketing is the ability to reach the targeted customers effectively, in real time and to be able to have direct interaction with the target audience. The marketers have the ability to publish whatever and whenever they want, there are no

deadlines as in the case of publishing in a magazine. The negative effect is that customers get annoyed by the amount of ads they receive online. If advertisements are not done professionally then people stop taking those brands seriously. It can be a big problem if the target audience do not even see the content due to the noise in the fast changing world of online media and the algorithms those platforms use (Super Savvy Business 2016).

According to BusinessDictionary (2017), social media is an internet based communication network and a tool to share information among people. In other words, social networking sites are platforms for people, companies, brands and other organisations to communicate, share information or to catch up with friends and engage with customers, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. It is a way to be together on a certain site. It also enables to create and share content from different social networking sites and blogs - cross-media marketing.

It does not take a lot of effort for a brand or a company to create a social media account, but creating relevant content, keeping customers satisfied and interested in a brand is another trial of being successful on social media. There are several pros and cons to social media. Usually social media sites are for free or have a small fee. It is up to the companies if they want to invest money into marketing on their social media platforms or grow organically. Social media is a great place to build up a brand, to create value for the customers and to build brand loyalty. Social media is fast and so too are the results. Marketers are able to provide online customer service and communicate with customers in real time and from anywhere in the world. It is easy for a client to contact a company and it is simple and personal to respond. Despite the tremendous number of users and potential customers on social media, being able to partake in the possible market share could be made more difficult due to the greater number of competitive companies. It can be quite difficult to stand out with all the competitors being on the same platform. This makes a fundamental understanding of the marketplace, user core and strategic marketing even more important because the potential return is increased due to the increased size of the potential customer base. According to LimeGreen Marketing 64% of digital marketers spend at least minimum 6 hours doing social media and the remaining 36% spend 11 and

more hours. It is not only about being present, but also offering value to the customers. If marketers are not on top of it, they will be lost in the new information coming in constantly. As opposed to a physical store, where a company already has a certain value due to their physical location, a company existing in the online and social media forefront has to make sure to be relevant because their location in the preference and minds of the customers is ever changing. One can make a name and can break a name in social media, meaning customer relations should be handled carefully. Due to the nature of humans, bad news tends to spread faster than good ones, which in the connected world of social media where companies can connect with their customers faster and more direct than ever, means that customers who have had negative experiences can also rally together and blow, what otherwise could be a small mistake, out of proportion. Therefore measuring success can be tricky, especially if a brand has a lot of followers, which could mean they don't act the way the brand would like them to. Especially if it is a physical store, it could be hard to know how many of the company's online fans actually visit the shop. Security maintenance and brand sensitive information can become threats as well, if shared too much the competitors can take advantage of this (LimeGreen Marketing 2016).

Sometimes for newcomers it is hard to understand the framework of digital, online and social media, what is the relationship with one another. To make it easier to interpret below has been brought out the visual of it. Internet marketing has the same meaning as online marketing (Figure 1).

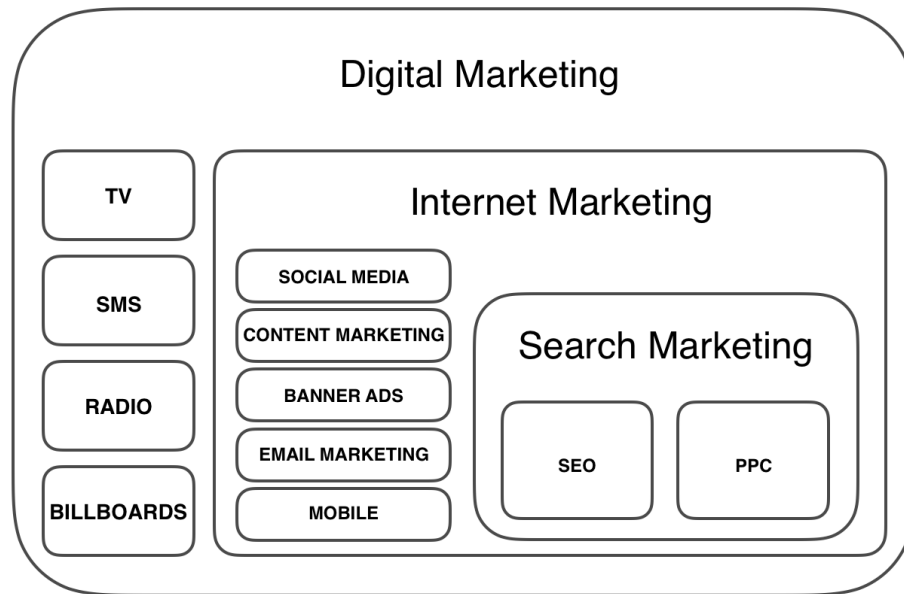


Figure 1. Difference Between Digital, Internet and Social Media Marketing. Source: Chris 2013.

Drawn by the author

To use any of the above mentioned media channels, start-ups and small businesses have to know who is their target audience in order to reach them, not to mention, to have a successful campaign. They need to have a clear understanding of what their marketing objective might be, such as raising awareness, increasing engagement, increasing sales, etc., to be able to concentrate their efforts and finances effectively. The content produced has to have a significant meaning, producing something that matters to the intended audience. Another important aspect is the noise surrounding the customers, it can be fairly difficult to pinpoint the effectiveness and interaction with the content and the advertisements on the streets, on online media and in any other platform being used. People are becoming more and more apathetic to all sorts of advertisements surrounding them, especially the younger generations, and mostly in the case of digital media, where no Internet is connected to the ads and therefore has less interaction possibilities. It is important to choose the correct mediums.

## 1.2 Businesses Using Online Media

Before the Internet era companies managed to become successful without being on social media or even without a proper website, but all that took time and money. This was done mostly through traditional media, promoting and selling products and services in the real world, through radio, printed advertisements, magazines, newspaper ads, etc (John Souza 2012). It has worked in the past, so why not now? It can, but marketers have to understand the limitations. It is tangible, customers can pick up the leaflets or read from the newspapers, and also listen to the promotions on the radio. When direct mail is sent out, it might work through their subconscious, as they hold the paper and it gives people the feeling they have received something. But all that is costly and timely, not to mention the difficulty of measuring the success of the campaign. There also may be little or no feedback, for example, even though if a magazine is chosen as a platform for advertisement due to their target readership, it could still be difficult to determine the advertising campaign's effectiveness. As mentioned by Optimize Social Media (2016), some of the efforts may even go straight in the trash. There is no winner or loser, however, a business should be able to combine aspects of the two in accordance with their capabilities and limitations.

Digital, online or social media marketing is not compulsory for any company, but will provide opportunities and value that they are not able to get from anywhere else. Today, more and more people are moving away from print and traditional media, towards digital media. So why should companies be on any social media site or have a functioning website to begin with? They might even have one or all of the social media sites, but are not active on them. Garifova (2016, 133) found that social media presence is really important in the economic interests of small businesses, especially in today's competitive circumstances. It also requires more work and effort in this age of technological innovation. Not to mention, the structural changes in the business environment that have to be considered as well.

Before going online it is important for businesses to know the approximate age of their target group and if it is possible to reach them online. Daily internet usage rate in Estonia by the 2016 data shows high internet usage among different age groups. This survey also found that 99 % of people between the ages of 25 and 34 are using the Internet daily. Younger people between the ages of 16 and 24 and below were not included in the study, but definitely are a considerable target group (Figure 2).

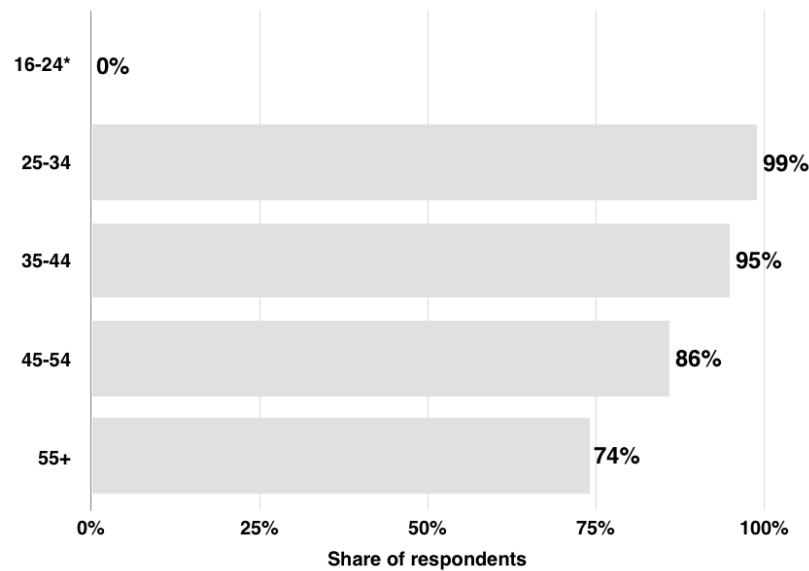


Figure 2. Daily internet usage rate in Estonia in 2016, by age group. Source: The Statistics Portal 2016. Drawn by the author

There are many reasons for a company to go online, nevertheless it is recommended to keep a healthy balance of online marketing and traditional media marketing, depending on the nature of the product and the destination of the potential customers.

### 1.2.1 Companies, Different Objectives and Target Audience

There are various types of companies on the market with different objectives and target audiences. The aim of this thesis is to address start-up companies that have just started their journey, and small businesses that have been recently established or have been

existing for some time, but have not yet utilised or are not fully using the potential of online media marketing to their benefit.

According to Investopedia (2016), a start-up is an enterprise at the very beginning of its operations. In the first stage they are often financed by the founders as they try to invest more in developing a service or a product, for which they believe a demand exists. As a result of the limited income and usually high costs, nearly all of those small operations are not continuous in the long term without any extra financing from venture capitalists. As there exists several definitions about start-ups and small companies, however in this thesis a start-up is meant as a company who is just starting out, a company who might grow enormous or continue its operations as a small company in the long run.

Small companies are considered to be firms of a certain size which fall under certain criteria in terms of the number of employees that work there, by total value of the assets, annual turnover, etc. (BusinessDictionary 2017). In other words, a small company is a company who has continued a year or even a decade, but has not grown rapidly a year after year and has stayed small.

The differences between a start-up and a small company are their objectives. According to Young Entrepreneur Council (2012), start-up companies focus more on the top-end revenue and growth potential compared to small businesses that focus more on profitability and stable long-term value.

Small companies are less risky and do not need as much investment as start-ups. Small companies are designed to make profit from day one (Quora 2015). Simply put:

“A start-up is a company that most people have never thought will be an independent entity in five years.” (Hoffman 2015)

Businesses have different objectives and target audiences, and all companies want to raise their brand awareness and reach their target audience. Both start small, some stay and others grow. A lot of times both types of companies do not have enough workforce,



money or time to have proper marketing, so they think it is not important to invest a lot in such a thing. But making a proper marketing strategy may look like it is just another extra item on the to-do list and it takes the focus away from the sales funnel. Small and start-up companies do not have to market the same way big companies are doing, but a proper strategy will amplify the message and eventually increase sales. These days a huge team of marketers and millions of euros is not an absolute necessity to do so (Hayzlett 2016).

Hayzlett (2016) has brought out important aspects for marketing smarter. Firstly, determine the objectives. Before starting, a set of goals should be established, such as gaining an extra 1000 followers on Instagram, reaching people in a certain area, raising brand awareness, getting Facebook likes etc. Try to figure out who is the target audience and what would be the strategy to fulfil that goal. For example, to increase followers or fans on social network, there are several tools that will help anyone to do so. It is important to decide if the advertising will be paid for, or to create engaging content in-house which will be more time consuming but not as expensive. Secondly, create and document the strategy. Once the goals have been agreed upon, it is time to write down the steps and platforms to achieve the goal. Thirdly, getting personal is the best way to acquire and keep loyal customers, it also helps to keep them engaged with the brand. Personalised one-to-one marketing is not an option, but rather a must. Last but not least, content is really important. Producing quality content and creating value to the target group is hugely important, it should be the rule, no matter the industry. Creating content can be scary and time consuming, but when done in-house, it will not be as expensive and can be really personalised deeply based on the brand.

### **1.3 Choosing the Appropriate Media Platforms**

Having an online presence is really important in today's Internet era for any business's strategy, both a website and social media, as they work as one entity. It can also be cost efficient, if managed correctly, and the companies are able to act more freely and independently as they are able to perform on traditional media (Super Savvy Business

2016). According to Garifova (2016, 133), Internet has made the shoppers' more proactive when it comes to the process of product searching. As people are so used to everything being online, they compare the prices, read the reviews and are looking up the information needed. A lot of the information is just a few clicks and keywords away, which makes pleasing people so much harder for businesses. People have a choice and if it is not your brand, it is someone else's. This simple idea makes it clear that the company who wants to compete, would be better visible, not only in physical world, but also online, to be accessible to the curious potential customers.

A study by Mattson and Barnes (2009) examined the use of social media among the fast growing corporations. This study showed that social media had quickly penetrated a big part of the business world. It also revealed that adapting to the use of different social media technology is not the same to all the companies. About 91 percent of the studied Inc. 500 companies were using at least one social media channel and they considered it to be "very important" to their business and marketing strategy.

Online networking tools are becoming more and more dominant and powerful in changing the way we see and understand brands and it also influences our purchasing decisions. A study by Jansen, Zhang et al. (2009, 2186), found that web communications and social networking services are influencing customers and often are forming their brand perceptions and people are making purchasing decisions based on the opinions of others. Users consider electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM as a trusted source of information, where they gain insight and form their opinions. This is a great opportunity for companies to see customers reactions, share information and also to collect feedback in real time and quickest way possible.

Moreover, companies need holistic approach when doing online marketing. Holistic approach focuses on the entity of different channels, works collectively towards the goals of the company and coordinating the messages sent out. The bigger picture plays an important role here, as it is not about a specific channel. Everything has to work together, such as a website and social media, or any other channel used. According to Toutounji

(2017), single-stream or one channel marketing is not as effective anymore as there exists many platforms where consumers are present. Social media channels are one of the main source of information for businesses on the marketplace. So it is vital to understand where the potential customers spend their time and which platforms they use. He recommends for businesses to expand the horizons and to be present at least on 3 different mediums, as one of the goals is to obtain the attention of consumers. Holistic marketing within different channels allows to reach such a goal. However there are other reasons for being present in different platforms as well. For example it is hard to determine the lifespan of a single-stream marketing, especially in the case of a third party owning it. That is why a business's own website is also important and one of the reason to lead traffic to the website.

Different channels strengthen the message and often the outcome by increasing chances that the consumer will take desired action. Holistic approach delivers many benefits by increasing brand loyalty, building consumer relationships and eventually increasing sales. It helps to assure that the messages are consistent in all the mediums. Holistic marketing can even consist of multiple different mediums, such as the website, social media, online ads, SEO, blogging, email marketing etc.

To sum up this section, L.A. Management Company (2015) states that a holistic online marketing approach is a great opportunity to reach a large audience on an affordable budget and it is definitely a way forward. Proper planning and making sure to take advantage of it, rather than giving the opportunity to the competitors.

### **1.3.1 The Importance of Websites to Businesses**

When it comes to a business's website, one should take the online presence of a company very seriously. It is like a business card to the client, without actually giving it to them. A website should be positioned online with a clear and professional design, so that the client understands the company means business and that customer would get motivated to

engage with the business. Leinbach-Reyhle (2014) suggests, that a strong website is important because first impressions count. Today, people Google and read reviews before buying, and “check-in” via Facebook. Consumers are judging and making decisions based on the website, and by the first impression they already determine, if they will visit the brand’s physical store or not. Window shopping isn't what it used to be. Products should be shown in other media channel as well and people should be provided with a link to the site, as people are constantly looking for places to shop. One should not forget to add the address and other important contact information, so as to be always visible. It is important to drive people to a website. Having no website means losing business and a bad one could mean the same effect as having no website at all. Visuals are becoming more and more important. The key here is appearing professional, with quality images and strong content, nowadays there are many places where creating an amazing website is not as difficult and does not cost a lot.

Garifova (2016, 134) has brought out that Internet usage on mobile phones already exceeded the Internet usage of desktop computers for online searching in 2015. This means Google searches on smartphones make up already more than half of all the searches done. If more and more people are making their purchases online and using their smartphones to search, then it gives a reason for businesses to improve their websites accordingly. Be ahead of the game. The websites should be made convenient for mobile platforms and serve the target audience.

In addition, Garifova (2016, 134) has added that users are more and more turning to the Internet for products, services, reviews, discounts, information about the companies, etc. If potential customers are looking for information about a company but they do not have an online presence, website and social networks, chances are the customer will turn to their competitor, who is present. Even if a business offers the best service in town, or a product with a better price-quality ratio, it will not matter, because the potential buyer does not know about them. The visibility of a business to their potential customers and the clear concise necessary information about the brand will increase its trustworthiness

and therefore sales, and through its timely and professional customer service will boost the return of existing customers.

According to Lee, Fairhurst and Wesley (2009, 152), more firms should communicate their social responsibility beliefs on their companies websites. Many of the employees of such businesses like to be a part of a company that is contributing to the general public, as this is becoming more and more important to the customers as well.

### **1.3.2 Facebook as a Marketing Tool**

Facebook is a social networking site and service that allows a person to connect and share content with their community, family and friends online. It is a place where users post comments, share images, share, post, and react to important news and also a major place for entertainment, games, live chats and even a place to stream live videos, with a selected group of people or publicly. It is not only for private individuals, but also for businesses and different types of organisations, where everyone is connected (LifeWire 2016).

Facebook is a crowded social market place, with lots of content being shared every day. According to Yuki (2015, 469) brand marketers are not fully understanding the value of sharing on Facebook. Sharing is an indicator of consumer interest, support and agreeableness to the content on any given social media platforms. People share posts by brands mainly for four reasons, which can also work to the advantage of their marketing. Firstly, people love to share the content that makes them “look good” in the eyes of their peers, friends and followers, making them also “look intelligent”. Secondly, people share the content that creates the feeling of happiness. It is this emotion that is most commonly thought of when creating content that is made for sharing. Thirdly, usefulness and practical value is one of the most important factors in the most shared content, especially among women. Usefulness was considered notably meaningful to people over the age of 55, such as tips, recipes, discounts, etc. Lastly, the attribute of personal storytelling

seemed to be one of the most shared content factors among 18 to 35 year-old users. Storytelling was not a significant driver, but rather sharing the audience members own story than sharing a brand's story. Yuki (2015, 469) also concluded that consumers are more active now with communicating with brands on social media than ever, but companies should design their posting strategy more consciously if they want to gain and use the full benefits of social media. A lot of the benefits from sharing social content depends on the target audience and this can help a brand hugely. Sharing happens because the subject matter consists of valuable social currency, sharing stimulates emotion, is useful and has a story to tell. The study by Yuki (2015, 469) recommends asking the following four questions to create content that would more likely be shared:

1. Will sharing this content make the consumer look good?
2. Will this content evoke a positive emotion, such as happiness or excitement?
3. Is this content useful, or does it otherwise contain information that has a strong practical value
4. Does this content tell a story in itself (or, when addressing millennials, does this content encourage the audience to tell their own story)?

### **1.3.3 Instagram as a Marketing Tool**

Instagram is a social media platform that allows it's users to take, edit, add filters and share photos and videos of their life events with friends and followers. Now they can also do stories and stream live videos as well (Instagram 2017).

Garifova (2016, 134) names the smartphone as a man's new best friend. Instagram is mainly a smartphone based application as opposed to desktop computer. It has become popular all over the world in a very short time. This gives an opportunity for small businesses to reach their target audience, where they would not have it possible otherwise. There is a portion of people who had little Internet access before owning a smartphone, they are now a new target audience for young businesses. Companies can

have more of a two-way communications and can build an interactive relationship with their followers as the use of social media has become a relevant and prevalent part of daily life. A considerable amount of brands are promoting and are looking at starting promotions on Instagram, some have chosen to use it as their main social networking and advertising tool, as it has so rapidly developed, about + 3 million users per year.

Businesses used to be able to enjoy an average of 16 percent organic reach on their business pages on Facebook, but that is no longer an option, with all the algorithms changing the way people see brands posts. This being always one potential downside of dealing in a monopoly-like micro-marketplace that the owner of the market square is able to change the rules according to their business needs. Adriel (2015) explains that using Instagram allows businesses to be heard and seen. Instagram has high engagement rate and top brands' posts were delivering 58 times more engagement than Facebook, and 120 times more than Twitter. Instagram has a highly engaged community and the visuals are extremely important to the users. With Instagram having been bought by Facebook in 2012, it is always good to have a strong website outside of that single company controlled marketplace to ensure safety from changing company policies and software updates that could affect a business negatively to ensure a more wholesome, reliable and holistic brand image and customer experience.

Adriel (2015) advises to stay true to the brand and define the personality and the voice of the brands essence. Sharing experiences and feelings that people have when using a product or service, can show authenticity and show the potential customer the company's vision and how the client matters. Having brand advocates can relieve workload, deepen brand recognition, increase interaction and make the customer base feel a part and in community with the company. One of the ways this can be done is through a social movement around a brand and a relevant cause by utilizing hashtags and sharing. A business should learn to know its audience, communicate and engage with them by asking to tag friends or comment on images of timely and relevant topics that matter to the targeted customer base.

According to Garifova (2016, 134), Instagram makes it easy to access the potential online customers profiles on a competitors site and competitors can also imitate the strategy of successful brands behaviour on the network, since it is open access to majority of business accounts. The beginning is always hard when starting out in a new online platform. It is time consuming and a lot of it is put into development and promotion. Often entrepreneurs think their product is not fit for the environment, but Instagram is a large community with themes, products and brands from various fields, from home made cupcakes to large companies. It is a visual blog with quality content, not only for outstanding boutiques and well known restaurants, where each account is unique and the content based on your brands specifics. Liking and following are effective ways to attract followers.

Brands are present on Instagram for showcase, to raise awareness and build confidence, it is a territory of the client. If the company turns over to selling, followers may turn away, it is a slippery road. If the decides to be present on Instagram, Garifova (2016, 134) considers important to be active on it too, since the audience is rather young, active and constantly needs interesting content, otherwise they may turn away.

Instagram with its rapid growth has become more and more known to the marketers in the world as in Estonia. It is considered to be a channel where mostly a younger generation is present. At the moment there are approximately 270 000 Instagarm users in Estonia, with majority of women and less than 10% of people ages 45 and up (Figure 3).



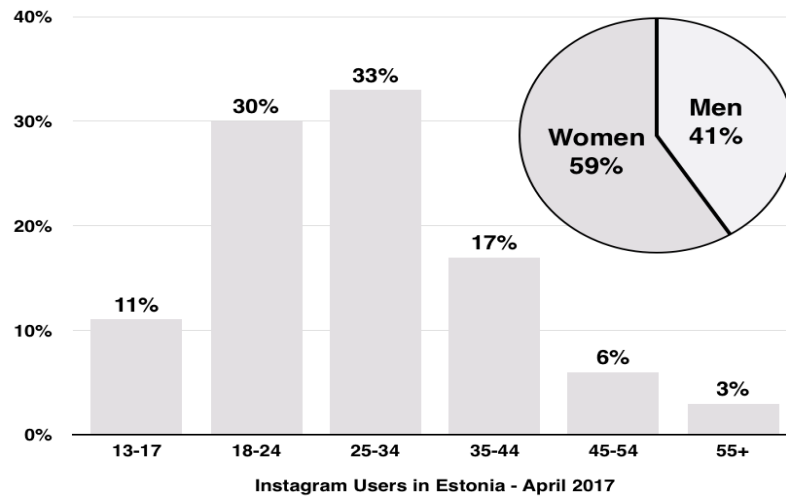


Figure 3. Instagram usage in Estonia by demographics. Source: NapoleonCat 2017. Drawn by the author

Visual content is becoming more and more important to people, as it is easy to consume and Instagram offers. A picture is worth a thousand words, and what better way to tell the company's story than a thousand words at a time.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODS**

The second chapter of the thesis explains the purpose of the study, focuses on the description of the research, and description of the research methods used, data collection and processing the information.

### **2.1 Research Questions**

The purpose of the research is to understand and explain what is important in using online media for business purposes for start-ups and small companies. More precisely how social media and company's own website work together holistically and what are the benefits of each of those for a business. It also helps to understand the strategic importance behind an online media marketing for a company. A person who has a company and has a need or decided to take it up to the next level and would like to use those offered media possibilities. The focus is to offer ideas and viewpoints that are important to understand before beginning with the journey from the perspective of people working on the field.

In order to accomplish the aim of the thesis and accordance with the theoretical framework, the author has asked four research questions:

1. What are the important indicators of a website; and how to get more out of your own business website?
2. What is the role of Facebook for start-ups and small companies; and how to use it for business purposes?
3. What is the role of Instagram for start-ups and small companies; and how to use it for business purposes?
4. How do videos, images and content affect people on social media platforms?

## 2.2 Qualitative Research

The qualitative research method is chosen for the purpose of this thesis. According to Patton and Cochran (2002), qualitative research is conducted to understand certain aspects and situations, this type of research usually generates words not numerical data or statistics, and it is characterised by its aims. This method may seem more approximate and estimated than qualitative research. Some criticisms state that samples may be too small and not enough representative of the whole, the findings lack exactness and it may be hard to understand if the findings are biased. However, there are many questions that quantitative research, such as a survey, can not answer, whereas qualitative study is perfectly suitable. Qualitative method in most cases is trying to understand the experiences, beliefs, motivations and attitudes of the participants and the community. This approach aims to answer the questions “why”, “how” and “what”, to gain more detailed understanding.

Qualitative Research Consultants Association (2017) brought out the reasons when to use qualitative methods:

- To understand the customer need
- To comprehend the values, feelings and ideas that govern and influence behaviour
- To catch the language and figurativeness of the respondents as they describe and relate to the subject matter
- To better understand the meaning and the context of the information collected
- To understand the ideas, attitudes and approaches behind the marketing and communication messages, strategies, positioning and how people perceive them
- Create ideas for improvement for a product, brand, service, etc.
- Open up potential strategic ways for communications plans or branding

In accordance with the above mentioned list qualitative research is used for the purpose of this thesis as it tries to understand the importance of using online media for business purposes. The intention is to understand the ideas, attitudes and approaches behind the

marketing and communication messages, strategies, positioning and how people perceive them from the perspective of people working on the field

Interview was chosen out of the different possible methods of qualitative research to conduct the study. In-depth interviews are excellent for collecting data on individuals personal experiences, viewpoints and past events, specifically when tactful topics are being explored as well (Family Health International 2017). There are three forms of interviews, such as structured, semi-structured and unstructured. According to Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2008), semi-structured interviews are prepared ahead of time, which allows the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview. This chosen method also allows informants to express their views freely and in their own terms. Usually the interviewer has a interview guide on hand that they follow. The questions are open-ended and discussions may diverge from the guide, it is recommended to record and later listen for analysis, also writing down the answers may distract from the topic spoken. Dialogue and rapport are essential between interviewer and interviewee for in-depth answers. This form of interview leaves room for various topics and thoughts.

The participants were interviewed with the semi-structured interview method to understand and gain insight about using online marketing for small and start-up companies from the perspective of them working on the field. This gives deeper understanding of the approaches behind the marketing and communication messages, strategies, positioning etc.

## **2.3 Sample Selection and Description**

In order to achieve the purpose of the research and gain valuable insight of the approaches of online marketing for start-ups and small companies, the selection of sample group was made based on the following criteria:

- The participants have had to work at the marketing agency for at least a year

- The participants had to have an experience on online marketing, either doing marketing for a brand as work or for their own personal brand

The objective of the study determines the sampling technique and sample most suitable for the research. The non-probability sampling technique is chosen for this purpose, because it is hard to determine the size of the population who fall under such criteria. According to Lund Research (2012), the main characteristic of non-probability sampling techniques are so that samples are selected according to the subjective judgement of the researcher, which is the cornerstone of such technique. The people interviewed fall under homogenous category, since it is based on the occupational level and experience, not to mention the structure of the research supports the chosen sample group. It was important to choose participants with similar experiences and work assignments to have answers related to the topic.

The purposive sampling option from non-probability sampling techniques was used to find people who fall under such criteria. Purposive sampling is also known as selective or judgemental technique (Lund Research 2012). Data was collected until the data saturation point was reached.

The participants have had to work at the marketing agency for at least a year. The first criteria was chosen since it is important to know that the participants qualify to the study based on their knowledge, skills and experiences. Working in the agency will give an overview and the base knowledge of the importance of marketing, not to mention it is the participant's daily work and they are aware of the techniques and trends happening. As according to Powell (2017), marketing agencies are about the communicating value to the potential customers. People working at the agency are more specialised in many methods and tactics, they are professionals, have creative coworkers around them and they know the trends.

The second criteria was to have an experience on online marketing, either doing marketing for a brand as work or for their own personal brand. Second criteria was

chosen because in this research it is important that the participants also know about the company's online marketing, as a whole. Only working at the agency might mean that they conduct only certain assignments however when they are participating in creating a brand's online presence, it might mean different work tactics and assignment. According to LimeGreen Marketing (2016), 64 percent of digital marketers spend at minimum six hours doing social media and the remaining 36 percent spend eleven and more hours, as this already indicates that people put a lot of time and effort into marketing.

The chosen participants (see Appendix 1) were selected with similar background and experience specifically in online marketing for a brand or a company, but from different agencies. This makes it a homogenous sample and supports the purpose of the thesis. The topic itself is not so much sensitive but rather reflects the interviewees personal experiences and knowledge about the topic.

## **2.4 Principles of Compiling the Interview Guide**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are used to conduct the research with the chosen sample group. The interview guide will set structure and framework to the interviews conducted, which are performed in Estonian.

An interview guide was created to reach the goal of the thesis (see Appendix 2). The interview guide includes questions that aim to affirm and understand the online holistic approach, importance of the social media and company's own website for the start-ups and small companies from the perspective of the people who deal with such matter on daily bases.

The interview guide of the thesis is formed to follow the main idea of the theoretical framework. The main idea was to reach to the point where it is clear that start-ups or a small companies would be better off on an online environment to manage in this competitive era. It is to show why start-ups and small companies should have an online

presence. It explains the different possibilities available for the companies and explains the business's objectives. The interview has six parts included, which are introduction and general background information, holistic approach, topic about the website and then moves on to the chosen social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. Last part of the interview questions in about interviewees experiences and recommendations.

The first part of the interview was the introduction and general background information part. Firstly when meeting with the interviewees introducing the researcher, followed by explaining the purpose of the study and shortly describing the idea of the thesis. Next followed asking the permission to be recorded again, although the participants were aware of it ahead of time, but rather to be sure. Then participants background information was asked, such as the role and the title of the respondent, years of experience, number of websites and social media accounts managed, with the extra question of the time they spend on each of the above mentioned channels.

The second part of the interview is about the holistic approach to online marketing, which typically includes the company's own website and some sort of other medium they use for social media marketing. As according to L.A. Management Company (2015) and Super Savvy Business (2016), social media and a website are important and unavoidable components to any holistic online marketing. It is important to develop and create an online presence. They claim that there are no longer the option to just build a website and hope it to be successful. Based on this knowledge the questions for the second part were created, which begun with the goals of holistic marketing. The questions begun with a wider approach to the topic, which were about the basis of creating an online presence, approaches and how to manage the whole.

The third part goes into more details about the parts of the whole, such as a businesses website. It is about the importance and different indicators of a website. As Leinbach-Reyhle (2014) has advised, beginning with the website, it is important to position yourself online strong. It is like your business card to the client, without you actually giving it to

them. As other channels have something in common in its design and look, your website represents you in the eyes of a customer. Based on that, the questions were made to gain proper understanding of this one piece of the whole.

The fourth and fifth part of the interview are about social media, more specifically about Facebook and Instagram. In Estonia and in the world as well, those two are one of the most used and offer most opportunities to the businesses (The Statistics Portal 2017). The role of social media has grown tremendously in marketing and it often is quite a challenge to the marketers. The questions are built up in a way that asks the questions about benefit of those social media channels to the business, about the goals and how to reach the target audience.

The last part about the interview is the most personal. This part is about the interviewees own experiences and recommendations to people who are starting to do an online marketing for their own company. This part aims to gain an understanding from what they have learned from their working lives, what has been the biggest success or failure. Something that can be a helping tool to others. This part is also important mainly because there are no one formula to be successful when doing online media marketing, but there are some common understandings and knowledge about the topic.

The interview questions are made according to the research questions which are accordance with the concept of theoretical framework. The questions are divided into five different parts, nevertheless the answers give an understanding of the whole. These are open-ended questions and it initiates the participants to give longer answers, which cover different topics that are connected.

## **2.5 Data collection**

During this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen from the qualitative research methods. All the participants were aware of the study ahead of time of the



interview and meetings were scheduled to the most suitable times for the interviewees. The interviews took place at the coffee shops and at the participants homes, where they felt it would be appropriate and suitable, as well as comfortable. The interviews were performed in Estonian to make it easier for the interviewees. Not to mention to better understand the questions and receive more competent answers in terms of language barriers, when understanding or giving answers. There were some terms that are more commonly in English used when talking about social media, such as 'reach' and 'engagement'. The time span of the interviews was from 50 minutes to an hour, which depended on the length and how the conveyable was the answers. The interviews were conducted in April 2017, during the week of 16 in Tallinn. This form of qualitative research gave the chance to ask further questions in order to gain a better overview of the subject matter. In the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked to be recorded and the short introduction to the research topic was conducted. Participants were willing to to share openly about the topic.

## **2.6 Data Analysis**

In this study the interviews were recorded and later analysed through the content analysis. According to Krippendorff (2004, 18-20), content analysis is a well known qualitative research technique for making replicable and effective conclusions from texts and other meaningful materials, such as recordings, to their context of their use. It is a research technique for objectively and systematically describe the written, spoken and visual communications. This method is used to understand the meaning from the content of the text or recording by identifying the characteristic elements. Content is contained in the message, it is waiting to be separated from its origins and described.

An interviews was conducted and recorded for the purpose of this thesis. The data was analysed through content analysis, as it is one of the most known and it helps to decode the interview to necessary components. No notes were taken during the interview to be fully present and engaged with the interviewee. Later on based on the topics spoken on

the interview and research questions, specific categories were made, the data was analysed through listening to the entire recordings, and corresponding parts were added to the appropriate segment. Important and corresponding findings were analysed and gathered to support the goal of the research. The results of the interviews are already introduced in the third chapter.

### **3 RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter presents the results of the in depth analysis of the interview data. The discussions have been analysed using the content analysis method and the results are presented below. The idea is to get insight on how to approach online marketing for start-ups and small companies, how to get the word out there. The first part is about the findings of the interview and discussion, then follow the recommendations, limitations and future research part. The interview was built up of six parts, which give different meanings to the entity of the research. At the same time the subject matter of the questions are overlapping and supporting each other.

#### **3.1 Introduction and General Information about the Participants**

The first part of the interview is the introduction and general questions regarding the background of the participants. It will cover their experiences, the online communities they have managed and the time spent on each one of those. This is to create a base for the relevance and credibility of the answers received.

The results indicate that the respondents have an experience in the marketing field anywhere from 2 years up to 22 years and have an experience in doing holistic marketing for a brand full time, or are marketing their own personal brand, which ranges from 1 year up to 5 years. The respondents have created and consistently managed business websites and social media accounts, on sites such as Facebook, Instagram, newsletters and online campaigns. Some respondents are also including blogs and Pinterest to their marketing strategy, and Participant 2 has used Twitter as well. The regular time participants spend doing online management varied a bit, from confident user to heavy user, which was from around 5 to 10 hours a week up to being online most of the working time, depending on the situation.

“...On the daily basis I dedicate my time for work for sure, on some days less, on other days more. There have also been days, when I have dedicated 14 hours straight on a portal.” (Participant 3)

## **3.2 Holistic Approach**

The second part of the interview was about the holistic approach. This section covers the aspects to be considered before going online or proceeding with the current strategy as a whole. The participants were asked about the aspects for creating an online presence, strategy, about different channels and dealing with negative feedback. The answers are to help to understand the whole situation.

According to all the interviewees creating a brand's online presence in marketing begins with the strategic work, the goals and the concept of the company. Participants 1, 3 and 4 all stressed the importance of knowing the reason to start doing online media for a company. It is important that everything goes together with the business's strategy.

“First, strategic work - understanding the brand's essence, finding out the problem and/or the solution. To clear it up, everything starts from the beginning. Figure it out of what, or of whom, and to who are you going to communicate... Then I would say the communication, as in our values, content, tone, messages and the way we speak... Choose and put down your goals. Then you can start thinking about the channels to use... Then through your brand's chosen channel you start to offer value to the customers... Everything begins with the content. Content, content, content!” (Participant 3)

If all that is in place, the suggested steps were to choose the social media platforms according to the businesses need.

“...know the concept of your brand and the purpose... bring out the strengths, like how social media is visual, you have to make yourself sure of your niche, your peculiarity. Based on that niche, see how can you solve the situation artistically online.” (Participant 2)

The initial answer for the objectives of creating a strategy for online presence showed that it all depends on the brand, the desired outcome and the goals. As suggested by the participant 1 and 3, explaining and thinking through the fundamental questions and goals should be done first. Then analysing the target audience and choosing the media channels accordingly, bearing in mind the nature of the product. Participant 2 and 4 explained that online media has to support the company’s objectives, as social media is an important part of it and has to be useful to the client.

“For my brand that I manage I see that the content has to be entertaining from one side, useful and educating from the other side, since we have younger and older generation as our fans.” (Participant 2)

Social media channels recommended for business by the participants were Facebook first, since it is in a unique position in Estonia due to its big user community, Instagram for its younger generation, LinkedIn for some enterprises and Snapchat to reach the youngest generation.

Some participants were using external social media tools that were not included in Facebook or Instagram to manage all the accounts. Participant 1 stated that there are several external social media tools, except they tend to be costly and it is possible to manage without. She has not seen it worthy to invest in one. Other participants brought out tools such as Canva, GIMP, Google Analytic, Buffer, Heyo, Shortstack, Infogr and the website’s own content management system.

Following social media as a tool for customer service is seen as really important. It is a tool for communication and for creating customer relations, for promoting a brand and

new services. Not to mention, for responding to the client as quickly as possible, if being contacted or commented. In the case of negative comments analysing the content was considered essential. Meaning, there are some comments not worth answering, therefore analyse and in most cases answer.

According to the interviewees, the aspects a brand's social media manager should know and carry out were rather universal. The results indicate that most important is to keep oneself updated with everything happening around, observing the trends and keeping up with the target audience. Every step and post has to support the goals set. The followers might dislike some posts, but as participants mentioned, this will help to get closer to understanding the customer. A marketer should try and test the customer base once in awhile.

There is a lot of information on the Internet about marketing, hence there is no need to pay expensive sums for online courses, with the exception of self-improvement or new insights. Social media marketing has remarkable amount of aspects it covers, like photography, communication, creating content, and knowing how to do several other tasks if needed. Integrating the visual style and language is considered significant according to interviewees, as social media is a visual channel. Visual content attracts, gets more reach and engagement. And lastly, always learning is a major part of being a brand's social media manager.

“People like to look. On Instagram, they don’t read anything, its just being looked. On Facebook, there is a rule of thumb that you should not have text more than two lines.” (Participant 1)

Following your competitors is considered every company’s ABC. Learning from their mistakes, from their success, and making relevant conclusions. Following the competitors on social media is seen as the easiest way, since accounts have open-access. Additionally the participants stressed to be only a follower and not to compare, since it is not healthy for the brand and marketer.

A piece of social media content is considered to be successful when reaching the goals set. Either when directing customers to the website, gaining new followers, getting customer engagement, sharing the content or even participating in a game. The participants newsletters and blogs should always be done consistently, as they also support the online marketing and the whole entity, if that is the strategy chosen.

“Online world is amorphous. The success of your post depends on so many things in total, such as the time of the day, weather outside, season, what is happening in the world at the moment, what is happening around us and who are the popular faces to promote your product.” (Participant 3)

The holistic approach is the base for all. The fate of a brand is often reflected in its online media marketing as discussed in the beginning of the thesis (last paragraph of section 1.1.2) and according to the participants, it is important to know the brand’s essence, the target audience and objectives. Start-ups and small companies have somewhat different objectives (see section 1.2.1), but one thing that is in common is creating a brand’s image, reaching the target audience and raising brand awareness. If all the objectives are clear, then, and only then should one move forward with their marketing strategy. Otherwise the outcome could be unexpected and the messages not be consistent, clear nor the same, not to mention the different messages all the online media platforms could be sending. It will cause people to be confused when trying to interpret and navigate the brand.

To really understand, which platforms and channels to use for marketing it is paramount to understand the customers and the nature of the product or service. It is fundamental to interpret whether the potential customers are traditional media users or they are situated on social media sites. There is no winner or loser, however, a business should be able to combine the aspects of the two in accordance with their capabilities and limitations (see sections 1.2), and again according to the participants, because more and more people are moving towards social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram. Social media

marketing takes time, which is different kind of investment, not to mention, start-ups and small companies typically have limited or even non-existent marketing budget. In the case of both time and money being limited, the interviewees suggested to use Facebook, as the channel enables to reach more people, more directly, more precise target groups and for less money in Estonia and around the world. Facebook has many possibilities for companies with limited resources.

Visuals are really important on social media as they create the image of the business that is being portrayed to the customer. Nowadays all channels are visual, not to mention the trend for creating websites in minimalist style with only the essential reading and a visual sensory feast. This way the first look of a site is memorable, understandable, relatable, navigable and attracts more people, (see section 1.3.1). Attractive websites are even able to pursue a customer to make a purchase, as stated by Participant 2. Visuals are in the form of image, video, Gif or other. This kind of content is engaging and has a higher reach compared to simple text. A picture says a thousand words, and a video is priceless. People hardly read anymore due to the overload and speed of information digestion and noise surrounding us daily. On Facebook, Instagram and other websites, the amount of content being produced has lead people to need simple and easily consumable content, such as an image. Participant 2 has highlighted the importance of using a good image, not too good nor bad images are often enough to influence the customer. As agreed by Yuki (see section 1.3.2), people need content relatable to their lives. Images depicting something too good are not taken seriously and will not communicate. Then again, people love to share content that makes them look good and intelligent in the eyes of others.

### **3.3 The Importance of Websites for Businesses**

The third part of the interview is in connection with the website and the importance of its indicators, responsiveness and leading traffic to the website. This section covers the need of a website for a business.



The most important indicators of a website were considered to be the attractiveness, availability of information, user comfort and first impression.

“In case of an information website, so called a business card website, what matters is if your potential customer found the needed information, product or service and whether they have contacted you... In case of the product website, behaviour flow is important, if they believed what they read and if they made a purchase... In case of the portal websites, visits are important, bounce rate, how much are the articles read, how much time anyone spent on your site, where did they click, are they repeat visitor, if they moved to a new subpage, how long does it take for the article to load, etc...” (Participant 3)

“...If I’m on a cosmetic brands website, both sell identical products, I am most probably to buy from the seller who has more pleasing, simple and easy to use page for me... if you have a product, bring out the Call To Action button, and always direct the client to somewhere else or something they have to do.” (Participant 2)

Having a responsive website was definitely vital, as jointly agreed by the respondents and considered very important. To stress the importance some participants had brought out the time people spend on mobile phones nowadays, which is considered equal with time spent on a computer.

“Website has to be well read and visible in all the browsers, different computers and also on mobile phone...” (Participant 4)

“Phones are more and more popular, smartphones and tablets, and if your site and the information on it is not visible and easily readable on a smartphone, then you lose a large part of your visitors...Plus search engines will lift the responsive webpages upwards in the searches.” (Participant 3)

All the respondents agreed with the main reason to lead traffic to the website should be in the case of an e-store or when a company is selling something in order to be contacted. As mentioned also, in the case of an informative site there is no need to lead traffic to the website.

First off, websites are considered to be very important for a business, as it is the online business card to the customer (see section 1.3.1). Website and social media channels are platforms which work together and form the whole entity. The interviewees covered several types of websites and whether there is a need to lead customers to the website. The answers varied depending on the purpose of the website. According to the authors (see section 1.3 and 1.3.1), it is rather important to lead people to the website, moreover the discussion is based on the product websites. Other types are not included in such discussions, as the websites with online stores are the first ones generally viewed when discussing online businesses. To clarify, if the business has an online store, the website is the base for all, and also important in the case of other types of websites as discussed by Participant 3.

### **3.4 Facebook as a Marketing Tool**

The fourth part of the interview was about the benefits and goals set for Facebook for business purpose. The participants were asked 4 questions.

The answers for the benefit of Facebook for business ranged from the most brilliant marketing channel, to a possibility to communicate with people in everyday language, to being close to the customers, forwarding them fast news and building brand awareness. Marketing within Facebook has the possibility of reaching a greater number of targeted audience with limited resources.

“For my brand it is especially visibility, it is a direct information distribution channel. Also Facebook has the biggest fan base too.”(Participant 3)

The goals set for marketing on Facebook were to increase fan base, let the followers know about the activities of the brand and gain more reach, increase engagement, gain post clicks, and drive sales. Despite the shine of all the social currency the reason for businesses being online is sales after all, so one should not lose sight of the main goal as was pointed out by one of the interview participants. Success can also be defined in the possibility to directly contact and communicate with the brand. The interviewees brought out that by opening a social media account for a brand, it should be made clear that the account would be held active and not become stale. Posting once every month was considered worthless, mainly for losing visibility among clients. Making a communication strategy and determining the way to achieve it are a must.

There are no generic strategies that would generate leads on Facebook, as stated by the interviewees. It is based on the product and service of the company. Some general recommendations mentioned were creating directed advertisements for the target audience, keeping an eye on the brands language, daring to be brave and playful. Trying to aim different target groups and recognizing which of them responds and becomes interested in your product or service should be tested. Building up texts logically and compactly, always adding call to action button for people to take further action.

“Personally I have noticed that the biggest interest that are causing leads, are written in caps lock and often are quite intriguing, such as UNBELIEVABLE, BOOM, LOOK NOW, etc.”

The percentage and reach of images has massively fallen, the suggestion is to focus more on video and link content. In case of using covers for posts, those should be appetising, interesting, and match the content of the post text. Once in a while experimenting with the content of the posts, covers are vital to understand the followers and their triggers to act upon the offer call to action.

To reach the desired target audience, all the participants suggested using Facebook's targeted ads, cross-marketing and cooperation partners, such as bloggers or other influencers.

Facebook is a very amorphous place as mentioned by participant 3 and strategy has to be in accordance with the business objectives, whether a product, service, an e-store or anything else. Thinking ahead at least 3 months should be considered when creating the strategy, this will provide the big picture and necessary adjustments are done on the way. Facebook is seen vital to business, especially for the economic interests of small businesses in a nowadays competitive circumstances (see section 1.2). So the role of Facebook for start-ups and small companies is considered important and might mean several things. First it is networking and communication place with customers (see section 1.3.2). For a business it gives visibility, it is an information distribution channel, being there and close to your customer is essential. It is about one on one connection and creating relationships. To use Facebook for business purposes means hard and consistent work. Having a strategy that supports the brand is necessary to forward messages that are relevant and valuable to the customers. Do not be afraid to test with different posts and messages to see what the customers appreciate. One thing can be certain, content which will make the customers look good and intelligent in the eyes of others, content provoking positive emotion, something useful and a person's story would be pleasing the customers definitely (see section 1.3.2). Be more bold, go deeper into the topics, communicate and ask feedback. Feedback helps to understand where the brand is positioned in the eyes of the customers.

### **3.5 Instagram as a Marketing Tool**

The fifth part of the interview was about the benefits and goals set for Instagram for business purposes. The participants were asked again 4 questions.

The interviewees brought out the benefit of Instagram definitely being mainly the visual aspect of transferring the message, increasing followers, creating emotion and brands image. Again the nature of the product or service plays an important role in starting to plan a marketing strategy. Instagram was seen rather as a supportive channel for the business, not as the main tool. As highlighted by Participant 1, at the moment Instagram is a networking channel for the younger generation, not as much to the older generation. The reason being was the simplicity of the information received and emphasis on visual content.

“...People are often on Instagram because they are curious and like to see how others are living... It is a beautiful picture channel and makes people feel good...”  
(Participant 1)

“It’s a channel where people can talk about you, for example cafeterias, restaurants, housings, they should definitely use it. Companies offering IT services, not sure if it’s worth being there for them.” (Participant 4)

The goals put for Instagram were first seen as creating brand image rather than selling, then keeping up with regular posting definitely on a daily bases, offering people an initiative, which would trigger the user a need to follow a brand. It was seen as a channel for people to engage and communicate with the brand. The success for Instagram comes from the objectives and reasons of the brand.

“... quite a big amount of readers to our website comes from Instagram, which makes the existence of this channel justified.” (Participant 3)

Strategies that would generate leads on Instagram are creating valuable content by using quality images, writing catchy and expressive captions and showing emotions. Offering followers something that is important to the target audience, however has to represent the brand as well. As highlighted by participant 4, inviting followers to post pictures of your

product or using your service with themselves, offering interesting games and creating campaigns could be the tools to engage followers. Participant 2 brought out the importance of engaging ambassadors to the campaigns, which happens to be one of the easiest ways to gain followers.

“Golden rule, how to get followers for free, look at the accounts who have the followers you want. Start liking and commenting, then they will become interested in who is this smart one, that constantly likes and comments. That’s one strategy.” (Participant 1)

In order to reach the desired target audience on Instagram, becoming a follower to the target audience first, creating amazing posts, tagging people and using relevant hashtags were considered a must. Not to mention, being social and active, commenting posts of other users and liking their pictures. Participants 1 and 3 brought out the possibility to try sponsored ads through Facebook as well.

Instagram on the other hand was seen more as a supportive channel for the business, nevertheless some companies have reached the conclusion to only concentrate on Instagram marketing (see section 1.3.3). The author agrees with the opinion of Instagram being a supportive channel, mainly in the case of sales there has to be a site, where to direct the customers to buy the product. The role of Instagram for start-ups and small companies depend on the target audience. As mentioned by participant 1, Instagram has mostly younger generation present. The biggest user base is the age group up to 30 years of age, following the older generation. The decision on a marketing strategy should obviously be based on the age group desired to reach and their preferred social media channels and inner groups within those channels . Agreeing with participant 4’s statement that an Instagram based marketing is not the right move for every company, likely due to the nature of the customer base of the business, but for the right business, the effect can be even stronger, for they can be seen as relevant, trendy and helps to cement their place in the minds and eyes of their target audience. (see also section 1.3.3). Instagram is a

visual channel, beautiful imagery matters and the text should be complimenting or playing off the image but should have little standing on its own . Nevertheless you should not leave the image without a well thought and catchy headline. Instagram can be used for engaging with the customers without saying a lot and making the images speak for themselves. The idea of including ambassadors is similar to the use of influencers on TV ads. It is a concept relocated to Instagram. Other ways to engage with the customers are by posting on a daily bases, commenting and liking the followers images, offering valuable content. Directly selling on Instagram could scare the customers away even though there are a set of users selling on Instagram, but the danger with this is being seen amateurish and insecure as opposed to using a professional and specific site or service (see section 1.3.3). It is a place of lifestyle, ideas, emotions and showing customers the brands character and soul. Posting images about activities, behind the scenes photos will make the customer appreciate the authenticity and they will be able to identify with the business and the people behind it.

### **3.6 Further Recommendations from the Interviewees**

The last part of the interview is the additional and personal recommendations part. The answers given here are based on the interviewees own experiences.

Recommendations to their past self from the point where they are now revealed somewhat similar answers. They suggested thirst for knowledge, meaning more self development. Trusting themselves more and highly recommending to be bolder with experimenting as well. They advised not to be afraid of failures, since it may lead to the right answer faster. Going deeper into the topics and doing a little research every day were also highlighted. Some of the more detailed suggestions are brought out below.

“...think forward at least 3 months of your actions and strategize on social media, change it according to your need and learn from the competitors, do not be afraid to test and definitely analyse, what works and what doesn’t .” (Participant 4)

“...Pinterest and Youtube are full of all kinds of instructions and ideas. I would recommend not to post anything ugly, because it is ugly. Acknowledge the visual side.” (Participant 1)

The biggest learning points the participants have included is to always check the numbers and statistics beforehand and not assume anything beforehand. An important matter that came out several times was not collecting feedback, not talking to the audience enough and forgetting to constantly develop. It was brought out by one participant, that daring to ask feedback, even from one's own friends would be excellent for initial feedback.

Further recommendations to a person beginning with online media marketing for their business were to set up the strategy, to make sure to know the goals and to become familiar with the analytical side and statistics. Keeping an eye on the competitors and making the brand well reachable were also recommended.

“Everything starts from the beginning, from your brand’s product or service. If the product is mediocre, then do not wait to achieve bigger results than your product is. First build a strategy for the whole brand, then start to focus on the channels. Always be open for everyone and everything, and remember, you are the representative of your brand as well!” (Participant 3)

It is important that the online marketing strategy meets the four key ideas (Figure 4), which will help to analyse and understand the marketing strategy and measure up to the goals and objectives set for the company. In order to start with online marketing the existence of real and meaningful strategy is necessity. Knowing the potential customer base and their destination is needed in order to choose the best channels for finding and interacting with the clients. It is always important to analyse and measure the company’s performance and activity, learn to know the statistics and also monitor the competitors.



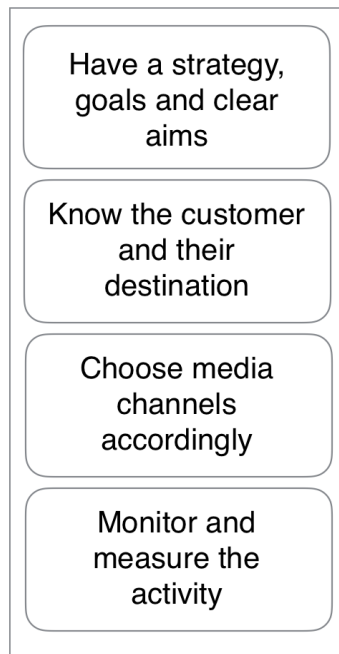


Figure 4. Strategical hierarchy for online marketing. Drawn by the author

The best knowledge comes from practice and the best way to gain some is to start doing and some testing as the interviewees have recommended. If the aim is clear moving forward will be easier.

### 3.7 Limitations and Future Research

In order to contain the thesis research and keep it within the designed definition without getting sidetracked, the author excluded some more specific and specialised tools that are used for online marketing, not to mention those are more advanced for the beginner. That would have meant doing the research on a specific company or a brand. In order to be able to advise businesses either in the case of a start-up or a small company interested in online media marketing, it was important to have more general approach. Instead focusing on the two most important, effective and smartest marketing tools available at the moment in the burgeoning online marketplace in Estonia, such as Facebook and

Instagram. The excluded tools include search marketing, banner ads, email marketing, mobile marketing (see Figure 1) like Facebook Pixel, Google AdWords, SEO, etc. Those are considered to be difficult and take much more time and effort to master. They are meant for marketers who already have an experience and more knowledge on the field. Therefore the topic can be suggested for further research, as based on a specific company and the tools need for them.

Additionally, the nature of the thesis prevented from achieving any groundbreaking new findings, as the aim was towards a holistic approach based on the experience of experts working in the field, and backed by theory in popular culture, academic writings and the authors personal experience working in the field.

Despite the limitations, the current study has contributed to confirming the importance of online marketing for start-ups and small companies, which gives a great overview of the aspects to be considered. It helps to set the rules and gives it a solid form.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to study the importance of using Facebook, Instagram and a company's website for small businesses and start-ups in the most effective and strategic way for marketing, how to create a holistic marketing approach and using marketing ideas from people in the industry. The work explains how social media and company's own website work together as a whole and the benefits of each of those channels compliment the whole. Highlighting the importance of a coherent and understandable strategy in symphony with the product and/or service being marketed, before going live with the accounts and/or campaigns. The focus is to offer ideas and viewpoints that are important to understand before beginning online and social media marketing to a company that has decided to take advantage of the enormous possibilities of the Internet and the offered media channel possibilities in the smartest way. Research based on the perspective of people working on the field has confirmed the previously found theories.

The key findings from the study confirmed that before starting online marketing for a brand, the company needs to know the essence, concept and goals of the company or brand. The study confirmed the importance of a strategic approach. The approach should derive from the character of the business and/or service. The interviewees confirmed the theory that an Instagram account for more personable visuals and younger audience, Facebook for storytelling and more wider and maturer audience, and a website for driving sales and/or providing information.

The communication channels recommended by the participants and also chosen for the study were Facebook, Instagram and a company's own website. A website is an important part of a business, as it represents the company, although leading customers to a website is not always a necessity, this will depend on the objective of the site. Facebook and Instagram were seen as one of the most popular social media channels to use for business purposes. Facebook has a wide audience and gives a vast array of opportunities for a

business to reach its target audience. Instagram was recommended for businesses who are interested in reaching younger people and/or whose business is based on, or wish to represent themselves in a mainly visual representation. All those three components are important for a business and have to support each other and create a coherent whole.

The findings provide valuable information and insight to the person interested in doing online marketing, in getting their word out to there. The findings start from the beginning and provide deeper insight into the holistic approach of Facebook and Instagram and provide essential ideas and pointers. It shows that one of the most important parts to consider about the product and service is the strategy you choose. A great deal depends on this and it will affect the further actions.

More specifically, for a customer it is important that a website looks attractive, information is easily found, comfortable navigation on the site, website should also be made responsive for smartphones and computers, not to mention first impressions often determine the users behaviour, whether or not they will continue on the site. Most cases businesses drive traffic to the website when selling a product, and it is considered not so important in the case of an informative websites. Marketing within Facebook has the possibility of reaching a greater number of people with limited resources. When on Facebook it is important to post no less than couple times a week and to be always consistent. When creating posts, headlines such as UNBELIEVABLE, BOOM, LOOK NOW will have a greater effect on people than just plain text. It is recommended to post rather shorter texts than longer ones, for the reason of people not paying attention. Video, link and image content is much more appreciated by the audience than just plain text, and has higher reach, with video leading. Instagram has rather younger generation present and it is a channel to create a brands visual appearance. People are not there to read, however the captions are considered to be important nevertheless. Golden rule to get followers on Instagram is to look at the accounts with the potential similar followers. Then start liking and commenting moderately, which might make the people interested and the company has potentially won followers. Social media marketing has remarkable amount of aspects

it covers, like photography, communication, creating content, etc. Think ahead at least 3 months when creating the strategy for a brand.

An entrepreneur interested in online marketing might have several issues or concerns related to the topic. In case of a lack of knowledge or concern about the continuously changing online environment, this study provides the base for future small businesses and brand managers with some specific examples.

Limitations for this thesis research were the exclusion of specific tools, that advanced marketers in most cases use. That would have meant limiting the research on a specific company or a brand.

The current study has contributed to the understanding of online marketing for start-ups and small companies, giving a great overview of the aspects to be considered.

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# APPENDIXES

## Appendix 1. Participant Data

Appendix 1				
	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
<b>Working Title &amp; Role</b>	Communication Manager at the Agency; Online Manager at the Personal Brand	Assistant Project Manager at the Agency; and Marketing and Communication for Family Business	Marketing manager at the Agency, then Strategist, Creative director Additional: Content manager Journalist Stylist	Marketing Manager at the Agency, Businesses Marketing Strategy and Communications
<b>Experience</b>	22 years	2 years	5 years	17 years
<b>Online communities helped to manage</b>	Websites, Facebook, Instagram, and Others	Website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat	Created Many Websites and Social Media Accounts, Consistently Managed My Own Brand	Businesses Homepage, newsletter, Campaigns, Instagram and some others
<b>Time Spent on the Channels</b>	"I'm definitely a heavy user, I'm online and in social media channels most of my awake time"	"5-10 Hours a Week, Depending on the Situation"	"That I cant tell by heart. Haven't Toggl'ed already in a while. On the daily basis I dedicate my time for work for sure, on some days less, on other days more. There have also been days, when I have dedicated 14 hours straight on a portal."	"At least 25 % of my working time"

## Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Appendix 2	
<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Introduction &amp; General (~5 min)</b>
	What is your working title?
	What is your role?
	How many years of experience do you have?
	What online communities (websites and social media accounts) have you managed?
	How much time do you spend on the previously mentioned channels?
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>Holistic approach - Seeing the Big Picture (~15 min)</b>
	How would you start creating brands online presence in marketing? (Name the steps)
	What are the objectives of creating a strategy for online presence? Approach
	Which social media channels do you recommend for a business and why?
	Which social media tools do you use? (to manage your channels)
	How do you use social media as a tool for customer service?
	How do you deal with negative comments or a brand reputation crisis?
	What is the most important thing a brands social media manager should be doing?
	Why visual content is important on social media?
	What are your thought about newsletters and blogs?
	What are our competitors doing on social media?
	What makes a piece of social media content successful?
<b>Part 3</b>	<b>Website - Importance to the Business (~10 min)</b>
	What are the most important indicators for a website?
	What does it mean to have a responsive website?
	Why should you lead traffic to your website?
	What is the most effective way to increase traffic to your website?
<b>Part 4</b>	<b>Facebook - As a Marketing Tool (~10 min)</b>
	What are the benefits of Facebook?
	What goals should be set for Facebook, and what does success look like?
	What strategies would you use to generate leads on Facebook?
	How do you reach your target audience on Facebook?
<b>Part 5</b>	<b>Instagram - As a Marketing Tool (~10 min)</b>
	What are the benefits of Instagram?
	What goals should be set for Instagram, and what does success look like?
	What strategies would you use to generate leads on Instagram?
	How do you reach your target audience on Instagram?
<b>Part 6</b>	<b>Additional Information (~8 min)</b>
	What would you recommend to your past self from where you are now?
	What have been the biggest learning points for you?
	What would you recommend to a person, who starts doing online media for their business?
	Do you have anything else to add, I have not thought of asking?