

Service Marketing Strategies – Investigating Current Practices and Related Challenges of Luxury Hotels in Finnish Lapland

Student Name: Nea Mikkola

Student Number: 603287

Supervisor: Dr. Freya De Keyzer

Master Media Studies - Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis

June 2022

Service Marketing Strategies – Investigating Current Practices and Related Challenges of Luxury Hotels in Finnish Lapland

Abstract

Finnish luxury tourism provides engaging hedonic experiences that embody the concept of new luxury tourism. New luxury together with the Finnish culture creates a sector of luxury hospitality that emphasizes simplicity and nature through one-of-a-kind experiences in unique exclusive locations. In addition to the challenges of service marketing and the intangible nature of its product, the marketing strategies of service businesses such as hotels in this area require careful consideration of how to successfully communicate an accurate service promise that captures the uniqueness of their offering. In relation to this, this research project examines the current marketing strategies and related challenges of luxury hotels in Finnish Lapland and the possible impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their marketing efforts. Using the Service Marketing Triangle together with the 7Ps Marketing Mix framework, the current study investigates the hotel and marketing managers' perspectives to further understand the theoretical and practical implications of service marketing elements and how they are used to set, enable, and deliver the hotels' service promise.

The data was collected by conducting seven in-depth qualitative expert interviews with the hotel and marketing managers of high-end hotels and hotel resorts located in the Finnish Lapland. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis with references to the elements of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the Service Marketing Triangle. The findings suggest that these hotels incorporate a range of practices related to the marketing mix elements; product, price, place, promotion, physical evidence, people, and process to set, enable, and deliver their promise of providing high-quality, authentic, and customizable customer experiences.

The interviews reveal that these hotels' products are designed to meet the needs of their customer through customization and are communicated carefully throughout their marketing efforts to set realistic expectations of the uniqueness of the Lappish luxury

experience. The prices of these services communicate a sense of exclusivity, but also respond to different factors such as fluctuations in service demand. To follow the sense of exclusivity, these hotels distribute their services mainly through tour operators. They also utilize OTAs and direct sales channels, however, the hotels report experiencing significant challenges relating to these. To address complications related to accurate communication of the distinctiveness of their service offering, the hotels utilize influencer marketing as one of their main promotional tools. Throughout such efforts on social media and the hotels' and third-party distributors' websites, promotional material play a crucial role in bringing the hotel experiences to life. The hotels adopt a strategy of carefully monitoring their processes at all levels of operations to ensure sufficient business that further contributes to the wider success of Finnish Lapland as a luxury destination.

Based on these findings these hotels are suggested to emphasize innovation throughout their operations and marketing strategy to develop distinctive service brands that together contribute to Lapland's attractiveness throughout the year. Moreover, this study further highlights the synergistic nature of service marketing. It proposes further research to be conducted on how the service promise is set, enabled, and delivered from differing stakeholders' perspectives.

Keywords: *hotel marketing, service marketing, 7Ps marketing mix, Finnish luxury hotels, Lapland tourism*

ABSTRACT	2
1. INTRODUCTION	6
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
2.1. Finnish Luxury Tourism	7
2.3. Marketing strategy development	10
2.3.1. Setting the promise	12
2.3.2. Enabling the promise	18
2.3.3. Delivering the promise	20
2.4. Impact of Covid-19	22
2.4.1. External marketing	22
2.4.2. Internal marketing	23
2.4.3. Interactive marketing	24
3. METHODOLOGY	25
3.1. Design	25
3.2. Sample	26
3.3. Operationalization	27
3.4. Procedure	28
3.5. Validity and reliability	29
3.6. Data analysis	30
4. FINDINGS	32
4.1. Product	32
4.1.1. Service feel	32
4.1.2. Service concept	35
4.2. Place	37
4.2.1. Tourism intermediaries	37
4.2.2. Website	40

4.3.	Price	41
4.3.1.	Fluctuations in demand	42
4.3.2.	Price positioning	42
4.4.	Promotion	45
4.4.1.	Traditional media	45
4.4.2.	Digital marketing	45
4.4.3.	Destination marketing	47
4.5.	Physical evidence	50
4.5.1.	Promotional material	50
4.6.	People	52
4.6.1.	Employee training	52
4.7.	Organizational processes	54
4.7.1.	Management of operations	54
4.8.	Customer experience	57
4.8.1.	Customization of services	57
5.	MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS	60
6.	LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	61
7.	CONCLUSION	62
8.	REFERENCES	63

1. Introduction

A service business derives the perceived value of the market offerings from delivering services that are characterized by intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, lack of ownership, and perishability (Ozturk & Ozen, 2021). It is central for service marketing to utilize its industry's unique affordances in their resource allocation and value co-creation as these are crucial for meeting customer needs, attracting, and retaining customers, and gaining a competitive advantage (Peng & Boonyanmethaporn, 2021). In reference to this, the current study aims to explore the sector of luxury hotels in Finnish Lapland. Finnish luxury tourism is characterized by its unique service offering and a customer base with particular needs and expectations. Hence luxury accommodation services in this area provide an interesting target for academic exploration and discussion. Previous research on luxury tourism is largely focused on quantitative methods and more qualitative research has been requested due to the complex nature of how luxury in the contemporary world is defined and perceived. Luxury tourism, and in particular experiential luxury has also been largely focused on consumers' perspectives (Iloranta, 2019). This study, therefore, contributes to the previous literature by offering a novel perspective by investigating the service providers' perceptions of luxury and how these high-end services are being marketed.

This study takes on a theoretical approach based on the 7P's marketing mix theory and the Service Marketing Triangle to assess how different elements of service marketing are utilized, what challenges are the hotels experiencing and what impact has the Covid-19 pandemic had on their practices. Previous findings suggest that the external, internal, and interactive marketing practices of the triangle model need to be adopted in response to the pandemic (Altinay & Arici, 2021). These practices can be used to increase hotels' service differentiation, quality, and productivity, which are paramount in the current competitive environment (Altinay & Arici, 2021). The study explores this idea regarding the integration of the marketing mix elements across each of the marketing processes in the context of the hotel industry. It offers a timely contribution to the field of hotel marketing and the exploration of how hotels can optimize their processes to manage the impact of external factors to further maintain the ongoing growth of tourism and hospitality in Finnish Lapland.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Finnish Luxury Tourism

Tourism in Finnish Lapland continues to be on the rise (Falk & Vieru, 2017) and plays a significant role in the region's economy (Ianioglo & Rissanen, 2020). Overall, luxury tourism lacks a definite definition due to its complex and multidimensional nature (Iloranta & Komppula, 2021). In the context of Finnish Lapland, luxury tourism constitutes a unique market as the concept of luxury tourism in this area can often be perceived differently from the more traditional luxury destinations, such as 5-star hotels in Dubai that are characterized by materialism and high exclusivity (Prapannetivuth, 2015; Hallott, 2013; Iloranta & Komppula, 2021; Piispanen, 2021). Finnish luxury tourism, on the other hand, emphasizes the features of new luxury: down-to-earth, hedonic experiences and values related to wellbeing, authenticity, and joy (Ivanov, 2012; Iloranta, 2019; Piispanen, 2021). The uniqueness of new luxury tourism lies in its products that reflect the tourists' demand for authentic, engaging services and experiences that add meaning to the people's lives and incorporate flexible and tailored service processes (Piispanen, 2021; Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). These luxury experiences are not necessarily defined by the monetary value of the service, but rather by their uniqueness and other high-end features together with the overall experiential and emotional attributes that bear value in these offerings (Ivanov, 2012). New luxury tourism in Finland differs from the traditional concepts of luxury due to its unconventional characteristics such as the authenticity of the Finnish culture and a remote location with unique weather and wildlife (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). Lapland is said to have the potential to develop as a luxury destination that encompasses simplicity, customized friendly service, and the authenticity of the Finnish nature that meets the traditional and new luxury customer needs (Hallott, 2013).

The popularity of Finnish Lapland as a winter travel destination has grown significantly within the past decade (Falk & Vieru, 2017). It possesses a strong regional branding that is associated with the arctic nature (Keskitalo, 2020), various outdoor activities, and its internationality (Dietrich, 2019; Falk & Vieru, 2017). It is also recognized for its authentic hospitality and culture (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022). For example, Ylläs, one of the most popular resort towns in Finnish Lapland for winter tourism, is said to be a unique destination known for its home feeling, calm relaxing atmosphere, beautiful nature,

activities, people, and pleasant memories (Aro et al., 2018). To support the growth of the industry, there is an increasing demand for tourism and accommodation businesses to further increase the overall visibility and attractiveness of Lapland as a travel destination (Malmström, 2020). Finnish Lapland tourism businesses should deliver services that strive to represent the new concept of luxury which embraces individualistic, friendly service that reflects the local culture (Hallott, 2013). This would require businesses to go beyond the travelers' service needs and instead assess how to incorporate strengths into the culture and uniqueness of the region to further promote Finnish Lapland (Hallott, 2013).

Although there is an increasing demand for accommodation services in Finland, hotels must maintain their service quality and accompany this with innovation and continuous development of new services and concepts to attract customers and remain competitive in the industry (Malmström, 2020; Prasetyo & Pertiwi, 2021). In response to the increasing number of businesses, hotels have adopted competitive strategies such as service innovation, strategic pricing, and the development of customer satisfaction through improved service quality (Malmström, 2020). Moreover, studies about place branding and brand love suggest that especially service quality and staff-customer interactions were more readily attributed to the service providers rather than the destination overall (Aro et al., 2018). This suggests that the interactions and service quality can differentiate hospitality businesses from other businesses in their area.

Finnish Lapland is known for its offerings during the winter season but seems to lack its place in the market as a summer destination (Ylimartimo & Manninen, 2018). It is therefore suggested to businesses in this area to increase the promotion of their low summer season and the unique selling points (USPs) of the destination all year round as this would bring sustainable growth to the area (Ylimartimo & Manninen, 2018; Keskitalo, 2020). This could be done by incorporating brand storytelling and emphasizing the cultural heritage of Lapland (Keskitalo, 2020). Overall, Finnish Lapland is recognized for its location as a peaceful, relaxing, and secluded environment that is surrounded by beautiful nature, unique activities, and experiences, and friendly people and culture (Iloranta, 2019; Räsänen, 2021). Finnish Lapland is seen to have significant potential for ongoing and substantial growth as a luxury tourism destination throughout the year. To ensure this, hospitality businesses should adopt marketing strategies that account for their distinctive characteristics.

2.2. Hotel Service Marketing

In the unique context of hotels, the marketing focuses on the promotion of intangible goods such as services and experiences that develop throughout the various interactions between the customers and the organization without gaining ownership of their purchase (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). The impalpable nature of such services makes it difficult to evaluate and manage them. The service providers therefore must communicate the service quality and the product in a tangible way to their customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). To do this, marketing managers must have a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of the product to be able to ensure customization and customer participation (Ozturk, 2020).

Delivering the brand promise through the day-to-day interactions between the organization, its employees and the customer is paramount to the overall service marketing process (Grönroos, 1978; 2020). The service is simultaneously sold and delivered and cannot be considered separate from the provider. This makes the employees a central part of the product which is then co-created with the customers during their stay (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2021; Grönroos, 2020). It is therefore not sufficient to review the elements of a marketing strategy independent of the interactive nature of a service. Instead, hotels' marketing strategies should incorporate careful deliberation of how their brand and its service promise are communicated and delivered throughout the organization and the customer experience prior, during, and after their stay.

Due to the ever-changing nature of the hotel business and the growing competition in the field, developing coherent and well-planned marketing strategies and ensuring that the interactions and processes are aligned is paramount for success (Pandey, 2022; Pasetiyo & Pertiwi, 2021). Doing so can have a significant positive effect on the overall organizational financial performance through improved service quality and customer satisfaction (Pandey, 2022). Concerning this, hotel managers are encouraged to take on integrated marketing communication (IMC) programs and ensure the communication of a consistent message, especially when targeting their final consumers (Šeric & Mikulic, 2020).

2.3. Marketing strategy development

In the service industry, internal and interactive processes play a crucial role in the delivery of the marketing message and the brand promise. These three types of marketing; external, interactive, and internal work together to set, enable and deliver certain promises about the brand and its services to the customers (Wilson et al., 2016). These three processes form the basis of a strategic framework, the Service Marketing Triangle developed by Grönroos (1978) which provides an insight into the multidimensional nature of these service marketing interactions. This model also reflects today's customer-centered marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). The framework consists of three stakeholders of service marketing: the company, the customers, and the employees, with the latter, also including technologies and subcontractors that contribute to the service delivery (Wilson et al., 2016). These three form the points of the triangle that are connected by the external, interactive, and internal marketing efforts. External marketing efforts that encompass anything or anyone that communicates to the customer before the service itself takes place, are used by hotels to set expectations and promises of the service delivery. Whether the made promises are kept or broken is then determined by interactive marketing in how the service is delivered by the front-line employees, technologies, or agents. These service providers require certain tools and processes to be able to deliver the service successfully and according to the brand's standards. For this, an organization engages in internal marketing processes such as recruitment, training, and rewards systems to further help and empower its employees (Wilson et al., 2016).

Due to the way services are marketed and delivered to the customer the external, internal, and interactive marketing efforts are difficult to distinguish from each other and should not be considered isolated incidents. It is not sufficient to only examine external marketing efforts to ensure organizational success, as the way internal and interactive aspects are managed can also have a direct influence on the customer experience and satisfaction (Rizvi & Siddiqui, 2019; Piehler et al., 2019; Xie, 2020). Service marketing in the past has relied on product marketing strategies due to their more simplistic nature, however, now it has increased its focus on the role of the customer and customer relations (Samatovich, 2021). The consumers have become active not just as a consumer, but as active participants in the production of the service, also called the "prosumer" of the product. Moreover, as customers have gained platforms to communicate their changing

needs, the role of customer relationship management throughout external and interactive efforts continues to grow (Samatovich, 2021). It is therefore important for hotel organizations to acknowledge this shift away from a product and transaction-focused approach together with the active role of the customer interactions and their autonomy in the hotels' marketing operations (Samatovich, 2021).

Marketing management is built around an integrated process consisting of individual marketing elements in all stages of strategy, tactics, and implementation to further support operational objectives and meet the needs of the target customer (Cespedes & Piercy, 1996; Drummond et al., 2007). The management process requires detailed development of a marketing strategy that is accompanied by the suitable tactics through which the strategy is brought into action (Drummond et al., 2007). For this, literature encourages the use of a marketing mix model in organizational decision-making and strategy development. A marketing mix is a tool used to achieve marketing goals and target markets (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2021). Based on the 4P's marketing model by Booms & Bitner (1981), a marketing mix consists of product, price, place, and promotion as variables controlled by the marketing managers in their strategies (Middleton et al., 2009). However, the traditional marketing mix is seen not to reflect the unique characteristics of the service industry and the impact of external factors on marketing decisions (Salman et al., 2017).

Throughout the years, the importance of stakeholder interactions and service-centered products has increased, and these aspects have become crucial to the service economy and modern business (Salman et al., 2017). An alternative model, the 7P's marketing mix model with an additional three P's; process, physical environment, and people, was created specifically for service marketing, which differs in its service quality and marketing strategies (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2021; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). The 7P's marketing mix model takes the interactions between stakeholders and the way services are sold through interconnected processes into consideration (Salman et al., 2017). Theoretical frameworks such as the 7P's marketing mix offer practical significance for the long-term development and performance of hotels (Peng & Boonyanmethaporn, 2021). However, it is said that many hotels do not systematically utilize such marketing theories but rather rely on the experience of the marketing management teams (Peng & Boonyanmethaporn, 2021). The strategies developed by the management tend to be incoherent with the actual operations of the organization and therefore often perceived as unattainable in practice

(Cespedes & Piercy, 1996). To better understand the marketing operations in this industry, this study investigates how the marketing mix elements are integrated into the marketing practices and strategies employed by luxury hotels. Doing this also helps to examine the practical implications and value of the 7Ps marketing mix as a theoretical framework.

2.3.1. Setting the promise

In their marketing strategies, hotels can build their brand equity through their strategies related to product, price, place, and promotion of the marketing mix as these strategies can reflect an investment in the overall brand (Šeric & Mikulic, 2020). Moreover, the messages related to service benefits and organizational values conveyed through external marketing and communications should be aligned and correspond to each other (Piehler et al., 2019). Conveying a coherent and consistent communication of the service offering and its value is crucial for ensuring a successful delivery of the made promises (Wilson et al., 2016). This can be done by developing an external communication strategy that considers each of the marketing mix elements, and how they can be integrated to reflect an accurate brand image that sets realistic and deliverable expectations in the mind of the consumer.

2.3.1.1. *Product*

The product or a commodity of a hotel is its services, such as rooms, meals, and room service. This also includes the offering of the tourism destination as a whole (Cirikovic, 2014). In service marketing, the product is divided into different levels that include the main product, additional product, and expanded product (Cirikovic, 2014). The main product is the established basic utility, the features of the product, and what customers should expect from it. This should reflect the intangible service elements that are included in the overall offering (Renaghan, 1981). Additional product in turn refers to the aspects that differentiate the product from the competitors and further enrich the organization's offering (Cirikovic, 2014). In the case of hotels, this includes elements outside of the standard use of a room, that make a hotel stand out from others (Renaghan, 1981). The advantage of differentiation through additional products can only be derived if the difference in the services satisfies and corresponds to the customer's needs (Taylor, 1997). The additional products can also be used to increase the tangibility of the service (Renaghan, 1981). Expanded product, on the

other hand, consists of the service's circumstances such as atmosphere, interactions, and customer participation. Each product level needs to be considered as all of them contribute to the overall service offering (Cirikovic, 2014). In the eyes of the consumer, the service attributes are perceived as a whole and not as isolated elements (Renaghan, 1981). If one aspect of the service changes so does the customer's perception of the entire offering (Renaghan, 1981).

The selling of hotel services is largely dependent on the quality reflected in its facilities, image, culture, comfort, staff, and level of service (Goryushkina et al., 2016). Hotel services are also largely dependent on the experiences and service encounters hotels produce together with the customer (Knutson et al., 2009; Jang & Moutinho, 2019). The uncertainty of how these experiences occur outside of the control of the service provider and are consumed at the time of their production can hinder the formation of customer expectations prepurchase (Renaghan, 1981; Cirikovic, 2014; Jang & Moutinho, 2019). To address and ease the management of customer expectations hotels can implement and strategize their external marketing communications and their brand promise to set the tone of their brand and its services before the actual customer experience. This process of building a service brand is paramount to the hotel product as gaining distinctiveness can increase customers' trust in the brand and its services (Radisic et al., 2010). Hotels should differentiate and position their services so that a clear association between the product and its attributes can be made (Ali & Kaldeen, 2017) by utilizing offerings that are relevant to the target customer (Renaghan, 1981). Once the product is defined, it provides a basis for the rest of the marketing mix elements. The discussion here highlights the need for marketing managers to acknowledge the uniqueness of service as a product and the adoption of appropriate marketing strategies that consider its sophisticated nature.

2.3.1.2. *Place*

It is not enough to only consider the services of the hotels, but also how these are made available to potential customers. This is reflected in the place element of the marketing mix, which refers to how the service is delivered and made available (Loo & Leong, 2017). With the rise in internet users worldwide, businesses are encouraged to utilize the internet's affordances in design, interactivity, and marketing mix variables through multi-channel approaches (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006; Creevey et al., 2022).

Five-star resort hotels that rely on tour operators and online travel agents (OTAs) tend to lack marketing features on their websites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006). OTA channels as marketing tools can help hotels acquire new customers, drive more traffic to the hotels' websites, and especially for independent hotels to gain a competitive advantage (Raab et al., 2018). Independent hotels have the potential to benefit from these channels as they often do not have brand reliance to acquire enough traffic through their own channels (Raab et al., 2018). However, OTA channels are reported to force hotel organizations to give up their control over the way their product is displayed and priced (Khan, 2014). Marketing managers should therefore focus on improving and increasing their online presence by also emphasizing the accessibility of their websites to facilitate direct sales (Moilanen, 2012).

2.3.1.3. *Price*

The price element refers to the monetary value of the service. Different pricing strategies such as the use of price promotions have the potential to generate benefits such as increased occupancy and exposure, but they can also risk damaging the hotel's brand by attracting the wrong kind of customers (Geerts & Masset, 2022) and potentially harming the notion of luxury (Jang & Moutinho, 2019; Geerts & Masset, 2022). A study conducted in the UK found that most hotels make improvised decisions that ultimately affect their occupancy performance and the profitability of their pricing policies (Jeffrey et al., 2002). Hotels that are considered successful due to their high occupancy performance implement short break periods and temporary promotional packages selectively in their pricing that are intended to gain visibility during off-peak periods (Jeffrey et al., 2002). Whereas less successful hotels use discount promotions generated by a third party such as tour operators or as an instinct reaction in response to perceived external market forces (Jeffrey et al., 2002). These reduced room rates harm their product position and reduce occupancy gains to the high season of the hotel. Using discounts, especially on luxury services therefore can be risky and should be used strategically (Jang & Moutinho, 2019; Geerts & Masset, 2022).

Incorporating frequent price promotions can decrease the perceived quality of the product (Jang & Moutinho, 2019). For example, high-priced rooms are expected to provide quality, and low-priced rooms, on the other hand, have better transaction value (Jang & Moutinho, 2019). Moreover, the demands and expectations of the customer of high- and low-priced rooms differ. An economy customer who is purchasing generally a lower-priced

room perceives the discounts more positively as they gain access to the luxury service and as a result are more likely to spend more on the hotel's services during their visit. Contrary to luxury customers who see price promotions as less desirable because they decrease the desirability of the hotel's image and do not deliver on their desire to signal wealth identity (Jang & Moutinho, 2019). High-end and luxury hotels should therefore avoid frequent promotions of discounts to preserve their customers' desired perceptions of quality.

As seen here, the effect of discounts on the perceived product tends to depend on the type of the consumer and whether they consider price to be a signal of prestige (Geerts & Masset, 2022; Meidan & Lee, 1982). However, the impact of discounts and price promotions may differ in the context of Finnish luxury tourism, as the entire cultural notion of luxury is a highly subjective and multidimensional construct (Iloranta & Komppula, 2022; Geerts & Masset, 2022). It is suggested that the concept of luxury should not solely rely on using price as its main determinant. Luxury tourism businesses should rather invest in the services and their quality to generate value for the monetary expenses of the experience and to deliver a sense of luxury (Hallott, 2013). Features of service quality tend to be more important to the luxury customer than the service price (Zhang et al., 2011). Moreover, due to the modest culture of Finland, the luxury experience may differ from what luxury customers are used to, and thus, service quality is especially important (Hallott, 2013). The Finnish luxury hotels' target market, therefore, does not necessarily constitute the small segment of traditional luxury customers, but rather the hybrid customer that wants to invest in memorable experiences (Hallott, 2013). This hybrid customer should be marketed as such by using the full potential of the once-in-a-lifetime experience and unique features of the area they operate in (Hallott, 2013). Keeping this in mind together with the Lapland's unique concept of luxury, hotels' marketing strategies should carefully evaluate their pricing strategies and perhaps focus on emphasizing alternative attributes of their service to communicate an accurate promise of the quality of their services.

Altogether, this discussion demonstrates the need for careful consideration of pricing strategies and their implications on the overall brand. Moreover, it highlights the influence different pricing strategies can have on different types of customers, further emphasizing the need for hotel managers to acknowledge when and to whom these offers should be directed.

2.3.1.4. *Promotion*

The promotion element refers to the use of promotional tools to generate awareness and incite preference for a particular organization or destination's services (Cirikovic, 2014). Promotion together with price is a central contributor to customers' expectations (Loo & Leong, 2016). Providing consistency in brand promise before the service delivery is found to provide a positive impact on multiple dimensions of brand equity through the brand image and perceived service quality (Šeric & Mikulic, 2020).

Luxury brands and hotels as sectors generally lack sufficient social media marketing strategies (Leue et al., 2013; Creevey et al., 2022). Instead, luxury brands tend to rely more on traditional media channels to communicate their promise (Creevey et al., 2022). Although the internet is a crucial asset also to the luxury and hospitality sector (Geerts & Masset, 2022), the adaptation of online platforms in their marketing strategy is suggested to pose opportunities as well as challenges (Creevey et al., 2022). For luxury brands, the challenge in integrating online platforms is in communicating a luxurious brand image through equivalent online experiences that resonate with the diverse customer segments (Creevey et al., 2022). The most often reported promotion-associated failure in luxury hotels emerges in misleading marketing communication where the service-related information is not consistent with the experience (Loo & Leong, 2016). Luxury hotels are also relatively slow and fearful adopters of online platforms as they require top-level management efforts (Creevey et al., 2022). Hotel owners also tend to avoid social media platforms due to their potential to shift the narrative from the organization to the consumer and to spread undesired word-of-mouth (Leue et al., 2013). This is contradictory to their audience's preferences as hotel guests demonstrate a positive perspective on hotels' online presence (tom Dieck et al., 2017). Hotels should therefore concentrate increasing marketing efforts on incorporating an online presence on social media (Leue et al., 2013; tom Dieck et al., 2017) as it can help them increase brand awareness and strengthen their brand image (Kusuma et al., 2022). Especially social media and user-generated content (UGC) on these platforms are encouraged to be utilized as a marketing tool for gaining awareness (Moilanen, 2012; Hallott, 2013). These tools are important to the context of Finnish Lapland as visitors often share their experiences on social media that highlight the predilection for the brand. Therefore, the hotels' presence on these platforms is encouraged and can further reinforce customer engagement also through hashtags and geotagging (Martinez Hale,

2021). The use of social media can also help hotels to make their services more tangible for current and future customers.

2.3.1.5. Physical evidence

The physical evidence element regards the characteristics of the product or service that make it tangible and marketable (Salman et al., 2017). This also includes aspects such as the location, design, and product features of a hotel communicated through their social media and website. Among marketing scholars, there is a consensus that the marketing mix elements differ in their importance, which is hypothesized to vary according to the hotel's target customer (Prapannetivuth, 2015). The physical evidence element is said to be less important than people and pricing, especially in small-sized hotels' marketing strategies (Prapannetivuth, 2015). This may be because hotel owners highlight the service and the overall feel of the hotel as more important than the more physical aspects such as rooms that tend to be similar among all hotels (Prapannetivuth, 2015). Physical evidence concerning homely greenery and the ambient environment of the hotel is highlighted as the third important marketing mix element for small-sized hotels in addition to price and people (Prapannetivuth, 2015). Hotels can also use images and reviews of these elements to communicate the appearance and feel of the services (Renaghan, 1981).

Hotels often also use customer reviews, one of the most common UGC forms when building their strategies (Jang & Moutinho, 2019). Customer reviews can help to make the service more tangible but also influence the customers' perceptions of the service (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). For example, research suggests that higher customer ratings are often seen as a signal of higher service quality and customer satisfaction. However, if they are excessively high this can seem unreliable and result in lower customer satisfaction during their stay (Jang & Moutinho, 2019). This is due to the diminished credibility of these reviews that in turn can lead to a discrepancy between the customers' expectations and the actual service (Jang & Moutinho, 2019; Wilson et al., 2013). Moreover, instead of focusing on solely a high degree of positive ratings, hotel managers should encourage and value attribute-specific reviews that are both positive and negative to maintain brand credibility (Jang & Moutinho, 2019).

Altogether this discussion suggests that the customer expectations are not formed through isolated elements but rather throughout the entire marketing mix where the

elements are integrated and influence each other. With this, the current study aims to investigate how luxury hotels in Finnish Lapland use the 7Ps to set their service promise.

2.3.2. Enabling the promise

Within an organization, the marketing triangle model is often neglected as a triangle, and instead, management often focuses on a single aspect. The role of internal marketing and the organizational need to understand the function of marketing are often excluded (Li, 2011). The employees are the marketers of the organization (Wilson et al., 2016). Therefore, without the efficient external and internal communication of the brand and service promise, the employees are unable to construct an understanding of the brand and their role in delivering it (Piehler et al, 2019). Therefore, the management needs to ensure that the brand is communicated to the service staff. This includes ensuring companywide awareness about what the brand represents and concrete actions of how employees can embody and translate the brand in their daily operations (Piehler et al., 2019).

2.3.2.1. *People*

The people element is concerned with anyone involved in the service interactions such as front-line employees that actively deliver the brand and the service to the customers (Salman et al., 2017). This also includes intermediaries often used by hotels such as travel agents that also distribute the hotels' services. The people involved in customer interactions and their management perform a crucial role in the marketing of services and their success in hotels (Prapannetivuth, 2007; Wilson et al., 2016). In the marketing strategies of small-sized hotels, people, in addition to price, is considered the most important element (Prapannetivuth, 2007). For example, the frontline employees represent the firm as a whole and can directly influence the customers' perceptions of the brand and their experience (Wilson et al., 2016). The employees ensure customer satisfaction and improve customer brand relationships through their ability to communicate the brand values (Rizvi & Siddiqui, 2019; Piehler et al., 2019). This is particularly true in the service context as the service is provided by the employees and as such the employees play an important role in the service delivery process. To enable the effective communication of brand values organizations can implement brand-oriented communication and leadership

within the organization together with the use of external communications in their internal marketing practices (Piehler et al., 2019).

Owners of small hotels are personally concerned about ensuring the quality of the services by training their staff to deliver polite, patient, and always available customer service (Prapannetivuth, 2007). As these interactions are often more closely managed the connection with customers is more readily established (Prapannetivuth, 2007). In tourism organizations of all sizes, employee training is considered the most important function of human resource management. Especially in the context of luxury hotels where it is paramount for its staff to meet the high customer expectations (Belias et al., 2020). For smaller luxury hotels, ensuring sufficient training can be paramount to their survival as they are often required to adapt to external factors and changing environments (Belias et al., 2020). Hotel businesses must ensure that they possess a well-trained and competent staff that delivers services that offer personalized and pleasant experiences throughout the delivery process (Narteh et al., 2013). It is therefore suggested that service organizations ensure their human resource strategies are directed at motivating and enabling their employees to deliver customer-oriented processes and promises successfully (Wilson et al., 2016).

In addition to hiring the best employees in the market, hotels should retain them by providing them with the necessary support systems that reinforce sufficient internal service processes and provide conditions that support employee motivation and their ability to deliver quality service (Wilson et al., 2016). Previous studies suggest that employees in luxury hotels are motivated by financial incentives and personal development opportunities (Maroudas et al., 2008). This includes providing employees with the agency and trust to gain control over certain aspects of their jobs (Maroudas et al., 2008). For example, hotels could engage the employees in the brand by giving them agency over their tasks and including them in the development of the external processes (Piehler et al., 2019). Concerning this, luxury hotels are also suggested to provide employee training and career development programs to motivate employees to perform their best (Maroudas et al., 2008). Ensuring the employees are driven to invest in their work can further help to ensure congruence between the service promise and its delivery. Especially in the context of Finnish Lapland and its accommodation services such as privately rented cabins and lodges, the service concept and ensuring service quality are essential. This is because the personality reflected

through their services significantly contributes to the value of the customer experience and the fulfillment of individual needs (Hallott, 2013). With this, the current study explores how luxury hotels in Finish Lapland use the 7Ps to enable the successful delivery of their brand and service promise.

2.3.3. Delivering the promise

Hotels sell a customer experience that appeals to one's emotions by engaging them in the co-creation of the experience and its value (Knutson et al., 2009). The product attributes that appeal to the customer should be reflected in the service itself rather than only used as a sales promotion ploy. This is defined through the process of interactive marketing and is crucial as hotel customers measure services based on performance rather than possession (Renaghan, 1981). The way these customer interactions and experiences occur plays a crucial role in the growth of the entire hospitality industry as it is highly dependent on these experiences and the customer footfall (Pandey, 2022). These experiences rely on the people and processes involved in the service delivery. With regards to the marketing mix, the people element is often integrated with the process element as the people involved in the service delivery process are inseparable from the service delivery (Xie, 2020).

2.3.3.1. *Process*

The process element refers to the procedures and activities through which the service is created and delivered to the customer. Throughout the services, relationship marketing, the maintenance of long-term relationships with customers by considering their needs, provides numerous benefits for the hotels and their success but also provides value for the customer (Narteh et al., 2013). Managing these relationships is crucial for gaining customer loyalty which in turn is postulated to be the future of hospitality marketing (Narteh et al., 2013). Successful customer interactions and experiences due to the hotel staff and their services have the potential to yield positive customer reviews and word-of-mouth that play a crucial role in hotel marketing (Jeffrey et al., 2002).

Ensuring engagement and active interaction between the firm and the consumer can further facilitate the co-creation of value for all the stakeholders (Morosan & DeFranco, 2019). The value is created throughout the interactions and processes before, during, and

after the customers' stay at the destination. However, most existing literature neglects the post-reservation stage where consumers can purchase additional ancillary services such as entertainment and food and drinks. These are the most profitable opportunity for the co-creation of value through mutual dialog, access, and risk-reward evaluations (Morosan & DeFranco, 2019). Hotel managers are therefore suggested to encourage interactivity with the customers and recognize them as service partners that are incorporated in mutual social activities that extend also to online social networks (Narteh et al., 2013).

Concerning the extension of hotels' services, the use of technology is said to be crucial for organizations' survival and should therefore be implemented across organizational practices (Ozturk & Ozen, 2021). Information technologies (IT) are recognized as a significant driver of change in the hotel industry (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). They can provide multiple opportunities for hotels in terms of innovation and the overall development of their services. Personalized and innovative hotel brands are an emerging trend in the hotel industry (Hao et al., 2020). Hotels are therefore suggested to utilize interactive IT and personalization in the sale of ancillary products that provide an important revenue stream without additional intermediation fees (Morosan & DeFranco, 2019). A recent study highlights that integrating intuitive and easy-to-use interactive IT in the hotels' offering can further increase the money spent on additional products through increased value co-creation (Morosan & DeFranco, 2019). Moreover, consumers increasingly demand convenience in service processes which should therefore be considered a central focus and concern for service marketers.

Developing hotel products through innovation can help hotels to appeal to the consumers' wish to create memorable experiences that can further differentiate the hotel from its competitors. Doing so also highlights the value of the hotel's service while enhancing its brand further allowing them to distinguish themselves and their processes from the intermediaries (Morosan & DeFranco, 2019). Service providers especially in Finland should incorporate technology into their operations to complement the existing notion of Finland as a tech-savvy country (Hallott, 2013). However, these technologies should be adopted carefully as there can be issues of how technology is perceived and adopted by the customers as well as the quality of their design. These can decrease rather than increase the overall customer satisfaction (Froehle, 2006).

Overall, the marketing efforts of luxury hotels in Finnish Lapland should emphasize the active engagement of the customers and generate meaningful discussions and interactions throughout the elements of the service experience, online and offline, as this can enhance the customers' unique bond with the brands (Šeric & Mikulic, 2020). In reference to this, this research aims to answer the following research question: how do luxury hotels in Finnish Lapland utilize the elements of the 7Ps marketing mix to set, enable, and deliver their service promise?

2.4. Impact of Covid-19

The hospitality industry is susceptible to experiencing the impact of various external forces such as economic, natural, technological, social, political, and cultural environments (Redjeki et al., 2021; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). In recent years, the Covid-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges for the hospitality sector whose business was limited due to domestic and international travel restrictions (Redjeki et al., 2021; Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Jiang & Wen, 2020). The restrictions have impacted customer demand and how business is conducted (Redjeki et al., 2021; Peng & Booyanmethaporn, 2021).

Overall, hotel businesses have restructured their overall strategies to adjust to the concepts of the new normal (Pandey, 2022). Research suggests that in response to the pandemic, hotels should optimize their service products (product), adjust their prices (price), shift towards online and digital marketing (place), and incorporate a mix of relevant promotional tools (promotion) (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2021). Moreover, the strategies should include a thoughtful delivery of services in the age of social distancing (process), focus on the tangible promotion of perceived experiences (physical environment), recognize the role of staff behavior (people), as well as analyze market competition (Peng & Booyanmethaporn, 2021). The impact the Covid-19 pandemic has on these businesses is not only limited to the duration of the pandemic but can have an ongoing impact on the business operations and customer needs.

2.4.1. External marketing

Hospitality businesses must consider the current strengths and weaknesses of the industry they operate in. To do this, organizations must acknowledge and gain awareness of

the customer demands, future marketing needs, and competition together with other external and environmental factors (Redjeki et al., 2020).

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, hotels have adopted a market share strategy and cost reduction to manage and optimize their available resources and reach the occupancy levels (Redjeki et al., 2021; Peng & Booyanmethaporn, 2021). Research suggests that the hotel industry has restructured its market and adjusted its strategies to target more of a local customer base (Pandey, 2022). A case study of a hotel in Indonesia found that one of the most common strategies adopted during a crisis is to alter the hotel's services and promotions by shifting the audience to a niche sector, allowing the hotel to continue operating although with limited services (Japutra & Situmorang, 2021).

2.4.2. Internal marketing

Any crisis can be utilized as an opportunity when correctly and strategically managed (Pandey, 2022). The way organizations respond to these forces depends on their ability to maintain strategic control over their operations and internal communications (Jiang & Wen, 2020; Redjeki et al., 2021; Kariru & Ndungu, 2021; Pandey, 2022). Especially showing concern for the hotel's employees is suggested to be an important element in overcoming the damages caused by the pandemic (Kariru & Ndungu, 2021). For example, in times of crisis such as during the pandemic, the internal announcements are crucial to occur before the external communication (Piehler et al., 2019). Hotels are also suggested to provide their employees the necessary training to be able to deliver quality services during times of reduced human contact. For example, how to ensure sufficient service delivery while wearing face masks and having hindered ability to communicate friendliness through facial expressions (Kariru & Ndungu, 2021). Businesses of all sizes are also challenged by retaining their employees during periods of reduced demand (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). Many employees seek alternative careers due to the uncertainty and availability of work in the hotel industry (Kariru & Ndungu, 2021). Due to this, hotels should take on rotational shifts to retain their employees and continue training their staff to maintain a connection with the hotel and its operations during such disruptions (Kariru & Ndungu, 2021).

2.4.3. Interactive marketing

Investment in service innovation is particularly important when adjusting operations to the global crisis (Pasetiyo & Pertiwi, 2021). Findings suggest that amongst hotels that perceive a more dynamic competitive context, innovation contributes to better marketing performance, than in hotels that do not experience a similarly high degree of turbulence (Campo et al., 2014). Moreover, developing technologies play a crucial role in innovation across industries and increasingly so in response to the pandemic (Peng & Booyanmethaporn, 2021). Especially hotels have increasingly utilized technologies and digital alternatives in their operations in recent years (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Peng & Booyanmethaporn, 2021). Hotels' investment in digital transformation can reduce costs and increase efficiency. Furthermore, when implemented into customer relationship management technology can help in providing customized services and increase customer loyalty through increased engagement (Hao et al., 2020). Digitalization of service processes may be a challenge as hotels still need to maintain intimacy and emotional connection with their customers (Bonfanti et al., 2021). However, employing certain safety measures during the pandemic rather unexpectedly has had a positive effect on the customer experience as it has increased intimacy and a reserved environment (Bonfanti et al., 2021). This suggests that social interactions are not eliminated but rather redesigned and reformed in response to the pandemic (Bonfanti et al., 2021).

Individual differences must be considered when generating successful customer experiences as the needs, motivations, and demands of the consumers vary widely (Falk & Vieru, 2017). Especially in response to the pandemic, hotels are suggested to develop their services according to the rising need for a healthy and balanced lifestyle that places new importance on private space and an active lifestyle (Hao et al., 2020). The care for customers' health and safety should also be incorporated into the external communications and promotions to further gain customers' trust in their services (Kariru & Ndungu, 2021).

In light of these findings, the current research aims to further explore this reformation of service processes. Thus, this study is guided by the following sub-question: how has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the external, internal, and interactive marketing practices of the luxury hotels in Finnish Lapland?

3. Methodology

This section details the methodology applied to examine the current marketing strategies and related challenges of Finnish luxury hotels. It explains and further justifies the chosen methodological approach.

3.1. Design

This study utilizes in-depth expert interviews as it offers an exploration of the participants' individual experiences and understandings of the discussed topics and the meaning that can be derived from them (Mears, 2012). Moreover, semi-structured in-depth interviews offer insights into complex information such as attitudes and perspectives of the practitioners contributing to this level of decision making. It is also considered to help in identifying the specific challenges and perspectives of the interviewees and in gaining a better understanding of their social reality (Döringer, 2021). A qualitative methodology is also seen to be appropriate for gathering information about the operations of SMEs and entrepreneurial marketing challenges (Kiatsongchai & Choibamroong, 2014). It has demonstrated its validity as a method throughout previous studies for example, by Kiatsongchai and Choibamroong (2014) and Redjeki et al. (2021) in their exploration of hotels' marketing strategies as well as other market research studies (Döringer, 2021). The in-depth qualitative approach is also relevant when conducting expert interviews.

This study follows a structure described by Döringer (2021) which combines a theory-generating expert interview together with a problem-centered interview method to form the problem-centered expert interview. This structure highlights the perspectives of the interviewees and aims to generate new theories based on systematic and interpretative analysis of the interview data. The in-depth interview with experts in the field who have experienced and taken part in the management of the pandemic's impact on the business and its operations offers a unique perspective (Mears, 2012) that is required to answer the current research question. The gathered interview data were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis on the interview transcripts.

The marketing practices of SMEs similar to the current sample often reflect entrepreneurial perspectives and attitudes and can therefore lack standardized procedures. Moreover, the practices of marketing practitioners are often based on their experiences

over their careers rather than the existing theoretical models (Peng & Boonyanmethaporn, 2021). In response to this, the chosen methodology aims to gain an insight into the multidimensional nature of marketing operations by investigating how their current practices are shaped by individual perceptions and orientations (Döringer, 2021). Conducting expert interviews with the marketing personnel of these organizations is considered to offer insights into the current situations and related challenges of Finnish hotels together with the practical implications of the two widely used theoretical models. It also allows access to information that can be difficult to encounter using other methods. Especially in the context of the pandemic, the in-depth exploration of the perspectives and practices of this population beyond their explicit knowledge is necessary and further enabled by the chosen methodology.

3.2. Sample

The data of this study was collected by conducting seven semi-structured in-depth expert interviews with marketing professionals and related decision-makers of selected high-end hotels and resorts located in the Finnish Lapland. The sample of this study consists of independent hotels that offer luxury tourist experiences that classify as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with less than 250 employees and less than 100 rooms. This includes various types of hotels such as resort hotels, boutique hotels, and hotels that provide private cabins and lodges. This represents the range of accommodation providers around Finnish Lapland. The sample includes hotel owners, hotel managers, marketing managers, and other employees that currently contribute to the management of the hotel's marketing operations. No other demographic information was collected to maintain full anonymity of the participants' identities and as these are not considered to be relevant to the context of the companies' current marketing operations.

The participants were recruited using convenience sampling by contacting companies that fit the sample criteria and fulfill the definition of a Finnish luxury hotel via email invitations. Convenience sampling locates participants based on a first-come-first-served basis until a large enough sample is acquired (Robinson, 2014). This was deemed to be the appropriate sampling method as gaining expert interviews based on other methods such as random sampling can be challenging due to the restricted time frame of the project and the

willingness of the limited number of companies that fit the required criteria to take part in such study. As per the discussion of the Finnish luxury tourism prior, the recruitment of participants included the requirement of providing experiences that through participation create intrinsic customer and experiential value, which is based on the definition of Finnish luxury tourism experience suggested by Iloranta (2021). The participant recruitment process included searching for hotels and accommodation providers online that provide luxury experiences that emphasize meaningfulness and authenticity of a holistic experience that is customized to customer needs and aimed at making customers feel special while having the customer play an active role in the experience itself (Iloranta, 2021). This was initially done by conducting a Google search for hotels in Finnish Lapland and then through the hotels' websites. Information regarding the hotels' size and services was derived from the companies' websites and their overall online presence and based on the available information the researcher decided whether they fitted the criteria for participation before contacting the organization.

Participant #	Job title	# of rooms
1	Receptionist	14
2	Owner/Hotel manager	11
3	Hotel manager	57
4	Head of marketing	69
5	International travel expert	8
6	General manager	60
7	General manager	Location A 85 / Location B 50

Table 1. Sample information

3.3. Operationalization

To explore the current marketing strategies of these organizations and to ensure the relevance of the interviews to the research question, an interview guide was generated utilizing structures from previous studies (Sfikas, 2020; Redjeki et al., 2021) and drawing upon the structures and sensitizing concepts derived from the previously discussed 7Ps Service Marketing Mix model (Booms & Bitner, 1981). Each applicable element was placed in the context of the marketing processes identified by the Service Marketing Triangle

model; external, interactive, and internal marketing (Grönroos, 1978). The questions were constructed based on how each element, as per their definition stated in the literature review, is present and utilized in the hotels' marketing strategies. More specifically, the interview questions focused on enquiring how each of these elements emerges in the context of external, internal, and interactive marketing. The guide was adjusted accordingly to fit the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and additional questions were formulated to fit the aim of this project to also allow for an explorative approach. The interviews also included open questions that allowed for the natural emergence of topics as it offers the participants the chance to enclose any relevant information they wish to share and see relevant to the topic. This is suggested to be an appropriate approach to expert interviews as a data collection process (Bogner et al., 2009). Appendix C provides an outline of the final interview guide.

The chosen exploratory approach that is often used to explore new and interesting findings (Swedberg, 2020) was adopted due to the novelty of the impact of the pandemic and the relatively limited previous research on the marketing strategies of high-end or luxury tourism destinations in Lapland (Iloranta, 2021). This approach also allowed for greater flexibility in the interview design as it enabled the exploration of unexpected findings based on the participants' unique experiences and the formation of follow-up questions on the emerging topics that may not have emerged throughout previous literature (Stevens & Wrenn, 2013).

3.4. Procedure

The interviews were conducted online using Zoom, WhatsApp, and Microsoft Teams according to the expressed preference of the participants, at an allocated time slot agreed upon between the researcher and the participant between March and May of 2022. The duration of the interviews was approximately 40 minutes to an hour. The semi-structured interviews followed the before-mentioned interview guide based on the discussed 7Ps marketing mix model. However, as the chosen semi-structured approach allowed for new questions to emerge throughout the interviewing process any additional questions related to these emerging themes and marketing practices were formulated accordingly. To reinforce a systematic and coherent analysis process the transcripts were transcribed

verbatim after which they were coded and analyzed using a combination of Atlas.ti computer software designed for qualitative data analysis and manual coding by the researcher. To improve readability, the quotes referenced in the analysis have been simplified to exclude word repetitions and vocalized pauses. One of the participants did not consent to the interview being recorded. To compensate for the lack of an interview transcript, the researcher took comprehensive notes of the discussion during the interview. The answers of this participant are discussed in the analysis by paraphrasing their answers without references to direct quotes.

3.5. Validity and reliability

To enhance the reliability of the findings, the discussion provides a visualization of the analysis process, makes comparisons, and discusses direct quotes from the conducted interviews to further validate the researcher's interpretations (Alhojailan, 2012). Validity of the analysis, the application of the chosen methods, and the extent to which the findings accurately reflect the actual data are ensured by seeking out similarities and differences in the data. This also ensures a reflection of all expressed perspectives. The analysis included verbatim descriptions of participants' responses to further support the findings and provide an in-depth assessment of the methodology of the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). Moreover, as thematic analysis heavily relies on the researcher's interpretations of the text, the analysis also accounts for potential factors regarding the background of the researcher that may influence the study findings. This is done by ensuring reliance on the data rather than on the expected findings. The potential factors include the influence of the researcher's existing knowledge about marketing strategies based on previous literature. Moreover, the researcher herself is of Finnish background and is born in Finnish Lapland and may therefore already be familiar with some of the organizations and their marketing efforts. To minimize any preconceptions on the topic the analytical approach emphasizes and continuously reflects on these factors and ensures an explorative approach and open-mindedness when approaching and interpreting the data. Furthermore, some additional topics emerged throughout the interviews that were not reflected in previous research. In these instances, the researcher ensured reliance on the interview data by connecting the made interpretations to excerpts of the transcripts and provided full transparency when discussing the made interpretations and the overall analytical process (Noble & Smith, 2015).

3.6. Data analysis

The interview data was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. This was considered the most appropriate for the conducted type of data and aim of the study as it allows for the identification and analysis of emerging patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Due to the nature of service marketing, as discussed previously, it is crucial to consider the interactions and relations that take place between various elements without isolating them and inferring causal relationships. The chosen approach allows for an interpretive approach that explores the concepts related to this type of service marketing in the wider societal and cultural context (Clarke & Braun, 2014). This includes the consideration of the wider impact of the pandemic, the current role of marketing in the hotel industry, and the unique context of the tourism business in the geographical and cultural area of Finnish Lapland. To conduct a systematic exploration of the current themes emerging in service marketing of these hotels and their interpretation of them the analysis process includes open, axial, and selective coding as described by Boeije (2010) and derives influence from sensitizing concepts from previous research and the Triangle model of service marketing. The analysis process started with a close reading of the transcripts and an open coding process in which all meaningful information was labeled regardless of their direct relevance to the research topic as the aim was to also discover novel ideas and practices in the hotels' operations. In addition to inductive codes, deductive codes were derived from the 7Ps Service Marketing Mix framework (product, place, price, promotion, physical evidence, people, and process). Following this, relevant and meaningful quotes were extracted and placed in the context of the research question and the previous literature to determine their relevance to the research topic. After this ongoing comparison, the text fragments were assigned to relevant codes and were then examined for possible data patterns and relations.

A codebook was formed following axial coding where the labeled codes and relevant categories were assessed based on their relevance, to allow for further operationalization of the concepts and provide detail on the chosen methodological approach. The final core categories and themes were formed based on all relevant information to answer the research question through a process of comparison during the selective coding. Appendix B

displays how the themes were developed and how they relate to the theoretical frameworks.

4. Findings

Throughout the interviews, the following dimensions of the hotels' marketing strategies emerged: the communication of service concept, feel, and facilities (product), distribution of services through hotels' own and third party channels (place), pricing strategies based on demand and brand positioning (price), promotional tools inclusive of digital marketing, traditional media, and destination marketing (promotion), hotels' promotional material (physical evidence), employee training (people), operational management (process) and customized customer experiences (people + process). These indicate aspects that the hotels currently utilize to set, enable, and deliver their service promise. The discussion here identifies current strengths, challenges, and opportunities for these hotels and their marketing strategies. Some of the emerged subthemes emphasize new topics and practices unique to this sample that emerged from the interview data.

4.1. Product

The hotels use their unique physical and abstract service features and the sufficient communication of them to set an accurate and realistic service promise. The most prominent mentions regarding the hotels' products include the attributes of their service feel and service concept.

4.1.1. Service feel

The intangible features and perceived quality of the services are central to the hotels' external communication of their product offering. Each of the seven participants provides friendly, personable, and high-quality services that adhere to their customers' needs. Some of the hotels reference providing services that take the individual wellbeing and needs of the customers into consideration. For example, participant 6 stated that:

“the most important thing is that the guest gets a customized customer experience from the entire experience when he interacts with our staff the staff is authentically interested in their matters, their well-being, and the success of their stay”.

Similar care for the customer was highlighted by participant 4 as they mentioned:

“our goal is to bring the home feeling to our guests and also like all the guests at our hotel are treated as VIP guests so it’s always, we always try to understand what they really need”.

Participant 7 concurred with a similar message of their customer getting a non-standard friendly service for a high price point and a feeling of visiting family. Using such symbols to communicate a unique personality is often used by marketers to appeal to customers’ emotions and influence their behavior (George, 2021). This is considered effective as tourism consumers often seek services that correspond to their self-image and can form emotional bonds with (George, 2021). These findings are consistent with the notion of authenticity of friendly and down-to-earth Finnish culture in luxury hotel services (Iloranta & Komppula, 2021). Friendly customer service by individual hotel providers is also found to be a differentiating factor among Lapland’s different destinations (Aro et al., 2018). However, the current findings indicate that such service features tend to be fairly consistent across the hotels. This may suggest that the homely and personable service may not be as unique to hotel brands but rather a common element of hotels in Lapland at large.

Each of these hotels highlights features that fit the characteristics of Finnish Lapland luxury tourism such as high-quality customizable services and friendly authentic interactions. These findings concur with the previously discussed concept of new luxury tourism that is rather concerned with hedonic experiences that focus on catering and ensuring one’s happiness and wellbeing (Ivanov, 2012; Iloranta, 2019; Piispanen, 2021). However, some participants avoid characterizing their products as belonging to the luxury category. Three of the hotels explicitly identify providing luxury experiences. This was evident in responses such as “we have a Facebook and Instagram to promote us through to show the quests the design and the luxury experience” (participant 1), “it is still like an experience and like a high-end accommodation” (participant 5), and “for example, world luxury hotels gala is one of those that we have gained positive experiences from, and it says about the quality of our operations” (participant 6). Another three hotels claim their hotels are not luxury and perceive this to be due to their services being more experience and activity-based rather than luxurious. For example, participant 4 noted: “the ones that are looking for an active high-quality holiday that we are not a 5-star hotel and we do not want

to be a 5-star hotel neither do we offer service like that, but people who are looking for high quality and active holiday are our customers”.

The findings suggest that the Finnish Luxury hotels tend not to characterize themselves as providing luxury services as they do not consider themselves to fit the notion of traditional luxury discussed earlier. This is further reinforced by the fact that third-party resellers who form their view of the hotel and its services by visiting the location describe their hotel with references to luxury. As participant 2 mentioned: “if some from the travel agency put on their website that we are a luxury place, which that we ourselves don’t use or describe ourselves as...sometimes we have had to communicate that with these prices you will not get a complete full-time maid at your service”. However, the same participant also discussed the high quality of their services when saying: “[the services] are also high quality... the services are aligned with our prices, that...and for those who understand and respect that”.

This indicates an avoidance of associating the hotel or its services with traditional luxury and suggests an incongruence between the perceived and delivered product. The discrepancy in the perceived product could further provide an opportunity for hotels to revisit their concept and ensure that the product design and its description, correspond to the experienced product. Doing so could provide an opportunity to better position their brand in the wider market and provide more accurate service promises.

Hotels overall do not consider the pandemic to have had a great impact on their businesses. The consequences reported by the hotels are temporary closures and the lack of general accessibility to hotel products during the national restrictions. In addition to these, the only notable impact hotels interviewees identified is the changes in the demand for experiences such as the ones offered by Finnish Lapland:

“we offer high-quality accommodation services, and those activities and nature experiences has not changed...but then demand for them has come with the pandemic, so when people have had the time, they have had the time after the pandemic, resort-like destinations like where we are near nature ... so actually the demand, the demand has come to us, we have this kind of offering” (participant 4).

One participant also noted an increase in customer expectations following the pandemic:

“the customer expectation about the destination and about the things that there that they do there so they had gone up, which was expected in a way, and we were also relatively well prepared for that, also that the people also seem to have more wealth, or it had been saved that money and they wanted to then spend that on different services when they are here” (participant 6).

This demonstrates inconsistency with previous literature regarding the Covid-19 pandemic’s wider impact on hotels. However, the current findings do highlight the previously identified importance and growing demand for experiential service products.

4.1.2. Service concept

The range of services provided by the hotels varies between hotel types. The hotels express the need to sufficiently communicate the uniqueness of their either abstract or tangible features to the final customer to set accurate expectations of the services. The hotels’ uniqueness is most often attributed to the role of nature, customization of services, and the use of technology. The hotels’ facilities together with the activity and nature-related customer experiences emerged repeatedly when they are seen to differ from the traditional expectation one might have of a hotel. Some participants considered the details of their offerings to be important for their customers when choosing to stay with them as these differ from other destinations in the Lapland area. For example, participant 2 said:

“we exactly have the unique and customized service, good service and the location...understanding that is important...those things I would hope that are...also the fact that it is a small place with very few people, so it is not like when compared to a larger hotel like for example on the arctic circle”.

Another theme that emerged is the hotel’s careful consideration and customization of the service offering to the needs of their target markets. This is reflected in the respondents’ either explicit references or comments about acknowledging the unique range of their customer’s profiles. For example, participant 2 highlighted:

“my own purpose was to be a clearly and mainly an ecological place, clearly green, that we wouldn’t offer at all snowmobiling, but during the first two winter seasons, we noticed that every customer wanted snowmobiling so then we had to start providing that too”.

Similarly, participant 5 described: “honeymooners, so then now we offer packages for them.... And then nature travelers, then cyclists because there are incredible routes. So, these sub-target audiences have been determined very specifically”. This individualized and targeted approach to the hotels’ services works to set certain expectations in the mind of the customer as personalization is often part of good service and the core of hospitality in hotels (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012). Such efforts can also further influence customers’ choice of hotel (Mihelj, 2010, as cited in Ylimartimo & Manninen, 2018).

The theme of nature emerged as another central topic in reference to the offered product. References to nature included mentions of rooms decorated with differing nature-related themes, the location of the hotel in the middle of the wilderness, and with altogether three hotels highlighting sustainable technologies and features embedded in their rooms and other operations. Nature is particularly central to the four resort hotels that offer accommodation and service packages that include for example husky safaris, snowmobile safaris, northern lights hunting, and reindeer rides. For the accommodation-only hotels, similar activities can also be added on as an additional service provided by an external organization as per the request of the customer. Three hotels whose main product is hotel accommodation also provide additional services such as food and drinks either by their catering and restaurant services or in collaboration with an external service provider.

The products of the hotels are also highly linked to the geographical location of the hotels. This is visible in the hotels’ mentions of the nature or calmness offered by the physical surroundings of the hotel:

“The most important thing there is that.... that really is that...that we are located in the wilderness, we are a very calm location, and we have a very small number of people here, like so even when we are full it is very low key. Yes and...and that there is nothing like...large numbers of people...so it’s peace and peaceful...and that our safaris are very...are a very small number of people at a time” (participant 2).

Participant 5 similarly highlighted the affordances of their location: “it is not mass tourism but regards to this that is the place, so that is very important and then the specialty that there are no lights like that so you can see the northern lights”.

Spreading awareness of the hotel’s offering, therefore, is also important as the hotels tend to seek customers who are appreciative of the affordances of their location. This can be a beneficial approach as the attractiveness and uniqueness of the location can facilitate a connection between the customer and the destination, which is then further reinforced during their stay (Ylimartimo & Manninen, 2018). As seen here, the product offering of these hotels may not be limited to the hotels' own services but also that of the entire area in which they are located. This indicates a shift from the differentiation of the hotel’s offering to a wider emphasis on the destination and its features.

Altogether the discussion here shows that the hotels utilize a wide offering that encompasses unique features throughout the facilities, services, and overall location to provide their customers with one-of-a-kind experiences. Together with this, the hotels use clear design and communication of their core, additional, and expanded product elements to set their service promise. Moreover, although differentiation of services can often be difficult as no single set of features can be considered desirable by all customers (Becerra et al., 2013), the range of customized services allows these hotels to differentiate their services and cater to the specific needs of their target customer.

4.2. Place

Travel agencies, tour operators, and other third-party distributors play a crucial role in the hotels’ marketing strategies. Although sufficient channels for sales and their management, these distribution channels limit and challenge the accuracy of the service promise. This suggests a need for hotels in Finnish Lapland to develop their brand and gain control of its communication and distribution while utilizing the visibility offered by these channels.

4.2.1. Tourism intermediaries

Travel agencies and tour operators were elaborately discussed in interviews which indicates their importance in these hotels’ marketing strategies. Two participants identified

these professional networks as their sole target audience for their external marketing efforts. For the remaining five hotels, travel agencies and tour operators are their main source of new business although they do also benefit from direct marketing efforts. For these hotels, the importance of travel agency and tour operator networks when compared to OTAs is derived from their ability to reach the desired customers and market the same offering as the hotels' direct channels. For example, participant 3 mentioned: "with online travel agencies we only sell hotel rooms and then again our retailers can also have like comprehensive packages that include then like in addition to accommodation and restaurant also activities and shuttle service" and continued to say "growing of the resale network, so internationally we have approximately hundreds of retailers around the world depending on our target markets. And through them own agent networks through which we achieve some visibility".

This is consistent with previous literature that state that tour operators grant a range of benefits to smaller organizations through accessibility to new and wider markets and their ability to direct the tourist flow (Romero & Tejada, 2020). This is important to the hotels with the identified aim to reach defined markets of people that purchase entire service packages instead of solely their accommodation services. However, these networks come with limitations, such as the fact that reliance on traditional travel agencies caters to a tourism segment that is shrinking globally (Romero & Tejada, 2020).

As briefly mentioned, one of the hotels' current significant challenges is travel agencies' and tour operators' role in the setting of the service promise. Third-party sellers that construct their own perceptions and understanding of the services can often provide inconsistent information about the hotel and its brand, which is then further marketed to their customers. For example, participant 4 noted that:

"we have, for example... case currently discuss with the tour operators about how if we are a Christmas destination, like is this hotel a Christmas destination if we have our own elves that are ours, what kind of Christmas lights do we have and else and like we are not...We have no need to make us into a Christmas land in December and yeah so, it is always difficult to communicate that and maintain our own messaging and idea, and it doesn't it doesn't always go that way".

The messages communicated by these external parties who perform as information and communication intermediaries and constitute the setting of customer expectations must be aligned with the promises made by the hotels (Romero & Tejada, 2020). This could be done by adjusting the hotels' promises to better correspond to the genuine experience perceived by the customer or the tour operators during their visits. Although the managerial perceptions of the offering perform as a basis for accurate brand communication, allowing tour operators to construct their perception of the hotel may be a better indicator of the reality of the authentic customer experience.

In addition to the more traditional intermediaries, OTA channels also play a crucial role in the hotels' marketing strategies. These channels are seen to ease these hotels' sales and marketing operations and therefore function as one of their main tools for gaining visibility. It is similarly noted in the literature that OTA channels afford hotels visibility and increased traffic on their own channels (Romero & Tejada, 2020). However, their use also poses significant challenges for these hotels. OTA channels are not seen as an ideal sales channel for resort hotels that provide a wide range of activities and services for a defined target audience. Participant 4 discussed this by saying:

“those channels are limited in what we can tell the customer, tell them about our services and there we cannot sell these holiday packages or others so that it is very basic hotel type of customers that we get through bookings.com so the customer is very different from the one that comes directly to us or through the tour operators”.

Relatedly to the other tourism intermediaries, this highlights the challenge of visibility and accuracy of the way their brand is represented through OTAs. Overall, unlike the tour operators who still provide bargaining power to the organization itself, the OTAs fail to deliver similar benefits (Romero & Tejada, 2020). For two of the hotels, the use of OTA channels only allows for the distribution of their accommodation services which is not their intended main product. Moreover, although OTAs provide good visibility and new customers, they are a significant cost that the hotels would prefer to avoid. This was indicated by four participants. Participant 4 reflected this in their response saying, “OTA channels are good really good channels for sales of course because it is quite expensive sales, we would prefer to sell directly ourselves”. Literature also identifies a power

asymmetry between OTAs and the service suppliers alongside similar issues of high commission costs for the hotels they distribute (Kontis et al., 2019; Romero & Tejada, 2020).

The findings further reveal the hotels' preference to lessen their reliance on OTAs. The same participant with a preference for direct sales mentioned that:

“we would prefer to sell directly ourselves which then requires awareness so that people would know to go to our website so that we would be in a position where we could get customers to purchase from us directly, but at the moment we are not in that position to do that so that's why we are involved in these channels but that will maybe be the first thing we leave out if we manage to gain direct sales from our website so that we do not need them anymore”.

Following this perspective, participant 7 had witnessed an increase in their direct sales as a result of increased branding efforts. Some of the remaining hotels also aim to reevaluate their use and investment in OTAs in their strategy by weighing their costs and benefits.

Overall, the findings reveal the hotels' preference for direct sales over third-party distributors, which further supports the need for these hotels to develop a distinctive service brand and to invest in their direct distribution channels. In fact, hotels that adopt tourism intermediaries in their strategies are said to be less innovative with their services and lack the adoption of ICTs (Romero & Tejada, 2020). This is therefore suggested to be a weak strategy and instead, smaller hotel businesses should diversify their distribution channels for example through direct selling (Romero & Tejada, 2020). Moreover, digitalization and investment in direct sales channels offer a way for businesses to step away from their reliance on these third-party distributors (Romero & Tejada, 2020; Kontis et al., 2019).

4.2.2. Website

The participants recognize the crucial role of the hotel's website in communicating the service promise and its potential as a direct sales channel. In terms of branding, the website is indicated to provide a sufficient channel for communicating accurate information about the hotel's offering and for reflecting the overall feel of the hotel. The website was claimed as one of the main channels for brand communication and a way for customers to

gain an understanding of what they should expect from the hotel. Two participants also indicate being in the process of improving their brand communication on their website in the future. This is done through efforts to sell various service packages on their websites and technical improvements in their booking engines. Placing more efforts on the hotel's own channels suggests these hotels' slow shift towards further developing marketing efforts through direct channels. However, most of the hotels seem to retain their main focus on the discussed tourism intermediaries.

Although hotels express a wide preference for direct sales on their own website over third-party distributors, many of the hotels discussed their websites mainly in reference to their importance in providing information about the services, not so much in their efforts to further reinforce direct sales. Moreover, although these hotels continue to treat intermediaries as their main distribution channels, the interviews reveal an increasing awareness of the opportunities offered by direct sales which further highlights developmental opportunities for the future. The findings here are therefore not entirely consistent with previous findings that hotels' own distribution channels have declined while the dependency on OTA and other intermediaries continues to grow (Kontis et al., 2019). Instead, the hotels' distribution channels seem to have remained relatively stable within their operations with some hotels looking to further increase the investment of their direct channels. However, the findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that higher-quality hotels tend to demonstrate a lack of marketing features on their websites together with an overall low adoption of technologies in their marketing efforts (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006). The findings also support the notion that hotels express similar concerns about OTA channels and a desire to break free from them (Kontis et al., 2019). This further sustains the suggestion for these hotels to recognize the role of distribution and communication channels in their overall strategy and to continue reassessing their reliance on third-party distributors.

4.3. Price

A decade ago, Lapland was seen as rather expensive but also as having extensive opportunities to become a premium destination (Hallott, 2013). The findings of this study suggest that the prices are only seen to increase alongside the popularity and demand for Lapland tourism. By increasing their prices hotels aim to set certain expectations about the

quality and exclusivity of their services, which may however suffer certain damages during the low summer season and related price reductions.

4.3.1. Fluctuations in demand

Hotels in this area tend to adopt pricing strategies that utilize discounts during periods of low demand to attract customers and maintain occupancy levels. The hotels report reducing their prices during low-demand periods and alternatively raising their prices during the high season which for Lappish tourism is between November and April. In Finnish Lapland, the reduced prices during summer tend to attract more domestic clientele. One of the hotels stated this to be as “Finnish people are not ready to pay for these nature experiences” (participant 3) during the high winter season. The unwillingness of this segment to pay high prices for such services could indicate a discrepancy between the perceived value and the price of the service in the eyes of the Finnish customer.

Price reductions are also utilized during other low-demand periods. Most participants mentioned reducing their prices significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic to maintain their occupancy level with the limited domestic and international clientele. One participant mentioned also using quick price promotions in response to a large group cancellation during the high season. Overall, most participants mentioned preferring not to adjust their prices drastically or wishing to maintain or even raise their current rates to maintain consistency between the price and concept of the hotel. The relationship between the hotels’ concept and price was also discussed in reference to attracting a particular target customer and communicating service value.

4.3.2. Price positioning

During the winter months, the hotels’ prices seem to correspond to the value of the experience, as the respondents report receiving highly positive customer reviews and increased demand even when continuing to raise their prices. However, as the prices are adjusted to be significantly more affordable during the low-demand seasons, this might bring people to question their perceptions of the hotel’s overall quality (Yang et al., 2016; Heyes & Lashley, 2017). Lowering the price may be an efficient way to attract the domestic market by addressing the price-value discrepancy, however, this can result in a detrimental effect on the overall brand image and service quality in the long run. This is as such changes

in prices may become increasingly more difficult to justify (Anttikoski, 2020) as the brand develops and gains awareness based on its original positioning as a high-end destination. Providing significantly more affordable services during the summer season may therefore work to discredit their offering and communicate a different service value.

Amongst the interviewed hotels, however, price is not seen as a central indicator of value in their external marketing communications. Four participants consider this secondary as the hotels are more driven to showcase their offerings. Even other hotels that do advertise their prices, rather focus on communicating what the price entails. This was seen in participant 6's response:

“we want to bring up but that what everything you can get for that price, so exactly that because say the return on investment from the perspective of the customer...but people have to like to get a clear understanding about that the prices in themselves are not comparable but that the content is what matters”.

It is suggested by previous literature, that hotels should utilize their price positioning and ensure their prices are aligned with the overall concept of the hotel (Anttikoski, 2020). However, there is an emerging challenge for some of the hotels to discover and establish their positioning as a summer destination alongside the changing marketing mix elements such as product and price. This was discussed by participant 2:

“That...now a little bit with the summer season, it sets us a... a kind of a challenge here that that the prices are at completely different level as in the winter, as it also is missing some of the services, we provide for the winter season. so that is a little bit like something I have been pondering a lot... but because the aim is to still sell our rooms, we cannot keep the same prices as during the winter”.

They continued this by stating: “what is the same is the place and the rooms, in the summer...but then other than that a lot of other things are different”.

The hotels identified being aware of what their pricing communicates to their customer and in particular reference to setting the correct kind of expectation of the level of

personalized service customers should expect for the given price point. For example, participant 4 highlighted that:

“the prices of our destination are in a way that they do create certain expectations in the customers that you must receive quality service when you do come here, and certain customization, etc. yes, it is the price-quality ratio regards to that is.... when you purchase the activities or the accommodation so that they do expect the quality also”.

The attitudes expressed amongst the respondents are in line with the previous findings suggesting that higher prices increase customer expectations and perceptions of the service (Knutson et al., 1993; Heyes & Lashley, 2017). Creating value expectations through the correct price position is therefore paramount for the hotels and their success (Anttikoski, 2020).

The hotels also set high prices for their services to attract the desired segment that consists of international customers who are more likely to purchase the full range of offered services rather than only accommodation. This is a strategic choice that is efficient for attracting certain types of customers such as the ones that are price insensitive or more luxury-oriented (Dev & Morgan, 1995). Participant 3 stated: “the price of our rooms and activity packages is that high that so that 97% come from abroad”. Whereas participant 2 mentioned “to have prices that...and on the second winter that they were attracting the wrong kind of customers” about customers who only purchase accommodation and no other provided services. Moreover, previous findings suggest that price is not necessarily indicative of a higher level of luxury, but rather correlated with higher exclusivity (Heyes & Lashley, 2017). As mentioned, the hotels wish to communicate an overall high quality and uniqueness of their services, not necessarily their luxuriousness per se. For example, as highlighted by one participant: “with these prices you will not get a complete full-time maid at your service” (participant 2). This indicates that these hotels utilize their pricing strategy to establish a level of exclusivity for their hotel.

Although the hotels demonstrate knowledge about the prices’ impact on the expectations and perceived quality of their services, as discussed, they are still pressured to respond to external forces, such as low demand. This may further influence customer

perceptions although managers themselves do not consider price to be a central indicator of value. In response to this, hotels should treat price adjustments with caution and understand the implications of their pricing strategies on the expectations and ensure these correspond to the product itself (Heyes & Lashley, 2017).

4.4. Promotion

Overall, most participants aim to create clear expectations throughout their external marketing communications. To communicate the product offering to potential customers, these seven hotels utilize traditional media, social media marketing, and destination marketing. Traditional media is used to some extent but is marginal in the bigger picture. Digital marketing, on the other hand, is adopted by most of the hotels. The most prevalent digital marketing tool is influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is seen as a crucial tool for communicating the service promise accurately and its role is only seen to grow in the future. Furthermore, as mentioned, hotels deem tourism intermediaries to be their main channel for distribution, but also as an important tool for promotions. Especially destination management organizations (DMOs) are used to gain awareness and advertise the different areas of Lapland.

4.4.1. Traditional media

Traditional media such as local newspapers or television adverts are utilized by altogether three participants but at a very small scale. Participant 3 mentioned using local print media for “visibility and also mainly through the image and brand awareness”, whereas participant 7 mentioned print media support their operations rather than provides revenue. This is because the hotels’ target market is largely international and therefore traditional local media would not be sufficient for reaching this target audience. Moreover, utilizing traditional media internationally is too expensive and not effective enough to be justified. This opposes the literature’s view that more high-end brands have a heavier reliance on traditional media as a promotional channel (Creevey et al., 2022).

4.4.2. Digital marketing

Social media is currently adopted in Lappish high-end hotels in different ways and to a varying extent. Its use is largely dependent on the audience the hotels wish to target. Five

out of the seven participants mentioned using social media in their marketing. One participant described their social media use as: “targeted campaigns that have been done to a specific country or part of a country that has gained traffic to our social media to our website” (participant 6). Participant 1 accompanied this by saying:

“for example, like Facebook, and Instagram to promote us and ugh to chat more with customers and followers and also, we offer special offers during the certain period for our customer, so it is also bringing more customers to us”.

The remaining two participants do not utilize social media as one of their promotional channels. One of these two has an online presence, however, they are not very active on any of the platforms. The remaining hotel is not present on social media at all and reasoned this by saying:

“I know that through social media you can achieve a lot of also domestic consumers but...social media...or let’s say it has not been used exactly because it is like a strong trump to the tour operators that we offer a top lovely product directly to them that is nowhere else” (Participant 5).

Both hotels that lack social media operate largely on a business-to-business basis with the travel agencies and tour operators that also help them to manage their sales-related inquiries. Therefore, these hotels do not deem social media to be efficient for their marketing aims.

Four of the hotels that utilize social media marketing in their strategy also use influencers as a promotional tool. Collaborating with influencers with organic following that suit the brand image and provide hotels visibility on their platforms is a sufficient tool for attracting new audiences through word-of-mouth. The participants discussed these collaborations by saying:

“we use influencers very much and that is our kind of suitable and aligned with our image, so within Finland influencers and social media, we have been studied and seen to be the best approach to our brand building” (participant 3).

“thanks to these influencers that we have been able to grow our audience that there has been very good in the tourism industry there is a very good one quite significant thing, but there are some that are skeptical about it, so they just come for a holiday the own work in that plays a significant part in that who you start collaborating with and you demand in response to them staying the night” (participant 4).

“Yes we do and we get a lot of requests and we go through very carefully we have a little group here internally that goes through and looks into whether the particular influencer suits our doings, our brand, and our operations in general and that is for sure a thing that in the future stays with us and even in a way that it is going to have its own strategic planning in the future for the future” (participant 6).

These findings concur with previous literature that notes similar advantages and the effectiveness of influencer marketing for international hotels (Yardi & Aksoz, 2019; Famenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020; Yetimoglu & Ugurlu, 2020; George, 2021). Moreover, choosing the correct influencers that are consistent with the brand is similarly reported to help hotels to further develop their brand identity and to communicate their services in a more tangible way (Yardi & Aksoz, 2019, Yetimoglu & Ugurlu, 2020).

4.4.3. Destination marketing

Altogether four participants see collaborating with local third-party partners such as DMOs as one of the most promotional tools. These liaisons with local travel organizations such as Visit Finland are seen to “operate kind of like a continuation and base of our operations” (participant 6) and to help hotels “get regional visibility as a part of local destination management organization that we have been building all the way from the beginning” (participant 3). These findings are consistent with previous literature that highlight the importance of DMOs for small to medium-sized hotels and their contribution to the hotels’ overall business development (Ahmad & Saber, 2015).

Destination marketing is seen to be not only important to Lapland but also for the individual cities and towns that should also be recognized for their before-mentioned unique features and increased need for differentiation. The participants noted that:

“Lapland destination marketing that in my opinion it already is there at the moment, the threshold has been crossed, so that tour operators know what we are talking about ... but now I mean that Rovaniemi is well known, then there is Ruka-Kuusamo they have done a good job, and certain areas so exactly it is that Inari-Saariselkä it is that airport and that influential area marketing and there is tough competition” (participant 5).

“[marketing] is largely about strengthening of the brand image...then, of course, tell the reasons why they should visit Finland, North, this town and most importantly why the decision should be made to come to us, to come and stay in our hotel and enjoy our these our services and of course some of it is communication about current things about what is happening in the area, new and what new and interesting for example is included in our services” (participant 6).

Some participants also went on to state a clear difference between hotels in their product offerings and how this may not always be clear to the customers:

“the fact that it is a small place with very few people, so it is not like when compared to a larger hotel like for example on the Arctic Circle, we are a totally different product, and the ones who want that and come to us are in a completely wrong place and vice versa” (participant 2).

Concerning this, three participants are currently incorporating information about the town, its history, and current events in their external marketing messages. This can further improve the communication of a clear service promise.

These findings suggest that from these hotels’ perspective, there should be an augmented focus on promoting different Lappish regions to further increase their recognition amongst a wider international audience. These areas are seen to already be well-known to the Finnish population and within the scope of domestic tourism. This was evident in the discussion with participant 3 as they mentioned:

“Finnish people choose first the...area where they want to go so like mountain in Lapland destinations like is it Ylläs, Levi, Saariselkä, Ruka or kind of a smaller area of their interest and from there they search that... the suitable place of accommodation whereas international customer searches Lapland and then looks for a suitable accommodation option”.

Although the need for regional marketing is recognized, the hotels are experiencing challenges in its execution in the less established areas. Participant 5 reflected on this by saying:

“in the spring there at the moment it is very challenging because we are dealing with things like in here now at the moment there is already the problem that there, they close down restaurants, they close activities until some other like...let’s say summer activity equipment renting operations”.

Such closures and unavailability of crucial services limit the hotel's offering and the overall attractiveness of the destination. This further supports the notion that cooperation between suppliers in an area is crucial for the hotels’ ability to offer high-quality services and enhance their competitiveness in the market (Buhalis, 2000; Komppula, 2014).

Moreover, although some of the participants recognize the potential of Lapland as a summer destination, they also report facing additional challenges regarding the summer season as an unexplored market. Two participants are experiencing changes in their services and having to adjust them to meet the demands of the summer travelers. Participant 2 referenced this by saying “there is not really knowledge about what that we have...about what kinds of customers and international people are traveling during the summer. It is a very different customer base to the ones that come during the winter”. Participant 5 followed this with: “the summer travelers behave differently but then begins autumn and...then there are the first northern lights and well that has been throughout very precisely like a year clock”.

Addressing seasonal changes in customer needs would require the organizations to evaluate their offering and how these changes suit their overall brand. Moreover, executing successful destination marketing and being able to claim its benefits throughout the year

requires the participation of not only one but multiple businesses in the area to ensure sufficient offering and attractiveness of the destination (Buhalis, 2000). This highlights the role of cooperation and the interdependence of destination stakeholders in the strategic management of service businesses (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; George, 2021). Moreover, it suggests a wider need for concentrated regional marketing to better communicate the affordances of the diverse towns of Finnish Lapland and as a result to set a more accurate service promise.

4.5. Physical evidence

As discussed, the hotels identify multiple challenges with accurately communicating their brand to set realistic service expectations. To address this, these hotels utilize their promotional material across their own and third-party channels to communicate their brand promise more tangibly.

4.5.1. Promotional material

Visual marketing materials on the hotel's website, social media, and third-party distribution channels play an important role in communicating the provided service experience in a concrete and consistent manner. These channels should therefore provide accurate information about the hotels' brand and its offering. For example, participant 3 stated: "when we market ourselves to the final customer it [website] of course plays a very important role, the notion of what our service concept is, we keep it important in that" which was further supported by participant 6's statement:

"there is yes website and all of that material that is there available to whoever one of our guests, so that that has directed the guest to come to us and to become active in for example in making the booking, so the brand is communicated through our website...through the accuracy and timeliness of the information and of course still the consistency so all the photo material and text and others are connected to our value and operational world".

The main challenge the hotels are experiencing in the communication of their promise through promotional material is the inconsistency in messages between the hotel's

own channels and the third-party distributors. For example, as discussed previously, the tour operator visits are reported to result in differing perceptions of the service than the ones of the providers. The use of promotional material generated by the hotels, therefore, plays an important role in controlling the flow of brand communication. This further highlights the use of direct channels such as their website and social media in accurately communicating their service offering.

Customer feedback especially online reviews can also help hotels to communicate their service promise more tangibly and credibly (George, 2021). Three of the hotels utilize these in their external communications. The participants consider authentic reviews that reflect the genuine experiences of customers who have stayed at the hotel important for their operations. For example, participants mentioned:

“we would bring forward things that let’s say that the actual the guests that have actually stayed there their feedback...we have gotten also negative as well as positive feedback and the positive feedback, of course, is utilized in the marketing from those we tell the tour operators what the customers have liked and really everything that is the feedback that let’s renew this and that so that is for real taken into account” (participant 5).

“[customer reviews] are always visible of course and people of course read them a lot, on those booking websites, like booking.com that...because only a person who has actually booked a room and been here is able to leave a comment, whereas pages, like others...others, where... anyone can write things, it is, those ones are not that reliable because there is no guarantee if that person has even been here” (participant 2).

These findings reinforce the hotels’ strategy to use customer reviews to enable the communication of the service in a more tangible and credible way (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). However, although some of the hotels highlight customer reviews in their external marketing, the majority only use them to improve operational aspects. Increasing customer review visibility significantly impacts customers’ purchase intention especially when the product is relatively expensive (George, 2021), and could therefore be a useful element to

incorporate into these hotels' strategies. The use of customer reviews can also help to further communicate the brand's promise and the creation of authentic experiences.

Overall, physical evidence demonstrates higher importance in these hotels' overall marketing strategy and the communication of service promises than identified in a previous study of small-sized hotels in Thailand (Prapannetivuth, 2015). This may be as these hotels work to manage the identified issues with the accurate communication of their brand and service promise by further emphasizing the role of physical evidence in their strategies. These findings are, however, consistent with previous studies that suggest that a physical evidence strategy utilizing the hotels' new media platforms and customer word-of-mouth help them convey service value and a perceived experience (Peng & Boonyanmethaporn, 2021).

4.6. People

Managing people who contribute to the customer experience is a crucial part of enabling the delivery of the hotels' service promise. Doing so requires internal processes such as staff training and setting of clear goals to further motivate and direct the employees.

4.6.1. Employee training

The hotels place high importance on their employees in regard to the success of the customer experience. Being able to provide exceptional services can further improve the perception and authenticity of the delivered service quality (Tag-Eldeen & El-Said, 2011). The hotels in this sample facilitate the delivery of quality services by providing clear instructions to their employees. This is evident in statements such as:

“It all starts from when one applies to work with us we aim to already then of course create that base picture of what we are and what we want to do here and how we want to do things and each person that comes as a new employee here they are given basic training that exactly includes values, operations, understanding about our customer base, our current and potential, and also an understanding of what the customer expectation is but what is also important is the expectation that the organization has for the employee” (participant 6).

Participant 7 also mentioned providing their employees with the necessary tools for them to be able to communicate with the customer. This includes customer service and technical training at the start of each season. Altogether six participants hold an induction or training period before the winter season starts. After this, employees go on to gain more technical training for their individual roles. Four hotels detail training to include communication about company values and related operations. Three of them also highlight the understanding of the customer needs and the service promise. This supports previous literature that recognizes customer wants and the incorporation of them into the training programs as an efficient tool in ensuring the productivity of a hotel's operations as well as a more marketing-driven approach to staff training (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997; Kilic & Okumus, 2005).

Emphasizing employee training in high-end hotels is an effective tool for ensuring customer satisfaction as such training can help reduce the gap between employees' and customers' perceptions of the service quality (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997). Although the staff is provided with intense training periods, two participants also mentioned encouraging their staff members to showcase their persona throughout their interactions with the customers. This helps the hotels to further communicate their promise of authenticity and personable customer service. Previous research also encourages an approach where employees are allowed to take initiative in personalizing the services (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997).

Some of the hotels also recognize the role of setting attainable goals for their staff in increasing their motivation to deliver their tasks successfully. For example, participant 6 highlighted:

“the community, community power is there that that of course everything related to work and working tools are in shape but also the understanding of what the goal is, without a goal it is difficult for anyone to do anything, so the setting of a goal is very important”.

Moreover, participant 7 described an internal policy of not hiring employees into management positions but rather allowing people to develop and grow with the company

to attain these positions. This ensures that the management is familiar with the brand and further motivates the current employees through opportunities for personal development. This drive to develop one's career can work to encourage brand internalization while working towards a goal to grow with the company.

These findings could further suggest a potential benefit of expanding operations to the summer tourism season to retain employees. Doing so could provide the employees with more motivation and time to internalize brand values and ensure the organization has a more integrated core workforce in addition to their seasonal employees.

4.7. Organizational processes

Organizational and managerial processes also demonstrate importance in enabling the successful delivery of the hotels' service promise. This includes the monitoring of operational processes and adjusting of their practices accordingly.

4.7.1. Management of operations

Being able to respond quickly and make necessary adjustments to operations is crucial for ensuring truly customized service delivery. This is highlighted in respondents' comments such as:

"we have a small place, we see the customers there, our employees are always in contact with the customers whenever they pass each other we in some way acknowledge them and make sure to ask how things are going and what is going on if they need anything. The idea is that the customer feels like he/she is being cared for and taken care of...that is very important...and also helps to deliver that as we are a small place" (participant 2).

"if guests want to have an earlier check-in or late check-out, we always offer them and...I think it is really good ... from my own opinion I think it is very good that it is more flexible than many others" (participant 1).

These findings indicate that the hotels utilize flexibility in their operations together with authentic, customized, and friendly services to fulfill the needs of the customer and the

service promise. The hotels' promises about individualized services are crucial as a previous study on five-star hotels suggests that many of their customers seek such personalized services (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997).

In relation to this, the hotels also practice close monitoring of the customer experiences and staff-customer interactions to ensure delivery of the service promise and quality:

“of course, that [brand communication] is related to feedback, own observations, general like monitoring and instructing that is that is the most important thing, but that we return back into our minds the purpose of what we do so that is usually enough for that so we follow the processes behind that so those processes are being followed once they are understood then this...like monitoring, which as a word does not fit this, but the general monitoring and involvement in matters is related in this brand the brand's and ensuring operations” (participant 6).

Overseeing the operations is particularly important due to the seasonal nature of Lapland tourism which also brings challenges to the hotels' internal management. For example, although staff training is delivered yearly, the winter season tends to not offer sufficient time for the employees to fully internalize the company's mission. To address this issue, the participants monitor their service processes closely as they happen throughout the season:

“our employees change quite a lot, whenever since we have only been able to offer work for the winter, so we always have 3 weeks to a month, 3 weeks when we do not have customers yet but we go through an induction period and....it continues in a way that when we do open and we start to have customers it is like...practically under my supervision that the service is like aligned to what it is supposed to be in a place like ours” (participant 2).

“For us we have an induction period, we have it at the moment here like still seasonal, seasonal opening times and seasonal employees, so that is still quite a challenge so how the induction happens and how much time is spent on it, and how much during that induction they can internalize these things so majority then

happens when doing the job and then there is the commitment of the immediate supervisors and other more experienced employees to our brand and our mission is highlighted” (participant 4).

“we have regular teams meetings, there is an agenda ... especially when I started the project that I had to internalize like that thing, and these men’s competence and then what I bring into the business so we really discuss and we have very often that it is the four of us and then often we discuss for example like me and two of them, depends on the matter but that is that the pandemic has really thought us that we can have these conversations like this” (participant 5).

“so that the old employees also remember what the thing is here about the regular meetings, regular discussions, monitoring and determining of personal development, they are important things” (participant 6).

However, participant 7 highlighted also avoiding micro-managing as it harms the promised authenticity of the service.

Process monitoring in these hotels extends from internal monitoring to the customer experience. This includes inspection of the customer experiences through customer feedback and incorporating operational changes accordingly. For example, participant 6 mentioned: “this feedback is improving us and help in our operational planning” whereas participant 3 similarly highlighted: “we systematically go through them when there is need or reason for it and when required we will make operational changes, to further improve the product and the quality of the services”.

This is consistent with previous research that recognizes process monitoring as a widely adopted practice in hotels (Buick & Muthu, 1997). Moreover, these hotels also recognize how process monitoring requires systematic evaluations to be able to identify where necessary changes should be made (Buick & Muthu, 1997). The positive feedback these hotels receive about their staff-customer encounters suggests that their employees are indeed equipped to deliver services that meet customer expectations. Maintaining successful customer experiences regardless of the challenges of seasonality supports the

sufficiency of the hotels' current approach to closely inspect their processes to ensure consistent and quality service delivery.

4.8. Customer experience

The service process begins once the booking is made. To deliver their promise of personability and friendliness the hotels work to fulfill individual customer requests throughout online and in-person interactions. These interactions were not discussed during one of the interviews as per the participant's request. The discussed findings are therefore based on the responses of the remaining six participants.

4.8.1. Customization of services

The hotels' promises of friendly and high-quality customer service are delivered through online communications before the customers' stay and in-person interactions at the resort or hotel. Four participants utilize the customer interactions that take place largely via email, social media, and phone as ways to improve the guest's upcoming visit. For example, participant 6 explained:

“the way we operate they do their bookings and after that, they are often in touch with us directly even like through email or through phone to confirm certain things or to improve their own service package or by wanting more services so that is after the first contact the contact becomes very personable and individual level”.

Two hotels highlight how these interactions are dealt with in a very friendly and authentically caring manner. They also mentioned a particular situation where they considered their brand delivery was successful:

“if there are no northern lights there is not much happening the entire 3-hour trip is completely on the shoulders of the guide and when there the next day [inaudible] we get feedback that the highlight of our entire trip was the northern light adventure for example with the sleigh and so, so we didn't really see northern lights but they told so much about everything stories and else, then then the hospitality and our friend,

the meeting of people as friends it has been executed when our customers are left with this feeling” (participant 4).

A similar incident during aurora hunting was also described by participant 7. Such interactions further reinforce the unique, friendly, and personable nature experiences that had been promised to the guest before their stay.

Although these staff-customer encounters are an important part of initiating the delivery of the service promise, multiple participants face challenges in the execution and management of these interactions. One hotel that has no direct contact with their customers but manages their customer communications and relations through the tourism intermediaries described:

“we do not want those consumer customers in any way because serving them again, if you think for example like a family comes over for two nights they have hundred questions or for three nights like during the pandemic there have been some and one of the owners has managed them, it has meant that I have had to, unfortunately, had to help with that because there the questions come of what activities, breakfast bookings, you know all that...so that does not work, but then with tour operators work because the product is sold to them” (participant 5).

Another two participants also identified a challenge with the number of messages. One of them has several people handling customer communications and experiences difficulties in ensuring a consistent tone throughout the interactions:

“I have been surprised by the number of Instagram direct messages and Messenger and messenger that people manage things to do with their bookings and very also pressed questions and things also via social media messages that that there have been on the best days we get tens of messages through there also and email, phone everywhere like I said the challenge is how do we communicate our brand when there are people who communicate these messages 10 to 20 different people, so friendliness, hospitality how are they executed through each of us” (participant 4).

Overall, these findings suggest that the hotels make use of online alternatives in extending the customer experience and the delivery of brand promises. Especially in two of the hotels that do not have a traditional customer service staff, the online communication channels play an important role in the customer experiences.

The findings of this study support the structure and implementation of the Service Marketing Triangle and the 7Ps Marketing Mix in luxury hotels' marketing strategies. They also contribute to the understanding of new luxury tourism and its multidimensionality in the context of Finnish Lapland. Moreover, the participants' inability to consider elements of their strategy independently from each other provides implications for the academic discussion of the interactive and inseparable nature of service marketing and its stakeholders.

5. Managerial implications

Based on these findings these luxury hotels in Finnish Lapland should place further emphasis on ensuring consistent efforts, especially throughout the external and interactive marketing processes. This includes addressing the gap between perceived and experienced service for example through shifting managerial attitudes and perspectives from traditional luxury towards new luxury tourism. This shift in perspectives should be accompanied by coherent messages throughout direct and intermediary channels.

Moreover, although their product is already unique in comparison to the rest of the world, the hotels themselves could adopt small efforts to further innovate their services and go beyond to exceed the customer expectations. Especially for smaller hotels, adopting new innovative ideas in their product development can help them gain better brand recognition and positioning in the wider market (Taylor, 1997). As there are notable similarities between the services of the hotels, innovation is increasingly important for gaining a competitive advantage and for developing a distinctive service brand. The hotel's brand is further suggested to affect the customers' destination choice even more so than the location of the hotel (Mihelj, 2010, as cited in Ylimartimo & Manninen, 2018).

As mentioned, if one of the elements of the marketing mix changes, the remaining ones should be adjusted accordingly (George, 2021). It is therefore crucial that when adjusting their marketing elements, the hotels should keep in mind what such changes communicate about their overall brand. Adjusting their strategy accordingly can be used to develop a promise that corresponds to the customer experience. For example, in response to fluctuations in demand, the hotels should correspond their product design, promotional tools, and the internal communication of the promise according to the new prices of the service. To further maintain their service value and quality throughout seasonal changes the hotels should ensure an alignment between their summer offering and their existing positioning as a high-end destination. Based on the current findings, the suggestion made in previous literature remains that the hotels should continue to concentrate their efforts on developing summer tourism by developing their product and brand design (Manninen & Ylimartimo, 2018; Kugapi et al., 2020).

6. Limitations and suggestions for future research

The main limitation of this study is the potential bias in the interviewees' responses. The responses are based on a perspective of a single person and may reflect an overly positive and optimal view of the organization as they wish to retain its reputation. This results in a possibly limited ability of these discussions to reflect an objective view of the organizations' marketing efforts. The biased view also includes reliance on managerial perspectives that may not accurately reflect the reality of the hotels' frontline operations. Future research should therefore continue the exploration of organizational perspectives of hotels' marketing strategies and their implementation. Future studies could incorporate interviews with multiple personnel from each hotel to reduce the possible impact of individual differences and attitudes. Furthermore, studies could also alternatively investigate the perspectives of other stakeholders such as the hotel employees and their role in enabling service delivery. This could also include taking on a comparative approach to further explore the consistency between the delivery of the organizations' perceived promise delivery and the promise experienced during the customer visit.

Moreover, the quality of analysis and procedure execution of this study should also be noted. The thematic analysis relies on the researcher's interpretation and although necessary steps were taken to increase the reliability of the analysis, the findings may reflect a biased view with limited objectivity and depth. The bias could be caused by the researcher's nationality, previous familiarity with the brands and their external marketing as well as the lack of extensive experience with the method itself. To address this bias, future research should aim to include multiple researchers in the coding process to increase inter-rater reliability and avoid previous exposure or predispositions to the marketing material of the studied sample.

The sampling method may pose another limitation. It may have attracted companies with more developed marketing strategies or positive attitudes towards marketing than other hotels in the area. Due to the nature of the study, the findings should be considered as exploratory insight into the marketing operations of these hotels. It is therefore advised for future research to confirm the findings outside of the context and sample of this study.

7. Conclusion

This study adopts an explorative approach to examining the current marketing strategies and related challenges of luxury hotels in the Finnish Lapland. This is done with the objective to analyse and identify how the hotels utilize the marketing mix elements to set, enable and deliver the service promise. The results suggest that luxury hotels in Finland acknowledge the interactive nature of marketing operations and adopt a wide range of practices to ensure their brand is reflected across their external, internal, and interactive marketing processes. The managers also demonstrate awareness of the strategic use of the marketing mix elements and their implications in the setting, enabling, and delivering their service promises. Regarding the pandemic, most of the hotels suffered only temporary disruptions in their operations and benefitted from an increased demand for the unique experiences and services Finnish Lapland has to offer. Moreover, this study also recognizes the hotels' challenge in ensuring and executing a consistent service promise throughout their operations. This was evident for example, in the discrepancy between the stakeholders' perceptions of the hotel services. Addressing this requires further exploration of how Finnish luxury hotels view and market their services in the context of new luxury tourism. In sum, together with previous literature, these findings highlight the need for distinct service brands that utilize the marketing mix elements to correspond to their desired brand image.

8. References

- Abrate, G., & Viglia, G. (2016). Strategic and tactical price decisions in hotel revenue management. *Tourism Management, 55*, 123-132.
- Ahmad, S. Z., & Saber, H. (2015). Understanding marketing strategies with particular reference to small-and medium-sized hotel businesses in the United Arab Emirates. *Tourism and Hospitality Research, 15*(2), 115-129.
- Ali, M. S., & Kaldeen, M. (2017). Impact of marketing mix strategies on performance of tourist hotels in the eastern province, Sri Lanka.
- Altinay, L., & Arici, H. E. (2021). Transformation of the hospitality services marketing structure: a chaos theory perspective. *Journal of Services Marketing*.
- Amin, M., & Priansah, P. (2019). Marketing Communication Strategy To Improve Tourism Potential. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal), 2*(4), 160-166.
- Anttikoski, T. (2020). Revenue Management Strategies in the Finnish Hospitality Industry.
- Ariffin, A. A. M., & Maghzi, A. (2012). A preliminary study on customer expectations of hotel hospitality: Influences of personal and hotel factors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 31*(1), 191-198.
- Aro, K., Suomi, K., & Saraniemi, S. (2018). Antecedents and consequences of destination brand love—A case study from Finnish Lapland. *Tourism Management, 67*, 71-81.
- Balekjian, C., & Sarheim, L. (2011). Boutique Hotels Segment. *New York. HVS Global Hospitality Service*.
- Baloglu, S., & Pekcan, Y. A. (2006). The website design and Internet site marketing practices of upscale and luxury hotels in Turkey. *Tourism management, 27*(1), 171-176.
- Becerra, M., Santaló, J., & Silva, R. (2013). Being better vs. being different: Differentiation, competition, and pricing strategies in the Spanish hotel industry. *Tourism management, 34*, 71-79.

- Belias, D., Vasiliadis, L., & Velissariou, E. (2020). Internal Marketing in Tourism: The Case of Human Resource Empowerment on Greek Hotels. In *Cultural and Tourism Innovation in the Digital Era* (pp. 559-573). Springer, Cham.
- Berecic, J. (2010). Marketing in selling the hotel product¹. In *Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija. Biennial International Congress. Tourism & Hospitality Industry* (p. 771). University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism & Hospitality Management.
- Boeije, H. (2010). Principles of qualitative analysis. In *Analysis in qualitative research* (pp. 75–121). SAGE.
- Bogner, A., Littig, B., & Menz, W. (Eds.). (2009). *Interviewing experts*. Springer.
- Bondarenko, V. A., Efremenko, I. N., & Larionov, V. A. (2019). Marketing strategy for hotel and tourist complex companies.
- Bonfanti, A., Vigolo, V., & Yfantidou, G. (2021). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on customer experience design: The hotel managers' perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 94, 102871.
- Booms, B. & Bitner, M. (1981). Marketing strategies and organizational structures for service firms. *Marketing of services*, 47 – 51.
- Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism management*, 21(1), 97–116.
- Buick, I., & Muthu, G. (1997). An investigation of the current practices of in-house employee training and development within hotels in Scotland. *Service Industries Journal*, 17(4), 652-668.
- Bunchua, E., & Chakpitak, N. (2011). Marketing information and knowledge in boutique hotels: A qualitative study.
- Campo, S., Diaz, A. M., & Yagüe, M. J. (2014). Hotel innovation and performance in times of crisis. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Cespedes, F. V., & Piercy, N. F. (1996). Implementing marketing strategy. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 12(1-3), 135-160.

- Ciriković, E. (2014). Marketing mix in tourism. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(2), 111-111.
- Creevey, D., Coughlan, J., & O'Connor, C. (2022). Social media and luxury: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 24(1), 99-129.
- Damnjanović, V., Lončarić, D., & Dlačić, J. (2020). TEACHING CASE STUDY: Digital marketing strategy of Accor Hotels: shaping the future of hospitality. *Tourism and hospitality management*, 26(1), 233-244.
- De Pelsmacker, P., Van Tilburg, S., & Holthof, C. (2018). Digital marketing strategies, online reviews, and hotel performance. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 72, 47-55.
- Dev, C. S., Morgan, M. S., & Shoemaker, S. (1995). A positioning analysis of hotel brands: Based on travel-manager perceptions. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 36(6), 48-55.
- Dietrich, J. (2019). *Co-creating the place brand of Finnish Lapland-mental associations and visual representations* (Master's thesis).
- Diffley, S., & McCole, P. (2019). The value of social networking sites in hotels. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*.
- Dinçer, F. I., Dinçer, M. Z., & Avunduk, Z. B. (2016). Marketing strategies for boutique hotels: The case of Istanbul. *Journal of Global Business Insights*, 1(2), 94-106.
- Drummond, G., Ensor, J., & Ashford, R. (2007). *Strategic marketing: planning and control*. Routledge.
- Döringer, S. (2021). 'The problem-centered expert interview'. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(3), 265-278.
- Dorussen, H.; Lenz, H.; Blavoukos, S. (2005). Assessing the Reliability and Validity of Expert Interviews. *European Union Politics*, 6(3), 315–337.
- Falk, M., & Vieru, M. (2019). International tourism demand to Finnish Lapland in the early winter season. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22(11), 1312-1326.

- Femenia-Serra, F., & Gretzel, U. (2020). Influencer marketing for tourism destinations: Lessons from a mature destination. In *Information and Communication Technologies in tourism 2020*(pp. 65-78). Springer, Cham.
- Froehle, C. M. (2006). Service personnel, technology, and their interaction in influencing customer satisfaction. *Decision Sciences*, 37(1), 5-38.
- Geerts, A., & Masset, J. (2022). Luxury tourism through private sales websites: Exploration of prestige-seeking consumers' motivations and managers' perceptions. *Journal of Business Research*, 145, 377-386.
- George, R. (2021). Characteristics of Tourism and Hospitality Marketing. In *Marketing Tourism and Hospitality* (pp. 33-61). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Goryushkina, N. Y., Shkurkin, D. V., Petrenko, A. S., Demin, S. Y., & Yarovaya, N. S. (2016). Marketing management in the sphere of hotel and tourist services. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 6(6S), 207-213.
- Grönroos, C. (1978). A service-orientated approach to marketing of services. *European Journal of marketing*.
- Grönroos, C. (2020). service marketing research priorities. *Journal of Services Marketing*.
- Gursoy, D., & Chi, C. G. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality industry: Review of the current situations and a research agenda. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 29(5), 527-529.
- Hallott, A. (2013). The future potential for developing luxury tourism and hospitality in Lapland.
- Han, S. H., Lee, J., Edvardsson, B., & Verma, R. (2021). Mobile technology adoption among hotels: Managerial issues and opportunities. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 38, 100811.
- Hanni-Vaara, P., Kähkönen, O., & Paloniemi, P. (2019). Developing Destination Experience and Digital Marketing in Co-creation Process—Case Cooperation of Ranua Municipality and Lapland University of Applied Sciences. *e-Review of Tourism Research*, 17(2).

- Hao, F., Xiao, Q., & Chon, K. (2020). COVID-19 and China's hotel industry: Impacts, a disaster management framework, and post-pandemic agenda. *International journal of hospitality management, 90*, 102636.
- Heyes, A., & Lashley, C. (2017). Price, exclusivity and luxury: Exploring London's luxury hotels. *Research in Hospitality Management, 7*(1), 17-25.
- Hilal, M. I. M. (2019). The effects of services marketing mix elements on brand equity and customer response to tourist hotels in the east coast of Sri Lanka.
- Ianioglo, A., & Rissanen, M. (2020). Global trends and tourism development in peripheral areas. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, 20*(5), 520-539.
- Iloranta, R. (2019). Luxury tourism service provision-Lessons from the industry. *Tourism Management Perspectives, 32*, 100568.
- Iloranta, R. (2022). Luxury tourism—a review of the literature. *European Journal of Tourism Research, 30*, 3007-3007.
- Iloranta, R., & Komppula, R. (2022). Service providers' perspective on the luxury tourist experience as a product. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, 22*(1), 39-57.
- Ivanov, D. (2012). Luxury Services in Tourism: Global expertise in luxury tourism services and endemic application in Lapland.
- Jang, S., & Moutinho, L. (2019). Do price promotions drive consumer spending on luxury hotel services? The moderating roles of room price and user-generated content. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 78*, 27-35.
- Japutra, A., & Situmorang, R. (2021). The repercussions and challenges of COVID-19 in the hotel industry: Potential strategies from a case study of Indonesia. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 95*, 102890.
- Jeffrey, D., Barden, R. R., Buckley, P. J., & Hubbard, N. J. (2002). What makes for a successful hotel? Insights on hotel management following 15 years of hotel occupancy analysis in England. *Service Industries Journal, 22*(2), 73-88.
- Jiang, Y., & Wen, J. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 on hotel marketing and management: a perspective article. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management.*

- Kariru, A., & Ndungu, D. (2021). Strategies to overcome the damages caused by covid-19 in the hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality*, 3(4), 202–215.
- Kaushal, V., & Srivastava, S. (2021). Hospitality and tourism industry amid COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives on challenges and learnings from India. *International journal of hospitality management*, 92, 102–707.
- Kenny, J., & Dutt, C. S. (2021). The long-term impacts of hotel's strategic responses to COVID-19: The case of Dubai. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 14673584211034525.
- Keskitalo, R. A. (2020). Storytelling in Destination Marketing.
- Khan, M. T. (2014). The concept of 'marketing mix' and its elements (a conceptual review paper). *International journal of information, business and management*, 6(2), 95.
- Kiatsonchai, S., & Choibamroong, T. (2014). An analysis of marketing strategies of boutique hotels in Thailand. *Journal of Language, Religion and Culture*, 3(2), 171-194.
- Kilic, H., & Okumus, F. (2005). Factors influencing productivity in small island hotels: evidence from Northern Cyprus. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Knutson, B. J., Beck, J. A., Kim, S., & Cha, J. (2009). Identifying the dimensions of the guest's hotel experience. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 50(1), 44-55.
- Knutson, B., Stevens, P., Patton, M., & Thompson, C. (1993). Consumers' expectations for service quality in economy, mid-price and luxury hotels. *Journal of hospitality & leisure marketing*, 1(2), 27-43.
- Komppula, R. (2014). The role of individual entrepreneurs in the development of competitiveness for a rural tourism destination—A case study. *Tourism Management*, 40, 361-371.
- Kontis, A. P., Skoultzos, S., & Papayiannis, D. (2019). Tourism marketing channels in digital evolution era: online travel agencies in Greek tourism industry. In *Strategic innovative marketing and tourism* (pp. 1303-1310). Springer, Cham.
- Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2016). Principles of marketing (16th edition. Global). Pearson

- Kugapi, O., Huhmarniemi, M., & Laivamaa, L. (2020). A potential treasure for tourism: Crafts as employment and a cultural experience service in the Nordic North. In *Tourism Employment in Nordic Countries* (pp. 77-99). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Kulluvaara, C., & Tornberg, J. (2003). Integrated marketing communication and tourism: A case study of Icehotel AB.
- Kurgun, H., Bagiran, D., Ozeren, E., & Maral, B. (2011). Entrepreneurial marketing-The interface between marketing and entrepreneurship: A qualitative research on boutique hotels. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 26(3), 340–357.
- Kusuma, A. A. N. W., Aryana, I. N. R., Susanto, B., Sudiarta, M., & Susyarini, N. P. W. A. (2022). Marketing Communication Model to Enhance Hotel Brand Image. *Marketing*, 1(1), 54-67.
- Kylänen, M., & Rusko, R. (2011). Unintentional coopetition in the service industries: The case of Pyhä-Luosto tourism destination in the Finnish Lapland. *European Management Journal*, 29(3), 193-205.
- Leue, M. C., Jung, T., & Knowles, T. (2013). Social Media Marketing in Selected UK Luxury Hotels. *eReview of*.
- Li, L. (2011). Internal Quality Management in Service Organizations: a theoretical approach.
- Loo, P. T., & Leung, R. (2018). A service failure framework of hotels in Taiwan: Adaptation of 7Ps marketing mix elements. *Journal of vacation marketing*, 24(1), 79-100.
- Malmström, S. (2020). Competition and competitive actions in the hotel industry in Finland.
- Maroudas, L., Kyriakidou, O., & Vacharis, A. (2008). Employees' motivation in the luxury hotel industry: The perceived effectiveness of human-resource practices. *Managing leisure*, 13(3–4), 258–271.
- Martínez Hale, A. E. (2021). Instagram as a branding tool for small tourism enterprises: insights from Finnish Lapland.
- McColl-Kennedy, J. R., & White, T. (1997). Service provider training programs at odds with customer requirements in five-star hotels. *Journal of services Marketing*.

- Meidan, A., & Lee, B. (1982). Marketing strategies for hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 1(3), 169–177. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0278-4319\(82\)90007-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0278-4319(82)90007-X)
- Middleton, V. T. C., Fyall, A., Morgan, M., & Ranchhod, A. (2009). Marketing in travel and tourism (4th ed.). Elsevier.
- Moilanen, S. (2012). Marketing Communications Plan. Case: Lapin Retriittisafarit.
- Morosan, C., & DeFranco, A. (2019). Using interactive technologies to influence guests' unplanned dollar spending in hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 82, 242-251.
- Morrison, A. (2010). Hospitality and travel marketing (4th International ed.). *Clifton Park, NY: Delmar, Cengage Learning*.
- Narteh, B., Agbemabiese, G. C., Kodua, P., & Braimah, M. (2013). Relationship marketing and customer loyalty: Evidence from the Ghanaian luxury hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 22(4), 407-436.
- Ozdemir, O., Dogru, T., Kizildag, M., Mody, M., & Suess, C. (2021). Quantifying the economic impact of COVID-19 on the US hotel industry: Examination of hotel segments and operational structures. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 39, 100864.
- Ozturk, E., & Ozen, O. (2021). How management innovation affects product and process innovation in turkey: the moderating role of industry and firm size. *European Management Review*, 18(3), 293–310.
- Pandey, M. (N.D.). Marketing Strategies for Domestic Travellers at Star Hotels in Indore during the Covid-19 first pandemic phase.
- Peng, Y., & Boonyanmethaporn, W. (2021). 7Ps theory of service marketing innovation: A survival strategy for hotel sector post Covid-19 in China.
- Piehler, R., Schade, M., & Burmann, C. (2019). Employees as a second audience: the effect of external communication on internal brand management outcomes. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(4), 445-460.
- Piispanen, S. (2021). *Finns' perceptions of luxury tourism in Finland* (Master's thesis, Itä-Suomen yliopisto).

- Prasetyo, B. W., & Pertiwi, I. F. P. (2021). The Influence of Product Innovation, Marketing Strategy, and Entrepreneurship Orientation on Sharia Hotel Marketing Performance in the Covid-19 Pandemic Period with Competitive Advantage as an Intervening Variable. *Journal of Business and Management Review*, 2(9), 605-619.
- Raab, C., Berezan, O., Christodoulidou, N., Jiang, L., & Shoemaker, S. (2018). Creating strategic relationships with online travel agents to drive hotel room revenue: An OTA perspective. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*.
- Radisic, B. B., Perisic, M., & Berecic, J. (2010). Marketing in selling the hotel product1. *Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija. Biennial International Congress. Tourism & Hospitality Industry*, 771-782.
- Redjeki, F., Narimawati, U., & Priadana, S. (2021). Marketing Strategies Used by Hospitality Businesses in Times of Crisis of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Case Study. *ENDLESS: International Journal of Future Studies*, 4(1), 121-131.
- Redjeki, F., Narimawati, U., & Priadana, S. (2021). Marketing Strategies Used by Hospitality Businesses in Times of Crisis of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Case Study. *ENDLESS: International Journal of Future Studies*, 4(1), 121-131.
- Renaghan, L. M. (1981). A new marketing mix for the hospitality industry. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 22(2), 31-36.
- Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 11(1), 25-41.
- Romero, I., & Tejada, P. (2020). Tourism intermediaries and innovation in the hotel industry. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(5), 641-653.
- Salman, D., Tawfik, Y., Samy, M., & Artal-Tur, A. (2017). A new marketing mix model to rescue the hospitality industry: Evidence from Egypt after the Arab Spring. *Future Business Journal*, 3(1), 47-69.
- Šerić, M., & Mikulić, J. (2020). Building brand equity through communication consistency in luxury hotels: an impact-asymmetry analysis. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*.

- Sfikas, I. (2020). Re-inventing a medium size family hotel business. <http://hdl.handle.net/11544/29419>, (Retrieved February 5, 2022).
- Tag-Eldeen, A., & El-Said, O. A. (2011). Implementation of internal marketing on a sample of Egyptian five-star hotels. *Anatolia*, 22(2), 153-167.
- Taylor, H. (1997). Competitive advantage in the hotel industry—success through differentiation. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 3(2), 170–173.
- tom Dieck, M. C., Jung, T. H., Kim, W. G., & Moon, Y. (2017). Hotel guests' social media acceptance in luxury hotels. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Wang, Y. (2019). Marketing Analysis and Strategies of High-quality Hotels. In *International Conference on Economics, Management and Humanities Science (ECOMHS 2019)*. Bangkok, Thailand.
- Wilson, A., Zeithaml, V., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. (2016). *EBOOK: Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus Across the Firm*. McGraw Hill.
- Wirtz, J., & Lovelock, C. (2021). *Services marketing: People, technology, strategy*. World Scientific.
- Xie, Y. (2020). The relationship among marketing mix, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty of Chinese tourists to budget hotel of central Bangkok. *International Journal of Business and Economics*, 2(1), 1-23.
- Yang, W., Zhang, L., & Mattila, A. S. (2016). Luxe for less: How do consumers react to luxury hotel price promotions? The moderating role of consumers' need for status. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 57(1), 82-92.
- Yardi, Z., & Aksoz, E. O. (2019). The impact of Instagram influencers on tourists hotel perceptions: a study on a five star hotel in Istanbul. *City Tourism*, 374.
- Yetimoğlu, S., & Uğurlu, K. (2020). Influencer marketing for tourism and hospitality. In *The emerald handbook of ICT in tourism and hospitality*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Ylimartimo, S., & Manninen, S. (2018). Travel Destination Choice, Destination Experience and Fulfillment of Travel Expectations in Lapland.

Zhang, Z., Ye, Q., & Law, R. (2011). Determinants of hotel room price: An exploration of travelers' hierarchy of accommodation needs. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.