



Louvain School of Management and Vytautas Magnus University

Building a Travel Influencer Brand Using Instagram Tools

Research Master's Thesis submitted by
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FOREWORD

The whole idea of this Master's thesis would not have been possible if it was not for the lectures of Dr. Lector Justinas Kisieliauskas. Thanks to his efforts in inspiring his students, it motivated me to try and create my own influencer trademark *Traveler's Child*. The creation of it lead me to getting deeper involved and seeing the challenges that exists on Instagram social media channel. This is what made me believe that analyzing branding on Instagram is a topic worthy to be emphasized by the scholars.

Afterwards I was honored that the same person, who inspired me to start this journey, agreed to become my supervisor and guided me towards reaching this result, which is this diploma paper. For that, I am incredibly thankful.

I also want to express my gratitude for my supervisor in Louvain School of Management Prof. Pierre Semal, for helping me in the time of need and sharing his experience towards increasing the quality of this diploma paper.

Then, I want to thank my *fiancée* Laura, who was my endless source of inspiration and strength during my time in Belgium. In addition, she is someone without whom *Traveler's Child* would not be possible and probably would have been gone from existence long time ago. It is hard to put in words how much I appreciate your love, support and contribution towards the decisions and ideas I make. Two of us is the best team I can think of!

Last, but most importantly, I want to thank my wonderful parents, who are an eternal source of wisdom and who seem to get smarter and smarter with each year I get older. If it was not for their love, patience, as well as, brave and sometimes harsh decisions, I would have never reached this stage of my life.

Thank you!

Paulius Bakanauskas

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SANTRAUKA

Baigiamojo darbo autorius:	Paulius Bakanauskas
Pilnas baigiamojo darbo pavadinimas:	Kelionių nuomonės lyderio prekės ženklo kūrimas naudojantis naudojant Instagram įrankius
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Šio tyrimo tikslas yra pristatyti modelį nurodantį, kokius Instagram įrankius turėtų naudoti naujai susikūrus kelionių nuomonės lyderio prekės vardas tam, jog sukurtų neapčiuopiamas vertybes reikalingas tapti prekės ženklu.

Teorinėje šio darbo dalyje atliekama literatūros analizė, kurios metu, remiantis vietinių ir užsienio autorių publikacijomis, išskiriama: skirtumai tarp prekės vardo ir prekės ženklo; prekės ženklo kūrimas; socialinės medijos ir Instagram; kelionių industrijos fenomenas.

Antroje darbo dalyje pristatomi tyrimų rezultatai, kuriuose buvo analizuojami žymūs kelionių nuomonės lyderių prekės ženklai, jų vartotojai ir kelionių nuomonės lyderių prekės vardas *Traveler's Child*, sukurtas šio diplominio darbo autoriaus. Taip pat pristatomi vizualinio turinio tipai, leidžiantys išskirstyti turinį, kurį publikavo prekės ženklai, vartotojai ir prekės vardas.

Paskutinėje darbo dalyje pristatomos rekomendacijos kelionių nuomonės lyderių prekės vardų savininkams kaip atlikti prekės ženklo kūrimą, naudojant Instagram įrankius tam, jog sukurti neapčiuopiamas vertybes reikalingas prekės vardui tapti prekės ženklu.

ABSTRACT

Author of diploma paper:	Paulius Bakanauskas
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The aim of this diploma paper is to present the model of what Instagram tools should a newly created travel influencer trademark use in order to create values to become a brand.

The theoretical part of this paper contains literature analysis of differences between trademark and brand; branding; social media and Instagram; travel industry phenomenon written by different authors.

The second part of this paper contains results of the research of travel influencer brands and the results of a travel influencer trademark created by the author *Traveler's Child*. In addition, types of visual content are introduced in order to differentiate content posted by brands and trademark.

The last part of this paper contains the recommendations for travel influencer trademark owners on how to process through branding stages, while using Instagram tools in order to achieve the creation of intangible values, which allows a trademark to become a brand.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Blog - the earliest type of social media, it is mostly text based and it allows users to write about their personal life, represent opinions or share ideas. (Takoka, 2017)

Blogging - (e.g., Blogger) - social media platforms (blogs) for users to create written or video content that other users can read, view, share, and comment. (Takoka, 2017)

Brand – name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers; customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas. (AMA)

Brand associations – this is what the organization wants to stand for in costumers mind (Aaker, 1996).

Brand Co-creation – a phenomenon visible in social media era, when both company and its customers contributes towards brand creation. An outcome of *crowdculture*.

Brand's Engagement with Customers – activities including commenting, liking posts of other users and following their accounts.

Brand Equity - a set of qualities a brand adds to the value of the product or service (Aaker, 1996).

Brand Identity System – branding process stage, which analyzes brand development.

Brand Implementation System – a last step in branding process dedicated to seeing if the previous stages of the process were successful.

Brand Loyalty – it is shows how valuable the brand is to customers (Aaker, 1996).

Brand Position – a part of brand identity and value proposition in which it is necessary to communicate these concepts to target audiences in order to demonstrate the advantages over competing brands (D. Aaker, 1996).

Branding (Building a Brand) – a set of processes which results the creation of intangible values, which allow the trademark to become a brand.

Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia) – the type of social media which allows users to gather and publish information in groups and in other cases, to rate information, in order to help other users to get information, which seems more relevant for a particular group. (Takoka, 2017)

Content communities (e.g., YouTube) – the type of social media that allows users the exchange of media like videos, images or text. (Takoka, 2017)

Content curation (e.g., Pinterest) – platforms like databases, which allow their users to access content from various other sources, which could be shared on their other social media networks. (K. Takoka, 2017)

Crowdculture – a result of social media and the power it gave to ordinary customers to be heard. This power allows customers became the ones who start the discussions about the brands and not the other way around (Brown, 2010).

Customer (Consumer) – someone who uses the services or products provided by a brand or trademark.

Engagement Rate – in Instagram case, it is a rate, which shows how engaged the customers are with content produced by a brand or a trademark. This rate is calculated by dividing the sum of a contents likes and comments by the number of followers a brand or a trademark has.

Follower – a customer (consumer) and a social media user, who follows a brand, a trademark or a person on a designated social media page.

Hashtag – is a # sign, which allows to assign a particular content to particular theme or category.

Influencer - endorsers who are independent and shape audience attitudes through different types of media (Freberg et al., 2011).

Influencer Marketing – activity during which influencers are paid by brands or trademark in order to promote their products or services on their social media channels.

Intangible values – values that are gained during the branding process, which separated a brand form a trademark.

Live streaming (e.g., Periscope) – social media platforms for their users to broadcast and watch live videos, both - from their computers and smartphones for 24 hours when the live streaming is being removed from the platform automatically. (Takoka, 2017)

Marketing - activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (American Marketing Association, n.d.).

Messenger (e.g., Viber) – platforms for mobile applications, created to be used as a tool for communication with a close circle of people. (Takoka, 2017)

Microblogging (e.g., Twitter) - the kind of platforms with a limited number of characters for one post for users to share their content and information in short messages. (K. Takoka, 2017)

Perceived quality – usually the main dimension of positioning for brands to show their advantage over the competition (Aaker, 1996).

Photo sharing social media platform (e.g., Instagram) - the social media platforms which allows users to easily share visual content with their community on computers, a mobile applications on smartphones or tablets. (Takoka, 2017)

Search Engine – an internet web page, which allows users to find the information they wish to find.

Shout-Out by Social Media User – a process during which one social media user when posting content mentions other social media user in order to provide attention for it.

Social Influence – an influence type, which is measured by gained followers on social media pages by a social influencer.

Social Media - computer-mediated technologies that allow users to create and share information, ideas and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks (Obar, Wildman, 2015).

Social Media Page – a brand or a trademark that uses social media website or platform.

Social Media User – a person of a social media website or platform.

Social Media Website (Social Media Platform) – a webpage that has the characteristics of social media.

Social Network (e.g. Facebook) – the type of social media that allows users to create their personal profiles, share information like pictures, videos, send messages and most importantly, gather into communities. (Takoka, 2017)

Social news (e.g., Digg) – the platforms for sharing news and articles in the users' community or network, allowing content to rate by other users, making the highest rated content easier to see for the others. (Takoka, 2017)

Strategic Brand Analysis – a stage of the branding process, where the trends, the competitors and personal qualities are analyzed (Aaker, 1996).

Strong Brand – a brand, which has created strong intangible values and is a more successful version of a brand. In the case of this Diploma paper, *Strong Brand* is named as a *Brand*, and a lesser version of a *Strong Brand* is named *Trademark* (Aaker, 1996).

Takeover of Social Media Page or Social Media User – a process during which one social media page or user is allowed to control the content publishing of another social media page or user.

Trademark – an indication of a property, which is yet to have acquired any intangible values in consumers mind. (A. Bogdan (2010).

User Engagement – a process which defines social media users or followers activities with a social media page.

Viral Content – content, which due to high *user engagement* starts spreading across the *social media website*.

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of selected topic. In the era of social media, users become equals to companies and can acquire audiences, which are big enough to generate social influence and have an impact on customers' decisions. These types of people are called social influencers and due to the significance to other consumers, they become able to create brands of their own. What is more important these social influencer brands created not by companies, but by social media users are more trusted by consumers. Statistics show that 74% of consumers rely on social media while making a purchasing decision (Bennett, 2014), and 96% of consumers, who discuss brands online, do not even follow the official social media profiles owned by those brands (Smith, 2016). What is more, according to Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising Survey (2012), 92% of people trust the recommendations of individuals (even though they do not know them in person) over brands. That is why it becomes relevant to analyze how social media users can create social influencer brands of their own.

Surprisingly, not so long ago one of the largest industries in the world – travel industry, was the second slowest industry, after financial services, to adopt Instagram, which is the second largest social media website worldwide (J. Jauncey, 2015). According to A. Sibley (2012), 90% of information transmitted to brain are visuals and it is being analyzed 60 thousand times faster than textual information. With that being said it is inconceivable and a major opportunity, as well, for people to put their efforts into creating travel influencer trademarks on Instagram – which is visual-based social media platform. After the trademark is established, the remaining goal is to find a way to turn into a brand – to make yourself into an influencer, whose opinion matters and has an influencer on consumer decisions.

The object of analysis: Process of creating intangible values, while using Instagram tools, that would allow a newly created travel influencer trademark to become a brand.

The defined problem: How a newly created travel influencer trademark should exploit Instagram tools to successfully perform the branding process, which would allow it to create intangible values, which would allow it to become a brand?

The pursued goals: To develop a model that would help newly created travel influencer trademark exploit Instagram tools, which through the process of branding, would allow it to become a brand. The thesis' aim will be achieved by performing qualitative analysis on different types of visual content posted by different travel influencer brands, trademark and its customers and by performing data analysis to process the findings.

The pursued objectives:

- Perform literature analysis on differences between trademark and brand; branding; social media and Instagram; travel industry phenomenon written by different researchers.
- While using qualitative content analysis to go through branding processes: strategic brand analysis; brand identity system; brand identity implementation system, which would include analyzing content of *Traveler's Child*, the competitors and the customers.
- While using data analysis to find out what Instagram tools and imagery should be used in order to create the most user engaging content, which allows a trademark to become a brand.
- To develop a model that would allow travel influencer trademarks exploit Instagram tools, which through the process of branding, would allow it to become a brand.

The sequence of investigation: The diploma paper consists of 3 parts. In the first part “The Theoretical Background for Creating a Travel Influencer Brand, While Using Instagram Tools” the analysis of scientific books and articles was carried out. In this part, differences between trademark and brand were analyzed, the branding process is introduced. Finally, social media, Instagram and travel industry phenomenon is discussed. The second part of the diploma paper is called “Branding Process of Travel Influencer Trademark *Traveler's Child* While Using Instagram Tools” and presents qualitative and data analysis of five major travel influencer brands, their followers and authors’ personal travel influencer trademark – *Traveler's Child*. The research revealed what types of visual content is most used and most engaging in the case of brands, what visual types are most used by customers and what Instagram tools work best for a newly created trademark. According to these findings, in the final project part a model was developed, that covers the process of travel influencer trademark branding while using Instagram tools.

Methods and techniques of investigation and reference: The research will be carried out through scientific literature analysis, by conducting qualitative and data analysis of travel influencer brands, their followers and a trademark created by the author of this diploma paper.

I. THE THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF BUILDING A TRAVEL INFLUENCER BRAND, WHILE USING INSTAGRAM TOOLS

To analyze the way of creating a travel influencer brand, while using Instagram tools it is necessary to understand the concept of brand and branding in the first place. According to J. Miletsky (2009), there is a greater chance for Las Vegas bookmakers to predict when the physicists will agree on everything, than to predict when marketing specialists will agree on a single definition of the brand. In this part of the thesis, the author will attempt to analyze and get a clear idea of the brand and branding.

For the process of adapting branding process to social media and, Instagram, this diploma paper will rely on the traditional branding process introduced by D. Aaker in 1996. This model is considered to be foundational on which relies the majority of scholar works discussing the branding process.

Branding in social media is important, because having your brand present in social media is no longer an innovation, but a complete necessity. Of course, there is a belief that the traditional media is a more effective communicational channel in certain industries, but for many customers if a brand is missing on most popular social media platforms it does raise questions and shakes their trust in the brand immediately.

According to E. LePage (2016) money spent by advertisers on social media in the world have doubled during the past two years. Author highlights that in U.S. only these budgets went from \$16 billion in 2014 to \$31 billion in 2016. E. LePage (2016) also notices that in 2017 advertisers worldwide should be spending more than \$35 billion, which is nearly 20% of all digital advertising.

T. Smith (2014) says that, social media has allowed the companies to connect with their customers, build a community, produce and share content. Different social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others have completely changed the rules of how brands interact with their customers.

1.1. The Concept of Brand

Even if we look at what is a brand according to American Marketing Associations (AMA) (n.d.)¹, we can find two separate definitions. One says that brand is a “name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers”, while other

¹ <https://www.ama.org/resources/pages/dictionary.aspx?dLetter=B>

identifies additional features such as “customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas”.

As U.K. Maurya and P. Mishra (2012) noted, there is even a thematic classification for brand, suggested by L. de Chernatony and D. Riley (1998), which classifies the brand into 12 different themes. These themes show brand as a logo; a legal instrument; a company; a shorthand; a risk reducer; an identity system; an image in consumer's mind; a value system; a personality; a relationship; adding value and an evolving entity. It is evident, that finding a narrow definition for what is a brand is a problematic task.

This occurs due to the long history this term has, dating back to XVIIth century. Back then, it was a name of a process of marking cattle in the Wild West of the United States to show the cows ownership (Kapferer, 2012). Soon, according to the author, it became not only a sign of ownership, but a sign of quality as well. Since then the meaning of the brand has changed dramatically. According to J. N. Kapferer (2012), this the understanding of the brand has evolved throughout the years from being “a name and/or sign that guarantees a product’s origin and authenticity” to becoming “A name that is able to create a community around its values” (p. 12).

The change of brand understanding is seen clearly while analyzing different editions of same books written by same authors. In 2002, P. Kotler and G. Armstrong define brand as a name, term, symbol, design or a combination of latter, whose purpose is to allow the customer to recognize one seller’s products or services from their competitors. In 2012, the same authors state that brand is much more than symbols and names, that it is crucial element in company’s relationship with their customers; it represents everything that the product or services mean to the customer (Kotler, Armstrong, 2012).

K. L. Keller (2013) broadens the definitions even more by stating that nowadays brand must be seen not only from the customer’s perspective, but also, from the company’s perspective and what meaning does it have for both sides. This change of understanding closely relates to the social media era emergence, which gave a stronger voice to the customer. Finally, the brand becomes what recognized as not only an image, but it also carries values, power to influence market and gather communities. So, the logical questions occur, how should we call an image of a company, which is yet to carry any values or power?

In 2013, T. Nistorescu and others, tackled the existing problem in the misuse of the word brand and suggesting that an image, which is yet to carry any values or power, though does identify one company from its competitors, should be called a trademark. As authors noted, according to A. Bogdan (2010), the trademark is an indication of a property and the brand is a relationship existing between customers and a product, service or idea. The idea of a brand is to add value to a business. G. Smith

(2009) also notices the differences between these definitions. According to the author, brand is both physical and emotional switch, which creates relationships between the customer and the services or products (G. Smith, 2009). This comparison of definitions allows to state, that a trademark becomes a brand only when it acquires the intangible values that can influence the customer's decisions and hopes (Figure 1).

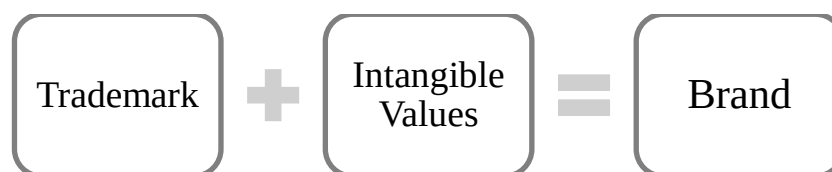


Figure 1. The connection between the trademark and brand.

Developed by author on basis of T. Nistorescu (2013)

D. Aaker proposed the *strong brand* concept in 1996. The theory states that for a *brand* to become a *strong brand*, there are a number of qualities that must be applied. The ideas presented in author's work, actually interpret *brand* the same way as *trademark* was described in previous parts and *strong brand* idea matches the *brand* idea. D. Aaker (1996) also presents the foundational parts of what is a brand and what intangible values does it have to meet in order to be one.

For the sake, of this diploma paper' continuity Aaker's concept of *brand* will be called *trademark* and *strong brand* will be called *brand* (Figure 2).

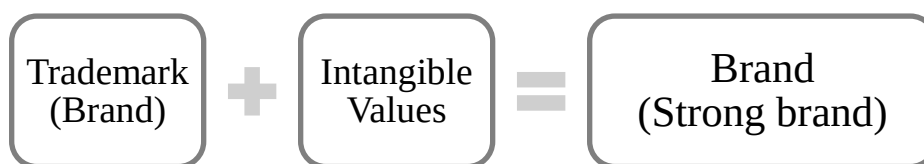


Figure 2. The adaptation of D. Aaker's Strong Brand theme to this diploma paper theme.

Developed on basis of D. Aaker (1996); T. Nistorescu (2013)

After understanding that a brand is a trademark, which possesses intangible values for the customer, the further question remains – how to create these intangible values to achieve the result of your trademark becoming a brand?

The Branding Process. Z. Geller (2013) compares brand and branding by quoting K. Zhivago (n.d.) – “Branding is the promises you make. Your brand is the promises you keep” (Geller, 2013, p. 14).

According to D. Aaker (1996), three main themes exists when creating a *brand* (Figure 3). First, there is the *strategic brand analysis*, where the trends, the competitors and personal qualities are

analyzed. Second, there is a *brand identity system* and it is crucial to analyze its development possibilities. Finally, there is the *brand implementation system*, which is a last step when creating the brand and to see if the previous steps were successful.

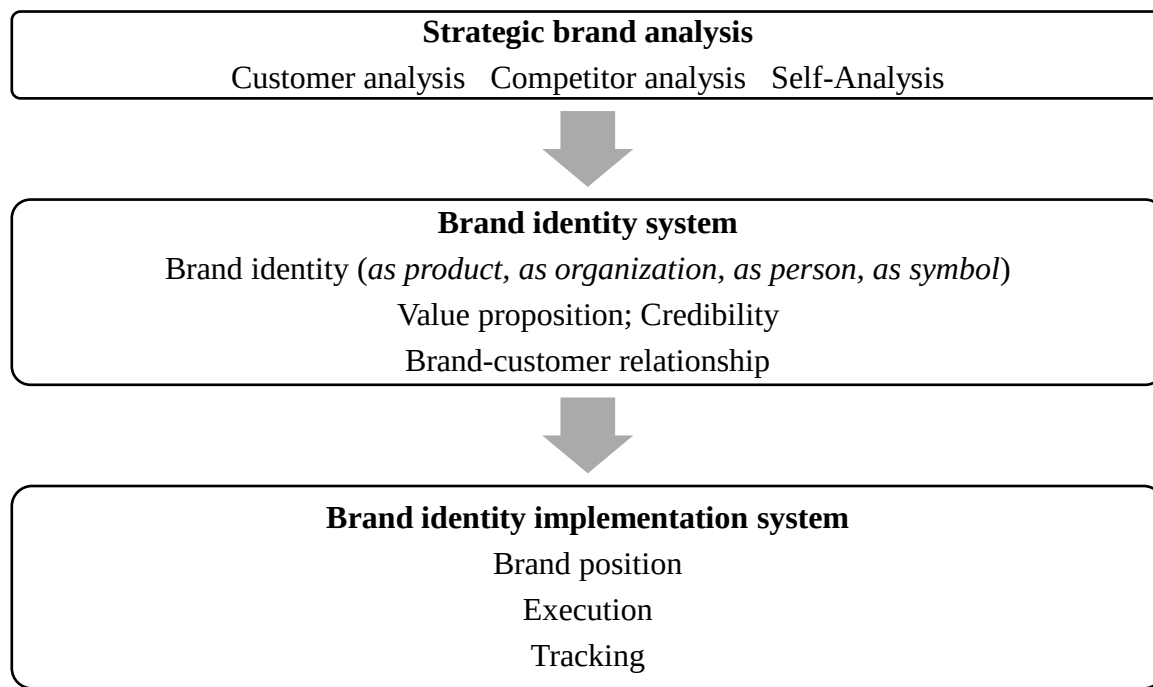


Figure 3. A model for building a strong brand (Branding).

Source: D. Aaker (1996)

Strategic Brand Analysis. D. Aaker (1996) states that the strategic brand analysis consists of the main aspects: customer analysis, competitor analysis and self-analysis. Author also believes that *brand equity* is crucial when building a brand. According to him, *brand equity* is a set of qualities a brand adds to the value of the product or service.

Brand equity. T. Erdem and J. Swait (2016) notices that, consumers realize there is a difference between knowledge about services which they and the *brand* has. This is called the *information asymmetry*² and customers, when searching for information, are not quite sure about if the information is true or wrong. As stated by P. Kotler (2002), one of the brands attributes is a promise of quality and maintaining a standard. Therefore, it is safe to say that brand equity does serve as a guarantee for a customer that the service is going to be of the expected quality or, in other words, a customer will be able to trust the *brand*.

² Information asymmetry - Situation that favors the more knowledgeable party in a transaction. *Business Dictionary* (n.d.)

In the standard D. Aaker's brand equity model, in which author explains how it generates value, he expresses the four main assets of categories: (1) Brand awareness, (2) Brand loyalty, (3) perceived quality, and (4) Brand associations (Aaker, 1996). Next few paragraphs will explain the terms.

- *Brand awareness.* According to D. Aaker (1996), brand awareness is the most important part of brand equity as it shows how strong the brand's presence is engraved into customer's mind. K. L. Keller (2013) believes that brand awareness shows if the consumers are familiar with the brand.
- *Brand loyalty.* D. Aaker (1996) believes that the brand loyalty is important, as it is what shows how valuable the brand is to customers. Customers support for the brand and their loyalty is important, as this is what helps the brand to grow. Nowadays when marketing changes its focus point from quality to experience (Klaus, Maklan, 2013) customer-organization relationship became one of the driving factors for successful brand building.
- *Perceived quality.* In traditional brand concept, D. Aaker (1996) states that, quality is usually the main dimension of positioning for brands to show their advantage over the competition. Though having in mind the previously mentioned statement from Klaus & Maklan (2013), it is possible to state, that brand loyalty becomes more important for brand building than the perceived quality.
- *Brand associations.* According to D. Aaker (1996), this is what the organization wants to stand for in costumers mind. It is a very important factor in order to develop and establish the brand identity. C. D. Bevins (2014) says that it is important for a brand to stay loyal to their foundations to reach consistency, which is crucial factor for success.

The findings of this chapter allows to conclude that the ideas of D. Aaker (1996) can be adapted to our firstly discovered model – brand equity assets of categories are what was previously called as *intangible values* (Figure 4).

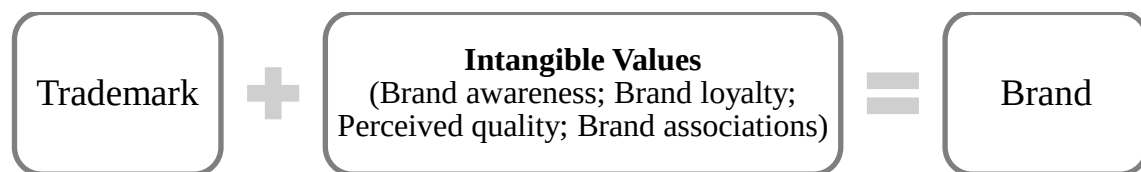


Figure 4. The adaptation of D. Aaker's Strong Brand theme to diploma paper theme.
Developed on basis of D. Aaker (1996); T. Nistorescu (2013)

This means that when we will try to find how to build a brand in social media era, will try to find how D. Aaker's mentioned qualities are acquired nowadays according to theorists (see paragraph 1.2.8.).

Brand Identity System. At this step, the intangible values are decided. It is necessary for company to know who they are, what is their purpose and what direction are they planning to take when defining brand identity. In addition, it is important not to confuse brand image with brand identity. According to M. Florek (2005) the main point of differentiation is that, these concepts are created based on two different perspectives: the sender's and the receiver's. J. Kapferer (2012) explains it shortly, saying that the sender creates identity and the image is what receiver perceives.

D. Aaker (1996) proposed four brand identity perspectives, which allows adding depth to the matter. First, a brand could be perceived as a product, an organization, a person and a symbol. Second, author introduced value proposition to the brand identity system. Third, the company has to provide credibility and, finally, the last part of D. Aaker's brand identity system is the brand customer relationship.

Brand identity. As mentioned before, brand identity is crucial to a company, because, according to D. Aaker (1996), it brands the strategy the company has, it represent what company stands for and allows customers to get a promise of what they can expect. There are four main brand identity perspectives proposed by the previously mentioned author:

- *Brand as a product.* According to author, associations related to product will always be a crucial part of brand identity because there is a link between decisions of the brand and the customer experience.
- *Brand as an organization.* This identity perspective focuses on the attributes of the organization, rather than on what service or product it offers. It is a way to show what the company's values, culture are and what people are related to this brand.
- *Brand as a person.* It is believed that brand identity is richer than the services or products that the company offers. According to D. Aaker (1996), this personality, that a brand get, makes it easier for customers to identify themselves with it, grow their loyalty and to become repeat-buyers. Personality is crucially important to previously mentioned brand image, which is how the customer perceives the brand, rather than how the brand wants to be perceived. Author conducted a research in which he questioned more than 1 thousand respondents about what personality traits they would assign to 60 different well-

known brands. 114 traits were mentioned and five of them were mentioned the most: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.

- *Brand as a symbol.* The last brand identity perspective is the one where it is seen as a symbol. It is a way to provide a visual for the consumer. It is stated that a strong symbol does a great influence to brand's identity and makes it easier to recognize and recall.

Value Proposition. Next in the brand identity system is the value proposition. D. Aaker (1996) states that value proposition is related to the functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits statements, which provide value to the customer. The successful implementation of value proposition should result an increase in brand-customer relationship and should have an influence on customers purchase decisions.

Credibility. Credibility is another important aspect of brand identity system. According to T. Erdem and J. Swait (1998), brand credibility is important as it is believed that it contributes to brand equity building by indirectly managing to add customer value to the brand. The idea is to establish brand's message as a trusted opinion, which would later allow the potential users to pay higher attention.

Brand-customer relationship. Finally, there is the last part of brand identity system, which is the brand-customer relationship. D. Aaker (1996) notices that this phenomenon emerges when brand is considered more as a person, than a product – this allows customer to get positive feelings and then it is important to keep and nurture this relationship.

Brand Identity Implementation System. The last theme according to D. Aaker's (1996) concept of strong brand building (branding) is the brand identity implementation system. This last part of the model contains of brand position, execution and tracking.

Brand position. D. Aaker (1996) defines brand position as the part of brand identity and value proposition in which it is necessary to communicate these concepts to target audiences in order to demonstrate the advantages over competing brands.

Execution. It is related to credibility and brand-customer relationship, as it is increases brand loyalty and perceived quality. D. Aaker (1996) states that a well-executed communication strategy manages to break through to audiences by being able to shock, entertain or get customers involved. Author also believes that the more alternatives are being implemented while executing brands strategies the bigger become the chances to create a unique and impressive result. In this part it is also advised by author to commit testing – it allows for a brand to see what works and what does not – later on it increases the confidence of communication efforts.

Tracking. This is the most important part of branding system for the purposes of this Diploma paper as there is going to be an attempt to track the success of different types of strategies, while using imagery on Instagram. Tracking can be based on quantitative and qualitative research. According to D. Aaker (1996), quantitative research through structured questions and scales allow to assess how brand's positioning efforts have affected the customer perception and qualitative research idea is to be able to be exposed to the target audience and to know what to ask.

This concludes the first part of first chapter of Diploma paper, which analyzes the concepts of the brand and branding. The analysis of literature presented in this part of the chapter allowed defining what a brand is and what the classical process of branding is. These ideas will be adapted to nowadays situation to find out how the social media influence these processes and how brands are adapting.

1.2. The Concept of Communication in Social Media

To further advance in this Diploma paper, it is necessary to understand the concept of social media and to understand how one works. Theorists describe social media in many different ways and even proposes different ways how to classify it. For example, A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein (2010) believes, that the idea of social media is far older than the World Wide Web (WWW) itself, which became accessible to public in 1991 (McPherson, 2009). According to the author, it started back in 1979 when T. Truscott and J. Ellis from Duke University created the Usenet, which allowed a discussion between Internet users worldwide. However, A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein (2010) agree that the social media as we know it started much later in 1997, when B. Abelson and S. Abelson found the Open Diary platform, which brought together online diary writers into one community. That moment in history represents the moment when blogs were born and the idea of social media – computer-mediated technologies that allow users to create and share information, ideas and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks (Obar, Wildman, 2015).

J.A. Obar and S. Wildman (2015) have published a study just for trying to define what social media actually is. According to the authors, there are two main reasons why this task has become so difficult – first, the speed in which technologies evolve and second, social media facilitate different forms of communication that were previously enabled by other technologies like phone, fax machine or email. In their research they found out that there are few main distinct features that apply only to social media as communication type – flexibility and influence potential. This allows us to form a definition, according

to which social media is a media type that can distribute information to audiences no matter the place and it can instantly influence the lives of much bigger audiences.

In addition, social media is categorized into different types. There are two main ways to categorize social media and it is through the user behavior and through the content type.

Social media categorization through user behavior. A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein (2010) proposed this way and they believe that social media should be categorized by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure. Authors (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010) single out six main social media categories:

1. *Blogs*. This type of social media is high on allowing users to present themselves, but is low when regarding the media richness. As mentioned before, blogs are the earliest type of social media, it is mostly text based and it allows users to write about their personal life, represent opinions or share ideas.
2. *Social networking sites* (e.g. Facebook). This type of social media is high on how they allow users to present themselves and medium in how rich the media is. Social networking sites allow users to create their personal profiles, share information like pictures, videos, send messages and most importantly, gather into communities as well as gives a chance to give an instant feedback on other person's or brand's content.
3. *Virtual social worlds* (e.g., Second Life). This type of social media is both high on media richness and self-presentation. It allows social media users to create their virtual-selves, personalities and interact in virtual three-dimensional environments. Basically, it allows users to live a life close to the one in their real lives, only in digital space.
4. *Collaborative projects* (e.g., Wikipedia, Pinterest). This type of social media is low on user self-presentation, as well as, low on media richness or social presence of the user. Collaborative projects allow users to gather and publish information in groups and in other cases, to rate information, in order to help other users to get information, which seems more relevant for a particular group.
5. *Content communities* (e.g., YouTube). This type of social media presents a low chance of self-presentation and a medium chance of social presence or media richness. The objective of content communities is to allow users the exchange of media like videos, images or text.
6. *Virtual game worlds* (e.g. LineAge). This type of social media allows users to have a high social presence, but is low on self-presentation. As well as, virtual social worlds it

allows users to create their virtual selves and interact in virtual environments, but the difference is that virtual game worlds usually have certain rules in which users are supposed to act in order to advance in the game.

However, it is possible to argue if A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein (2010) proposed an accurate categorization of social media. Social media platforms have reached a level in which they possess features of different social media types. Facebook, as well as, it is a social networking site, has now become a way for people to post blog-type of information, it is as much of a content community as any other social media platform and for quite some time it was a popular place for people to gather and play virtual games with each other. In addition, content communities, such as YouTube have become places where self-presentation of users is very high.

Social media categorization through content. Another way of categorizing social media platforms is the type of content that is being published. Social media professional K. Takoka (2017) proposed categorizing social media through content into ten types:

1. *Social networking* (e.g., Facebook, Google+). This type of social media allows users with similar interests, likes or experiences to connect and share information between each other, while also allowing to gather into communities.
2. *Video sharing* (e.g., Youtube, Vimeo). According to K. Takoka (2017), “Video is far more engaging than any other type of social media content.” Video sharing social media sites are platforms that allow its users to upload videos that is shared specifically to that platform and can be embedded in almost any other social media type.
3. *Live streaming* (e.g., Periscope). Evolving from video sharing, live streaming social media platforms allows their users to broadcast and watch live videos, both - from their computers and smartphones. In this kind of social media platforms, broadcasted video could be seen or commented only for 24 hours after the live streaming is over. After that the video will be removed from the platform automatically.
4. *Microblogging* (e.g., Twitter). With a limited number of characters for one post, this kind of platforms allows users to share their content and information in short messages. For example, in Twitter case, the limit is 140 characters for one post. According to K. Takoka (2017), the content in this type of social media platforms changes more dynamically than in the other platforms, because here users posts more frequently than users of other social media sites.

5. *Blogging* (e.g., Blogger). Blogging social media platforms (blogs) allow their users to create written or video content that other users can read, view, share, and comment.
6. *Social news* (e.g., Digg). These platforms allow users to share news and articles with their community or network. After sharing the information, content is rated by other users, making the highest rated content easier to see for the others.
7. *Photo sharing* (e.g., Instagram). According to K. Takoka (2017), “After video, images are the most engaging content available on the web”. Photo sharing social media platforms allow their users to easily share visual content with their community. Though these platforms work on computers, most of the photo sharing platforms is designed to be used as a mobile applications on smartphones or tablets.
8. *Content curation* (e.g., Pinterest). Content curation platforms are like databases, which allow their users to access content from various other sources. According to K. Takoka (2017), this type of platforms is very beneficial in order to maintain a good social media presence. It allows users to reach a high-quality content, which could be shared on their other social media networks.
9. *Wikis* (e.g., Wikipedia). Wikis are collaborative social media platforms where users contribute in creating informational articles. Main goal of these platforms is to create vast informational sites.
10. *Messenger* (e.g., Viber). Messenger platforms are mobile applications, created to be used as a tool for communication with a close circle of people. Despite this fact, K. Takoka (2017) believes, that since such a big platforms as Facebook started creating their own messenger tools, these platforms have the potential to become “the future of social media marketing”

However, it is still possible to argue if K. Takoka (2017) proposed an accurate categorization of social media, by which we could assign certain social media platforms to certain categories. Let us take Facebook for instance – it is impossible to state that it is only a social networking platform as it was almost ten years ago. Now Facebook has become as much of a *video and photo sharing* social media platform as YouTube or Instagram, with only one click you can browse only pictures or only videos in Facebook. *Blogging and microblogging* in this social media website has become one of its most used features for politicians or other public personas to communicate with its followers. Newest researches also show that Facebook users use this platform more and more for *sharing news* than for posting personal content (Griffith, 2016). Number of likes is a main factor why some content appear higher than

other, so Facebook has become *content curation* website as well. Facebook Messenger is also a widely used *messaging platform*. Finally, Facebook recently introduced the *live-streaming* function. Therefore, this social media platform has almost all the features of other categories.

Different social media websites adapt more and more different features, so it has become hard to put different platforms in certain categories. This constant evolution of social media has created an always-changing environment with no certain rules and has created many new challenges over the years for advertisers to communicate with their customers.

Challenges in Social Media Era. The technological leap that society is facing in the era of social media does a significant influence to the world of advertising – it stimulates a creation of new tools and way of communicating with customers.

According to R. Edelman (2014) there are two main types of communication: direct and indirect communication. Indirect communication consists of advertising, sales promotion and public relations. Direct communication consists of personal sales, direct marketing and interactive/internet marketing. S. Fahmy et al. (2014) state, that these types of communication need channels, tools, through which it is possible to communicate the right content into right direction. J. Fiske (2010) divides media into three main categories in which the message is being transmitted: the presentational media, the representational media and the mechanical media. This chapter orientates towards the direct communication and to one of its' communicational channels – social media.

D. Holt (2016) notices that with an emergence of social media advertisers thought that a new, better times for branding and overall communication arises. Despite the huge investments, only a number of companies were actually successful. Author says that companies believed that social media will allow them to “leapfrog the traditional media” and in this way to create the contact with the customers directly. What happened, according to D. Holt (2016), is that brands and companies during the social media age actually became *less* significant. Who became *more* significant? The customers.

Crowdculture. D. Holt (2016) introduces us to a new concept called the crowdculture, which is a result of social media and the power it gave to ordinary customers to be heard. According to E. Brown (2010) customers became the ones who start the discussions about the brands and not the other way around and now advertisers work becomes to keep those discussions running. D. Holt (2016) explains that before social media advertisers were able to put brands in whatever place they want, the customer had a little choice of where to see the advertising. So, one of the most important things according to the author was a way for users to opt-out of ads while using ad-blocking programs on their computers. According to S. Dumenco (2015), this service became popular because of how over-crowded with the

advertising internet became. That is when companies realized that they can no longer be only advertising, but that they should create the content of their own. For a short period that worked, but soon it backfired.

D. Holt (2016) says that social media allowed new communities to form; people with same ideas and interests that used to be isolated with each other now has a chance to form communities and to become actually heard and have an influence on other masses of people. People started to create their own content and it became impossible for companies to compete with that. Those people who were able to gather communities around them in social media, became as relevant as brands and that was how the phenomena of social influencers was born.

1.3. Building a Brand in Social Media: Travel Industry Case

Building a Brand or simply *Branding* in social media is no longer an innovation, but a complete necessity. Of course, there is a belief that the traditional media is a more effective for reaching some customers, but for many customers a situation in which a brand is not found on social media platforms does raise questions and shakes their trust in the brand immediately.

E. Brown (2010) notices how *branding* has changed due to social media – customers have become the driving force for discussing about *brands* and companies should do everything to keep these discussions going. Author also states that the way the brands are built changed from broadcasting to customer and now is about listening to what customer has to say.

In this part of Diploma paper the author will try to adapt the previously explored traditional branding concept (Figure 3) of D. Aaker (1996) towards the social media era.

New branding trends in social media era. With the emergence of social media era, the branding processes changed significantly. According to Bergström and Bäckman (2013), if we compare traditional media with social media, the major difference is how fast users can start engaging with the brand. In social media, these important processes can happen instantly and that is why customers can have a bigger impact on brand's behavior and can even help co-create the brand. M. Laroche et al. (2012) says that there are four main types of activities, which allow customers to co-create the value added to the brand – social networking, impression management, community engagement and brand use. Customer interactions with a brand on social media reflect their willingness to engage. In Instagram case the main customer activities to show their engagement with the brand are: following the brand, liking and commenting its post and sharing their content with others. What happens during the brand co-creation is that when users are actively engaging with the content posted by a brand it becomes viral,

which is the main goal for any content published in the social media. It is the main way for a brand with no budget to get attention. L. Porter and G. J. Golan (2006) says that for any type of commercial content on internet the main goal is to become viral. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2011), the process of content becoming viral is quite similar to the traditional word-of-mouth, but it simply has a better reach. This is because according to the authors in case of traditional word-of-mouth people usually have two or three friends, whom they will share information with, while in case of social media, this number grows to 150.

Bergström & Bäckman (2013) believes that customer interactions with a brand indicate their trust. As discussed in previous chapters of theoretical analysis customer trust is a crucial for the intangible values that allow a trademark to become a brand. This state in which customers are willing to engage with a trademark, to trust it and start promoting it is a turning point in which the metamorphosis from trademark to brand happens.

The strategic brand analysis in social media era. Traditional model emphasizes the necessity to analyze the customers, the competitors and the brand itself. According to T. Smith (2014), opinions and information sharing is what social media is centered around, so the need for brand to listen to what is happening around them is more important than ever. According to A. Hill (2010), branding in digital age has to begin with research of customers, what they will want to see in order to engage with your brand. This allows us to believe that before executing any further actions a brand must analyze its environment to know what type of content it has to deliver for the customer.

The brand identity system in social media era. In the traditional model D. Aaker (1996), mentions that it is crucial for a brand to know what it stands for as it represent its values and allows customers to get a promise of what they can expect. Brand identity in social media era remains as important as before, especially because customers can track brand activities much closer, so everyone related to the brand has to know exactly what the brand's core values are. According G. Christodoulides (2009), nowadays, companies no longer should try to protect the brand identity, but to provoke and host the dialogue about it by allowing the customers to have control.

The brand identity implementation system in social media era. In traditional model brand identity implementation system consists of three main parts: brand position, execution and data tracking. These obviously remain as important as it were twenty years ago. For making a brand position, according to E. C. Malthouse et al. (2013), social media has allowed brands to define it even better, because by following customer responses brands can more easily predict what customers want. This also leads to better execution and, of course, it is easier to perform data tracking in social media. In Instagram case,

the platform allows to see everything about how well your content is performing as you get immediate response in comments, likes and increasing follower numbers. One of the most important metric in Instagram to track the results of how successful is posted content is the engagement rate, which is according to A. Johnston (2016), calculated by adding up number of comments and likes and dividing it by number of followers.

1.3.1. The phenomena of Social Influencer

According to K. Freberg et al. (2011), social media influencers are a new type of endorsers who are independent and shape audience attitudes through different types of media. C. Francalanci and A. Hussain (2015) explain it as users of social media who have acquired a wide audience.

Statistics show that 74% of consumers rely on social media while making a purchasing decision (Bennett, 2014), and 96% of consumers, who discuss brands online, do not even follow the official social media profiles owned by those brands (Smith, 2016). What is more, according to Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising Survey (2012), 92% of people trust the recommendations of individuals (even though they do not know them in person) over brands. That is possibly because with individuals users feel actual social presence, which happens due to intimacy, interpersonal communication (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013).

Travel Industry. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (2016) travel and tourism has been one of the major contributors of GWP³. According to the source, in 2015 the direct contribution of this industry to GWP was more than 2 trillion U.S. dollars, which is 3% of total GWP. The industry is directly responsible for more than 107 million jobs worldwide, which is 3.6% of total world employment. The numbers are even higher if we look at the indirect contribution. Due to the supply chain, investments, etc. travel industry is responsible for almost 8 trillion U.S. dollars, which is more than 10% of GWP.

Travel Influencer. Z. Xiang and U. Gretzel (2010) made a research, which results showed that users are more likely to use search engines before making travel decisions and that these systems usually direct users to social media sites or, in other words, to influencers. This proves that travel influencers are gaining an important role in this industry as they can be directly responsible for the decisions of other travelers. Another research made by E. Christou (2015) confirms this idea of increasing impact of travel influencers as author says that third-party opinion makes other users increase their trust

³ GWP – Gross World Product – combined gross national product of all the countries in the world. *CIA World Factbook*. CIA (2015).

in the matter. In addition, N. Sumarian et al. (2014) say that increasing popularity of digital media leads that social media platforms like Instagram or Pinterest are the most effective in promoting tourism.

So, in this context, with the continuing growth of the impact and usage of social media, advertisers have been forced to implement effective marketing strategies in order to reach consumers on social media platforms.

The Influencer Marketing Concept. In recent years influencer marketing concept has emerged as a strategy. According to S. Woods (2016), in this case the focus is now placed on particular individuals and not on a target market as a whole. According to social media professional M. Talavera (2015), with the growth of social media, significantly more people are looking for recommendations from each other, or from their favorite personalities than from the brand itself. The concept of influencer marketing allows companies to identify the individuals who have the influence over potential customers, and orient their marketing strategy over these influencers. According to M. Talavera (2015), influencer marketing opens new opportunities for brands to reach their potential customers more directly, and avoiding traditional advertising tools which is considered more and more ineffective.

Influencer marketing concepts matches the same principles as traditional word of mouth concept does, just in this case it works virtually and as a result can reach a wider audience. What is more, according to S. Woods (2016), the strength of influencer marketing is a hardly recognizable difference between a sponsored and an organic post that users see on social media. Author believes that the lines between what is a genuine endorsement and what is a paid one can no longer be easily separated and because of the use of content-rich platforms it is what makes influencer marketing so powerful. To sum up, people are more likely to react positively to the message or post about the brand, which is told by the person who they are familiar with, than through the sponsored company post.

According to the study made in May, 2015 by Schlesinger Associates, content is the driving force of a successful influencer marketing campaign⁴: more than two-thirds (67%) of marketing and communication professionals, that participated in the survey, named content promotion as the main tactic when engaging with influencers; more than half of respondents (59%) said that they are using influencer marketing tactics for product launches and content creation.

In addition to the two main factors in influencer marketing, there is a third party – mediator, which connects brands and influencers into working together. In order to start the partnership with an influencer, brands usually contact influencer agencies, which are representing intermediate functions between influencer and brand. This type of agencies is responsible for finding monetary opportunities

⁴ <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Marketers-Pair-Up-with-Influencersand-Works/1012709>

for influencers and helping them with contract negotiations after that (Woods, 2016). In addition, influencer agencies are constantly keeping a connection with brands or advertising agencies, in order to suggest influencers for a certain campaign (Woods, 2016).

Over the recent years influencer agencies increased dramatically. On Niche, an influencer agency platform owned by Twitter social media platform, the number of influencers grew from 6 000 in 2015 to the 24 000 in 2016, with the number of monthly campaigns rising 300% (Swant, 2016). According to S. Woods (2016), this rise can partially be explained by the significant increase of influencer marketing budgets and the more profitable job as an influencer.

To sum up, influencer marketing concept brings new opportunities in searching for the more effective way to promote brand on social media, avoiding the growing ineffectiveness of traditional advertising tools. Growing number of influencers and influencer marketing budgets illustrate that influencer marketing is becoming an effective marketing strategy on dynamic and constantly changing social media channels.

1.3.2. Instagram Phenomenon

Social media platform Instagram is currently one of the most popular of its kind. According to D. Chafey (2017) it has 600 million users worldwide and is the second largest social media site if excluding Chinese and messenger type of social media websites. According to the same source, Instagram has second most loyal audience, which half of it uses this social media platform everyday.

According to Bergström & Bäckman (2013), Instagram, allows users to have an impact on companies, by letting their thoughts be heard to others. Sumarian et al (2014) says that as one of the most popular image sharing social media platforms worldwide Instagram has also become probably the most popular tool for digital tourism, because it allows users to get a quick interchange of images and comments across each other's profiles. This allows anyone to be perceived as an expert in traveling and create impact on other users.

Instagram gives brand owners these main tools:

- Posting an image or a video;
- Writing a description;
- Using hashtags;
- Viewing the engagement data;
- Engaging with other users (commenting, liking posts of other users and following their accounts).

- Engaging with other trademarks or brands (receiving shout-outs or performing takeovers).

In addition, recently Instagram added a new features, which were not used actively for the purposes of this thesis – story mode and video streaming.

Data Analysis. According to social media expert M. Allton (2017), there are five major measurements, which allow to identify how successful activities on an Instagram page are:

- *Follower Growth.* M. Allton (2017) believes that, it is an important indicator of how well is an Instagram page performing. If your followers numbers is growing it means, your content is affecting them well and in case of follower drop it means that the content needs reconsidering.
- *Engagement Rate.* According to A. Johnston (2016), Instagram engagement rate is calculated by adding up number of comments and likes and dividing it by number of followers. It shows how engaging your followers are. According to L. O'Reilly (2014) an average engagement rate in Instagram is around 4%, so anything above 5-6% is considered good.
- *Effectiveness of Posting Time.* It is an important metric once you have set your target audience and it lives in the same time zone. Then you can try to predict what time is the best for you to get the most response.
- *Effectiveness of Hashtag Usage.* Hashtag use in Instagram is necessary because it increases your chances of better reach of potential followers.
- *Performance of Individual Posts.* Analyzing what types of posts give the best results is crucial, because you can base your future decisions on it in order to achieve better results.

Visual Analysis. As Instagram, according to K. Takoka (2017), is mainly a photo sharing social media platform it is important to understand the basics of visual semiotics. Being able to categorize the visual content and to understand how to analyze it is a crucial part of this Diploma paper.

According to J. Mawhinney (2017), in 2017 visual content will represent 74% of internet's traffic. There are many different reasons why. A. Sibley (2012) states that 90% of information transmitted to brain are visuals and it is being analyzed 60 thousand times faster than textual information. J. Medina (2008) says that people are likely to remember 10% of information they hear, but that number increases to 65% if that information is associated with imagery.

According to T. Van Leeuwen and C. Jewitt (2001), social semiotics of visual communication allows to understand what can be said while using imagery and how these things can be interpreted. J. Hélène (2008) says that there is a difference how people react to textual (verbal) and visual materials. The first leads them towards more rational and logical thoughts, while visual send people along emotional pathways. In addition, G. Kress and T. Van Leeuwen (2006) believes that viewers also interpret imagery through their own experience. This is why interpreting visual data is a complicated task. However, from this we could theorize that users will be more engaged to a content that is similar and to which they post and/or like on social media.

Visual communication. Visual communication is being analyzed in many different scientific researches, these types of fields are: art, psychology, communication etc. According to P. M. Lester (2014) this is because visual communication relies on both eyes and brain that interpret all the information that is being passed by. An active mind is able to remember and use visual imagery in many different ways. Author says that being able to analyze visuals critically, could possibly lead to creating high-quality imagery that others will keep in their mind. H. Jamieson (2007) notices that visual information is being adapted much faster than the textual one. Every observer can interpret the same visual differently from another and though the difference between understanding may not be big, but the chances of different understanding are high. This information is valuable to the brands as nowadays it is necessary to communicate through visuals, as it was mentioned before – in 2017, visual content will represent 74% of internet's traffic. Therefore, it is critical to make your message in your visual content clear and understandable.

This concludes the first part of the Thesis. The analysis allowed understanding the meaning of brand and branding process. In addition, a deeper knowledge about social media and Instagram was provided and why it is necessary to understand and analyze processes of this particular social media platform. Finally, theoretical analysis allowed understanding why it is relevant to analyze this through the spectrum of travel industry. Knowledge gained through theoretical part will allow to proceed into the next part and to perform the analysis of actual travel influencer brands and to understand what types of Instagram tools provide effective results.

II. BRANDING PROCESS OF TRAVEL INFLUENCER TRADEMARK *TRAVELER'S CHILD* WHILE USING INSTAGRAM TOOLS

The theoretical analysis showed that it is important to analyze how brands could use Instagram to become influencers themselves and build a strong influencer brand. The branding process in this case is quite similar to the traditional model. The difference is that social media increases the importance of the customer as communication with him or she is related to the success of branding.

Previous part of this thesis also showed that user engagement is directly linked, to creating the intangible values, which allow a trademark to become a brand. It becomes relevant to research what type of content on Instagram helps to increase user engagement, which is necessary for a trademark to become a brand.

First, the research object – travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child* will be presented. Secondly, the research logic, methods and limitations will be introduced. Then, the research will be conducted, which will analyze the three steps of branding for a new trademark. Finally, the results and recommendations will be presented.

2.1. Research object, logic and methods

Research object. The Thesis author created travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child* for the purposes of conducting a research, which would allow to get a chance to deeper analyze what Instagram tools and content helps to create a successful travel influencer brand.

It was created in June, 2016. In the first half year *Traveler's Child* managed to gather a respectable amount of 15 thousand followers and currently has more than 20 thousand followers. With an engagement rate of almost 10 percent it nearly doubles the engagement rate of an average Instagram influencer, which is 3-6 percent (FanBridge. 2015).

During this period, *Traveler's Child* managed to create contact with a couple of tourism departments in Kaunas (Lithuania) and Gent (Belgium).

According to Instagram data, *Traveler's Child's* 68% of audience is women and 32% is men. The biggest age groups are 18-24 and 25-34. The majority of followers come from United States of America and Turkey.

Traveler's Child travel influencer trademark is oriented to create a trust and a relationship with their customers in order to become more influent. The communication occurs on different social media channels, but mainly on Instagram, so it is most relevant social media channel for the research. Research will analyze this trademark's Instagram social media account: user engagement and the content type.

Research logic. For the purposes of researching the problem of this thesis, the case analysis strategy was chosen, while using the qualitative content analysis and data analysis.

Research **problematics** – how a newly created travel influencer trademark should exploit Instagram tools to successfully perform the branding process, which would allow it to create intangible values, which would allow it to become a brand?

Research **objective** – To develop a model that would help newly created travel influencer trademark exploit Instagram tools, which through the process of branding, would allow it to become a brand.

Research **goals**:

- To prepare the research methodology;
- While using **qualitative content analysis** to go through branding processes: strategic brand analysis; brand identity system; brand identity implementation system, which would include analyzing content of *Traveler's Child*, the competitors and the customers.
- While using **data analysis** to find out what Instagram tools and imagery should be used in order to create the most user engaging content, which allows a trademark to become a brand.

The research **strategy** for this thesis is the **case analysis**. For the case analysis three methods are selected – **qualitative content analysis** for selected criteria and **data analysis** to research which Instagram tools and content is most efficient in order to allow travel influencer trademark to become a brand. The research is orientated to analyzing how Instagram allows trademarks to communicate in this social media platform in order to create a more engaging content, which allows it to become a brand.

Qualitative Content Analysis. This qualitative research method is most suitable for this Diploma paper, because it allows performing any kind of systemic text or any other symbols flow reduction into data, which can be statistically processed and allows reflecting the characteristics and its existence, intensity or quantity, which are relevant for certain social sciences (Shapir, o Markoff, 1997). The way of understanding this method has not changed for decades as it is described as a scientific method, which allows describing the communication facets in a kind of way that summary statements

and generalization about the content can be made (Auster, 1956). Qualitative perspective has a goal to understand, how individuals understand or explain their surroundings and how individually created meaning influence their behavior (Kardelis, 2002). According to J. Thomas and J. Nelson (1990), as qualitative researches do not rely on hypothesis, it is flexible and has inductive data analysis, which attributes inductive researcher's logic to qualitative research characteristics. The content can be presented not only as text, but as any other material such as pictorial, musical, etc. (Mayring, 2000). According to M. Gall et al. (1996), researcher while using this method, does not interfere with occurring events, but researches it the way it is. A qualitative content analysis will be used to find themes and engagement to see how customers are responding to travel influencer trademark activity on Instagram.

The research will analyze the visual data of different travel influencer brands, its consumers and travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child*. Visual data will be allocated between four categories introduced by J. A. Donaire et al. (2014), which were identified after researching tourists photos in Flickr social media platform:

- *Nature*. This category includes the views of landscapes, flora and fauna.
- *Heritage*. This category includes the views of historic buildings, monuments, castles, churches, etc.
- *Culture*. This category focuses on visual data containing views from certain local cultures, traditions and festivals.
- *Tourist services*. This category includes views from tourism infrastructure and facilities such as accommodation, attractions, etc.

Authors also add a degree of human presence in the picture, as well as, zoom and whether the picture is taken indoors or outdoors. As the most important factor is the human presence, this Diploma paper will research the visual data by allocating it to eight categories (Table 1).

Table 1

Visual categories for the qualitative content analysis.

No.	Category	No.	Category
0	None of the categories		
1	Nature (no human presence)	5	Nature (with human presence)
2	Heritage (no human presence)	6	Heritage (with human presence)
3	Culture (no human presence)	7	Culture (with human presence)
4	Tourist services (no human presence)	8	Tourist services (with human presence)

Source: J. A. Donaire et al. (2014).

Additional category for the customer (follower) analysis will be required as customers are not usually supposed to post content related to tourism. Another type of posts in Instagram are videos and galleries, which will be excluded out of the research as Instagram primary purpose is photo sharing. In addition, this thesis will analyze the influence of hashtags, when marking a place, how different types of visual data influence the growth of followers and overall user engagement.

This will allow to go through branding processes: strategic brand analysis; brand identity system; brand identity implementation system, which would include analyzing content of *Traveler's Child*, the competitors and the customers.

Data Analysis of Instagram social media platform. After identifying the visual categories for the qualitative content analysis, it is necessary to analyze the second research method – data analysis, which will allow to find out what Instagram Instagram tools and imagery should be used in order to create the most user engaging content, which allows a trademark to become a brand.

According to A. Agresti (2002), for proper analysis of the links between actions and consequences, it is necessary to exclude two types of variables: *qualitative* and *quantitative*. *Qualitative* are the ones that distinct categories by its quality differences, while interval variables are *quantitative* – it distinct levels that have different amounts of the characteristics and can prove the connection between actions and consequences.

The Diploma paper will include these *qualitative* variables:

- *Types of visual content.* Nine categories as mentioned before will be used in customer and competitor analysis, as well as, while tracking the data of travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child*.
- *Brand activity.* It reflects how the brand is engaging with its users, two variables will be used to define trademark activity:
 - *Active.* Actively commenting, liking posts of other users that are interested in traveling and following their accounts. In addition, active usage of *live* function and broadcasting the videos to users.
 - *Passive.* Rarely commenting, linking posts of other users. No usage of *live* function.
- *Use of destination hashtags.* A place is considered popular if its' hashtag has at least 300 thousand pictures.
- *Shout-outs by other high-influence* (1 million+ followers) travel influencers.
- *Takeover of other influencer pages.*

The *quantitative* variables, proposed by M. Allton (2017), will be used:

- Follower growth.
- Engagement rate.

These variables will allow seeing the connection between the usage of different Instagram tools and how it directly affects the factors related to effective branding, which include user engagement and follower increase. The thesis will not use these suggested measurements by M. Allton (2017): the performance of individual posts, effectiveness of hashtags and time. Those were indicated as not suitable for this analysis, as those possess features of qualitative variables.

Research Limitations. Despite the research being well prepared, there are certain limitations that need to be mentioned:

- *Lack of self-analysis in the strategic brand analysis part.* This was not available to perform due to the fact that the trademark, which is being analyzed is completely new and has no previous history to analyze.
- *Lack of brand identity system.* Visual content type analysis of traveler influencer brands (competitors) and customers does not propose enough material, which would allow getting well-based guidelines for how to form brand identity rather than what images to post. In addition, as Instagram is primarily an image sharing social media it is possible to state that visual content analysis is most important part for understanding of what increases user engagement.
- *Lack of brand position and execution strategies for brand identity implementation system.* These strategies have not been used as it was believed that defining a strategy for travel influencer trademark, would prove the effectiveness of only one selected strategy. That is why different types of strategies were implemented in order to define, which tools provided by Instagram are most useful and how it should be exploited.
- *Lack of variety of visual content types used by Thesis author.* First, some of the visual types were immediately identified as ineffective. Secondly, thesis author was unable to provide pictures of certain types of visual content due to technical difficulties.
- *Lack of analysis for posts descriptions.* As Instagram was believed to be a visual-oriented social media channel, author did not perform a research, which would analyze the types of descriptions and how they affect user engagement and follower growth.

- *Lack of analysis for the impact of post time.* As author has not defined his target audience, it is irrelevant to analyze the impact of post time, as different users live in different time zones.
- *Lack of analysis for popular hashtag use.* Author decided to have a consistent use of same popular hashtags and only change the destination hashtags. That is why only results for destination hashtags were acquired.

2.2. Results for Strategic Brand Analysis for *Traveler's Child*

As found in theoretical analysis part, it is necessary to analyze the customers (followers), the competitors and the brand itself to begin the branding process. In order to do that, first, five of one of the biggest travel influencer brands on Instagram were selected in order to figure out what type of content is being published the most. It is done by analyzing a hundred posts of each brand, while excluding the promo posts and video posts.

Second, fifty different followers, which have at least minor social influence (500 followers) were selected to in order to analyze what type of content customers post, to see if they engage with the same type of visual content they post themselves. It is done by analyzing fifty posts of follower, while excluding the promo posts and video posts.

For competitor and customer analysis, visual content type qualitative variable and user engagement quantitative variable will be used. The other variables are excluded because either it is not possible to track these types of activities or these activities are not constant in every brand or follower case and it might give misleading results.

2.2.1. Competitor Analysis

In this part, five major travel influencer brands were analyzed to see if there are any constant types of content that these brands use. In addition, competitor analysis will allow making predictions about which types of visual categories have the biggest impact on increasing user engagement, which allows the brand to grow. User engagement is calculated by adding up likes and comments and dividing it by the number of followers.

Beautiful Destinations. According to the official website of this travel influencer brand, it is the biggest travel community on social media overall, as well as, on Instagram. During the time of research, Beautiful Destinations had 9 million followers on Instagram.

Analysis of 100 posts made by this travel influencer brand on Instagram (from March 18, 2017 to April 28, 2017) social media platform allows to state that mainly three types of visual content were used, four were used rarely and one was not used at all (Figure 5). Most used type of visual content was the heritage type with no human presence, which was used 41 times. Almost the same amount of times Beautiful Destinations posted visual content, which portrayed nature with no human presence and nature with human presence. These types of visual content were used 28 and 23 times respectively. Four times during the research period this travel influencer brand posted heritage with human presence. Three categories were used only once, which were culture with and without human presence and tourist services without human presence. Not once have Beautiful Destinations portrayed tourist services with human presence.

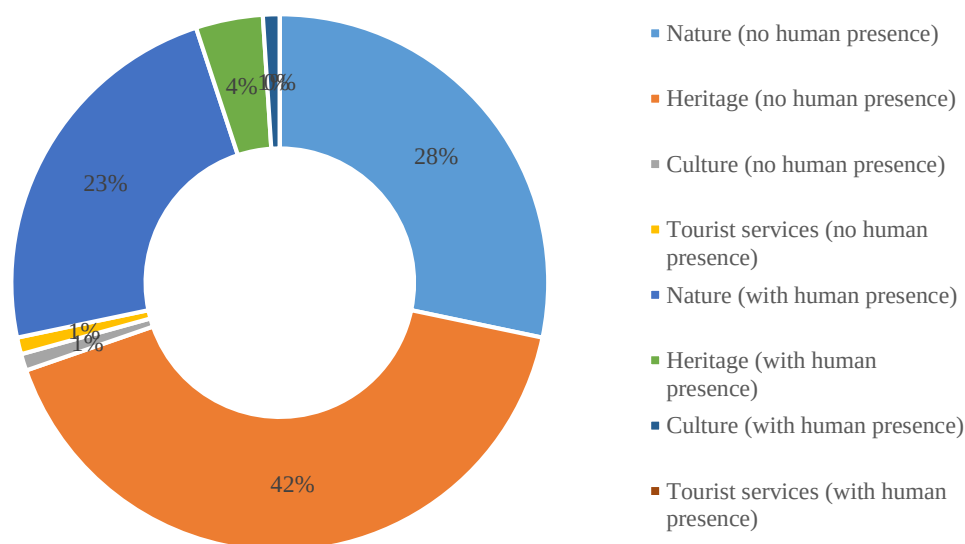


Figure 5. Types of visual content used by Beautiful Destinations. (%)

In addition, the most user engaging types of visual content were researched. It showed that there are differences in which content is more engaging and that though some content is used rarely it has better results than the other visual content (Figure 6). The most engaging visual content was the one that was second most used – nature without human presence, which had 2.33% engagement rate. Second largest engagement rate belonged to category which was one of the least used – heritage with human presence – 2.27%. Two other visual content types had also a higher than two percent engagement rate, which were heritage without human presence and nature with human presence – 2.14% and 2.01% respectively. Least used visual content types also had the lowest engagement rate: 1.7% for culture with no human presence, 1.68% for culture with human presence and 1.67% for tourist services without human presence.

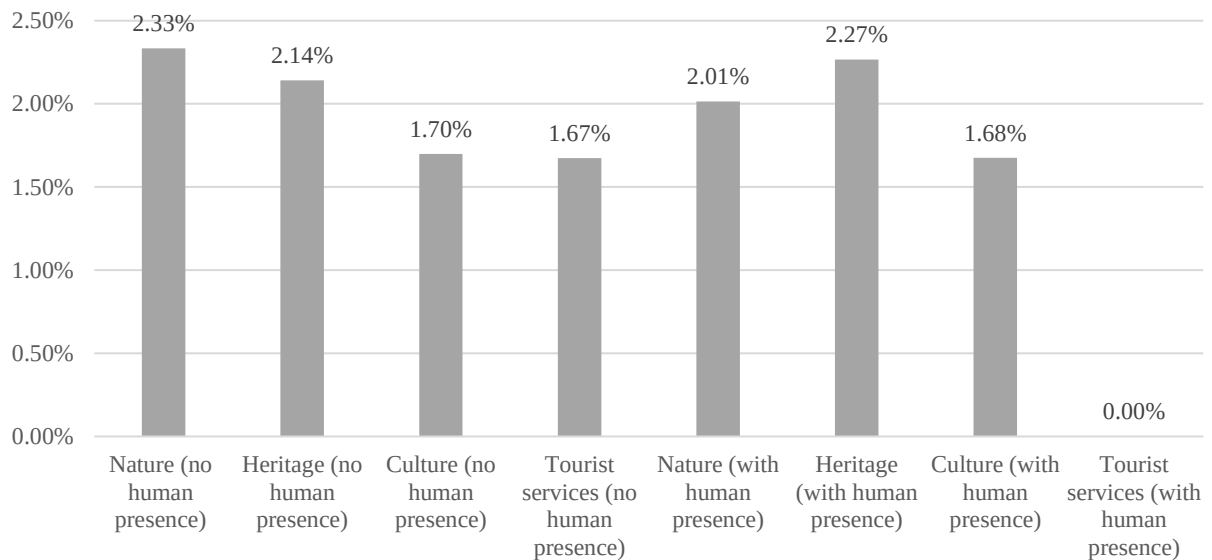


Figure 6. Most engaging types of visual content for Beautiful Destinations. (%)

Beautiful Destinations visual content types' analysis showed that the usage of nature and heritage type of visual content is an effective way to get a higher engagement rate. In addition, heritage type of visual content is visibly more effective with human presence and visual content including nature is much more effective when human presence is missing.

Naked Planet. This travel influencer brand was created in 2012 in Miami (United States) and in five years has increased their community into more than three million followers worldwide. At the time of analysis it had 3.1 million followers on Instagram.

Analysis of 100 posts made by Naked Planet (from March 4, 2017 to April 28, 2017) allows to state that mainly two types of visual content were used, five were used rarely and one was not used once (Figure 7). Nearly half of the visual content types were nature with no human presence – used 45 times and the second largest is also nature visual content type only with human presence – 35 times. Third largest type, but significantly smaller one was the heritage type without human presence – 9 times, almost the same amount of times were used the tourist services without human presence and heritage with human presence visual content types – 5 and 4 times respectively. Finally, two types were used once – culture both with and without human presence. The high usage of nature types could be explained as Naked Planet encourages nature travelling rather than city sightseeing.

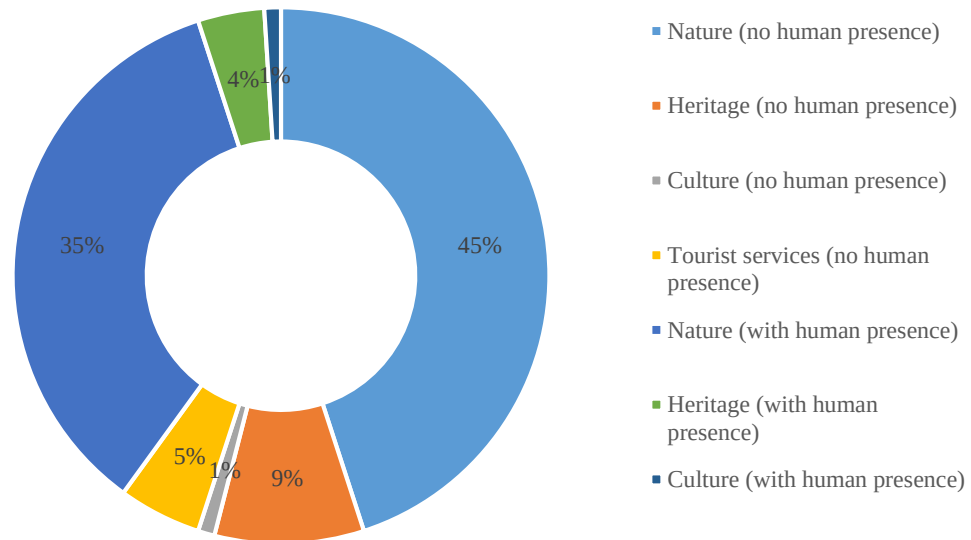


Figure 7. Types of visual content used by Naked Planet. (%)

In addition, research of the most user engaging types of visual content was performed. It showed that Naked Planet could be encouraged to try a deeper variety of visual content types, as the mainly used types are not as effective as others are (Figure 8). The most successful visual content type in terms of user engagement was culture with no human presence – 2.80%, but as it was used only once it is not possible to predict if the numbers would remain the same if there were more images of this type. Second most effective visual content type was the tourist service type with no human presence and as it was used 5 times, it is possible to state that Naked Planet could use these types of post more often. Third and fourth were the most used types of visual content – nature with and without human presence – 1.83% and 1.77% respectively. The variable of human presence differs from previous analysis, as this time in nature pictures the view of a person made the posts more engaging. Least effective were the both heritage types of visual content, which were used rarely (4 and 5 times) and also proved that it is less effective in case of user engagement. Lastly, culture with human presence post type was used only once and had the biggest gap between other types of posts as its' engagement rate was 0.75%.

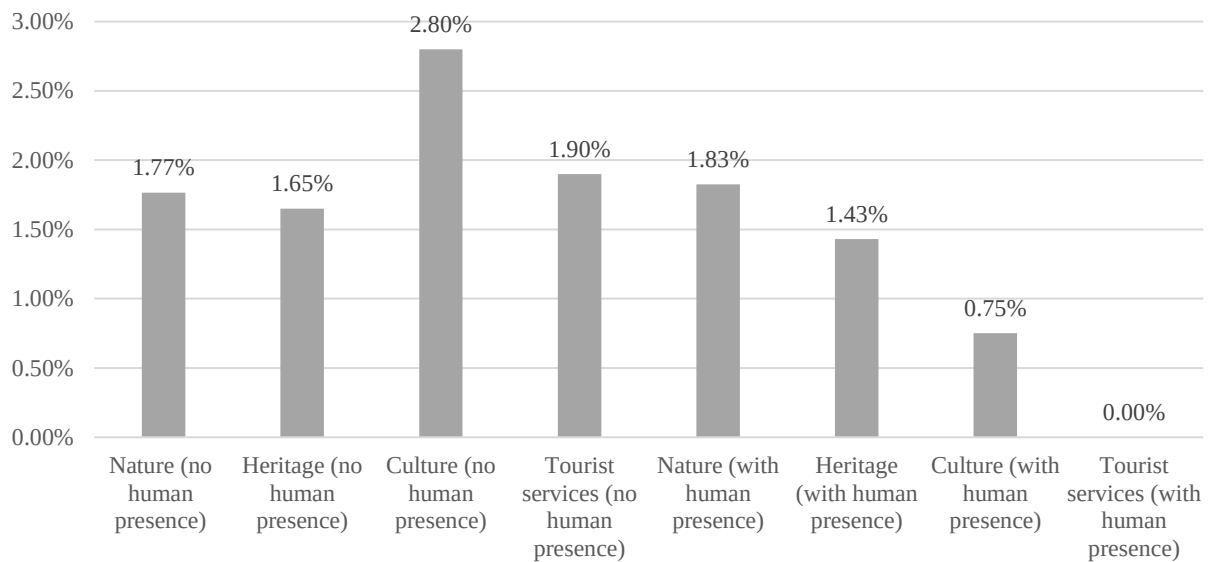


Figure 8. Most engaging types of visual content for Naked Planet. (%)

Naked Planet visual content types' analysis showed that the usage of nature type of visual content is an effective way to get a higher engagement rate, though data analysis shows that there is a chance that other types could be even more effective.

Earth Official. This travel influencer brand is only present on Instagram social media platform and at the time of analysis had 2.4 million followers. It states that it has a social purpose of increasing environmental awareness by sharing images of our planet. It is also a brand, which encourages nature traveling rather than city sightseeing.

Analysis of 100 posts made by Earth Official (from March 4, 2017 to April 28, 2017) allows to state that mainly one type of visual content was used, two were used sometimes, two were used rarely and three types were not used even once. Of all competitor analysis Earth Official turned out to be a brand which used the smallest variety of visual content types (Figure 9). The majority of the posts of this travel influencer brand included nature, which was mainly without human presence – 57 times and 23 times nature included a person. The other relevant type of visual content was heritage without human presence as it was used 17 times. A couple of times Earth Official posted heritage with human presence and once a tourist service without human presence.

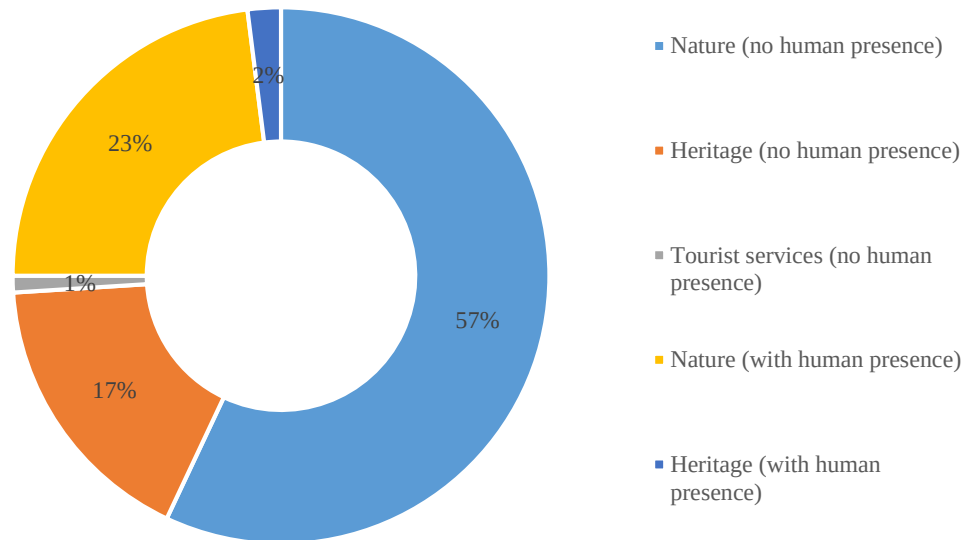


Figure 9. Types of visual content used by Earth Official. (%)

In addition, the most user engaging types of visual content were researched. The results indicated that Earth Official is possibly not using the most effective types of visual content (Figure 10). Most engaging type of visual content for this travel influencer brand turned out to be the heritage with no human presence type – 1.91%, which was used only a minority of times by Earth Official. Second was the tourist services with no human presence type, but as it was used only once conclusions could not be drawn and the results are irrelevant. Third was the most used type – nature without human presence – 1.79%, which indicates that Earth Official could possibly be losing follower interest as it is being used majority of the time, but does not have the best results. Next went the heritage with human presence – 1.73%, but as it was used only twice, the results are not relevant. Finally, the last went the nature with human presence visual content type, which was second most used, but was by far the least effective type in case of user engagement with the rate of 1.61%.

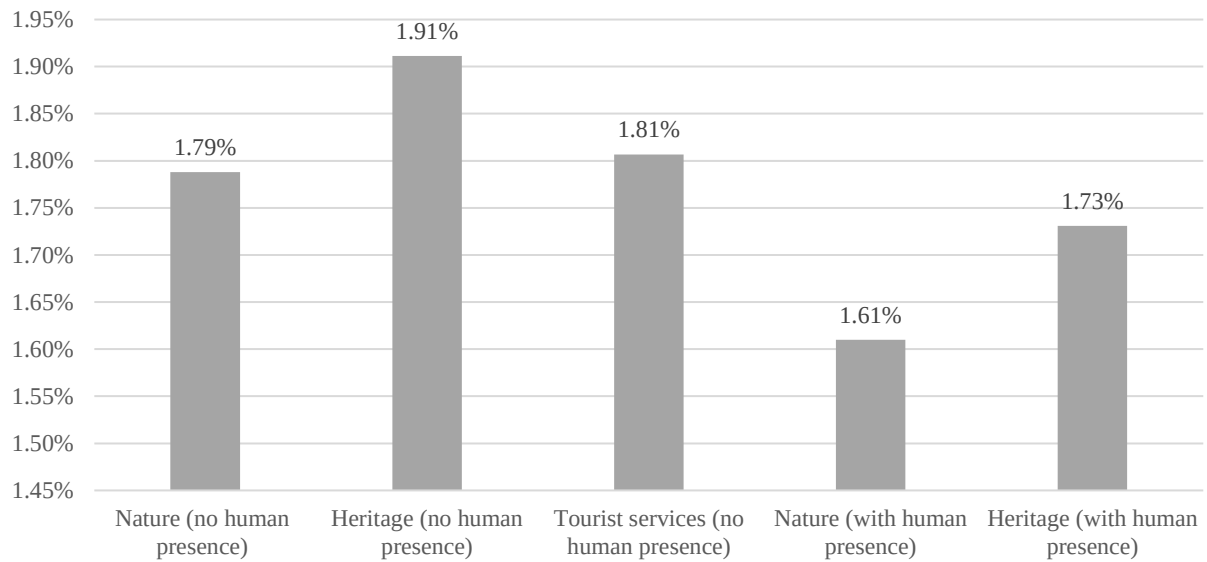


Figure 10. Most engaging types of visual content for Earth Official. (%)

Earth Official visual content types' analysis showed that the brand is doing damage to itself by using less effective types of visual content.

Travel and Leisure. This travel influencer brand is present in different social media platforms and has a following of nearly 10 million users. It is one of the biggest travel influencer brands on Instagram and has more than 2.6 million followers.

Analysis of 100 posts made by Travel and Leisure (from December 23, 2016 to April 28, 2017) allows to state that mainly one type of visual content was used, two were used sometimes, four were used rarely and one type was not used even once (Figure 11). More than half of the post were the heritage with no human presence type – 53. Interestingly, Travel and Leisure seemed to choose exclusively heritage images without people, as there were only four cases where heritage visual content included a human being. Almost the same amount of times were used the nature type images, the ones with no human presence – 22 times and with human presence – 16. Two times were used the culture and tourist service types of visual content, both without human presence. Only once Travel and Leisure posted an image showing tourist services and a person in it.

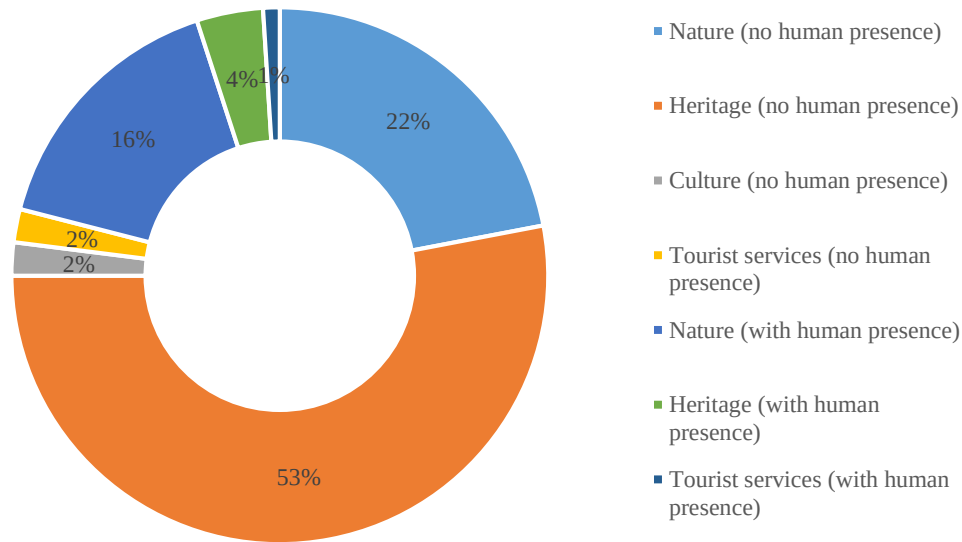


Figure 11. Types of visual content used by Travel and Leisure. (%)

In addition, research of the most user engaging types of visual content was performed (Figure 12). Differently from previous cases, Travel and Leisure’s posts that got the most engagement were both the tourist service visual content types, which is probably because this travel influencer brand emphasizes the leisure. Tourist services with human presence had 1.79% of engagement rate, while the same type without human presence had 1.71%. However, these types of visual content were used rather rarely, but it allows to believe that followers expect tourist service images from a brand with a word “leisure” in it. A significant difference while comparing the human presence was found in heritage type of visual content. In the case of no people the engagement rate was 1.45%, while people presence increased the rate to 1.63%. Almost no difference between the presence of human was seen in nature type of visual content – 1.36% without people and 1.34% with people. Finally, cultural images without human presence had also a respective 1.60% engagement rate.

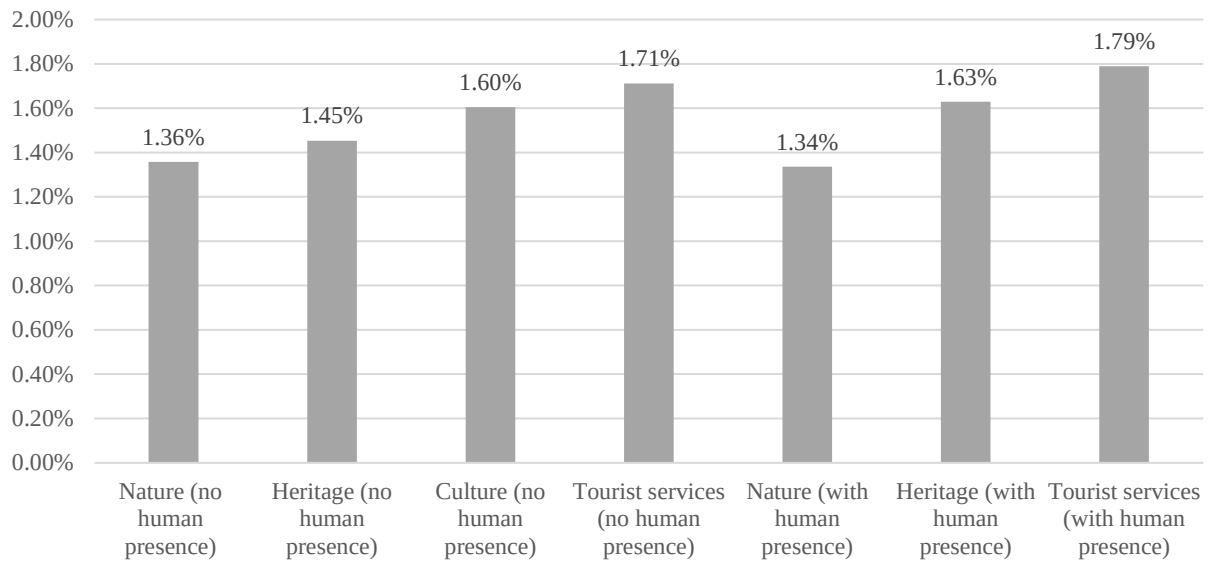


Figure 12. Most engaging types of visual content for Travel and Leisure. (%)

Travel and Leisure visual content types' analysis showed that in this brand's case human presence is more effective for increasing the engagement rate. Also, the high numbers of tourist services visual content type posts suggests that this brand, which emphasizes their relation with leisure should provide more imagery related to this subject.

Travel Awesome. This travel influencer brand is present on two social media platforms – Instagram and Snapchat. Travel Awesome has nearly 2 million followers and has worked with such worldwide known brands as Walt Disney, Dom Perignon, Sandals, etc.

Analysis of 100 posts made by Travel Awesome (from February 27, 2017 to April 28, 2017) proved this brand as most diverse in case of different types of visual content used (Figure 13). It was the only one that featured all the types of visual content at least three times. Two mostly used types were both nature types, where nature with human presence was used 29 times and nature without human presence – 27 times. 15 times Travel Awesome has posted the heritage type of visual content, 10 times – tourist service with human presence. The least used categories were heritage with human presence – 8 times, tourist service without human presence – 5 times and three times were used both culture with and without human presence.

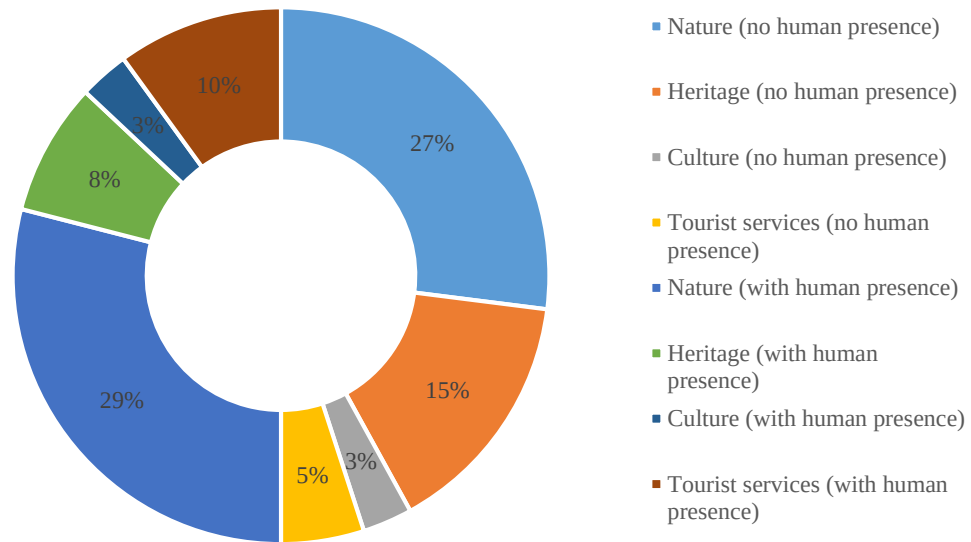


Figure 13. Types of visual content used by Travel Awesome. (%)

In addition, the most user engaging types of visual content were researched. This analysis provided quite different results when comparing to the previous brands (Figure 14). Firstly, the most engaging were the culture types of visual content, which were used only three times. These types were the only ones in Travel Awesome case, which had a higher than 2% engagement rate. Culture with human presence got 2.39% engagement rate, while culture without human presence – 2.33%. Visual content including nature were both the next most engaging, while also being most used by this brand. Nature without human presence got 1.75%, while nature with human presence got 1.90%. Heritage visual content type was the only one in this case where human presence had a negative impact on user engagement rate. Heritage type of visual content without human presence had 1.70% and heritage with human presence had 1.61%. Images portraying tourist services were the least engaging types of visual content and got 1.3% for tourist services without human presence and 1.56% if people were visible in the image.

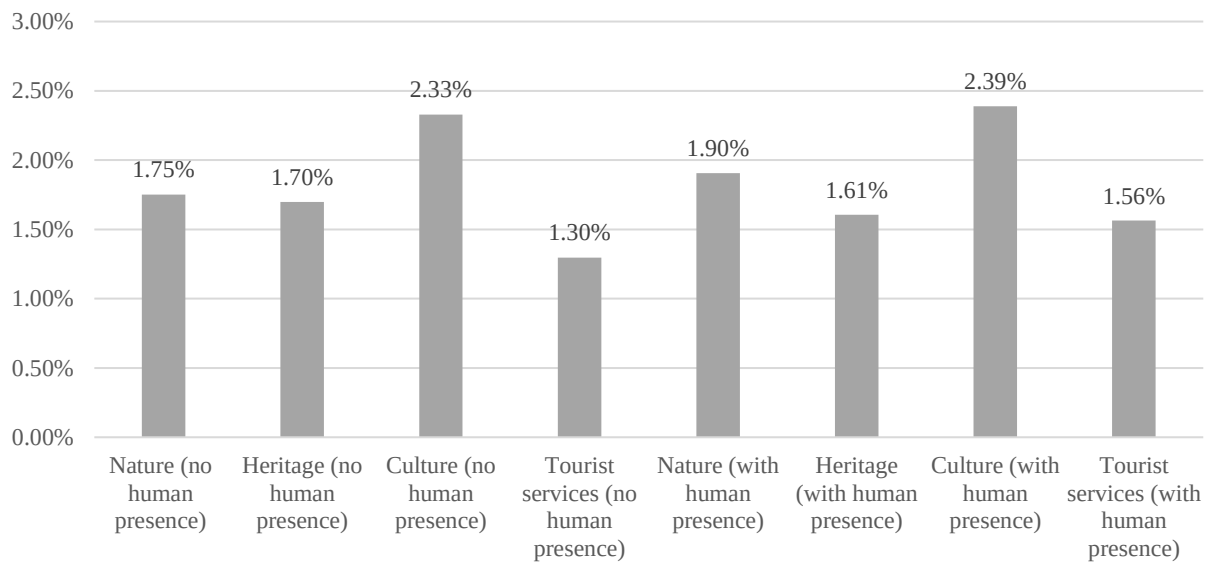


Figure 14. Most engaging types of visual content for Travel Awesome. (%)

Travel Awesome visual content types' analysis showed that in this brand's case human presence is exceptionally more effective for increasing the engagement rate. In addition, images showing cultural visual content increase the engagement of followers dramatically.

Overall Analysis. Overall analysis of accumulated numbers from all five travel influencer brands provided guidelines, which could be adapted by travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child* (Figure 15). Three of the types were used the most, while the rest of five were used rarely. One of the most successful travel influencer brands mostly use imagery with nature without human presence – 36% of posts matched this type. Second most used type was the heritage without human presence – 27%. Third – nature with human presence – 25%. The rest five types of visual content were used rather rarely. Heritage with human presence had a small advantage with 5% of posts, while tourist services without human presence and with human presence were posted 3% and 2% of the time respectively. Only 1% of the posts were both types of the cultural visual content.

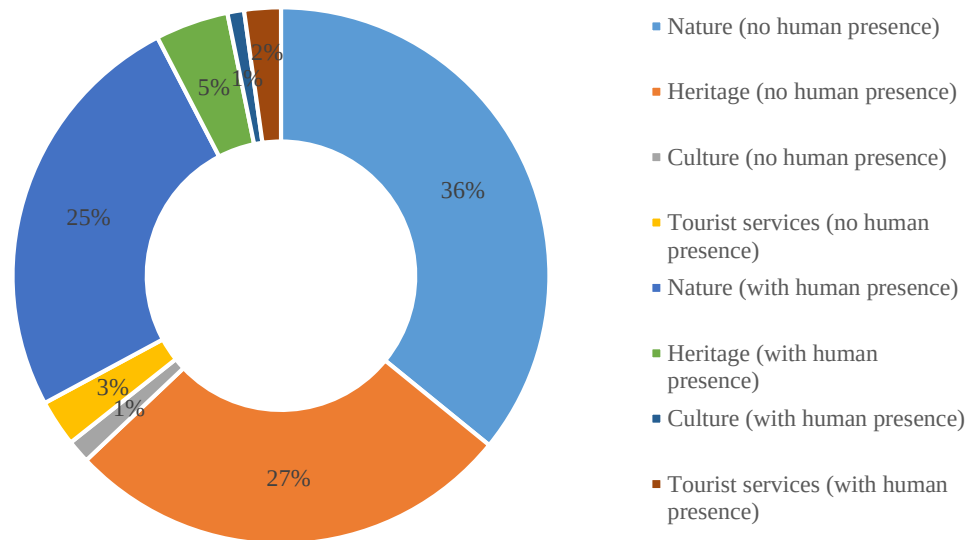


Figure 15. Types of visual content used by 5 of the biggest travel influencer brands. (%)

Additionally, the analysis of posts user engagement was performed. Due to different types of engagement rates, which range from one account to another, the highest engagement rate value for each brand was rated 100% and the lower values were calculated accordingly.

After accumulating data of all the travel influencer brands the engagement rate of most of the visual content types has leveled off (Figure 16). Results indicate that most effective types of posts are all four types of nature and heritage with or without human presence. A slight advantage in these cases could be seen if there is no human presence – nature without human presence was the most engaging type of visual content overall and heritage without human presence performed less than one percent worse. In case of these types of visual content with human presence – heritage with human presence performed 1,72% better than nature with human presence. An actual advantage in case of user engagement could be seen when human presence is in culture or tourist service types of visual content. When comparing culture type visual content the difference is almost 40. Finally, an enormous difference of 55% is visible when comparing tourist services visual content – 94.64% for services without human presence against 40.76% with human presence.

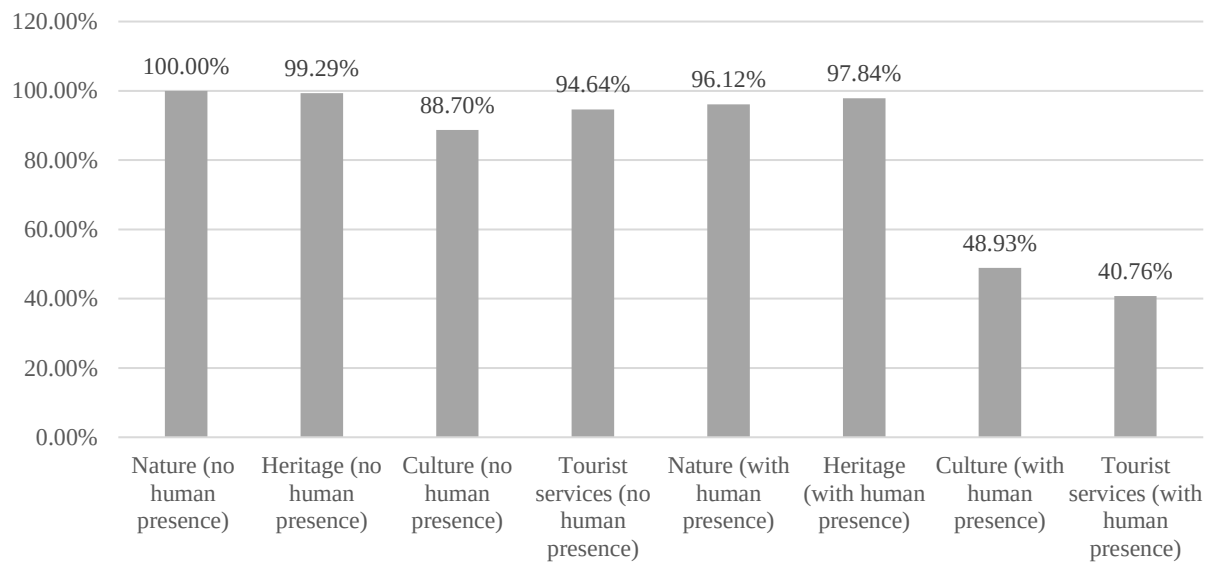


Figure 16. Most engaging types of visual content for 5 of the biggest travel influencer brands. (%)

The visual data types' analysis of major competitors in travel influencer market suggested that *Traveler's Child* should mostly use these three types of visual content: nature without human presence, nature with human presence and heritage without human presence. In addition, competitor analysis indicates that in every category human presence is a disadvantage rather than an advantage.

2.2.2. Customer Analysis

The purpose of customer analysis is to find out if there is connection between what followers post and the engagement rate. During the analysis, 50 random followers of previously mentioned competitors were chosen and 50 of their posts were analyzed to see what types of visual content they use (Figure 17). The criteria for selection was that followers had to have a visible interest in traveling (more than a half of posts must fall under the types chosen for this research), users should also have at least a minor influence of 500 followers. The engagement rate of followers' post was found irrelevant due to the previously stated purpose of the customer analysis – finding if what users post is what they engage with. This will be achieved by comparing the most used types of visual content overall results from competitor analysis with the results of customer analysis.

Most used visual content by customers. The analysis of 2500 posts showed that there are two major types of visual content used by the customers, which are nature and heritage, both without human presence. Nature without human presence was used slightly more times – 670 and accounted for 27%, while heritage without human presence was used 642 times and accounted for 26% of all types of visual content posted by the followers of major travel influencer brands. Almost the same amount of

times followers posted nature with human presence (298 times) or chose to post travel unrelated content (306 times), which both accounted for 12% of total posts. The last type of visual content to have at least a 10% of total posts was the heritage with human presence type – posted 241 times (10% of total posts). At least one hundred times were posted both tourist services types. These types of visual content were posted almost the same amount of times – 132 times without human presence and 129 times with human presence – both accounting for 5% of total posts. The most insignificant types of visual content were the culture types. Culture with human presence was posted 66 times, which accounted for 3% and culture without human presence was posted 16 times, which accounted for less than 1% of total posts.

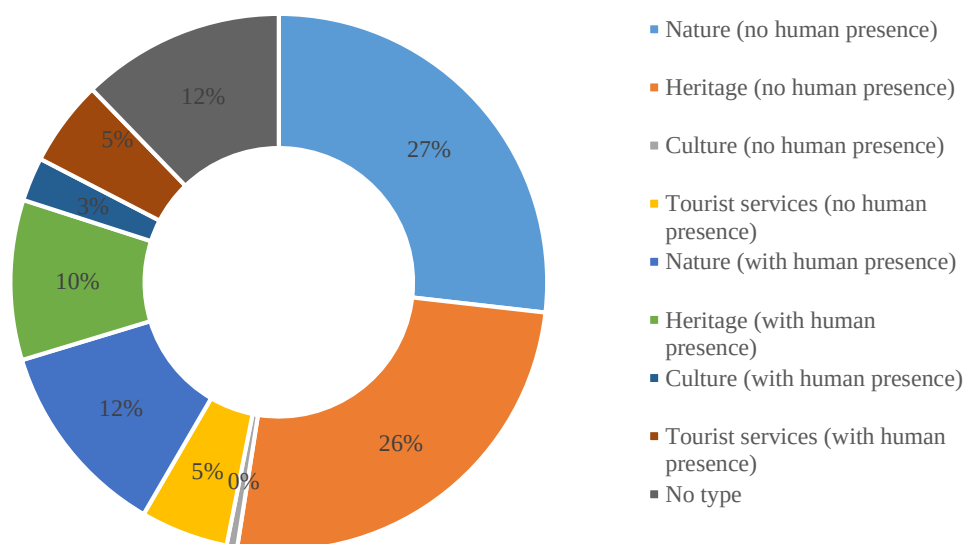


Figure 17. Types of visual content used by 50 followers of major travel influencer brands. (%)

Most used visual content comparison. The analysis of most types used by competitors and customers shows that on both sides the most popular types of visual content are the same (Figure 18). Both competitors and customers post mostly nature with no human presence, though there is a significant advantage of how much competitors post it over how much the customers post it – 36% of all posts made by competitors were nature without human presence, compared to 27% made by customers. The second most popular type of visual content is also the same – heritage with no human presence, which is used almost the same amount of time – 27% by competitors and 26% by customers. The third most popular type of visual content is again the same for both sides – nature with human presence, though the usage difference is the largest between all the types. Competitors used nature with human presence on 25% of occasions and for customers it accounted for 12% of all posts. The fourth most used type by customers was the heritage with human presence, which accounted for 10% at was used twice as much as it was used by competitors – 5%. Competitors also 5% of the time used tourist services with human presence,

which was the same amount for customers too. Customers also for the same amount of times used the tourist service types of visual content, which accounted for 5% and was a bit more than what competitors used – 3%. Finally, the least used were the culture types of visual content. Without human presence, it was 1% of the time by competitors and 0.5% of the time by followers, while with human presence it was also used 1% of the time by competitors and a bit more often by customers – 3%.

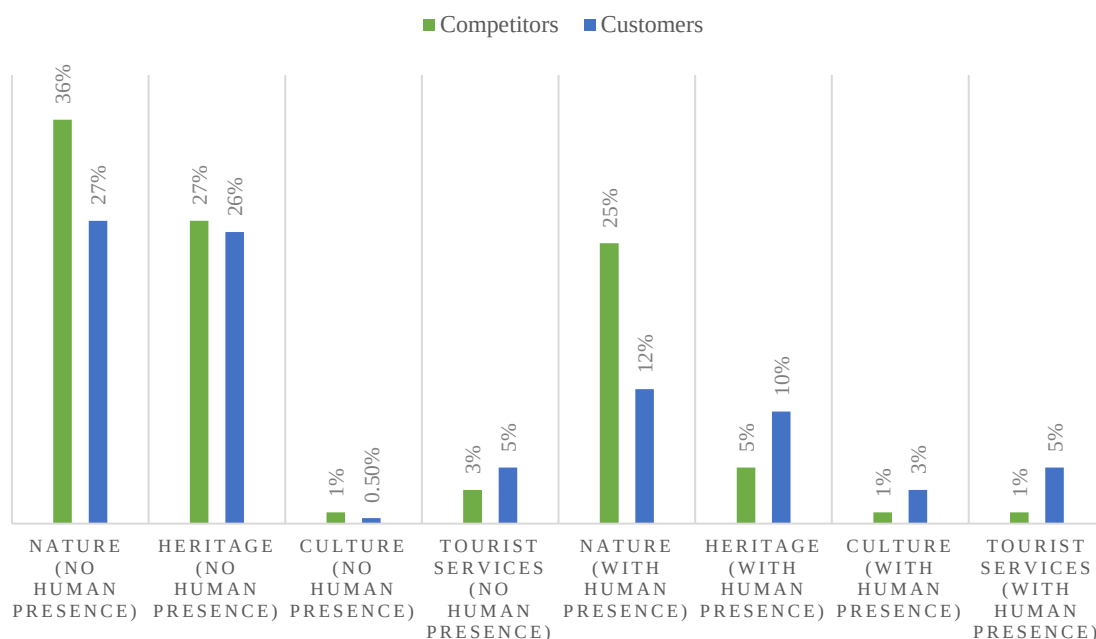


Figure 18. Competitor and customer comparison for most used types of visual content. (%)

Comparison between most used types of visual content by customers and most engaging content by competitors. After finding that there is a link between what competitors and customers post, it is necessary to analyze if customers are also engaging more with the same types of visual content posted on travel influencer brand's social media platforms. To compare these stats the most popular and the most engaging types are equivalent of 100% and the lower values are a percentage from those numbers.

Analysis shows that the most popular type of visual content is also the most engaging one (Figure 19). Nature without human presence is both the most used type of visual content and the one that followers the most engaging. Almost the same can be said about heritage without human presence – it is second most popular post among customers and the second most engaging.

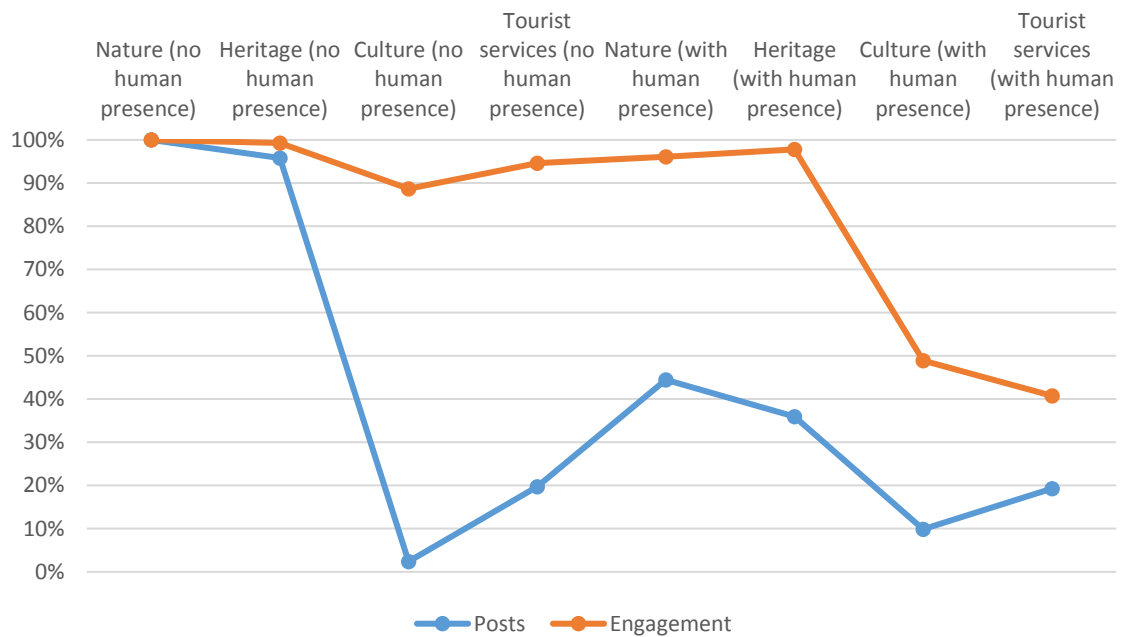


Figure 19. Comparison between customer usage and engagement with types of visual posts. (%)

Overall results of all five brands show that users are engaging with almost every type of visual content except for the culture and tourist service, both with human presence. These types of post are also the only ones that have poor engagement rate between the users. Still it is necessary to mention that the results would vary between brands, as engagement rates are quite different in individual case.

2.3. The Results of Tracking of Brand Implementation System for *Traveler's Child*

The brand implementation system is used to finalize the process of branding in which, the company has to finalize the processes of creating its identity, defining brand's position, executing their strategy and, finally, to track the results to prove the effectiveness of previous actions.

As mentioned in research limitations, traveler influencer trademark *Traveler's Child* has not selected their brand position strategy or execution strategy and rather tried different types of strategies in order to define, which tools provided by Instagram are most useful and how those should be exploited. Certain types of visual content were immediately identified as ineffective, due to their poor results, which were also backed up by competitor and customer analysis, as well as, some were unable to perform due to technical difficulties faced by the Thesis author.

The Results of Tracking. The results of data tracking will present an analysis of 90 posts made by *Traveler's Child* during the period of February 6, 2017 to May 7, 2017. During this time different types of Instagram tools were used. Thesis author used these *qualitative* variables:

- Types of visual content. Nine categories as mentioned before will be used in customer and competitor analysis, as well as, while tracking the data of travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child*.
- Brand activity. It reflects how the brand is engaging with its users, two variables will be used to define trademark activity:
 - Active. Actively commenting, liking posts of other users that are interested in traveling and following their accounts. In addition, active usage of *live* function and broadcasting the videos to users.
 - Passive. Rarely commenting, linking posts of other users. No usage of *live* function.
- Use of destination hashtags. A place is considered popular if its' hashtag has at least 300 thousand pictures.
- Shout-outs by other high-influence (1 million+ followers) travel influencers.
- Takeover of other influencer pages.

The success of these variables were researched while analyzing their influence to these *quantitative* variables:

- Follower growth.
- Engagement rate.

Types of visual content compared to competitors and customers. During the period of February 6, 2017 to May 7, 2017 travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child* posted 90 posts. Due to results of competitors and customer analysis and early-visible possible outcomes, mainly three types of visual content were used – heritage, both with and without human presence and nature without human presence (Figure 20).

More than half of the time *Traveler's Child* used heritage without human presence – 56%, which was the second most used type of visual content for both competitors and customers. Second most used type of visual content was the heritage with human presence – 23% and compared to competitors and customers was used significantly less times. The most used type of visual content for competitors and customers, was the third most used type for *Traveler's Child* – nature without human presence – 16%. 2% of the time the author's created trademark used nature with human presence, which was used

significantly more times by both competitors and customers. The least used types were culture with and without human presence, and tourist services without human presence – 1%. These types were also unpopular with both competitors and customers. Not once, due to technical difficulties, was *Traveler's Child* able to use tourist services with human presence.

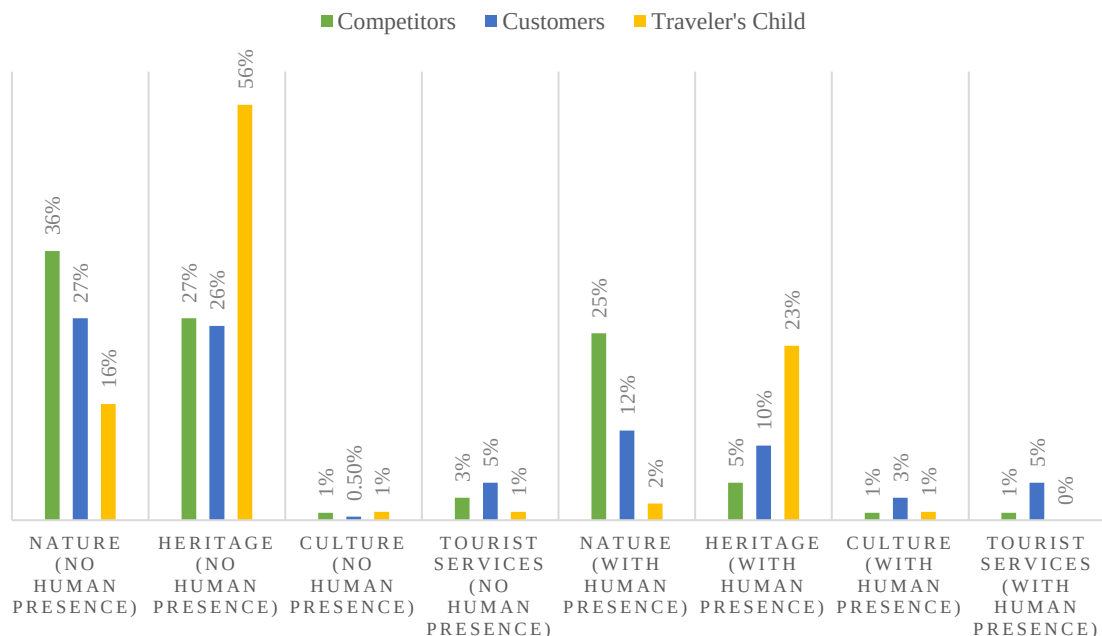


Figure 20. Competitor, customer and *Traveler's Child* comparison for most used types of visual content. (%)

Types of most engaging visual content compared to competitors. The data tracking of *Traveler's Child* Instagram data allowed to identify, which types of visual content was most effective in case of user engagement (Figure 21). Due to different engagement rates, which decrease Most visible difference is seen between most engaging types of visual content is seen while comparing the results of nature with human presence. In case of competitors it is the most user-engaging type, while for *Traveler's Child*

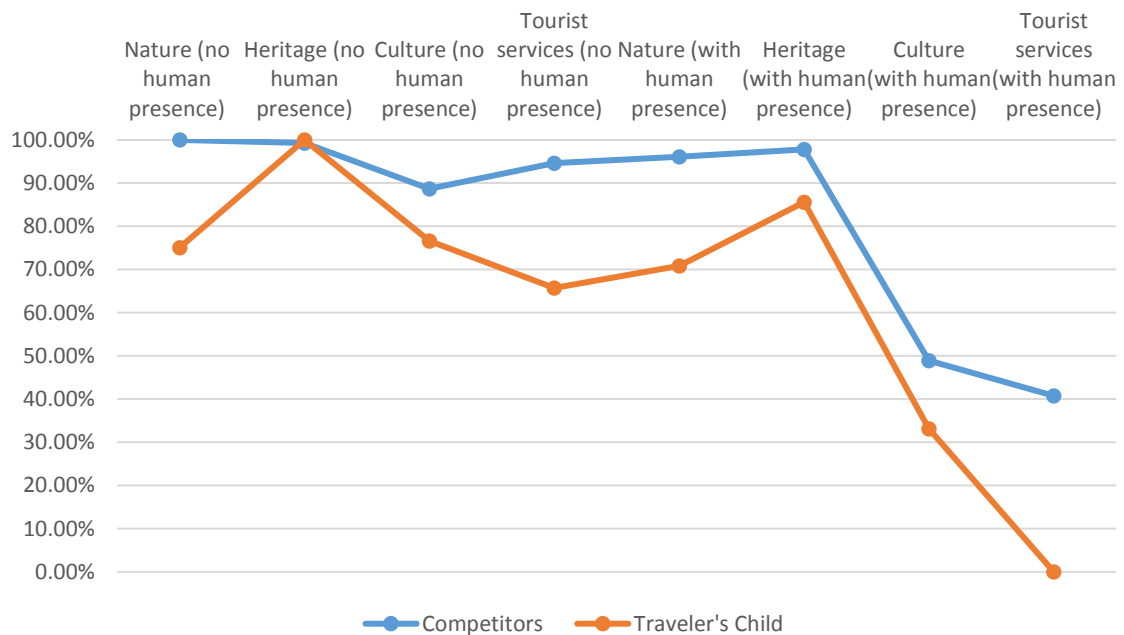


Figure 21. Competitor and *Traveler's Child* comparison for most engaging types of visual content. (%)

Types of visual content that increased the followers the most. During the period of February 6, 2017 to May 7, 2017 travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child* posted 90 posts. During the research it was monitored how different types of visual content affect the follower increase (Figure 22).

The most successful types of visual content were the heritage type. When trademark posted heritage without human presence the follower number increased 0.38% and 0.37% when the same type included a person. The third most effective type was the culture without human presence. However, it was only used once and was posted during the shout-out of Beautiful Destinations. It also received a bad engagement rate, so the follower increase in this case should not be taken into account. The fourth most successful type was the nature without human presence – 0.12% and the fifth was the tourist services without human presence – 0.08% average follower increase. Once again, a positive effect of people not being in the pictures can be noticed. Finally, nature and culture with human presence got 0.06% and 0.05% follower increase, accordingly.



Figure 22. *Traveler's Child* comparison for types of visual content, which were most successful in increasing the followers. (%)

Brand activity. During the period February 6, 2017 to May 7, 2017, performed two types of activity of actively engaging with its' followers (commenting, liking posts of other users and following their accounts) and doing it passively. *Traveler's Child* since February 6, 2017 to March 10, 2017 actively engaged with its users and during the span of March 10, 2017 to May 7, 2017 have acted passively in terms of engaging with it followers.

The analysis showed that customers respond to brand activity much better, when trademark is actively engaging with them (Figure 23). During the period of *Traveler's Child* being active in case of engaging with its followers users were 3% more engaging with trademarks' posts (commenting and liking) while also was much more likely to start following the trademark – 0.59% daily follower increase against 0.17%.

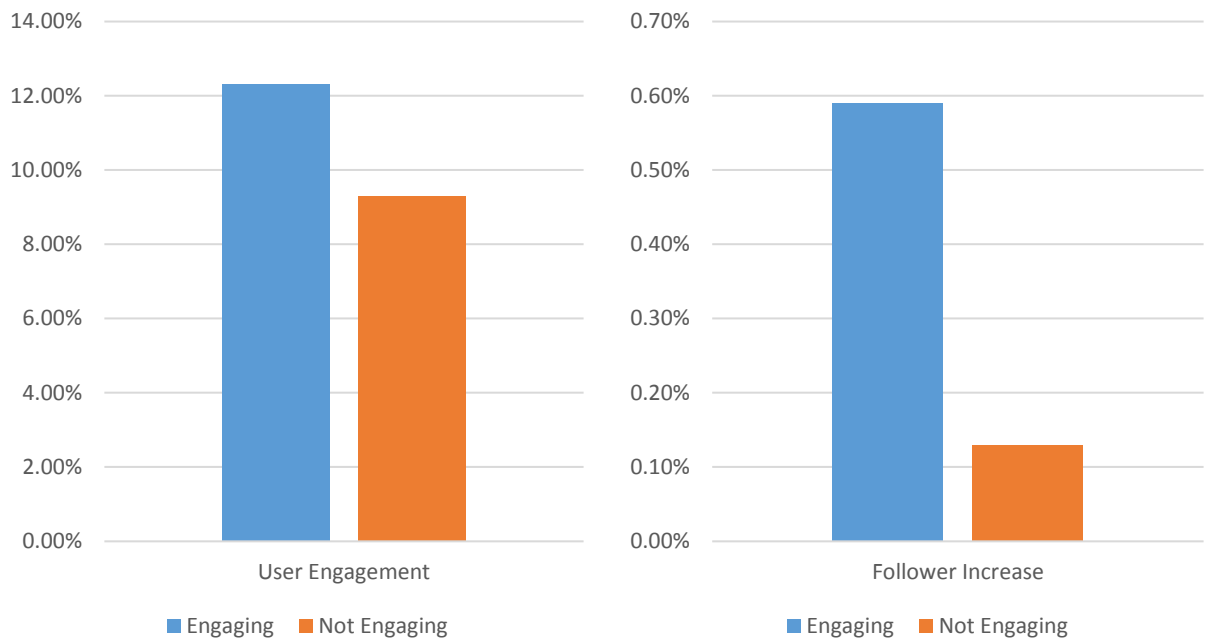


Figure 23. Comparison between customer activity in case of trademark being actively engaging and not. (%)

Use of destination hashtags. During the period February 6, 2017 to May 7, 2017, two types of hashtags regarding place of picture taken were identified – *popular* and *not popular*. These identifications were made according to popularity of these places hashtags – 300 thousand and more pictures with this hashtag made it to be considered as *popular*, while any less was considered as *not popular*. *Traveler's Child* posted 48 pictures of places that are considered *popular* and 42 pictures with places that are considered *not popular*.

The analysis showed that customers respond to brand activity much better, when trademark is actively engaging with them (Figure 24). During the periods when *Traveler's Child* was posting pictures with hashtags of popular places, users were 3.2% more engaging with trademarks' posts (commenting and liking) and also an increase in likeliness of following the trademark was noticed – 0.38% daily follower increase against 0.26%.

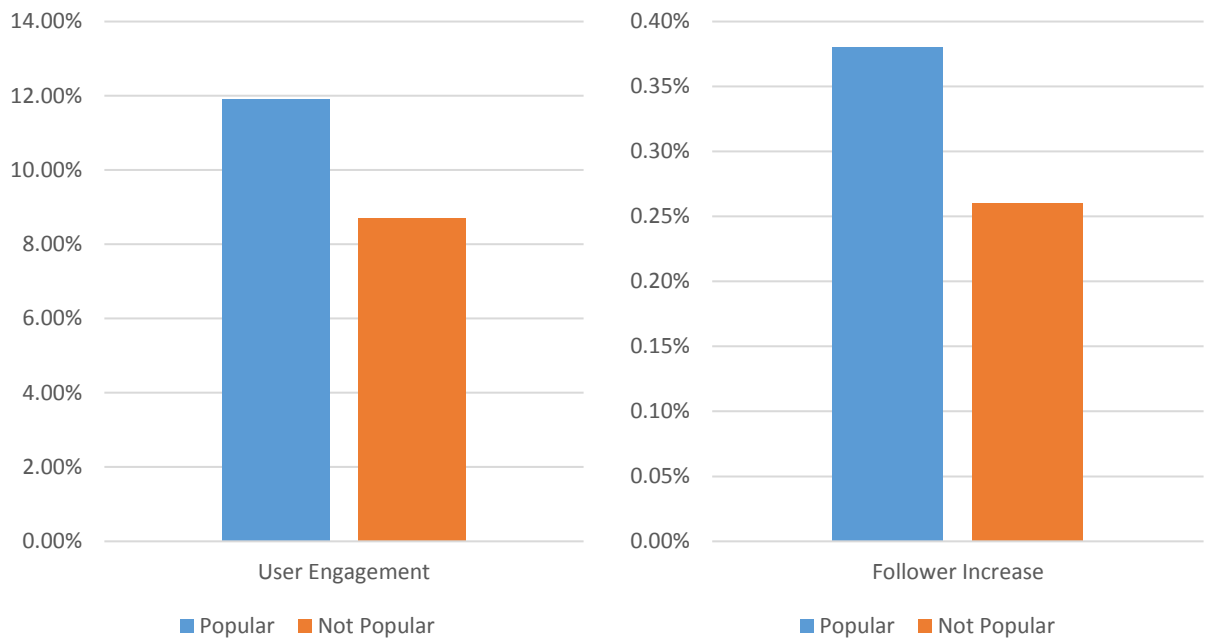


Figure 24. Comparison between customer activity in case of trademark posting pictures of places with popular and not popular hashtags. (%)

Shout-outs by high-influence travel influencers. During the period February 6, 2017 to May 7, 2017, only once has *Traveler's Child* received a shout-out from high-influence travel influencer, which was Beautiful Destinations, which has more than 9 million followers. During the period of when picture made by *Traveler's Child* was on a first page of Beautiful Destinations (from February 22, 2017 until February 25, 2017) a noticeable increase of both user engagement and follower increase was noticed (Figure 25). In case of shout-out being visible in the first page of Beautiful Destinations users were more engaging with *Traveler's Child* content – 13.2% against 10.2% and the increase of average daily followers was the highest in all the period of analysis – 1.45% daily follower increase over 0.26% for when the shout-out was not visible in the first page of Beautiful Destinations.

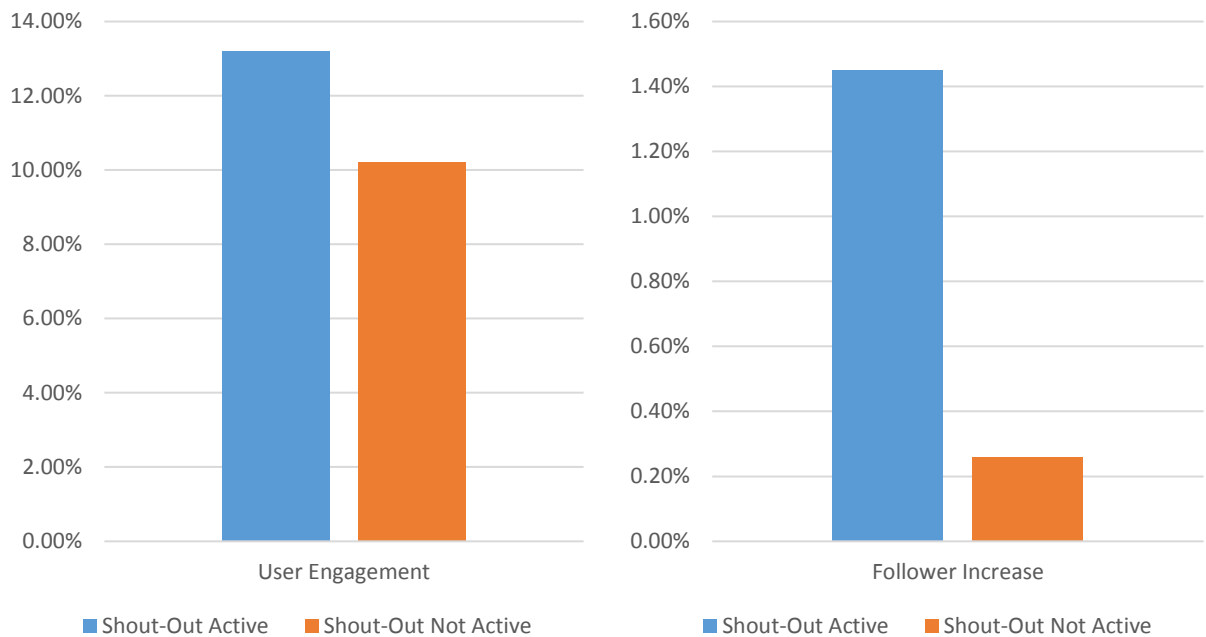


Figure 25. Comparison between customer activity in case of trademark receiving a shout-out by a high influence travel influencer brand and not. (%)

Takeover of other influencer pages. . During the period February 6, 2017 to May 7, 2017, only once has *Traveler's Child* performed a takeover of other travel influencer page. From April 18, 2017 to April 24, 2017 *Traveler's Child* took over the control of Kaunas (Lithuania) official Instagram tourism account Visit Kaunas. This meant a week-long exposure of *Traveler's Child* to the audience of Visit Kaunas and allowed its users to become more acquainted with the trademark. During this period *Traveler's Child* posted same pictures of Kaunas city on both accounts, influencing visitors to become followers of both accounts. This analysis of this activity was performed during the period of March 11, 2017 and May 7, 2017, after the trademark stopped its activities in engaging with its followers to provide results only from period with the same other factors.

Analysis showed that during that period there were some noticeable differences (Figure 26). First, a slight drop of user engagement was visible – 7.3% with the takeover being active and 9.6% without it. These results could also be an outcome of Kaunas being *not popular* destination. Still, there was an increase in follower numbers. During that week, there was an increase of 0.08% over the rest of the time – 0.24% daily follower increase when takeover was active against 0.16% when it was not active. In addition, it was noticed that after this period Kaunas became fifth in case of where *Traveler's Child* followers come from.

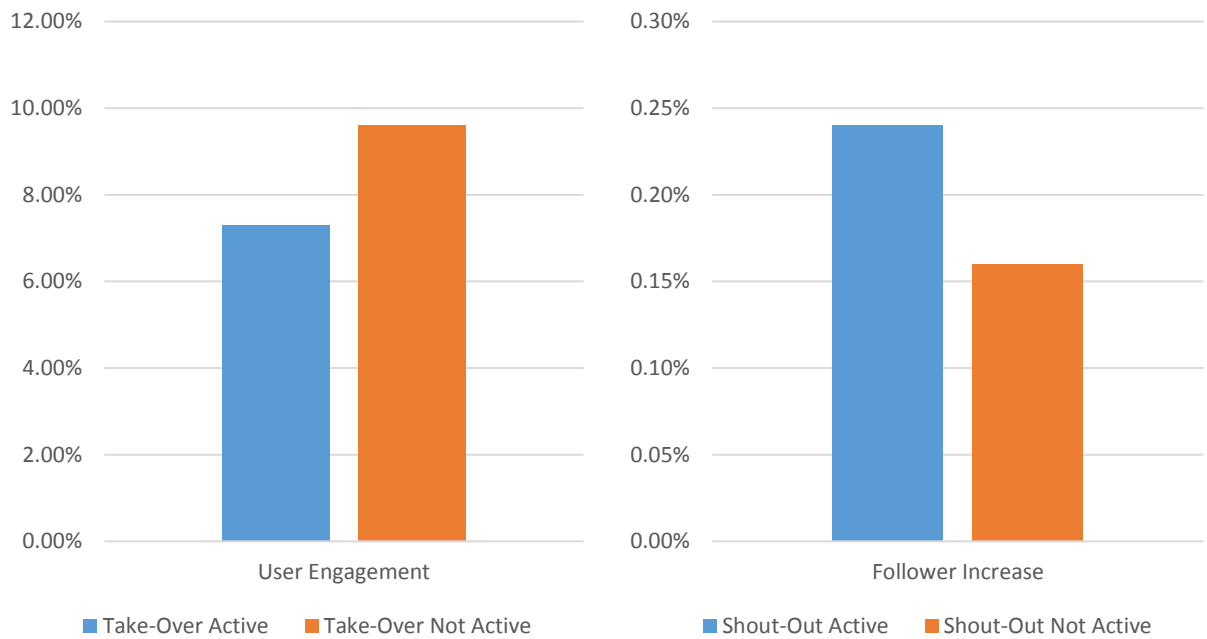


Figure 26. Comparison between customer activity in case of trademark performing a takeover of other travel influencer brand and not. (%)

This concludes the second part of this Diploma paper. The summary of the results allows proceeding to the third part. The results acquired during the research will allow to form recommendations for travel influencer trademarks on how to proceed through the branding process, while using Instagram as the primary channel for communication.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRANDING FOR TRAVELER INFLUENCER TRADEMARKS

After analyzing the theoretical aspects of communicating in social media, it allows coming up with a conclusion, that visual communication is one of the most important types of how to present your content. It also allowed believing that it is relevant to research Instagram social media and travel industry influencers in particular. This is because, first, Instagram is one of the fastest growing and biggest social media platforms around and second, travel industry is one of the major world industries. Getting your customers to engage through social media is crucial, as engagement is directly related to creating intangible values, which allow a trademark to become a brand.

In research part four major travel related visual types were identified. This allowed performing a competitor and customer, as well as, data tracking analysis of which types of visual content is most effective in order to make customers more engaging with the trademark. Analysis allowed us to see if competitor and customer research is effective in order to predict, which types of visual content will be most engaging in case of your own trademark.

During the research the ideas of how to adapt the D. Aaker's (1996) branding model to social media and Instagram were gathered. In the third part of this Diploma paper, author will present a recommendation model on how travel influencer trademarks and brands should base their branding strategy while using Instagram tools.

The three stages of traditional branding model will be adapted in order to provide solutions for these problems:

- How to step-by-step perform travel influencer branding process relying only on Instagram as a media platform;
- Which steps in the model are relevant in this case;
- How to categorize visual content;
- Which visual content is most engaging for the followers.

3.1. Brand Analysis Stage

Research proved that brand analysis which is the first stage of traditional branding model, does not differ in the case of travel influencer branding on Instagram. During this stage a competitor, customer and self-analysis was put into motion. In the case of this research, only competitor and customers analysis

was done. This is because it was not possible to perform a self-analysis for a trademark, which has no previous activity.

During analysis five well-known major travel influencer brands and fifty customers (followers) of these brands were compared. 100 posts of each brand and 50 posts of each follower were assigned to eight different types of visual content identified by J. A. Donaire et al. (2014) (Table 1).

Analysis results allows forming these recommendations:

- Because of an existing link between what both competitors and customers post, trademark owners should put both competitor and customer analysis into motion, when trying to build a brand using Instagram (Figure 18).
- Because of an existing link between what customers post and what they engage with in brands exists, customer analysis proves to be important in order to predict which types of visual content will be more effective (Figure 19).
- Because of the link between what customers post and their engagement is bigger than what competitors post and customers engagement, it is recommended to rely more on customer analysis (Figure 27). As branding is related to increasing relationship with a customer, it is logical that customers engage better with what they post themselves.

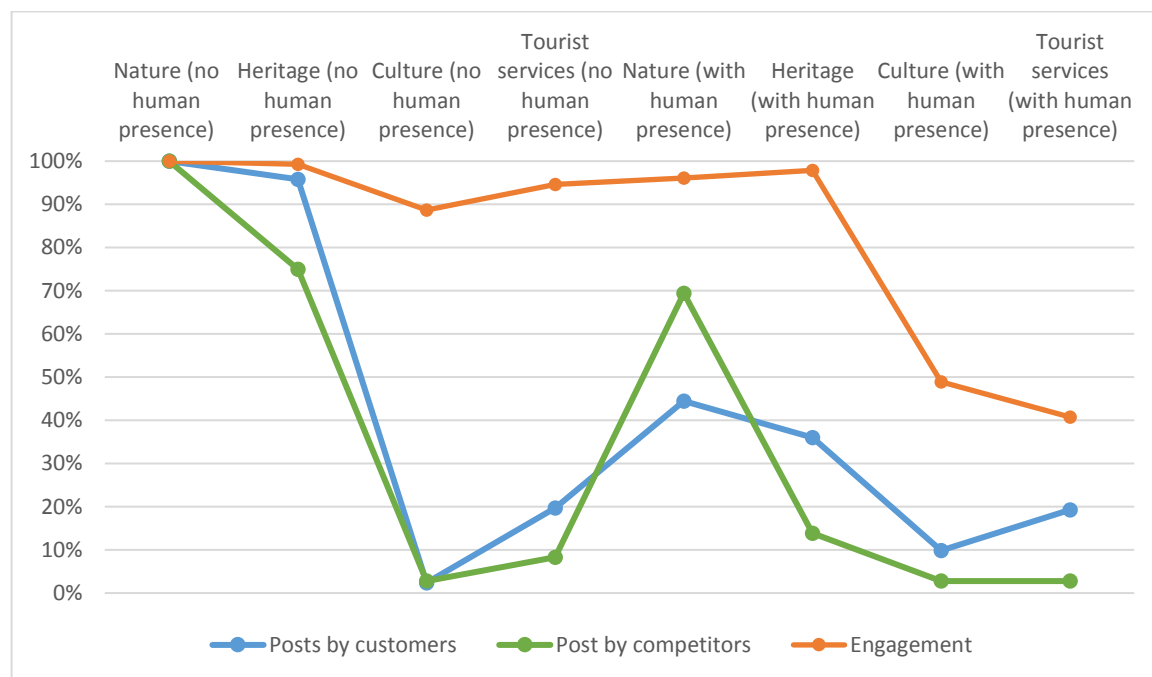


Figure 27. Comparison between customers, competitors posts and what customers engage with in brands page. (%)

- Travel influencer trademark owner should depend their strategies on the direction a brand has taken. During the research, it was noticed that the results differ when comparing different travel influencer brand's cases. For example, in overall competitor analysis human presence turned out to be a factor, which lowers the engagement, but in particular case of Travel and Leisure the human presence had a positive effect and also, the tourist services was the most engaging type of visual content. It allows believing that the reason for this could lie under the fact that brand's name – Travel and Leisure – attracts followers who are interested in tourist services images and seeing other people on holidays. That seems like the most logical explanation for the differences between particular brand cases.
- Travel influencer trademark owner can base their results on visual content types suggested by J. A. Donaire et al. (2014). These proved to be suitable for the analysis of visual content types in the case of travel influencer brands. It only did not apply to customer analysis, where customers posted not only travel related images.

3.2. Brand Identity System Stage

It is necessary for travel influencer trademark owners to know (1) who they are, (2) what is their purpose and (3) what direction are they planning to take when defining brand identity. D. Aaker (1996) proposed four brand identity perspectives, which allows adding depth to the matter. A brand or a trademark could be perceived *as a product, an organization, a person and a symbol*. Secondly, author introduced value proposition to the brand identity system. Thirdly, the brand or a trademark has to provide credibility and, finally, the last part of brand identity system is the *brand customer relationship*.

Brand identity. The analysis and insights gained during it, allows to form a recommendation that the most effective way for a travel influencer trademark is to position itself *as a person*. As found during the theoretical analysis, for an influencer the most important intangible value is trust, which according to D. Aaker (1996) is best achieved when positioning the brand as a person.

This is because:

- Personality makes it easier for customers to identify themselves with the brand or a trademark and to grow their loyalty.

- Personality is crucially important to for how the customer perceives the brand or a trademark.
- Positioning the brand or a trademark as a person seems to be a logical approach especially in the social media, where engaging with users is the most important thing.

These assumptions are based on the data-tracking results of *Traveler's Child*, where the trademark's active engagement with its followers was compared to follower's engagement with a trademark (Figure 23). User engagement with the trademark was much bigger, when the trademark was actively engaging with their followers (commenting, liking posts of other users and following their accounts). In addition, experiences gained during this research, allows to state that in order to possess your trademark as a person, you have to share stories, which seem more personal, contain emotions and experiences.

Figure 28 reflects how these findings impacts the creation of the intangible values, which are necessary in order to turn a trademark into the brand.

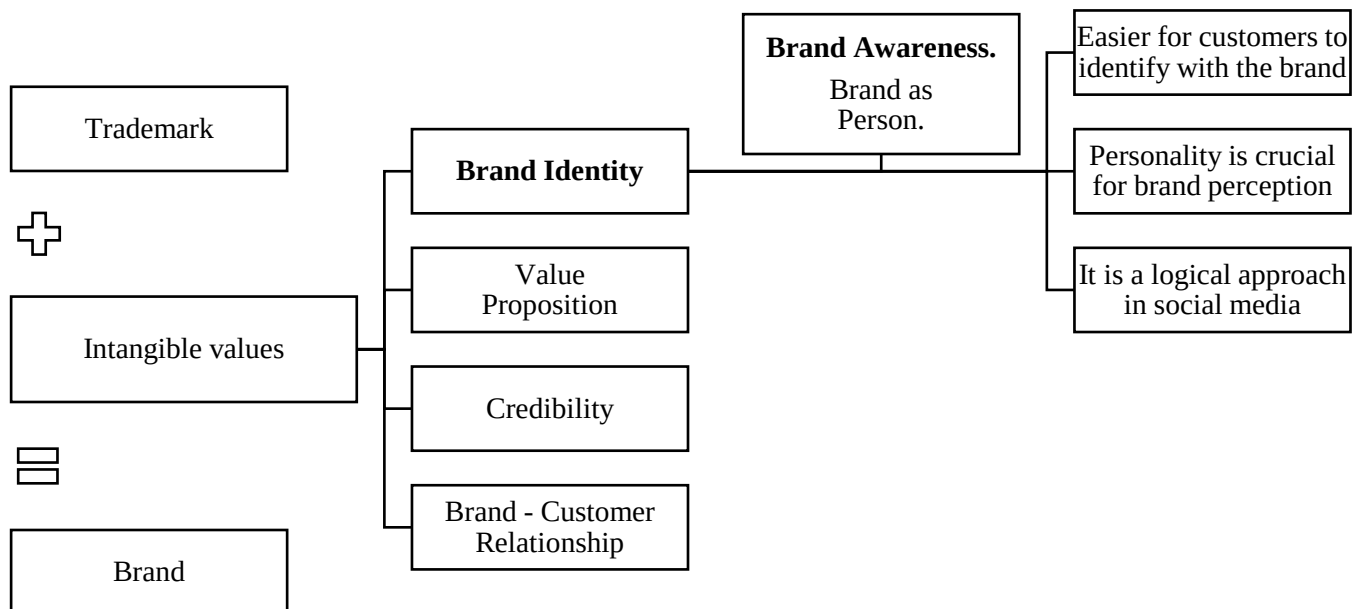


Figure 28. Impact of author's research towards brand identity in the branding process.

Value Proposition. The successful implementation of value proposition should result an increase in brand-customer relationship, which is crucial for both travel influencer brands and

trademarks. Though relevant analysis of what values does travel influencer brands promote was not performed, there are a few presumptions, which were made by the author:

- Travel influencer brands usually do not communicate any particular values rather than expressing their goal is to simply share the beauty of the world. This is already related to caring about environment, because if we do not preserve the travel destinations, there will be no place to travel. Still, it is worth mentioning that these messages about brand's values were notified while exploring other brand's social media channels.
- Travel influencer brands or trademarks which are not using Instagram as their only communication channel, do communicate values on other social media channels (f.e. <..>), which are more text friendly.

As mentioned in research limitations, author did not analyze the effects of post descriptions and focused on analyzing visual communication aspects as Instagram is considered an image sharing social media platform. However, experience gained during the process of managing travel influencer trademark and also engaging with other brands allows to believe that brands, which do not post informative descriptions are not utilizing the full potential of Instagram's tools.

In case of *Traveler's Child*, author was using different sorts of descriptions for the posts on Instagram and, although there is no numeric evidence, a better follower response was noticed when the posts had historic facts or stories posted next to the images.

This allows to form recommendations for travel influencer trademark owners to communicate their values and exploit the post description tools.

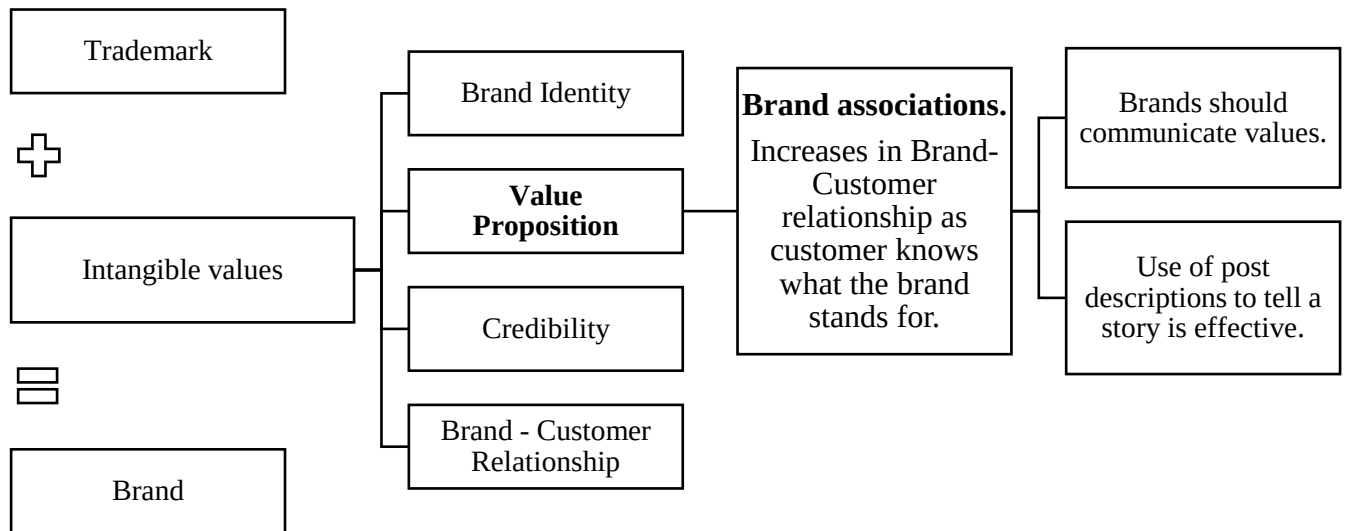


Figure 29. Impact of author's research towards value proposition in the branding process.

Credibility. The idea is to establish trademarks' message as a trusted opinion, which would later allow the potential users to pay higher attention. This could be achieved while interacting with other travel influencer brands, who have already established their positions between customers. Both times *Traveler's Child* had interactions with already established brands it had a positive effect on the user activity:

- When *Traveler's Child* received a shout-out from the biggest travel influencer brand Beautiful Destinations, the stats of both user engagement and follower engagement were booming (Figure 25).
- When *Traveler's Child* was performing a takeover of an official Kaunas (Lithuania) city's tourism account, there was a significant increase in the followers from that location (Figure 26).

The results clearly indicate that gaining credibility is important during branding process and it is necessary for the brand to form a connection with other brands, who already have trust of their followers, in order to seem trustworthy itself. Figure 30 reflects how these findings impacts the creation of the intangible values, which are necessary in order to turn a trademark into the brand.

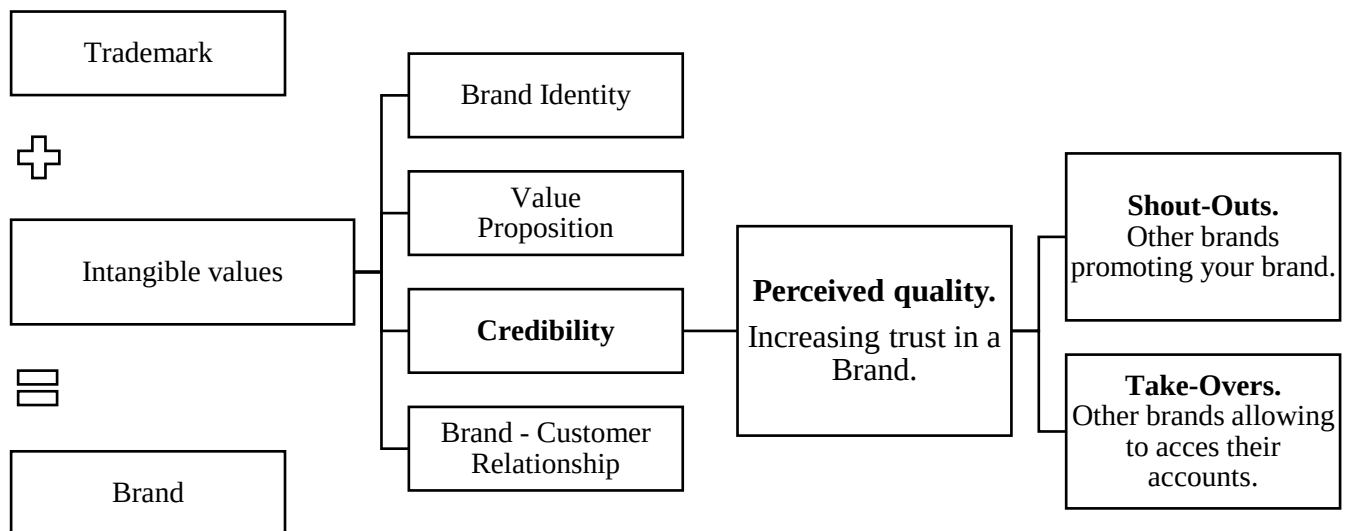


Figure 30. Impact of author's research towards credibility in the branding process.

Brand-customer relationship. This phenomenon is crucial in terms of social media, as an active and positive brand-customer relationship builds the loyalty, which is necessary to build the intangible values, which allow a trademark to become a brand. This works more effectively when the brand or a trademark is considered more *as a person* – this allows customer to get positive feelings and then it is important to keep and nurture this relationship.

The previous results allow to state, that brand-customer relationship in social media should be considered as an elementary thing. As discussed in theoretical analysis brands are no longer created by their owners, but are rather co-created together with the customers.

As mentioned before, results of *Traveler's Child* data tracking proved that when trademark was actively engaging with its followers, they were more likely to respond back and create a connection (Figure 23). Ignoring the relationship with followers will lead to stagnation of your trademarks' growth on Instagram. Figure 31 shows how engaging with followers directly impacts brand-customer relationship, which is necessary for creating intangible values, which allows trademark to become a brand. This allows to form a recommendation for travel influencer trademark owners to keep engaging with their followers as much as possible.

These finding allow recommending to replace brand-customer relationship step, with brand co-creation step, as it is a more logical approach in social media era and Instagram case.

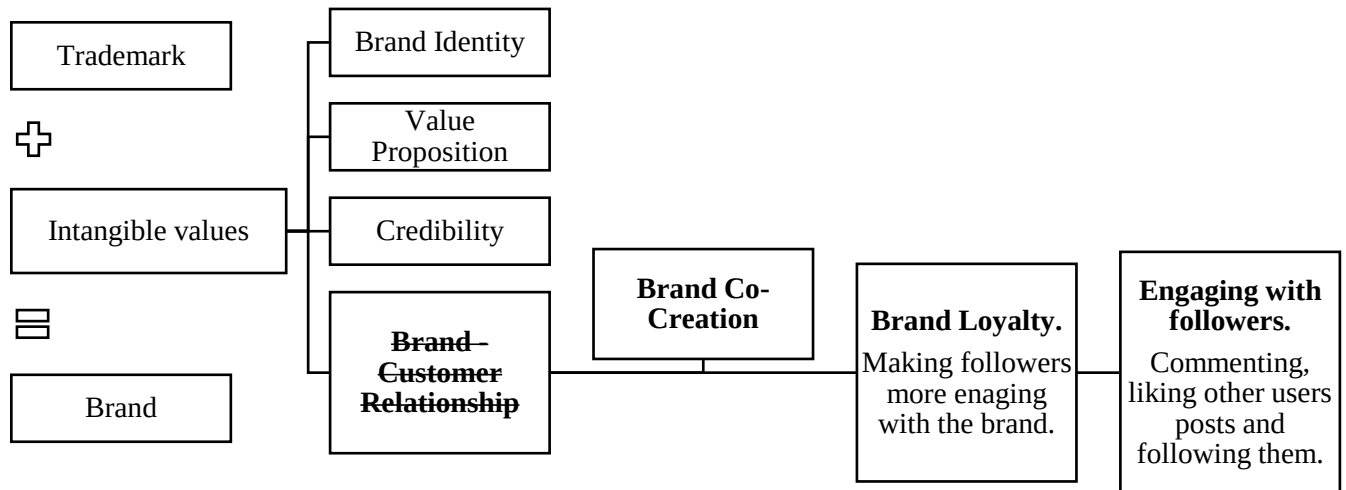


Figure 31. Impact of author’s research towards brand-customer relationship in the branding process.

The brand identity system stage recommendations allows to understand what actions are necessary to be planned to create these required intangibles values (Figure 4): brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations.

3.3. Brand Identity Implementation System Stage

The last theme of branding is the brand identity implementation system, which contains of brand position, execution and tracking.

Brand position. It is a part of brand identity and value proposition. It is necessary to communicate these concepts to target audiences in order to demonstrate the advantages over competing brands.

Research allows us to believe that brand position is quite important, though major Instagram influencer brands do not focus on it. As Instagram is a photo sharing social media platform, brands seem believe that user engagement is mostly related to the quality of the picture and the hashtags you use. However, it is worth mentioning that, Instagram experts online, like R. Simonds (2015), B. Cachon (2017) do also include the necessity for brands to engage with its users. This is why, as mentioned in research limitations, this Diploma paper also focused mostly on the visual aspects of the communication and engaging with users.

During the research and managing own trademark, *Traveler's Child*, it was noticed that there is an impact of other factors rather than only focusing on what images the brand posts. As mentioned before author noticed a bigger engagement, when *Traveler's Child* was posting descriptions including valuable historical information or stories. This, as mentioned before, allows believing that brands, which do not post informative descriptions, are not utilizing the full potential of Instagram's tools.

In addition, there was an attempt to research whether brands engagement with the customers (commenting, liking posts of other users and following their accounts) have an impact on their engagement with the brand and follower increase. The results were obvious – there is a major impact when brands are communicating with their followers (Figure 23).

The experience gained through the period of this research allows stating that for creating a successful brand position it is recommended for travel influencer trademark owners to:

- Post informative descriptions, as it has influence on followers' interactions with the trademark. That also leads to believe that having a socially responsible brand position, would have an actual impact on trademarks' success.
- Engage with their customers.
- Engage with other brands. As mentioned before, both times when *Traveler's Child* engaged with other brands it had positive effects on follower activity, such as follower increase or user engagement (Figure 25 and Figure 26).

Execution. It is related to credibility and brand-customer relationship, as it increases brand loyalty and perceived quality. Well-executed communication strategy manages to break through to audiences by getting customers involved. It is believed that more implemented alternatives have bigger chances to create a unique and impressive result. In this part testing is also valuable – it allows for a brand to see what works and what does not.

During execution, these variables were monitored:

- Popular and not popular destination hashtags;
- Trademark receiving a shout-out;
- Trademark performing a takeover;
- Trademark actively engaging with the followers;
- Different types of visual content (Table 1).

Experiences gained during the period of the research allows to state that, for trademarks to perform a research of their own, additional variables should be taken into account:

- Having clearly expressed values and communicating them. Travel influencer brands on Instagram do not seem to express any particular values strongly and further researchers should analyze if brands and trademarks communicating values has an influence for influencers activity. This could possibly done by monitoring two identical brands or trademarks.
- Different types of popular hashtags. Author of this diploma paper, as mentioned in research limitations, has selected a number of popular hashtags, which were being used constantly and were not changed. That is why the difference between different usage of hashtags could not be identified.
- Different types of descriptions. During the period of research author noticed that there is an impact for followers activity if the trademark *Traveler's Child* posted descriptions, which contained historic information. For future research, these types of descriptions could be proposed, which were used by the author:
 - Historical - describing the history of the object seen in the image.
 - Experiential - describing the experience a person had with object or place seen in the image.
 - Informational - giving information and advices for people who might visit the place seen in the image.
 - Promotional - promoting the object seen in the image for financial purposes, contests.
 - Resonant - writing posts that are related to events happening in followers life – worldwide events, celebrations, etc.
 - Non-related - describing other things, which are not related to the object seen in the image.
 - No description.

Tracking. This part allows assessing how trademark's positioning efforts have affected the customer perception. In this part the previously mentioned variables were being tracked. As already discussed these tendencies were noticed:

- Trademark's engagement with the followers leads to a better results in followers engagement with the brand.
- Both takeovers and shout-outs have a positive effect on user engagement.

What was missing was how popular destination hashtags affect the trademark's user engagement and follower increase. In addition, there was no presentation between the *Traveler's Child* engagement results with competitor and customer analysis results. Finally, it was not mentioned how visual content types affect follower.

During the research these results were also acquired:

- There is an impact when popular destination hashtags are being used – users engage better and the follower increase is bigger (Figure 24). This is due to increased reach. It allows the content to become more visible and more viral.

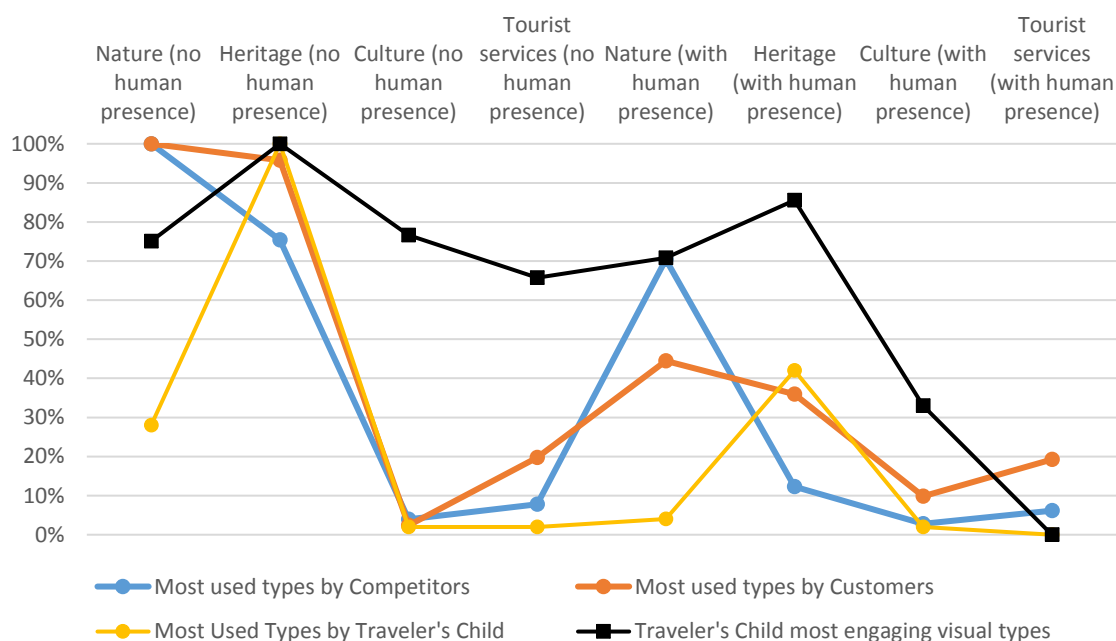


Figure 32. Comparison between most used types of visual content by competitors, customers, *Traveler's Child* and the most engaging visual types for the trademark (%).

- In the particular case of how engaging users are with *Traveler's Child*, the comparison shows that the trademark should have trusted customer analysis more than the competitor analysis (Figure 32). When comparing the most engaging types of visual content for both competitors and customers (Figure 33), the correlation is visible, but the differences are also very clear. Both competitor and customer analysis for most used visual types suggests that nature with human should be the most used type. It is also the most engaging type for the brands, but in *Traveler's Child* case – nature was not successful at all. However, while comparing the most used types and most engaging types of the trademark – results are much more similar. It allows to assert that in the

case of *Traveler's Child*, because of posting mostly heritage type images, it acquired followers who are more interested in this type. That is why they are engaging better with it. Therefore, it is possible to state that consistency is what actually allows the trademark to achieve better results.

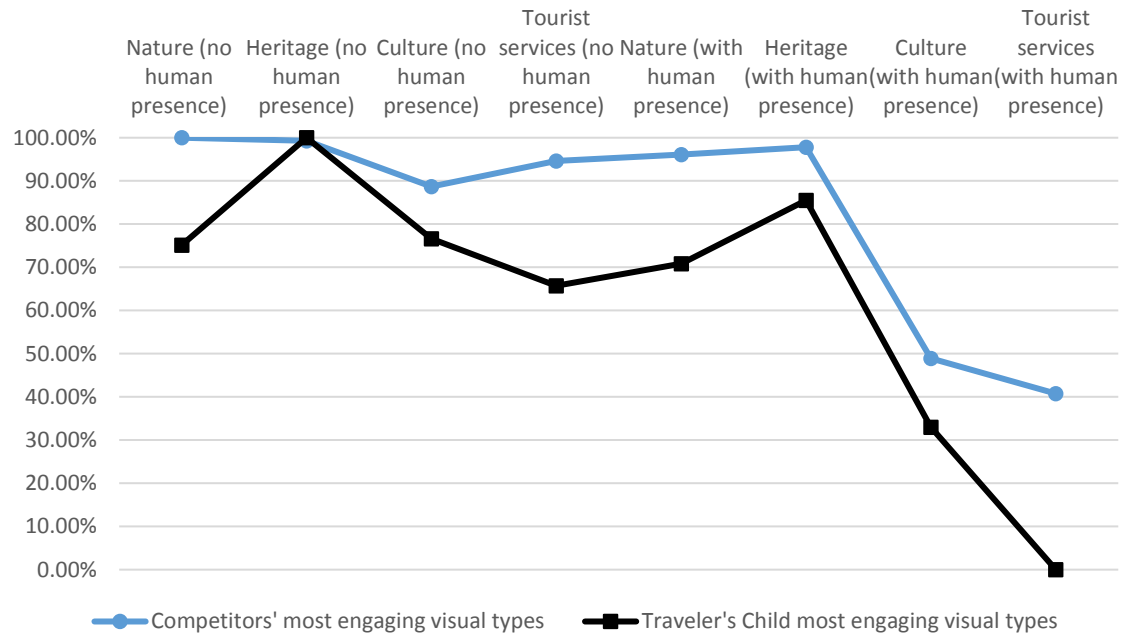


Figure 33. Comparison between most engaging types of visual content for competitors and *Traveler's Child*. (%)

- In the particular case of follower increase for *Traveler's Child*, the comparison shows that the trademark should have trusted customer analysis more than the competitor analysis (Figure 34). However, results once again show that even better correlation is visible when comparing most used types of visual content and follower increase, when both graphs belong to *Traveler's Child*. In addition, when comparing most engaging visual types and the follower increase for *Traveler's Child*, the link is obvious. With this, it is possible to state that the more users engage, the more viral the content becomes and attracts a larger number of followers. Therefore, it allows indicating that a trademark has to select which type of visual content is going to be used majority of the time and remain consistent while posting it to its followers.

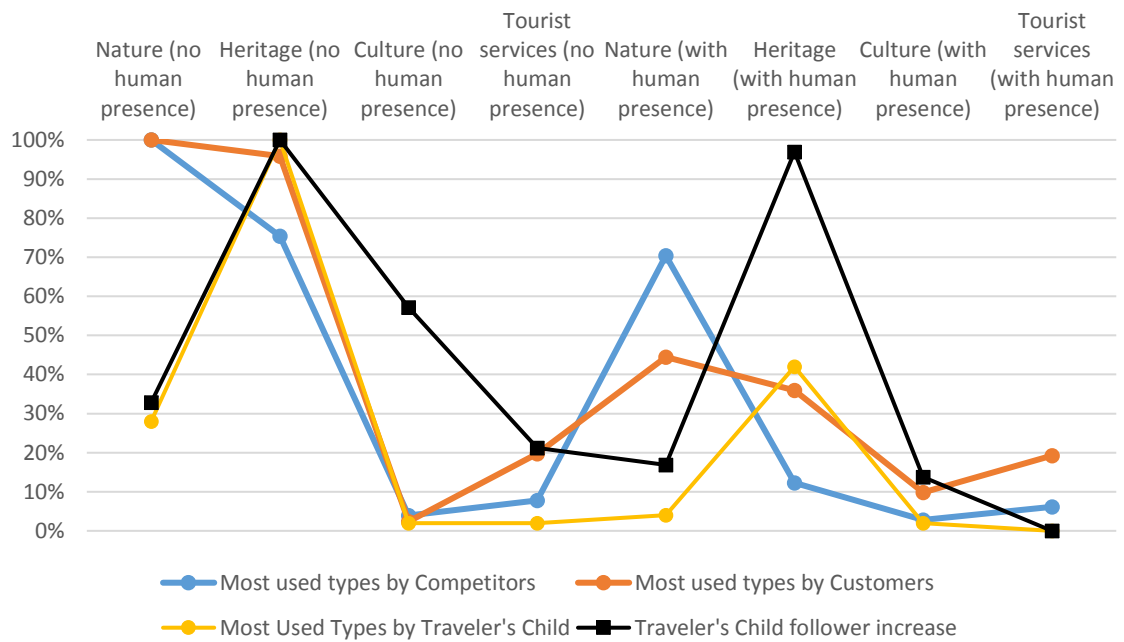


Figure 34. Comparison between most used types of visual content by competitors, customers, *Traveler's Child* and the follower increase for the trademark. (%)

- The comparison between most engaging visual types and the follower increase for *Traveler's Child* (Figure 35) shows that there is a link between what users engage with and how the number of followers increases. This allows to form a recommendation that trademark should keep consistency when posting visual content. It is possible to state that it is related to the fact that the followers you acquire with the content you post, expect more of the same and when they get it, they make this content viral, which attracts more followers, who like this type of visuals more.

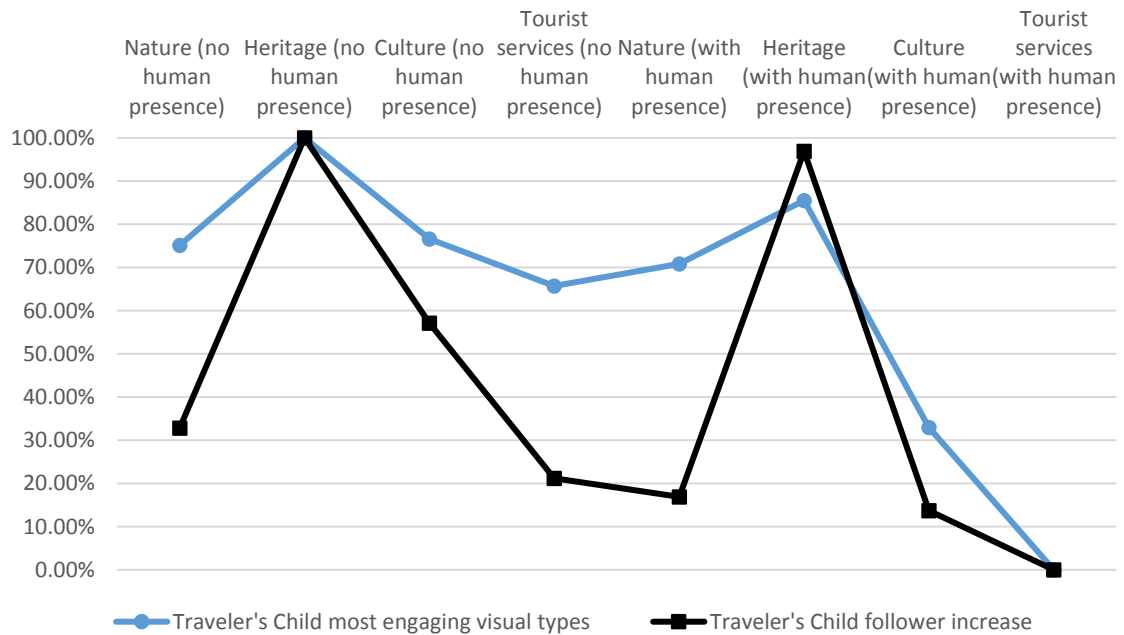


Figure 35. Comparison between most engaging visual types and the follower increase for *Traveler's Child*. (%)

Finally, for tracking, these quantitative variables, proposed by M. Allton (2017), were identified as beneficial for analysis:

- Follower growth.
- Engagement rate.

3.4. The Final Model and Overall Recommendations

After presenting recommendations for each part, author was able presenting a full model of D. Aaker's traditional branding model adaptation to the case of travel influencer branding while using Instagram tools (Figure 36). Model represents the findings of this Diploma paper and how a travel influencer trademark should exploit Instagram given tools in order to create the intangible values to become a brand.

First, during the brand analysis stage these recommendations were formed:

- Both **competitor** and **customer analysis** is recommended;
- However, **customer analysis** provides data, which is closer to the actual results of trademark performance.

- **Brand analysis** allows to proceed towards next stage, which is the **brand identity system** and is crucial for setting the **intangible values**, which a trademark has to create for its customers.

Second, during the brand identity system stage these recommendations were formed:

- **Brand identity system** stage should rely on the findings of **brand analysis** stage.
- To create **brand awareness** a trademark has to position itself as a person, which allows for the customer to create a deeper bond and feel closer to the trademark. This is achieved through Instagram tools like post descriptions, while expressing feelings, emotions and experiences.
- To create **brand associations** a trademark should acquire social values, by which they stand and communicate it through post descriptions. In addition, using post descriptions is a tool, which should be exploited to not only show the values a trademark stands for, but to also form a deeper connection. As trademark should be presented as a person, that person should also have a character, with whom followers can associate with.
- To create **perceived quality** a trademark should increase the trust of its followers, as it is a long process, it can be boosted by acquiring relationships with brands, who have already gained the trust of the followers. During the theoretical analysis, the co-operation with other brands was not identified as an Instagram tool, but it was found to be a very important and useful asset to create brand credibility. Co-operation can be achieved through:
 - *Shout-Outs*. Which is a popular way for brands and trademarks to gain followers and shout-outs are even being sold. This is because a shout-out itself is usually beneficial only for one of the sides, thus to become beneficial for both sides shout-outs become paid.
 - *Takeovers*. Not as popular, but is beneficial for both sides. One side gets the attention, while other side can save resources required for content creation.
- To create **brand loyalty** in traditional model D. Aaker (1996) suggested implementing **brand-customer relationship**. The findings of this Diploma paper suggests, that in social media era this should transform into **brand co-creation**. This is because social media makes the trademark and its customer (follower) become equal. The most important factor for a trademark to grow into brand is for its content to become viral

and this can only be achieved if there are customers, who are willing to constantly engage with your content. To achieve that the results of this thesis recommends to:

- Post constant type of visual content. This is the recommended way of using content posting tool. Results showed that followers most successfully engage with the content, which is the majority of posts made by the trademark or brand. This is due to the fact that those who follow you, most probably did that because of the content they liked and they expect more of the same.
- Constantly use the tools to engage with the followers (commenting, liking posts of other users and following their accounts). The connection has to be mutual and if the followers are commenting and liking pictures of the trademark, he or she expects you to return the favor, because as mentioned before social media makes the trademark and the customer equal. In addition, if trademark possesses itself as a person, creating relationships is also a thing to do.

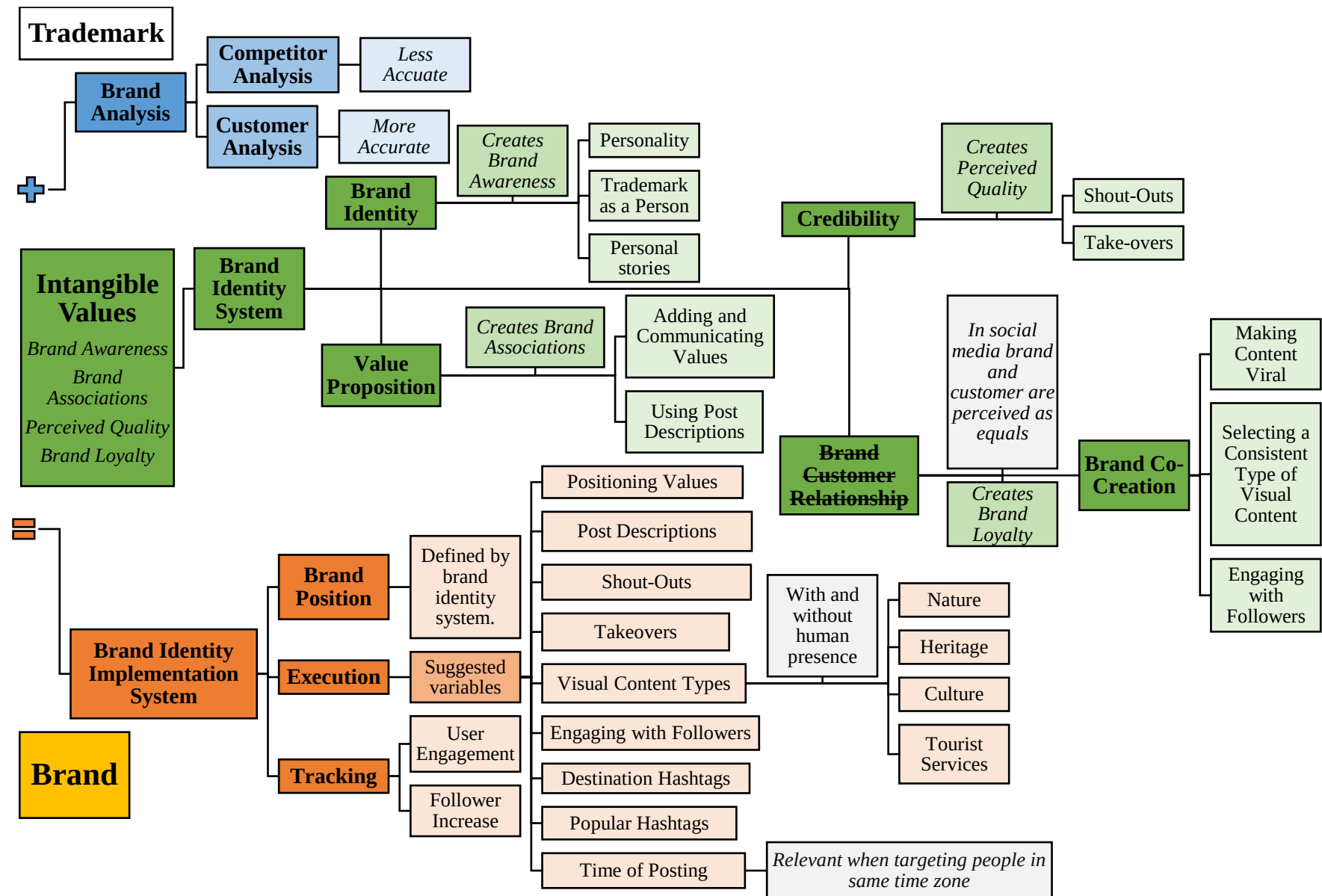


Figure 36. D. Aaker's traditional branding model (1996) adaptation to the case of travel influencer branding while using Instagram tools.

Finally, during the brand identity implementation system stage the author formed these recommendations:

- **Brand positioning** should rely on the decided strategy of **brand identity system** stage.
- During **execution** these factors should be used and/or tested:
 - *Positioning values.* Author believes that positioning values, could be beneficial for creating deeper **brand associations**.
 - *Post descriptions.* The experiences gained during the research period allows stating that post descriptions tool should be beneficial for creating both intangible values of **brand awareness** and **brand associations**. Author also suggests this categorization of post descriptions: *historical; experiential; informational; promotional; resonant; non-related; no description*.
 - *Shout-outs.* Receiving shout-outs increases trademark's visibility, benefits the **perceived quality** and **credibility**.
 - *Takeovers.* Performing successful takeovers increases trademark's visibility, benefits the **perceived quality** and **credibility**.
 - *Visual content types.* The results of this diploma paper showed that different visual content types have different results on engagement. It is recommended to check, which of them are most effective in different cases of travel influencer trademarks or brands. Visual content types suggested by J. A. Donaire et al. (2014) proved to be effective when categorizing travel related images (Table 1).
 - *Engaging with customers.* This tool is one of the most important and it is recommended not to ignore it. There is a huge difference in both follower engagement and follower increase when this tool is being used and not.
 - *Destination hashtags.* This tool is also recommended as it attracts the people who are interested in these destinations, so your content becomes more relevant and there is a higher chance of user engagement.
 - *Popular hashtags.* Despite checking the difference between different hashtag usage, author believes that it is recommended to use popular hashtags, which are relevant to your content as it increases the chances of user engagement.
 - *Time of posting.* This variable was not significant for the research of this thesis as *Traveler's Child* has acquired audience from different parts of the world, from different time zone. However, in case of target group being in the same time zone this factor is recommended to be taken into account.

CONCLUSIONS

In the era of social media, an opportunity for users to become influencers arises. This is because social media platforms allow user created content to be in close reach for other users. As travel industry is one of the largest industries in the world and not yet well adapted by the second largest social media platform – Instagram – an opportunity for ordinary people appears. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze, how people can adapt traditional branding process created by D. Aaker (1996) while using Instagram to create their own travel influencer brands and generate income from their influence. In theoretical part of this diploma, these conclusions were made:

- A trademark is a sign or a symbol, which differentiates one service provider from another. A brand is a sign or a symbol, which user identify with certain experiences and intangible values (T. Nistorescu, 2013). In social media case, a travel influencer trademark is what differentiates one social media user, who has a goal to become an influencer from another, while travel influencer brand identifies social media user, who has created intangible values in consumers mind and generates influence – has an impact on consumer decisions.
- A social media users become able to generate influence do to the crowdculture phenomenon (D. Holt, 2016) – users are no longer only on the receiving end, but can transmit their message too and be widely heard.
- Social media platform types and the importance of visual communication has been highlighted. That also allowed to understand why Instagram, which is an image-sharing based social media platform should be emphasized by the scholars.

In the second part of this diploma paper the most used and engaging visual content types of travel influencer brands were analyzed. Then an analysis of most used visual content types of travel influencer brands customers were analyzed. Finally, the most effective tools used by travel influencer trademark *Traveler's Child* were identified. The results of these analysis allowed to form these conclusions:

- For analysis of visual content, these types proved to be effective: 1) nature, 2) heritage, 3) culture, 4) tourist services. It is also necessary to look at if whether visuals contain human presence.

- Customers are more engaging with the types of visual content they post, than those posted by the brands.
- Customer analysis gives more accurate predictions of what types of visual content will receive better user engagement for trademarks.
- Trademarks should actively engage with their customers.
- Trademarks should try to receive shout-outs from already established brands.
- Trademarks should try to get a chance to perform takeovers of already established brands.
- Trademarks should post pictures from popular places, which have popular destination hashtags.

The last part of this diploma paper included recommendations and showed the process of how the final model of travel influencer branding using Instagram tools was formed. These additional conclusions and recommendations were reached during this part:

- Consistency has more impact on the trademarks' success and not the particular types of visual content.
- Positioning trademark as a person allows creating a more successful brand identity and is more effective when creating brand awareness.
- Associating the trademark with some social values and communicating through post descriptions allows effectively creating associations in consumers mind.
- Shout-outs and takeovers create perceived quality and makes the trademark look more credible.
- Brand-customer relationship due to social media era tendencies, should be replaced with brand co-creation.
- Brand co-creation allows trademarks' content to get viral, which is the crucial part for a trademark to grow. From brands' perspective a more involved audience can be achieved by publishing consistent content and active engagement with the followers.
- Despite Instagram being an image-sharing social media platform, trademark owners should emphasize the importance on the textual part of post publishing, as descriptions prove to have importance in user engagement.
- These possible variations of Instagram tools usage were identified:
 - Value positioning;

- Visual content types;
- Post descriptions;
- Post time;
- Destination hashtags;
- Popular hashtags;
- Engaging with other trademarks or brands:
 - Shout-outs;
 - Takeovers;
- Engaging with followers.

This diploma paper analyzed the different types of usage of Instagram tools for travel influencer brands and trademarks. Depending on the findings of this diploma paper, future researchers would be able to be introduced to the concepts of trademark, brand, branding, social media, challenges in social media era, Instagram, travel industry and travel influencer phenomenon. As Instagram remains a fast growing social media platform and the travel influencer phenomenon is still not well researched this is where **the research novelty** is revealed.

Scholars should be able to obtain information how to interpret the visual travel related data on Instagram and how the tools provided by this social media platform transfers into branding process. Depending on this research, future researchers should be able to adapt this information to other social media platforms and to different industries.

This research contained a number of limitations, which could be analyzed by **further researches**:

- The impact of posting time was not analyzed. Because this information is hardly obtainable on Instagram in competitors and customers cases (only the day of posting is provided), there was no way to track the time of posting. In addition, as for a trademark created for the purposes of this diploma paper – *Traveler's Child* – there was no target audience, so due to different time zones, this type of analysis seemed irrelevant. Further researchers could analyze different social media platforms, which provide a precise time of posting to see if there is an effect of posting at the same time as competitors and customers.
- The impact of popular hashtags was not analyzed. The author of this diploma paper has decided not to add another qualitative variable in the research as there were already

plenty. As research showed, too many qualitative variables makes it difficult to predict, which of the variables had the effect. Further researchers could base their research on using pictures of the same visual type, as well as, from the same city, with the same destination hashtags, to see the impact of different popular hashtags. Accounts of particular destinations (for example: visit_kaunas, topamsterdamphoto, etc.) is popular on Instagram and would allow to contain constant qualitative variables and to check the impact of variables not analyzed in this diploma paper.

- The impact of post descriptions was not analyzed. The author of this diploma paper presumed that because Instagram is an image-sharing social media platform there is only a need to analyze the visual aspects of content sharing. During the research an effect of different types of descriptions was noticed, which allows to presume that there is an actual impact of post descriptions. Further researchers could analyze how user engagement is affected by this qualitative variable. The author of this diploma paper suggests these types of post descriptions:
 - a. Historical - describing the history of the object seen in the image.
 - b. Experiential - describing the experience a person had with object or place seen in the image.
 - c. Informational - giving information and advices for people who might visit the place seen in the image.
 - d. Promotional - promoting the object seen in the image for financial purposes, contests.
 - e. Resonant - writing posts that are related to events happening in followers life – worldwide events, celebrations, etc.
 - f. Non-related - describing other things, which are not related to the object seen in the image.
 - g. No description.

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