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Different Means of Customer Acquisition for an SME Organization in a Saturated Niche Market. Case Aulanko Golf

Erilaisia uusasiakashankinnan keinoja pienelle- tai keskisuurelle yritykselle saturoituneilla niche-markkinoilla. Case Aulanko Golf

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ABSTRACT

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This Bachelor's thesis pursues to find out different means of customer acquisition when targeting a niche market of young people in a competitive environment. In the theory section customer acquisition is divided into marketing and non-marketing incentives through which the topic is studied with an overlook of previous studies and literature. After this, interview materials are analyzed based on the presented theories and then used to discuss different solutions for the research questions.

This research is a qualitative case study conducted for a Finnish golf organization, Aulanko Golf. The research material is collected by interviewing representatives of the target group and the CEO of the case company. All the interviews are executed as half-structured individual interviews.

The findings reveal that customer acquisition is crucial for organizations growth as it is the way to keep the customer base growing. In golf markets, as the average age of golfers is high, acquiring young golfers is vital for the future. Marketing should be visually pleasing and coherent concentrating to social media. The advertising and events should include young people taking their values and motives into account. As WOM-messages are one of the top forces affecting marketing in golfing business, reviews should be encouraged, and services created to enhance distinctive, positive experiences.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä: Iina Seppälä

Tutkielman nimi: Erilaisia uusasiakashankinnan keinoja pienelle- tai keskisuurelle yritykselle saturoituneilla niche-markkinoilla. Case Aulanko Golf

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Tämän kandidaatintutkielman tavoitteena on löytää erilaisia uusasiakashankinnan keinoja kilpailullisessa ympäristössä, kun kohteena on nuorten niche-markkinat. Teoriaosassa uusasiakashankinta jaetaan markkinoinnin - ja muihin kuin markkinoinnin kannustimiin. Tästä näkökulmasta aihetta tutkitaan aikaisempia tutkimuksia ja kirjallisuutta käsittelemällä. Tämän jälkeen haastattelumateriaaleja analysoidaan esiteltyjen teorioiden valossa ja näiden avulla pohditaan ratkaisuja tutkimuskysymyksiin.

Tutkimus on toteutettu laadullisena tapaustutkimuksena suomalaiselle golf-organisaatiolle, Aulanko Golfille. Tutkimusmateriaalit on kerätty haastattelemalla kohderyhmän edustajia ja Aulanko Golfin toimitusjohtajaa. Kaikki haastattelut on toteutettu puolistrukturoituina yksilöhaastatteluina.

Tulokset osoittavat, että uusasiakashankinta on elintärkeää organisaation kasvun kannalta. Koska golfmarkkinoilla asiakkaiden keski-ikä on korkea, on nuorten uusasiakashankinta ratkaisevaa sen tulevaisuudelle. Markkinoinnin tulisi olla visuaalisesti miellyttävää ja yhtenäistä keskittyen sosiaaliseen mediaan. Mainonnassa ja tapahtumissa tulisi ottaa huomioon nuorten arvot ja motiivit. Koska WOM-viestintä on yksi tärkeimmistä markkinointiviestinnän keinoista golfmarkkinoilla, tulisi palautteen antamiseen kannustaa ja palveluilla luoda erottuvia, positiivisia kokemuksia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Young people are more and more moving into finding information online and by mobile devices. Traditional mass media marketing is losing its power among young people while they prefer finding consumption-related information from internet and from peer reviews in blogs, social networks and forums (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 20). Social media has made consumers more demanding than ever before (O'Brien 2011, 37). To acquire these young, social media-oriented consumers, organizations must have something that catches the prospects, in other words, the possible buyers' eye from the huge mass of advertisements they see every day. Furthermore, they need to awaken positive conversation among consumers.

In 2018, average age of a Finnish golfer was 48,8 years and approximately 10,7 % of the golfers were aged 19-29 (Suomen Golfliitto, 2018). Not to mention the relatively low number of young golfers, there seems to be no studies about acquiring them. Because of the lack of information and high future potential of young golfers as the big generations are aging, it is important to find out different possibilities to acquire these young golfers. Overall, customer acquisition is an important subject to study because it is how companies attract more customers and thus, the pathway for more revenue. Even though customer acquisition is an important subject there seems to be quite a little research done about it.

The subject of this thesis is customer acquisition in a highly saturated niche market during the times of social media powered consumers. How could a medium sized organization grow its consumer base of young people in competitive markets with low budgets for marketing? The focus of this research is on acquiring through different internet platforms, spreading positive word-of-mouth messages and providing competitive services. The research is a qualitative study on the golf culture through the eyes of young golfers and how to use that effectively in marketing messages and service offerings. The topic is a case study given by a Finnish golf organization: the goal of this thesis is to find out possible ways for Aulanko Golf to acquire these young social media-oriented golfers.

1.1. Literature review

Customer acquisition has changed a lot after the rise of digital technology and social media. As consumers are accessible to more and more consuming related information and have tools to block advertisements online, they have gained more power than ever before. (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 33) Acquiring customers has been exposed as one of the most challenging concerns in business as the expected value from it is considerably high (Alhawari 2012, 1). Additionally, customer acquisition is quite expensive and prone to fail if the organization doesn't have enough guidance and a realistic strategy (King, Chao & Duenyas 2016, 1332). Not paying attention to customer acquisition can lead to diminishing and aging clientele (Tillmanns, Hofstede, Krafft & Goetz 2017, 99).

There are very few empirical researches done on customer acquisition (Tillmanns et al. 2017, 100) and although there have been studies on the impacts of social messages to customers, there is almost nothing on the possible effects to customer acquisition (de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang 2017, 1). Most of the studies on customer acquisition seem to be done for certain organizations, like banks (Vallurupalli & Bose 2018; Bapat 2014; Finken, Kaufmann & Gerald, 2016) and for business-to business markets (Meire, Ballings & Van Den Poel, 2017; Thorleuchter, Van Den Poel & Prinzie, 2012). Also, the studies seem to be more about the costs of acquisition and how to link the acquisition to customer retention. Customer acquisition is mentioned in literature of marketing and customer relationship management, but there seems to be no big studies on it precisely at least by that specific term.

Golf has become quite popular in western countries during last few decades (Statista, 2019a). In Finland, however, golf has yet a relatively small niche market (Statista 2019b). However, there are over 130 golf clubs in Finland (Sarpakunnas, S., 2017), most of them situated in the Southern and Mid parts of Finland (Suomen Golfliitto, 2018). Many golf unions around the world collect statistics of golfing industry on a yearly basis. In Finland, however, the Finnish Golf Union, Suomen Golfliitto, seems to be the only organization conducting yearly researches on golf. There are some empirical researches done about marketing golf and golf culture, but none in Finland.

To top this, as the age distribution among golfers is quite old, the amount of information about young golfers in specific is quite nonexistent.

Because of the importance of acquiring young golfers and the lack of previous researches on both customer acquisition and golfing culture in Finland, there is a need for further research. This thesis will try to connect the previous researches on customer acquisition to empirical findings on Finnish golfing culture in order to provide some propositions on how to acquire young golfers.

1.2. Goals and research problems

The goal for this thesis is to present effective ways on how to get young golfers interested in the case organization and how to attract them to play in their fields. The main research problem is: *How could Aulanko Golf attract young golfers to play on their fields?*

The sub-questions were created by dividing the main research problem into smaller themes as follows:

What kind of values and motives do young golfers hold for the sport and are they in line with the Club's offer?

How do young golfers feel about golf related marketing and how could it be more effective?

How could the organization use external acquisition incentives in order to acquire more customers?

1.3. Delimitations and structure of the thesis

The delimitations for this research were set upon in agreement with the case organization. The task was to study different possibilities to acquire young golfers with a "zero-budget". This budget lining practically outlines many forms of marketing and

steered the focus on low budget internet and social media marketing and brand-building for a better word-of-mouth marketing, also known as WOM: reviews from customer to customer (Kurian 2013, 291). The target group was limited to young people who already play golf. The firm was interested specifically in young people as the age distribution of the club is mainly consisted of middle-aged people and pensioners. It was also found irrelevant for this research to study how to get young people in general to play golf because of the distinctiveness of golf as a sport.

The distinctiveness of golf also limited the study to focus on how to get the target group to make the first purchase on the case organization. In this case, a purchase means a game played in the case club. Thus, building a customer relationship will not be discussed as the single purchases are big and the firm already has good methods for building relationships. As the sport itself is the most important offer of the organization, the research is concentrating on promoting the Club and getting people to play there, leaving out the marketing of golf equipment and golf courses. Neither the services provided, nor the prices will be addressed as the goal is only to find ways to present the field games, and services included in it, in a profitable way.

Even if the case organization operates on a highly saturated market, the research is limited to only concern the case organization because of limited time and resources to execute this study: the state of the markets will be discussed to assess the current situation but the competitors will not be mentioned. The marketing will be mostly targeted to golfers living in a reasonable distance from the golf club since they share the biggest possibility to purchase a field game. However, also other young golfers within Finnish region might be targeted to take part in bigger events and competitions.

This thesis will start by giving theory on customer acquisition, dividing it into consumer behavior, e-marketing, sports marketing and word-of-mouth marketing. After this short theory section, there will be information on the research methodologies used in this thesis, presentation of the empirical materials and a short introduction of the case organization. Then, the research questions will be answered in separate chapters by connecting the empirical and theoretical findings. Finally, the thesis will end with conclusions and summary.

2. THEORY ON CUSTOMER ACQUISITION

The theory section will start by describing the basic distinctives of customer acquisition. After, the research will present theory on customer relationship management and consumer values. Furthermore, theory on marketing will be divided into marketing strategies, e-marketing, sports marketing and different marketing platforms. The theory section will be ended with theory on word-of-mouth marketing and how to manage it.

2.1. What is customer acquisition

There are two ways to keep a company's customer base growing: by acquiring (attracting) more customers and by retaining the customers the company already has (King et al. 2016, 1332-1333). Acquiring customers can be even 10 percent more expensive than retaining old customers (Mooradian, Matzler & Ring 2014, 269). The bigger expected value the prospect has, the harder the acquisition is. Then again, these customers can prove to be very valuable once converted. (Tillmanns et al. 2017, 111) Anyhow, by investing in different acquisition strategies, the long-term profitability of the company can be greatly influenced (Villanueva, Yoo, & Hanssens 2007, 48).

Rhouma and Zaccour (2017, 2610) divide the incentives affecting both customer acquisition and retention into two factors: internal and external incentives. The internal ones include different marketing expenditures performed by the company, whereas the external ones include every factor that is not marketing. Accordingly, Villanueva et al. (2007, 48) divide acquisition into marketing-induced and word-of-mouth customer acquisition. When choosing the consumers worth acquiring for, it is important to understand the probability of the prospect becoming a customer and their profitability once becoming a customer (D'Haen, Van Den Poel & Thorleuchter 2013, 2007).

According to King et al. (2016, 1333) customer acquisition must, in addition to marketing, be also understood as an issue of alignment on operations: the activities affecting on the resource allocations of acquisition are operations and service capabilities. These activities also add to the value of acquisition as in best case

scenario they can convert the acquired customer to spread positive word-of-mouth messages to other consumers (Villanueva et al. 2007, 49). The consumers reacting to acquiring first are suspected to put more value on the service offered. After these consumers are acquired, it gets more expensive and unprofitable as the consumers left are more skeptical and not as responsive. (King et al. 2016, 1333-1336)

In targeting, organizations profile people by definitions, like age, gender and location, in order to focus their marketing efforts to the desired consumers. This is useful especially in niche markets. (Perkins 2015, 118-119) A niche is a market with only few customers with high demand for the marketed product or service (Kurian 2013, 194). Tillmanns et al. (2017, 102-103) denotes that to create a successful campaign targeting the wanted prospects, the organization must be able to create methods predicting customers response behaviors. For this, they must gather valid information, like age, gender, marital status, and then choose a group of predictors to discover the most promising prospects. Yet, he also points out the problems on these predictors, like inaccuracy, correlance and too many predictors. Additionally, Baecke and Van Den Poel (2012, 12105) notify that customer acquisition can suffer from non-quality data if the information of prospects only consists of sosio-demographic and lifestyle variables. Yet Storey and Larbig (2018, 19-20) points out, how the best way to create services the customers really need is by working together with the customer and by observing them, as it is the most definite way to reveal the latent needs.

To succeed in highly competed markets, organization must be market oriented elevating the competition around it. A market-oriented organization is better than the competitors in understanding, acquiring and keeping valuable customers. However, as acquiring customers is quite expensive most of the value comes from creating relationships with the valuable customers. (Day 1999, 5-14) By highlighting customer value-creation strategies, like customized quality services, the organization can gain distinct market advantages (Andotra 2007, 181). To succeed, a market-driven organization must create a culture oriented to it and have distinguishing capabilities in reading, evaluating and reacting to markets (Day 1999, 14). Furthermore, in competition, customer acquisition has become one of the key advantages for companies (Alhawari 2012, 2).

2.2. Customer acquisition as a part of Customer Relationship Management

Customer relationship management, CRM, has become one of the most crucial points in business as customers are the most important asset for companies and a lot is expected from it (Alhawari 2012, 2). CRM can be separated into customer acquisition and customer retention. Finding a good balance between these two is one of the most important questions of CMR. (Calciu 2008, 214) Basically, CMR is about understanding and delivering customer values better by using value chains to integrate people, processes and technology (Alhawari 2012, 3).

According to Wood (2003, 638-639), the company should keep a record on both customers and prospects as these records are essential on indicating the value of customers in the future and creating profitable CRM approaches. O'Brien (2011, 35) defines, that these customer databases collected with information technologies help the organization to understand the customer needs and to implement marketing strategies. Furthermore, calculating the costs of acquiring customers with these records is essential in creating profitable marketing campaigns. The records are part of defining the customer segments, in other words, strategic units of market (Kurian 2013, 247) and should have information like the concentration location of suitable prospects. (Wood 2003, 638-639) As Badgett and Stone (2005, 103) state, segmentation is understanding the customers and creating increasing revenues by recognizing the valuable customers thus helping to improve targeting.

2.3. The significance of values and community on customer acquisition

The rise of social media has empowered consumers and created a highly demanding, cynical and untrusting social consumer (O'Brien 2011, 38). According to postmodernism, consumers are rather seeking for symbolic value in purchase than use value or exchange value. This means that consumers are giving more value for the experiences linked to the services and products and to the symbolic meanings around them. Thus, consumers are rather seeking for value for time than value for

money. This leads to consumers seeking experiences from brands, that they can share with other consumers of the brand. According to postmodernism, consumer is a socially connected, subconscious being making decisions by emotions and experiences. (Parsons & Maclaran 2009, 44-47)

As consumer are seeking for community in brands, they manipulate the signs and symbols of the brand to be able to communicate with other consumers of the brand (Parsons & Maclaran 2009, 44). A community is an engagement towards a common interest, goal or purpose bringing individuals who share similar interests, behavior and attitudes together. The goals and interest of company must be in line with the community around it. (Perksin 2015, 4-9) According to O'Brien (2011, 38), the need to feel of belonging to a community can influence the patterns of consumers consumption. An organization can create meanings around their brands but if the meanings are in conflict with the meaning's consumers have toward it, the marketing will be seen unauthentic or it won't be accepted. However, there are now evidence that we are moving out of the postmodern era as conditions are starting to change. (Parsons & Maclaran 2009, 44-47)

The organization should perform perceptual mapping to determine how they want their products or services to be positioned in the minds of consumers compared to the competing brands (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 190) By segmenting the consumers, the marketers can decide which brand positioning advertising campaigns should be targeted to which consumers (Badgett & Stone 2005, 110) To make most out of marketing, the organization must, according to Andotra (2007, 182) have knowledge on the consumers, such as their buying habits and – motives, demographics etcetera. Today, following your web sites traffic and internet communities make it easy by allowing crowdsourcing: the company can engage with customers and learn about their interests to facilitate more essential content. (Perkins 2015, 263-264). Consumer behavior is affected by various forces coming outside, like the instability of world economics (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 35).

2.4. Marketing

Marketing is identifying and fulfilling consumer needs better and quicker than the competitors (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 104). Today, individuals are subjected to numerous advertisements a day. Marketing has changed a lot as a phenomenon during the last few decades. New fields have appeared, such as services - and relationship marketing, and new definitions of terminology and terrain have been created alongside. Because of these late changes it is important to acknowledge that marketing is an exchange between an organization and society where values and relationships play a big part. However, today it seems that marketing has a decreasing role in organizations meanwhile the customers' feelings toward marketing are getting worse. (Parsons & Maclaran 2009, 1-5) O'Brien (2011, 38) describes, that today, consumers are more untrusting and critical towards marketing communications than ever. Nevertheless, traditional advertising is still proven to be very effective on acquiring customers as it is good in raising awareness and consideration and contributing to favorable consumer-to-consumer social messaging (de Vries et al. 2017, 9-12).

Parsons and Maclaran (2009, 6-8) are offering two suggestions for marketing: marketing productivity should be linked to the organization's strategy and the marketing should have a collaborative approach working together with the consumers. Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann and Neslin (2012, 60) emphasize, that to acquire customers, it is very important to spread knowledge of the brand by increasing market presence. Today, as internet empowers the consumers allowing them to share and create information, marketing can be viewed as value co-creation. Organizations are not able to control the marketing and the brand consumers are creating among themselves. Thus, the consumers should be heard, understood and worked together with. (Parsons & Maclaran 2009, 6-8)

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010, 36), customer's behavior in decision making process is a compilation of various stimuli that needs interdisciplinary reading. Consumers have different motives behind consumption, that can be either rational or emotional. Most of those motives, however, are dormant and the marketer needs to

find a way to arouse those motives. The arousal must be timed right and the marketer needs to understand if the stimuli is in individual's psychology or – surroundings and if it's behind emotional or cognitive process. (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 114) Some emotional motives can be about how the organization acts: sustainable organizations having ethical values and clear plan on social corporate responsibility can evoke positive emotional motives (Mooradian et al. 2014, 60).

In marketing, to enhance the consumer's learning and slow down the process of forgetting, advertisements must have repetition. The advertising must, however, be varying in order to reduce advertising wear out, which means the loss of attention because of satiation of numerous exposures. (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 214) As the competition in markets is getting deeper, the organization must use an innovative promotion mix to be able to answer to other contestants (Andotra 2007, 183). The marketing should not only bring out the esteem of the product, but also the relevance to the customer as they are found to positively interact with each other in acquiring customers (Stahl et al. 2012, 59). Because of the intangible nature of services, creating a specific, differentiating image is the key factor on standing out from the competition. (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 192)

2.4.1. Marketing strategies

Marketing strategy is created to control either the marketing process, the outcome of marketing or both. The goal of the strategy is to form profitable relationships by offering specific customers specific solutions better than the competitors. (Mooradian et al. 2014, 42-43) An inclusive strategy is a plan answering the following questions: who are the customers, when should the marketing be timed, where is the business situated, what is the organizations' offering to meet the market needs, how can those needs be served and customers reached and why are these things being done. These questions can be combined in choosing a target segment, deciding on the competitive advantages and creating a singular, distinct strategy. (Mooradian et al. 2014, 42-43)

There are many generic frameworks on how to create a marketing strategy. One way is to decide on if you are competing with low prices or product differentiation and then choosing whether you are targeting a narrow niche market or executing a mass marketing strategy. Another way is to create a value-map based on the pricing and quality. You can also decide on strategy by looking at the age and innovativeness of the markets and the products. (Mooradian et al. 2014, 43-44) However when the strategy is created, Webber (2013, 306) highlights the importance of behavioral data as a part of attitudinal information to be able to create qualitative decisions.

Mohamad, Zawawi, Abdullah and Wan Noordiana Wan (2018, 939) explain, that today one of the most essential tools in creating a marketing strategy is social network marketing. And to make a successful strategy, they state that you must understand the bridge of purchase intention between interest and purchase. Furthermore, to make a good marketing strategy the organization must widely assess the situation around it and inside it. Marketing strategy must be specified in objectives for it to go to the right direction and to reach the aimed goal. One way to set the objectives is SMART-technique: it means the objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-specific. (Mooradian et al. 2014, 49-76) To get all the potential from targeting, segments should be accessible, stable, big enough, distinguishable and in line with the marketers' goals. (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 73) However, Badgett and Stone (2005, 111) highlight that segmentation should also answer to when should certain segments be targeted, how do they act in purchasing and when they change the purchasing patterns.

When starting to implement the created marketing strategy it is crucial to understand the positioning the brand or product holds in the customer minds. The organization must have unique and effective ways to target the chosen segments with an altered marketing mix. The marketing mix is a set off tools that can help to direct the positioning in customers minds, but the baseline is already set on customer's minds and difficult to change. (Mooradian et al. 2014, 80-84) To understand the best ways to use the marketing mix, the organization should perform consumer research for its' offering and messaging to be able to meet the customer needs (Schiffman & Kanuk et 2010, 42).

2.4.2. E-marketing

Internet creates both possibilities and threats for organizations. It can, for example, bring productivity to economics, provide cheap channels for communication and change the location of work. However, it can also lead to failure due to censorship, information floods and obsolescence. (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 5) What works well today in the internet might already be outdated before you notice, since the dissemination (Hamouda 2018, 427) and evolution of internet is rapid: markets change and grow, new technologies are created, and prices fluctuate (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 6). Internet has already shifted the power of communication as it has considerably leveraged consumer voices (Mohamad et al 2018, 939) and made marketing communication much cheaper (Webber 2013, 306).

According to Webber (2013, 291-301), direct marketing has been under evolution as the communication channels have evolved: it has divided into acquisition and retention; the focus has drifted into maximization of responding to the frequency and monetary value of purchases; and evaluation if consumer should or should not be contacted has evolved to timing and content optimizing. O'Brien (2011, 37) states, that marketing messages should be personalized, as consumers are more open to communication that shares their personal needs and interests. What is good, is that most of the marketing fundamentals also work on the internet which means that traditional guidelines are just as valid in internet (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 118).

However, as the communication via, for example email, is not as sparse and lacks many social signs of face-to-face selling and phone-selling, the communication and interactions can be very different. It has been found that consumers response to internet contents are close to their behavior in the physical world. This for it is important to keep certain basic real-life aspects, like politeness and personality in mind when planning internet marketing. (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 118-121). An appointed a social media marketing manager can make the communication more personified as it enhances the feeling of relationship and creates trust and easier recovery in negative situation. This is crucial for organization, since using social media platforms

ineffectively can be more harmful for brand reputation than not using social media at all (O'Brien 2011, 38-39)

Hanson and Kalyanam (2007, 254-257) list different ways to create more traffic for organizations websites: creating a brand, creating web search optimizations (e.g. with paid keyword advertising), banner advertisement, mass media advertising, WOM and publicity. Today when talking about e-marketing, we often talk about visible ads in social media, email and pop-up advertisements. As Webber (2013, 307) notifies, the low costs of direct e-marketing have resulted to a high level of competition which means great expenditures in order to gain acceptable visibility. He states how this has led to intense inflation of Google keyword advertisements. Because the internet is full of information, it must also be considered how to make your information accessible for the prospects (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 121) However, as Sashi, Brynildsen and Bilgihan (2019, 1266) noticed, there are also low cost ways to get attention: marketing messages send through social media during the day and not too late at night are received more positively and acted upon.

2.4.3. Sports marketing

As a result of increasing commercialization of sports, Baena (2016, 204) states that sport clubs are now corporations whose most crucial assets and investments are their brand and players. Rundh and Gottfridsson (2015, 786) divides the research done in sports marketing into promoting sports teams and events, and to promoting products and services related to sports events. They state that the goal of sports marketing strategy is to promote either the sport or the products and services. Baena (2016, 205) claims, that because of the high level of commitment from the brand supporters, branding is one of the most crucial tools for sport organizations to gain growth. Furthermore, sports today tend to have high level of identification among the supporters of the brand. This strong emotional bond makes them sensitive of over-commercialization of the brand. (Baena 2016, 204)

2.4.4. Marketing platforms

When making personalized messages, like in email, the marketer needs to have information on the target audience (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 316). To be able to reach for the chosen segment, the marketer needs to conduct segmentation research in order to understand via which medias is the target group accessible (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 73). If an organization wants to authenticate their messages with personalization, they need to create them with caution: it might be better to treat everyone the same way than to use faulty interpretations as a base of contacts. In time, the marketing can be profitably personalized by observing which kind of messages triggered the customers to act and vice versa. These trigger events can be very valuable by revealing information on the consumer behavior. (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 316-319)

An organization can ensure good possibilities for consumers to form an online community around its products. At best, these communities can create loyalty and commitment. In the community, users are responsible for creating content, but the organization must support it and sometimes moderate the content. Launching the community can be difficult, but when it starts getting positive attention it will create good social network value by reaching many like-minded people by the users' connections. Communities are also good on collecting valuable information of the consumers: both qualitative and quantitative information can be created, for example, by following the reactions of campaigns, tracking signs of brewing problems and measuring ambitions. (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 327-341) By observing consumer behavior online, the company could evaluate how consumers behave from searching the product or service to evaluating and finally disposing it. (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 23)

The digitalization brings with it both positive and negative effects for marketers. It makes it easier to target the right customers with targeted advertisements, but it also adds pressure to offer more services and products than ever before. The marketers can spread advertisements quickly to right consumers and gain feedback of the success as easily. Not only is the information at the consumers hands, but also

marketers can find quite reliable information on customers. (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 33-34) One of the best qualities of social media is that it provides real-time interaction with big audiences (Sashi et al. 2019, 1251). Also, according to O'Brien (2011, 37), social media has created a need to socially interact and be included with their friend's social interactions, which has led to a peer pressure to keep on track on the activities others find favorable.

Communication in social media from business-to-consumers seems to have some positive effects on business, but even so traditional marketing is seen by some to still be more effective (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman & Kannan 2016, 22; de Vries et al. 2017, 12) Still, there are divergent opinions on how great the influence of social media communication is. De Vries' et al. (2017, 2, 12) study denotes that the effect is mostly complementing traditional marketing and mostly by impressions. Yet Kumar et al. (2016, 8) states that it has synergies with email marketing and is most effective among social network minded consumers. Nonetheless, it can't be denied that for business-to-consumer interaction, social media is an ideal platform and even more so as internet is starting to fully replace some consumers use of traditional communication mediums (O'Brien 2011, 34-36). To top that, social media provides the organization a unique possibility to approach the modern marketing critical consumer in a way that they might not understand they are being advertised to and furthermore, adding visibility for increasing brand awareness (O'Brien 2011, 38).

2.4. Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Today, an event, a spectacular advertisement, campaign or news can make a web-site famous during a night. Social media, bloggers and youtubers have so much coverage that the word can spread to a large group in a very short time. Sadly, this also means negative word-of-mouth (Sashi et al. 2019, 1250). As Hanson and Kalyanam (2007, 257) state, WOM recommendations are found to be the most convincing and plausible source of information. Wong, Kwok and Lau (2015, 316) agree, addressing that positive WOM has been regarded to define consumers

behavioral intentions towards buying. Since these informal communication sources, like a friend giving an advice or other consumers in social network and web forums, are found to have zero gain from the actions of receiver, they are held more reliable sources than the formal communication coming from the organization (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 281; Wong et al. 2015, 316).

The internet and social media have made word-of-mouth communication easy: the communication is no longer dependent on time, location and access (O'Brien 2011, 32). Messages can be sent to several different sites, for example, brand community sites, forums and blogs and can be anything from reviews to different sort of messages. A consumer spreading positive WOM helps the organization co-create value as an advocate (Sashi et al. 2019, 1250). De Vries et al. (2017, 1) point out that it is important for organizations to understand the effects of consumer to consumer messages on brand and consumption and how the marketing messaging can influence it.

O'Brien (2011, 35) describes WOM to have enormous potential marketing vice. Despite of being reliable and convincing, De Vries et al. (2017, 9-12) address that traditional marketing is still more affective in customer acquisition than WOM social messages. However, according to Villanueva et al. (2007, 58) customers acquired with WOM create better long-term profitability for the company and demand less action in customer retention. Even so, WOM social messages are much more effective in converting consumers preferences. The amount and valence of WOM social messages have different outcomes: the volume is more effective on acquisition where the valence is more effective on the preferences. (De Vries et al. 2017, 9-12)

2.4.1. Managing Word-of-Mouth messages

According to Sashi et al. (2019, 1253), to receive positive WOM communication, the organization must work hard to create satisfaction, commitment and increase the connection and retention efforts towards customers. However, even if the customer satisfaction is low, the organizations can use contacting efforts to promote positive WOM and thus have a great effect on customer acquisition (Williams & Buttle 2011,

90). Today, organizations are using satisfied customers, celebrities and different opinion leaders, like bloggers to spread positive words to get potential customers' attention. For example, using sports celebrities in marketing has a big influence on young consumers, even though they are more immune to marketing strategies. (Wong et al. 2015, 314-316) Sashi et al. (2019, 1248) are calling the act of converting customers into brand supporters as digital customer engagement. Furthermore, targeting opinion leaders in social media can have a great influence also for wider audiences (O'Brien 2011, 38)

Williams & Buttle (2011, 86-89) state, that there are many aspects affecting the WOM together and separately. He created a model presenting eight different attributes that should be considered when trying to influence WOM: customer-to-customer WOM, the product / services, business-to-consumer communication, key influencers, referral, partner and employee networks, and organizational WOM. As the WOM seems to be an efficient way to affect consumers, companies should try to manage it by encouraging customers to spread the word and by doing cooperation with people who are visible among the targeted segment. For example, newly acquired customers should be attracted to give WOM, because they are proven to be likely give it regardless of the satisfaction level (Wangenheim & Bayón 2007, 247) Nevertheless, the endorsers chosen to represent your brand must be carefully selected as the endorsers actions can also have negative effects in consumers' minds. (Wong et al. 2015, 320)

3. RESEARCH METHODS AND - MATERIAL

This research is executed as a qualitative case study. Two different types of interviews were conducted, one for the CEO of the case organization and the other for five representatives of the target group. This chapter will give an introduction of the research methods used in this thesis and the empirical material collected. Furthermore, the case organization will be shortly presented at the end of this chapter.

3.1. Qualitative research

In qualitative research, the researcher uses an open-ended study to investigate unforeseen parts of discovery in the peoples' lives who are objective in the research. The aim is to get a deep understanding of the behavior of a certain social group. With a qualitative study, the researcher is creating interpretations of the realities of the research settings and people in it: the aim is not to picture reality, but an approximation of a complex entity by collecting a number of case examples of social life. (Holliday 2002, 5-6) It can be separated into four stages: first you need to perceive the research, then collect all the material for the research, transcribe the collected material and lastly, analyze the material. (Kiviniemi 2018, 73-83) Analyzing the data often begins the moment the researcher starts collecting the data. The data should be traceable, reliable and complete. (Farquhar 2012, 90-91)

According to Stake (1995, 37-46) qualitative research does not look for an explanation, but an understanding of interrelationships among various exists. The intention is often to produce relevant knowledge in order to create or promote solutions for a certain practical problem (Flick 2007, 6). The research questions usually concentrate into a case or phenomena, looking for expected and unexpected relationship patterns. As qualitative research is looking for relations, the researches must also be aware of many contexts, like cultural, social, economic and so on. Taking these into consideration, the researcher must be subjective and understand what might be affecting into his or her and the objectives way of acting. (Stake 1995, 37-46) This research is analyzed with

an inductive approach. In inductive analysis, the researcher looks for emerging common ideas and themes from the data which are supported throughout the interviews (Farquhar 2012, 92).

Alhawari (2012, 5) separates customer acquisition into four dimensions: customer relations, attracting customers, capturing customer knowledge and analyzing customer data. This view will be used as a core for this research (Figure 1). The customer relations will be studied by interviewing the CEO of Aulanko Golf, and attracting customers and capturing customer knowledge by interviewing representatives of the target group. All these three phases are building to each other as the thesis proceeds and have the information from previous researches affecting them. In empirical section, all the collected data will be analyzed.
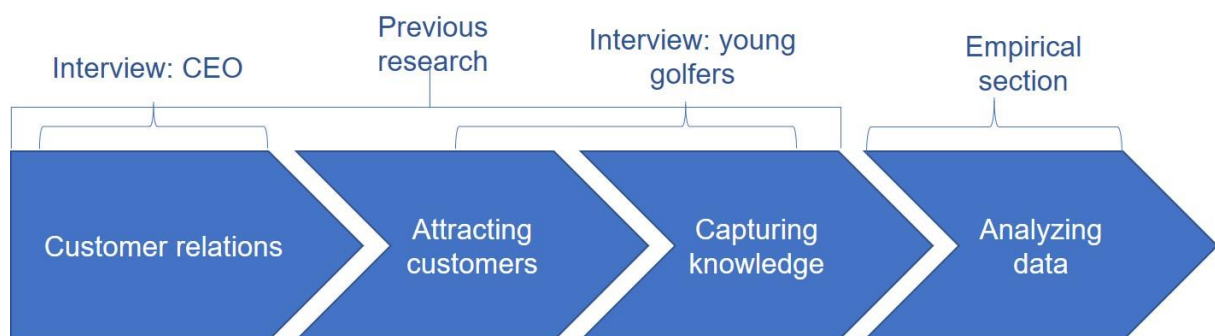

Figure 1 - Four dimensions of customer acquisition

3.1.1. Interviews as a research method

An interview is a conversation with a goal set by the interviewer: the interviewer has an interest which for questions are set and the conversation is guided focusing it to the set themes and encouraging the interviewee to give answers. (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 22-23) The interviewer must have a good research-question-based plan on what he or she wants to ask in order to make sure the answers are useful for the research. A good interviewer can read the interviewee, ask dumb questions to get a truthful answer and clarifications. (Stake 1995, 64-66) In order for the customer acquisition to

be effective, marketing should be created together with consumers (Parsons & Maclaran 2009, 6-8), which is why getting qualitative customer information with the interviews is important as it will help to identify opportunities, reveal latent needs, improve services and offerings and notice alternative possibilities (Storey & Larbig 2018, 19)

Interviews can be divided into structured and unstructured interviews; structured interview means a question form with same questions for everyone, where unstructured means a free conversation like action (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 11-12). When qualitative research uses interviews for collecting data, they are usually semi-structured (Farquhar 2012, 73). Brinkmann (2013, 21-24) lists four characteristics for them: they have a purpose to produce certain knowledge, they look for descriptions on how interviewees experience the subject, they are about life world phenomena and have interpretations of interviewees experiences.

After the interviewing, the data must be written down, in other words, transcribed. This is a good way to help memorize the data and notice the important details. Often, transcribing also has notes, for example, on how the interviewee speaks, uses volume and expressions. (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 16) When analyzing the interview materials, coding is used to interpret and manage the data in order to find the important references to the research objectives. (Farquhar 2012, 93) Analyzing the collected data is not only giving meaning to final compilations but collecting the important parts from the first impressions to the end. Thus, analyzing and interpreting the data is making sense and finding relations of the whole research process. The researcher is looking for patterns to gain consistency among the set conditions. (Stake 1995, 71-78)

As described in the theory section, customer's behavior in decision making process is a compilation of various stimulus' that needs interdisciplinary reading. The figure below describes all the stimulus' affecting the process modified from the figure by Schiffman and Kanuk (2010, 36). With the interviews, this research is trying to find out how the stimuli listed in the Figure 1 are affecting to young golfers' decision making when purchasing gaming time. The red outlining addresses the main focus of this research: the focus is on external influences as the research gives advice on place and promotion to acquire more customers and how to direct the services to be more valuable for the

prospects. The lined area is the simplest to affect, but also the other areas must be considered as part of the bigger picture.
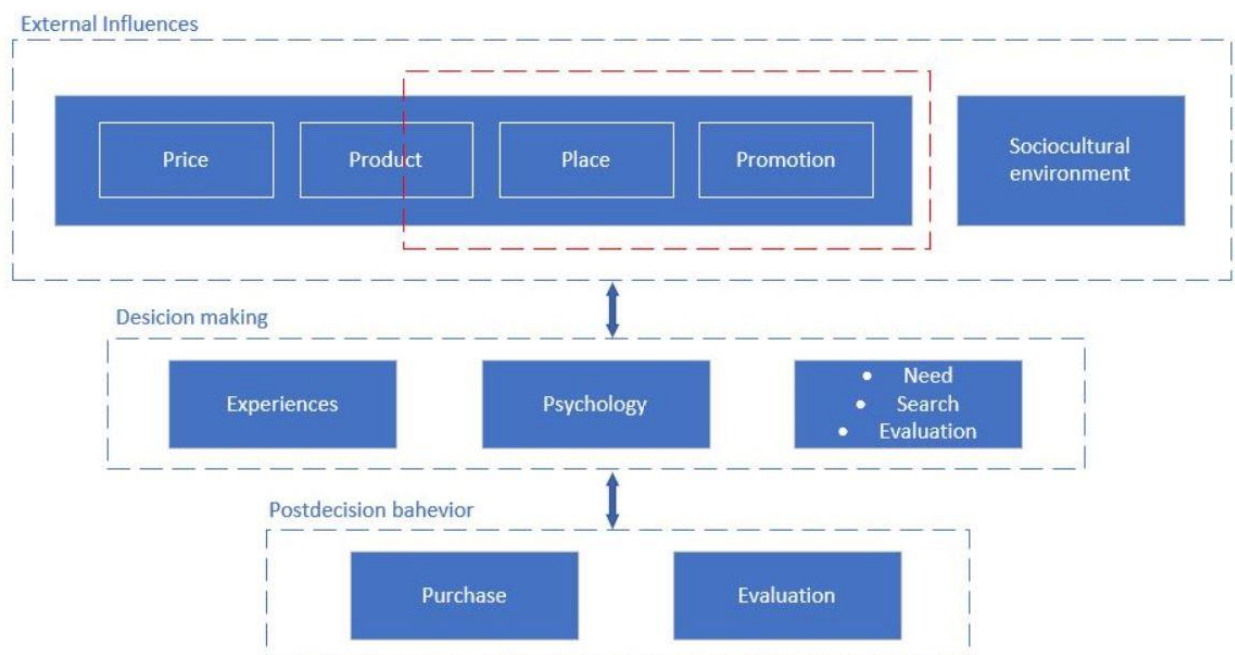

Figure 2 - Consumer's decision making process

Two different kinds of half-structured interviews were constructed in order to gain understanding on opportunities and needs to improve services and offerings accordingly. The interviews in this research were conducted as individual interviews in order to keep the conversation in the direction most useful in relation to the interest of this research and to create a confidential conversation atmosphere to get personal aspects from interviewees lives (Brinkmann 2013, 27) All the interviews were recorded to help the analyzing process. At first, there was a face-to-face interview with the CEO of the organization (Appendix 1). The interview consisted of 10 short questions that were created to encourage the CEO to speak freely of the basic distinctives of golfing culture, the organization's marketing strategy, values and community. This interview was approximately thirty minutes long. After the interview, the material was transcribed and the main points for the study were highlighted. Then, the interview for the prospects was conducted according to the information collected with the first interview.

Five young golfers with different golfing backgrounds were interviewed as representatives of the target group to get a diverse overlook of the subject. Some of them were very active and competitive golfers while some were more amateur golfers. The interviewees were 20-26 years old from all around Finland and two of them were girls. Because of the interviewees' locations, some were interviewed face-to-face and some via Skype. Every interview took about thirty minutes. The questions (Appendix 2) were about the values of golf, the needs and wants, the golfing community and marketing. There were quite many and precise questions to make the answers comparable and to make sure they understand the questions as intended. The questions were deliberately made similar, asking the same thing in a different form to get an overlook from different sides of the matter. After all the interviews were finished, they were transcribed and coded to a chart where they were easy to compare. All the similarities and differences were highlighted and the meanings behind their words and expressions and repetitive themes were sought. Finally, a coherent summary of the answers was created.

3.1.2. Case study

Case study is an approach employing methods, interviews, field studies and observation to generate a sociological perspective of the case (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin 1993, 1). Case studies do not generalize, but rather particularize a certain case we want to get to know well; what it is and what does it do, not what makes it different from others. However, as we are talking about uniqueness, there must be a knowledge of the others differing from the case. (Stake 1995, 8) With a case study, the researcher is able to look at the phenomenon in the context it is taking place at (Farquhar 2012, 6).

A case study is an empirical research based on knowledge and experience (Farquhar 2012, 6). It should be reflective, patient and able to take into account the other view of the case (Stake 1995, 12). The researcher is often relativistic as it must be taken in consideration how much knowledge is determined by experiences and personal traits.

However, not all interpretations are of equal value, but rather depend on the credibility and utility of the interpretation. (Stake 1995, 102) The case is subjective to our previous experiences and values, (Simons 2009, 81) so it is also important to acknowledge some of the personal experiences that might affect the results (Stake 1995, 134).

The goal of this thesis is as Simons (2009, 21) describes the purpose of case study, to create in-depth understanding of the described topic to create knowledge and inform custom development. According to Thomas and Myers (2015, 15), a case study is viewing the phenomenon as a whole from many angles, trying to see the connections of the elements. Accordingly, this research will look at the case from the views of young consumers, the club, and the previous researches creating a coherent subjection.

3.2. Introduction of the case organization

Aulanko Golf has two different golf fields, Hugo and Eversti, located in Hämeenlinna, Finland. The location is ideal, as it is only an hour drive away from Tampere, one and half hour from Helsinki and two from Turku. Hugo was opened in 1940 as the second golf field in Finland. (Aulanko Golf 2019a) Aulanko Golf consists of Aulanko Golf Oy and Aulanko Golfklubi ry. The first one was founded in 2003 and is responsible for maintaining the fields and the buildings of Aulanko Golf. Aulanko Golfklubi ry, AGK, meaning Aulanko Golf Club, is the club responsible for member activities, teaching and coaching. (Aulanko Golf 2019b) The Club was founded in 1959, which makes it the fifth oldest golf club in Finland. (Aulanko Golf 2019a) In 2018, AKG had 1667 members, with 990 men, 500 women and 177 juniors making it a medium sized golf club. (Suomen Golfliitto, 2018)

4. RESULTS OF THE THESIS

As all the data has now been collected, transcribed and analyzed, the results drawn from this case study will now be indicated. At this section, every research question will be presented on its own chapter building the results to finally give the conclusions of the research.

4.1. The values and motives of young golfers in comparison to the Club's offer

The interviewed prospects were asked about their values and motives towards golf in several different ways to see them from multiple points of view. The values could be divided into three main values that were mentioned in many contexts throughout the interviews by every interviewee: sociability, success and tranquility. Golfing is a social interaction for every interviewee as it is a way for them to spend time with their families and friends. Everyone had started playing because the family played golf and all of them mentioned the sociability when asked about the most important aspects. When asked about the best golf related memories or what would make a golfing day perfect, everyone mentioned the importance of friends and family almost immediately. Two also mentioned the importance of getting to know new people and the sense of community.

It could also be seen that all the interviewees were very keen on the feeling of success. Four out of five had been competing in golf, but none were actively competing at the moment. All of them enjoyed it and brought up the importance of being rewarded in various points of interview. Feelings of success and personal records were important for everyone even when not competing. The explanation for this seemed to be the competitive nature of the sport and the need for a lot of practice to get results. The feelings of success were mentioned as best memories, the motivation to play, values and as characteristics of a perfect day. It must be noted that also the importance of friends' success and group success was mentioned by three.

Tranquility was mentioned in different forms in many contexts. When the interviewees went golfing, four out of five sought for a way to forget the stress. The feeling of tranquility came from being outside in the beautiful nature, which was mentioned many times, and as a form of exercise. Even if two did not mention tranquility as their values, they brought its' importance up in the motives of golfing.

According to postmodernism, consumers are rather valuing the experiences and symbolism in services than value for their money (Parsons & Maclaran 2009, 44-46). This insight was both supported and challenged by the findings from the prospect interviews. As the main values in golf were sociability, success and tranquility, golfing seems to be mostly about the experiences and good feeling. However, some questions aroused the importance of price: as golf is quite an expensive sport, the price was one of the main aspects in comparing different golfing fields. The price seemed to be more important in first impressions, but if the club was above average in other aspects the price was not mentioned as often. However, advertising too much with the prices was found cheap and unattractive, as golf holds a meaning of luxury in their minds. The question of price in this research might however be more about the living situation of the interviewees: all of them were students with zero to low incomes, which might affect this result.

The mission of Aulanko Golf is nature, health and friends, and the values are good community spirit, working together, success, enjoyable golfing and good and thorough management. They want to be a versatile club with a good, welcoming community working together for everybody's enjoyment. These are mostly in line with the values of interviewed prospects. The only differences are that the feeling of success is more important for the prospects and the organization puts more value on the community while the prospects value more their personal relationships.

A consumer has a need to belong to a community (O'Brien 2011, 38) and according to the interviews, the communities in golf clubs can be tight. The importance of communities comes up several times in the interviews and it also seems to be a topic discussed among golfers. One of the Clubs' values is a welcoming and friendly community, but the CEO mentions that it is not always that simple. Both interviews show, that some are keener to be a part of the community than others, but most

important is the welcoming and friendly atmosphere in the club. Three of the interviewed prospects talk more about the meaning of community: two mention the importance of "we-spirit" and the need to give one's input for the greater good of the community. One speaks of the equality in community; people should be invited to the community regardless of qualities like age, money and gender, and it should me made clear starting from the advertising. This is in line with the research of Licsandru and Cui (2019, 268), stating that millennial consumers are against stereotyping. The communities are also good for collecting information of the consumers (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 327-341) as customers can help the company to understand and interpret their needs in order to embody that tacit knowledge in services (Storey & Larbig 2018, 19). This for it is important to have a platform, like Facebook, for a social media community, not just as a source of information for consumers, but also for the organization's information.

4.2. Feelings towards marketing and how to make it more affective

The consumers' feelings regarding marketing have degraded during the last decade (Parsons & Maclaran 2009, 5) and consumers are becoming more and more critical about marketing communication (O'Brien 2011, 38) as the amount of marketing seen every day is increasing. This can be clearly seen in the interviews with prospects, as four out of five of them said that their emails are so filled with advertisements that they are not even bothered to open them and that they mostly block internet advertising or just intentionally avoid it. However, this is in contradiction with a research by Beautiful Insights, (Ridley-Siegert 2015, 93-95) that claims that when an unknown brand is contacting consumers, email is the most preferred channel according to 60 % of respondent customers and social media the third most preferred by only 4 % of respondents. Licsandru & Cui (2019, 268), state that millennial consumers are aware of persuasive intentions of marketing and prone to interpret the hidden meanings in advertisements. However, according to de Vries et al. (2017, 12). traditional marketing is still best for raising awareness and consideration. The results of interviews were

coherent to this, as almost every one of the interviewees stated that Golf Clubs' advertisements on the roadsides and in email have awaken "aha-effects".

Furthermore, advertising should be repetitive to slower forgetting, but varying enough to prevent wear out (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010, 114). Still, the interviewees point out, that the marketing from Golf Clubs is almost nonexistent: the only advertisements they remember seeing were weekly newsletters, few roadside and Facebook advertisements and some few marketing efforts through different communities, like an ice hockey league and a school committee. This is in line with the marketing of Aulanko Golf, as it only does marketing via weekly newsletters for the club members and few advertisements on newspapers at the beginning of golf season. They do have accounts on Facebook and Instagram, but they have not collected information on the spread and mostly use it for sharing information and pictures from events. Aulanko Golf also does face-to-face marketing by going to schools to promote golf and by working together with the nearby spa-hotel.

Social media marketing is most effective among the young social media-oriented consumers (Kumar et al 2016, 8). It is also ideal for communicating with consumer and is starting to replace the use of traditional communication media for some consumers (O'Brien 2011, 34-36). Accordingly, the interviewees point out, that they would be most likely to notice an advertisement in social media, more precisely in Instagram or YouTube. In Instagram, a beautiful scenery picture or video would make them interested and more so if the whole Instagram profile is visually pleasing and coherent. In YouTube, they mention to pay attention to video advertising as they often cannot be skipped. Two of them also mention to search for golfing videos in YouTube and two of them mention following golf related Instagram pages. Only one of the interviewees mention Facebook as a good platform for marketing, but Facebook is used to look for reviews and more information about the Golf Clubs.

The organization should appoint someone responsible for social media marketing, as personified communication is found more attractive and persuasive (O'Brien 2011, 38-39). Every interviewed prospect highlighted the importance of professional looking advertisements in a right place at a right time. The ones responsible for marketing should have certain set of skills, as Day (1999, 14) describes they need to be able to

read, evaluate and react to markets in order to succeed. With an appointed, skilled social media representative, the social media sites could be created coherent, visually pleasing and informative in order to promote desirable brand image among the consumers. Furthermore, it would make the marketing more accessible and add a real life touch to it with personality to make it more appealing to consumers (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 120-121).

For the advertising to stand out from competition, it must be relevant for the consumer (Sthal et al. 2012, 59) and create a specific, differentiative image of the service (Schiffman, Kanuk et al. 2010, 192). The interviewees mention, that when they see an advertisement about golfing, they are more likely to notify it because it is an important subject for them. What they say to be looking from the advertisement, is a reason why they should play in that specific Golf Club. The reasons they name are an affordable price, reachable location, an interesting event and beautiful golfing fields with a good atmosphere. These are relevant for the consumer and should be identified from the advertisement with ease, as the interviewees state that they are prompt to lose their interest if they must start searching for this information. If the price and location are suitable for them, they look at the differentiative aspects: what interesting aspects does this Club have to offer compared to others. As O'Brien (2011, 37) states, consumers act more openly to communication that shares their needs and interests. Few of the interviewed prospects also mention the importance of timing: they are most likely not to pay attention to a golf advertisement during Wintertime or late Fall. According to Sashi et al. (2019, 1266) best time for social media marketing is during the day and not too late.

To create a working marketing strategy, the organization must identify its advantages in competition, decide on the segments, how to target them and what positioning it will aim for (Mooradian et al. 2014, 49-77). According to the CEO, biggest advantage in competition is the name Aulanko, as it has long golfing history. To support this insight, two out of five interviewed prospects had heard of Aulanko before and linked it to golfing. Adding to that, the two fields Aulanko Golf has, are versatile in scenery and features, well taken care of and the Club house has many services with a restaurant that has been voted to be the best among Finnish Golf Clubs. These features are in

line with the values stated above and are advantages in competition. Because of the small marketing budget, targeting could be done by using clever keywords for the pictures and videos to get better visibility when the target group searches for golf related material in Google, Instagram and YouTube. Targeting can also be done by going to events and places where the target croup is, like schools and different communities. The positioning should aim to trigger the prospects' motives. There are many tools to evaluate the marketing strategy, like the marketing mix and SMART technique mentioned earlier.

As the set target group is not very precise, marketing shouldn't be very generalizing unless the target group is first divided into even smaller niches. As said, in targeting, profiling the consumers and predicting their response behavior is important (Perkins 2015, 118-119; Tillmanns et al. 2017, 102). As appointed, at the moment, the target group consists of golfers aged 19-29 living in Southern and Mid-Finland. As there are no more congruent distinctives, targeting can be quite challenging: at that age, some are still studying as some are already in work life, some already have a family while some live alone. Even if Aulanko Golf can use the values found in this research in target marketing, it could be beneficial to further profile the target group.

4.3. How to profit from using external acquisition incentives

External acquisition incentives were described by Rhouma and Zaccour (2017, 2610) as every acquisition method that is not marketing. This research handles WOM as a non-marketing incentive and discusses events as a part of it. The meaning of events was mentioned in the interview by the CEO as a way to get attention, interest and customers, with relatively low costs. Furthermore, according to Williams and Buttle (2011, 87), corporate events endorse positive WOM messages.

To organize a successful event, the organization must understand the target audience's needs, wants and what they enjoy (Perkins 2015, 116, 270). The interview for the prospects treated the needs, wants and pleasures by asking what their golfing event of dreams would be like. It was noticeable, how the core values of golf were

present in the results. First, everyone mentioned that it would be a competition. It would have good awards for different successful performances, but rather than being serious competition it would be more fun and relaxed played with a pair or a group preferably chosen by themselves so they could play with their friends. Second, it would not only be a competition: four mentioned that there should be activities alongside the competition for the audience and players, for example smaller pre games, teaching or stands for presenting new golfing gears and the future markets of golf. Few also mention having some performance after competition or charity event with famous people. Also, a lunch and sauna after competition were mentioned. The value of tranquility comes up as many mentions that the fields should not be too crowded. Young golfers should be included in organizing these events, as according to Storey and Larbig (2018, 19), the latent needs of customers are best seen when working together with customers and by observing them, as surveys can't be relied to uncover them.

Villanueva et al. (2007, 49) highlighted the operations and services as a source of positive WOM. The interviews supported this insight throughout the interviews, as the young golfers mentioned the importance of quality services in the club: friendly employees, good restaurant services and club facilities, and friendly atmosphere were mentioned several times by every interviewed prospect. These are all in line with the values of the club. However, most crucial aspect seemed to be the condition and features of the golfing fields. It can be drawn from the interviews, that the prospects do not necessarily have a need to play somewhere else than in their own club. However, good recommendations of a club can have them try another Club. Other reasons for trying another Club are the need of variation, going together with friends, beautiful scenery, a cheap price and a good location.

As the trust in traditional advertising has diminished, Hanson and Kalyanam (2007, 257) points out that WOM is found the most reliable and convincing source of information. It is also very easy today as social media has made it independent from place and time (O'Brien 2011, 32). According to the interviews of prospects, WOM about Clubs is very easy to find and as the marketing is as minimal as described earlier, decisions on Golf Clubs are often made solely by WOM information. The interviewees

stated, that sharing both positive and negative experiences from different clubs is very common and easy among golfers. Apparently, they give very straight forward information on the features of the fields, quality of Club services, prices and the atmosphere. The most discussed aspect is, however, the condition of the fields. The interviewees note, that if you cannot get enough information from other golfers, it is easy to find from Facebook.

According to Wong et al. (2015, 315-316), using celebrities in marketing has big influence among young consumers. However, the results from the interviewees are applying that young golfers might not be as vulnerable for influencer marketing as most of them do not follow any golf influencers in social media. One follows Tiger Woods, and one follows a Finnish female professional golfer, but apparently only because she is a big influencer in the interviewees home Club. Overall, young golfers seem to be more interested in success stories from their own Clubs than about golf influencers in general. This is in line with Wangenheim and Bayón (2007, 247) research, that working together with people visible among consumers is positive for WOM. This for Aulanko Golf could use the clubs' own success stories to spread positive WOM.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This Bachelor's Thesis was a qualitative case study on different ways of customer acquisition for a Golf Club in a saturated niche market. The research started with a short introduction, stating the reasons for the research, the goals and the outlines. After, the research presented different theories and researches around the theme. Material was collected with two different interviews: one for the CEO of the organization and five for representatives of the target group. The research continued by presenting the methodologies used in the study and the materials collected with the interviews. Furthermore, the research presents the findings from the interviews supported by the different theories and researches of the topic.

The findings from the interviews were almost entirely supported by the previous researches. The appeared contradictions were reasonably explicable by the distinctiveness of the target group and of the market. It was found that the target group seems to have quite similar values on golf and those values were looked after in marketing communication, events and offered services and remembered as best golf related memories. The target group does not seem to have a need to play in other Clubs' fields than their own, but the research was able to name some aspects that could make the members of the target group play in the case organizations fields. Marketing among Golf Club's is very light, but the research proves that there are potential ways to improve it with minor costs in order to differentiate from the competition. Most of the customer acquisition now lies on the power of heavy word-of-mouth marketing. There are however possibilities for the case organization to guide the WOM messages in order to attract more customers.

By answering to the sub-questions, the research will be able to give an answer for the main question of the research. The main question was: *How could Aulanko Golf attract young golfers to play on their fields?* There are several possibilities for the case organization to improve their customer acquisition and attract young people into their golf fields. As the customer acquisition can be divided into internal and external incentives, the sub-questions were formed accordingly.

The first sub-question was about the values and motives young golfers share in golf and how are they in line with the Club's offering. By getting to know the values, Aulanko Golf can plan the acquisition to correspond with the prospects' values. There were three main values among the prospects, that were present in almost every question in the interviews: sociality, feeling of success and tranquility. The motives were in line with the values as the values were also the main reasons to play golf. The Club's values were very similar to these, put with a bit different emphasis. Aulanko Golf should pay attention to these values when planning the operations, providing services and creating marketing messages, as these are a great part of customer attraction.

The second sub-question was about the internal incentives of customer acquisition: how young golfers feel about golf related marketing and how could it be more effective. The feelings toward marketing were quite neutral as it turned out that there is practically no marketing at all. The marketing efforts that the prospects had encountered left them a feeling of amateurish advertising with poor targeting efforts, bad pictures and spamming with price offers. However, as golf was important for the prospects, they shared an interest in quality marketing communication. They highlighted social media as a channel of communication and Instagram and YouTube were drawn to be the most effective ones. Even if Facebook was not actively used by the prospects, it was the main media for searching for more information about the Club and to see the golf communities' opinions about it. Most importantly, the advertisements should catch their eye and give them a reason to leave their home field. Marketing should consist of visually pleasing pictures and short, scenery videos with warm and welcoming atmosphere and basic information of the Club. Furthermore, marketing through communities and face-to-face was also found compelling. To be able to fulfill these expectations, the organization should create a good marketing strategy and have one skilled person responsible for the implementation.

The final question was about the external incentives of acquisition, on how the organization could use them to attract more customers. As the WOM has a huge role among young golfers, the company should try to guide it. Maybe most important is to organize the operations and communication according to the prospects' values, to enable the customers to experience the tranquility, sociality and success. As the

condition of the fields and quality of the services were most talked about among young golfers, they must be taken care of very cautiously. Like this, Aulanko Golf can effect on the nature of WOM communication. Furthermore, as both positive and negative WOM is very beneficial for the organizations, Aulanko Golf should guide the customers to give feedback and create good conditions for the used platforms for the community to share information. One possibility for the organization to provoke WOM communication is by organizing successful events. For the event to be successful, it would be good to include some representatives of the target group to the planning process. There was interest among the prospects for a casual competition: there should be awards for different performances, the players should be able to choose their partner or group by themselves and it should have something extra for the players and audience, like different mini games, teaching, food, stands or a performance. Also, a charity game with celebrities was mentioned.

As the thesis states from the beginning, golf is most popular among older generations. There are not so many young golfers and the competition of them is heavy in the saturated markets. These young golfers hold great value for the Golf Clubs as they are the future of golf. The findings from the thesis are practical mostly for the case organization, as it offers good propositions on how to acquire these young golfers. However, the results can be profitable for other Golf Clubs as well as the findings can be generated for their use too. Otherwise, this research can help to set a way on how to further study customer acquisition and how could a manager create a plan for customer acquisition.

However, for further customer acquisition, there should also be innovations that are not created together with the customers. Storey and Larbig (2018, 18) prove this in their research stating that concept transformations created with customers did not have significant effect on success as the process was biased by customers inability to think outside the existing frames on success. Also, the organization should follow trigger events that had the consumers react on the advertisement during the marketing attempts, to better understand consumer behavior (Hanson & Kalyanam 2007, 316-319). Because it is crucial for successful marketing to know the customers buying habits and motives, (Andotra 2007, 182) there should be further, broader research on

them to get the best out of acquisition. As the research points out the values and motives, a quantitative research would give better intel on the consumers traits, buying habits and motives diminishing the effects of generalization. It is important to study the consumers acting in purchasing and the purchasing patterns to get the full potential from acquisition (Badgett & Stone 2005, 111) With a survey, it would be possible to create quantified, comparable answers from a larger point of view (Brinkmann 2013, 19)

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: The interview questions for the CEO

1. Kuinka klubin markkinointia hoidetaan? *How is the marketing managed in the Club?*
   - kuka, missä, mitä, miten, milloin? *Who, where, what, when and how?*
2. *Mitä eri asiakassegmenttejä klubilla on ja miten ne huomioidaan mahdollisesti markkinoinnissa? What different consumer segments does the Club have and how are they acknowledged marketing-vice?*
3. *Millaista asemointia asiakkaiden mielissä tavoitellaan? What is the positioning the Club aims for among golfers?*
4. *Kuvailisitko asiakaskuntaanne? Can you describe your clientele?*
5. *Voisitko kuvailla brändinne ympärille muodostunutta yhteisöä? Can you describe the brand community in the Club?*
6. *Voisitteko kuvailla golfyhteisöä Suomessa ylipäänsä? Can you describe the golfing community in Finland?*
   - *Kuinka iso, kuinka yhtenäinen, kuinka informatiivinen? How big, how tight, how informative?*
7. Mitkä ovat klubinne arvot? *What are the Clubs values?*
8. Mikä on klubinne missio? *What is the mission of the Club?*
9. *Mitkä ovat klubinne tunnusmaisimmat piirteet kilpailullisessa ympäristössä? What are the most distinctive traits the Club holds in competitive environment?*
10. *Mitkä tahot ovat vastuussa erilaisten tapahtumien järjestämisestä ja onko niiden huomattu vaikuttavan asiakaskuntaan? Who are responsible for organizing different events and competitions and does these events affect your clientele?*

Appendix 2: The interview questions for the target group

1. Minkä ikäisenä aloitit golfaamaan ja mikä sai sinut aloittamaan sen? *How old were you when you first started playing golf and what inspired you to start it?*

2. Kuinka usein golfaat ja kuinka intensiivisesti? *How often and how intensively do you play golf?*

3. Mitkä asiat ovat sinulle tärkeimpiä golfissa ja miksi? *What matters for you the most in golf and why?*

4. Voisitko kuvailla parhaita muistojasi golfiin liittyen? *Can you describe your best golf related memories?*

5. Oletko pelannut muiden klubien kentillä? Miksi ei / Millä perusteella päädyit tälle kentälle? *Have you ever played golf in other fields than your Club's? Why not? / How did you end up playing in that field precisely?*

6. Mitkä tekijät motivoivat sinut lähtemään golfaamaan? *What motivates you to go to the golfing fields?*

7. Kuvitellaan, että olet lähdössä viettämään päivää golfauksen merkeissä. Mitkä asiat tekisivät päivästäsi täydellisen? *Imagine you are going to spend your day in the golfing fields. What are the things making your day perfect?*

8. Kuinka helposti jaatte golfaaja kaveriporukoissa positiivisia tai negatiivisia kokemuksia pelipäiviltänne? *How actively do you share negative or positive experiences from your golfing days to your golfing friends?*

9. Oletko törmännyt muiden golf klubien mainoksiin tai markkinointiin ja missä? *Have you encountered advertising or marketing from other golf clubs or fields and if so, where?*

   a. Mitä/mikä niistä on jäänyt mieleen? *What has been memorable in the advertisements?*

   b. Miten suhtaudut muiden kenttien mainostamiseen vai katsotko niitä ollenkaan? *What are your feelings towards other Club's advertising to you, or do you look at them at all?*

   c. Mihin asioihin kiinnität huomiota mainonnassa? *What are the things you look for in advertising?*

d. Millaiseen mainokseen varmimmin tarttuisit? *What kind of advertisement would you most likely react to?*

e. Missä kanavassa huomioisit mainoksen todennäköisimmin? *In which platform would you be most likely to notice an advertisement?*

10. Kuinka aktiivisesti seuraat somessa omaa / muita klubeja? *How actively do you follow your Club or other Clubs in social media?*

11. Seuraatko golfaavia julkimoita? *Do you follow any golfing influencers?*

12. Jos sinun pitäisi pitää pieni mainospuhe saadaksesi uusi golfaaja tuttavasi pelaamaan suosikki kentällesi, mitä sanoisit? *If you should convince your new golfing acquaintance to play on your favorite field, what would you say?*

13. Osallistutko golf-tapahtumiin? Millaisiin / miksi ei? *Do you take part in different golfing events? If yes, what kind? If not, why?*

14. Millainen olisi sinun unelmiesi golf-tapahtuma? *How would you describe the golf-event of your dreams?*

15. Oletko koskaan kuullut Aulanko Golfista ja jos olet, niin mitä? *Have you ever heard of Aulanko Golf, and if yes, what?*