

PLAN OF APPROACH

your  surprise

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The list of abbreviations

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) - The goal of SEO is to rank well on as much queries as possible as this brings organic traffic from search engines

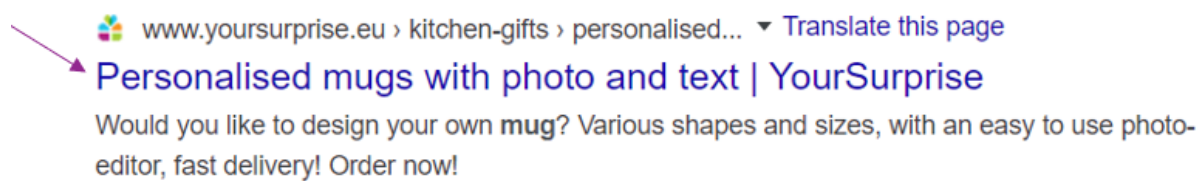
- ❖ Three main pillars of SEO: **Technology** (technical underpinnings of a website), **Relevance** (content, Title tags, Meta Descriptions) and **Authority** (Links and citations).

Organic search - unpaid search results

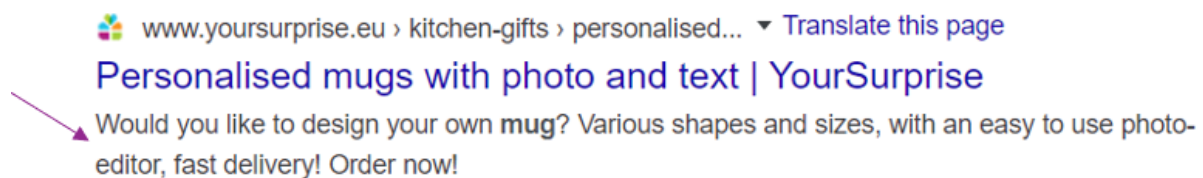
Paid search- pay-per-click advertising

SERP - Search Engine Results Pages

Title tag - HTML element that specifies the title of a web page. Title tags can be displayed on SERPs as the clickable headline for a given result



The meta description - HTML attribute that provides a brief summary of a web page. Google often displays the meta description in search results.



Snippets: a search result

1. Preliminary research

1.1 Company and product analysis

YourSurprise is an online gift shop with more than 2000 branded and personalized gifts. YourSurprise aims at distinguishing itself from competitors by offering **original gifts, fast delivery, affordable top-quality products, user-friendly website and an outstanding customer service** (Wouters, 2019). All of the 2000+ gifts can be made personalized with a photo, text or logo according to the wishes and desires of the customers. The customer segments of YourSurprise include B2B, B2C, B2P (partners) and B2B2C (famous brands).

YourSurprise was founded in 2005 by the co-founders Gerbrand Verton and Wouter de Vries with the initial idea of a personalized song: the surprise song. Having developed the initial idea, a webshop with personalized gifts was established in the same year in Zierikzee, The Netherlands. At present, YourSurprise has 22 websites all around Europe and delivers gifts to private as well as company addresses (Fygi, 2019).

The motto of YourSurprise is: **Spread a little Happiness** (YourSurprise, 2018). The mission of YourSurprise is to help the customers to create wonderful memories by surprising the loved ones with thoughtful, personalized gift (YourSurprise, 2019). The time, care and attention that the customers put into their orders is reflected in the YourSurprise's work ethic and passion (YourSurprise, 2018).

For that reason, the core values are:

- ❖ **Exceeding expectations**
- ❖ **Paying attention**
- ❖ **Expressing yourself**

YourSurprise is a fast growing and innovative company which grows by 35% per year (YourSurprise, 2019). In 2019, YourSurprise sold 2.300.000 gifts to 1050 million customers. The companies' strategy is disclosed in the form of **“Moonshot 2021”** which is a sum of all the goals set for the years ahead. Moonshot is a vision of what YourSurprise will look like in 2021 (a five-year plan developed in 2016) (YourSurprise, 2018). The goal by 2021 is to **deliver over two million of the personalized gifts which Europeans can order on a website in their own language and receive it within 24-48 hours** (YourSurprise, 2016). The graduation research will contribute to fulfilment of this vision.

All the activities of YourSurprise are taking place in-house in Zierikzee, realized by 180 employees that are grouped into teams, and the teams into autonomous squads. (YourSurprise, 2018). The main teams are:

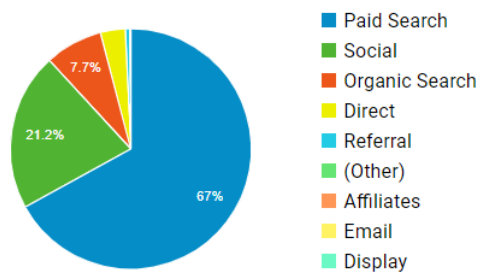
- Products and Design, Production, E-commerce, IT, Purchase, People, Customer Service, Finance

The legal form of YourSurprise is a private limited liability company owned by shareholders, and the company's shares are privately registered and not freely transferable (YourSurprise, 2019).

1.2 The Problem analysis

Currently, there are in total 22 countries, all with websites in their own language. Along with other countries, YourSurprise launched the Slovak website in August 2019. Most of the visitors on the Slovak website are reached through paid search on Google at the moment which is considered to be very expensive for YourSurprise as it is paid per click. (on average €4.5 mio spent for all countries per year). Hence YourSurprise is dependent on expensive traffic sources.

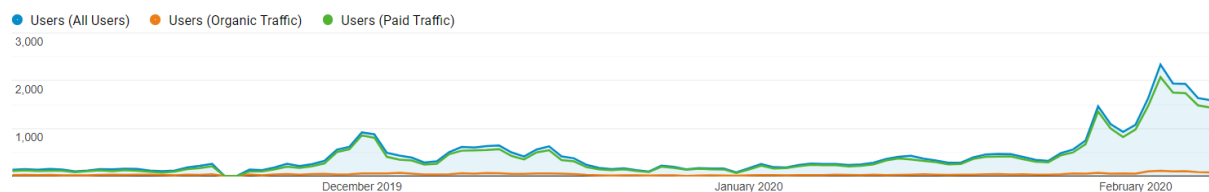
Graph 1: Slovakia - Overview of the top channels: Aug 2019-Jan 2020



Graph 1 describes the mix of the online channels through which the Slovak customers have been reached since August 2019 until the beginning of February 2020. 67% of all customers find YourSurprise through paid search (retrieved from Google Analytics).

To further describe the problem, the organic traffic is compared to the paid traffic.

Graph 2: Slovakia - Organic traffic compared to paid traffic



Graph 2 shows organic traffic in comparison to paid traffic within the time period of August 2019 until the beginning of February 2020. As seen on the graph, the traffic from organic search is still very low - 7.64% of all users (retrieved from Google Analytics). More organic traffic would allow YourSurprise to benefit from the free channels and become less dependent on paid channels in terms of attracting potential customers to the website.

Table 1: Summary of the main problem - 6W Questions

What?	67% of the Slovak visitors is reached through paid search on Google
Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Paid advertising is expensive for YourSurprise (€4.5 mio for all countries per year)- YourSurprise is dependent on paid search
Who?	E-commerce team

When?	After launching the Slovak website in August 2019
Where?	E-commerce team - Slovak website
How?	It is a general problem in all countries where markets were entered only recently

In order to reduce dependency on paid search, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) takes place (SearchEngineLand, 2019).

Table 2: Three pillars of SEO

Technology	Technical underpinnings
Authority	Links, trusted sources
Relevance	Content, Title Tags, Meta Descriptions

Having considered all the pillars of SEO, the two pillars that my research will not be focusing on are Technology and Authority because the technological pillar is optimized at YourSurprise for all the websites in total (for all countries) and the authoritarian pillar is depending on external forces such as other trusted websites (Traphagen, 2015).

The research will concentrate on the content pillar of SEO- **Title Tags and Meta Descriptions** as they are ranked as highly important metrics in the SEO Periodic Table among other things Title Tags are a ranking factor. In addition, they are visible in the Search Engine Results Pages (SERP) and thus are what the users see first when they use Google and decide whether to click or not. Lastly, until now, there has not been an SEO specialist at YourSurprise and thus there is no previous internal data collected about how to optimize Title Tags and Meta Description.

1.3 Information gaps

In order to research how to attract more organic traffic to the Slovak Website through optimizing Title Tags and Meta Descriptions, there are information gaps to be filled.

Table 3: Title Tags and Meta Descriptions

<i>Title tag</i>	HTML element that specifies the title of a web page
<i>Meta Description</i>	HTML attribute that provides a brief summary of a web page

The three main information gaps are:

(1) The current performance of Slovak website in the SERP

- How is the Slovak website currently performing in the Search Engine Results Pages (SERP)?
- What kind of snippets YourSurprise currently has on Google?
- How do different pages of the Slovak website perform?

(2) The importance and the advantage of Title Tags (TT) and Meta Description

(MD)

- Why is it important to optimize TT and MD?
- What are the TT and MD restrictions from Google? How is Google handling these tags?
- What types of snippets are there in Google?
- What is the expert opinion about TT and MD?

(3) The competitors

- How do the competitors write their TT and MD?
- What can we learn from them?

(4) User reaction to optimized TT and MD

- How does the Slovak market react to different variations of Title Tag and Meta Description in terms of click rate?

(5) Google reaction to optimized TT and MD

- How does the ranking on Google change using different variations of TT and MD?

1.4 Project aim

The goal of this graduation project at YourSurprise is to research ways on **how to attract more organic traffic to the Slovak website by improving the website visibility in the SERP through increasing the effectiveness of snippets by optimised Title Tags and Meta descriptions.**

First of all, the research that will be conducted to fill in the information gaps will provide an insight into the current SERP performance of the Slovak website, followed by researching the importance and advantage of optimized Title Tags and Meta Descriptions including the expert opinion, and lastly SERP performance of the competitors.

This will be carried out through an online research and an interview. The gained knowledge will be tested in an online observation, testing the user and Google reaction to different variations of TT and MD.

As a last step, all the obtained and tested knowledge will be used in order to set up a **SERP Strategy Plan** presenting the importance and advantage of optimized Title Tags & Meta Descriptions and providing guidelines on how to setup/write attractive and effective Title Tags & Meta Descriptions for best Search Engine Result Pages (SERP) results in order to increase the organic traffic coming to the Slovak Website.

Table 4: SMART Research goal

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-related
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2. Research approach

2.1 Design

Figure 1: Research Design

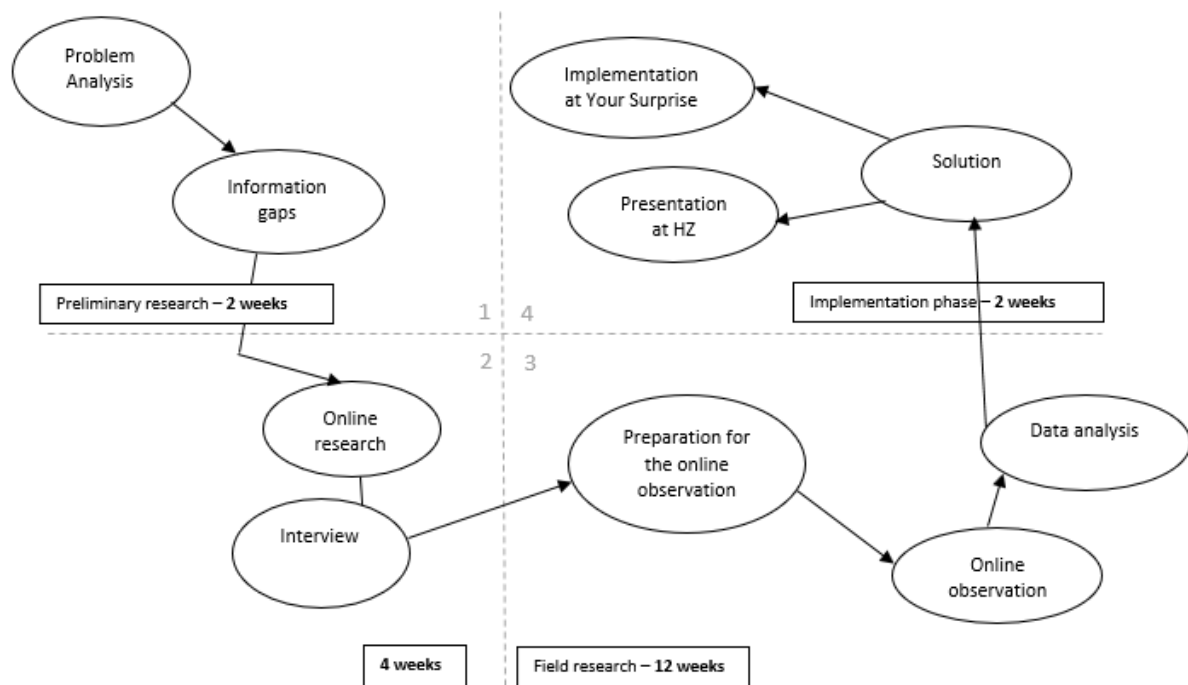
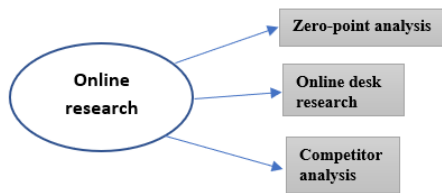


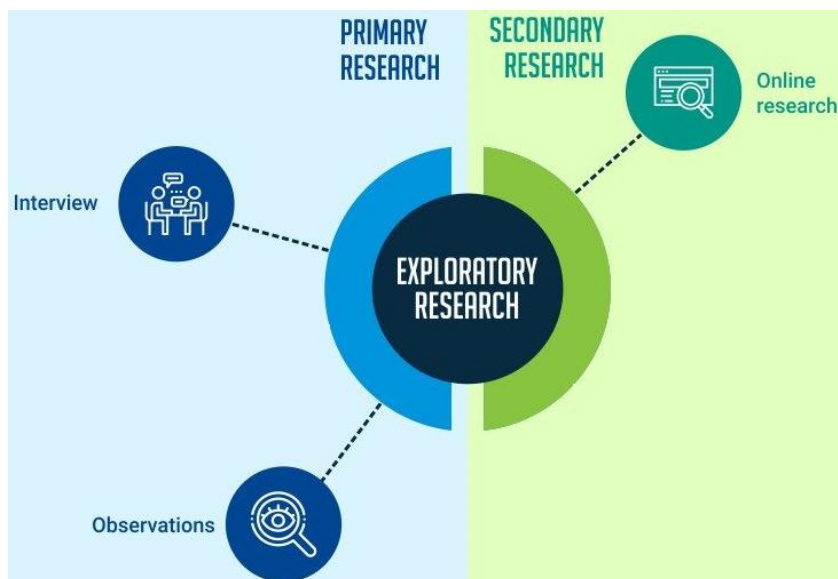
Figure 1 shows the research design that clarifies the conduction steps of the graduation project. Firstly, during the first two weeks of preliminary research this Plan of Approach has been developed including the problem analysis and the identification of the information gaps. Secondly, in order to fill the information gaps, the online research (zero-point analysis, online desk research, competitor analysis) and the interview are conducted during the next four weeks.

Figure 3: Online research



To continue with, based on the knowledge retrieved from the online research and the interview, the online observation takes place. The preparation, operationalization and the data analysis of the online observation takes place for about twelve weeks. Lastly, the last two weeks are dedicated to the solution (professional product), the implementation at YourSurprise and the presentation at the HZ.

Figure 2: Research approach



2.2 Approach per information gap

The five previously identified information gaps will be answered by the means of online research, interview and online-observation:

- ❖ **(1) The current SERP performance of the Slovak website** will be filled in through zero-point analysis. This analysis reveals which 100 YourSurprises' pages will be later observed based on their Average Clickthrough rate (CTR) and Average Position on Google search.
- ❖ **(2) The importance and advantage of Title Tags and Meta Descriptions** will be first filled in by online desk research in the form of reviewing SEO statistics and researches conducted by SEO experts. This approach has been chosen as there is currently not sufficient information available about SEO in a form of literature as Google is updating the algorithm on a daily basis. In order to ensure the accuracy of the online research, the collected knowledge will be reviewed through an interview with the SEO specialist at YourSurprise of more than 10 years of experience. This interview is perceived as an opportunity of collecting accurate and useful information for the research. The SEO specialist started working at YourSurprise in the beginning of February 2020. As a result of this, fresh and valuable information will be collected.
- ❖ **(3) The competitor analysis** will be conducted on the SEO level. As the research aims at learning from the largest competitors, the analysis will focus on the three highest ranked Slovak e-shops and Bol.com. Bol.com has been selected because there is evidence that Bol.com is investing a lot of time in SEO improvements and thus will be potentially a very interesting source of information (Herman, 2020). The Slovak e-shops are chosen according to the available statistics (Schnerhauser, 2018) , which are:
 - ✓ **Alza.sk, Mall.sk, Hej.sk**

The competitor analysis will reveal different approaches to the topic of writing Title Tags and Meta Descriptions of the highest-ranked Slovak e-shops + Bol.com. Based on that, 4 to 5 variation groups of the Title Tags and Meta Descriptions will be created which will be tested on 100 YourSurprises' pages on the Slovak website that were selected via zero-point analysis (20 to 25 webpages for variation group). In addition, there will be one extra group of web pages with no changes (zero group) to ensure reliable results.

- ❖ **(4) User reaction to the optimized TT and MD and (5) Google reaction to the optimized TT and MD** will be filled in through online observation. The chosen 100 webpages (based on zero-point analysis) will test 4-5 variation of TT and MD (based on competitor analysis). The online observation will test how user and Google react to different variations of TT and MD through measuring Average Click Through Rate and average position on Google search.

2.3 The units of analysis

Table 5: The units of analysis

Online desk research	Expert publications, articles, statistics
Zero-point analysis	Webpages of Slovak website
Competitor analysis	Alza.sk, Mall.sk, Hej.sk, Bol.com
Interview	SEO specialist Chantal Smink
Online observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The users/ the potential and current customers of YourSurprise - The behavior of Google

2.4 Data collection

2.4.1 Online research

The online desk research will be collected through reviewing expert publications and articles.

The competitor analysis will be conducted by using the program Screaming Frog (YSP has license to Screaming Frog), in which a web crawler (a spider) will be sent to competitor

webpages, collecting TT and MD data (McDougall, 2017). *The zero-point analysis* will be conducted with assistance of Google Console (YSP has the access), a platform that helps to measure organic traffic (Schwartz, 2020).

2.4.2 Interview

One interview will be conducted with the SEO specialist at YourSurprise, one due to the fact that she is the only person at the company specialized in SEO and thus the only source of internal information about TT and MD. For that reason, a structured in-depth interview is selected in order to collect expert opinion on the information previously collected through online desk research. (Harvey, 2020). The interview follows a guideline with the most important questions and is flexible to allow free-flowing conversation without pre-coded answers (IMAS, 2018). The interview question will be created based on the online research about TT and MD. The conversation will be recorded by audio recording combined with note taking to identify contradictory statements and to continue with new, insightful questions that do not appear on the guideline (Roller, 2020).

2.4.3 Online observation

Online observation will be testing 4-5 variations of Title Tags and Meta Descriptions which are based on the competitor analysis. These variations will be entered and tested directly on the Slovak website - namely on the 100 web pages that were selected through zero-point analysis and divided into 4/ 5 groups per variation. In addition, one extra group with 20/ 25 webpages will be included in the testing and no change will be done to this group for better comparing the result of the variations and increasing the research validity.

2.5 Data analysis

The current performance in organic traffic of Slovak website in total and separate webpages will be analyzed in zero-point analysis with assistance of Google Console based on average Click through Rate and Average Position. The average Clickthrough rate indicates how often

people who view the Google Snippets actually end up clicking on it - user focused factor. In contrast, the Average position on Google Search determines the order in which the snippets appear on Google Result Page - Google focused factor (information retrieved directly from Google Console).

The title tags and Meta descriptions of the competitors will be analyzed with assistance of Screaming Frog SEO Spider and the criteria of the analysis will be based on the online desk research about TT and MD. Both the zero-point and competitor analysis will be used for the online observation

Considering *the interview*, first the audio-recording will be transcribed and analysed. Presumably, deductive coding is expected. The findings from the interview will be used in online testing as well as when setting up the SERP plan.

Lastly, *the online observation* will be analysed per group and per web page. The two factors that will be analysed are:

- **The user of Google/ potential (perhaps current) client of YourSurprise:** based on average click-through rate
- **Google ranking:** based on average position on Google

The data will be collected and analysed on a weekly basis through Google Search Console and noted in Excel. The detailed analysis will be conducted at the end of the online observation.

The bias of the research is that it is not known how often Google shows the entered Title tags and Meta Description vs the content that Google believes is better (Cojocariu, 2019).

2.6 Operationalization

The online research will reveal the theory and best-practice examples behind developing Title Tags and Meta Descriptions that will lead to the interview questions and online-observation.

The competitor analysis will reveal 5 / 6 variations of the Title Tags and Meta Descriptions and the zero-point analysis will recognize the 100 web pages of the Slovak website on which the variations will be tested.

2.7 Planning and budget

Planning of the entire project has been developed, including each step of the process from the 15th of January to the 8th of June. The budget for this research is 0€.

Table 6: Planning

Week 1	27/01	Beginning of the internship at YourSurprise
Week 2	03/02	Observing/ presenting my ideas to YourSurprise
Week 3	10/02	Writing Plan of Approach 14/02 deadline
Week 4	17/02	Zero-point analysis
Week 5	24/02	Online desk research, competitor analysis
Week 6	02/03	Online desk research, competitor analysis, preparation for the interview
Week 7	09/03	Interview + Interview analysis
Week 8	16/03	Preparation for online observation Assessment form in-company couch
Week 9	23/3	Online observation + weekly analysis
Week 10	30/03	Online observation + weekly analysis
Week 11	06/04	Online observation + weekly analysis
Week 12	13/04	Online observation + weekly analysis
Week 13	20/04	Online observation + weekly analysis
Week 14	27/04	Online observation + weekly analysis
Week 15	04/05	Online observation + weekly analysis
Week 16	11/05	Data analysis + research justification + professional product Assessment form in-company couch I
Week 17	18/05	Data analysis + research justification + professional product Assessment form in-company couch II
Week 18	25/05	Data analysis + research justification + professional product
Week 19	01/06	Professional product, presentation
Week 20	08/06	Presentation and Interview
Week 21	15/06	Presentation and Interview

2.8 Reliability and Validity

In terms of reliability and validity, it can be concluded that all the indicators of this research are consistent as they are measuring the same concept - the optimization of the Meta Descriptions and Title Tags with the goal of providing information on how to increase the organic traffic on the Slovak Website (Roberts & Priest, 2016) . To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, there will be no further changes done to the web pages during the research (no extra content created, etc.) In addition, one extra group will be added, with no changes done to the webpages (the webpages will be taken as they are now with the original Meta Descriptions and Title tags) in order to ensure relevant and valid results.

Self-assessment Plan of Approach

Student name: Petra Hložna

Date of assessment: 12/02/2020

VERDICT: (PASS / NO PASS)

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

The criteria:

- The company and its product/service have been explored using a thorough company analysis;
- The business problem has been explored using a thorough problem analysis addressing at least the 6W questions;
- One or more possible solutions for the business problem have been addressed and linked to one or more Professional Product(s) to be delivered corresponding to one of the four Working and Management Tools (Marketing & Sales, Finance & Accounting, Operations & Supply Chain Management and Organisation & People);
- The possible solutions result in a SMART project aim;
- Knowledge that currently lacks to underpin the solution(s) for the business problem has been identified, stating the lack of knowledge in detailed information gaps;
- An adequate research design is chosen, described and justified, addressing -if applicable- per information gap the research approach, the units of analysis, the process of data collection & analysis, the operationalisation and reliability & validity.

Motivation for the assessment:

I have worked hard past weeks and I believe in my research concept. I made sure to take sufficient time to observe the current situation, analyzing everything happening around me at YourSurprise, as well as talking to different people at the company with different experiences. Those are all the factors that lead me to my research concept.

Once the research concept has been created, all the above-mentioned criterias have been taken into account when writing Plan Of Approach. I have also closely taken into account the word limit and made sure not to exceed it (I found it challenging).

More than that, I am convinced that my research will bring very useful and interesting insights for YourSurprise which can help YourSurprise gain more traffic from organic sources. The research topic fascinates me as Google does not reveal a lot of information and many times the companies just assume what Google thinks/wants/believes. Nowadays, almost everything that e-commerce companies do goes through Google(not only e-commerce companies, people in general - which is a bit scary). I am enthusiastic to research and test how to become less dependent on paid search and bring more organic traffic to the website.

Lastly, the finding of the research will bring important insights that can be further tested on different international website of YSP.

Thank you for taking time to assess my work!

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