



XXLofoten: Marketing-innovation for an SME during Covid-19

Karianne Klovning

Lokaritgerð til BA gráðu í ferðamálafræði

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***XXLofoten: Marketing-innovation for an SME
during Covid-19***

Karianne Klovning

050398-3319

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(Gústaf Gústafsson)

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XXLofoten: Marketing-innovation for an SME during Covid-19

XXLofoten: Nýsköpun í markaðsmálum í litlum og meðalstórum fyrirtækjum á tímum Covid-19

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Ísland

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Abstract

The Norwegian tourism industry faced tremendous challenges when Covid-19 led to closed borders and strict travel restrictions in early spring of 2020, causing drastic changes in the external environment of many business of the service industry. Adapting to these changes had to happen overnight, while not having control over the infection situation. The prognoses for the upcoming tourism season in Norway looked rather hopeless and unmotivating, and the closed borders in early stages forced SMEs of Norway adapt to new main target markets. The work behind this paper was conducted in the middle of probably one of the toughest periods tourism has ever seen and is a result of six weeks of desperately trying out a variety of different strategies to receive any interest of purchase. Limited literature is to be found on how to market your tourism business during a pandemic which prohibits you from traveling, forcing the work to be affected by slowly getting familiar with the situation and adapting to the drastic changes through addressing changes in consumer behavior and putting strategies to life in terms of how to reach out to the consumer through marketing-innovation.

Keywords: Covid-19, marketing, innovation, tourism, social media

Útdráttur

Norsk ferðaþjónusta stóð frammi fyrir gríðarlegum áskorunum þegar Covid-19 leiddi til lokaðra landamæra og strangra ferðatakmarkana snemma vors 2020. Þetta olli róttækum breytingum á ytra umhverfi margra þjónustufyrirtækja. Aðlögun varð að gerast á einni nóttu og án þess að hafa neina stjórn á aðstæðum. Spálíkön fyrir komandi háannatíma í ferðaþjónustu í Noregi voru ekki hvetjandi og lokuð landamæri í upphafi faraldursins neyddu lítil og meðalstór fyrirtæki til þess að horfa til annarra markaða. Vinnan á bak við þessa ritgerð fór fram á einhverju erfiðasta tímabili sem ferðaþjónustan hefur nokkru sinni staðið frammi fyrir og eru niðurstöðurnar árangur sex vikna af örvæntingarfullum tilraunum til að vekja áhuga fólks á að kaupa þjónustu ferðaþjónustufyrirtækis. Mjög takmarkaðar heimildir er að finna um hvernig hægt er að markaðssetja ferðaþjónustufyrirtæki í heimsfaraldri sem kemur í veg fyrir ferðalög. Þannig varð allt markaðsstarf óhjákvæmilega litað af því að fyrirtæki voru að kynnast nýjum aðstæðum hægt og bítandi. Þau þurftu að laga sig að róttækum breytingum í neytendahegðun og móta stefnu hvað varðar hvernig hægt er að ná til neytandans með nýsköpun í markaðsstarfi.

Lykilorð: Covid-19, markaðsmál, nýsköpun, ferðamál, samfélagsmiðlar

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I would like to thank Trygve and XXLofoten for welcoming me to becoming a part of the difficult situation they were facing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in May and June of 2020, and still are facing when completing this paper in May 2021. The trust and freedom I were given encouraged me to work very hard within exploring, researching, creating and experimenting with strategies and actions in the desperate attempt of increasing activity levels within the company. Thank you Mariell for so openly sharing your great knowledge and experience, in addition to sharing your work throughout the pandemic for me to use in this paper.

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1 Introduction

When getting close to rounding up my second year of studying tourism the spring of 2020, I had gained confidence on my own knowledge and started to feel ready to in just a bit more than a year, hopefully enter a full-time career within the industry. I had been lucky enough to lay behind a fantastic summer season as a tour guide in tourism in Lofoten, Northern Norway and did not doubt a second that this was the right career choice for me. Never had it struck my mind that a natural disaster like Covid-19 could ruin the industry as brutally and suddenly as it did.

When Covid-19 for real affected north of Europe in March 2020 I made the sudden decision of heading home to Norway from Iceland instead of waiting until the school year was over. Being at home close to my family felt right and safe but being in lockdown and hearing all the negative news of bankruptcy, hopelessness and naturally people receiving and passing away from the virus, definitely had its impact on me. Later, in April, I had a conversation with the CEO of XXLofoten, Trygve, regarding the upcoming summer and the outlooks for my summer job, which naturally were highly uncertain as everything else at this stage. Throughout the conversation I suddenly got an idea. I had during this spring semester decided that I wanted to finish my education (one year later) by doing the internship and internship report option to gain relevant experiences for when starting a tourism career. I therefore asked Trygve right away if it could be an option having me over as an internship student in marketing and innovation (as I also had early decided on that approach), but that I had to ask if it would be okay as the work period normally takes place the very last semester of the education program. Trygve said they were ready to welcome me anytime and I also that same day received a green light from the university. I felt confident about my choice in terms of the pandemic-impacted timing and immediately started noting down ideas and payed close attention to marketing trends and practices that had taken place in terms of the pandemic.

XXLofoten is a business very close to my heart, and a main motivation for requesting this company to be the place of my internship was highly motivated by a strong desire to help and contribute throughout the severely difficult times the pandemic brought them. Aimed

was previously for an internship in Iceland to gain experiences also within Icelandic tourism, meaning my internship and finished paper would have looked quite differently if there would be no pandemic. The chosen topic of marketing and innovation was to me, regardless of a pandemic and where in the world the work would take place, a natural choice for a variety of reasons: I run my own business on the fifth year, making both marketing a significant part of receiving new clients, building and maintaining relations, and innovation for staying attractive and maintain the interest of both new and old clients. Second, I did marketing classes in high school and have very much enjoyed the tourism-adapted marketing classes we have done throughout this university program. And lastly; I have always had a massive creativity living inside of me, which I often put to life through photography, art, words and music, all of this which can frequently be used in marketing and innovation. Not only putting behind me a highly rewarding internship, I continued to explore the areas of modern marketing and innovation and gained through passionate interest a lot of great inspiration for what my final paper would mainly aim to investigate.

After eagerly collecting my considered suitable topics, I struggled with narrowing it down so that it would be of suitable scale for the paper. Then, after great assistance from my supervisor Gústaf, I finally found an aim perfect for my gatherings and experiences throughout the six weeks of internship done in early summer of 2020, resulting in the following research question: *How can an SME adapt to Covid-19 through marketing-innovation?* This research question will be answered through the next main chapters of addressing external and internal environment, findings of research supported by secondary literature and evaluations of the work done during the internship in regard to the content of the paper.

2 External & internal environment

2.1 TOURISM IN THE ARCTIC

Arctic tourism destinations have experienced significant growth in rather recent years (Bystrowska & Dawson, 2017; Saarinen & Varnajot, 2019), despite their rather long history of tourism (Hall & Johnston, 1995; Saarinen & Varnajot, 2019). Today there are great diversities of local and regional actors found in the inhabited Arctic (Keskitalo, 2007; Saarinen & Varnajot, 2019). Typical known motivations for visiting arctic destinations are the open spaces, extreme environments and adventurous expeditions (Hall & Johnston, 1995; Hall & Saarinen, 2010b; Saarinen & Varnajot, 2019). Tourism in arctic and Nordic countries therefore frequently emphasizes nature, therefore nature-based activities are not a rare sight within these destinations (Hall et al., 2009; Jóhannesson et al., 2010; Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2010; Sæþórsdóttir, 2010; Huijbens, 2014). Nature-based tourism holds the branch of *adventure tourism* (Beedie, 2003; Buckley, 2010; Pomfret, 2006; Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003; Sigurðardóttir & Helgadóttir, 2015) focusing on elements such as outdoor experiences, excitement and adrenaline rushes (Bucley, 2010; Imboden, 2012; Page, 2007; Swarbrooke et al., 2003; Sigurðardóttir & Helgadóttir, 2015).

Norway holds per 4th quarter of 2020 a population of 5,39 million (SSB, 2020) and in 2019 the Norwegian tourism sector employed around 154 000 people, an increase of 42 % since year 2010. The Norwegian tourism sector the year of 2019 was valued NOK 228 billion, the highest number in history and was expected to continue its increase also through the following years (Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020).

2.2 THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS



Figure 1: Satellite map over Norway (Sweden, Finland & Estonia), Satellite map over Lofoten. © Google Maps.

Lofoten is an archipelago located in the Arctic Northern Norway (picture 1) between 67° and 68° North and holds a population of around 25 000 (Kaltenborn, Linnell & Gómez-Baggethun, 2020). This archipelago is considered one of the most spectacular tourism destinations in the world, with the main reasons being the unique landscapes with steep, picturesque mountains, rich oceans, white beaches and narrow fjords. Svolvær is the largest town and therefore regional capital, inhabiting around 4500 people. Tourism has become a highly important factor for the local economy, estimated to together with the neighboring region Vesterålen in 2013 to generate about 40 million euros annually (Enger et al., 2013; Kaltenborn, Linnell & Gómez-Baggethun, 2020), a number which based on the large increase in visitor numbers, has doubtlessly increased the following years. During normal times Lofoten is an all-year, roaring destination with several attributes of both accommodation, dining and activities, and a big share of the visitors of the islands use the town as a base for their round trips in the archipelago. Foreign tourists visit the islands all year for the different purposes of watching the northern lights, the midnight sun, and generally to experience the versatile nature that is to be found there.



Picture 2: Sakrisøy, Lofoten (own photo).

2.3 XXLOFOTEN A/S – AN SME

XXLofoten A/S is an SME (small-medium sized enterprise) located in Svolvær, which today can count as one of the most profitable nature-based adventure tourism providers in Northern Norway (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021). The company has five all-year employees but recruits several seasonal workers and freelancers throughout the summer season and other high seasons such as the Lofoten fisheries in March and April. The company has three main ocean-based activities which are scheduled all year; zodiac-safaris with sea eagles, sea kayaking and fishing trips. The company also offers private guided trips for hiking and sightseeing, and scheduled trips for businesses and partners. The company is a familiar name in the regional tourism sector and do collaborations with several local accommodation providers and both domestic and international tour operators (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021). XXLofoten was established in year 2005 and has since then experienced great increases in both profit and activity. The CEO of XXLofoten is today Trygve Steen, who has been on the front end of the company since July 2017 and my supervisor for the internship.

2.4 MARKETING, INNOVATION & MARKETING-INNOVATION

Marketing is considered the main factor to success for businesses considering it being the main channel between them and their customers, and where the goal is to promote products to increase sales and commitment (Thabit & Raewf, 2018). Throughout modern times, successful marketing has perceived a shift from being product-oriented to customer-oriented whereas the focus lies close to singularly on identifying and satisfying customer needs (Kotler & Levy, 1969; Goldsmith, 1999; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Park, 2014). The strength of consumer preferences is large and unpredictable, and the need to fulfill them is crucial to gain profit. The award-receiving work of Kohli & Jaworski (1990) and Narver & Slater (1990) on marketing centered their theories around that marketing orientation is the need to get close to the customer (Foreman, 2003). Developing long-term customer loyalty through marketing, aims to increase traffic and to build relationships with consumers to make sure customers can be converted into profitable partners (Foreman, 2003). Digital marketing has until recent years been considered suitable for small-scale businesses of limited budgets, which however today is something all businesses should engage in due to the frequent use of digital services among the global population (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019). The development of technology, especially considering the high power of social media, has therefore made fundamental changes in the ways of marketing and promotion (Park, 2014). Marketing in our current time period is highly based on online, creative, innovative content, which by the marketing platform of HubSpot is defined as *every piece of content that creatively conveys your message and tells your story to prospective customers* (HubSpot, 2021, 3).

Social media (SM) is considered and confirmed a main advertising strategy in our modern times (Fondevilla-Gascón, Polo-López, Rom-Rodríguez & Mir-Bernal, 2020) being a grand marketing channel which allows brands to communicate with consumers while advertising (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019). A SM platform is described as a digital environment where users can send and receive digital information and content including text, audio, images and videos, over a social network (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019). This digital world has introduced a whole new marketing approach with new, effective and persuasive techniques (Hajli, 2015, Alghizzawi et al., 2018), and SM has due to its

significant part of a big share of the world citizens' lives greatly impacted both consumer behavior and marketing practices (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019). Attention is a highly limited resource (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010, Agapito, de Almedia & Campos, 2016), perhaps especially on SM as standards and demands are drastically increasing, meaning that marketing needs to follow this development. Tourism is considered having been greatly impacted by extended use of SM, whereas a large share of consumers uses SM to find inspiration for their travels (Fondevilla-Gascón, Polo-López, Rom-Rodríguez & Mir-Bernal, 2020).

Innovation is also known as a very important aspect of tourism and plays an important role within most kinds of entrepreneurship to maintain an attractive contribute to the market (Ateljevic & Page, 2009). Innovation includes a minor or major change in a business (Afuah, 2003) whereas it can introduce for example lower costs, improvement of products or bring completely new products into the market, changes which should have their origin in market knowledge (Afuah, 2003). The process of innovation can therefore happen within a market or internally within a company, as the main focus is the improving change working for each individual company. Competitive advantage is gained through innovation and is lost if not maintained while competitors continuously practice innovative processes (Afuah, 2003). Marketing-innovation (innovation within marketing) aims to connect with consumers on new levels, often including new ways of promotion (Kahn, 2018). It involves creating awareness around the brand and its products so that it gets better recognized for its uniqueness in the market (Kahn, 2018). Greater emphasis should always be put on holistic strategies which is consumer oriented rather than promotional and revenue-focused, even though the goal of marketing strictly is to make and increase profits (Park, 2014).

2.5 COVID-19 IN NORWAY 2020

The first person in Norway was diagnosed with Covid-19 the 26th of February 2020 (Kolberg, Olsson & Elster, 2020; Mjåset, 2020), right after many returned home from their winter break abroad (Helsedirektoratet, 2020; Mjåseth, 2020). The 12th of March was the day of closing down big parts of the countries, including closed schools and shops (Elstad, Jansson & Døving, 2020) and has become a date many Norwegians combine with the day it

for real began. New cases escalated in fast pace, especially between day 25 and 40 after first confirmed case (FHI, 2020; Moges Menebo, 2020). It was early known that the travel and tourism was one of the most severely impacted sectors (Elstad, Jansson & Døving, 2020) and traveling was completely banned in the early spring. Some regions or municipalities demanded quarantines for those coming from outside their borders, and people were also denied visiting their own holiday home. May 14th the health authorities released a changed approach to domestic travels going from banned to being advised against, showing a gradual change in people's attitudes towards traveling after two months of closed societies. From the 15th of June inhabitants of the Nordic countries were excepted from quarantine, and national tourists were encouraged to travel domestically (Helsedirektoratet, 2020). Results of a spring in lockdown therefore turned the profits of the Norwegian tourism sector close to 80 % lower in April 2020 than April 2019 (Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020).

3 Literature review

Tourism and travel is considered the single most pandemic-impacted sector of the global economy (Lew, Cheer, Haywood & Salazar, 2020) and SMEs often suffer greatly from economic turndowns due to limited financial resources (Bourletidis & Triantafyllopoulos, 2014). Still, Penrose (2000) claims crises to be both threats and opportunities, for example when forced to develop alternative marketing strategies (Bourletidis & Triantafyllopoulos, 2014). Marketing had to change and adapt almost overnight (Taylor, 2020) and challenges have been in regard to marketing an industry that is globally on hold. Innovation can therefore be considered an highly important attribute when it comes to gaining competitive advantage (Thabit & Raewf, 2018) and for a company to provide attractive contributes to the market (Ateljevic & Page, 2009). Consumer behavior gets affected by factors as environmental and economic conditions and contexts (Foreman, 2003), whereas the pandemic have made grand changes within both (Sheth, 2020). Early it was expected that the summer of 2020 would have to be spent locally or domestically (Lew, Cheer, Haywood, Brouder & Salazar, 2020), forcing businesses globally to aim for new main target markets and while facing a crisis and trying to maintain their business (Bourletidis & Triantafyllopoulos, 2014). Adapting to changed environmental conditions is often of short-

term nature due to desperate attempts of adaptation (Bourletidis & Triantafyllopoulos, 2014) but through seeing the crisis as an opportunity can result in innovative processes within a company for long-term outcomes (HubSpot, 2021).

4 Methodology

4.1 RESEARCH METHODS

The research question aimed to investigate is: *How can an SME adapt to Covid-19 through marketing-innovation?*

Due to the main focus of explaining what was done to adapt to the changed external circumstances of May and June 2020, an explanatory case study method was chosen to qualitatively identify the case of this specific company (Morse, 1991). The research design includes a three-stage process; 1) analysis of literature, 2) data collection in form of a post-internship interview and experiences and collections from throughout the internship, and 3) analysis and evaluation of the work done in relation to literature and accomplishments.

The paper therefore makes frequent use of both primary and secondary data. The secondary literature used for the paper aims to investigate modern marketing and innovation theory, which is in constant change, in addition to literature exploring effects of Covid-19. Therefore, the secondary literature used is recent and updated. Due to the investigation of a specific case, reflecting the basic nature of case studies, this study carries a qualitative approach which might be considered suitable for the investigation of the specific methods used within one individual company and not generally. Throughout the internship several methods and strategies were attempted, whereas some will be presented in the paper together with supporting literature.

An interview was done for data collection aiming for professional opinions on and information on the strategies used for the unique case of the company, in addition to receiving statistical information from the company IT manager, Kenneth Greger-Pettersen,

over e-mail. The main interview object for this paper was Mariell Hagen, manager of sales and marketing in XXLofoten A/S. The interview was of a semi-structured nature, suitable in terms of the fixed questions looking to gain concrete answers, but which were also open to further elaboration and added information from the interview object. The interview was done over telephone due to both the limitations in terms of social distancing and the currently hectic working days of the interview object planning the summer and closing future deals. As the interview did not look for emotions or feelings and rather looked for facts and information, the consideration of relying on audio was not stated a limitation compared to physical presence. The purpose of the interview is to receive professional opinions and information on the business handling the Covid-19 situation to support my internship work and provide extensive information for the paper.

4.2 PREPARING THE STUDY

A brief marketing plan was constructed early in the internship of May 2020, at a stage of high uncertainties in regard to the time ahead. The plan was therefore not constructed into detail but rather kept as a motivator and guide throughout the period. The plan carried a main aim of differentiating the company from competitors and encourage bookings through marketing-innovation. At the end of this paper, the marketing plan have been evaluated in terms of success of the actual work done throughout the internship, how it has been guiding the process of answering the research questions. Two SWOT-analyses were constructed to be able to compare the different attributes which are normally present and those being a result of the pandemic. Both the marketing plan and SWOT-analyses functioned as great support for the work done through being reminders on the strengths and challenges of the company, and where focus should be centered throughout the whole working period. Both the marketing plan and SWOT-analyses will be referred to throughout the following sections of the paper and added as appendixes to provide their specific content.

As mentioned, the study and following sections of results and discussion is built on individual work within a company in a highly uncertain and unfamiliar situation. The research bases on concrete actions and plans within marketing-innovation which were done adapted to the specific case and situation of a tourism SME in Northern Norway.

5 Findings

5.1 PREPARING FOR AND ADAPTING TO A NEW CUSTOMER BASE

XXLofoten was totally closed for tourism activity for 10 weeks; from March 12th to early June, but the staff from early April started to work extremely hard to try to close deals and payed close attention to governmental restrictions and whether anything could be of slightest possibility to go through with (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021). It was early expected that Covid-19 would drastically change the traveling habits of people and take a closer look at what is available locally and domestically (Lew, Cheer, Haywood, Brouder & Salazar, 2020). The changes in the customer base was a known fact to the company from early stages of the pandemic and that aiming for a national market forced the marketing procedure and product portfolio to go through a reconsideration. Firstly, new sub-markets had to be discovered within the limit of the Norwegian market segment. Market segmentation is an action of dividing a total or sub-market in to be able to create groups to be targeted effectively (Misiura, 2006, 79; Park, 2014). Segmentation can base on for example demographic, socio-economic, cultural or psychographic customer information. Market segmentation has been criticized as singularly revenue oriented (Tsiotsou & Vasaoti, 2006; Park, 2014), but when facing a pandemic and dealing with great economic losses, increasing revenue is an obvious aim. Throughout prior summer months, the share of domestic guests to the activities of XXLofoten has been around 50% (K. Greger-Pettersen, phone interview, 28.02.2021). Hence, domestic tourists have not originally been a main aim in terms of marketing, as they normally book directly through the company website or on-site, while international visitors make frequent use of external booking channels (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021). A couple of issues were therefore identified and discussed within the company in terms of adapting when segmenting the Norwegian domestic market:

- **The largest share of Norwegians (and therefore domestic tourism base) live in the southern part of the country, and in early May it was not even sure if they would be able to travel domestically.**

- **Domestic tourists have throughout the times of XXLofoten shown a low willingness to *pay* for nature-based activities (which on a local and regional level has been considered totally absent)**
- **There has been a rather low interest among domestic and especially regional tourists for attending organized nature activities due to the desire of managing by themselves**
- **The pandemic has as known had negative, economic effects on a large number of people. Transport and accommodation is expensive, making the room for paid activities smaller.**

The issues were taken into consideration throughout the construction of the marketing plan and SWOT-analyses, and when implementing the strategy of marketing mix presented a couple of sections down.

5.1.1 Digital audiences

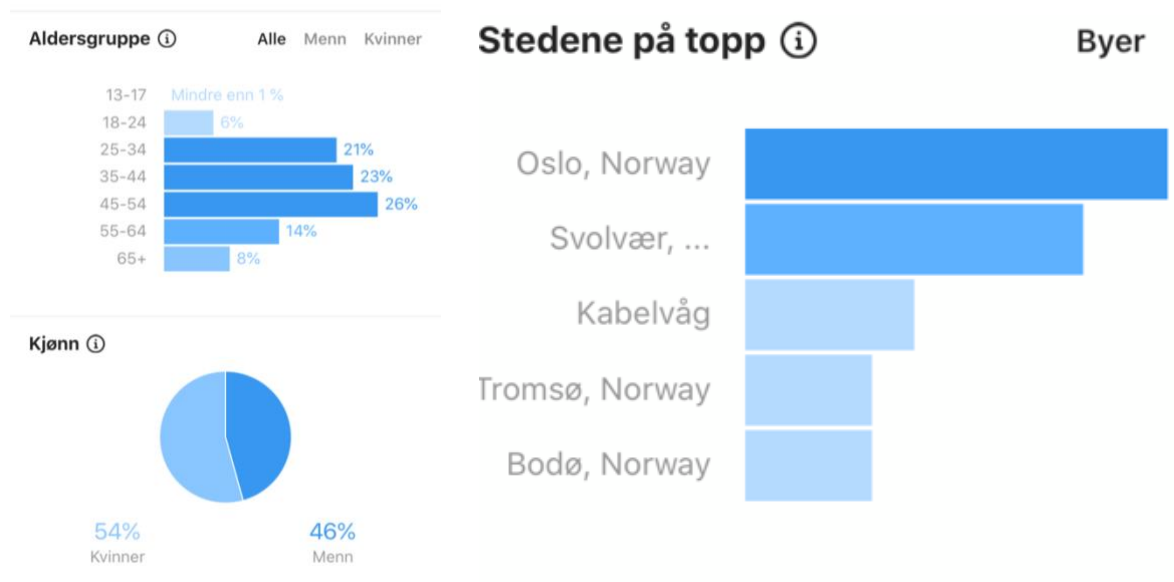


Figure 3: Audience details from Instagram, May 2020.

A great advantage of the current modern SM platforms is the opportunities of segmenting and locating target audiences due to specific demographic and socio-demographic

information provided within several platforms (Fondevilla-Gascón, Polo-López, Rom-Rodríguez & Mir-Bernal, 2020). The main digital platform used for the purpose of the internship is Instagram which provides great measuring tools and information on current audiences. The Instagram audience of XXLofoten carried by early May 2020 the following attributes as seen on Figure 3. It is considered convenient that the already large share of Norwegian audiences on the platform, a percentage share which were not able to be provided at the time, but which did not matter due to the listed cities holding the majority of the following were singularly situated within the borders of Norway. Due to the aim for Norwegian citizens, considered was a change in the communication language from English to Norwegian to more easily appeal to the Norwegian target group, as this was something many other large businesses did. However, I kept having the feeling that this will not last forever and it is important to make sure that the international audience does not feel excluded as we will depend a lot on them when the world opens up again. Among the Norwegian audience, most people were situated in the capital of Oslo, whereas two local Lofoten towns are next, followed by the two largest cities in Northern Norway. The capital city of Oslo early turned a solid target area both due to the large number of inhabitants and therefore possible customers, considering their large share of our national social media audience, and in terms of the pandemic many urban citizens in Norway have communicated their desire for nature space after having gone through strict social restrictions for months. Still, Oslo and the surrounding areas carried the by far the largest numbers of infections as per 3rd of May 2020 with 4487 out of 7809 domestic cases (FHI, 2020; Moges Menebo, 2020).

The divide between men (46%) and women (54%) were very equal, with the main age group being 45-55 years. The divide of men and women is quite equal, with 54 % of the total audience being women. This Instagram audience turned out to be a highly relevant target group, whereas this age group is often represented by established people of steady incomes, which is relevant for an adventure tourism provider. Still, domestic tourists visiting and planning to visit Lofoten functioned as one large target group whereas the global situation did not make room for picking and choosing.

5.2 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Lockdowns and social distancing resulting from Covid-19 has generated large impacts on consumer behavior (Sheth, 2020), which also counts for the large-scale use of SM which has highly influenced both consumer behavior and marketing practices (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019). *While consumption is habitual it is also contextual* (Sheth, 2020, 280). Four major contexts are claimed to have major impacts on consumer behavior being changes in 1) social contexts, 2) technology, 3) rules and regulations, and 4) natural disasters (Sheth, 2020). For the current case of the pandemic, there has been contextual changes within all four of the mentioned categories and which should all be taken into consideration when marketing the business:

- The social context for most people has changed in terms of less physical social contact and for example time spent in-store shopping. Many have experienced an increased desire for social contact and have therefore seek this through online social platforms (Hussain, 2020).
- There has been increased use of modern technology, in the shape of for example social media and video communication services (Sheth, 2020). Spending more time at home has made people more available throughout the day, which have for example resulted in increased interests in livestreams which also can be a successful approach to marketing (HubSpot, 2021).
- Rules and regulations have hindered the social context of humans in functioning as regular, such as travel- and social restrictions which up until June 2020 hindered domestic people from attending different of activities
- Natural disasters as epidemics for sure have their impacts on consumer behavior, and when it is global like Covid-19, it turns out likely to have its impact on all suggested major contexts of consumer behavior.

Using SM has become such an integrated part of the daily life of the consumers (Sheth, 2020). A major change is that the customer less and less goes to a physical store due to the development of technology (a change which also has significantly been emphasized due to the pandemic), and today the store often finds the customer online through individually adapted practices based on online behavior (Sheth, 2020). Potential customers should

therefore be monitored closely to achieve efficiency and effectivity in direct online marketing, as consumer behavior varies with changes in for example environmental and economic conditions and contexts (Foreman, 2003). On social media there are possibilities of getting great insights in the general behavior of our audience. Large differences can be within posting schedules in terms of when the audience is the most active, which is the time you should be posting to gain the most attention from it. Figure 2 shows the most active hours of the specific Instagram audience of XXLofoten, meaning the hours around 9 p.m. carry many online users within the audience. This was taken into consideration in the work of content posting throughout the internship, showing noticeable differences compared to content posted on earlier hours of the day.

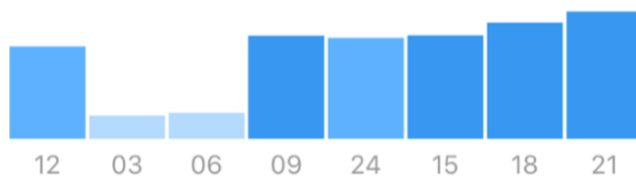


Figure 4: Audience activity on the XXLofoten Instagram account.

5.2.1 The Buying Process

The buying process represents the steps from when a consumer realizes a need or a problem, to purchase and after-purchase behavior. With every purchase there are social and economic risks, which in regard to the consumer will change its buying behavior (Store Norske Leksikon, 2020). The buying process consists of five stages:



Figure 5: The Buying Process. © Julie Askew, Fundamentals of Marketing

<https://julieaskewblog.wordpress.com/marketing-principles/competitive-advantage/>

The need for recognition / realizing the need for a product occurs when exposed to marketing, leading to further information search which therefore need to be available. Frambach et. al (2007) refers to convenience being shown to have an effect on consumers' choice of channels as ease and speed within the buying process of gathering information and purchase of the product is an advantage, reflecting in the statement of Keeney (1999) that the consumer desires to consume the product with as little effort as possible (Gensler, Verhoef & Böhm, 2012). The stage of evaluation of alternative is where competitive advantage becomes extremely important to be able to differentiate from others (Thabit & Raewf, 2018) so that the decision becomes you and not the competitors offering lower prices or more appealing products (which will be further discussed in the following section of marketing mix). Delivering a product that meets the needs of the customer is also highly important to obtain satisfaction and whether it will be further recommended to others (Store Norske Leksikon, 2020).

5.3 MARKETING MIX

Marketing mix (also known as the 4 Ps) is a strategy considered the most important in the current modern marketing era, originally introduced by McCarthy (1981) (Park, 2014). The strategy contains a group of variables used to pursue marketing objectives in their specific target market, in addition to gain insight on the business' own competitive advantage (Thabit & Raewf, 2018). Hudson (2008) argues the usefulness of four additional Ps including *people*, *physical assets*, *process* and *personalization* (Park, 2014), but which despite of their specific adaptation for service sectors, are left out in this paper.

5.3.1 Product

The product is the main element of marketing mix as the other variables builds on the product or service of the business (Singh, 2012; Thabit & Raewf, 2018). Product expectations are increasing among travelers in search for uniqueness, meaning it takes more and more to fulfill the expectations of travelers (Smith & Puczko, 2014). XXLofoten offers a variety of products, but which in itself are not unique for the local tourism sector. Kayaking, fishing

trips and zodiac safaris can be purchased with competitors and therefore it is important to use product differentiation in terms of why XXLofoten would be the best company to provide the consumer these experiences. The local knowledge and storytelling, authenticity and nostalgia of the 100-year-old fishing boat, and the secret kayaking spots therefore became among others strongly emphasized and communicated in marketing.

Product development or innovation can be considered being of key importance also in most other industries (Hujibens, 2014), and can be in the shape of new products, but also improvement or adjustments to already existing ones (Kahn, 2018). Innovation therefore includes in large extents realizing opportunities and taking advantage of them (Gössling & Mattsson, 2002; Tew & Barbeiri, 2012; Hjalager, Kwiatkowski, Larsen & Østervig, 2017). Covid-19 gave many businesses the opportunity of realizing a need of product innovation, both in terms of product improvement and adapting to new markets. In the wake of desperation, every product offered in XXLofoten was re-evaluated and analyzed for further possible development and use for when the travel ban would end. The main issue and hinder of the already existing products were the possibility of practicing social distancing during the activities. For the zodiac safaris, guests would be closer than half a meter to each other in addition to wearing the same overall suits (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021). This being the largest and most profitable activity made the question of innovation highly important. It took several weeks to come to the conclusion of offering full-face covering masks and disinfectant spray for the suits to make the product being able to be offered like normally. Up for discussions were also the possibilities of starting to offer new, innovative products that would be specifically adapted to domestic tourists and that would not already be offered in the local environment such as beach snorkeling, weekly kayaking for retired locals, local food experiences in nature, and more. During discussions, thinking and frustration and as the society opened more and more; bookings, requests and guests started showing up, making the time of change and innovation highly limited. Hence, the result ended up being similar for all three main products – offered as per usual but naturally with more focus on infection control, with product innovation forced aside for now.

Even though product innovation had to be set aside, XXLofoten made collaborations with a couple of other local businesses, for example a hotel situated a couple of hundred meters down the harbor. One part of the collaboration was packaged prices containing both

activities, dining and accommodation, or discounted prices of either an activity or accommodation when purchasing an activity or accommodation. A basic aim of collaboration is to achieve goals that otherwise could be hard to obtain (Di Benedetto, Lindgreen, Storgaard, & Clarke, 2019, Crick & Crick, 2020), and packaging in tourism is considered important in helping to smooth out seasonality of visitor volumes (Morrison, 2010; Morrison, 2019). The interview object adds on that throughout the pandemic the collaborations were mainly about staying together and trying to get the best of each other through a drastically harmed tourism season, and which for the future can generate close bonds between the tourism providers of Svolve (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021).

5.3.2 Price

Price is what can be known as the value charged for any product or service (Borden & Marshall, 1959; Thabit & Raewf, 2018). Pricing is a critical decision as it impacts the demand of the product and profitability of the business (Singh, 2012; Thabit & Raewf, 2018) as consumers will aim to buy the product for the lowest price (Balasubramanian et al., 2005; Hamilton & Chernev, 2010; Gensler, Verhoef & Böhm, 2012). Priciness has been listed as a weakness in the SWOT-analysis both in the normal and pandemic context, which was highly discussed back and forth whether or not to lower the price down. Massive cut of costs is still considered a short-term initiative which can be in the position of damaging long-term growth potential (Bourletidis & Triantafyllopoulos, 2014). A study done by *NHO Reiseliv* (e. Norwegian Hospitality Association for tourism) for the summer season of 2020 showed that 72% of Norwegians would prioritize nature experiences and other free activities, which reflected the familiarity of different domestic money spending of Norwegians than when on international holidays (Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020). Beedie (2003) also argues that locals are unlikely to pay for activities that can be done by themselves (Beedie, 2003), which has also for a long time been anticipated in the regional tourism sector of Lofoten. NHO Reiseliv predicted a trend of increased prices due to the lost income and high costs, questioning whether or not domestic tourists would be willing to pay those prices (Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020). Still, similar to the absence of product change and innovation within XXLofoten, price ended up being kept original due to the sudden hit of domestic tourists who showed an unexpected willingness of doing scheduled activities. However, it was opened for family- and group discounts as a pricing and marketing strategy. Comforting

people about price and guarantees has been a common strategy among businesses during the pandemic (Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020). High-risk actions such as air travel, accommodation across municipality borders and scheduled activities has demanded alternative possibilities as open purchases guaranteeing the money back if restrictions would hinder attending the activity. Practiced was therefore open cancellation up until 24 hours of tour departure. Keeping the price as before therefore demanded emphasizing the other parts of marketing mix, such as making sure and communicating that the uniqueness of the product would be worth the price.

5.3.3 Place

Place promotion is bound up with systematic presentation of the tourism activity within the sector (Williams, 2009, 193; Park, 2014). The promoted images of an activity or a business play a crucial role in decision making (Park, 2014), and therefore it has to be available at suitable places where a deal of purchase can be made. As earlier mentioned, the consumer desires to consume the product with as little effort as possible (Keeney, 1999; Gensler, Verhoef & Böhm, 2012) meaning the product needs to be easily available. A large contextual change in the consumer market through the pandemic as mentioned in earlier sections is that *the store comes home* similar to home-office work or school (Sheth, 2020, 281). As this was considered an outcome not possible as a physical service provider, it was instead taken advantage of in terms of showcasing through marketing; for example, doing live streams so that consumers could receive digital nature experiences directly home to their smart phone. In early May when the internship period started, we as known did not even know whether or not there would be any traveling activity throughout the summer season. However, the 5th of June, the government signaled that the 15th of June, the travel bans would repeal, even for Nordic residents (which still were not significantly present until later in the summer). After this day, XXLofoten all of a sudden received large numbers of requests and bookings for the entire summer ahead (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021), and important was to clearly communicate the newly established campaigns and discounts and make them visible on relevant channels. After 15th of June, when the domestic tourists started arriving, direct sales at the head office and direct online bookings through the company website turned, as expected from the domestic market, the main place of orders (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021).

In terms of place when considering geographic location, XXLofoten is conveniently situated in the middle of the harbor in the regional capital Svolvær; but perhaps most important of all was the convenience of the location for this particular summer season. Already in May 2020, it was identified that around 10 % of all Norwegians considered it likely that they would visit the Lofoten Islands in the upcoming summer season (Ipsos, 2020). Additionally; one of the strengths listed in the SWOT-analysis was the well-established name of the company within the regional tourism sector, making many searching directly for XXLofoten when looking for activities for their Lofoten holiday (M. Hagen, 16 March.2021).

5.3.4 Promotion

With product being the most important element of marketing mix; promotion is claimed the strongest one (Thabit & Raewf, 2018). Its main purpose is to concretize the product image to the market zone, where strategies determine the positioning of the product in the target market. Promotion plays a large role in the buying process as it is often what makes the consumer realize its needs, which is further what leads the consumer through the process of purchase (Store Norske Leksikon, 2020). Promotion was my main task throughout the internship. Attention is a scarce resource (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010, Agapito, de Almedia & Campos, 2016) and a big aim listed in the marketing plan was to start creating modern and consumer-oriented content to catch great attention from audience and potential guests. Even though XXLofoten has been successful in establishing a name within the regional tourism sector and engages with many grand, international clients, the social media platforms have not been of frequent use throughout the years. The Instagram and Facebook profile of XXLofoten has included inconsistent, low quality and unplanned content mainly aiming to spread information and promote products. This has resulted in very low audience engagement despite a decent number of followings. The social links of the company hence was in need of SM marketing-innovation.

When entering the managing of the Instagram account, I did simple steps within making the page more professional looking: I changed the profile picture from a low visibility scenery picture to the two X's of the company logo, changed from personal to business profile, and changed the written details of the profile as Instagram is to be counted also as a search engine (HubSpot, 2021). A business profile makes you able to get an insight into you audience and

monitor your posts in terms of how much engagement they are generating. I spent a lot of time early in the internship collecting media in shape of photos and videos for use both on SM, brochures, websites and online campaigns. A large focus from the marketing plan was to decrease the sales-talk, shifting into showing the human side of the brand and creating a more relatable tone and authentic connection with the audience – a strategy that is expected to continue to increase in marketing and promotion (HubSpot, 2021). The promotion was highly affected by just showing the world that we are here. We are still kayaking, going fishing and spending time in nature, and the only thing stopping you (the audience) from participating is the travel-banning pandemic and closed borders, encouraging dreams of visiting the location of the SM content as soon as the situation would allow.

“The biggest challenge for brands is to look for new ways to create innovative content that will stand out and stop their followers from scrolling.”

Mireille Ryan, CEO – Social Media Marketing Institute (HubSpot, 2021).

When Facebook and Twitter were introduced to the world as the first social media platforms, the posts were texts, and more and more pictures were introduced as smart phones and new platforms started occurring (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019). For our current time, video is by far what raises the most engagement in social media where short, eye-catching video campaigns are of relevant significance (Battisby, 2021; HubSpot, 2021). SM is in our modern times claimed to have a large influence on decision making (Alghizzawi et al., 2018), meaning that producing marketing content that differentiates your company from competitors is a clever strategy, and perhaps especially in the context of a pandemic. Content on SM also helps the business build trust with customers in shape of connecting with new potential customers and sustaining contact with existing or previous customers. Reaching out to new potential customers and sustaining contact with the audience being considered a post-purchase service were considered equally important as customer experiences in the virtual world is considered a strategic investment (Sheth, 2020). Going through a pandemic as a tourism provider made the contact with previous customers highly valuable through sharing memories and with many expressing a desire of returning when seeing content being posted. Content is expected to be consistent and high-quality, and according to a study done by HubSpot; consistent brand presentations on different platform has globally shown to increase revenue on average by 23% (HubSpot, 2021).

A consumer-oriented shift was also done in the media usage of XXLofoten both online and physically. From previously showing pictures of the fishing boat or big groups of kayakers, we changed these to pictures showing the perspective of the customer – what the customer can expect when purchasing a trip with this company. This shift was both done for the on-site physical promotion outside the head office, where all the three main activities are showcased on individual signs next to the harbor walking area, and for the pictures used on the company website and other external booking channels. With it being impossible to measure whether this had an impact on the buying, it still made the overall appearance on all mentioned platforms more professional looking and appealing and hopefully encouraged the stage of the need of recognition.

5.4 MARKETING DURING COVID-19

The pandemic is claimed to represent one of the most major environmental changes in the history of modern marketing through having large impacts among others marketing philosophy (He & Harris, 2020). The pandemic has generated significantly increased use of SM platforms, including Facebook and Instagram (Sheth, 2020), meaning businesses should make efforts in becoming even more visible. Developing and maintaining customer relationships is considered valuable in social sustainability within a business (Park, 2014). An opportunity in marketing was to enhance positive emotions between the negative ones of fear and anxiety in terms of the pandemic, and thereby *hope* was an emotion most people desired (He & Harris, 2020). For the inhabitants of Lofoten, hope was quite largely found in being able to freely spend time in the surrounding nature. Several live streams were conducted throughout the internship which was a new concept to the company, and which have been a trend during the pandemic and believed to increase further into 2021 and beyond (Keller, 2021; HubSpot, 2021). With people living in lockdown in mind, showing the views from a kayak on a sunny day with silent surroundings and crystal-clear water gained a lot of attention from people worldwide wishing they were there. Viewership of livestreams has in February 2021 risen by 50% only since the start of 2020 (Khaja, 2021; HubSpot, 2021), showing the value it has had for people throughout the pandemic.

SM has been considered having negative impact on wellbeing; with excessive use having proved to lead to social isolation, loneliness and depression in some cases (Kross et al., 2013; Primack et al., 2017; Steers et al., 2014; Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019). However, SM has been claimed to carry the role of spreading positivity and making people feel less alone throughout social distancing and isolation caused by Covid-19 (Hussain, 2020) and several businesses has used this as a marketing opportunity while sustaining contact with customers throughout difficult times (Pinto, 2021; HubSpot, 2021). Health personnel and political leaders have additionally actively used social media to reach out to large-scale target audiences (Hussain, 2020). Marketing is as stated in the literature review, expected to continue to be affected by Covid-19 also when entering a post-pandemic phase (Bullock, 2021; HubSpot, 2021).

In addition to the 4 Ps, the 4 Cs (*community, contactless, cleanliness, compassion*) were gathered into a business model throughout Covid-19 (HubSpot, 2021). In the wake of the pandemic, it is anticipated that customers are far less likely to seek your product in person, and for example for a tour operator this adapt to the following consumer behavior: They research the product or service and their reviews and content before deciding on whether or not to spend money on the specific brand (HubSpot, 2021). Due to the fact that physical meetups are essential for an activity provider; it was put great focus on communicating that the pandemic was taken seriously in XXLofoten both when welcoming the customers and within marketing, as hygiene has after Covid-19 increased significantly in importance when it comes do decision making (Arora et al., 2020). In addition to showing our policies of contactless payment and procedure, and the cleanliness of both surroundings and procedures, we also shared the feeling of community through that we were in it together, and expressed compassion of those who had to cancel their scheduled activity (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021).

5.5 THE SUMMER SEASON OF 2020

According to the literature review; SMEs were considered being the most impacted by crisis due to limited financial resources (Bourletidis & Triantafyllopoulos, 2014), but enterprises of all sizes globally have been severely impacted by the pandemic, with tourism by far being one of the most harmed industries (Elstad, Jansson & Døving, 2020). Predictions from May 2020 showed that an unchanged domestic travel behavior of Norwegians from the summer

season 2019 would generate a -40 % decline of the total high-season profit. Increased domestic travels of Norwegians could get this decline down to -26%, while opening the borders to the rest of Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Germany was considered to be better saving the tourism sector through a decline of -7%. A total opening for international entry was considered the only action for saving the summer season in terms of lost profits (Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020). The Norwegian tourism sector of 2020 was anticipated to best-case receive a -20% decrease in profit from the year before, and worst-case -52% due to covid-impacts (Fjose et al., 2020; Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020). XXLofoten received a - 24,89 % decrease in year 2020 compared to 2019 (K. Greger-Pettersen, phone interview, 20.04.2021), which based on the anticipations of Fjose et al. (2020) shows a rather fortunate number compared to the worst-case numbers.

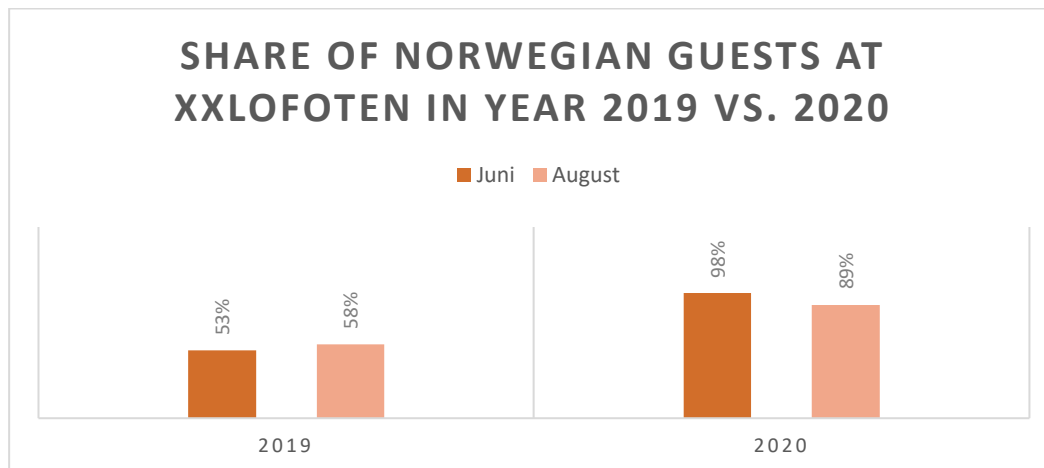


Figure 6: Share of Norwegian guests at XXLofoten in year 2019 vs. 2020.

As shown in figure 6: In June 2019 XXLofoten welcomed a number of visitors whereas the share of Norwegians equaled 53 %. In June 2020 the share was 98 % (K. Greger-Pettersen, phone interview, February 2021). What was seen throughout the summer was that when August arrived, the share went down to 89 % compared to 58 % in August 2019 (K. Greger-Pettersen, phone interview, 28.02.2021). July showed similar numbers to June for both years. The high number of domestic guests from June 2020 was not unexpected, and we were happy to welcome an increased number of international tourists throughout the summer season. In July 2020, XXLofoten despite this reached their highest month revenue in the history (figure 7), this with 97 % of the guests being of Norwegian nationality (K. Greger-Pettersen, phone interview, 28.02.2021). This was highly unexpected and motivating, even though this single

month cannot by far make up for the grand losses the company still is facing as the pandemic still causes closed borders and large restrictions.

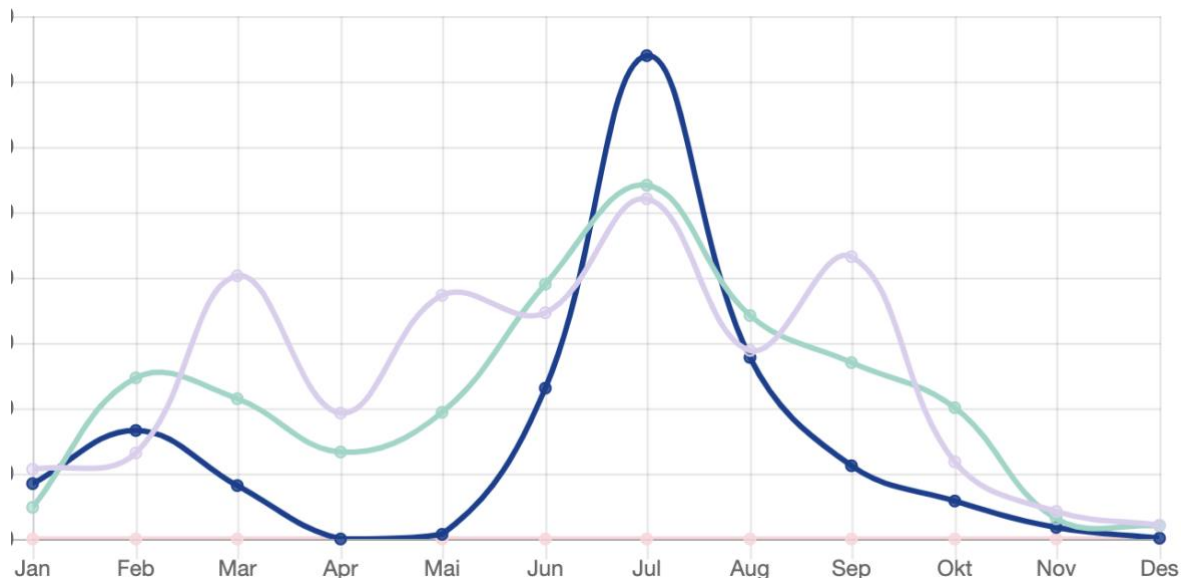


Figure 7: Accumulation 2020 (blue), 2019 (green) and 2018 (purple). © XXLofoten, Bilberry.com.

5.6 MARKETING-INNOVATION: EVALUATING THE MARKETING PLAN

As earlier stated, the marketing plan was not constructed into great detail due to the uncertain situation and constantly changing external environments. Still, the main aim of the marketing plan was using marketing-innovation with the aim of standing out from competitors in a time where every neighboring tourism business was facing the same challenging situation. As SM was such a big part of the internship and is such a big part of modern marketing, using it to reach marketing-innovation was an easy and confident choice. Kotler & Levy already in 1969 identified the need for consumer-orientation in sales and marketing (Park, 2014), but still there still seems to be many brands which do not make this their main aim within marketing on SM. The marketing that was done during my time in the internship and beyond, was largely consumer oriented in terms of showing activities from the perspective of the guest and revealing the human and authentic side of the brand. The focus on SM for this internship is considered suitable to the situation due to the fact that domestic tourists do not make use of external booking channels (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021), making the focus rather

aiming for good visibility and consumer-oriented marketing to a SM platform mainly consisting of the target group of people situated in Norway.

A big advantage of using modern SM channels for businesses is the great features of specifically measuring the action and engagement of your posts (Fondevilla-Gascón, Polo-López, Rom-Rodríguez & Mir-Bernal, 2020). It is difficult to measure results within how the interaction on SM generates sales within the company, but many both requests and arrived guests referred to locations or activities they had seen on SM, and one single photo generated alone 5 website-clicks the 20th of May 2020. Brands should pay attention to their content that gets the most engagement and understand why the consumers engaged especially with that type of content (Garnett, 2021; HubSpot, 2021). As earlier mentioned, video is considered a desire type of content in SM, and short, authentic videos gain great engagement and attention both people obviously planning to visit Lofoten, and for those who had to keep dreaming of open borders. The work around the marketing plan therefore showed great results in terms of large increases in SM engagement, a development which later on also has shown to continuously increase. Interesting was to see the great response and the audience coming alive with consumer-oriented content instead of sales-oriented, which again showed great results in terms of website-clicks through Instagram and direct requests through Facebook Messenger.

There was a general assumption in the local area that Norwegians / locals in general were not likely to engage in or pay for activities as per several assumptions and previous experiences. Price turned out to be a significantly smaller challenge than first anticipated, as the domestic guests showed great interest in and willingness to pay for leisure activities. Promotion turned from being sales to consumer-oriented, an innovative turn within the marketing strategies of XXLofoten. Products remained unchanged and turned out to be of great interest for the domestic tourists who for years have been anticipated unlikely to pay for nature-based activities. The offered discounts were not even taken as great of an advantage of as anticipated (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021). Place was geographically a fantastic ascendancy, while the use of external booking channels was set aside to the advantage of great shares and high engagement on online and on-site sales. Hence, the marketing-innovation turned out to be not forced to take prices into consideration, while consumer-oriented promotion through SM and main website together with being highly conveniently

located, turned the summer season an uplifting and comforting period to both XXLofoten and the atmosphere of the Lofoten Islands.

All in all, the activity of the summer season 2020 was not too different for XXLofoten except from the change in customer base and adapting to their behavior, and increased focus on infection control, and no major changes were therefore made at this point. However, for XXLofoten turning the approach of marketing to be as consumer oriented as possible was an innovative change which showed noticeable results within the online engagement with the audience and which also is believed to have contributed to the first stage of the buying process of realizing a need. This approach to marketing has been continued to be followed also after ended internship, whereas I have continued to be in charge of the social media channels of XXLofoten. Learning along the way and becoming better in understanding consumer behavior and the desires of the audience has given great results and the company today has lively social media channels which increases in activity day by day. Being in a similar situation at the time of writing, the spring of 2021; we are hoping that the marketing approach of XXLofoten can help in differentiating from other companies also for the uncertain upcoming summer season.

5.7 FUTURE OUTLOOKS

On May 3rd 2020, the first day of the internship, the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Norway were 7809 (FHI, 2020; Moges Menebo, 2020). May 2nd 2021, days before completing this paper, the number is 113 259 (FHI, 2021). The pandemic was at early stages set to have major long-lasting economic, social, political and cultural impacts (He & Harris, 2020), but it is clear that literature from early stages of the pandemic are influenced by hopes of it being under great control by the summer of 2021. An example is anticipating that the restaurant sector would again reach 2019 leveled revenue the winter of 2021 (Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020). This shows the great uncertainty of the extent of the pandemic, considering in the spring of 2021 we are situated at a much more serious and comprehensive stage of the pandemic than one year ago. The domestic markets were per May 2020 anticipated to stabilize by the end of 2022 (Sandvik, Tuftin & Jakobsen, 2020), which is just

a matter of time to discover. Still, the pandemic is believed to change how people see the world and conduct their lives (He & Harris, 2020) and have its impact on how we travel (Lew, Cheer, Haywood & Salazar, 2020). Hence, it is important to remain focused on maintaining infection controls and communicate this to the market, for example in the shape of the 4 Cs (HubSpot, 2021).

Advertising on social media continues to be explored (Gordon et al., 2019; Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019) and the focus always comes down to understanding and adapting to the consumer behavior on the different ones to turn attention to action in terms of purchase. Marketing will continue to be affected by Covid-19 due to how it is affecting absolutely everyone's life, and hence it should be taken into considerations also when entering a post-pandemic phase (Bullock, 2021; HubSpot, 2021). Marketing-innovation within the markets is difficult to obtain in a world where audiences have "seen it all", but most important is the significance of marketing-innovation and optimalization within individual businesses. Similar for both pre- and post-pandemic practices is that people use social media to find inspiration for their travels (Fondevilla-Gascón, Polo-López, Rom-Rodríguez & Mir-Bernal, 2020), making it possibly crucial for businesses to take advantage of.

XXLofoten experienced an unexpectedly successful summer season the summer of 2020. However, the flow of guests turned to a sudden but predicted end in August, and the work of adapting to the unusual environment continued. Continued is to focus on adapting to national markets, but also being prepared for the international ones both for the summer to come and for the foreseeable future (M. Hagen, 16 March 2021).

6 Conclusion

Covid-19 has generated severe changes both in traveling habits, consumer behavior and marketing approaches. Marketing-innovation played a significant role in differentiating from competitors who all were all operating within the same markets throughout the summer of 2020. While writing this paper in the spring of 2021, the situation is quite similar to the year before, in terms of that the outlooks for the upcoming tourism summer season is as uncertain as it was one year ago. Still, marketing-innovation continues to stay highly relevant and will continue to be a practice for many businesses.

When reading through my internship diary, I see that a lot of the time was spent on discussing, reflecting, questioning and talking about why, what and how. That is understandable due to the fast-changing restrictions, unfamiliarity with the extent of the virus and pandemic. The internship period was therefore strongly affected by uncertainty, hopelessness and desperation. The business was at a stage where one was forced to try out a wide variety of strategies which most failed and did not generate any results, but some also turned out successful, which my supervisor so wisely claimed to be a big part of marketing. Experiencing this and getting to try out a wide variety of methods and strategies has definitely been of help within getting more familiar within the marketing world and how one needs to be creative, especially in times like these where you do not even know if the targeted consumers are permitted to visit you.

All work within the internship was proceeded by a genuine desire to contribute and help a company situated in a hopeless situation. For me it was highly inspiring to take part in such an educational journey in adapting to the drastically changed circumstances that the pandemic brought to us all, making great efforts within staying positive in times of bad outlooks. I have continued to practice marketing-innovation both within my own business and for XXLofoten, and interesting will be to follow along on innovative marketing practices that will take place also for the future.

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