Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Administration, Lappeenranta
Degree Program in International Business

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A Research on Chinese Tourists' Consumer Behaviour in "Purest Finland"-Lake Saimaa Region

Thesis 2018

Abstract

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A Research on Chinese Tourists' Consumer Behaviours in "Purest Finland"-
Lake Saimaa Region, 41 pages, 4 appendices
Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Administration, Lappeenranta
Degree Program in International Business
Thesis 2018
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This thesis was contacted for the Lappeenranta's Communications and Marketing team. The general objective of this research was to solve the main research problem "How to understand Chinese tourists' consumer behaviour in Lake Saimaa region and how to reach them better in China?" To solve the problem, the organization has to get feedback from Chinese visitors. The author of this thesis organized interviews with Chinese tourists to get the results.

The theoretical part focuses on studying the general tourism consumer behaviour model and the promotion of Lake Saimaa region in Chinese outbound tourism market. The empirical part was implemented by interviews with Chinese tourists who had visited Lake Saimaa region.

As a result of this thesis, all the research questions regarding motivations to visit Lake Saimaa region and factors affecting Chinese tourists' buying behaviour are answered, and it is recommended to the case company that developing online marketing strategy is the best way to reach Chinese consumers better in Chinese outbound tourism market.

Keywords: Chinese tourists, tourism consumer behaviour, motivation to visit Lake Saimaa region, online marketing

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The background of this research is that China, one of the world's econo-
mies nowadays, is impacting greatly on tourists' destinations everywhere in the
world. According to the statistics of the China National Tourism Administration, in
less than twenty years, China has grown to one of the world's most powerful
outbound markets. Chinese tourists overseas spent 261.1 billion US dollars in the
year 2016, increased from around 10 billion US dollars in the year 2000. In 2018,
there are over 130 million outbound Chinese travellers collectively, and their
spending overseas increased 7% from 2016. (China National Tourism Admin-
istration 2018.)

The reason behind the growth is that most Chinese people have become wealth-
ier in recent years. The Boston Consulting Group indicates that the distribution of
income for urban residents will shift significantly upward over the next decade.
They expect the disposable income per capita double in approximately 600 loca-
tions in China from 2010 to 2020. They forecast that the size of China's urban
middle class will double by the year 2020, and its affluent middle class will in-
crease about four times over, which means more than 130 million Chinese people
will live at the middle-class level or above. In short, China has a large conversion
in income levels, where large parts of the population are transforming into the
real middle class and have a large amount of money to spend on shopping and
outbound tourism. (The Boston Consulting Group 2010.)

Many European travel destinations desire to take advantage of the potential ben-
efits from high-spending Chinese outbound travellers in recent years. The case
company of this thesis is Lappeenranta's communications and marketing team,
aiming at making the Lake Saimaa Region one of Finland's best-known travel
destinations alongside Helsinki and Lapland. The 'Visit Finland's statistics (Figure
1) indicates that the nights spent by Chinese tourists in Finland been increased
from 150,271 to 362,138 from the year 2014 to 2017 (Visit Finland 2018).

NIGHTS SPENT BY CHINESE TRAVELERS IN FINLAND

Figure 1 Nights spent by Chinese travellers in Finland (Visit Finland 2018)

Thus, Chinese tourists play increasingly important roles in the development of Finnish tourism market. And China has become one of the case company's biggest targets. The Lappeenranta's communications and marketing team tries to promote the region's profile as an attractive destination for tourists come from all over the world. The organisation also tries to present themselves as both a harmonious and versatile destination to the Chinese tourism market, including consumers, the travel trade and other stakeholders. (LakeSaimaa 2017.)

The Lake Saimaa Region includes the towns of Lappeenranta, Imatra, Mikkeli and Savonlinna. As the international tourists have already considered Finland as a clean destination, the company wants to emphasize this image and promote Lake Saimaa as the 'Purest Finland' experience. Although Helsinki and the Lapland region have been the most popular Finnish tourists' attractions for Chinese visitors (Visit Finland 2018), the Lappeenranta's Communication and Marketing team as one of other tourism businesses in Finland is trying to jump on the bandwagon to lure Chinese tourists to visit the Lake Saimaa region in Finland.

The author as a business student in Lappeenranta, has been very interested in the tourism and business between the Lake Saimaa region and the China outbound markets. With the understanding of Chinese culture and Chinese customers' consumer behaviour, the author is highly motivated to conduct this research for the Lappeenranta's communications and marketing team.

1.2   Lappeenranta's Communications and Marketing team

The case company in this thesis is the Lappeenranta's Communications and Marketing team. It is in charge of planning and coordinating its communications and marketing both in Finland and abroad. The team also circulates information on the decisions of the central administration, Town Council and Town Board, organizes press events. What's more, it is in charge of the town's media relations. Besides, it coordinates the maintenance of the town's website and publishes brochures and resident magazines. (Lappeenranta 2018.)

In general, the Lappeenranta marketing and communication team is considered as a bridge which connects the organizers of cultural events and the town (Lappeenranta 2018.) This thesis is supported by Ms. Mirka Rahman-the head of Marketing and Customer Service in the Lappeenranta's Communications and Marketing team.

1.3   Saimaa region's cooperation with Tencent

Figure 2. Cooperation between Gosaimaa and Tencent (Hosiokoski 2018)

In June 2018, GoSaimaa Oy, the marketing organization for tourism in the Lake Saimaa region, has signed a cooperation contract with a Chinese digital service provider Tencent (Figure 2). The agreement made the Saimaa region became one of the top tourism destinations in the world in the Tencent's WeChat application, which the most popular social media application among Chinese people. (Thai 2018)

According to the organization, the aim of this cooperation is to promote the "Purest Finland" image of Lake Saimaa region and attract more Chinese tourists to visit the Saimaa region during the year 2018. (Hosiokoski 2018)

The WeChat application which made by Tencent company, is an all-in-one digital application, it has many functions connected very closely to Chinese people's routines, such as online chatting, shopping，financing, playing games, reserving taxis and making travel reservations. WeChat is far more than any of the Western messaging app. In other words, it is a mix of WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Skype. It also contains ten million third-party apps. The users can get almost everything they need from their mobile application. (Thai 2018)

WeChat provides both individual and business accounts. Organizations as Gosaimaa Oy can create its official account to stay in contact with Chinese users and post promotional information of the region. (Thai 2018.) The account of Gosaimaa Oy will show Chinese users many local information about the Lake Saimaa Region, including various accommodation options, restaurants, places to visit, routes and events (Hosiokoski 2018). Although the program has not been released to market yet, it is believed that the program will promote the digital travel sales of Lake Saimaa region and it will bring opportunities to other regions in Finland as well.

1.4   Statement of problems

The main research problem of this thesis is "How to understand Chinese tourists' consumer behaviour in Lake Saimaa region and how to reach them better in China?"

Lake Saimaa region lacks communication and marketing with Chinese outbound market. This shortcoming directly causes that there are much lesser Chinese consumers in Lake Saimaa region than in other famous tourist attractions in Finland and other European countries. Besides, beautiful landscapes and scenery of the Lake Saimaa region is not enough for the Lappeenranta's communications and marketing team to attract a large number of Chinese customers.

More attention should be paid by the Lappeenranta's communications and marketing team to Chinese customers' events, experiences and activities in Lake Saimaa region along with the "Purest Finland" concept.

1.5 Objectives and delimitations

The general objective of this research is to help the case company know their Chinese customers better. Besides, another purpose is to give recommendations to the case company about how to reach Chinese tourists better in China. To achieve the goal, the company has to get feedback from Chinese visitors, the author of this thesis will organize interviews with Chinese tourists to get the results.

It is inevitable to have limitations during this research process when selecting potential outbound tourists in China to research on. The author only focuses on the case company's target group of Chinese tourists, who are wealthy and experienced travellers. Besides, only citizens in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Chongqing are targeted, because these cities provide straight flights to Helsinki. Moreover, because the topic of this thesis is only regarding Chinese tourists in Lake Saimaa region, other foreign travellers or other regions in Finland or European countries as the tourist attractions are not analysed in this thesis.

1.6 Research questions

To solve the main research problem, many research questions should be answered to get the final results. The main research problem as well as research questions listed below will be answered in the conclusion part of this thesis:

- What are the motivations for Chinese tourists to come to Lake Saimaa region and why?
- Which factors affects Chinese tourists' buying behaviour and why?
- What events and services attract Chinese tourists in Lake Saimaa region?
- How can the case company reach Chinese customers better in China?

In addition, it is common that Chinese tourists, especially young independent travellers who travel abroad, thoroughly plan their trips in advance. These travellers usually start planning their overseas trip at least one month before departure and this usually happens online. According to an article written by Kadriye Kizmaz, the Chinese travellers spend about one week searching information online and visiting at least one website which can compare all the prices. Moreover, when booking transportation ticket or hotels, young Chinese tourists seem to like to use their mobile phones. Nevertheless, older Chinese travellers usually choose traditional booking methods, such as phone calls and visiting travel agencies. (Kizmaz 2018.)

Taking this situation into consideration, it is necessary to let Chinese tourists know about the town brand before reaching a destination. This research will introduce some of China´s digital platforms that tourism providers can use to create brand awareness, communicate with Chinese customers and offer service.

1.7 Characteristics of Chinese tourists in Finland

There exist some researches which can provide this thesis a lot of useful knowledge. The previous researches which are related to the topic of this thesis include the research on motives of Chinese tourists who travel abroad, the reasons they come to Finland and other cities in Finland. Moreover, there are also researches on Chinese outbound tourists' expectations and demands. In addition, there is a large number of existing researches on Chinese outbound tourists in Finland, but previous research does not exist regarding Chinese tourists who are interested in traveling in Lake Saimaa region and the marketing strategies to attract more Chinese tourists to come to Lake Saimaa region.

The following paragraphs introduce the main results from previous researches which can provide related and useful knowledge to the research on Chinese tourists' consumer behaviour in Lake Saimaa region.
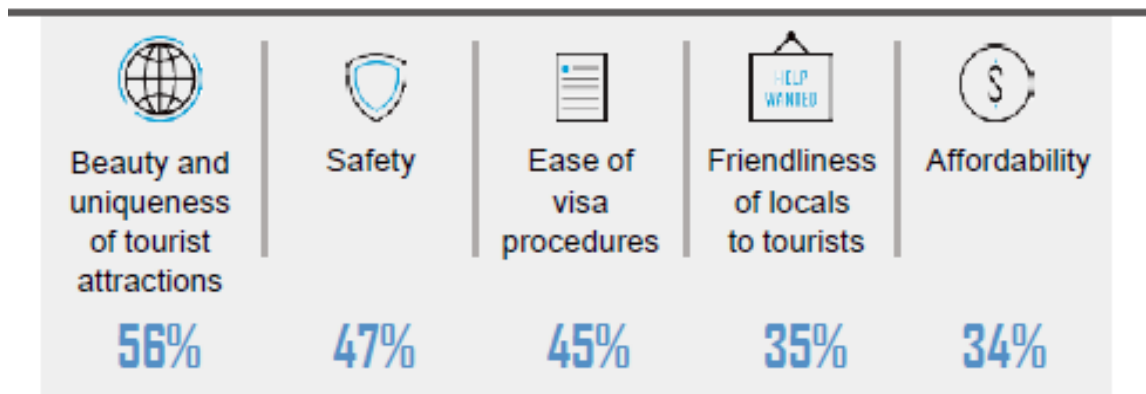
Figure 3. Top five factors Chinese outbound tourists consider (Nielsen Holdings 2017)

There was a study about factors affecting Chinese tourists' consideration of choosing a travel destination abroad (Figure 3). It illustrates that the most motivating factors for Chinese tourists are the beauty and uniqueness of tourist attractions. The reasons behind this is that China, nowadays, is facing serious pollution problems, especially air and water pollution. Due to increasing population and rapid economic and technological growth, as well as lax environment oversight, the water and air pollution have become the most serious issues in China. The air pollution even became China's biggest health threat. A study of a non-profit organization estimated that 1.6 million people in China die each year from heart and lung problems and strokes because of polluted air. (Berkeley Earth 2015.) In short, tourist attractions which have beautiful natural sceneries attract Chinese travellers most.

According to the bachelor's thesis of Zheng who studied in Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Chinese tourists love shopping, especially in Finland, because they can get cheaper luxury goods prices in duty-free shops in Finland. Secondly, Finnair airline company provides Chinese tourists direct flights from China to Helsinki, it makes a great improvement on tourism development between China and Finland. (Zheng 2016.)

After Chinese tourists arrive at Helsinki, it is easy for them to visit other Schengen countries. Last but not the least, the clean and beautiful nature, friendly people and northern lights are reasons why Chinese tourists visit Finland. (Zheng 2016.)

In terms of Chinese outbound tourists' expectations and demands, the research of a student in tourism department in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences has illustrated that comparing with other European capital cities, Helsinki win higher score in local people's friendliness, clean environment and green lifestyle in Chinese tourist' opinions. What's more, Chinese tourists expect convenient transportation, tourist and product information in Chinese language, longer opening time of restaurants and shops. (Xu 2014)

2 Tourist consumer behaviour model

A recent European Commission report indicates that Chinese tourists prefer to save their money on food, accommodation and transportation when travelling, but they become bountiful when they go shopping (Smith 2018). It is essential to research and understand the way in which Chinese tourism consumers make decisions and act associated with the consumption of tourism products. Because it can help the travel organizations develop their marketing strategies as well as knowing the possible perception of risk for tourism purchases. Besides, it helps tourist destinations to develop their market segments based upon purchase behaviours. (Belch, Belch, Kerr & Powell 2009.)

To understand Chinese tourists' consumer behaviour, it is essential to know the factors influencing their demand of tourism. The factors include social factors, cultural factors, personal factors and psychological factors. In addition, purchase decision-making process and the theories from the perspective of Chinese tourists are included in the tourist consumer behaviour model. What is more, the key models explaining the decision-making process for the purchase of tourism products are included. (Belch, Belch, Kerr & Powell 2009.) The information for theory part is collected from multiple sources including academic books, articles, recent studies and other internet sources.

Consumer behaviour refers to the behaviour of customers of selection, acquisition and consumption of goods and services to satisfy their needs and wants (Belch, Belch, Kerr & Powell 2009). It refers to the behaviour of customers in the market and underlying motivations for this behaviour.

This behaviour happens in every purchase decision-making process. (Figure 4)

Figure 4 Purchase decision-making process (Stewart 2013)

Firstly, consumers find out what products they would like to consume, then they select only those products that meet their needs by information seeking. After selecting the products, consumers evaluate the product and estimate expected prices and check the actual price. After that, they make decisions about which products or services to consume. And in the final stage, they evaluate whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with the purchase. (Han & Ryu 2011.)

A consumer may take the decision of buying a product on the basis of different buying motives. The purchase decision leads to higher demand, and the sales of the marketers increase. Therefore, marketers need to influence consumer behaviour to increase their purchases. (Chand 2018.) For tourists, the decision-making process also starts from recognizing the need to travel, then they seek information about tourist destinations to fulfil their needs. As there is a large number of options, tourists evaluate the alternatives of various destinations and make the final decision which destinations to choose.

Nevertheless, there are several factors influencing consumers' purchases because every individual is different in attitudes, perceptions, images and motivation (Chand 2018).

For example, attitude shows a consumer's perception of the world; perception means a traveller's mental impression of a destination; travel motivators explain why the tourists want to travel and they are the inner urges initiating travel demand; and images reflect sets of beliefs, ideas and impressions relating to travel products and destinations (Chand 2018).

To conclude, the factors influencing consumer behaviour can be classified into cultural, social, individual and psychological factors (EPY 2008).
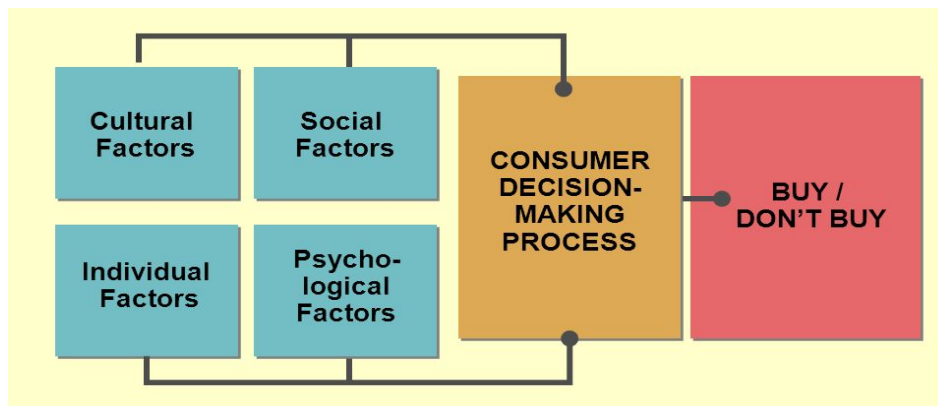

Figure 5 Factors influencing buying decisions. (Hamilton 2015)

2.1 Cultural factors

The cultural factors generally refer to the religion, customs and behaviour that a particular group of people follow. As a person grows up, he engrafts the buying and decision-making patterns through his family and the growing environment. The cultural diversity influences food habits, clothing, customs and traditions. (Chand 2018.) For example, purchasing alcohol and meat in the majority of countries is not restricted, but in certain religious country, purchasing alcohol and meat is prohibited.

Sub-culture also affects consumer buying behaviour. Each culture consists of smaller subcultures that provide specific identity to its members. Subcultures include sub castes, religious sects, geographic regions and language. (Chand 2018.)

The behaviour of Chinese tourists belonging to various subcultures is different. Therefore, marketers can adopt multicultural marketing approaches, for instance, designing and marketing goods and services that cater to the tastes and preferences of Chinese consumers belonging to different subcultures. (Chand 2018.)

2.2 Social factors

Social factors affecting consumer buying behaviour can be classified into reference groups, role in the society and social status (Juneja 2008).

The reference groups have great effect on the buying decisions. The family is the main reference group that may influence the consumer behaviour. Nowadays, people are well informed about goods and services through their relatives or friends, and other sources. (Croce 2016.) In China, many Chinese tourists decided to travel if their families or friends recommend the destinations. Because when someone recommends the place, he probably has been there, or he has known many specifications and he is satisfied with the destination.

In addition, consumer buying behaviour is also affected by the role in the society and social status. A person acts a series of roles in a particular group such as family, club, organization, and so on. For example, a person may perform the role of a CEO in an organization and another person may perform the role of a marketing manager. (Chand 2018.)

In terms of role in the society and social status, the behaviour of the urban consumers is different from consumers in countryside. Most consumers in countryside are very conservative in their buying behaviours. For wealthy rural consumers, it is common that they consider carefully about spending on travelling abroad despite having enough financial supports, whereas the urban consumers may even take bank loans to visit foreign countries because they want to broaden their horizons. (Singh 2012.)

What's more, the major Chinese outbound travellers in Europe are supposed to have higher education level and average income than those who never travel to Europe. It is obvious that Chinese tourists from upper middle class would spend on luxurious travel experience whereas others from middle to lower income group would save money and travel to cheaper destinations (Croce 2016).
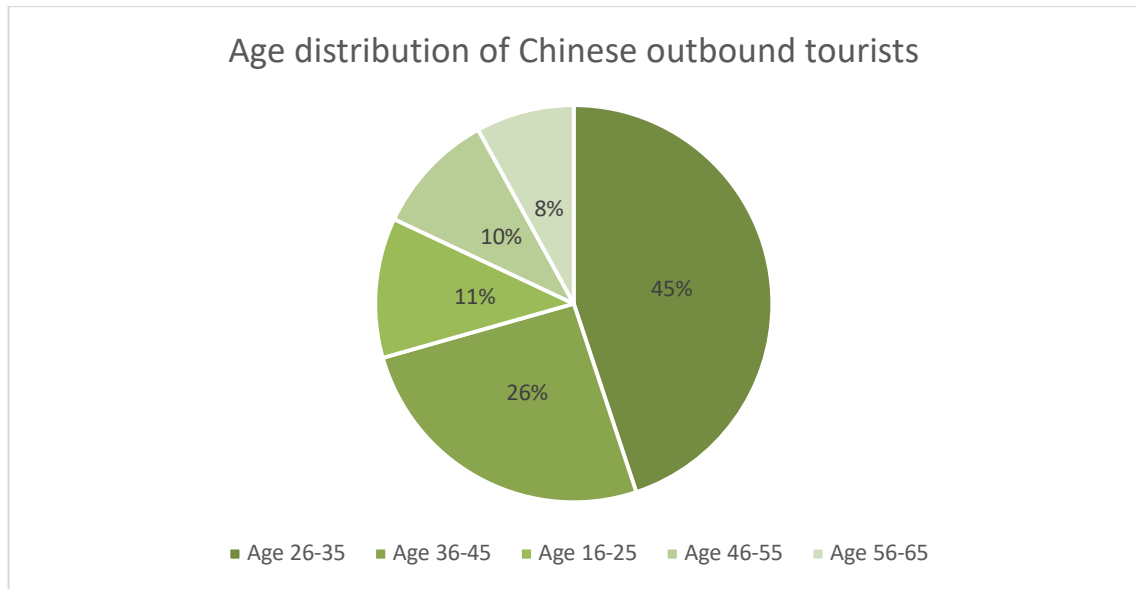
2.3 Individual factors

Figure 6 Age distribution of Chinese outbound tourists. (China Daily 2015)

The individual factors refer to a person's occupation, age, financial condition, life-style and personality (Juneja 2008). The individual factors have great influence on Chinese tourists' buying behaviour because every person does not behave exactly the same. For example, some tourists would like to go travelling very often and even spend beyond their savings. They even borrow money from friends, relatives and banks to spend on travelling. But there are other consumers who, despite having surplus money, do not go even for a camping event on weekends and avoid using and purchasing of any travel products. (Chand 2018.)

For Chinese tourists, the occupation, age and financial condition directly decide which kind of travel destinations and experiences are attractive. As analysed in the social factors, the occupation and financial condition is also related to a person's social status. Normally, low income Chinese tourists do not travel to European countries. Besides, a research of China Daily organization reflects that the majority of Chinese outbound tourists are between 26 to 35 years old. (Figure 6) There are few Chinese tourists between 16-25 years old travelling abroad because most of them are too young to have much savings for visiting foreign countries. (China Daily 2015)

Most Chinese tourists who are over 56 years old also do not want to travel abroad. Because most old Chinese people cannot communicate fluently in English or any other foreign languages, they can only travel abroad with translators and tour guides, which increases the travel expenses. (China Daily 2015.)

Lifestyle and personality have great influence on Chinese tourists' consumer behaviour as well. For example, most Chinese tourists visit Finland for its clean and beautiful nature, and they enjoy slow and quiet lifestyle in Finland. It seems that Chinese people who enjoy modern life and summer beaches would prefer travelling to noisy and popular coastal cities such as New York, Tokyo and Barcelona. In general, the individual factors can reflect directly what travellers need and want. (Chand 2018.)

2.4   Psychological factors
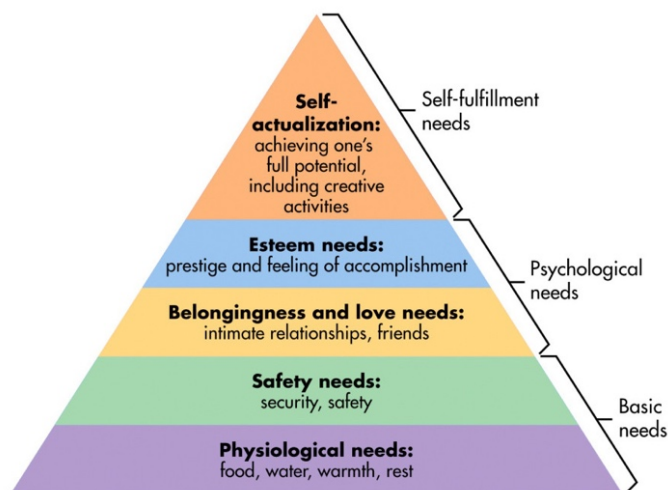
Figure 7 Maslow's hierarchy of needs. (McLeod 2018)

Last but not the least, the psychological factors are also playing an essential role in affecting Chinese tourists' buying behaviour. According to the Maslow's hierarchy of needs model (Figure 7), the psychological factors fulfil people's needs for and belonging and love. These factors include consumers' motivations, perceptions, learnings, beliefs and attitude. (Juneja 2008.) They can directly affect Chinese tourists' decisions of whether choosing a destination or not. (Chand 2018.)

In terms of learnings, when a customer buys a new travel company's product and service, and is satisfied with the quality and arrangement, then they are more likely to buy the same company's product and service the next time. Through learning, people acquire beliefs and attitudes, which in turn influence the buying behaviour. (Chand 2018.)

When it comes to attitudes, people always likely give feedback in certain manner to a particular situation or product or thought. Buyers can develop a positive, or a negative, or a neutral attitude towards certain products or brands, which also affect their buying behaviour. (Chand 2018.)

The motive refers to the inner drive that encourage a person to act or behave in a certain manner. It is essential for marketers to identify the buying motives of their target customers so that they can influence consumers positively towards the products. (Chand 2018.) For Chinese customers who are interested in Finnish travel product, the motives could be their need of fresh, safe, clean and natural environment.

3 Promotion of Lake Saimaa region in Chinese outbound market

In Chinese outbound market, it is very important for foreign tourist destinations to do marketing to improve their competitiveness. The Boston Consulting Group has indicated that in 2005, in order to reach 70% of Chinese consumers who were from Middle and Affluent class, a company was supposed to have presence in approximately 70 locations in China. They predicted that by 2020, companies will be required to develop in over 400 locations to reach and serve 70% Chinese customers. In other words, real income growth is taking place all over China and not just in the targeted cities of the case company in this research. The growth will bring a large amount of new opportunities to European travel organizations. However, only few of these organizations are able to reach their target Chinese consumers through traditional channels, such as brochures and travel agencies. (The Boston Consulting Group 2010.)
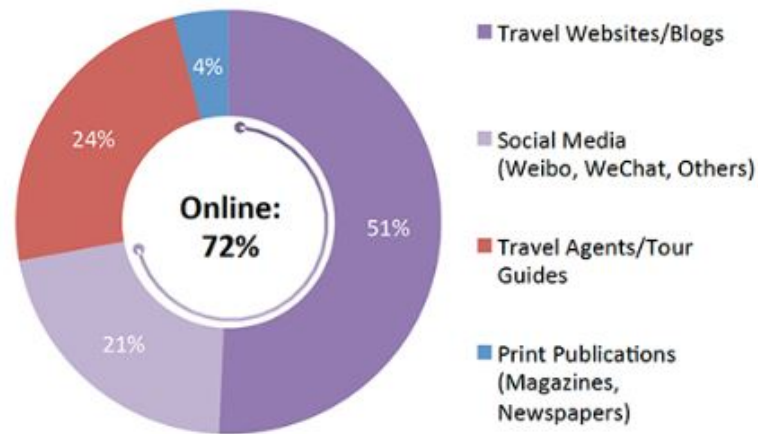
Figure 8 The channels Chinese tourists use to plan trips. (China Luxury Advisor 2017)

Figure 8 indicates the channels Chinese tourists use to plan their trips. Seventy-two of Chinese tourists use online platforms such as travel websites, blogs and social media. (China Luxury Advisor 2017) Thus, the cooperation between Lake Saimaa region and Tencent is a very excellent and explicit trend. However, Tencent is not enough to promote Chinese customers. Lake Saimaa region is supposed to focus marketing on more Chinese online platforms. Tencent used to have restrictions on advertising, but they now allow brands to advertise on WeChat with a banner ad, KOL advertisements, and Moments ads. A Moments advertisement allows companies to advertise within the Moments section, as compared to Facebook's news feed. Doing advertising on Moments in WeChat is considered much easier and more affordable. (Thai 2018.)

Figure 9 Mercedes-Benz ad on WeChat moments. (Chen 2016)

For example, the figure above shows an advertisement of Mercedes-Benz on WeChat moments. This advertisement is shown to every user on WeChat who opens the "Moment" function. Users can share, comment and give the ad a "like" when they see it.

As well as WeChat moment, Weibo is a very popular and recommended platform for the case company to do marketing for Lake Saimaa region. Because Weibo is a very popular blogging platform in China, it contains a large source of informational and trending content. Companies and celebrities in China use Weibo to communicate with their customers, fans, and followers. Besides, companies can create and modify a page to discuss and debate on many popular topics to increase the interaction with their customers. What is more, Weibo also allows companies to generate a marketing strategy and even directly sell their products on Weibo. (Chozan 2017.) According to China Internet Watch's latest re- port in 2018, Weibo has 340 million monthly active users (CIW 2018). It is specifically popular among young white-collar workers and the urban customers with mobile phones. Weibo's users rise a huge marketing wave that businesses cannot ignore. (Chozan 2017.)

The figure below is a forwarded post of "Visit Finland" organization on Weibo platform. (Figure 8) It shows the beautiful scenery of lake in Finland. The posts of the account have many viewers and comments. It has been promoting uses on Weibo to visit Finland. Thus, the Lappeenranta's Communication and Marketing team is very recommended to create its own Weibo account.

Figure 10 Weibo of Visit Finland (Visit Finland 2016)

What is more, Baidu is also a very recommended online platform for the case company. Baidu is the largest Chinese language search engine in China. It offers search opportunities as well as a variety of related search products, such as pictures, articles, maps and news search. The statistics of DMR shows that Baidu has 660 million monthly active users. (Collins 2018.)

Baidu also allows businesses to create their own page and target specific groups through the platform. Businesses can post on a range of topics and use the platform to communicate with other users. (Collins 2018.)

Using the platforms mentioned above correctly can help develop an organic presence in China without resorting to paid advertising. These online platforms can be very useful for the Lappeenranta's Communication and Marketing team to build town brand in China.

4 Research method

The research on Chinese tourists' consumer behaviour is based on qualitative research method, because qualitative research method is able to indicate Chinese travellers' experiences in Lake Saimaa region in detail. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviour, and social contexts of particular populations. The characteristics of it can help the author answer the research questions efficiently. (Sofare 2002.) Comparing with quantitative research method, it is more suitable for describing variation, relationship, individual experiences and group norms (Bhat 2018).

In addition, open-ended questions and probing characteristics of qualitative research method can help this research to get responds in Chinese interviewees' own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses as quantitative methods do. Thus, two structured interviews were arranged for this research. The questions in the interview were designed by the author of this thesis and they can be found in the appendices (see appendices 3 and 4).

4.1 Interview arrangement

The interviews were organized by the author between her and a small sample size of Chinese tourist representatives. Depending on the resources and time available，purposive sampling method was used in the research. Target representatives were selected from two different types of Chinese tourists who had visited Lake Saimaa region.

There were 9 representatives in total. They were divided into two groups. The first group was foreign independent traveller (FIT), another was group traveller. Different interview questions were designed for each group of interviewees. Both interviews were arranged through the group video chat on WeChat application. The representatives are from different cities in China and they have different ages and occupations. They were selected by the author because they all had been in the Lake Saimaa Region for at least one day. The detailed interview information can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

During the interview, the personal information of interviewees was collected by the author in table format in Microsoft Excel software and their responses to interview questions were typed in Microsoft Word software by the author. Meanwhile, with the permission of interviewees themselves, the WeChat group videos were recorded in order to review and reanalyse the original responses.

4.2 Data analysis

To shorten and summarize the data collected in the 1 hour and 50 minutes interviews, the author decided to analyse the interview results by dividing the typed script into few sub-topics under the main topic "Motivation to visit Lake Saimaa region". The sub-topics are about travel information Chinese tourists get in China, interesting tourist attractions and events, transportation, food and accommodation, shopping and translation service. The sub-topics help the author to organize and analyse the responses interviewees gave. After knowing these, the case company can make improvements more effective and easier on its marketing strategy.

Referring to qualitative content analysis, in addition to categorization, it is important to have transaction rules for transforming spoken language in interviews into text (Mayring 2014). The transaction rule selected by the author is selective protocol. The author viewed recordings of interviews repeatedly to make sure there was no important information missing in the typed script. After that, the typed script was reanalysed by the author. The responses from interviewees were kept in the script only if they were relevant to the topics. Thus, the contents regarding introduction, motivating interviewees or explaining the research question were removed from the text interpretation. The rest part of typed script lead to interview findings as follows.

5   Motivation to visit Lake Saimaa region

The motivation of FITs to visit lake Saimaa region is very similar with group travellers. Although for group travellers, the Lake Saimaa region is only one small part of their whole journey. Lake Saimaa region is normally not their main target destination in Finland so that they all stayed in the region for a very short time. As introduced before, Chinese tourists need Schengen Visa to travel in European countries, once they get the Visa and join a travel group, it is very common that they visit many countries in one week. The interviewees from travel groups illustrated that they all had more than two destinations in Finland. And they had only about one-day time to stay in the Lake Saimaa region.

The group travellers are motivated to visit this region because of the events that travel agency arrange for them, such as fishing and outdoor BBQ. And of course, they are attracted by the crystal-clear sky and beautiful lake scenery in Lake Saimaa region.

For Chinese independent travellers, the biggest motivation is that they have already heard about the "Purest Finland" image of Lake Saimaa region and it sounds very attractive. Besides, most FITs know some Chinese people who work or study in Finland so that they plan to visit the people they know and travel around Lake Saimaa region during their visit.

Also, most Chinese tourists fly to Finland with Finnair airline, and they consider Helsinki as a transportation hub in Schengen area. When choosing tourist destinations in Finland, the Lake Saimaa region is much nearer to Helsinki than other popular destinations such as the Lapland region.

Some of the interviewees of this research illustrated that before their visit in Lake Saimaa region, they had never seen such blue sky and lake. Besides, the forests impressed them very much because the trees are so tall and dense in Lake Saimaa region. One interviewee said that she had visited many countries and she supposed the Lake Saimaa region is not only the "Purest Finland", but also one of the purest places in the world. In general, the pureness of Lake Saimaa region is the biggest motivation for Chinese travellers because the environment is much more clean, fresh and healthy than in China and many other places.

5.1   Travel information got in China

When interviewing the travellers who visited Lake Saimaa region, all FITs illustrated that they searched and received travel information of Lake Saimaa region online, as the majority of Chinese outbound tourists do. Many popular online platforms in China nowadays are mentioned by interviewees, such as Weibo, WeChat, QQ, Baidu and Zhihu etc. They saw beautiful photos posted by others who had visited Lake Saimaa region as well as their experiences there. And FITs got further information and booked flight tickets and hotels in tourism website such as Qyer and TuNiu.

The two couples travelling with a group responded that they also have seen some travel information via social media and online advertisements. Besides, some of them heard their relatives' or friends' recommendations. But they did not want to search routes, hotels and book tickets by themselves. Thus, they called and visited travel agencies to get detailed trip arrangements and joined the travel groups to Lake Saimaa region.

5.2 Attractive tourist attractions and events in Lake Saimaa region

In this topic, the author got various opinions from different interviewees. The tourist attractions and events were arranged by the travel agency for group travellers while FITs visited where ever they were interested in. However, in general, they all had very good impressions on the tourist attractions and events.

Comparing Helsinki and Lapland region with the lake Saimaa region, there seems to be no specific architecture such as Helsinki Cathedral and Santa village to attract tourists. Instead, tourists enjoy the beautiful nature in Lake Saimaa region everywhere. In terms of events, the most attractive activities for Chinese tourists are sauna, hiking, outdoor BBQ and fishing.

It is said by the interviewees that they enjoyed the nature in Finland very much because in China, people try their best to move from countryside to suburbs or cities for more job opportunities, higher salaries and more modern lives. However, in cities and suburbs, the number of buildings and industrial factories are increasing unbelievably in China. As China is developing so rapidly, many problems show up on the environment, such as air pollution, smog, sand storm and water pollution. People living in big cities in China nowadays cannot enjoy such clean and beautiful nature as in Lake Saimaa region.

FITs' travel routes and time arrangements are much more flexible than group travellers. The respondents had various activities in Lake Saimaa region. Some of them went to the Lake Saimaa region to visit their families or friends who were studying or working there. Comparing with group travellers, the FITs seem to know more about local life and culture in Lake Saimaa region. Those who stayed more than three days in Lake Saimaa region, illustrated that there are not many places of interest as in other big European cities. They felt very relaxed and they could do many activities they were interested in. For example, skiing, hiking in forests, watching sunset at the lake side, swimming in lake, sauna, taking boat, visiting local coffee shops and bars, shopping in malls or local markets, and some of them even went to Holiday Club in Imatra to spend their leisure time. It is said that the low-step local life in Lake Saimaa region lets tourists forget all their troubles and worries.

In short, the FITs enjoy local life and beautiful nature in Lake Saimaa region, rather than any other "tourist attractions" where there are always many tourists queuing for buying entry tickets. The tourist attractions and events Chinese tourists like in Lake Saimaa region reflect that the natural beauty in this region is the most attractive thing.

5.3 Local transportation system

The ways of travel in Lake Saimaa region are very different between group travellers and FITs. The Chinese travel groups are always led by a local guide after their arrival in Finland. Thus, they go everywhere with the tour guide by taking a tourist bus which can normally contain up to 40 passengers. The guide and tourist bus are normally provided by the travel agency to the tourists for their whole journey in one country.

Thus, when it came to the topic of local transportation system in the interview, some group travellers responded that they have never taken a public transportation in Lake Saimaa region. They think that it is very efficient and convenient to travel with tourist bus. Because compared with cities in China, the traffic in Lake Saimaa region is not crowded at all. They can go to all the destinations on time in good weather by bus. Besides, with the tourist bus and tour guide, the group travellers had no need to worry about unfamiliar public transportation system, any delays or traffic rules.

As for FITs, they bought train or bus tickets to Lappeenranta, Imatra and Mikkeli from Helsinki by themselves. In fact, all FIT interviewees indicated that they had searched travel transportation information online before. And some of them got help from their friends or relatives in Finland. It is said by the interviewees that with many digital travel and map applications nowadays, it is not complex any more to search travel route and buy tickets by themselves. In addition, they can always pay in Chinese RMB when they book flight tickets to Finland.

In terms of public transportation in the cities, Chinese travellers understand that there are only city buses around the region because the population is too small. The Chinese FITs interviewees used various transportation such as buses, bikes, trains, rented cars and taxis in Lake Saimaa region.

Nevertheless, the Chinese FIT interviewees suppose that the public transportation tickets are very expensive as well as car-renting and taxis in Lake Saimaa region. Thus, there are still something that can be improved to attract more Chinese travellers. For example, the local governments can cooperate with Chinese Mobike company who operates the world's largest shared bicycle business. The shared bikes of Mobike company have been used in many European countries. If the system is used in Lake Saimaa region, it will be a very good choice for Chinese travellers as well as others who would like to move a short distance at a cheap price. Meanwhile, they can enjoy beautiful lakeside scenery and fresh air in the forests.

Besides, to attract more Chinese independent travellers, it is important for Lake Saimaa region to post more transportation information on Chinese tourists' websites. What is more, developing direct flight from China to Lake Saimaa region seems the most effective way of bringing more Chinese tourists, although it is more realistic to develop the transportation between Helsinki and the Lake Saimaa region. Because Helsinki has developed many direct flights to China and Helsinki is close to Lake Saimaa region.

5.4   Shopping in Lake Saimaa region

Traveling consumers are a particularly dynamic market segment to study. Especially, for Chinese outbound travellers, shopping is a very important and attractive activity. For Chinese FITs, the prices of food, household and daily necessaries in Lake Saimaa region are higher than most other tourist attractions in China and other European countries. Chinese group travellers do not know as much as FITs about local prices because many of their expenditures are included in the travel package price such as car-renting, tickets, drinks and food.

However, in the interview, when it came to products made in Europe, especially luxury product purchasing, both types of Chinese customers responded that they were willing to purchase those products, especially products made in Finland. Because the same products they bought in Finland cost more in China because of tax. Besides, Chinese consumers can get tax-free service in many shops in Finland.

In terms of payment methods, Chinese FITs are very satisfied. Because they all have at least one Visa or Master card before they travel abroad, and the cards are very useful in Lake Saimaa region. As Chinese tourists are increasingly reliant on technology to navigate the retail landscape and inform their spending, especially when traveling to new or foreign destinations. It is emphasised by Chinese tourists that they expect in the future that WeChat payment system can be applied in the Lake Saimaa region as well as Alipay.

When interviewing group travellers, some old persons responded they only use traditional payment method such as cash or credit card. In terms of purchasing, they think the prices of local food and products are very high. It is very common that a product is (one or) even twice more expensive than in China. For memorizing the trip and bringing gifts from Finland to relatives and friends, most Chinese travellers purchase many souvenirs, even though they know that some of the products they buy in Finland are originally made in China. Besides, the Finnish brands such as Iittala and Fiskars are very popular for Chinese travellers. Chinese tourists suppose that although many Finnish brands have high prices, the products have very good quality.

5.5 Local accommodation and food

The group travellers who stayed a very short time in Lake Saimaa region reflected that trying local food is a very unforgettable experience. Because the local food is very healthy and fresh. They enjoyed the natural flavour of food rather than flavours of many spices.

Chinese travellers who stayed almost one week in Lake Saimaa region did not like the local food very much. They reflected that although it was interesting to try specialties such as fishes in the Lake Saimaa, the cuisine and flavour was too different from Chinese food. Especially for Chinese tourists who come from Chongqing. They are very fond of spicy Chinese food so that the fresh and natural dishes in Lake Saimaa region do not attract them too much. When they get bored with the local food, they searched for Chinese restaurant in Lake Saimaa region.

Although there are not many Chinese restaurants in one city in Lake Saimaa region, the tourists felt very surprised and pleased to have their hometown food in Lake Saimaa region. The reason behind this behaviour is that there are too many differences between Finnish and Chinese eating habits, etiquette and cuisine. For example, many interviewees illustrated that they are used to using chopsticks and drinking hot water. However, they have to use forks and knifes and drink cold drinks during their journey in Lake Saimaa region. Some of them even had never drunk sparkling mineral water before they visited Finland.

In terms of accommodation, interviewees had different experiences in living in Lake Saimaa region, some FITs lived with their friends who were studying or working there. It provided FITs experiences closer to local live. They can communicate with neighbours, walking around apartment and make food by themselves at the place where they stay.

The group travellers lived in hotels or lakeside cottages that their travel agency arranged. Both FITs and group travellers reflected the places they stayed were very clean and it was very quiet at night. They enjoyed the tranquil surroundings because they all come from big and noisy cities in China. Living in Lake Saimaa region let them feel very fresh and forget their troubles.

5.6 Translation service

It is known that translation service is essential in international business as well as in tourism and hospitality sector. Hotel and restaurant owners, travel agents, tour operators, and tourist guides are supposed to provide contents in multiple languages to serve their foreign customers' needs.

Chinese travellers who go aboard independently usually speak English fluently. Because they have realized that they have to manage the journey and communicate with local people by themselves. If they cannot speak English or other local languages well, they usually travel with groups with tour guides who can speak English or local language very well.

Chinese FITs are very satisfied with communicating with others in their trip. Because most local people in Lake Saimaa region can speak English very well, including in shops, restaurants and hotels. Thus, Chinese travellers with English language skills did not meet many problems with translation services. Comparing with small cities in other European countries such as Estonia and France, the lake Saimaa region provides tourists with more open and friendlier environment. Even when travellers meet problems, for instance, they do not understand products' specifications in Finnish, there are usually warm-hearted customers or helpful shop assistants who can translate that information into English for them.

For group travellers, although they have tour guides, they still can meet a series of problems with translation services during their journey in Lake Saimaa region. For example, it is very common that Chinese group travellers buy a large number of gifts in foreign countries for their families and friends. However, most Chinese travellers do not want to take a lot of luggage with them for the rest of their journey. Thus, many Chinese customers would like to deliver the products directly to their homes in China. During the purchase and service process, they can meet many translation problems when they communicate with shop assistants, filling forms by themselves and so on. Some of interviewees illustrated that they expect more information and instructions in Chinese language as many other tourists' destinations do.

Besides, many Chinese travellers are not satisfied that in popular shops and tourist attractions in Lake Saimaa region, there are no Chinese guides who can help Chinese customers. For instance, in Helsinki airport, where Chinese customers usually buy many tax-free products, many products and services are translated into Chinese and there are often Chinese shop assistants. But in Lake Saimaa region, it is not as convenient as in Helsinki for Chinese customers who cannot speak English to communicate and purchase.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Understanding Chinese tourists' consumer behaviour

After interviewing some Chinese tourists and summarizing their responses, the author has got enough information regarding the research topic. In the final chapter, the main research problem "How to understand Chinese tourists' consumer behaviour in Lake Saimaa region and how to reach them better?" is able to be answered conclusively as follows.

The biggest motivation for Chinese tourists to visit Lake Saimaa region is the attractiveness of natural scenery there. There is no doubt that "Purest Finland" is a very successful and attractive concept for Chinese customers. Because of serious problems concerning environmental pollution in China today, Chinese tourists admire natural and beautiful tourist destinations where to spend their holidays. The fresh air, dense forests, crystal clear sky and blue lake in the Lake Saimaa region is exactly what many Chinese residents are looking for. The interesting events also motivate Chinese tourists，for example fishing, living in cottages at lakeside. The original motivation for Chinese tourists is the beautiful nature of Lake Saimaa region.

Another major motivation is that the Lake Saimaa region is near to Helsinki which is many Chinese tourists' first destination in Europe. As analysed in Chinese customers' consumer behaviour. It is common that Chinese tourists visit many cities in one country in a short time. Because the majority of Chinese people travel to Europe only very few times in their whole lives, they want to see as much as possible. Thus, the Lake Saimaa region has become a very good choice for Chinese tourists who visit not only one city in Finland.

Chinese tourists' buying behaviour is mainly influenced by social factors, cultural factors, personal factors and psychological factors. The buying decisions of tourism products of Chinese tourists are influenced greatly by individual and social factors. Especially their financial condition, age and role in the society. What is more, the cultural factors are also very important for some religious Chinese people.

However, most Chinese tourists who travel to Lake Saimaa region and purchase Finnish products and services do not consider the cultural factors much, because very strict religious Chinese people normally would not travel abroad. In terms of psychological factors, Chinese consumers' attitudes affect their buying behaviour greatly. Most of them suppose that Finnish products are more environmental-friendly and have better quality than Chinese products.

In terms of interesting tourist attractions, the beautiful nature in Lake Saimaa region is the most attractive element for Chinese tourists. In terms of events, the most unforgettable and interesting activities for Chinese tourists are living in cottage at lakeside, enjoying sauna, making outdoor barbeque and taking boats and fishing in the Lake Saimaa. Other interesting events such as swimming and hiking were also mentioned by Chinese tourists. In short, Chinese tourists enjoy the events which make them closer to the beautiful nature of Lake Saimaa region.

In addition, many Chinese tourists enjoy shopping in local shops and malls, they are promoted to purchase especially in some shops where Alipay service and discounts are offered to them. And Chinese tourists are motivated to buy products in shops where they can get tax-free services.

6.2   Reaching customers better in China

In the end of this research, it is very much recommended to the Lappeenranta's Communication and Marketing team that developing online marketing strategy is the best way to reach Chinese customers better in China. With smart online marketing, it is much simpler and effective to reach potential Chinese tourists and consumers.

As discussed in the background chapter, the cooperation between Lake Saimaa region and Tencent company is supposedly a very good marketing strategy. It follows the trend and it is believed that the cooperation will attract more Chinese tourists to visit the Saimaa region from the year of 2018.

However, to develop online marketing strategy of Lake Saimaa region in Chinese outbound market, the Lappeenranta's Communication and Marketing team has to be updated with the changing technology, which is proficiently used by Chinese consumers and the company's competitors. Many tourism and social media platforms are required to continuously get information of what is happening around Chinese outbound tourism market, as well as to spread the events and services in Lake Saimaa region.

The popular social media platforms in China have been mentioned in the empirical findings chapter, they include WeChat, Weibo and QQ. These platforms are exactly where Lake Saimaa region are supposed to promote its Chinese consumers and tourists. It can improve Lake Saimaa region's brand awareness and the "Purest Finland" concept. And they seem the most stress-free and profitable digital marketing platforms that can be used to increase business visibility. Besides, it is very cost-effective. Because it is free for users to create an account and sign up on all social networking platforms mentioned above. What is more, these platforms play a vital role in networking and communication platform. They can also help the case company in this research to get more information and a better understanding of the tourism industry.

Also, the official and travel-related websites in Chinese outbound tourism market play an important role in online marketing to get ready to reach Chinese consumers. It is recommended to the case company to register Lappeenranta's Communications and Marketing team's own website in China. Having a Chinese website address helps avoiding the long loading time of the content due to China´s government regulations regarding having related licence. The case company is recommended as well to create a mobile version working or cooperating with travel Apps. As analysed in the promotion chapter, 71% of Chinese outbound tourists use mobile internet to search for travel information.

After creating the websites and mobile version, it is important to link the website to popular Chinese social media platforms mentioned in this research to increase visibility. Besides, travel and purchasing tips, recommendations and information on payment methods should be provided to Chinese tourists.

Last but not least, other sources of travel information and booking platforms such as Ctrip, Trip Advisor and Tuniu are also very recommended in Chinese outbound tourism market. The Lappeenranta's Communications and Marketing team can start developing online marketing strategy with creating profiles on these Chinese websites.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview information of FITs

Interview Date: 5th April 2018

Tourists type: Foreign Independent Travellers

Participants: 5

Duration: 1 hour

Interviewee number	Age	Departure City	Language	Occupation	Duration in Lake Saimaa Region
1	50	Chongqing	Chinese, basic English	Civil servant	6 days
2	51	Chongqing	Chinese, basic English	Business-man in dairy industry	6 days
3	27	Guangzhou	Chinese, fluent English	PhD degree student in China	2 days
4	36	Beijing	Chinese, basic English	photographer	1.5 day
5	31	Shanghai	Chinese, fluent English	Business-man in textile industry	4 days

Appendix 2 Interview information of group travellers

Interview Date: 7th April 2018

Tourists type: Group Travellers

Participants: 4

Duration: 50 minutes

Interviewee number	Age	Departure City	Language	Occupation	Duration in Lake Saimaa Region
1	52	Chongqing	Chinese	CEO of an electricity company	1.5 days
2	46	Chongqing	Chinese	Manager in an electricity company	1.5 days
3	44	Shanghai	Chinese	Civil servant	1.5 days
4	50	Shanghai	Chinese	Civil servant	1.5 days

Appendix 3 Interview questions for FITs:

1. What's your name, occupation and age?
2. How much did you know about Lake Saimaa region before your visit and where did you get the information?
3. Which factors did you consider before making decision of visiting Lake Saimaa region and why did they affect your decision?
4. Why did you visit Lake Saimaa region?
5. How did you arrive at Lake Saimaa region and why did you choose the transportation?
6. When did you arrive in Finland and how long did you stay in the Lake Saimaa region?
7. Did you have any difficulty in communicating with local people and why?
8. What do you think about the local food and accommodation and why?
9. What's your general impression on the tourist attractions and why?
10. What kind of events attracted you most and why?
11. Did you like local products and why?
12. Did you enjoy shopping in Lake Saimaa region and why?

Appendix 4 Interview questions for group travellers

1. What's your name, occupation and age?
2. What kind of travel group were you in and how did you find it?
3. Why did you choose Lake Saimaa region as one of your destinations?
4. Which factors did you consider before making decision of visiting Lake Saimaa region and why did they affect your decision?
5. How did you arrive at Lake Saimaa region and why did you choose the transportation?
6. When did you arrive in Finland and how long did you stay in the Lake Saimaa region?
7. Were you satisfied with the language service and why?
8. What do you think about the local food and accommodation and why?
9. What's your general impression on the tourist attractions and why?
10. What kind of events attracted you most and why?
11. Did you enjoy shopping in Lake Saimaa region and why?