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**INSTAGRAM AS A BRANDING TOOL FOR SMALL ENTERPRISES
INSIGHTS FROM FINNISH LAPLAND**

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Abstract:

The present research document aims to identify the contribution of Instagram to the branding strategy of the small tourism enterprises of the Finnish Lapland. It is addressed the requirements for the type, and tourist approaches on the photographic content and the inclusion of Instagram within the small enterprises' business activities. The theoretical framework includes studies of branding in SMEs, the importance of photography within tourist activities, and the convenience of Instagram as a branding channel. The study has a qualitative approach and to analyze the data it was applied the content analysis method. The data consist of semi-structured interviews with five photography content creators of Instagram accounts and one manager responsible for the branding strategy. All of them have more than two years of experience in the field and the interviews were held during the spring and the summer seasons of 2021.

The findings indicate that the performance on Instagram is a major stage within the branding efforts of the small enterprises in Finnish Lapland. Its recognition as a social media network in which photo-sharing amenities inspire travel choices and things to do options combined with the important role of photography within the tourism industry in Lapland converts Instagram into a strategic platform to spotlight the tourist activities that the small enterprises offer through their services. The photographic content is focused on displaying travel experiences in the natural surroundings charged with color harmony and positive emotions to encourage people to travel to Lapland but with a predilection for the enterprise's brand during their stay. Besides, the contribution of Instagram for branding is implied within the services offered by the enterprises due to the common practice among visitors to share the photos of their moments in Lapland through social media channels. Despite this practice has demanded time and effort to interact with the users, it also reflects high levels of customers’ satisfaction and reinforces the presence of the enterprise’s brand on the market by the interactive features the posts include; likes, hashtags, comments, and geotagging.

Keywords: Branding in SMEs, Photography, Social Media, Instagram, Finnish Lapland.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Previous research	9
1.3 Purpose of the study	13
1.4 Research methods.....	15
1.5 Structure of the study	15
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	17
2.1 Branding in SMEs	17
2.2 Photography in tourism branding.....	23
2.3 Instagram as a branding tool	27
3. METHODOLOGY.....	35
3.1 Empirical Context	35
3.2 Data collection.....	36
3.3 Content analysis	38
3.3 Research ethics.....	39
4. FINDINGS	41
4.1 Photographic management through Instagram	41
4.2 Photographic approaches	50
4.3 Instagram within the branding strategy.....	54
4.4 Challenges on Instagram for future considerations	61
5. CONCLUSION.....	68
REFERENCES	72
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	80

1. INTRODUCTION

Branding is defined as the internal designing process that must consider the management goals, stakeholders, target market studies, and the display of intangible attributes over tangible features to create a brand that awakes an emotional attachment with the public to gain preference, and in this manner ensure the growth of profits (Anholt, 2005; Murphy, 1992). Despite the lack of studies focused on the branding strategies developed by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), some studies have already addressed the important contribution of SMEs for the national economies, community development, and entrepreneurship opportunities (Alkhowaiter, 2016; Cant, Wiid & Hung, 2013; Odoom, Narteh & Boateng, 2017). Equally important, Instagram has been identified as a competitive branding channel for SME's because it allows to reach potential customers 24/7 and to maintain interactive communication at the lowest financial costs (Christou, 2015; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Granberg, 2019; Iglesias-Sánchez, Correia, Jambrino-Maldonado & de las Heras-Pedrosa, 2020; Mäläskä et al., 2010; Saxena & Kumar, 2020).

For small and medium tourism enterprises Instagram is a social network which photo-sharing amenities serve as an effective branding strategy to constantly post attractive images about tourist destinations and activities to do, thus to persuade to travel by a permanent visual stimulus which is the most influential factor on individuals' reactions (Wedel & Pieters, 2008, p. 1). On Instagram by a single photo, the public can obtain all the required information to strongly influence a travel decision. *Geo-tagging* allows to exactly locating destinations, *hashtags* permit to compare other people's experiences, *comments*, and *likes* provide credibility and all these elements together create an effect of active participation where tourists and potential tourists are the main promotional forces (Saxena & Kumar, 2020, p. 2025).

Finnish Lapland is a tourist destination that despite being located in the Arctic Circle has developed well- established tourism industry; its capital city Rovaniemi is worldwide recognized as the official town of Santa Claus, attracting approximately 500.000 tourists from all over the world (Popescu & Corboş, 2010, p. 280). Sustained by the definition and standards for Small and Medium Enterprises established by the European Commission (EC) (Recommendation 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003) which became effective from 01st

January 2005, it is established that the main economic forces for the tourism industry in Finnish Lapland are categorized as small enterprises. Consequently, the worldwide recognition of Lapland as a tourist destination is the result of local business operations based on a branding strategy applied by SME's that have achieved an international scope (Odoom et al., 2017, p. 79).

These small enterprises besides offering a variety of tourist activities in the region which includes outdoor guided excursions, visits to Santa's village, the husky and reindeers' farm, the photo-tours, etc., also maintain an active performance on Instagram accounts. The professionalism and high-quality approach for the photographic content that is updated on this social media network about the northern lights, the midnight sun, the husky rides, and the moments in winter landscapes are main insights to analyze a possible implication of Instagram within the branding strategy. This practice has already been noticed by other scholars as well, for example, Bertella (2013) and Dietrich (2019) embraced the important role of images in shaping a rewarding tourist experience in the Lapland region which satisfaction is usually expressed through the settings of Instagram. Similarly, Pavon-Jordan (2019) pointed out the advantages that Instagram has provided for the promotion of Finland due to it is mainly a visual platform that allows the display of luring photos of the destination, accompanied with the possibility to interact with customers in a more personal manner. Therefore, following previous studies about the importance of photography during visit experiences in Finnish Lapland, analysis of branding, the business model of SMEs based on a reduced budget, and the current involvement of Instagram in the tourism industry, the present research addresses Instagram as an important factor for the branding strategy of the small tourism enterprises in Lapland.

The researcher recognizes that the tourism industry in Lapland has a long history of successfulness and it cannot be compared with this social media app which common handling can be qualified as a new trend (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020, p. 1). However, Instagram has been defined as the most influential source of inspiration for future travels at the current times and also as a competitive site to perform a branding strategy for small enterprises because it is a popular social network which settings are mainly visual (Agostinelli, 2020; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, Yu & Egger, 2021). Acknowledging in the

manner, the current influence that Instagram wields among societies around the world and the low cost it represents as a marketing channel hence the key opportunity it has represented as a branding tool for the Small Tourism Enterprises of Finnish Lapland.

1.1 Background

It was in 2006 when Finland launched a national strategy to create a country image to improve tourism activity (Pavon-Jordan, 2019, p. 18). Since then iconic features like the Christmas atmosphere, the husky rides, winter landscapes, the midnight sun, and the northern lights are the most persistent elements on the visual advertisement for promoting Finnish Lapland. The variety of activities that can be practiced due to the land's properties has become a characteristic element for the tourism industry that attracts visitors from all over the world. Dietrich (2019) pointed out that Finnish Lapland has developed a well-defined place brand that is easily related to the environmental characteristics of its location thus, its international recognition is determined by the mental association among people to the northern lights phenomenon and the winter landscapes. For example, the northern lights phenomenon despite not being part of the Lapland's tourism strategy (2011-14), is an important tourist attraction in the region, in fact, the demand for the northern lights tours has increased in the last years and visitors highly appreciate skilled guides for taking the perfect picture of the phenomenon and the landscapes (Heimtun, Jóhannesson & Tuulentie, 2015, p. 22-24).

The included photographic services within these tours have been identified as one of the main appealing aspects for this activity due to the interest from visitors to re-create a photo they previously saw on promotional images to keep it and possibly to share it to other people. Studies have demonstrated that one of the main motivations among visitors is to capture through their cameras the same images about the husky safaris, the northern lights and different winter activities as they saw them in official DMO's WebPages (Bertella, 2013, p. 110). Following this information, it can be suggested that photography and other visual elements exhibited on internet platforms have an important role in the branding process of Lapland as a tourist destination but also in shaping visitors' expectations about

the travel experience itself. As revealed by professionals in the tourism marketing fields it is highly important for a destination to have an image, logo, or another type of visual element that people can easily relate to the possibility to travel, thus to encourage a travel decision (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005, p. 334).

Despite branding strategies have always been approaching customers and potential customers through different channels; TV, radio, newspaper, etc., with the birth of the internet these approaches must be redirected to virtual spaces because it is where people spend the majority of the time (Pavlova, 2018, p. 8). The common saying “If a company cannot be found in Google, then the company does not exist” is a clear reflection of the current reality where people rely more on the internet to get informed and spend time (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015, p. 2). However, at present the Internet can be defined as a pathway; statistics showed that 60% of the time that people spend on the internet is actually on social media platforms. Moreover, its importance does not only rely on the sharing of photos, social media has been defined as an important element for maintaining relationships with friends and family due to its accessibility allows an easy and fast way for keeping in touch (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013, p. 9).

In spite of the options for social media apps, Instagram has been defined by many scholars not only as the most popular social media application but as the most effective website for performing a branding strategy (Christou, 2015; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Saxena & Kumar, 2020). Per the studies that have demonstrated that human beings are creatures whose impulses are primarily boosted by visual stimulus (Wedel & Pieters, 2008, p. 1). Likewise, guided by the researches that described Instagram as a social media app where the main designing base is the photo and video sharing amenity (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Khan, 2018). It can be considered that the preference of Instagram, as well as its effectiveness for positioning a brand over other social media apps, relies on the adaptability of its settings to the main motivational force on human beings; visual elements. Additionally, the fact that Instagram is an application mainly for cell phones allows reaching and contacting customers at any time and at any place they are (Alkhowaiter, 2016, p. 2). As it was explained by Murphy (1992) branding is a process based on the design of a visual representation of all the values a business activity wants to reflect on the

target market. Therefore, the social media app Instagram is a communication tool that perfectly embraces one of the main aims of branding; attracting customers through the display of intangible attributes conceptualized in a visual element. Instagram requires the investment of neither time nor money in advertisements on outdoor spaces. It offers the opportunity to convert a virtual platform in a public space where people will receive the brand advertisement but with the contributing factor of personalized content and the opportunity to interact with the audience, conditions that allow an emotional connection with the target market (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015, p. 6).

Compared to other communication channels like telephone, radio, and television, Instagram can be defined as a new communication method because it was released in 2010 (Alkhowaiter, 2016, p. 1). However, despite its youngness, Instagram has achieved a leading position beyond a popular leisure platform to post photos and videos. Instagram has become an esteemed platform among people to interact through the sharing of visual content that represents an emotional value, thus users have endorsed it as a dependable source for information, about social trends, brand preferences, and in terms of tourism to get ideas about travel destinations. These conditions have created the necessity among companies to create a social media account to maintain an omniscient presence on public cognizance by visual representations (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013, p. 2). For example, H&M has more than 5 million followers and is constantly updating information about fashion tendencies, new products, and sales (Berg & Sterner, 2015, P. 3).

Finland is not an exception, its tourism strategy has recognized the importance of maintaining active participation on the Visit Finland's Instagram account because the advertising efforts are accompanied by the possibility to interact with the audience and even make them participate in the posts, thus it has allowed a feeling of engagement with the brand that has resulted in a co-created destination value (Pavon-Jordan, 2019, p. 35). Following the results by Pavon-Jordan (2019) Instagram is an assertive resource for expanding the promotion of a destination, but this is only possible if are correctly applied all the advantages that Instagram provides as a branding tool. He proposed 3 essential elements for successfully achieving the aims of destination branding; firstly, it is required the creation of interactive and engaging content. Secondly, diversify the advertising

approaches to attract the public with different interests. And thirdly, prioritize the use of the settings of the social media platform that are easy to handle by users. Coherent guidelines taking into consideration the current reality where social media channels mainly Instagram have been defined as the main inspiration source for traveling among millennials who are the stronger tourism force at the time because for them tourism is not leisure it is a necessity (Watson, 2020, p. 10). Likewise, the arguments presented by some scholars about the competitive advantage that Instagram provides for branding purposes to small businesses (Alkhowaiter, 2016; Buinac & Lundberg, 2015; Wally & Koshy, 2014).

1.2 Previous research

Following Alkhowaiter (2016), the use of Instagram as a marketing and selling platform provides great benefits for start-up businesses. Besides the inexpensive factor, and the facility to attract customers through photos, Instagram allows the interactions with customers, and then it is possible to know them better and recognize their needs. Similarly, Bergström and Bäckman (2013) identified the facilities of Instagram; *like*, *hashtag*, *tagging*, and *comment* as elements that permit the detection of followers with similar interests, a situation that within a marketing strategy are interpreted as potential customers. It is also important to remark that the role of Instagram as a medium for people to share daily moments is a condition that allows the deeper analysis of social contexts like cultural differences around the world. For example, guided by the type of content men and women share in certain countries can be determined the levels of conservatism or gender equality (Al-Kandari, Al-Hunaiyyan & Al-Hajri, 2016, p. 54).

The competitive advantage provided by the facilities of Instagram for market studies, for maintaining people informed about products or services through posted photos, and the opportunity to keep records of people interested in the material cannot be denied. Nevertheless, the management of a branding plan must consider that the use of social media for promotional activities includes the interaction with the audience, something that in the past marketing practices was not even foreseen. But now, it is necessary to accept that the social interactions on Instagram play an important role in the correct promotion of a brand.

Instagram has eradicated the role of customers as passive receptors of publicity (Buinac & Lundberg, 2015, p. 10). Through Instagram, the users have the freedom for updating photos and categorize them by the descriptions they add and the likes they receive. This condition was qualified by Fatanti and Suyadnya (2015) as User-Generated Content (UGC). A condition that has empowered customers by the possibility nowadays they have to share, define, and even qualify their experiences on a medium that will be seen by a wider audience in an instant. Therefore, to achieve the goals of gaining customers' loyalty and brand preference through advertisement on Instagram it must be remarked that is not enough to apply the same branding strategies that are commonly applied on other communication media (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013, p.32). It is required to take advantage of the facilities that Instagram provides to constantly actualize the information about the brand performance, to maintain records of the material that is posted by customers, and to make them feel part of the brand by keeping constant communication with them to know about their needs and concerns. Moreover, it is a positive contributing factor if the brand makes the audience take part in the promotional activity by tagging customers, liking their posts, or using the same hashtags. These are tactics that generate among customers notion of confidence because they feel that their actions, opinions, and concerns matters for the brand, thus by the awakening of this confidence will be possible to develop a brand-customer bond that will generate long term benefits for the company (Granberg, 2019; Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020).

Bergström and Bäckman (2013) presented Instagram as the main origin for the “era of interactivity” which is defined as a condition where brands can constantly and publicly maintain contact with customers. This opportunity provided by Instagram to interact with customers was presented by Christou (2015) as an updated and viable channel to develop the required trust and engagement that will strengthen the company's image on the market. It is a strategy in which competitive advantage relies upon the communication with customers on a more personal level because Instagram is already a common element in everyone's lives, thus these constant communication processes will add value to the brand encouraged by the already existing familiarity with Instagram.

Despite the recognition of Instagram as a modern and beneficial marketing tool, there are not yet proper guidelines about how companies should advertise themselves on this social media app (Buinac & Lundberg, 2015, p. 19). However, some studies have provided some essential aspects for the development and positioning of a brand strategy where Instagram is the main promotional spot. For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that if companies aspire to use Instagram as a marketing channel they must remember to be active, be interesting, be humble, be professional and be honest. Instagram is not a virtual space of one-time posts. Due to the fast manner in how information is spread on the internet and the daily growth of competition in different industries, the planning of a branding strategy requires the investment of time for training the people who will manage them, and also it requires active participation, update, and analysis of the feedbacks (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015, p. 19). The reason behind the requirement of proficient people to manage the branding process on Instagram is the categorization of the word-of-mouth effect as an important element for providing a positive image of a product or service. When people express their experiences after a buying decision, it is somehow inviting or preventing others to make the same choice. Thus, when this effect takes place on social media the impacts for the brand should be taken seriously because the receptors can be a larger number of people. Instagram must be perceived as a space where the collateral damages after a negative review can have higher impacts resulted from the fast manner in how everything is communicated on the internet. However, the visual base of Instagram also provides an empowerment effect for a company. For example, the photos of customers using the products of certain brands are considered by Bergström and Bäckman (2013) great word-to-mouth advertisement because it creates some humble effect of the brand's adaptation to people's daily lives. Additionally, the companies can extend the positive effect of word-of-mouth by tagging themselves on the content, sharing the picture, or using the same hashtag (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013, p. 19).

According to Pavlova (2018), the requirement of an interactive promotional activity should not be seen as a complication for a marketing strategy, instead of as an opportunity to establish a bond with customers resulted from the priority that is perceived among the customers of the brand for meeting their needs, opinions, and concerns. Besides, through these interactions can be obtained important and deeper information about customers and

public in general which is a more efficient tactic for knowing the market and tracking customers than typical market studies methods that used to be applied in the past.

Based on the condition of Instagram as a personal account that any person can download, Bergström and Bäckman (2013) propose for brands the update of more intimate content that is not mainly approaching the sale or promotion, but posts of content that show more intimate moments of the processes behind the brand to connect with customers in a more personal level. A clear example of this strategy is the one applied by artists and celebrities during the backstage of MTV Music Awards shows when they let cameras enter the dressing rooms or when they share short films about the rehearsals or complications involved in the preparation of a performance (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013, p. 36). This tactic allows the public to feel identified with them because it reflects the human side of people that are usually admired and idolized. Likewise, this effect can be successfully generated on Instagram by an enterprise within its branding strategy if it is foreseen the display of photos and videos about the manufacturing processes to demonstrate to the public the levels of quality, the respect for the natural environment, or the priority for protecting social well-being as the main brand's goal.

To conclude, it can be determined that despite the benefits that Instagram, provides to a branding strategy due to the higher impacts at the lowest financial investments (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1093). It is still required the development of further studies about the adaptation of branding strategies through Instagram because there are still gaps of information related to the levels of importance that enterprises give to Instagram as a branding channel (Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015, p. 11). Kettler (2017) argued that social media represents endless opportunities for enterprises to stand out from the crowd. A condition that for Small and Medium enterprises represents an important opportunity to strengthen a brand position based on the visual advertisement that is adjusted to a limited budget. The condition of Instagram as a popular social media app allows this strategy due to the support it provides for visual advertisement and word-of-word publicity (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020, p. 4).

Nevertheless, the studies made by Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) reflected that the use of social media as a marketing channel is lacking purpose because enterprises are not

completely taking advantage of the benefits that Instagram provides for branding efforts. They consider that SMEs have not widely understood how to completely apply social media for strengthening their brands, and even have described the use as poorly. These results should be considered a serious issue for the examination of branding strategies in SMEs because one of the main advantages that Instagram provides is the opportunity to enrich the visual advertisement and the word-of-mouth publicity through the post made by customers who already experience the product or services the SMEs offer. As it was stated by Iglesias-Sánchez et al. (2020) “the experience is the brand, the brand is co-created and evolves with experiences”. However, regardless of the studies that social media mainly Instagram is a competitive tool for brand building because it allows a profitable and long-term engagement with the audience, some scholars stated that the SME located in central Finland had not widely adopted the use of social media for branding and neither other marketing purposes (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015, p. 7, 15).

1.3 Purpose of the study

The general aim of the present study is the implication of Instagram within the branding strategy developed by the small tourism enterprises of Finnish Lapland. It is aimed to examine the standards for creating and updating the photographic material, and the type of communication patterns between service providers and customers through this social media app to determine if Instagram has been applied as a tool for building a brand based on the uniqueness of the tourist activities Finnish Lapland provides. Besides, it is foreseen to analyze as well if Instagram due to its settings as a social media network has represented a beneficial factor for the creation of an engagement with customers in terms of loyalty and preference.

The research subject was inspired by the lack of studies about the branding strategies developed by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Mäläskä et al., 2010; Odoom et al., 2017). Likewise, the arguments presented by some scholars about the competitive advantage that Instagram provides for the marketing efforts of SMEs due to the influence of this social media app for communication in current societies and the low financial costs that

its use represents (Alkhowaiter, 2016; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015, Khan, 2018). The scientific objective is to identify the contribution of Instagram as a photographic social network for the branding efforts of the small tourism enterprises in Finnish Lapland, thus it is aimed to answer the main research question: What is the role of Instagram in the branding of the Small Tourism Enterprises of Finnish Lapland? Followed by the sub-questions:

SQ1: How is photography understood and handled by the workers responsible for the content of the Instagram account of small tourism enterprises?

SQ2: What are the advantages, challenges, and opportunities of incorporating Instagram within the branding strategy of small tourism enterprises?

The important role of Instagram in the promotion of tourism industries like hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and other visit activities is an issue that has been constantly discussed by many scholars (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010, p. 120). It's a photo-based app where stakeholders and others can participate by comments, likes, geo-tagging, hashtags, reviews, etc., thus it is an attractive branding method for SMEs because represents neither high effort nor expense because is a social media app where the majority of the target market has an account. Besides, it was noticed that the most influential tourism enterprises of Finnish Lapland have active Instagram accounts constantly updated with photography material of events like the northern lights, the husky rides, and moments on winter landscapes as well as interactive content with comments, reviews, or personal photos shared by visitors. Therefore, it is required to define the role of these visual content and interactions on Instagram have for shaping the tourists' expectations and also in the post-experience stage where the visit will be shared through this platform as a tangible proof of the moments and services involved (Bertella, 2013, p. 100). Accordingly, it will be possible to determine if Instagram has an essential role in the branding strategy of the small tourism enterprises of Finnish Lapland or if it is just a complementary promotional tool that is commonly used following social trends.

1.4 Research methods

The research was developed under the qualitative research method. The data was collected by semi-structured interviews and the data was examined through content analysis. The criterion for selecting the interviewees was based on their professional experience in the fields of photography and management of social media apps, mainly Instagram. Therefore, following academic recommendations and friends connections were approached workers who have at least two years of experience working for small enterprises in Finnish Lapland. They were contacted and invited to participate per their availability and time schedules. Pursuing honesty and integrity, it was included a short description of the research in subject to correctly inform them about the type of information that would be required from them during the interviews, thus it was avoided "assumption of participants' understanding" about the research (Silverman, 2006, p. 320). In total six photographic content creators were interviewed; from which four were held face-to-face and the other two by Google meet and Skype respectively. The interviews were held in English language, recorded, and then transcribed by including both; the interview questions and the responses because the content analysis is a method that concerns the description of meanings in context (Flick, 2014, p. 174). Following the findings obtained from the analysis, it was applied a review of the Instagram accounts of the most remarkable small enterprises in Finnish Lapland to get insights about the photographic content that is usually updated, the levels of interactivity by using the Instagram features (likes, hashtags, comments) and also to verify the increasing activity and the changes between photo-posts since the year when the Instagram accounts were created until now.

1.5 Structure of the study

This research consists of 5 chapters. The first chapter offers an introduction of the phenomenon under study: the competitiveness of Instagram as a branding tool for SMEs. Besides, the background, previous studies, the purpose of the study, and research methods are presented as well. The second chapter is comprehended by the theoretical framework that backs up this research where are developed the theoretical concepts; branding in SMEs,

photography in tourism branding, and Instagram as a branding tool. The third chapter covers the methodological section. This chapter describes the empirical context, the data collection, and the content analysis method that were applied in this study, emphasizing the academic reasons for deciding semi-structured interviews to collect the data and an explication of the coding and categorization process, to close with the research ethics. The fourth chapter develops the findings from the analysis with the support of the theoretical framework by aiming to answer the two research sub-questions. To conclude with the fifth chapter where are discussed the prime findings that answer the main research question, also the limitations and considerations for future researches.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Branding in SMEs

Branding is the process of creating an enterprise concept that will be distinctive on the market. It is a process that requires the analysis of the core significances of the business activity to determine the messages “*the brand*” wants to communicate to the public through its products and services. It is aimed to create an easily recognized brand from the competition that will remain imprinted in the minds of consumers by a color, a symbol, a quote, or a sound to address an unconscious purchase choice (Vaid & Campbell, 2003, p. 2). Hoyos (2016) defined branding as the “art of marking hearts” because it is a process guided by the aim of creating a brand concept that can develop a bond with consumers resulting in the awakening of emotions. These emotions aim to be positive and delightful to seductively promise a recovery or protection from the negative conditions society is experiencing, thus people will feel connected with the notion of reaching gladness or comfort (Manca et al., 2012, p. 1).

The approaching for emotions as the main strategy of branding can be seen in the promotional campaigns of nowadays famous brands that were focused on an emotional connection with people’s deeper desires; aspirational social status, benefits of practicing sports, nostalgic childhood memories, imitation or admiration for celebrities, etc.(Klein, 2000, p. 21). Another example is the sentence presented by Scott Bedbury; “emotions sell”, per his studies and experience as an executive of the famous coffee company *Starbucks*, the more emotional charge is included in the process of building a brand, the higher impacts on people to inspire preference that will conduct the purchase (Holt & Holt, 2004, p. 21). People will feel a deeper motivation to buy something by the capacity of the brand to be easily identified, then remembered and the remember capacity will be stronger if it exists an emotional connection that can be perceived on the brand. Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, Ford, Underwear are some examples of companies that do not need to invest more promotional efforts in creating awareness of the products or services, people already distinguish and even prefer them over other options (Vaid & Campbell, 2003, p. 8). Another clear example of the benefits that a correct branding strategy represents for allowing a leading market

position is the fashion industry where the element that people distinguish at first is not anymore the garment but the brand that is visible in the outfit (Hoyos, 2016, p. 135).

Branding is an essential element for ensuring the survival of any business activity. The brand's ability to stand out from the competition multiplies the possibilities to be the preferred product or service to be bought. A correctly defined and promoted brand allows the scope of a company with neither language, neither cultural nor geographical barriers (Vaid & Campbell, 2003, p. 13). It is a required intangible value for both; multinational companies and small and medium enterprises that will ensure them a competitive advantage to gain a site in the marketplace, as well as to overcome difficult times like economic crisis or social changes (Abimbola, 2001, p. 97).

Nevertheless, despite the proven benefits that branding provides for business activity, there is some lack of diversification of studies about the impacts, origin, and strategy of branding relying on the size of the companies. The data collected is mainly from studies about multinational companies, the ones which are considered that have mastered branding in the business world (Anarnkaporn, 2007, p. 25). Meanwhile, the study of branding for small and medium enterprises (SME's) seems to be unnecessary and in the business fields, it is yet an unexplored topic (Ahonen, 2008; Odoom et al., 2017). Based on the success of big companies which are still leading the market, it is understandable the interest among scholars to study their branding strategy that even allowed the development of a whole cultural movement where the brand has become in a fashion accessory that people want to show by a visible logo, for example, *Nike, Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, Lacoste, Ralph Lauren* (Klein, 2000, p. 28). However, the identification of branding as a business strategy that has defined and preserved the impact on the market only for big companies is not accurate anymore (Odoom et al., 2017, p. 81). Recently studies have been directing attention to the branding strategies in SMEs due to statistics that have demonstrated that in many countries the economic pillars have been for generations the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Odoom et al., 2017, p. 68).

Sentürk (2010) presented the cases of the developing countries Turkey and Albania where the SMEs play a significant role in the national revenue growth through the employments that generate, likewise are sources for entrepreneurship opportunities. Croatia is another

country where the transition from an emerging national economy to a well-established one was driven mainly by national SMEs (Radas & Božić, 2009, p. 439). Besides, Dietrich (2019) showed in her studies the perspective from some managers of the local SMEs of Finnish Lapland that the branding strategy for the site as a tourist destination is a continuous cooperation process between local companies and local organizations. Reflecting in this manner that SMEs represent an important element for the economic and social stability of different countries resulted from the jobs they create, the promotion of local products or services, and in many cases, the international acknowledgment of the culture and traditions that belonged to the place. Therefore, it is understandable to question the elements behind the origin and success of enterprises that despite not having international recognition, the monetary investments, and neither the long history of success as multinational companies have, SMEs were able to settle down a profitable business activity with positive repercussions for the local community.

Due to their size and the fact that some SMEs are located in remote regions, the branding strategy has been recently considered as the key management strategy that provided SMEs enterprises with the distinction their activities require to be able to make an appearance on the market where the competition is comprised of multinational companies with already loyal customers (Odoom et al., 2017, p. 79). Branding represents the element that SMEs enterprises require to provide their activities with innovation to be accepted and distinguish within the local community and abroad (Anarnkaporn, 2007, p. 27). The recognition of a brand can empower the community's pride while for international people will be promoted the uniqueness of products and services that only that SMEs enterprise can provide. Finnish Lapland is a clear example of a region where its citizens feel highly proud of the brand image that is mainly related to the natural properties that its northern location can uniquely allow (Dietrich, 2019, p. 44). Furthermore, Pencak (2012) defended that branding is essential for any business regardless of their size but for SMEs, it is a key strategy to provide competitiveness to the business activity by the trust, loyalty, and recognition a strong brand generates.

Some studies suggested that the creation of a distinctive brand with an emotional charge that creates an impact on customers is a process that in SMEs does not represent notable

complications (Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007, p. 342). Contrasting with big companies where the creation of a distinctive brand was addressed as an adaptation strategy to strengthen the company's presence in the light of the growing competition resulted from the machinery production and the appearance of mass media (Klein, 2000, p. 5). For Small and Medium Enterprises the creation of the brand's value was, in fact, the initial phase for the foundation of the business activity itself. If it is analyzed the roots of SMEs' business activity is characterized by the offer of innovative products and services that are resulted from the location's social, environmental, or architectural properties, thus the differentiation from others has always been inherent (Cant et al., 2013, p. 736). However, this does not mean that a well-defined and identified brand is immediately included in the creation of SMEs neither that their activities do not require constant reviews of branding processes. It means that for SMEs the branding process should be addressed differently to multinational companies because the conditions that add value and distinction to the brand identity completely differ (Ahonen, 2008, p. 1).

The creation of a brand image for SMEs instead of prioritizing to expand the promotion for an international scope should approach a brand value based on the establishment and maintenance of close relationships with customers and potential customers as well. For SMEs the brand value is perceived among the public through the acceptance that exists of the business activity with the local community; customers, business partners, employees, etc. (Anarnkaporn, 2007, p. 342). As it was stated by Mäläskä, et al., (2010) that branding for SMEs is more than an internal process, but it is the value of the attributes perceived, emotional appeals displayed, market scope, and influence for other businesses to define the brand thus is a process of co-creation through interactions with multiple stakeholders. Therefore, SMEs in their branding process must prioritize the limited budget, the benefits of partnership, and the high importance it has for their performance word to mouth publicity.

Despite the lack of studies about branding in SMEs and the statements made that it is still an unexplored topic in the business field that even allowed the definition of branding as a term that is not prioritized in the management guidelines of SMEs (Mäläskä et al., 2010; Inskip, 2004; Krake, 2005). It is presented that branding is, in fact, the strategy that has

allowed the development and success of SMEs in many countries by the advantage competitiveness that a strong and distinctive brand provides to generate the awareness and credibility a product or service requires to attract the audience (Cant et al., 2013, p. 735). But, due to the obvious disadvantages that SMEs have in comparison to multinational companies, where the business' aims differ, the branding strategy in SMEs could be defined as *discrete and direct*.

Studies have demonstrated that the branding process in SMEs emphasizes the important role of different stakeholders for its business activities in the building of a corporate brand; customers, employees, partners, sellers, etc (Mäläskä et al., 2010, p. 41). The creation of the brand in SMEs instead of addressing an international scope to expand the business activity prioritizes the approach for a more specific target market to keep close interactions before, during, and after consumption where will be possible as well constantly review the brand performance on the market (Mäläskä et al, 2010, p. 2). SMEs base the creation of a brand in values-oriented to the offer of a more personalized, unique, and unrepeatable product or service. Moreover, due to their size and limited recourses, SMEs do not intend to display expensive marketing strategies that require mass media communications. The branding strategy in SMEs is driven by the opportunities provided by communication channels that are affordable but equally efficient to reach the public. Based on the arguments presented by Ketter (2017), that social media provides endless opportunities to strengthen the brand image through the appraisal that social media has acquired itself among the public. Similarly, guided by the statement made by Todorov et al. (2011) that an indispensable element for the brand strategy is the visual stimuli that can be easily perceived by the audience, it is suggested that at the present times branding in SMEs is mainly sustained by social media apps where the visual advertisement is the principal lure.

It is concluded that SMEs do not fully embrace the creation of a brand for their business activity as a priority for preserving the impact of their offer in the market neither the influence of a well-defined and strong brand can influence on potential customers (Cant et al., 2013, p. 743). Nevertheless, SMEs have understood that the strongest element they have for standing out from others and being identified is by maintaining the innovation and uniqueness of their products and services, but under close interaction with different

stakeholders. SMEs do not intend to expand the brand but to enrich it following the facilities the market provides and combined with more personalized services to shape the brand values (Mäläskä et al., 2010, p. 23).

Based on the influence of social media has on society and the fact that has become the favorite promotional site for many industries due to the low costs and the high reach to customers (Christou, 2015; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Granberg, 2019; Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020; Mäläskä et al., 2010; Saxena & Kumar, 2020). The present study theorizes that SMEs have been guided in their promotional efforts to display attractive images that will contribute to the messages the enterprise wants to communicate to the public. Additionally, social media allows interactions with customers, during and after the consumption due to the possibility to participate through likes, reviews, or sharing videos or photos. Thus, SMEs can develop trust and loyalty among customers and potential ones by practicing constant analysis of the business performance that takes into account the post-service impacts (Mäläskä et al., 2010, p. 39).

The research agrees with the statements presented by other scholars that branding in SMEs requires further examination to obtain more factual data (Cant et al., 2013; Mäläskä et al., 2010; Odoom et al., 2017; Radas & Božić, 2009; Şentürk, 2010; Todorov et al., 2011). However, it is presented the theory for SMEs branding has represented the strategy to ensure the success of their activities following their target markets, location, budget, and values. Branding through social media has represented the key element that SMEs are required to keep one of their most important sources to attract customers; the word to mouth fame where visual advertisements are the persuasive essence. As it was stated by Manca and Pieper (2012) visual representations create major impacts on our perceptions, we get easily influenced by what we see and then we develop complete imaginary constructions". Therefore, social media provides SMEs the great opportunity to strengthen the brand's presence among users by the display of images appealing to emotions, customers' rewarding experiences, and posts that allows the communication with people more interactively due to the facilities that social media apps have (Lavoie, 2015, p. 2).

2.2 Photography in tourism branding

The present section is focused on the role of photography in tourism in the three stages where the researcher considers it has the greatest significance in the branding process; the images on tourism advertising were categorized as the first stage, the photos shared by visitors while they are experiencing tourism are the second one, and at last but not least, the effects that shared photos of past tourist experiences have on the public are the third.

Tourism is one of the industries that highly depend on visual stimuli to create awareness about a certain tourist destination. After that, it is more viable for tourism enterprises to generate interest for traveling to the place through the display of visual advertisement that stands out the benefits that can be enjoyed while staying there. This is a process of lures where persuasion and seductive images are the main keys to convert potential visitors into factual tourists (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010, p. 1).

Furthermore, tourism is based on the consumption that will take place during a period completely out from the normal course of daily schedules. It is a business activity that must remark on the properties of places, activities, and even the local communities to make the destination look special, unique, and worth visiting. It is required that the symbolic transformation of reality will prioritize images that might indicate and invite (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010, p. 120). For example, Iglesias-Sánchez et al. (2020) present the cases of Spain and Portugal where the photos of tourism usually show only one person who is enjoying peacefulness, calm, and relaxation, reflecting in this manner the opportunity to experience an unrepeated equilibrium with the environment.

For this reason, photography is one of the most important elements in the creation of tourist advertising. To attract customers is required to generate inspiration to travel, and this will be possible only through the promotion of creative visual offerings that transmit a great number of positive emotions within a message that appears simple (Casaló et al., 2020, p. 2). The process of deciding the location, the angles, filters, or other elements like animal life, lights, darkness, or the participation of personalities well- recognized among the audience are just some examples of the creativity that can be applied in the production of photos full of positive emotions that will create interest, curiosity, and engagement with the

image and information that is being shown. As was stated by Iglesias-Sánchez et al. (2020) the image destination-building is a process that involves both production and consumption.

The effectiveness of the correct selection of photos that accomplish the persuasive nature of visual advertising is notorious in all the aspects related to the tourism industry, for example, the tourism advertisement about a destination has been pointed out by service providers as the main source for expectations about the destination that tourists create even before their arrivals to the place (Bertella, 2013, p. 110). The images that appear in travel brochures, city guides, and official DMO's encourage the travel decision among potential customers by an imaginary idea about the destination that involves different expectations about the experiences that will be lived. It is a decision-making process highly influenced by the photos of the tourist destination and its sites (Komppula & Laukkanen, 2016, p. 42).

The photo can generate strong emotions that can define a travel decision that includes different expenses and steps; flight tickets, hotel booking, reservation of activities, dinner reservations, etc. The value of photography for the tourism industry is the visual communication that will encourage the purchase motivated for an aspirational idea about a moment that might be experienced (Komppula & Laukkanen, 2016, p. 43). By a photo, potential customers can become a tourist who is a person that by participating in a tourist activity is approaching the aim of a rewarding experience for different aspects of his life (Articles on experiences, 2014, p. 72). Photography involves the promise of transcendence in a society where routine and daily complications have created somehow the necessity for meaningful experiences originated by a personal choice but encouraged by a completely new environment. Photography in tourism encapsulates the emblematic transformation of reality by highlighting the attributes of the places to make them look more alluring (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010, p. 1). The impacts of photography in the tourist advertisement can be proved in the studies that have demonstrated that one of the main aims among tourists is to recreate the images of the tourist attractions precisely as they have seen previously on the promotional photos (Bertella, 2013; Jenkins 2003; Moir, 2010). Although this situation cannot be qualified as an obstacle for the normal course of planned activities during a visit experience, it has represented some pressure for inclusion in the tourist

services providers' list of responsibilities to help tourists for taking the best shots from their phones or cameras (Bertella, 2013, p. 110).

Supported by the information presented, it can be argued that the recognition of the importance of visual offerings for attracting tourists is a situation that has been widely accepted and recognized in the tourism industry. Moreover, is a condition that highly influences the creations of tourists' expectations about the destination, and also it conducts the memorability of the tourist experience by the photo the visitor can get as visual proof of the travel experience (Bertella, 2013, p. 109). Therefore, if we look at the pictures commonly taken by tourists will be found that are always of the principal landmarks, activities, or conditions that make the destinations stand out from other places. For tourists it is important to obtain the best possible photo about those sites to feel the satisfaction of this "capture effect" on a photo that will endure over time and will remind the emotional value of the experience (Bertella, 2013, p. 180). Following this priority among tourists it can be stated that the photo represents an essential element for the way in which the destination and its activities were experienced, how it will be remembered and how will be shared (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020, p. 1). On the other hand, the importance that it has for tourists to get a great photo of the travel experience can be also the result of the application of an effective visual advertisement, thus the necessity to retain that moment (Bertella, 2013; Jenkins 2003; Moir 2010). It can be suggested that the photos taken by tourists are emotional souvenirs that capture the meaningfulness of the experience itself as a one-time life experience they were able to enjoy.

To continue, tourism enterprises have recognized as well the importance of maintaining a competitive advantage of destinations (Granberg, 2019, p. 13). Due to tourism being an industry that completely depends on people's availability to travel, competitiveness is provided by detecting on time the social, economic, and climatic changes that could influence the availability to travel among people. Thus, globalization has encouraged the current tendency where the constant use of technological interfaces has converted the internet into something more than just the preferred way of communication among societies (Saxena & Kumar, 2020, p. 2500). The internet is a virtual interface that has modified several aspects of human life and when it comes to the tourism industry it has highly

modified customer's behavior (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1090). Since the last decade the internet has been the most wanted source for finding travel information, but also, it has been the favorite medium for sharing photos and personal experiences. This situation has been categorized by some scholars as a consequence of the facilities provided by social media, where participants comment, receive likes, and even can make the photos look better due to the filters some social media apps like Instagram have (Saxena & Kumar, 2020, p. 2502).

This situation has represented a collateral effect for the role of photography in tourism. The unique role of photography is not any longer in the advertisement designed by tourism enterprises. Nowadays, another important space of photography is upon the photos that were taken and then shared on social media by tourists after they experienced the visit. From a promotional approach, it has been detected that the photos shared by tourists generate among the public a notion of trust, credibility, emotional resemblance, and inspiration for a future travel decision (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020, p. 22). Those tourists' photos are the ones that have a more convincing effect among potential visitors because they reflect an emotional value and a type of verification effect of a great experience. Additionally, this common photo-sharing attitude has even been categorized as an element that boosts the creation of the destination's image due to the interactions that can be held among participants (Christou, 2015; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Granberg, 2019; Iglesias-Sánchez, et al., 2020; Saxena & Kumar, 2020). The personal photos shared by tourists provide them an opportunity to share their options and special moments with a wide range of public and also it helps potential visitors to get more information or a different perspective about a destination (Saxena & Kumar, 2020, p. 2501). Therefore, it is not surprising that some scholars have defined social media as the best promotional tool with the greatest impacts at the lowest cost where the main promoters are the visitors and the target audience as well (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1093).

From a marketing point of view is a scenario where the customers are the ones who renovate the information and then generate interest to motivate the travel decision (Fatanti, & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1090). In consequence, it is required to present photography as an element that has a major role in the tourism industry before, during, and after the travel

experience. By a visual representation, people can get the required motivation to travel, and during the travel experience, tourism enterprises must take into account the photos obtained by tourists because those are the ones that will generate important impacts for the promotion of the destination afterward visit.

2.3 Instagram as a branding tool

It cannot be denied that the internet as a communicational and research tool has represented a wide variety of benefits for societies in different fields; academic, social, and even economic. In the same way, has in a manner empowered people due to being a virtual space where a single individual can share information that can be seen by millions of people (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1089). We live in a moment where everything is only one click away. People have access to global information from different sources and communication has become easier and faster, thus nowadays the internet has become an indispensable element of our lives (Hoffman, Novak & Venkatesh, 2004).

Besides, together with the growth of the internet, the popularity of social media apps among people has been notorious as well (Casaló et al., 2020, p. 1). At the current times, it is really difficult to find someone who does not have a personal social media page like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. Some scholars have suggested that the popularity of social media platforms is the result of the opportunity they provide for users of being more than just receptors but to be themselves the creators of visual, writing and even important data content (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1090). This opportunity that social media provides to users is accompanied by some sense of exclusivity because on social media users share information that has an important value for them like personal interests, hobbies, or concerning issues. Therefore, it facilitates the opportunity to catch the genuine attention of other people, allowing in this manner the social interactions between selected members with similar interests (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1093). Despite the options for social media apps that are commonly known; *Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, personal blogs, etc.* studies have demonstrated that Instagram is leading the polls about the preferred social media app. Instagram has even been defined as the favorite and the most influential social

media app among the majority of people (Casaló et al., 2020, p. 1). Following the statements made by Diamond (2015) that people will consume information that is easy to understand, likewise, the studies that confirmed the nature of human beings are driven primarily by visual stimulus (Wedel & Pieters, 2008, p. 1). It can be presented that the reason behind the favoritism for Instagram relies on the fact that it is mainly a visual platform where people can immediately get attracted by a single photo or a short time video without a lot of effort. Plus, Instagram is a photo-sharing app with a lot of options for improving the quality of the photos and for enriching the content like location, comments, or audio features (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1092). It is an application that allows users to beautify the image by the use of filters accompanied with some specific information about the moments and places that are captured on the image. All these conditions enrich the visual appreciation among the users that will generate positive reactions to the commenting section. Supported by this information, Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) defined Instagram as a two-way communication channel due to the update of visual content will receive the reactions from the audiences which can be seen to others through the settings; *like, hashtag, comments, or sharing*. But, the impact of Instagram on society goes further than just being the preferred app due to its interactive facilities to make a photo or a video look more appealing. It has been a peak from where a new generation of leaders who are defined as “Influencers” have emerged.

The Influencers are not academics, politicians, artists nor social advocators. They are just people who have gained popularity and admiration among users of Instagram due to the photos or stories they update on their Instagram accounts. Their name comes from the word “influence” because what they do and they say have great relevance to their followers (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017, p. 1). Citizens trust in their statements until the point of being qualified as a reliable source of information for many people (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 2). This situation must be considered as a condition where Instagram has evolved from an entertainment app to a platform that not only guides but determinants people’s behavior and can create important impacts on social structures due to the trust and priority people perceive from it.

Instagram must be seen as more than just a popular social media app based on photos, Instagram must be embraced as the main encounter for communication among people where the visual content shared by users has remarkable social and cultural repercussions. From an advertisement perspective, it is a site where people through their photos, comments, likes, questions, and responses play an active part as promotional agents of the image that is being posted (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1090). The material posted on Instagram has an inherent sense of permanence resulting from the responses it will generate. Those photos, videos, or descriptions will be seen, reviewed, and commented not only on the virtual space but possibly during face-to-face moments as well. It is an unorthodox promotional tool at the lowest cost but the higher impacts within a virtual environment perceived as casual (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1093).

If the content of Instagram photos is deeply analyzed will be found that the majority are beautiful landscapes, dishes, drinks, family moments, city's main spots, etc, all of them are moments that were enjoyed and evoke positive feelings not only for those who shared but also among the audience as well (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020, p. 8). Instagram converts a photo in a condition where all the users can become into more than receptors of the visual content but to be themselves, participants of the experiences, through the content they add with cheering comments, symbols, reviews, or even questions (Saxena & Kumar, 2020, p. 2503). On Instagram a single photo involves an emotional component due to the image is a proven fact that the moment was relevant, thus awakes the necessity to publish it, and it exists a high probability of generating curiosity and interest for the spaces, figures, or people who appear on the photo creating in this manner the effect e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) (Saxena & Kumar, 2020, p. 2503). From a marketing perspective “The word-of-mouth effect” is categorized as an important element for providing a positive image of a product or service. When people express their experiences after a buying decision, it is somehow inviting or preventing others to make the same choice. Thus, when this effect takes part on Instagram the consequences for the brand should be taken seriously because the receptors can be a larger number of people. Plus, the companies can also extend the positive effect of word-of-mouth by tagging themselves on the content, sharing the picture, or using the same hashtag (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013, p. 19). Based on the fast and easy manner in how everything is communicated on the internet due to the influence it wields on

society. The recognition of Instagram as an important spot for the Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has been acquired by many professionals for the study of Instagram in the marketing fields (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013; Khan, 2018; Hsu & Cai, 2009). For example, Bergström and Bäckman (2013) pointed out the photos of customers using the products of certain brands as great word-to-mouth advertisements because it creates some humble effect of the brand's adaptation to people's daily lives. Instagram is an interactive social space which use compromises all the required elements for a successful visual advertisement strategy; constant presence among potential customers, attractive images to persuade, and emotional engagement with the target market, therefore it is not surprising that it is at the present times the preferred stage for marketing efforts (Granberg, 2019, p. 8).

Instagram can be defined as the most popular User-Generated Content (UGC) in the current times, where people are constantly posting photos of personal experiences with an emotional value about those moments. Instagram allows creativity and originality for the transmission of a great number of emotions through a visual message that appears simple and in a fast manner (Casaló et al., 2020, p. 2). This condition where the users are the ones who create, develop and share the content of Instagram can be defined as a practice where the public decides what is worth it to be posted, commented and even shared. User-Generated Content despite being a common activity for modern societies that rarely is taken seriously has been described as a new phenomenon for branding strategies because it creates wider opportunities for reaching customers but also creates the necessity to innovate traditional branding practices applied in the past (Dennhardt, 2013, p. 3). For a branding strategy, the User-Generated Content creates a competitive advantage of self-promotion aid where the users have become the real marketers of every image, visual content, or post they update (Saxena & Kumar, 2020, p. 2506). At the current times, customers play the role of co-creators of the brand value and participate through social media platforms in the publicity (Dietrich, 2019; Pavon-Jordan, 2019). Lavoie (2015) brings up the example of Dunkin'Donuts" and its strategy of branding itself through Instagram. It is a company whose constant activity on Instagram includes the creation of funny, emotional, and interactive content that invites the audience to participate, strengthening in this manner the brand's presence. Similarly, Acuti, Mazzoli, Donvito, and Chan (2018) stated that User

Generated Content (UGC) is the most effective communication strategy for influencing and shaping how the brand is perceived among customers because the visual brand associations that can arise from Instagram are charged with emotional value, lived experiences, and users' creativity. On the other hand, the actual competitiveness in different economic sectors has generated among people the unconscious necessity to look from different sources of information that inspires future purchase decisions. For example, in the travel industry, it has been proved that tourists rely more on travel reviews and travel experiences posted on Instagram to make a travel decision (Vitouladiti, 2014, p. 279). This tendency per Bahtar and Muda (2016) is due to the content that is generated by the users despite alluding to a specific brand that is perceived as more genuine and trustworthy without any type of selling interest. Because users do not receive any type of merchandise benefit for the updating of visual material on Instagram, instead, they do it just for the rewarding experience of interaction through the sharing of videos or photos that represent an emotional value for them. Following the statement by Balmer et al. (2006) that “strong corporate brands are possible only when firms tie their products or services to activities that create meaningful associations or representations of the firm” it is required for branding strategies to take into considerations the implications of User-Generated Content (UGC) to build an engagement with customers guided by a positive and authentic representation of the brand on the most influential social media app; Instagram.

Nevertheless, despite its success, and the benefits social media apps provide for connecting people through a virtual interface, they have also been already widely criticized and even its constant use has been defined as a dependent behavior. Some critics pointed out social media as sites where people spend more time faking a perfect and shallow lifestyle instead of going out to the real world to realize factual actions to develop meaningful social relationships and improve emotional wellbeing (Sinek, 2016). Similarly, Stein (2013) in the article “Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation” presented *the millennials*; those who were born with technology as something normal in their life as lazy, selfish, and even narcissistic people who need approbation on social media to improve their confidence. Of course, the arguments about the negative effects resulted from the widespread use of social media as a communication tool cannot be denied. However, for any type of business activity, it is highly important to recognize that the continuity of their activities and their acceptance

among customers depend on their adaptation to the social trend to determine a strategic location on the market that will allow them to stand out from the competition (Ketter, 2017). In consequence, it is crucial to accept that in the modern world internet and social media apps have overcome the influence that in the past years' other communication media like television, radio, and newspapers had on society. Instagram is more than an information source; Instagram is the current spotlight to shape people's perceptions, attitudes, social relationships, idols, and even political beliefs. It is a site for social interactions without any type of time or geographical barrier, thus it provides endless opportunities as a marketing tool to promote a product or service by the posted images (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1093). Likewise, its settings for User Generated Content are competitive strategies for branding due to the posted photos involving emotions and rewarding experiences, conditions that strengthen the brand presence and acceptance among the audience (Iglesias-Sánchez et al, 2020, p. 1).

The photos shared on Instagram are mainly of rewarding experiences that people feel are worth being seen by others. Although this sharing attitude can be driven by positive reasons like sharing happy moments, as well as negative intentions like bragging about happiness or success. The truth is that the necessity for announcing an event to a great number of people provides some sense of confirmation that in fact, it was a great experience. This situation was defined by Saxena and Kumar (2020) as “silence appraisal”, where the impacts of the elements within the photo are enough to appreciate the emotional value that represents.

The potential of Instagram as a promotion space has already been noticed for some scholars who have qualified Instagram as a strategic platform where the daily use by people facilitates the engagement with the customers, thus it boosts the enhancement with any brand image (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020, p. 1). It is a social media application that reduces for marketing campaigns the difficulty of creating a visual advertisement that promises a rewarding experience or any other type of benefits because the photos are factual evidence of the satisfaction that was experienced. Instagram is the best e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) source where satisfied customers themselves through photos, videos, and comments are confirming and in a way recommending the experience (Saxena

& Kumar, 2020 p. 2503). Moreover, the public who sees those photos unconsciously becomes participants and promoters of the experience that it has been displayed (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1090).

The definition of Instagram as a platform where promotion is permanent but is not easily noticed due to the adoption of this app among society as something typical within daily activities has foreseen as a bigger opportunity not only as an advertisement site but as a key element for building the brand image of enterprises (Christou, 2015; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020; Mäläskä, Tähtinen & Saraniemi 2010; Saxena & Kumar, 2020). For example, in the tourism industry, a photo posted by travelers can inspire curiosity for the tourist site that appears on the image and then influence a future travel choice (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020, p. 2). Likewise, Christou (2015) stated that for the travel industry Instagram provides a great opportunity to consolidate the enterprise's image on the market because the content is shared by visitors who experienced the destination and the photos express how they feel about it.

A common and perceived visual element that can be conceptualized in a logo plays an important part in the process of building a brand (Blain et al., 2005, p. 332). The fashion industry is a clear example where a common and perceived visual element can represent a crucial factor for the empowerment of the brand image on the market. Tommy Hilfiger, Lacoste, and Ralph Lauren are companies whose revenues and participation in the sale industry highly increased since their logos were from being a distinctive signature to a fashion accessory that many people wanted to imitate (Klein, 2000, p. 28). Similarly, professionals in the tourism marketing field have agreed that the increasing competition has created a condition where is highly important for a destination to have a logo or other type of visual element that people can easily be related to the possibility of traveling to that place for encouraging a travel decision (Blain et al., 2005, p. 334). For example, the information provided by Dietrich (2019) reflected that Finnish Lapland possesses a place brand based on the mental associations with nature and the northern lights, which constantly attracts not only visitors but photographers and film professionals as well for capturing the unique natural settings that this tourist destination can provide.

The success of a branding strategy through Instagram depends on the post of appealing visual material that encourages engagement with the public (Pavon-Jordan, 2019, p. 2). It cannot be denied that an image promoted by the consumers themselves generate higher impacts for any business activity, not only for the easy perceived image but because a displayed image by the customers themselves demonstrate to others some sense of satisfactory acquisition or experience that it is still enjoyed, thus it wants to be shown, co-creating in the manner the brand (Holt & Holt, 2004, p. 16). Instagram is a platform that allows the permanence of this strategy due to its facilities being based on enriching the projection of visual material by filters, tags, and even contests where the followers can participate (Casaló et al., 2020, p. 7). And when it comes to the photos of experiences lived thanks to a site, person, product, or service, it acquires a convincing effect to other potential customers that can influence the buying decision. This situation strengthens the brand. As it was stated by Iglesias-Sánchez et al. (2020) “the experience is the brand and the brand is co-created and evolves with experiences”.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present research is developed under a qualitative research methodology which in accordance with Mariampolski (2001) is a competitive method that allows deeper insights into the psychological perceptions of brands and the marketplace fluctuations to strategically understand the elements attached to a brand or product that determine the perceived brand value and the levels of satisfaction to motivate the buying choice. Therefore, it is a suitable method for this research that is analyzing Instagram as a social network which features for photo-sharing and user-generated content have contributed to the consolidation of the brand recognition, brand values, and customer preference of the small tourism enterprises among the public.

Additionally, branding is a process that is not limited to monetary aspects; it is a design that involves the audience, business aims, and market status for creating a meaning that is perceived by consumers (Anholt, 2005; Balmer et al., 2006). In consequence, the qualitative research method is the one that provides the techniques and tools for obtaining a more meaningful understanding of the social phenomenon that is under study beyond exact numerical data (Silverman, 2006, p. 56).

3.1 Empirical Context

Guided by the arguments presented by Hallett et al. (2010) that the main approach in tourism advertisement is the transformation of ordinary places into something extraordinary to make them look more attractive, the northern lights, the midnight sun, and the winter landscapes are clear examples of a well-designed tourist product. Climatologists would agree that there is nothing paranormal or unexplainable behind the darkness, solar activity, and magnetic storms which are the elements required for creating the northern lights on the sky neither about the weather changes and a geographical location required to create snow and the midnight sun phenomenon (Lee, Weaver & Prebensen, 2017, p. 67). However, they have been converted into distinctive symbols of the arctic due to the application of a well-designed marketing strategy that started to be applied in Finland during the 200th century

based on promoting the natural qualities of the region (Lapin elämysteollisuuden osaamiskeskus & Elämysinstituutti., 2004, p. 86).

The success of this strategy can be proved by the number of visitors that Finnish Lapland annually receives who are highly motivated not only by the possibility to witness those natural events but to get a photo from the travel experience. Following Bertella (2013) tour guides expressed their responsibility to provide guidance and support to tourists for obtaining the best possible photo even as similar as the displayed image on the DMO's official page to later post it on social media to demonstrate that in fact, they lived the experience. Pavon-Jordan (2019) stated that these types of personal photos by visitors through the internet or social media apps besides being an important element for the travel experiences among visitors is an important contributing factor for the tourist promotion of Finnish Lapland. The photos obtained by visitors are the ones that will create a higher impact for increasing tourist activity because people's travel decisions are highly driven by the images of travel experiences they find on the internet (Pavon-Jordan, 2019, p. 40).

Therefore, authenticity and the privileged interconnection with the Lappish wilderness have been remarketed by some scholars as to the essential elements for the branding strategy of Finnish Lapland within an international scope (Dietrich, 2019; Pavon-Jordan, 2019). It is the offer of an innovative tourist product attached to the advertisement support given by the internet and social media platforms. Despite the limitations like reduced budget, remote location, and lack of recognition, Finnish Lapland has created and preserved a tourism industry that generates benefits for the local community where the main pillars are small enterprises.

3.2 Data collection

Following Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) that defined qualitative research as a method that involves analyzing and interpreting texts and interviews in order to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon, the data was collected by interviewing six professional workers of the small tourism enterprises of Finnish Lapland. Four of them were workers responsible for creating the photographic content and for

managing the official Instagram account, the other one despite not being in charge of the Instagram account, is responsible for creating the photographic content that is posted, and one interviewee was responsible for designing the marketing strategy that implicates the brand performance through Instagram and other social media applications as well. All the participants had at least two years of professional experience in the field and the interviews were held during the spring and summer seasons of 2021.

The decision for semi-structured interviews was based on the opportunity that this structure offers for giving the interviewees the freedom to narrate their experiences but with prevalent interventions from the researcher to convey the narration to the research subject (Galletta, 2013, p. 47). Consequently, it was possible to enable an interview technique that never lost its purpose. As it was suggested by Flick (2014) for obtaining deeper insights from the participants' responses based on their reactions, experiences, and interactions during the interview it was prioritized the practice of one-to-one on live interviews. Nevertheless, there were cases where the geographical location did not allow this method, thus two of the interviews were held by Google meet and Skype, which in accordance with some scholars are innovative and trustful technological tools that provide valuable and wider data for the research (Lo Iacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016; Paulus, Lester & Dempster, 2013).

During the process, it was always respected the space that is required for letting the interviewee's narrative be developed (Galletta, 2013, p. 48). The semi-structured interviews lasted between sixty minutes to one hour and thirty minutes because it was created a more casual, interactive conversational environment to allowed reciprocity and reflexivity between the interviewee and the researcher in terms of topics that might arise during the interview (Galletta, 2013, p. 75). As a breaking the ice strategy, it was created a "background section" that gave the participants the opportunity to tell about their personal motivations to start practicing photography and the creation of social media content. Subsequently, the interviews were divided into two more sections where the first section was approaching the role of photography for the branding strategy, and the second section was focused on the role of Instagram for the branding efforts. However, all the sections were covering the main factors for analyzing a branding strategy and the tools that might be

supporting it; brand values, emotional approaches, customer engagement, loyalty, and recognition on the market, and due to the focus of this research; brand performance on social media networks (Holt & Holt, 2004; Hoyos, 2016; Martinus & Chaniago, 2017).

3.3 Content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is a flexible and systematic method (Flick, 2014, p. 171). The data is reduced by the selection of aspects of meaning that the researcher selected due to their relation to the research question. The categories should cover a higher level of abstractions to obtain more concrete because each category covers wider concepts (Flick, 2014, p. 171). It was decided to apply a data-driven process that started by listening to the recordings of the interviews to carefully transcribe everything the participants responded to each question. It is important to clarify that the transcriptions included both; the interview questions and the interviewee's answers without leaving out anything that was considered irrelevant. However, based on the research's purpose which is not addressing emotions or personality studies where verbal reactions are highly relevant for analyzing sensitive and uncomfortable topics, by means of readability, all the "utterances" were eliminated during the transcription process (Flick, 2014, p. 299).

It was applied the technique of successive summarizing which in accordance with Flick (2014) is the examination of sentences or phrases and erase everything that looked unproductive or redundant and summarize them with other similar ones, therefore will result in categories and subcategories. The names for the categories clearly and specifically described what they were referring to and the descriptions explained the characteristics of the elements that will be covering. For analysis de data it was decided to apply a data-driven process which consisted of reading the material until a relevant concept for the research and fit it on a subcategory that covered this concept or creating a new subcategory that covered the concept (Flick, 2014, p. 176). This process was followed until saturation which is the point where no more concepts can be found (Flick, 2014, p. 176).

To conclude, for ensuring the quality of the coding frame it was applied a post-evaluation to check if the subcategories were clear and exclusive for the assigned units of coding and

if the categories accurately describe the concepts of the research questions, confirming in the manner the consistency and validity (Flick, 2014, p. 179).

3.3 Research ethics

Despite the interview questions covering the performance of a branding strategy through Instagram, it is a research subject that does not cross any type of personal boundaries neither sensitive nor traumatic experiences, which in accordance with Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong (2008) are serious ethical concerns that must be considered in qualitative research, there were other ethical issues that were taken into consideration. Following the guidelines of *informed consent* provided by Silverman (2006), it was explained to every participant detailed information about the research purpose, the people who would have access to the information they provided, the confidentiality of their identities, and the fact that the interviews would be recorded, thus they always had the opportunity to withdraw from the research's process at any time. Additionally, before each interview all the participants were asked to sign a letter of consent that clearly specified the purpose of the research and the processes of how the information was given by them were going to be processed. Allowing in this manner a well-defined understanding among the participants about their rights to answer the questions and to end the interview in the case it was needed (Galletta, 2013, p. 46).

Pursuing fair and honest research, in the process of data collection, for finding the interview participants it was decided not to contact directly to the tourism enterprises of Finnish Lapland. Instead, it was decided to approach the workers responsible for managing the photographic material and the Instagram accounts in a more casual way by using personal contacts as friends and social circle to obtain people with genuine interest to participate in the interview. The intention of this strategy was to get information from people openly and happily agreed to be interviewed without any type of pressure or obligation from a boss's petition to participate, therefore, it was achieved complete voluntary participation and a high level of mutual trust between the researcher and interviewees (Silverman, 2006, p. 323). Moreover, to ensure interviews in a more comfortable setting, it was used cell phone

equipped with an audio recording application that was located in a place and in a position that was not noticeable as a recording machine, thus the data was not affected by the presence of a recording item (Silverman, 2006, p. 202). It is important to mention that all the participants were adults within the legal standards, thus it was not required parental consent (Silverman, 2006, 324).

To summarize, the present research was carried out following the guidelines of The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK) for the responsible conduct of research and for handling alleged violations of conduct. It was embraced the practice of the term research integrity in every stage of the activities that were required for the accomplishment of the research, and its results (The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012, p. 29).

4. FINDINGS

It was applied qualitative content analysis that consisted in reducing the data by the selection of aspects of meaning that the researcher selected due to their relation to the theoretical framework and the research question; what is the role of Instagram in the branding of the Small Tourism Enterprises of Finnish Lapland? Following Flick (2014) for the creation of the categories, it was applied the successive summarizing process consisted in the examination of sentences or phrases stated by the interviewees and erase everything that looked unproductive or redundant, then it was summarized with other similar ones, thus resulted in categories. The coding was created from the most repeated patterns and words the interviewees used to describe Instagram and photography within the branding plans and the services they offer. For organizing the information it was applied a data-driven process which consisted in reading the material until a relevant concept for the research and fit it on a subcategory that covered this concept or creating a new subcategory that covered a different or new concept instead (Flick, 2014, p. 176). Data analysis was grounded on constant and systematic readings of the information offered by the participants along with checks of the Instagram accounts, and the theoretical framework with constant returns to the data for further studies until it was achieved a verifiable meaning (Galletta, 2013, p. 19). The present section is organized into four sub-chapters. The first two; 4.1 photographic management through Instagram and 4.2 photographic approaches aim to respond to the first sub-research question. Subsequently, 4.3 Instagram within branding strategies and 4.4 challenges on Instagram for future considerations aim to respond to the second sub-research question. The conclusion chapter presents the discussions to respond to the main research question and to finalize there are presented the limitations for this study and considerations for future researches.

4.1 Photographic management through Instagram

The non-existence of strict written rules regarding the use of Instagram does not decrease the recognition of photography on this social network as a competitive strategy that enables the constant exposition of the brand image (Martinus & Chaniago, 2017, p. 208). For this

reason, there are some standards the content creators apply to decide the type of photos and the tourism approaches that will be covered on the updated content. These standards despite not being written to be tightly obeyed are established following the main aims the enterprises foreseen to achieve through their activity on Instagram; to boost the brand visibility and to increase bookings.

First of all the participants constantly remarked that at the current times Instagram besides being a popular social network is the most checked webpage to get inspiration for future travels and things to do. Based on their experience not only as photographers and Instagram content creators but as individuals who enjoy traveling Instagram is a handy platform where the photographic content and the user-generated content features; *likes, hashtags, comments, geotagging* offer ideas about places to visits, food to eat, activities to do, etc.

Instagram is a place for inspiration because many people use it for finding places, locals, and tourists. Instagram gives great ideas about where to visit. (IA)

People look more on Instagram than any other page for inspiration for future travels. (ID)

It is conceived that to be able to inspire traveling at first the content must be attractive and catch the attention of users, thus an important requirement for the photos that will be posted on Instagram is that they must be “colorwise”. Per the participants' descriptions, the colorwise effect on photos occurs when the colors match each other in the displayed image until the point of creating a visual harmony that attracts the viewers' attention. Consequently, it is foreseen that this effect beyond attracting the attention will keep the attention to encourage the scrolling on the Instagram page thus increasing the exposition of the services the enterprises offer through each photo.

I usually choose something following the colors to select the images that are more consistent colorwise, so when I choose a photo it must be something that matches with the colorwise; blue, green, green, blue, green, I want that when people see my profile they will notice the consistency of the colors. (IA)

The design, the layout, that the colors match that everything looks nice all together. So these are the main things to try to make the picture look interesting to scroll, and interesting for people to check. (IC)

Besides, the photographic content must be creative and attractive to increase the inspiration to visit Lapland. It is prioritized the post of fun, colorful, and photos from travel experiences of factual visitors to get the audience's attention by showing the experiences they can get by acquiring their services.

I try to be very positive, happy feeling and colorful especially yellow color and green color because are very natural but also very positive and encourages people to be Lapland. (IA)

The photography on Instagram must be mainly about those travel experiences that are immediately linked with Finnish Lapland due to the conditions the weather and the location allows; the husky rides, the northern lights, the midnight sun, the snowed landscapes, etc. to keep the desire to choose Finnish Lapland as a travel destination. The participants clearly stated that the main goal is to evoke strong and positive feelings in the viewers when they see the photos from travel experiences provided by the company. For this reason, they carefully analyze not only the photos they post on the official Instagram account but also, they often check the accounts of visitors who posted the photos acquired through their photography services. Their strategy is to spotlight mainly the photos of moments and activities that encourage the necessity to travel to Lapland but directing the attention to acquiring their services.

We want to make people want to be in the photo, we want to awake in them the urge to visit Lapland. (IA)

In consequence, the photographic content must show the uniqueness of the experience of traveling to Lapland to maintain alive the fervidness and curiosity that might drive the travel choice. This is the reason why the photos are mainly about the events that have been categorized as bucket list experiences; the northern lights and outdoor activities in the snow or meeting Santa Claus. These types of photos aim to awake some sense of recognition that the travel experiences in Lapland cannot be lived anywhere else, thus boosting the urgent to travel with a strong preference for the enterprise's brand.

In a more general perspective it is about displaying a photo of the stereotypical things that people want to do when they come to Lapland, usually I choose pictures of northern lights and it was better if the photo had northern lights and people, also, for example, the night the lights of the midwinter in Lapland. (IE)

From an advertising perspective, it has already been remarked on the importance of prioritizing the visual material over the written material to send more implicit messages, thus letting individuals complete it with their imagination (Manca & Pieper, 2012, p. 2). Visual representations create major impacts on our perceptions, we get easily influenced by what we see and then we develop complete imaginary constructions. Likewise, Yu and Egger (2021) argued the relevance that the presence of some colors have for awaking certain emotions that will encourage the engagement rates on Instagram, and how this conditions should be taken seriously by professional to optimize the advertisements efforts. Therefore, taking into consideration the existence of some unawareness of Lapland as a tourist destination and the other small enterprises that offer the same services, the creation of engaging content through photography on Instagram is considered a key technique that the small enterprises in Finnish Lapland apply to consolidate and distinguish the brand among potential customers.

The visual aspect of Instagram provides the opportunity to post engaging content to attract customers. (IA)

Similarly, some scholars have already approached the impacts of social media due to the power of photos for inspiring travel choices (Agostinelli, 2020; Yu & Egger, 2021). Thus, it can be suggested that the descriptions provided by the participants are not inaccurate at all. However, the post of engaging photographic content to attract customers was not defined as the only requirement they apply for deciding the photos that will be updated on the Instagram page. The photographic content must be accompanied with characteristics that will stand out their services among the competition. For example, they explained that nowadays the enterprises are not uniquely directing the attention to the promotion of Lapland as neither the town of Santa Claus nor the place for Christmas because the region is already quite famous due to those themes. Instead, they approach to spotlight the uniqueness of the natural environment Lapland possesses and the activities that can be enjoyed due to the services them as a tourism company provides.

Photography on Instagram nowadays is not approaching the promotion of Lapland as the place of Santa Claus because that is already well-known. It is more focused on nature and the new trend is the promotion as the perfect place for photos. (ID)

These approaches also have represented an opportunity to expand the offer to other target markets. For example, one of the participants exemplified that nowadays Finnish Lapland is the focus of attention from photographers and videographers. Statements that coincide with the information presented by Dietrich (2019) about the increase of film and photographic productions held in Finnish Lapland mainly in outdoor spaces during recent years.

Additionally, they described a requirement that during the analysis process was categorized as "coherence" because it conducts that the photographic content must be coherent with a certain timeframe, the promotional aims, and the expectations that might generate among the audience. It was explained, that the photos are decided following the season is aimed to be sell; for promoting the summer season will be posted summer events like the midnight sun, beach activities, sunny days, etc. On the other hand, when is aimed to be promoted the winter season the photos will be about the snowed landscapes, the northern lights, the husky rides, and so on.

It depends on the time, and if the company is trying to sell something for instance, if we are in the mid-December, and we try to sell some northern lights tours, so we are going to post some photos related to that, the same applies for the summer, during this season I select pictures of summer activities. (IC)

For branding photography on Instagram is advertising per upcoming events. (IE)

Coherence also embraces other aspects that are more related to the expectations that the photographic content might create depending on the assumptions people have about certain seasons or weather conditions. This situation was explained by the participants as the reason why the winter season in Lapland lasts from November until May. Despite May is worldwide considered as the month of spring, the assumption of the spring season among local Lappish people highly differs from the worldwide assumptions about spring.

For local Finnish people the spring means that is sunny even there is snow on the floor, but this is not the same for other people in other countries. If we promote the spring season people assume flowers and warm weather, but that is not how it occurs in Lapland, thus since there is still snow, we still promote the winter season. (IF)

Moreover, they also take into consideration the responses the updated photographic content receives because those reactions through comments, likes, hashtags, etc. are considered elements that wield some level of influence in how the brand is perceived among users.

Despite the decision for traveling are the result of personal and emotional necessities of every individual, the booking for a certain tourist service in a hotel, restaurant, or tour is highly influenced by the reviews and comments that were available on virtual platforms (Sârbu, Alecu, & Dina, 2018, p. 1026). Since the performance on social media is addressing the aim to increase the possibilities of being the enterprise chosen while staying in Lapland, the activity generated from an updated photo is important to maintain the interest in their services among the audience. The participant's opinions coincide with the arguments presented by Subramanian (2018) of the word of mouth publicity as an effect that nowadays takes place on social media platforms through images and messages. All the participants stated that besides planning and designing the photographic content, they also take into consideration the reactions the content receives. Also, it is considered an important step to check the photos updated by customers and their subsequent reactions to get a perspective of the brand performance among customers.

Customers can be your best marketers or they can be also the best anti-marketers. (IF)

Based on their experience when customers post a photo, video, or any other visual element about the services or products the enterprise offers it is perceived as recognition of a satisfactory experience. It was remarked that the public accesses to Instagram do not demise the ownership by the user; each individual who owns an Instagram account manages it per their style and preferences. Since it is a personal social network in which visual and written information will be of public access, people will prioritize uniquely what they want others to see. For this reason, the participants suggested that the posts made by customers serve as effective word of mouth publicity because people who shared something used their time and also a personal platform to express his/her experiences with a certain brand, a situation that is perceived as a positive review.

It is the most effective (when it occurs on Instagram) because it means that people who spread out the words, really trust in that company, and it creates this kind of trusting feeling more, but if the sharing of the experience is negative, it will stick more on the minds of people (due to the main visual element of Instagram). (IA)

When customers share the experience other people believe more in the company and its services is more trusted, more honest. (IF)

Besides, the effectiveness is increased when the photos show people doing some activity in the destination because it reflects enjoyment and satisfaction the people are experiencing, thus there is a high probability of generating a strong yearning on viewers to encourage the curiosity or even the choice to do the same activity as the people on the photo.

To include people in the photos makes people more feel like that place actually exist and it is not some digital art, or whatever, and just in general it makes feel like that person is there (the people think) so maybe I can be there also, and then they start planning the trip. (IE)

On the whole, the management of the photographic content on Instagram is not limited by the photos themselves, it is an activity that involves the impacts and the responses will generate. For the small tourism enterprises, Instagram has represented an important opportunity to make an appearance in the business world against bigger and better-consolidated companies in other tourist destinations in Finland due to its current influence on social interactions and its inexpensive factors.

Without Instagram, the services of small companies maybe would not even exist. (IB)

For small companies photos help to show the experience and make potential visitors relate to that. (IC)

To achieve the branding goals through the photography content on Instagram, they focus their attention in the design and post of photos with the added values the enterprise aims to consolidate on the market; *quality, honesty, authentic experiences, Lappish uniqueness, nature*. As it was previously mentioned the local competition is rough because other companies are offering the same services not only in Finland but in neighboring countries as well. For instance, Bertella (2013) studied the profitability it has for the tourism industry in Tromsø, Norway the offer of the northern lights chase tours. Therefore, the photos on Instagram must be managed to demonstrate the honesty and professionalism the enterprise has to offer, to stand out the brand, and to gain the trust among the audience to be the chosen company for a tour in Finnish Lapland. Therefore, along with their responsibilities, the photographic content must be authentic to demonstrate to the audience the high level of trust they can have in them as service providers. For this reason, they do not apply any type of editing program that will modify the photos, as content creators, they invest time and

effort to create visual and writing material that demonstrates *"what you see is what you get"*.

Despite some small fixes to diminish the darkness for standing out the colors, the post of real photos without any type of editing that will modify the essence of the image is considered a serious issue to gain the trust among users. *Real photos, not Photoshop, not high editing, not fakeness* were the most repeated patterns for describing the requirements of the photos that will be posted. For the participants, it represents a high priority to display the photos that demonstrate the real experiences that they as a tourism enterprise can provide without any type of modification to the image. This standard is a serious issue to gain the trust of customers because they were the ones who witnessed the event, thus any type of editing would be immediately noticed and could lead to a negative reputation. Likewise, if they post an altered photo there is a high probability to disappoint new visitors if they are not able to see the events as they appear on the Instagram photos, thus can represent negative reviews as well.

We want to be seen and remembered as honest people. The ones who do not lie, that is why there is not high editing in the photos, and if I do some editing, I always add clarification on the post. (IB)

Societies nowadays are more visual, therefore the photos that are posted on Instagram will be the first and the most perdurable brand impact that will be truly difficult to eradicate. (ID)

Thus, the quality and angles of what is posted must be prioritized as well because is the brand image that will stick on the mind of users. For small enterprises, the term quality is linked with the veracity of the photography content they post on Instagram. The photos on Instagram are perceived as the first impression that potential customers will get about the enterprises however it is a first impression which effect is planned to be positive and appealing to remain the brand presence during the travel inspiration process for Finnish Lapland.

I think that is very important for a brand nowadays, to use Instagram for showing people the most unique features, so that will increase your brand visibility among people. (IA)

For small companies photos help to show the experience and make potential visitors relate to that. (IB)

During the analysis process, a topic that constantly aroused was the descriptions offered by the participants about how photography on Instagram is approached using as an example the current complications generated from the COVID-19 global pandemic. The impossibility to travel on an international scale is a situation that no tourism enterprises ever expected.

The lack of visitors to the Finnish Lapland has created one of the hardest moments for the tourism industry in the region, the decrease in revenues is evident and the uncertainty about the tourism industry remains constant. (IF)

At these times, photography on Instagram has represented a suitable strategy to maintain the brand presence on the market even on a worldwide scale, thus the decrease of visitors has not influenced the performance on Instagram which is focused on inspiring to travel to Lapland. The participants explained that since it was confirmed by authorities the cancellation of the tourist activities in Lapland due to the closed borders, the quarantines, and the restrictions to travel. The photographic content is mainly focused on the creation of photos, slogans, videos, and comments to show to potential customers that despite at the moment is not possible to travel; they should remember that Lapland is waiting for them to create unforgettable experiences. This strategy aims to keep alive the inspiration to travel to Lapland along with the brand presence through photography to ensure future bookings.

Instagram has maintained the presence of the enterprises among the public, mainly nowadays with the situation tourism is facing (the covid-19 pandemic and the closed borders) the enterprises are focused on to show like; "yes the borders are closed but when they are open again you can come here, we are waiting for you". (IE)

It is foreseen to occur the “remembered brand effect”, thus when people can travel again, they will direct their attention to Lapland with an unconscious association to the enterprise's brand. Consequently, they have decided to keep posting the same type of photographic material hoping to keep attracting customers.

Even with the pandemic, the companies are still trying to make people excited to come here. (IA)

To conclude, the management of the photographic content on Instagram is guided by the enterprises' aims of increasing the brand visibility to gain the required recognition on the

market that will attract customers. In this manner, it is expected to stimulate bookings that will contribute to the company's growth in terms of revenues, publicity, and branding.

4.2 Photographic approaches

The leading role of photography within the business activities of the small tourism enterprises of Finnish Lapland was an aspect constantly remarked by the participants during the interviews, thus it was an aspect that stood out during the analysis process. Following the information obtained from the searches done to contribute to the study and subsequently confirmed by the participants, the photo tours and the hunting northern lights tours are the main offers the small enterprises provide. The tours' services include transportation to a tourist spot in Lapland (Santa Claus village, the husky rides, the reindeer farm, a northern lights spot, outdoor snowed spaces, etc.) and a photo session by a professional photographer in the location that the customer prefers. The lists of prices vary per location, the number of participants, and the length of the tour (*Explanations/descriptions offered by the participants*). However, photography besides being defined as an important component for one of the most profitable services of the small enterprises in terms of revenues and recognition was described as an essential characteristic of the tourism industry in Finnish Lapland. Based on their experience working in tourism and interacting with tourists, the participants shared that travelers from all over the world come to Lapland with a high priority for obtaining a photo of their visit experience in at least one of the tourist spots previously mentioned.

Well, that is the base of the business; we offer the opportunity to get a photo from the experience, a photo that they can later share through Instagram or any other social media platform. (IB)

The photos obtained from travel experiences have already been defined as the main pillar for constructing the travel experience themselves (Agostinelli, 2020, p. 12). But, according to the participants, photography is an important element not only for the small enterprises but for Finnish Lapland as a tourist destination as a whole because the northern location and the limited accessibility channels are the main obstacles for the tourism industry in the region.

There are people from other countries who do not even know what Lapland is. (IC)

Therefore, photography is considered as more than an advertising tool but as an indispensable factor to create awareness and builds the image of the destination in people's brains.

Photography is one of the main motivations for tourists to want to come here; it helps to build this image of the destination in their brains. For small companies photos help to show the experience and make potential visitors relate to that. (IC)

The seriousness of photography for the tourism industry in Lapland was reflected in a sentence said by one of the participants;

It takes one minute to take a photo, but it generates endless impacts. (IF)

For small enterprises photography has become an important key to gain recognition among the market, thus it must be designed and managed as a pattern that reflects the brand values and emotional approaches that will encourage the inspiration to travel to Finnish Lapland but directing the attention to acquiring the enterprises' services. Therefore, the efforts are focused on the creation of photos charged with positive emotions not only to attract attention but for creating an engagement with the audience. Rajaram and Shelly (2012) have studied that the unconscious emotional associations with visual elements are a condition that has always been existed in worldwide societies. However, for the branding goals of the small enterprises in Lapland is required the creation of photographic material that communicates specific emotional reactions to contribute to the companies' growth. This priority is based on an important issue the small enterprises have to confront; the existence of other local companies that offer the same services at similar prices. Consequently, the enterprises invest in the creation of photography with the emotional approaches that stand out the brand until the point to motivate the audience to be the preferred one among the local competition.

Post photos to show that with us you can get those experiences. (IE)

Through photography is aimed to promise the eternal representation of an unforgettable experience. Photos are converted into an emotional contract with past travel experiences which value relies on its unalterable preservation along the times (Agostinelli, 2020, p. 15).

The emotional approaches through photography are the joy and happiness of the moment but also the representation of how the activity generates some memories afterward. (IC)

This situation captured the attention of the researcher during the interviews and also during the analysis process because the workers responsible for managing the Instagram accounts have solid patterns for approaching emotions through photography. For the small enterprises the statements made by Agostinelli (2020) of photography as the main pillar for constructing a travel experience it is the main assets the brand aims to communicate. Per the descriptions provided by some scholars of branding as a designed process that aims to communicate to the public all the benefits that can be expected and enjoyed by acquiring the brand (Holt & Holt, 2004; Hoyos, 2016, Klein, 2000). Within the branding goals of the small enterprises, photography represents more than a communication tool. Photography is comprised as the factual evidence of the satisfactory assets that customers have already got by acquiring the enterprises' services; photos from the photo tours in Finnish Lapland. In consequence, the condition of Instagram as a mainly photo-sharing app has provided small enterprises the opportunity to maintain a constant presence of the brand among users because it is a social network where the photographic evidence of a satisfactory travel experience can be publically shared not only by the enterprise but by the customers as well.

Many people would not even do certain things, if not because of social media; the photo is proof that they had the experience. (IC)

It's a great place to bring our brand strategy alive, to people to see it and feel it, because there are some many, we can post photos, we can post stories, we can post reels, is a great channel to tell stories, and give more kind of deeper idea of the destination. (IF)

As content creators, they do not limit their performance on posting photos about the type of activities that people can practice in the touristic spots of Finnish Lapland. By their experiences as photographers, content creators, service providers, and travelers as well, the brand will be noticed and will generate a real impact if the photography visually communicates all the emotions that can be enjoyed thanks to the services the brand offers. Iglesias-Sánchez et al. (2020) also suggested the capability of Instagram to convey feelings and emotions through photography as a valuable communication pattern for branding purposes. Therefore, the small enterprises have developed a performance approaching certain emotions to appeal to the audience, expecting that the emotional engagement will not be generalized to the idea of traveling to Lapland but will be addressed specifically to

the acquisition of the company's services. The approaches through photography aim to create an emotional bond that will remain the brand presence among potential visitors, generating in this manner a level of preference within the plan to travel to Lapland. Therefore, the current popularity of Instagram combined with the opportunity that photography provides to capture moments charged with emotions is foreseen as an open door to consolidate the brand presence among users resulted from an emotional engagement created through photography material.

Photography on Instagram builds an image of the destination that writing cannot do. (IC)

The visual representation is very important for every brand but the small enterprises due to the nature there is in Lapland, the visual representations on Instagram give great potential for the brand to be present in the digital world of social media. (ID)

Therefore, the photos of travel experiences must be more than good-looking images of the site. The photography content creators remarked on the importance of posting photos that communicate a strong meaning about the experience itself. They highly prioritize the post of photos that tell the story of the moment that is being lived to create a major emotional impact on Instagram users. Instead of posting a photo about the event like the northern lights or the midnight sun, they prefer to post a photo of people enjoying the events. The photos must do more than just show an event you will be seen. The photos on Instagram must communicate the emotions and feelings that will be felt while enjoying the travel experience in Lapland. In the words of one of the participants during his photographic procedures, he tries to capture the moment that is being enjoyed not the photo or the image.

I want to capture a story I want to show in a way that people will understand the story behind every picture first. (IA)

Authentic, happiness, joyfulness, colorful, enjoyment, memories, were the most repeated words by the interviewees, thus occupied a main role during the analysis. Besides creating curiosity about Lapland, and inspiration to travel to Lapland, the photographic content on Instagram must keep the feverishness of those emotions to maintain the presence of the enterprise's brand among users. It is expected that the photographic content focus on positive emotions will create greater impacts to attract customers but also to keep the brand resonance on social media networks.

For small companies photos help to show the experience and make potential visitors relate to that. (IC)

The interviewees pointed out that the main focus on photography is to make people wish to be in Finnish Lapland by showing the excitement, happiness, and joyfulness of the activities that can be enjoyed due to the natural settings of Lapland, likewise, the unique and unforgettable events that could be experienced; the northern lights, the husky rides, the midnight sun and the Finnish interconnection with nature. The participants believe that the beauty of the experiences in Lapland through photography is not based on the good looking of the site, but visual beauty is perceived by the emotions that the photo transmits. The small enterprises aim for the brand to be perceived as the one that can provide the opportunity to enjoy those moments shaped by the beauty of the experience that involves; happiness, joyfulness, and of course the uniqueness of being in Lapland.

The company prioritizes outdoor photos it is all about nature or people in nature doing activities. The experiences of people, emotions, and show that people are happy doing different things. In photos we aim to capture these moments; so, experiences and tourist moments. (IC)

4.3 Instagram within the branding strategy

The concept of Instagram as an interactive visual platform to spotlight Finland and its different regions as tourist destinations has been a subject already presented by some scholars. Pavon-Jordan (2019) identified the use of the visual and written content of Instagram as a supportive platform for the tourist industry in Finland. Similarly, Dietrich (2019) suggested that the visual representations of Finnish Lapland in both virtual spaces and printed brochures are the main elements for shaping tourist expectations and travel experiences. Nevertheless, for the small enterprises in Lapland, the recognition of Instagram as an important platform to spotlight the photographic material was a slow adoption process that started around 2010 when to follow the social trend, they decided to make an appearance on social media apps like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram of course. It was repeated by the interviewees that Instagram at first was not taken seriously as a branding channel; in fact, they stated that Instagram was conceived as no more than just a photographic network for posting random landscapes photos. But, this condition changed

when slowly they started noticing the number of visitors who stated to have known about their services from the Instagram posts of previous visitors, thus they started to be more careful and more selective about the photos that would be posted on Instagram.

Companies stopped posting random photos, they contracted a professional photographer to get visually attractive and they tried to make the content as engaging as possible. (IA)

The role of photography on Instagram is huge, almost everything, all my customers come from Instagram. (IB)

On the other hand, specifically one of the interviewees stated that within the enterprise's activities the seriousness of Instagram was embraced after new members joined the marketing team and they argued for the action to re-direct the branding efforts to online channels, mainly social media platforms.

The company understood from us about how to do it, and they put some trust in us that we could handle it on our own, so we started creating the content. (IC)

Another participant stated that the recognition of Instagram as a site of relevance for the branding efforts was a required adaptation to be able to compete within a changing business and social world.

The world is changing and the audience is changing, the algorithm is changing, so you need to work on that. In a few years maybe you are not going get the same publicity, neither the staff like in a few years ago nor even 1 year ago. So that's why you need to change your attitudes so you can continue and handle the changes". (IB)

Despite the different reasons but all the participants explained how Instagram went from being an informal space for posting photos to a social network that occupies an important space in the branding planning process.

The main innovation is that nowadays when companies are planning a strategy, social media has an important role in planning. (IE)

The current importance perceived from Instagram for positioning the brand was reflected in the responses offered by two of the participants. In the words of the content creators who have more than 5 years of experience in the tourism industry as photographers, service providers, and social media content creators, not only in Lapland but in other countries as well. They stated that in fact, Instagram encouraged the creation of one of the most famous and profitable services of the small tourism enterprises in Lapland; the photo tours.

Instagram is mainly a visual platform I think that it has supported the distinction of the companies that provide photography services because on Instagram potential tourists see exactly what they are going to get by acquiring those services from that company. So, I think that social media, mainly Instagram impacted or influenced that product to be created (photography tours). (IE)

Despite is recognized the natural surroundings and the Christmas myth of Finnish Lapland as the main contributing factors for making the photo tours more appealing and innovative, they also suggested that was Instagram the platform that makes their services noticeable on an international scale due to its main photo-sharing setting. Instagram has helped to create more awareness of the services the small enterprises offer to practice outdoor activities within the Finnish natural environment by the photography material that is updated on Instagram by them as content creators and by customers as well. The photography on Instagram is a persuasive communication tool that encourages curiosity, and subsequently engagement because its effects are constant due to the common use of mobile devices (Serafinelli, 2017, p. 23). Based on the participants' arguments, Instagram is a virtual space where a wide audience can have access to the products and services the small enterprises offer. Moreover, its settings for user-generated content allow customers to post their photos from the acquired service which is perceived as positive reviews to the brand because the levels of satisfaction can be noticed as well.

The conditions of Instagram as a mainly visual platform enable the constant exposition of a brand image. Additionally, the possibility to reference the enterprise with tags or hashtags facilitates for potential customers to find more information about the services and products provided by the small enterprises. As Martinus and Chaniago (2017) argued the active interactivity, informative content, amusement content, and the consideration of consumers' feedbacks are the main pillars for building a successful branding strategy through Instagram.

The photographic content on Instagram keeps and spreads the brand presence among the audience. (IF)

The participants shared the fact that along with the growing popularity of Instagram has increased the demand for photo tours approximately since 2016. Also, it increased the number of customers who come from Instagram where a request for information about their services ended up concreting the sales. It was suggested that the growth in sales were

resulted from the impacts generated by the photography material shared by the enterprises and also by visitors. They argued that Instagram has boosted the recognition of the natural uniqueness that exists in Lapland which combined with their capability as photographers and content creators to create high-quality photos, attracts people with different interests; photographers, videographers, travelers, or families but all of them share the same goal; to get a photo within this natural unique tourist destination. It must be mentioned that during the interviews as proof of these statements two participants shared a few moments where they noticed that visitors were more interested in getting a photo than enjoying the experience itself.

Actually, I have noticed that nowadays Instagram highly affects traveling, and I have met people (visitors) who travel only to get the picture, they don't care that much about the experience itself, they only need to get the photo, lately, it is getting more over the edge that their holidays are mainly about getting a photo of the northern lights or other experiences. (IE)

International tourists want to take photos of everything and mainly younger tourists want to post everything (taken photos) on Instagram (teens to thirty) I think this is because nowadays everyone is more connected on social media. (IA)

On a whole, this photo-sharing attitude on Instagram besides allowing the visitors to demonstrate and verify their travel experiences in the eyes of others also offers visibility to the enterprise that provided the services with faster and deeper effects among the audience. This situation was explained as an ideal branding strategy because the photographic content that aims to position the brand on the market does not feel like visual advertising at all. The audience receives it in a more casual and even intimate context due to its familiarity using this app and also because the photos are shared by factual customers.

Instagram is like a reviewing site, when customers post something shows that you as a company did something right. (IA)

Every time people share something, it means that we did something good, so we always try to check that and to see how other people react to it, most of that could be just beautiful images of northern lights pictures that people want to share some experiences, ice floating, people comment and then they tag to their friends. So, when we get these kinds of reactions it means that yeah, it was good, and we need to keep working in that direction because people show some interest. When we create the marketing material on Instagram we want to show that the post is the factual evidence of a satisfactory experience. (IC)

The benefits provided by Instagram for entrepreneurs and small enterprises were acknowledged by Alkhowaiter (2016) who pointed out the popularity of Instagram as an opportunity to promote brands because it allows approaching and keeping customers at the lowest costs. Likewise, the participants shared similar opinions about the advantages that Instagram has provided to small enterprises to bring attention to the brand. As they perceive it, besides the local competition, the size of the enterprises in Lapland represents an inherent challenge because they need to make an appearance on a national and international market where there is a bigger and more consolidated competition. Therefore, they defend that Instagram has provided small enterprises the opportunity to gain acknowledgment more consistently because the photographic content is led by them as content creators who guide their efforts on the enterprises' branding aims.

For small companies, Instagram gives the visibility they need. (IA)

This is my main marketing strategy, in minutes many people recognize my offer and my value. (IB)

Taking into consideration the previously mentioned lack of strict guidelines within the small enterprises regarding the use of Instagram, but also the explanations offered about how Instagram has gained notable importance over the years it can be suggested that Instagram provides freedom but also a great level of command about the type, frequency, and approaches for the photographic content, thus the content creators can consistently address the efforts for the achievement of the branding goals without any type of restriction. They can base their choices following the specific enterprise's aims, as it was described before, they can direct the photographic content for the promotion of the next tourism season, or they can update photos about upcoming events or random situations in the region that can attract customers.

I think that is very important for a brand nowadays, to use Instagram for showing people the most unique features, so that will increase your brand visibility among people. (IA)

One of the most repeated statements to describe the competitiveness of Instagram for branding was the inexpensive factor. As content creators, they explained how Instagram allows spotlighting their talent and hobby for creating photography without additional costs but generating branding assets on the process. As an example, one of the participants

referred to a past strategy applied to promote Lapland that consisted in to pay for publicity spaces on foreign magazines mainly in neighboring countries twice a year approximately, but this strategy was highly expensive and the rates included only one spot or one article. Nevertheless, Instagram brings up the opportunity to advertise Lapland as a tourist destination without any type of cost or limitation.

In the past, the company needed to pay a lot of money for publicity in magazines of other countries, but now with Instagram they have their virtual magazine. We have the marketing tools in our hands. (IF)

Instagram allows the design of a public virtual platform where content creators have all the control over the photography to cover exclusively the tourist offer that exists in Lapland. Besides the activities and photo tours, they can even expand the offer to hotels, restaurants, or other types of events to attract the attention of wider target markets for the acquisition of their services: people with different interests.

Along with the advantages that Instagram provides to expand the brand visibility it also comes with another responsibility that involves the condition of Instagram as a social network. As content creators their activities are not limited to designing and updating photography, it also involves building and interacting with the audience generated from the performance on Instagram. However, this inherent responsibility is not perceived as a challenge but as an opportunity to analyze how the enterprise is perceived per the audience's reactions. Their statements coincide with Martinus and Chaniago (2017) who pointed out that the interactive nature of Instagram permits a company to maintain close communication with the audience, thus it is more viable to detect the type of posts and information that will attract the attention. The participants defined the setting of user-generated content on Instagram as a measure of signals to evaluate the brand's performance among customers and the audience in general.

Hashtags, Likes, Geotagging, and Comments are measure signals those reactions of people say which content should be modified or if they should stick on it. (IA)

Interactions with customers are an opportunity (silent selling) you can tell more about the activities. You can study customers; the trend, type of interest, and so on. (IF)

This possibility to build the audience, create followers and interact with them also provides a competitive effect for the brand's image. It allows to bond with people until the point to

generate customers loyalty because these interactions are perceived as a brand that truly cares about the public's needs. The levels of engagement on Instagram are reflected in the likes, comments, and re-sharing responses a post receives. This condition goes beyond creating awareness of a brand; in fact, it even determines the buying intentions (Yu & Egger, 2021, p. 3). Additionally, the condition of Instagram as a public platform where the majority of people have an account eliminates any type of relation to sales intentions. On Instagram a brand characterized for interacting with customers through Instagram is not perceived as a strategy for increasing sales. On the contrary, it is perceived as a brand that honestly wants to be part of the value that the shared content represents for the users. Creating in this manner a positive image that will generate long-term loyalty. This effect was defined by Raut and Brito (2014) as "*brand resonance*" that is the emotional bond with the brand that creates loyalty and some sense of belonging, generating in these manner constants investments from the customers beyond the consumption. Therefore, the aims of the small enterprises by the interactions on Instagram do not appear inaccurate in fact, there are academic proves to support this practice.

During the analysis, it was found out that Instagram was constantly described as a *positive* platform or a *very happy* platform. Per the participants overall, a factor that might contribute to prefer Instagram over other social media apps for branding efforts is the situation that Instagram is not commonly approached for posting negative things. As content creators they are well aware of the impacts that a negative review could generate for the brand, thus they pay a lot of attention to the responses they get from customers through social media platforms not only Instagram but Facebook, Twitter, and blogs as well. Therefore, they confirmed that situations of negative reviews rarely, actually almost never have come on Instagram. By being candid they shared that the negative reviews they had needed to confront had come from Twitter mainly or publications made on foreign magazines and newspapers.

Instagram is like a happy platform no one wants to share anything negative there, so there is mostly positivity everywhere. People usually share positive experiences, nice comments, it was amazing. But, the lack of snow during the winter season was negative publicity that arrived from a newspaper in the UK. (IC)

All the negative things happen on Twitter, I don't know why but it is a negative channel. I don't remember but maybe some negative comments we have had from some influencers, not so many go on during the year, but I do not remember any bigger negative cases on Instagram. (IF)

As they see it, complaints about the services or negative reviews in the case of occurrence would be done on Twitter because it is a platform which settings address quotes and trends discussions among societies. While Instagram is a more sociable platform where people take advantage of its features to beautify and enrich photos to project themselves as they want to be perceived; Instagram somehow encourages people to share the side of their lives they want everybody to see. This attitude was defined by Stein (2013) as a negative aspect of current societies where social media has encouraged the priority among the new generations to fake their lives which can be a very addictive attitude. Nevertheless, this situation does not diminish the valuable contribution that it represents for a branding strategy mainly for small enterprises that require the public applause to gain notoriety and renown on the market. Instagram besides allowing the promotion of the enterprises' services and products also offers insights into the customer behaviors (Sârbu et al., 2018, p. 1017). Therefore, Instagram is perceived as a platform that brings more benefits than challenges for small enterprises in terms of branding. It is a social network that ensures the widespread of the posts and also encourages the association with positive and rewarding opinions. Moreover, the photo-sharing feature that is available to customers silently promotes the photo tours services provided by small enterprises.

4.4 Challenges on Instagram for future considerations

The confirmed shared recognition among content creators of Instagram as a suitable and competitive platform for branding purposes does not fully eliminate the existence of gaps regarding its use. One of the most repeated complaints and negative descriptions about the performance on Instagram of the small enterprises is the lack of focus on the summer season.

Small enterprises should advertise summer as they do for winter. Rovaniemi has great potential for tourism due to the opportunity to practice outdoor activities and the events like the midnight sun. (IA)

Per the participants, the summer season in Lapland has great potential to be promoted because offers impressive and beautiful landscapes that can be successfully captured through photography, thus could be posted on Instagram to attract customers. However, the already gained international fame of Lapland as the site of Christmas and the destination to witness the northern lights has somehow shadowed the tourism potential that summer could provide to Lapland for establishing a constant tourism activity during the entire year. One of the participants clarified that a few years before the organization in Lapland in charge of the tourism marketing was focusing the attention on the promotion of summer but for some reason, it stopped.

A clear example of the positive impacts of directing attention to the summer season in Lapland is a situation that occurred in 2018 when a visitor took a photo of two reindeers at the beach. This photo went viral on the internet due to the peculiarity of this wildlife attitude towards the high temperatures. In consequence, Finnish Lapland gained more visibility as a tourist destination, increasing in this manner the possibilities for the small enterprises to gain customers.

The publicity was huge, there were comments, re-posting, and people asking about the place, it was like a “trending topic” on the internet and this kind of presence stand out Lapland, thus increase the possibility to get attention from travelers. (IF)



Image 1. Pekka Ninivaara (2018)

During the interviews, also the participants explained that the recognized competitiveness of Instagram is an accepted fact among photographers and content creators but it is not professionally accepted on the high management standards of the small enterprises. One of the main obstacles to fully accept the importance of Instagram within management guidelines is that the benefits generated from Instagram are not noticed in a short-term period and revenues to obtain are difficult to evaluate.

Well, it is kind of difficult to financially evaluate the role of it (Instagram) because quite often you don't see the financial results of what you do by social media or in marketing in general, at least not in the short term. (IC)

The interviewees clarified that despite within the small enterprises where they work or have worked for the creation of photographic content is an important stage and there are certain people in charge of managing the Instagram account, this does not equally occur in all the small enterprises in the region. Based on their arguments, in Finnish Lapland, there are more companies that provide fun and interesting activities, however, they do not take advantage of the visibility that Instagram or other social media platforms could provide, thus are relatively unknown on the market and visitors get to know about them until after their arrival to Lapland.

I would like all the enterprises in Lapland to understand the importance that it has to make an appearance on Instagram or on the internet in general, some do not do it because they want to see right away results, and that is not how Instagram works. (IF)

Guided by the participants' experiences the impacts generated from Instagram are that important that can even represent to expand the target markets to gain more customers. One of the interviewees presented the case that occurred a few years ago in 2017 when a famous couple of celebrities from India who during their holidays in Lapland posted a photo on Instagram specifying the name of the location: "Finnish Lapland". After that, it was evident the increase in the interest and number of visitors from India. This situation represented an important change because from the touristic perspective of small enterprises a market target on India was not even foreseen.

It was not even a market target to approach; it was a kind of dead market for the small enterprises in Lapland. (IF)

This settlement of Finnish Lapland as a tourist destination in India was reflected in 2018 when Finland was awarded the “Most trending destination” at India Travel Awards 2018 (Business Finland, 2019). Of course, this award cannot be completely attributed to the Instagram post made by the Indian celebrities. As it was stated by Visit Finland’s India market representative:

With the amazing experiences that Finland offers, the numbers have been growing rapidly. With unique experiences such as Santa Claus, Northern Lights, and the igloo stays, it’s a bucket-list destination for Indians and we hope to gain a lot of market share from India. (Business Finland, 2019)

Nevertheless, the visual presence of Finnish Lapland on the Instagram account of celebrities who are admired and followed by a large number of people in India could have served as a contributing factor to get the attention to Lapland among people in the country. De Veirman et al. (2017) examined the current social reality where noticeable/famous people are seen and trusted by customers as a valuable source of information, even as an opinion leader rather than merely from popularity. However, the influence that celebrities wield among people does not demise the fact that the appearance of Finnish Lapland as a tourist destination to Indian people occurred through Instagram, thus the advantage that provides for reaching the new markets is ascertainable.

Another issue that was remarked by the participants as an important consideration for future practices is the empowerment that Instagram has given to the users due to its main setting for user-generated content. Despite in a more general perspective, this aspect was qualified as an advantage for studying the market; it can also represent negative repercussions if it is not constantly checked.

The features of user-generated content like Hashtags, Likes, Geotagging, and Comments, are measure signals about the reactions of people to certain content, providing an idea about which content should be modified or if we should stick on it. (IA)

It was specified that along with checking the algorithms to analyze the levels of activity and then to decide when to update the posts to get more visibility, those features of Instagram are primordial elements to determine the type of content that should be modified and which type should continue. The settings for user-generated were described as an effective semi-formal communication style that creates a casual and comfortable environment for

interactions between the enterprise and the public. From among these settings, the “hashtag” was specifically pointed out as the most efficient pattern to maintain the presence of the brand in an easy-going and even funny way. Moreover, the fact that occurs in the public space offers some level of transparency about the enterprises thus develops some sense of trust among people. Additionally, the excitement and cheerfulness in how these features are approached on Instagram add a type of positive review to the travel experience that remains permanent in social networks' environment.

For small companies, this user-generated aspect of Instagram gives them more visibility. It spreads the enjoyment of a satisfactory travel experience and it somehow settles down the recognition of the company's services because, by those features (hashtags, likes, geotagging), the company and the destination (Lapland, Rovaniemi) remains permanent on Instagram. (IE)

However, the joyfulness involved in the setting for user-generated content and the features as likes, hashtags, comments, and posts should not blind its seriousness, in fact, there had been some negative experiences that the enterprises needed to confront in the past. As with any other tool within a branding strategy, their effects must be carefully foreseen to detect mistakes in their use on time to prevent possible damages to the brand image. In the case of the small enterprises in Finnish Lapland, this situation must be constantly analyzed because the destination does not have a variety of names, definitions, or locations to refer to, thus misunderstandings can easily occur. One example offered by one participant was the misunderstanding with the use of the Geotagging and Hashtags of “Santa Claus Holiday Village” which is very similar to the “Santa Clause Village”. It was explained that the visitors started to use only the Hashtag and the Geotag directing to Santa Claus Holiday Village, thus all the marketing and branding efforts were approached uniquely to that one company; “Santa Claus Holiday Village”, leaving behind without any type of recognition to the traditional “Santa Claus Village.

Similarly, another participant provided an example of how the customers through the use of the settings for user-generated content can condemn the disappearance of the brand in the social media environment. It was explained that visitors on social media usually Hashtag the word Lapland or Finnish Lapland, despite the common use of these words maintains the presence of the destination on Instagram and the easy link with the company that provided

the services, it can also create some level of confusion about the enterprises that have those words in the title. For example, as there exist "Visit Finland" and "Visit Rovaniemi" it also exists "Visit Lapland". However, this is a small enterprise; the big and official account for the destination is called "All in Lapland". It was clarified that due to the similarity of the titles mainly for the connection with the word *Visit*, it is hard for visitors to realize that the official account is All in Lapland, and they usually post the Hashtag "#VisitLapland" directing in this manner all the attention to the smaller account instead of to the official one.

Therefore, as content creators, they highlight that for generating profitable impacts through Instagram in terms of branding their performance and the content generated by customers and users, in general, must be constantly analyzed because it is a condition where the users take the control of the brand visibility and if these conditions are not corrected on time the consequences can scale from a common confusion until completely disappear the brand presence in social media networks. For this reason, during the interviews, the participants pointed out the importance within the enterprises that there is one person or a department in charge of managing the social media accounts to keep the photographic content updated and also to analyze the brand performance through the posts made by customers and the features of user-generated content that provide brand visibility on social media environments. Likewise, it is more viable to maintain constant communication with the public by responding to their questions or reacting to their interactive features (*comments, hashtags, likes, geotagging*) which is also a strategy that provides a positive perception of the brand. This necessity for certain and proficient people to manage the branding strategy on Instagram to keep records and offer feedbacks on time was identified by Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) as the result of the growing competition in different industries and the fast way in how everything is communicated through the internet.

To conclude, the participants shared more competitive advantages for branding purposes from Instagram, but they also empathized that the activity on this social media app must be adopted with seriousness, professionalism, consistency, and with a foreseen strategy to expand the offer. Instagram provides great competitiveness but this is only possible if it is accepted that the brand presence on Instagram will generate profits for the enterprise but

won't be immediately noticed. The repercussions will be consistent but on a long-term scale.

5. CONCLUSION

Despite there is evidence to assume that at the contemporary time Instagram is a convenient platform to be incorporated within the branding strategy of SMEs, the present study aimed to analyze specifically the role that Instagram has within the branding of the small enterprises in Finnish Lapland. It was the evident prominence of photography within the tourism industry in Lapland the outlier that generated curiosity for choosing the subject. As it was stated by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) the research starts because it was found an interesting condition and wants to be better understood. The high demand for photo-tours, the priority of visual advertising over written material, and the professional approach of the photographic content on the Instagram accounts of the small tourism enterprises were the circumstances that settled down the basis for this research.

It was required to approach the workers responsible for creating and managing the photography content on the Instagram accounts to get deeper insights into the priority this social media app represents for branding efforts. The interviews' responses were transcribed and then analyzed with the support of the literature review to respond to the research questions. During the interviews and analysis process the remarkable importance of visual representations mainly photography not only within the branding strategy of the small enterprises but for the tourism industry in Lapland was a remarkable aspect. At the first stages of this study, the researcher had the theory that the potential of Instagram as a branding channel was based on the current popularity of this social media app among people and its inexpensive factor to update material for aims of brand visibility. Although this theory was partially right, the findings demonstrated that Instagram has been incorporated by the small enterprises as a suitable component for one of the main assets for their business activity; photography.

Photography, besides being the base of one of the most notorious services of the small enterprises, is considered a key recourse to spotlight the natural environments of Finnish Lapland which per the interviews is its most distinctive tourist offer as a travel destination. Among photography content creators there is a leading focus on the design of photos where the main theme is the natural surroundings in Lapland and the well-being that this nature provides to locals and visitors. Additionally, photography is an element highly appreciated

among visitors that also serves as an indispensable pillar for shaping the travel experience (Agostinelli, 2020, p. 12). The myth of Christmas and the natural phenomena allowed by its northern location like the northern lights and the midnight sun have created on an international perspective the categorization of the main tourist attractions of Finnish Lapland as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, thus tourists from all over the world travel to Finnish Lapland with a high priority to get photos that serve as visual evidence and eternal souvenir of their travel experiences in the destination (Bertella, 2013, p. 110).

Despite the display of photography on Instagram is accepted as a key resource to gain the brand visibility that small enterprises in Lapland require, its definition as a recurring site for inspiring travel choices is not enough condition to automatically assure the achievement of branding aims. It is acknowledged that the updating of photographic content on Instagram will generate positive impacts for the brand only if its visual features are applied smartly and if its base for user-generated content is embraced as an opportunity to engage with the public and then gain customers. Firstly, for the small enterprises, the common practice among current societies of sharing photos of travel experiences through Instagram is an expected and proven step that tourists in Lapland commonly do. Therefore, photography is performed with professionalism and quality because the offer of this service includes an inherent exposition through Instagram which will be the first brand impression a wider audience will receive. Secondly, the selection of photos posted on Instagram by the enterprise must be done following color harmony to catch the attention of users and then must be prioritized the display of photos of travel experiences charged with emotions to make the brand stand out from the competition. And besides creating and deciding the photographic content the performance on Instagram involves constant checks about the photos posted by visitors who acquired their services to evaluate the perceived levels of satisfaction and the audience's responses through hashtags, likes, geotagging, and comments. Despite this aspect was described as challenging because it requires the investment of time to respond and interact with customers, it also strengthens the prestige and recognition as a brand that truly cares for its customers beyond merchant goals.

The findings showed that the activity on Instagram is an important stage within the business activities of the small enterprises. The creation of the photography that will be

updated on the official account is a detailed process that involves the communication of specific touristic approaches. Likewise, the photography posted by customers that acquired their services of visit activities or photo-tours is a serious matter because it reflects high levels of customer satisfaction. Instagram is empirically recognized as a happy and positive platform. It was constantly described as a platform where the small enterprises rarely or even never have needed to confront negative reviews or comments. But also, as a channel that generates profits difficult to evaluate because there are no revenues immediately acquired. Therefore, the activity on Instagram through photographic content or interactions with customers is performed with some sense of certainty and passivity that will generate beneficial impacts for the brand but in the long-term run.

Following the studies of branding as a designing process for the set of meanings that the brand aims to consolidate on the market to make it distinctive by the public, which involves constant communication efforts to achieve an inherent perception of the intangible values the brand offers through its products and services (Anholt, 2005; Balmer et al., 2006; Murphy, 1992). The study suggests that the main purpose of the photographic content posted on Instagram is to consolidate Finnish Lapland as the travel destination that must be chosen. The small enterprises aim to encourage the booking choice for their services by posting photos that show the authenticity of the tourist experiences in Lapland. Within their branding aims, photography is the tactic, and Instagram is the strategy. Photography is created and updated to communicate the intangible attributes that a tourist experience in Lapland can provide. Likewise, Instagram is the path to outstanding the brand through the photography content and interactivity features. Besides, when the content is generated by customers it reinforces and validates the brand values that the small enterprises aim to consolidate on the market; *quality, honesty, authentic experiences, Lappish uniqueness, and nature.*

The collection of data for this research implicated the interviews of photography content creators of small enterprises located uniquely in Rovaniemi. This condition is one of the main limitations because the results do not include small enterprises located in other municipalities of Lapland where there are enterprises that also represent an important economic pillar for the tourism activity. Moreover, the responses of two of the participants

were merely based on their professional experience as seasonal workers, thus they do not have access to internal branding guidelines applied the entire year. Another possible limitation is that the theoretical framework selected was uniquely emphasized on branding studies and Instagram as a branding channel, thus, this research excluded studies of other social media networks to compare its competitiveness for branding goals. Likewise, was omitted other marketing strategies besides branding which can also represent an important management pillar for small enterprises.

To conclude, the present study provides insights that can be applied in researches of small enterprises located in different tourist destinations in Finland or other countries as well. Additionally, the findings could serve for further studies that aim to analyze the value that photography represents for the tourism industry in a Finnish destination. Similarly, the research topic has the potential for deeper studies of branding through social media networks. Since branding is a process that must be constantly evaluated and innovated (Balmer et al., 2006, p. 752). The theoretical framework and the findings in this research can also serve as inspiration for workers in the tourism industry to re-consider the implications that Instagram has within their branding practices.

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