

Social Media Strategy in the Tourism Industry

Formulation and Implementation

Public Version

The background image shows a tropical beach scene. On the left, a wooden pier extends into the turquoise water. A small white boat is suspended from the pier's structure. The sky is blue with some clouds. The right side of the image is partially obscured by a green vertical overlay.

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This is the public version of the thesis. Some parts are not available because they contain confidential business information.

Acknowledgments

Social Media is a topic which already has my interest since I began with studying Business Administration. Social media is a phenomenon and a relevant topic because today an increasing amount of people are using social media (Agichtein, et al., 2008). When I got an assignment during my business administration study I always tried to write about the topic social media as a subject of the assignment.

Therefore it makes sense that social media became the subject of my graduation thesis. In my search for a company to graduate that was also my main objective, and once I saw the request for a graduate student on the website of Oad Reizen about social media, I did not hesitate and immediately wrote an application letter. Finally, this letter led to this research where I have worked on with lots of pleasure and interest.

This research took place at the e-commerce department of one of the largest travel companies of the Netherlands, Oad Reizen.

During the process of writing the thesis, I was involved - as part of my function as Oad - to roll out social media into the organization. An outline of my activities and achievements can be found here as best case scenario on the Marketingfacts daughter website Travelnext (2012):

<http://www.travelnext.nl/oad-reizen-zet-facebook-hoog-op-haar-agenda.html>. These activities also resulted in a job for me at Oad and the creation of a new function in the organization. That is also something of which I am really grateful for.

Like Goldsmith in *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) already said: *"Good company upon the road, is the shortest cut"*. In the spirit of this sentence I would like to thank my first and second supervisor Ton Spil and Efthymios Constantinides for all their advices and their overview of my work, which helped me to improve my thesis. I also want to thank Marlies Wilms-Floet and Mieke Zinnemers for their good care and all the help I needed. But thanks also to all the other colleagues at Oad Reizen who helped me to finish this research.

Holten, 19 september 2012
Matthijs van Bloem

Management Summary

In this thesis Matthijs van Bloem reports the work for his MSc graduation project which he conducted for Oad Reizen for his study Business Administration at the University of Twente.

Oad Reizen (Oad) is one of the leading travel organizations in the Netherlands. Like many other organizations Oad questioned themselves how they can make use of the new phenomenon social media which is of a growing importance (IBM, 2011). Oad would like to have a social media strategy formulated and implemented in the organization. To address this issue the following main research question has been formulated:

What is the best way to formulate and implement a social media strategy at a travel company?

This main question has been split up into five subquestions in order to provide an answer in the end. With help of the theoretical framework the different strategies and strengths and the definition of social media (like brand exposure, brand engagement and the social norm) were discussed.

To find an answer to the research question as formulated above a twofold research design has been conducted. First eleven managers were internally interviewed about social media and strategy. For the external analysis an environment scan took place in which the activities of Oad on social media were compared to the activities of competitors on social media. As a part of the environment scan also two other companies who have proven themselves on the field of social media from an other branch were interviewed to function as a best case scenario.

The results of the internal interviews show that at Oad the managers are positive about introducing social media into the organization. They do see the positive effects like brand exposure or brand engagement, still they also see some risks like, the risk of getting negative comments. The managers would also like to use social media as a soft sales channel, marketing channel and service channel.

The environment scan showed furthermore that the competitors are bridging the gap which Oad had enforced on social media; they are catching up. That is why the focus should be on social media to keep this lead and therefore more resources should be allocated to social media, which should be used for the right campaigns and listening tools to be successful on social media in the end.

The recommendations in this research can be used to be more successful on social media. An important recommendation is that the product departments could be more involved at social media, also could social media be more exposed on the media channels of Oad. The recommendation is to publish the activity on social media in phases because of the unexpected amount of questions and comments Oad could expect.

For further research these recommendations could be applied in combination with the recommendations of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) to serve as an advise which Oad but also possibly other companies in the tourism sector could use to implement social media into their processes. Therefore the strategy formulation and implementation model of De Wit and Meyer (2010) has been adopted which in turn is adjusted to a social media tourism strategy model and can be used for further research into this topic. Also an overall Tourism Social Media strategy has been constructed.

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1. Introduction

"A New Communication Era" (Castells, 2007)

Time magazine voted in 2006 "You" as person of the year. Despite the old saying of Thomas Carlyle "the history of the world is but the biography of great men". He believed that it is the few, the powerful and the famous who shape our collective destiny as a species (Time, 2006). With social media this theory takes a beating. It is not just about certain famous persons anymore. With the help of social media everybody can be famous. It is a new way of communicating (Castells, 2007).

More and more people are using social media (Agichtein, et al., 2008). According to a report of Fiserv (2010) 94% of Gen Y are engaged in social media, 90% of Gen X are engaged in social media, 78% of Boomers are engaged in social media, and 65% of the Seniors are engaged in social media, which means that social media are used in all age categories. According to numbers of Nielsen (2009), two third of the global internet population visits social media. With the recent introduction of Google+ it does have the potential to grow even further, because social media are of a growing importance (IBM, 2011). That is why also travel companies like Oad Reizen (Oad) want to make use of social media. But the question is how? That is what this paper will address.

Instead of only receiving information, users are becoming more active in creating content and in spreading this content on the internet. But what are social media exactly? Everybody talks about it, in a lot of television programs for example viewers see hashtags (#) and Facebook profiles on which they can respond. But who got a clear definition? What do people exactly mean with social media? According to Graham (2005) social media are anything where users can participate, create and share content. Which makes everybody instead of just users now producers. We all now got the possibility to create our own news and to choose our own information. We frame our own news nowadays, while before only editors could do that for us. Castells (2007) recognizes the revolution enforced by social media and pointed out that we are all living in a whole new communication era.

This also applies for companies in the travel industry. According to Buhalis (1998) information is the life-blood of the travel industry and is the effective use of IT important. Buhalis (1998) further explains that unlike durable goods, intangible tourism services cannot be physically displayed or inspected at the point of sale before purchasing. These services are bought before the time of their use and away from the place of consumption. Customers therefore rely heavily on representations and descriptions provided by the travel company. Timely and accurate information, relevant to consumers needs is often the key to satisfaction of tourist demand (Buhalis, 1998). With social media as a whole new popular way of receiving and spreading information (Fiserv, 2010), travel companies find themselves at the crossroads to determine how they want to use social media and implement it in their strategy.

This is also the case for the Dutch travel company Oad. Oad which is an abbreviation of Overijsselsche Autobus Diensten, i.e. a Dutch family concern and nowadays one of the leading travel companies of the Netherlands. The head office is located in Holten the Netherlands and Oad offers at the moment jobs for around 1400 people. The Oad Groep itself consists of the following five divisions:

- Oad Reizen, the allround touroperator for airplane, bus, car, boat and train travels to more than 60 countries around the globe.
- Oad sport, events and incidental travel (SEIT) group, which organizes travel to sport events but also other special events like musicals or concerts.
- Globe, one of the largest Dutch travel agencies with more than 200 consumer travel agencies and seven business travel agencies in the Netherlands.
- Oad Touringcar, with the largest private touringcar fleet of the Netherlands.
- SRC cultureholidays

Specific Company information about Oad are not available in the public version of this report.

Oad already got some ideas about social media and sees the potential of the concept social media. They already were listed as number 31 in the social media monitor (Social Embassy, 2011) and were already on social media like Facebook and Twitter. However Oad did not have a clear policy or guidelines yet how they should apply social media and implement it in such a way that it creates more sustainable value for Oad. Therefore this research is conducted.

Research Problem

In the section above an introduction to the problem has been given. This resulted in the following problem statement:

Research Problem: What is the best social media strategy for Oad?

Social media are according to Graham (2005) anything wherein users can participate, create and share content. Yadav and Arora (2012) adds that social media are a combination of media and society. In the Oad case, it will be mainly focused on social networks like Facebook, Twitter. But also on social media like Youtube or Flickr. These are the most common forms of social media and mostly used by the Dutch people (Marketingfacts, 2011). Oad uses the strengths of each of these channels to reach specific users .

Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to formulate a social media strategy for Oad and possibly for other travel companies or other companies in general. In this strategy special attention will also be given to the implementation of social media in the company. The main question for Oad is how they can use social media on a purposefull meaning, to get an answer on this question a strategy will be formulated and implemented. This strategy will be generally defined as a social media strategy.

The practical objective is to formulate a plan and implement this plan at Oad as a case study. To reach this goal a case study will be conducted in which an environment scan will take place to investigate how the environment is performing in the area of social media and to investigate if and how the Oad rivals are implementing social media. In addition to the external analysis also an analysis of the internal processes will be conducted. The study contains interviews among some managers and employees of Oad who got to work with social media . Data will be analyzed through coding of the interviews and also through an analysis of the use of social media of Oad at the moment.

Research questions

With help of this purpose and research problem the research questions are formulated. In this research the use of social media in a strategy will be investigated focussed on the tourism industry. For this research the following research questions and subquestions are formulated based on theoretical framework which will be shortly addressed before every research question. Later on in chapter 3 the theories will be discussed more in-depth.

Because of the fact that Oad does not know yet which strategy they should implement the main question will be:

What is the best way to formulate and implement a social media strategy at a travel company?

Before this question can be answered the following knowledge questions have to be answered first:

First it is needed to know what exactly a strategy is. De Wit and Meyer (2010) argue that there is not a clear definition of strategy. Because there is not a widespread agreement among practitioners', researchers, and theorists as to what strategy is. Therefore this definition will be first addressed as follows.

Subquestion 1 : *What is a Strategy?*

Before a social media strategy can be made, it must be clear what social media exactly are. According to Graham (2005) social media exists for a quite long time. Graham (2005) states that bulletin boards for example are social media, and those bulletin boards were already upcoming in the 1980's. But bulletin boards are not really using web 2.0 concepts. To give some clearance in this subject the following sub question has been formulated.

Subquestion 2: *What are Social Media?*

Now with both strategy and social media defined, these terms will be used in to built a strategy. This research is about creating and implementing a social media strategy, but what is a social media strategy exactly? Therefore subquestion 3 is formulated.

Subquestion 3: *What is a Social Media Strategy?*

Besides knowledge questions also research related questions are formulated. To know whether social media can be applied in the organization it should be known if the organization itself is ready for social media. Therefore the following subquestion is formulated.

Subquestion 4: *Is Oad ready for Social Media?*

To know whether the organization is ready for social media Subquestion 4 will be split up in two questions to address this issue.

In case social media needs to be incorporated into Oad's processes, it is required to know which processes are in place and how social media should be implemented. These processes will be made visual with the use of the social network diagram from van Dijk (2005).

Subquestion 4a: *Which processes are needed or need to be adjusted for Social Media?*

Also the culture and the desire to make use of social media are important. It could be that people hesitate to use social media because of possible inherent risks. To conduct a strategy it is important to know such things. Therefore the structuration theory of Poole and McPhee (1985) will be employed to analyze the organizational communication processes. The process of structuration is about the development maintenance and change of structures. Despite the importance of structures in organizations Poole's theory contends that structures are not as permanent as others might think (Dainton, Zelly, 2005). But besides the formal processes, people are at least as important. Therefore subquestion 4b has been formulated.

Subquestion 4b: *Is the internal culture of Oad ready for social media?*

Other companies already use social media, and the customer wants to have their favorite brand on social media. That is why it is necessary to know how other companies are using social media. An environment scan will be made, to be sure what is happening in the environment of Oad and how others use social media. Special attention will be directed to the direct competitors of Oad. Oad does have many competitors, and because social media is a relatively new development Oad can outperform its rivals and create a gap with their competitors on social media. Thanks to the Matthew effect (Merton, 1968) this gap will become even larger over time. Therefore it is of importance to create added value against their competitors to use social media in such a way that Oad will be leading in the Dutch travel industry. That is why it is important to know in which way and how much the competitors of Oad are already using social media.

Subquestion 5: *How is the environment and in particular the competitors of Oad using social media?*

In the next chapter the methodology which will be used to give an answer on the questions (the how part of this study) above will be addressed.

2. Methodology

In this section of the report the method part of the research is addressed to answer the question how a social media strategy needs to be formulated and implemented in a travel company. First the research method will be discussed, i.e. the interviewees, and research moments.

2.1. The Object of Research

The research is conducted at Oad Reizen, which is the largest fully Dutch owned tour operator in the Netherlands. In appendix 1 an organogram of Oad Reizen can be found. Oad Reizen is part of the Oad group. As already stated before the Oad Group consists of five companies namely: Oad Reizen, Oad sports events and incidental travel, Globe, Oad Touringcar, and SRC Cultureholidays. Because of the broad range of activities this research will focus on the B2C side of Oad Reizen and Oad sport and special events, i.e. two important Oad products in the portfolio of Oad Group which could benefit from social media.

Oad already investigated in 2010 to what extend they want to use social media and why. They asked all divisions how they want to make use of social media and as a result Figure 2 has been created.



Figure 2. The current social media situation at Oad (Oad, 2011).

In the diagram the different divisions of Oad and their link with social media is graphically displayed. Social media has its influence on many divisions at Oad. Not only on business to consumer but also for recruitment, and business to business. For the scope of this research, the focus will be on the B2C, branding and webcare part; but the implications of this research could also possibly be applied to other tourism companies.

2.2. Research method

In this research a qualitative method is used. The social media strategy will be researched with help of information gathered from interviews and analysis of social media activity in comparison to the rivals of Oad. The latter will be preceded by a literature study as provided in Chapter 3. From various scientific sources information was gathered to answer the theoretical subquestions 1,2 and 3 (see the theoretical framework). However to answer the subquestions 4-6 a research plan has to be set up (see Figure 3). In this section the methodology to conduct this research will be explained.

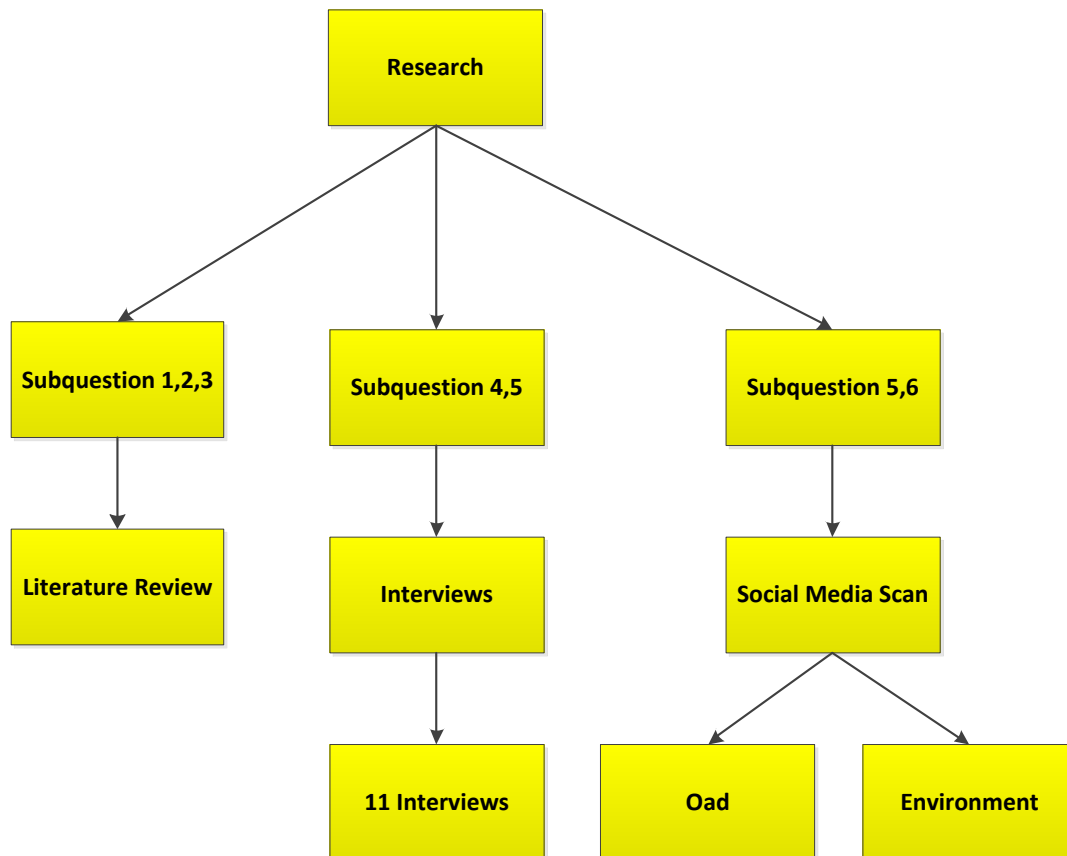


Figure 3. The research method.

2.2.1. Interviews

As seen in Figure 3 the sub questions 4 and 5 will be answered with help of several direct (face-to-face) interviews. The interviews will take place in a one to one setting. First it has been investigated which people should be interviewed. Therefore a company scan has been made taking into account the following. Which processes are intertwined with social media? Which people are responsible for these processes? With help of this information, the following list of people has been made (Table 1):

Table 1
The Interviewees

Function	Department	When
Director	Operations	11-04
Director	Marketing and Media	11-04
Manager	Marketing and Sales Promotions	06-04
Business Unit Manager	Countries Southern Europe	02-04
Business Unit Manager	Countries Northern Europe	19-04
Business Unit Manager	Intercontinental Flight Destinations	12-04
Business Unit Manager	Big Cities & Disneyland® Paris	27-04
Manager	Sport, Event & Incentive Travel	05-04
Senior Product Manager	Touringcar (Bus)	16-04
Manager	Customer Relations and Quality Control	18-04
Manager	Customer Contact Center	11-04

These interviews took place internally with the stakeholders in Table 1. They all relate to some extent with social media within the organization. Especially managers, because according to Katsma (2008) support from the top is essential to make changes successful. Eleven stakeholders were selected, according to the current processes in Oad and the organization structure, there were no other stakeholders who could have added new added value to the outcome.

The persons described above were interviewed in-depth, i.e. to assess motivations, feelings, beliefs and descriptions. In quantitative research it is about what and how many and that is not the purpose

of this research. The interviews were semi-structured, this means that the outline of questions were based either on information from the theoretical framework, and on the results from the analysis part of this research. The questions were formulated with help of Patton's (2002) six types of interview questions and the content of questions posed were based on the findings in the literature study (Chapter 3). The scheme of the semi-structured interview can be found in appendix two.

The interviews were recorded on tape and afterwards analyzed through transcription and this resulted in the end in an summary per interview. This summary has been fed back to all the interviewees, so that they could give comments and give any additions if needed. After they sent their feedback these interviews were used for this research. Besides the interviews, there has been an environment and Customer analysis on social media done. In the following section more information will be provided about this analysis part of the research.

2.2.2. Environment and Customer Analysis

The analysis was carried out in two phases. First of all an environment scan took place and as part of this scan also a competitors analysis was performed. The environment is analyzed with help of one of the four modes of environmental scanning by Choo (1999)

- Undirected viewing, the goal is to scan broadly with no specific informational need in mind in order to detect signals of change early.
- Conditioned viewing, the goal is to evaluate the significance of the information encountered in order to assess the general nature of the impact on the organization. The individual directs viewing to information about selected topics or to certain types of information.
- Informal search, the goal is to gather information to elaborate an issue to determine the need for action by an organization. The individual looks actively for information to deepen the knowledge and understanding of a specific issue.
- Formal search, the goal is to systematically retrieve information relevant to an issue in order to provide a basis for developing a decision or course of action. The individual makes a deliberate or planned effort to obtain specific information or information about a specific issue.

One of the four modes of Choo (1999) will be applied to the situation of Oad. In this research the informal search has been used. The topic was clear (social media) only what should the company do with it? First of all the situation of Oad will be broadly viewed, in the current state. Who are the competitors? Are they active on social media? Which trends are occurring in the market?

Further on it will be more specific by for example performing interviews of companies who relatively use social media a lot. These interviews were conducted by the companies Coolblue and Centraal Beheer/Achmea. They were selected because of the social media processes they already have in place. For example Coolblue claims publicly that their consumers will get an answer within 30 minutes on social media. How do they manage this? This question and other questions posed to these companies can be found in appendix five.

Note the fact that Facebook and Twitter are the biggest social media in the Netherlands (Marketingfacts, june 2012). Therefore this study will concentrate on these social media. The following parameters were researched to compare the different social media accounts:

1. Likes/followers. The amount of people who are interested in the company on Facebook and Twitter
2. IPM. The interaction per thousand fans (Interaction per mile). What are fans if you do not interact with them? (Facebook)
3. Klout score, how many people do you influence? (Twitter)
4. How many people are talking about a page. This measure for the amount of interactivity taking place in five days time. (Facebook)

These factors were researched with help of the following tools:

- Facebook statistics (what are the likes, best posts, client segmentations)
- Conversocial (to measure the IPM score)
- Klout, to measure the Klout score
- Hootsuite statistics
- Crowsbooster (to give an answer on the question who our superpromoters are, and what is the best time schedule to post updates.

2.3. Research moments

In this paragraph an indication of the most relevant research moments and their corresponding dates are depicted. In April 2012 the interviews with the different stakeholders took place. In July 2012 the environment analysis and the customer scan were conducted (as can also be seen in Figure 4). After the data collecting phase the data has been encoded and analyzed to function as the input of the conclusion and recommendations. The results are shown in Chapter 4.

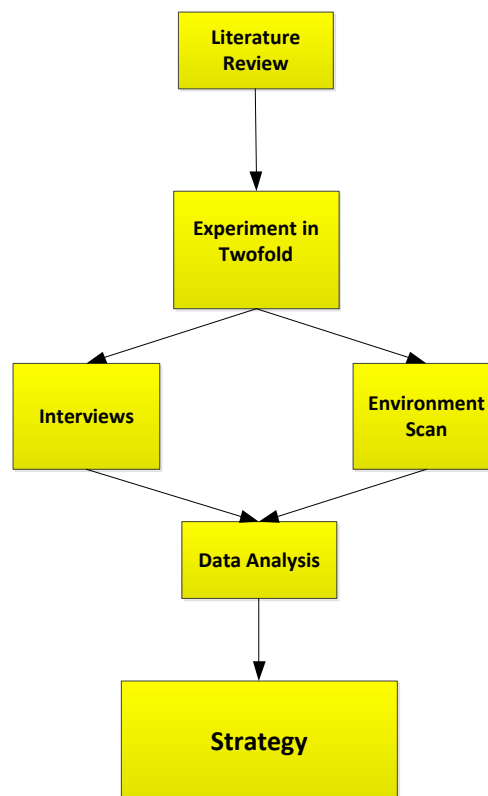


Figure 4: Experiment design

3. Theoretical Framework

In this paragraph different theories and information is provided to obtain answers to the research questions. The subjects that will be discussed in this theoretical framework are respectively: strategy, social media, and social media strategy. In what follows, various models and theories will be highlighted. The first subject is about strategy and discusses certain elements and illustrates the importance of a good strategy.

3.1. Strategy

“Every real-life strategy problem is complex” (de Wit and Meyer, 2010)

De Wit and Meyer (2010) argue that there is not a clear definition of strategy, while there is no widespread agreement among practitioners’, researchers, and theorists as to what strategy is. Bourgeois (1980) argues though that a strategy is about determining how an organization defines its relationship to its environment in the pursuit of its objectives. Porter (1996) states that the essence of strategy is to perform activities differently than rivals do. In this paper the essence of strategy according to Porter (1996) and in less extent from Bourgeois (1980) will be used. A competitive strategy is to create a competitive strategy based on being different (in for example product differentiation). It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value. When it creates a difference that it can preserve, a company can outperform its rivals. That is why the environment is important in conducting a strategy.

If for example a new technological or political development appears on the horizon and if a company does not correctly respond on the new situation a misfit between firm and environment can occur. Therefore a company has to renew its strategy to ‘fit’ again with the environment. According to Johnson (1988) a company should avoid the situation whereby the firm drifts too far away from the demands of the environment (Figure 5).

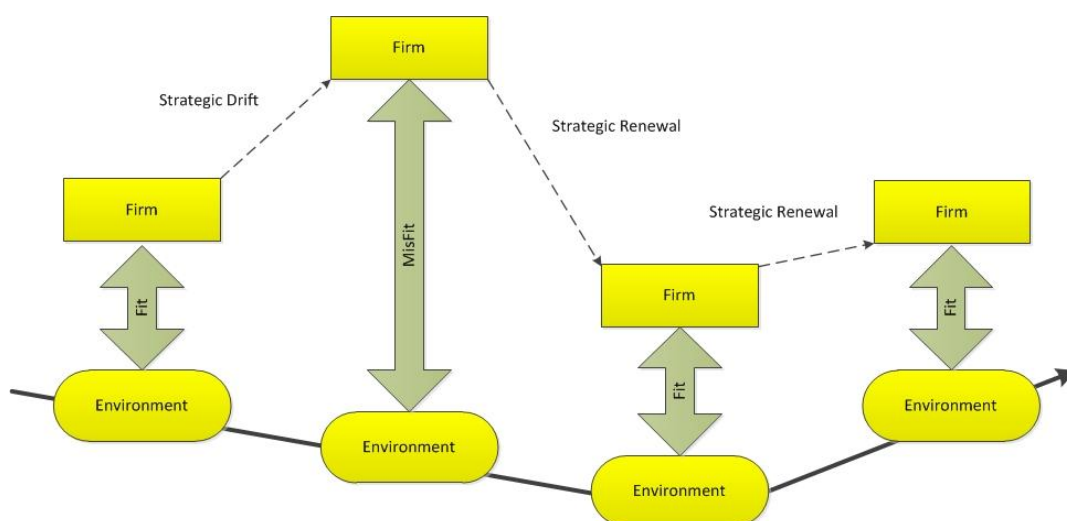


Figure 5. Strategic renewal process (Johnson, 1988).

In order to know whether a company is drifting away with its strategy from the environment a company should make an environment scan (Choo, 1999). With help of this environment scan they can also fit with the demands of the market, if a large amount of consumers expect a company to be on a platform because he or she is on it as well and the company is not on this platform a misfit could occur. That is why companies question themselves: how do I deal with the changing consumer?

Environmental scanning is the acquisition and use of information about events, trends and relationships in an organization's external environment, the knowledge of which could assist management in planning the organization's future course of action (Choo, 1999). Organizations scan the environment in order to understand external forces of change so that they may develop effective responses that secure or improve their position in the future. An organization's ability to adapt to its outside environment depends on knowing and interpreting the external changes that are taking place (Choo, 1999).

The environment does not only consist of new developments but also how for example competitors are adapting to the new development, and how also other companies in a different industry are responding to the new development. Therefore the environment covers a broad spectrum but also plays an important role in developing a (new) strategy.

Now the definition of the environment and strategy is layed out, the stage is set to outline what a strategy itself consists of. De Wit and Meyer (2010) argues that a strategy got three dimensions, that can be recognized in every real-life strategic problem situation (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The three dimensions of strategy (De Wit and Meyer, 2010).

In particular a strategy needs first of all an input; this is the organizational purpose. In the case of Oad, this is the trigger to develop a higher service delivery rating, more sales and more marketing offerings through social media. Oad sees the opportunities of social media and wants to use this new development more in their organization. To conduct a strategy a range of activities should take place concordantly. This strategy entails an internal research in among the Oad employees, and an environment scan to analyze the context in which Oad operates (competitors, trends for example) the latter is denoted as the strategy dimension. Finally in the strategy content dimension the results of the research will be presented as output of the whole process. The whole process of formulation and implementing a strategy is graphically displayed in Figure 7.

3.1.1. Formulation

To come up with a strategy two important aspects will get special attention. First the formulation of strategy, i.e. before a strategy can be applied a strategy must be put together. The subactivities covered by this formulation, are respectively: identifying opportunities, and threats in the company's environment and attaching some estimate risk to the discernible alternatives. Therefore before a choice can be made the company his strengths and weaknesses of the company should be investigated together with the available resources, with help of a Business Model like Osterwalder (2009).

The other element of the strategy process is the implementation part. A company can formulate a great strategy, but it can fail completely on the implementation part. According to Bourgeois (1980) this part of the strategy receives little attention but an implementation can make or break a strategic decision It can make a great strategic decision ineffective and at the other hand it can make a debatable strategy succesfull (De Wit and Meyer, 2010). Therefore personal leadership is paramount and sometimes decisive in the accomplishment of strategy. To formulate and implement the strategy the following model from the book of De Wit and Meyer (2010) can be used.

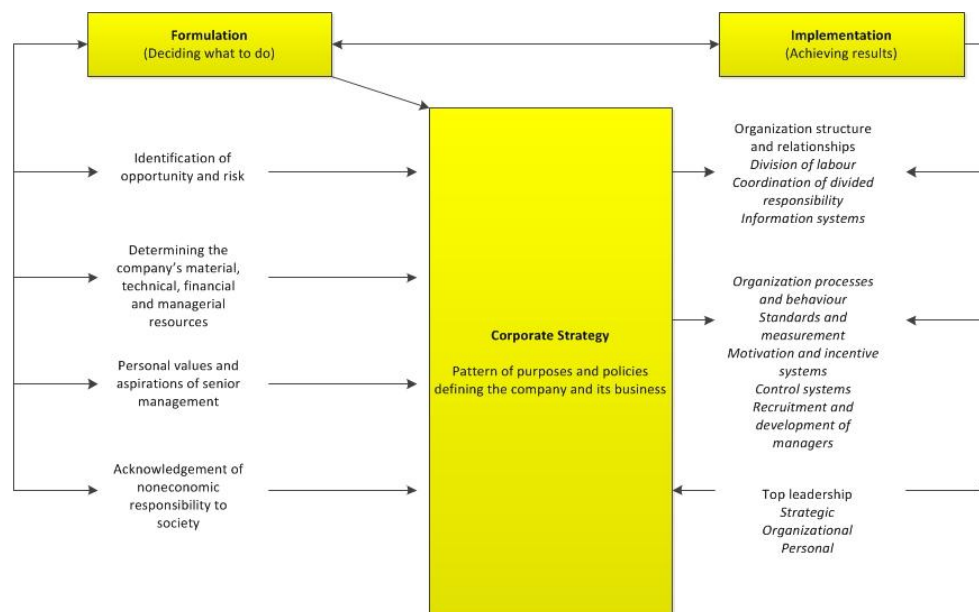


Figure 7. Strategy formulation and implementation (De Wit and Meyer, 2010).

Figure 7 shows in a graphical form a distinction of formulating the strategy and implementing this strategy. It describes what the input of such a strategy should be and what the associated output is. In this study the social media strategy for the tourism industry will be carried out with help of this model.

For the strategy formulation part of the model the Osterwalder (2009) business model can be employed. A business model is as a blueprint for the implentation of strategy in the organization structures, processes and systems. A business model describes how an organization creates value and how an organization retains value (Osterwalder, 2009). The Osterwalder business model (see

Figure 8) uses nine building blocks which includes four main areas of a company: clients, offers, infrastructure and financial viability.

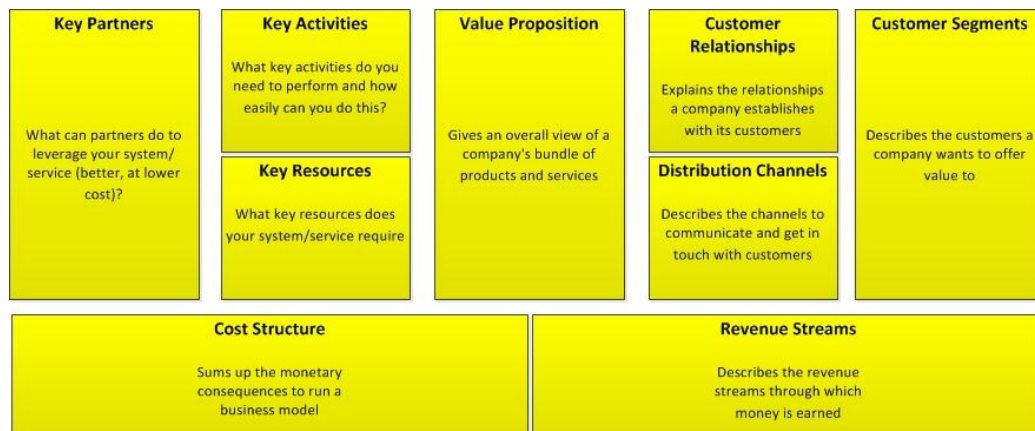


Figure 8. Osterwalder Business Model (Osterwalder, 2009).

Every building block has a short description about what the particular building block is about. In this work the latter model will be used to describe Oad's strategy. Note that a strategy can be created by describing, but according to Bourgeois (1980) the implementation part of a strategy is vital to make a strategy a success. Therefore the next section will elaborate on existing models which could assist an organization to implement systems or new strategies.

3.1.2. Implementation

Besides the change in use there will also be a change in organizational communication processes and that is where the structuration of Poole and McPhee (1985) theory comes into play. The process of structuration is about the development maintenance and change of structures. Despite the importance of structures in organizations Poole's theory states that structures are not as permanent as others might think (Dainton, Zelley, 2005).

The theory gives some concrete advice for organizational members. In Table 2 this overview can be looked up (see Dainton and Zelley, 2005).

Table 2
Practical implications of structuration

Advice	Explanation
Plan for restructuring	Assume that restructuring is a normal part of organizational life; have explicit conversations with organizational members about the structures and how they are used.
Communicate why	Do not just present the details of the structure to organizational members, explain the philosophy behind it. This will allow members to reproduce the structure creatively.
Experiment	'Test drive' structures to determine whether they work in the

	intended ways, and assess unintended consequences. Listen to organizational members' responses to ideas and problems with structures.
The dangers of writing	Putting structures into writing (e.g. policy manuals, user's manuals, etc.) gives everyone the same information, however written structures can be easily misunderstood and manipulated.
Capitalize on ambiguity	Ambiguity is useful; it allows interpretation and does not alienate members who disagree with the details. Members can show initiative within a framework of general guidelines that they cannot within specific guidelines.
Temporary structures	Using temporary structures such as task forces allows members to recognize that all structures are transitory; it calls to the forefront the process of structuration, reinvigorating members' agency.
Beware of expertise	Expertise often means a narrow perspective; nonexperts can bring new ways of looking at creating structures.

In the paragraph above the strategy and various tools to conduct a strategy are discussed. Further on the strategy specifically about social media will be discussed. Nevertheless the subject on which the strategy will be made will be addressed first in the next section.

3.2. Social media

Before a social media strategy can be made, it has to be clear what social media exactly are. According to Graham (2005) social media exists for a quite long time. Graham (2005) states that bulletin boards for example are social media, and those bulletin boards were already on the rise in the 1980's. However bulletin boards or forums back then did not heavily use web 2.0 concepts, i.e. web 2.0 is a concept which is often intertwined with social media, although both terms convey a different meaning. To clarify this distinction O'Reilly (2007) gives the following definition of web 2.0:

"Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation," and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences".

Nowadays, web 2.0 facilitates social media. Yadav and Arora (2012) state that social media are a combination of media and society, i.e. media is an instrument of communication, like a newspaper or a radio, so social media would be a social instrument of communication. Or like Graham (2005) states: social media is anything wherein users can participate, create and share content, there are many shapes in which social media conceals itself. To make clear what the difference is between all

the different forms of social media Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) distinguishes five different kinds of social media:

- Blogs, the earliest form of social media. They are the social media equivalent of personal web pages and can come in a multitude of different variations, from personal diaries describing the author's life to summaries of all relevant information in one specific content.
- Content communities, the main objective of content communities is the sharing of media content between users. This can be for example photos (e.g., Flickr), videos (like Youtube) or presentations (with Slideshare) but also information like Wikipedia.
- Social networking sites, are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and send e-mails and instant messages between each other. Examples of social networks are Facebook, Twitter or Hyves.
- Virtual game worlds, are platforms that replicate a three-dimensional environment in which users can appear in the form of personalized avatars and interact with each other as they would in real life. Examples are Habbo Hotel, World of Warcraft and Fanta world.
- Virtual social worlds, the second group of virtual worlds, allows inhabitants to choose their behavior more freely and essentially live a virtual life similar to their real life. A popular example is Second life.

Besides the five types of social media from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) Bulletin boards (Forums), collaborative platforms or review sites are also social media. Therefore the above five kinds of social media of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) will be extended with one category derived from the five main categories of web 2.0 (Constantinides, Fountain, (2008)).

- Forums/bulletin boards: sites for exchanging ideas and information usually around special interests; like for example www.epinions.com.

In this work the focus is specifically on social networks. Because it contains the most popular social media at the moment (Twitter and Facebook, Marketingfacts, 2012) and it are social media which suit the products of Oad. Therefore a distinction will make more clear of what a social network exactly is and why a forum like a bulletin board is not. The following three social network sites elements from Boyd (2008) can be used to make this distinction:

- 1) Allow individuals to construct a public or a semi-public profile within a bounded system
- 2) Allow individuals to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection
- 3) Allow individuals to view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

What makes social network sites unique are not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make their social networks visible (Boyd, 2008). Furthermore, according to Haythornthwaite (2005) this can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made - but that is often not the goal - and these meetings are frequently between 'latent ties' who share some offline connection. On many of the large social media platforms, participants are not necessarily 'networking' or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended

social network (this is in less extent true for LinkedIn). To emphasize this articulated social network as a critical organizing feature of these sites, Boyd (2008) label them as “social network sites” .

Bulletin boards do not allow showing others your social network it cannot be considered as a social network; is a bulletin board for example then a form of social media? Yes it is. But it is not a social network site.

In the context of Oad the focus will be mainly on blogs, content communities and social networks. These are the kinds of social media which suits best to the company Oad. With blogs and content communities, but also with social networks the customers of Oad can experience the travels through narrative stories, pictures, video’s, and what others say about the stories or other posts. Experience is the most important thing in selling travels (Buhalis, 1998). Oad sells a service, an experience, such intangible goods can be best experienced through channels which facilitate this, that is why the focus should be on these social media.

In Figure 9 a timeline is presented which shows the launch dates of major network websites based on information from Boyd (2008). However Boyd (2008) does not make the distinction between content communities and social networks, both kinds of social media are incorporated in Figure 9.



Figure 9. The rapid evolution of social media (Boyd, 2008).

As can be seen in the Figure 9 social media are a relatively new communication channel and its user base exploded in a relatively short time. Thereby almost every day new social media websites still appear on the horizon, new developments like Google+, Pinterest or Fancy.

According to Nielsen (2009) two third of the people on internet are already using social media, and it is becoming more and more over time. This also gives companies opportunities, because social media enables companies to talk with their customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and therefore reach a big potential group. This group of consumers can experience the companies' products, as well as get to know the people who use them (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

In the Netherlands recent statistics point out that Facebook and Twitter are the biggest social media (Marketingfacts, july 2012). That is why the focus in this research is on these two social media. Below these two social media will be discussed more in-depth.

3.2.1. Facebook

Facebook is in the social media landscape as described by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) a social networking site. It was founded by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow computer science students Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes (Pelser, 2011). The website was at first limited to certain universities. But in September 2006 Facebook opened registration to non-college based users. This change led to a rapid growth in the number of users, as well as almost viral growth within non-educational organizations (Joinson, 2008). Facebook enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate "Friends" who can post comments on each other's pages, and view each other profiles (Ellison, Steinfield, Lampe, 2007). Ellison et al., (2007) further describes Facebook as a social network wherein Facebook members can also join virtual groups based on common interests, see what classes they have in common, and learn each other hobbies, interests, musical tastes, and romantic relationship status through the profiles.

Besides the personal possibilities, Facebook also give companies the opportunity to talk with their customers as well through the so called Facebook pages (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Pages were originally envisioned as distinct customized profiles designed for businesses, band celebrities etc. to represent themselves on Facebook. Users interact with a page by first becoming a "fan" of the page; they can post messages, photos and various other types of content depending on the page's setting (Sun, Rosenn, Marlow, Lento, 2009). Sun et al., (2009) further states that when users become fans of a particular page their actions may be broadcasted to their friends' news feeds and thereby spread the brand indirect also to the friends of the fan. And like Yadav & Arora (2012) says: brand community shapes the consumer product purchase behavior. Therefore Facebook can be worth full for companies as a new channel to for example to communicate their new products.

3.2.2. Twitter

Java, Finin, Song, Tseng (2007) define Twitter as a micro blogging tool in which users can describe their current status in short posts distributed by instant messages, mobile phones, email or the web. People will talk about their daily activities and seek and share information (Java et al., 2007). It therefore is a form blogging but also a social network (Huberman, Romero, Wu, 2008) because you can connect with others by placing new updates, create a personal profile etc. A distinction between Facebook is the amount of characters which can be used. At Twitter this is limited to 140, and therefore is more suitable for short and more often updates.

Twitter is even a tool to gather news. Kwak, Lee, Park, Moon (2010) compared Twitter with the news from CNN headlines. And from this research Kwak et al., (2010), conclude that Twitter is a media for

breaking news which even comes close to the communication speed of CNN headlines and regularly is even faster. Therefore it can also be a channel for companies to share their news with, or communicate with their customers. A good example is KLM which used Twitter to communicate with their customers about calamities like the volcano eruption on Iceland.

According to Yadav & Arora (2012) social media created a great opportunity to develop and maintain relationships with busy customers. Research shows that customers even expect organizations to interact through social media and that the use of social media can also greatly enhance the organization's reputation. That is why this rise of the new communication channel, 'social media' gives opportunities for marketers and companies to reach a huge amount of people.

But more specifically how could social media establish these benefits like improving an organization its reputation or purchase intention? To give an answer on this question the following section will demonstrate the strengths of social media.

3.2.3. Why are social media effective?

In the last section the definition of social media was explained, but what are the strengths of social media for Oad, the unique selling points to implement social media? The following paragraph will cover these questions and also tries to give an answer about the questions why social media are effective and in which way social media can be of benefit to Oad . Therefore several strengths will be discussed namely: brand awareness, brand engagement, word of mouth, friends/liking, trust and social validation.

Brand awareness

One of the major goals of advertising in situations of low interest or involvement is to generate and maintain brand awareness (McMahan, 1980). And according to Hoyer and Brown (1990) brand awareness has an effect on consumer choice. When companies use social media and consumers like or follow the brand, they will receive on their Facebook news feed or in their Twitter feed updates about the company. In the feed these status updates from the companies are listed between the updates of friends. They might not be that interested in the company (the consumers liked or followed the company because they get a benefit like for example a discount), but the company does create awareness. This can be explained with help of the elaboration likelihood model of Petty and Cacioppo (1986), a message on for example Facebook can be seen with no thought about the information and therefore the peripheral route of persuasion is used which can lead to a (short-term) change in attitude.

According to Baker (1999) mere brand exposure is a successful advertising strategy and easy to execute. This is an important finding because most advertising does little to maximize brand name exposure. For example in television advertising the brand name will be only visible at the end of the spot. To improve on this Baker (1999) suggest that the brand name, package or logo should be repeated continuously throughout the commercial spot. For social media this is also an important finding. If people like or follow your brand, but might not read your posts, according to these findings it does could have an effect on their brand choice. This is also in line with the findings of Hennig-Thurau et al., (2010), online brand communities could influence the perception of participants towards the brand.

Brand engagement

Brand awareness, one of the objectives of classical marketing practises transforms into brand engagement, purpose of marketing 2.0 (Milano, Baggio and Piatelli, 2011). This engagement is created by the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of those with whom the different companies and organizations communicate (Milano, et al., 2011). Engagement is something what also reflects in an other old marketing technique called narrative persuasion. The fact that already the cave paintings from cavemen or the the power of tragedy of Aristoteles already explained that humans are committed to stories. It is evident that fables, tragedies, parables, and even hunting stories always touched emotions and affected beliefs and behaviours (Brock and Green, 2005). But also nowadays stories or narratives are also used in for example advertising (Deighton, Romer, and McQueen, 1989)

When people become transported into a narrative world, their emotional responses and their creation of vivid mental images of characters and settings influence their beliefs and behaviors after people have left the virtual world (Brock and Green, 2005). Recall that social media as already explained is a channel which makes use of different narrative elements. This also holds for words used in blogs or status updates on social networks to tell (short) stories to others. In particular pictures are used on social media like Flickr and videos on YouTube try to tell a story to others.

Those stories which people share can also be narrative which will have as a consequence that people are more engaged and create more empathy and those stories can direct or indirectly influence consumer behavior (Bickhart and Schindler, 2001). Customer engagement influences brand attitude, which could have an effect on the purchase behavior (Kumar, 2010). A good example of this is the P&G commercial for the Olympic Games of 2012, which focused on the mothers of Olympic athletes and the 'job' mothers do all over the world. No direct sales message but just the story how mothers all over the world are the driving force behind the athletes (and have P&G as a supporter).

Word of Mouth

After the just discussed influences on a brand or branding, it can also have influence on (indirect) sales by word of mouth. According to Schumann and Thorson (2007) word of mouth (WOM) via mediated communication will likely be more important than ever before, thanks to the opportunities that social media will offer marketers.

The benefit of social media is that messages or posts can be written by the same kind of people who share the same interests, and think the same about a lot of things like you do. As a result, information published by these people, is more appealing to people who look like them (Park & Kim, 2008). Wangenheim and Bayon (2004) showed that the level in which people can identify with each other has a positive influence when people buy or not buy a certain product. This is also something what Brock (1965) and Philips (1974) showed in their papers; when a person can identify with someone else, that person will more likely follow the actions of the other one. When the information is spread by someone who shares the same interests as you, then this information will become also more interesting to you (Bickhart & Schindler, 2001).

The question hereby is why do people want to share their experiences with others? Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, Gremler (2004) argues that the most comprehensive WOM motives are formulated

by Sundaram, Mitra and Webster (1998). Sundaram et al., (1998) uses in their collection of WOM motives, elements of studies from Dichter (1966) and Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1993). A distinction can be made between Positive Word of Mouth (PWOM) and Negative Word of Mouth (NWOM). PWOM is positive content made by users, and NWOM is negative content made by users.

- Altruism (PWOM), the act of doing something for others without anticipating any reward in return.
- Product involvement (PWOM), the purchase and use of products that are perceived highly important or relevant, tends to create excitement of having a product or service.
- Self-enhancement (PWOM), enhance their image among others by projecting themselves as intelligent shoppers.
- Helping the company (PWOM), the desire to help the company.
- Altruism (NWOM), prevent others from the experiencing problems they encountered.
- Anxiety reduction (NWOM), an avenue to vent their anger.
- Vengeance (NWOM), retaliate against the company associated with the negative consumption experiences.
- Advice seeking (NWOM), consumers who had encountered negative consumption experiences and were unaware that by asking a question about their problem, they share their negative experiences.

Several researchers have already concluded that WOM has an important influence on purchases of consumers, whereby this effect mainly occurs when a consumer considers to buy a certain product (Engel, Blackwell, Kegerreis, 1969). For example Burzynski and Bayer (1977) already demonstrated in their study that individuals who were exposed to Positive WOM (PWOM) communication before they watched a movie were more positive about this movie compared to others who were exposed to Negative Word of Mouth (NWOM) communication. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) proved in their research that WOM also is effective in the sales of online books. They found a causal link between WOM and the purchase behavior of consumers, above that WOM also is one of the most important sources for buying household goods and Engel et al., (1969) proved that WOM does not only have an influence on products but also on services like selecting car garages for car maintenance.

It is difficult for marketers to apply WOM in their marketing strategies because of the fact that WOM is hard to measure (Park and Kim, 2008). The rise of the internet has resulted in extended possibilities for consumers to gather information from other consumers. In addition the internet also delivers consumers opportunities to provide information about products (Hennig- Thureau et al., 2004). Recommending products or services through the internet is referred to in the literature as eWOM. eWOM is easier to measure then 'regular' WOM because comments on products are written and available on websites (Godes, Mayzlin, 2004). These comments are in general informal and do not rely on a certain format (Park and Kim, 2008). Research shows that eWOM can result in knowledge exchange between consumers and impacts the perceptions of consumers regarding certain products, for example Garnefeld, Helm & Eggert (2010) found that eWOM of a brand directly influences the behavioral loyalty. To conclude, this knowledge exchange is also of influence on the probability of recommending products by consumers (Gruen, Osmonbekovb and Czaplewskia, 2005).

WOM is also very relevant and important in the travel industry. Travel review sites are immense popular and heavily used by consumers and more and more also by touroperators like Oad. For example: Tripadvisor, Zoover, and Vakantiepanel (partly owned by Oad).

Friends/Liking

Like discussed before, word of mouth can be important to retrieve sales out of social media. An important form of word of mouth is your personal network (family, friends, colleagues etc.) and their influence on your buy behavior. A fact of social interaction to which each of us can attest is that people are more favorable inclined toward the needs of those individuals they know and like, in other words, people should be more willing to comply with the requests of friends or other individuals they like (Brock and Green, 2005). A good example that illustrates this are the Tupperware parties. A neighbor invites all her other neighbors at home and explains them why they should make use of those plastic trays. The sales representative will receive a commission for it and the neighbors will leave her home satisfied and happy with their new tray.

Marketing professionals try to respond on this by building a strategy that we like 'them'. That is also something what Facebook literary uses. People can 'like' brands. If they do so, the brand becomes a friend, and as already explained above friends got power.

Trust

Besides branding and word of mouth (friends/liking) research has revealed that lack of trust especially in risky situations, significantly reduces individuals' willingness to continue future actions with a (untrustworthy) partner (Crosby, Kenneth, & Cowles, 1990). Perhaps the reason why many online consumers do not make commitments - manifested by low click-through rates, conversion rates, and the tendency to decline offering personal information over the internet - could cause the lack of trust (Hoffman, Novak, & Peralta, 1998).

With the rapid advancement of internet technology, the amount of available information increased exponentially, and consumers face new problems of selecting and accessing relevant information (Rouet, Levonen, Dillon, & Spiro, 1996). Maes (1994) states that consumers may even need help in avoiding potential information overload, reducing the vast amount of information to fit individual needs. It is important to find efficient ways that enable users to interact with information systems in a manner that can prevent information overload (Schumann, Thorson, 2007).

We trust people not technology (Friedman, Kahn, Howe, 2000). And according to Friedman et al. (2000) evolving systems like the Internet actually create an 'atmosphere' of trust. This trust is created thanks to certain factors like anonymity and accountability, but, also by history and reputation. With social media people 'think' they are talking with others who are like them. For example consumers who are talking with other consumers. They tend to believe consumers more than for example sales persons who may not even have used the whole product and thus are not considered objective. This will give them more trust and gives them possibly more clearance to know which information they want or can use.

Social validation

The final strength which will be discussed here is social validation. According to Brock and Green (2005) we use social validation to determine what is correct by finding out what other people think is correct. When a lot of people are doing something, people think in general that it is usually the right thing to do (Brock and Green, 2005), i.e. the more people who are performing some kind of behavior, the stronger is our likelihood of doing it as well. If you do not know how to behave, look how others do and behave also like them (follow the crowd). Milgram, Bickman and Berkowitz (1969) conducted the following experiment which shows the power of social validation.

Stand on a busy sidewalk, pick a tall building and stare at it for a full minute; very little will happen. Most people will walk by, and do not glance at the sky. The next day bring four friends to the same spot and do the same experiment again. Pick a tall building and stare with your friends at that tall building. Within a minute a crowd of people will gather around you and will also stare at the sky. According to Milgram et al., (1969) 80% of all the passerby will look up at the tall building. As more people are acting in a certain way, the more likely we will also act in the same way. This is also relevant in the case of social media. If for example a lot of people like and therefore watched a certain YouTube movie, you are more likely to watch the movie and like it as well. This is in line with the Matthew effect, i.e. the rich will get richer effect (Merton, 1968). In other words once a lot of people are using certain media it is more likely that you will also use that media, instead of other media which are hardly used.

3.2.4. Social media and tourism

Above social media and its strengths were discussed. But how is the travel industry using social media? This is an important subject because this is also the industry in which Oad operates.

The future of internet-based tourism will be focused on consumer centric technologies that support tourism organizations in interaction with their customers in a dynamic fashion (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Web 2.0 gives companies the opportunity to interact with their customers. Furthermore, as stated by Milano, Baggio, Piattelli (2011) Web 2.0 has been set up to facilitate social media which in turn has a significant impact on the tourism industry. The impact is so huge that travel is now also termed Travel 2.0. Tourism has long been one of the most important components of the online commerce world (Milano, Baggio, Piattelli, 2011). And for example social media are playing an increasingly important role as information sources for travelers (Xiang, Gretzel, 2010). The results of Xiang and Gretzel (2010) indicates that social media already constitute a substantial part of the search results; thus it is very likely that search engines will redirect travelers to social media websites.

Many tourist companies are changing their approach of presenting themselves online (Au, 2010; Jones & Yu, 2010). On the other hand at the same time Milano et al., (2011) showed that web 2.0 features were/are not used on a large scale on tourism websites. The reason of the modest adoption of any information technology by travel companies is the shortage of resources, poor technical competence and sluggish management. In case of social media the information technology adds a certain level of suspicion, distrust and reluctance to share information, comments or suggestions with other people Milano et al., (2011). Thus the impact of modern ICT's and web 2.0 poses a big challenge to any business or organization working in today's tourism arena (Milano et al., 2011).

The fact that tourists make extensive use of technologies like social media, shows their appreciation regarding the possibilities offered by internet and in particular web 2.0 websites such as social media; according to (Milano et al., 2011) this should not be ignored. Milano et al., (2011) further states that even the decline in performance of the Italian tourism the past years might be caused by the poor usage of modern technologies.

That is why travel companies who now jump in on social media, have an advantage on other travel companies. This is because of the underrepresentation of other companies on social media. However, there is an increasing market demand to have travel companies on social media and therefore it is also relevant for Oad to anticipate on social media developments. The next section of the paper will elaborate on the combination of social media and strategy as discussed above.

3.3. Social media strategy

In the last section the definition, forms and strengths of social media were explained. In this section different theories about social media strategy will be discussed. Social media are a relatively new research subject but theories about networking and media in general, could also be applied on the new phenomenon social media. In the section below social media and strategy are intertwined and it will be discussed what a social media strategy consist of. First the social network diagrams will be discussed, hereafter ten recommendations from the literature are presented which companies can use to develop their social media strategy.

3.3.1. A Strategy?

Today, everything is about social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) states that social media allow firms to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency that can be achieved with more traditional communication tools. They also state that social media is not an easy task and may require new ways of thinking, but the potentials are far from being negligible. As Porter (1996) states companies should act different than competitors. Therefore a strategy is needed to operate different or better than the competitors.

Thanks to the complexity of social media (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010), it is as de Wit and Meyer (2010) already stated in the beginning of this report: *Every real-life strategy problem is complex*. And therefore a company could really benefit from a proper social media strategy.

3.3.2. Social network diagrams

There are all kinds of networks, with among others social networks, which describe concrete ties in abstract relationships (Van Dijk, 2005). Social networks (as every kind of other network) consist of a collection of links between elements of a unit (Van Dijk, 2005). The elements are termed nodes and units, these nodes and units together are often termed systems. A network can be classified as a network if it has at least two links and three elements.

Social network diagrams is a tool to know who talks more with whom, and which people have a close relationship with each other (Figure 10). The basic units of a social network diagram are individuals, groups/organizations and societies; increasingly networks are shaping the structure of an organization: the structures linking and cutting social units (Van Dijk, 2010). In this way it can be seen

who maintain a lot of relationships and who has less. In these diagrams theories as the six degrees of separation (every person in the whole world is on average six steps away from each other) and as Merton (1968) mentioned the Matthew effect (the rich get richer, people with a lot of connections will receive more and more connections) could occur.

According to Katsma (2008) this diagram can also be used to communicate the structural conditions and process dynamics between nodes like organizational dimensions. Basically, a social network diagram is a map of all the relevant ties between the nodes being analysed. It can therefore also be used to analyse how processes are functioning in a company, to make for example a visual representation of the application of social media in the organization.

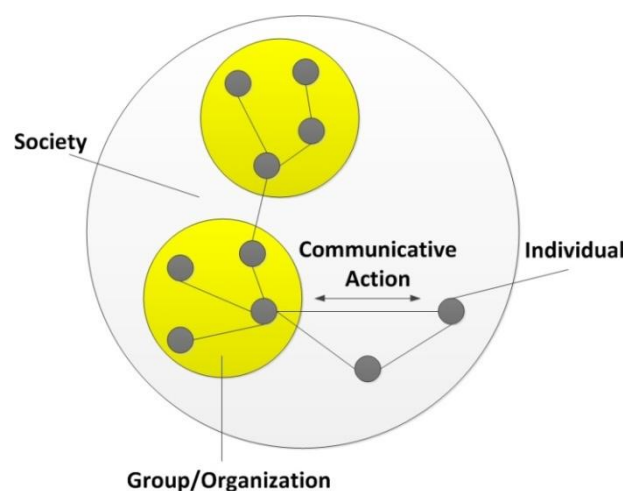


Figure 10: Social Networks, Van Dijk (2010).

3.3.3. Recommendations social media strategy

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) acknowledged the struggle in which some companies are to define a strategy. They claim that it is crucial for firms to have a set of guidelines that can be applied to any form of social media. Because social media exists of two parts, they have also split their advice into two sections: five points about using media and five points about being social. It will be explained further below.

Using social media

1. Choose carefully, there are dozens (or maybe thousands) of social media applications and new ones appearing on the horizon every day. Choosing the right medium depends on the target group to be reached and the message to be communicated and to create focus.
2. Select the application or make your own, once you know the game you are playing the next decision involves whether to make or buy. In some cases, it might just be best to join an existing social media application and benefit from its popularity and user base. But in some cases the right application might just not be available yet.

3. Ensure activity alignment, sometimes companies decide to rely on various social media in order to have the largest possible reach. In this case, it is crucial to ensure that the company's social media activities are all aligned with each other.
4. Media plan integration, integration is key between the relationship of social media and traditional media. Those two areas can be completely different to a company, but in the eyes of the customer they are both part of the same: the company's corporate image.
5. Access for all, once the firm has decided to utilize social media, it is worth checking that all employees may actually access them. Commonly firms block social media on corporate PCs for fear that staff might spend too much time networking instead of working.

Being social

1. Be active, if you want to develop a relationship with someone it is always advisable to take the lead and be active. Social media are all about sharing and interaction, so firms have to ensure that their content is always fresh and that they engage in discussions with their customers.
2. Be interesting, nobody is interested in speaking to boring persons. If a company would like that their customers are engaged with them, a firm needs to give them a reason for doing so.
3. Be humble, firms should never forget that social media existed before they decided to engage in them. In this light, companies should not expect to know better how to use them than others who have spent countless hours on Facebook or Twitter, for example.
4. Be unprofessional, firms would be wise to avoid overly-professional content offerings. Try to blend in with other users and do not be afraid to make mistakes. Social media people are like you, who understand that things do not always go smoothly.
5. Be honest, and respect the rules of the game. Some social media (Like Wikipedia) may not allow companies to be involved, so do not try to force the company's way in.

The recommendations from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) are meant for any company with interest in participating in social media and can be used as a fundamental to develop a social media strategy on. But as Buhalis (1998) already explained the tourism industry sells a special product, and therefore needs a special treatment. That is why this study's focus will be on building a social media strategy for the tourism industry and what the part of the rivals are in this.

In the chapter above theories are discussed which all have in common that they are about strategy and social media. It shows that a strategy consists of both a formulation and an implementation part. Furthermore it demonstrates that social media have certain strengths which can be used for the company's benefit. Therefore a company needs to build a social media strategy, whereby certain models can be used to develop such strategy. In the next chapter the results will be discussed explaining to which results the theories and the methodology above have led to.

4. Results

The results (and thereby also the analysis part) are not available in the public version of this report.

5. Social Media Strategy

Social media as the results show above can be used as a sales, marketing and service channel. As already stated social media are of a growing importance because more and more people use it (Agichtein et al., 2008), therefore consumers expect also companies to be active on it as well. That is why companies are questioning themselves how they can respond to this demand, this is also the case for tourism companies like Oad. Especially in the tourism sector social media can be of added value, imagine delivering service to the consumer abroad, or inspire the consumer with appealing stories and pictures on social media. Which can eventually lead to more sales and a better brand image based on the strengths of social media as described in chapter 3.

To assist those companies to implement social media the following strategy can be used to roll out social media in two years.

First make sure that the internal processes are ready to implement social media:

- Make clear which social media channel suits the company's needs, products and where its target group is on. Claim the desired url and start with listening.
- Investigate if there are enough resources to implement social media. Like enough time, FTE, and money to buy for example software tools to monitor social media.
- Make sure to buy a software tool which suits the company's needs, when a company just starts with social media a free or a not so expensive tool is sufficient. Later one when the communication on social media grows and will become more complex, more extensive tools can be used.
- The messages on social media should be posted by the marketing department with information gathered from the product departments (they got the knowledge). Schedule a meeting once a week to make a content planning together.
- Make sure that people are assigned to work with social media (like responding on questions on social media) got affection with the medium and knows how it works. Put the new tasks in their job description and monitor and evaluate the employees if they are responding on social media in a good manner. All the people who are active for the company on social media should know how to write a message on social media without grammar mistakes. A course can help them if this knowledge is insufficient. A protocol how employees could respond on messages on social media could function as a guideline.
- Start with reachability of social media during working hours. Later on this can be expanded to social media coverage in the evenings and weekends and eventually 24/7. Because the customers in the travel industry are due to the different time zones all over the world online all the time. Also define a SLA, how fast is a reply needed? Aim for 30 minutes because social media is a quick medium.
- Make sure there are clear communication lines between the different departments who are active on social media. This is especially necessary if the company is reachable on social media during working hours, evenings and even at night.
- Create awareness among the employees about the urgency to be active on social media, tell them why the company need to be active on social media and make them eventually proud by communicate the success stories by for example television screens in the building.

Especially creating support from the board is necessary, they should be aware of the (in)possibilities of social media.

When the internal processes are in place the following steps can be taken:

- Start with marketing expressions on social media to increase your likes and followers to create a larger audience for the marketing expressions.
- A unique selling point of travel companies are the travel guides on the destinations. They could function as an extra service channel on social media whereby consumers can directly speak with the travel guides through social media. Make use of these possibilities and create an extra form of service.
- Communicate in phases that the company is active on social media and create awareness among the target group that the company is also reachable on social media. In phases is important because in that way the company is in control and can stop with rolling out social media if it cannot handle the amount of questions on social media anymore. Start therefore small with communicating in the e-mail signature, expand this later on with communicating on the website, at the holiday destinations, in the offline marketing expressions etc.
- Not just answer on questions directly asked to the company, but also listen and respond to people who are talking about the company or about the products. Eventually sales can lead to this by listening in on certain key words (like specific holiday destinations) and help people who for example do not know what holiday they should book
- Try also to derive sales out of social media by offering the company's fans or followers special holidays with exclusively for them a lower price
- Monitor the messages on social media, the campaigns and the comments and use the feedback gathered to improve the messages, campaigns or comments in the future.
- Make a link between social media and the company its CRM system to have a larger amount of data which can be used to define the target group even better, and to give consumers a better suited and personalized travel offering

Finally if the above social media strategy is (partly) rolled out the company can also roll it out for specific products or departments (in the case of Oad for example the SEIT products). When the company wants to be active on more new social media channels they should walk through the above steps again to make sure to implement these new social media on a right way.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Following the results from this research, in this chapter a conclusion is drawn. This conclusion provides an answer to the main question as formulated in the introduction of this report

“What is the best way to formulate and implement a social media strategy at a travel company?”

First, the subquestions related to this main question will be answered. To answer this question the formulation part of a social media strategy will be addressed, i.e. the implementation of social media in a travelcompany will be considered. These parts of the main question will be answered with support of the answers on the sub questions.

After this section where the conclusions are formulated the recommendations will be discussed, which also serve as an advise to Oad. As Oad is not a unique company in the travel market, these recommendations can also possibly be used by other travel companies who consider the implementation of social media into their processes.

In the public version of the report the specific advise for Oad is not available.

6.1. Conclusion

Not available in the public version of this report

6.1.1. Formulation Social Media Strategy

The formulation of a strategy exists of four parts namely: 1) identification of opportunity and risk, 2) determining the company’s material, technical, financial and managerial resources, 3) personal values and aspirations of senior management, 4) acknowledgements of noneconomic responsibility to society (De Wit and Meyer, 2010). These four parts will be discussed below.

Identification of opportunity and risk

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Determining the company’s material, technical, financial and managerial resources

Not available in the public version of this report

Personal values and aspirations of senior management

Not available in the public version of this report

Acknowledgements of noneconomic responsibility to society

Not available in the public version of this report

6.1.2. Implementation Social Media Strategy

The implementation of a strategy exists of three parts: 1) Organization structure and relationships, 2) Organization processes and behavior, 3) Top leadership, this will be discussed below.

Organization structure and relationship

Not available in the public version of this report

Organization processes and behavior

.... Therefore a plan should be made and the structuration theory of Poole and McPhee (1985) is applied. This theory will be adapted to the situation of Oad, the tourism Industry and social media.

Further explanation is not available in the public version of this report.

Plan for restructuring,

Communicate why,

Experiment,

Dangers of Writing,

Temporary structures,

Top leadership

Not available in the public version of this report

6.2. Recommendations

As stated above the formulation and implementation of social media in Oad has been discussed and therefore an answer to the main question has been provided. In the following section recommendations which are a consequence of the above stated conclusions will be discussed.

These recommendations are necessary to implement social media in a good way in Oad. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) already gave ten recommendations to implement social media in a business strategy. These recommendations are adjusted with the conclusions of this research and therefore tailored to the tourism industry especially for Oad. In Chapter 5 an overall concrete social media strategy has been formulated (based on the recommendations below) which can be used by also other companies (especially tourism companies) to implement social media.

Using social media

Make sure the strategy and brand image are clear before you will be active on social media. This will streamline the processes which will result in a clear message to the customer. Also determine for which purpose you want to use social media for (like for example as a sales channel).

Identify chances and risks, these chances and risks are necessary to know what you as a company should do and pay attention to when social media will be implemented into the organization.

Choose carefully, you can only spend your marketing euro once. Determine on which social media horse you are betting. There are many social media around, therefore a choice have to be made. According to numbers (Marketingfacts, 2012) in the Netherlands Twitter and Facebook are mainly

used and these social media seems therefore the most logical choice. Also the tools to use social media for should be clear, which tools suits the company's needs and therefore could be used to support the social media strategy

Make sure to communicate via internal communication that the company is active on social media. By making employees proud of what Oad does on social media through flat screens in the building with a Twitter/Facebook Oad news stream on it. But also by creating understanding through giving a presentation inside the company, to explain what social media are, why Oad uses social media, and how Oad uses social media.

Make sure in the guidelines how employees make use of social media and that necessary processes are in place (as stated in the social network diagram, Figure 19). An important part of these processes is to involve all the (product) departments within the processes, they have the product knowledge, make use of it.

Travelers are always online thanks to the different time zones in the world. Therefore 24/7 coverage would be ideal. Therefore investigate whether it is possible to assign people to get this 24/7 coverage, by for example making use of the tourist guides.

Allocate resources to it, without the resources you cannot do social media right. Put social media in the job profiles, and possibly assign more FTE to it.

Adapt the processes internally to make use of social media on a right way in the whole organization

Ensure activity alignment, if you say something on Facebook, make sure you say the same on for example Twitter as well

Media plan integration; integrate social media with the other marketing expressions, i.e. the different media could enforce each other. Also make sure to communicate social media in all the company's expressions. An important expression to communicate that you are active on social media is the website. Make sure to integrate social media on the company's website.

Make use of communication phases, which will give more control about the situation. Imagine the situation where Oad expresses in every channel that they are active on social media, an avalanche of reactions could occur which cannot be answered with a certain amount of FTE. Therefore phases can be used, if a phase has been rolled out and the processes seem to collapse due to the immense amount of response, the roll out can be stopped and the processes could be adjusted.

There also should be guidelines and a SLA (Oad should for example respond within 30 minutes) for people how they should respond on social media. The following recommendations therefore can be used:

Being social

Be active, if you want to develop a relationship with someone it is always advisable to take the lead and be active. Social media are all about sharing and interaction, so firms have to ensure that their content is always fresh and that they engage in discussions with their customers. Especially tourism

companies, because every day something else happens in the world. Make sure to anticipate on that with help of for example the tourist guides all over the world.

Make also use of the different client segmentations on social media. Try to be interesting to them, and target your updates and messages tailored to the specific audience.

Be interesting, nobody is interested in speaking to a boring person. If a company would like that their customer is engaged with them, a firm needs to give them a reason for doing so. Therefore make use of the knowledge of the product departments. They got all the interesting information about the different products.

Be humble, firms should never forget that social media existed before they decided to engage in them. In this light, companies should not expect to know better how to use them, than others who have spent countless hours on Facebook or Twitter, for example. Like the marketing manager already explained: be open and vulnerable and try to change negative comments into positive comments, in the end by listening and helping the person as much as needed. Especially travelers who are grounded on foreign air fields can be helpless and therefore need help from their tour operator. Therefore make sure to respond on those negative comments and turn them into something positive.

Be unprofessional, firms would be wise to avoid overly-professional content offerings. Oad mainly uses formal language, but make sure to make use of a more informal language on social media, brands are becoming friends. And friends do not speak to their friends formally as well.

Try to blend in with other users and do not be afraid to make mistakes. Social media people are like you, who understand that things do not always go smoothly.

Be honest, and respect the rules of the game. Some social media (Like Wikipedia) may not allow companies to be involved, so do not try to force your way in.

The recommendations as formulated above are (somewhat) tailored to the situation of Oad. Other companies could also use the steps as formulated chapter five to implement social media into their processes.

7. Discussion

In this research aspects which are related with social media and strategy were addressed. This study focused on the formulation and implementation part of a strategy. Like with almost every research also in this research there were some limitations which will be addressed in 7.1. Furthermore some more connecting factors for future research will be discussed in 7.2.

7.1. Limitations

The first limitation in this research is that only one tourism company has been taken into consideration. Other tourism companies might have other processes or other structures. Though in this research two companies were visited but not in the tourism branch. Therefore visiting more companies in the tourism branch could have resulted in more data and therefore more extensive conclusion and recommendations. Still this was not possible, like for example KLM did not want to collaborate and therefore it was not possible to see how an organization who is in the lead of using social media in the travel branch makes use of social media and how these processes or structures can be used in the context of Oad.

The second limitation is the fact that only the management has been interviewed. Employees could think different about social media than their management and therefore processes could be not as ideal as possible or organizational members have frustrations which they cannot express and therefore resistance could appear.

An in-depth analysis of the page was beyond the scope of this research therefore these results are not as extensive. The analysis will just function as an indication of the results; still the most important information has been analyzed. Also due to the limitations of the use of an external platform not all the information could be analyzed.

During the research Oad was in a process of restructuration, therefore the processes are subject to change. This made it even more difficult to analyze the processes for social media; while these processes could slightly change over time.

Every tourism company got different target groups, other internal processes, and probably a different company culture the research as stated above is focused on Oad and therefore it is not clear to what extent the recommendations can be generalized to other companies.

7.2. Future research

Future research is important for a relative new research area as social media, especially for social media in the tourism sector. In this study a model is presented which elaborates on the work of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) but adjusted and applied for the situation in the tourism branch. Besides the adjustments in the model also the strategy model of De Wit and Meyer (2010) has been applied to the situation of Oad. This model can now be used as a social media tourism strategy model, that companies in the tourism sector could use to also implement social media in their company. This strategy model can be found in Figure 20.

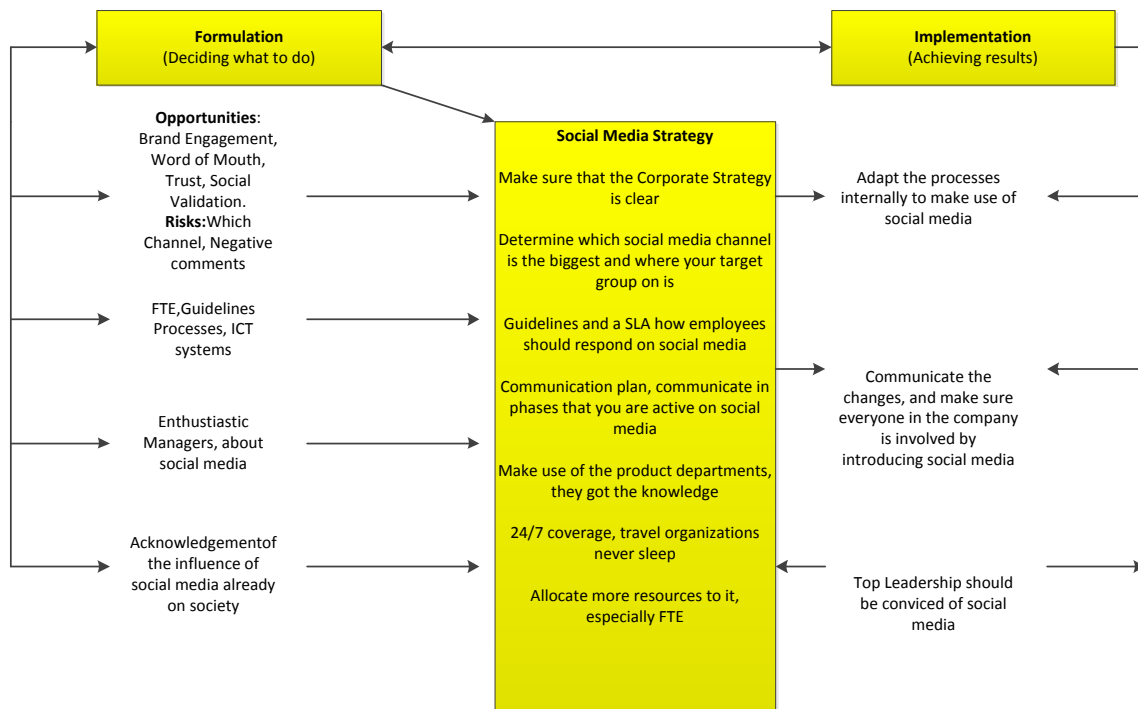


Figure 20. Formulation and implementation social media in the Tourism Industry

More research is needed to see whether this strategy and the use of the adjusted Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) model can be applied in other tourism companies, as only Oad has been researched. This could be other tourism companies in the Netherlands, but also in tourism companies in other countries, because results could fluctuate per country.

Also further research is needed to research whether the results hold for other branches than tourism. Other branches might have similarities and therefore this research could also be applied in these branches.

It would also be interesting to conduct a research to carry out interviews with employees instead of managers, to see whether the results will differ compared to this research where just the managers were interviewed. It was also beyond the scope of the research to investigate in-depth the Facebook statistics of Oad. Therefore it is still not really clear on which target group Oad and possibly other tourism companies should focus on by writing their messages.

In this research only the informal search of Choo (1999) has been used to make an environment scan. Further research could make use of this research to be more specific and to conduct an experiment where the environment will be more extensively investigated.

Also a subject for further research which could not be researched in this report is the effect of social media on the purchase intention. This is because of the fact that the interviewees said that they could get sales out of it. But maybe we already get indirect sales out of it, and therefore a research is needed about the influence of social media on the purchase intention of consumers.

When Oad set up a campaign on social media they mainly use incentives or rewards (like holidays) to make sure that people will follow or like Oad. But what is the effect of such incentives? Do people like a Facebook page because of the brand, the branch of the company or the incentive?

An also interesting topic is the moment of placing an update on social media. This could be part of the social media strategy because at the moment it is unclear when is the best time to post a status update? This could be worth full information for the tourism branch because it is unclear when most of the customers are online and therefore it is unclear whether updates or messages attain the largest reach on social media.

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9. Appendix

Appendix 1: Organogram

Appendix 2: Semi-structured Interview

Appendix 3: Summary answers Interviews

Appendix 4: Interview questions Cool Blue and Centraal Beheer Achmea

Appendix 5: Summary answers Cool Blue

Appendix 6: Summary answers Centraal Beheer Achmea

9.1. Organogram

Not available in the public version of this report

9.2. Semi-structured Interview

Below the interview scheme can be found which is used as a guidance during the interviews with the different stakeholders.

Introductie

- Voorstellen
- Wat doe ik, waar studeer ik af
- Vertrouwelijk
- Dit wordt opgenomen
- Wat ik wil bereiken
- Wat voor Facebook acties we al hebben gedaan
- Wat doet u, wat is uw functie
- Bent u begaan met Computers, Internet, Facebook

Social Media

Gebruikt u persoonlijk social media?

- Blogs
- Content communities (Flickr, YouTube, Slideshare)
- Social Networking sites (Facebook, Hyves, Myspace, LinkedIn)
- Virtual game worlds (3D, interact with each other)
- Virtual social worlds (Live a virtual life, second life)
- (Forums)

Hoe kijkt u aan tegen social media?

- Waar denkt u aan?
- Ziet u positieve punten? Uit onderzoek blijkt namelijk dat de sterke punten bij social media liggen bij brand awareness, brand engagement, word of mouth, friends/liking, trust, social validation. Ziet u deze potentie ook?
- Ziet u negatieve punten? Privacy? Geld? Tijd?

Ziet u social media als een toegevoegde waarde voor Oad Reizen? (zie ook positieve punten)

(Buhalis en Law, 2008) geven aan dat Informatie het middel is voor toerisme om producten te verkopen. Xianx en Gretzel (2010) geven aan dat social media steeds belangrijker wordt om informatie te vergaren. Milano et al., (2011) geven aan dat social media belangrijk is voor reizigers en dat zelfs het dalende toerisme niveau in Italië hier aan te wijten is doordat er niet gebruik wordt gemaakt van de mogelijkheden.

- Ziet u social media als een toegevoegde waarde voor uw afdeling?
- Heeft u social media wel eens gebruikt voor Business doeleinden? Ja, waarvoor? Nee, zou u dat in de toekomst willen?

Inzet Kanaal

Zou u social media willen inzetten als communicatie of marketing-kanaal? Uit onderzoek blijkt bijvoorbeeld dat het potentie heeft voor klantencontact en voor branding.

Zou u social media ook willen inzetten als kanaal als het uw afdeling mankracht kost?

Hoe vaak zou u dan social media willen gebruiken? (bijvoorbeeld eens per week, per maand)

Waar wilt u dan social media voor inzetten? (producten aanbieden, communicatie met klant, service, branding)

Welke klanten denkt u te kunnen bereiken met social media? Uit onderzoek van Fiserv (2010) blijkt dat social media namelijk vertegenwoordigd wordt in alle leeftijdsgroepen.

Strategy

Er zijn verschillende omgevingsfactoren van invloed op Oad. Hoe gaat oad om met veranderingen in de omgeving die plaatsvinden? (economisch, technologisch, politiek, socio-cultureel, buyers, suppliers, industry outsiders, insiders).

Hebt u eerder moeten inspringen op technische ontwikkelingen binnen Oad? Zo ja Welke?

Hebt u bij het inspringen op deze technische ontwikkelingen veel weerstand gemerkt binnen de organisatie?

Wat zijn volgens u bij Oad (osterwalder, 2011):

- De keypartners
- Key activities
- Key resources
- Valueproposition
- Customer relationships
- Distribution channels
- Customer segments
- Cost structure
- Revenue streams

Proces

Zijn er (veel) personen op de afdeling met affiniteit met social media?

Wie praat met wie mbt marketing en communicatie met uw afdeling?

Welke interactie bestaat er tussen uw afdeling en de andere afdelingen?

9.3. Summary Answers Interviews

Not available in the public version of this report

9.4. Interview questions Coolblue and Centraal Beheer Achmea

The interview questions which are used internally and can be found in Appeldix 2, in this appendix the interview questions for CoolBlue and Centraal Beheer Achmea can be found.

Algemeen

- Wanneer zijn jullie begonnen met Social Media?
- Hoe is er intern gereageerd op Social Media?
- Hoe zijn jullie begonnen met Social Media en hoe heeft dit proces zich ontwikkeld?
- Hoeveel FTE's zijn er bezig met Social Media?
- Zijn jullie medewerkers opgeleid voor Social Media of is alles zelflerend gegaan?
- Hoeveel tijd kost Social Media jullie concreet?
- Is er een afdeling Social Media/ zijn er volledige functies voor Social Media of is het onderdeel van een ander functieprofiel en is Social Media dus een toevoeging op een functieomschrijving
- Welke afdelingen houden zich bezig met Social Media?
- Van welke Social Media kanalen maken jullie gebruik en wat is het doel per kanaal?
- Wat is het doel van Social Media voor jullie? [verkoop, service, marketing, communicatie...]
- Hoe groot is het budget dat jullie hebben voor Social Media?
- Merken jullie een verschuiving van 'traditionele' manieren van communicatie naar Social Media?
- Hebben jullie een uitgewerkte strategie of zijn er slechts richtlijnen?

Processen

- Hoe zien de processen er intern uit? Een vraag/opmerking komt reactief/proactief binnen....en dan?
- Jullie garanderen dat jullie binnen 30 minuten reageren? Hoe garanderen jullie dit? Wat als het niet lukt? Hoe reageer je?
- Hoe communiceren jullie naar buiten dat jullie bereikbaar zijn via Social Media?
- Werken jullie met tools [bijvoorbeeld Hootsuite]? Zo ja met welke?
- Hoe verloopt de communicatie over Social Media binnen de organisatie?

Marketing

- In een korte tijd zijn jullie tot een mooi aantal Facebook Fans gekomen? Hoe hebben jullie dit bereikt? Met welke acties? Met Facebook advertenties?
- Hoe en waar worden er acties bedacht? Doen jullie dit zelf of hebben jullie hier een [reclame]bureau voor?
- Worden de acties adhoc bedacht of zit hier een proces aan vooraf?
- Hoe zorgen jullie ervoor dat de mensen engaged blijven met je merk op Social Media? Werken jullie met een contentplanning?
- Hoe staan jullie tegenover pushberichten? In welke mate doen jullie dit en wat is het positieve/negatieve effect hiervan?

- Welke acties/vragen prikkelen jullie volgers/fans et meest/waar krijgen jullie de meeste respons op?
- Kunnen jullie het effect van Social Media hard aantonen? Welke KPI's gebruiken jullie?
- Koppelen jullie de Facebook activiteiten aan een CRM?

9.5. Summary answers CoolBlue

Not available in the public version of this report

9.6. Summary answers Centraal Beheer/Achmea

Not available in the public version of this report

