



Research into the preferences of Japanese tourists visiting South Coast of Finland

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Laurea University of Applied Sciences

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tourists visiting South Coast of Finland**

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The aim of the Caito project 2017-2019 is to attract Japanese tourists in three Baltic sea countries: Finland, Estonia and Latvia. This is done by promoting the participation of rural tourism companies in the Japanese market. The project is financed by the central Baltic program with members and partners from the three countries. Laurea University of Applied Sciences is one of the project partners.

The purpose and objectives of this thesis project, which is a subset of the overall purpose of Caito project 2017-2019, is to identify and provide marketing strategy channels for the Finnish companies in the South Coast regions used by the Japanese tourist.

There are several steps involved to achieve these objectives. At first, a general study of the Japanese tourist is made and the top three channels they used to find information when visiting Finland are identified. Furthermore, an understanding of their preferences and expectations about these channels available to them are listed and analysed based on how cheap, easy to use and comfortable they are.

The knowledge base utilises related research, articles and literature and statistical reviews to generate ideas and provide secondary data. The methods used in collecting primary data were qualitative and quantitative approach. A SWOT analysis, personas and benchmarking were used in analysing the final outcomes of the report.

The main outcomes of the project were that the Japanese tourist, especially the young and middle-aged generations used more social media and the internet to find information about Finland and the South Coast region when they want to visit.

The recommendations to the Finnish companies in the South Coast were that they should promote more of their product and services to the Japanese population via social media and the internet. Moreover, they should provide information in Japanese on their websites, and in guidebooks and brochures in order to attract more audience.

Keywords: Japanese tourists, South Coast Finland, channel, social media

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1 Introduction

Tourism is all over the world at the moment. It is the means of traveling for pleasure or business, and the practice of touring from one place to another. Tourism can be national or international, traveling to and staying in places outside usual environment for no more than one consecutive year (World Tourism Organization 2018).

There are difference range of tourists. Grzywacz, Zeglen, Fizycznego and Rzeszowski (2016) refers to a study by Cohen in 1972 on the topology of tourists and their satisfaction level. Tourists experiences and roles are described into four types; the organised mass tourist, the individualised mass tourist, the explorer and the drifter. (Cohen 1972 cited in Grzywacz et al. 2016). Furthermore, according to Grzywacz et al. (2016), Smith (1977) also states that tourists are divided into seven categories; “The explorer, elite, offbeat, unusual, incipient mass, mass and charter tourist”.

According to Research facts of Matka Nordic Travel Fair (2016) and Messukeskus Helsinki (2017), tourists plan to spend more money and invest on travelling in the near future. The Matka Nordic Travel Fair is the largest travel industry event in the Northern Europe where people from around the world meet to make an impact in the decision making on both the travel public and travel trade. Turku, which is on the South-Western Coast of Finland host a Fair Center exhibition events every year and the Matka Nordic Travel Fair 2018 was held there in January where so many people, tourists attended.

The overall aim of Caito project 2017-2019 is to attracts more Japanese tourists in Finland, Estonia and Latvia. As Asian market is growing rapidly, Caito project will help to promote and support rural tourism companies to participate in the Japanese market.

This thesis; which is the subset of the Caito project aim is to find an easy ways or channels where the Japanese tourists find information about Finnish companies in the South Coast. The thesis will focus on the preferences, experiences and expectations of the Japanese tourists in South Coast of Finland. The business challenge of the companies in South Coast Finland is to identify a proper marketing strategy channels to the Japanese tourists who would want to travel to the South Coast of Finland. A general study of tourists and the Japanese tourists is made and identify the top three channels they used to find information when visiting Finland. Furthermore, a deep understanding of their preferences and expectation about these channels available to them is analyse based on the chosen criteria.

1.1 Project background (Aims)

The Caito project expected results and solutions are to boost and make a better cooperation between small business enterprises and micro rural tourism businesses, tour operators and travel agencies on a national and global basis. Moreover, the expectation is to cut down and avoid any risk or potential barrier that will affect the Japanese tourist visits to these three Baltic Sea countries; Finland, Estonia and Latvia. Finally, the aim is to adapt rural tourism products and services by improving their appearances to the Japanese tourist and lure or attract more tourists from Japan. Based on these expectations from the SMEs organisations, the project activities and processes are to have good analysis and information on the Japanese tourist concerning these three Baltic countries. Furthermore, to gather an in-depth information from the Japanese tourist during their visit to these three Baltic countries. Knowing the mind of the customers by putting them in the centre of service or product design will attract more of the Japanese tourist. To have the advantages on the competitive global market, SMEs organisations need to do more better and faster in producing new products and services for their customers and potential customers so that they can sustain their financial growth.

With Caito project, there are step-by-step questionnaires, surveys interview from the Japanese tourist's opinion and need during their visit. This information is analysis and given to the SMEs organisations so that they can provide better products and services for the Japanese tourist during their visit to these three Baltic countries.

1.2 Business challenge of companies in South Coast Finland

There is not an easy way or channel where the Japanese tourist find information about the Finnish company in the South Coast of Finland. For these reasons, the companies in the South Coast Finland would like to know the easiest and comfortable ways of marketing to the Japanese tourists. This thesis will focus on finding the proper marketing strategy for the service providers in the South Coast of Finland. The market strategy will help the Japanese tourists that would want to visit South Coast Finland.

1.3 Project partners and Associate partners

Caito project 2017-2019 is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. Where Estonia University of Life Sciences is the lead partner in the Caito project. Furthermore, my university; Laurea University of Applied Sciences is one of the project partners with several other universities include: Estonian Rural Tourism Association;

Latvia University of Agriculture, Faculty of Economics and Social Development; Latvian Country Tourism Association "Lauku celotajs";

University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute; Regional Tourism Association in Southern Finland “Visit South Coast Finland”.

Associate partners include: Association of Latvian Travel Agents and Operators; Society Zemgale Tourism Association and Estonian Travel and Tourism Association.

1.4 Objectives (Scope)

This thesis objectives are the subset of the Caito project overall objectives. Firstly, to study and get information about the Japanese tourists in general, other country where Japanese tourists visit and compared to the Japanese tourist visit here in South Coast of Finland. The expected outcome is to draw a persona card of a typical Japanese tourist visit or stay in the South Coast of Finland. Secondly, to find the top three channels they use when they want to find information about Finland before and during their visit to South Coast. The channels will be identify based on criterial like; cheap, easy and comfortable. Finally, get a deeper understanding of the expectation and preferences from the Japanese tourists about these channels available to them. What are their criterial involve in choosing these channels?

The thesis result and analysis will be given to Suvi Suven, who is my client and also the manager of Caito project representative at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The thesis duration is about three months, and it will be done by 20th of December 2018.

2 Previous Researches

There are many studies and projects about Japanese tourists visiting Finland. I have read through some and get ideas on how to carry out my thesis project well according to the Caito project’s requirement.

2.1 Japanese tourists in Finland, Estonia and Latvia Literature review

The objective of this research was to gather all current relevant information and other researches about rural tourism of the Japanese in Finland, Estonia and Latvia. The research gets a deeper understanding of rural marketing strategy to the Japanese tourists and also point out any potential hinders for the Japanese tourists’ market in these three countries (Finland, Estonia and Latvia). The literature review centred on typical behaviour of the Japanese tourists and recount the difficulties and benefits of rural tourism in these three countries. It was based on online material like google scholar, information from the public such as government databases, theses, reports, studies,

previous research, presentations, cultural books and statistics. (Suvanto, Sudakova, Kattai, Grinberga-Zalite, and Bulderberga 2017.)

2.2 Japanese tourists in Australia

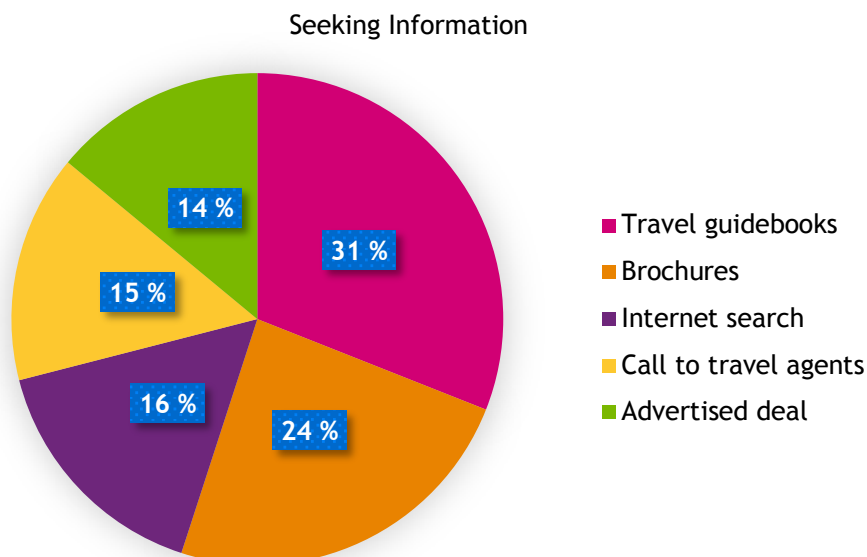
According to consumer Profile Japan (2017), Japanese tourists select their destination to Australia based on good food, drinks, coastal experiences, and great history views including safety. Furthermore, the perception of the Japanese tourists about Australia is limited as they have less admiration for their coastal and beaches because those are their least activities.

Consumer Profile Japan (2017) also mentioned that they mostly travel between January-March, July-September and December. They usually used online and offline sources of information for booking such as reading travel brochures, guide books, and travel agents.

Japan is ranked fifth in the Australia market review (TripAdvisor 2016). And sixth largest inbound market for visitors (Noto 2016).

Australian tourism market is using many programs in advertising to their target consumers through digital, video and content marketing.

The graphs below show where Japanese tourists find information about Australia and which booking channels they preferred for their trips.



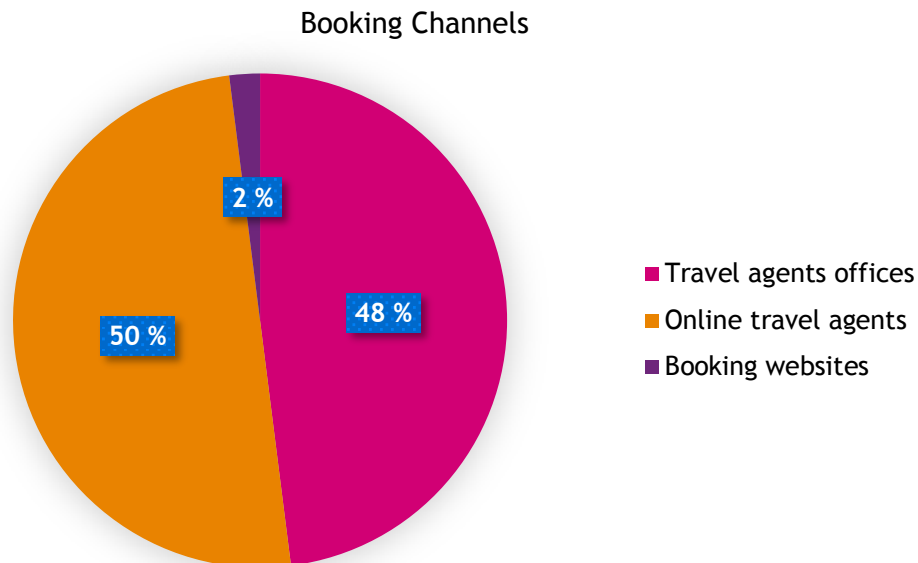


Figure 1: Preferred information sources and booking channels of the Japanese tourist to Australia (Consumer Profile Japan 2017).

2.3 Visit Finland Visitor Survey 2015

This survey is part of the TAK Border (TUTKIMUS- JA ANALYSOINTIKESKUS TAK OY) who is responsible for all the practicality of the survey and which is also an on-going research that started in 1997. Its objectives are to provide data and information on tourists visiting Finland by identifying the annual amount of them and how much they spent during their stay. Furthermore, the survey gives an in-depth profile of tourists from various countries by telling their length of stay; where they stay; reason for visiting; how many times they visit in a weeks, months or year and their activities during their visit.

According to Visit Finland Visitor Survey (2015), Japanese tourists are interested in visiting Finland and would recommend Finland to other people. Moreover, they are keen to know and experience the Finnish culture and its historic background. Visit Finland Visitor Survey (2015, 29-30) showing how tourists found information about Finland when they want to visit, booking channels in 2014 and 2015 as shown in Figure 2 below.

There were some increased and decreased in the booking channels from tourists who visited Finland in the years 2014 and 2015. The internet was the highest increase in booking channel as compared to other booking channels from 65% to 68% increase. However, there were decreased in other booking channels like tour operators or travel agents from 14% in 2014 to 9% in 2015, On location at the hotel or with transportation company service point from 3% in 2014 to 2% in 2015, Cell phone calls

or email to the tour operators or travel agents were half decrease from 8% 2014 to 4% in 2015 and finally a 13% booking channels in 2014 for other channels to 11% in 2015. In overall, the Japanese tourists booked less online or use the internet less for their trips. Nevertheless, they used the tour operators or travel agents service points for booking. (Visit Finland Visitor Survey 2015, 29-30.)

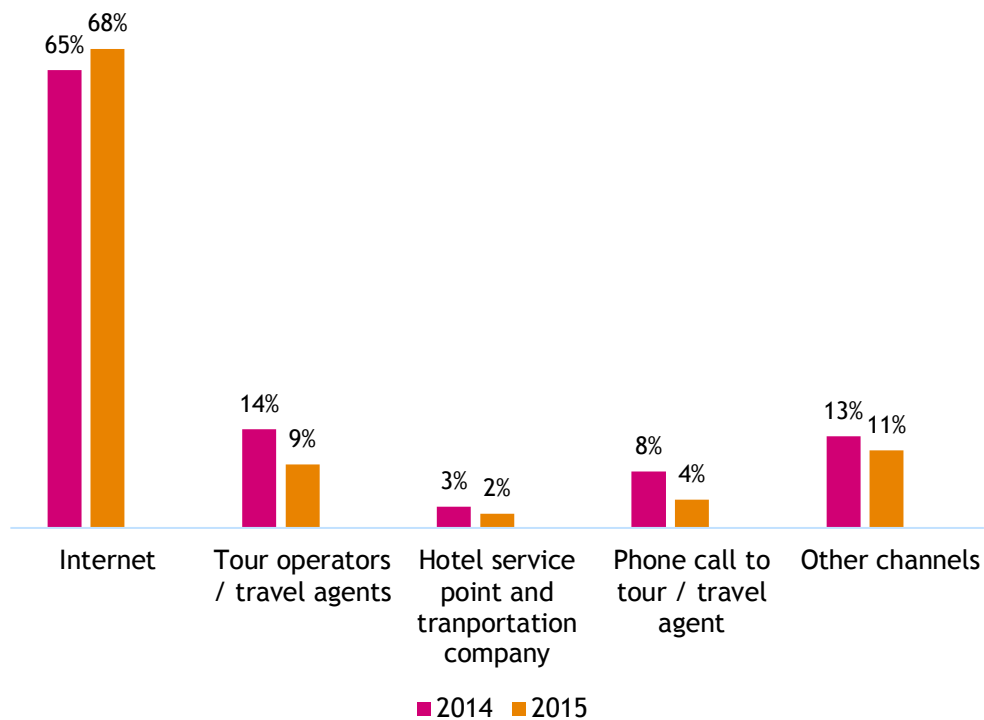


Figure 2: Booking Channels (Visit Finland Visitor Survey 2015).

According to Noto (2016, 4), showing the statistical trends and profile of the Japanese tourist in Finland identify that Japan ranked 7th place in the Finnish market.

In all, there were 454,000 tourists from Japan to Finland in 2015 of which about 10% of the tourists mostly spent 4-6 days in Finland.

Noto (2016,12) mentioned a research by Visit Finland Brand Tracker in 2015 that Finland has moved up to number one destination for the Japanese tourists by reaching 44% share of market in 2015.

3 Visit South Coast Finland

This is a tourism travel brand for tourists. The region is unique for its quietness, peacefulness and tourist's attractions. There are a lot of Finnish living history and culture in that region. (Visit South Coast Finland 2018.)

According to Discovering Finland (n.d), the region extends from close to the Russian border in the East to New city on the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia. The nature of South Coast areas is exceptional with the largest lake in the Southern Finland; Lohjanjärvi (Visit South Coast Finland 2018). The inland towns include Kouvola, Lahti and Hämeenlinna; and the coastal towns are Kotka, Porvoo, Turku and Naantali. The towns can be reach by airplane, ferry, train, bus and boat and there are a lot of activities such as hitchhiking, skiing, fishing and sightseeing. (Discovering Finland n.d.)

Most Japanese tourists, over 90% visit Helsinki and only a small percentage travel to other parts of Finland, mostly Lapland, which is the main target for over 40% of Japanese visitors in winter. Summer visits are in several other countries, but in winter Finland is the only destination and the stay is longer. In summer 82% of the visits are to the Helsinki area and 7% to Lapland whilst in winter these numbers are 48% for the Helsinki area and 44% for Lapland. Both groups and independent travellers prefer the Helsinki area, but package holidays are typically in Lapland. Lake and coastal Finland are destinations for only 4-5% and their share has been declined. Overall summer holidays are the most popular (70%) although autumn and winter have increased their share recently, as shown in the report of Ruralia institute of University of Helsinki in Figure 3 below (Visit Finland 2016c,2016f, cited in Suuvanto, Sudakova, Kattai, Grinberga Zälite and Bulderberga 2017, 29.)

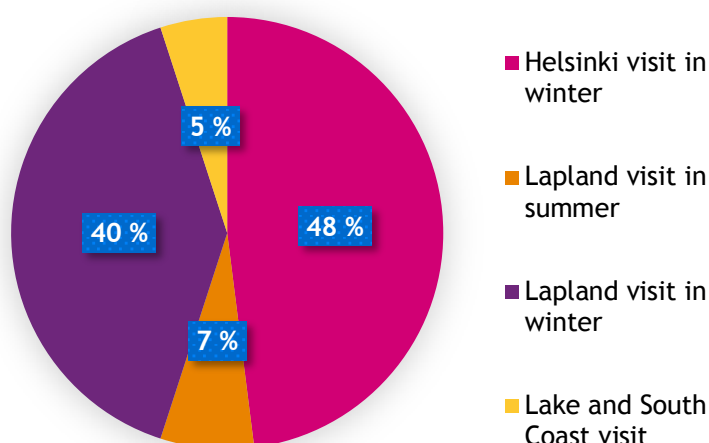


Figure 3: Japanese visits in Finland regions during seasons (Visit Finland 2016).

Suuvanto et al. (2017, 36) further refers to a report by Visit Finland 2016d that Japanese tourists are less interested in summer activities like biking, hiking, swimming, kayaking, sailing, cruising, fishing and wildlife watching in the countryside. According to Suuvanto et al. (2017,30), Visit Finland states that Finland is suffering from language barrier, and especially the older people do not prefer English. For that reason, they would appreciate a local guide and informative web pages in Japanese, which will make it easier for them to organise tour packages and travel agents.

In a competitive business world where the buyers have choice and information about alternative, the value of the customer asset is mentioned by how satisfied customer are, the likelihood of doing future business with them, interest rates, and the profit margin. Satisfied customers are not only the most consequential economic asset, but they are also the main representative for all of the sum total value of other company assets. (Fornel and Macmillan 2007, 66.) According to Fornel and Macmillan (2007, 92), a company or supplier who is well-informed or take good consideration of what the customers want and acts accordingly is more likely to create a satisfied customer. For these reasons, the Finnish company in the South Coast of Finland should listen and offer the Japanese tourists what they want in order to travel to the South Coast part during their visit in Finland. According to Finland trip planner (2018), Southern Finland has gorgeous national parks like Nuukio National Park; Repovesi National park; Serena Water Park; Sapokka Water Garden; and the country's cultural life and natural beauty like Porvoo old Town and Cathedral will give the tourists plenty of vacation ideas. Furthermore, Finland trip planner (2018), mentioned that Finland trip planner create a fully customised day-by-day itinerary freely for customers.

3.1.1 Top available channels to the Japanese tourist visiting Finland and the South Coast

A characteristics of good travel agents are to be reliable and provide accurate information for their customers and potential ones. They should be able to establish valuable long-term relationships between their loyal customers, know what the customers want so that they can satisfy their needs with quality products and services. (Chapek 2014.) Furthermore, wikiHow (n.d) state that a good travel agent should be able to clarify the purpose of the customers trip so that it can provide a smooth, time saving and good experience to the customer.

According to Association of Finnish Travel Agents AFTA (no date) (suomen matkatoimistoalan liitto ry), there are many travel channels such as tour operators, Incoming Agencies and Regional Operators available to the Japanese tourist visiting Finland and the South Coast of Finland. The top travel channels are as follows:

- Travel agents and travel operators in Japan
- Travel guidebooks and tours from lonely planet

- Online travel agents
- Travel packages
- Tumlare corporation
- Finland trip planner

According to this thesis questionnaire and interview survey analysis, the Japanese tourists highlighted and mentioned the best and preferred travel and information channels available to them based on some criteria like; easy access, cheap and comfortable. The three best channels they choose to get information about Finland for their trip are as follows:

- Google search is used to find online cheap travel agents such as; booking.com, TripAdvisor, and Expedia group which are the world travel platforms for tourists. The Japanese tourist said the google search is an easy way to find any information about a place they would like to visit.
- Japan travel agents with travel package and travel guidebook. This one is preferred because it provides them guides in their local language which makes it easier for them to communicate and understand what they want for their trips. Moreover, many people especially age 60 and older have had bad experience in an online booking channels due to language barrier or an unclear tour packages information.
- Social media was also chosen as the final channels due to good recommendations from friends, families and others who have visited Finland and the South Coast earlier. It is an easy channel thus showing reliable and valuable ways of finding good experience from people by sharing texts, pictures, videos with others. A good recommendation from people on social media will motivate others to travel the same place. Most of the preferred social media used were; Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Figure 4 and 5 show the percentages of how the Japanese tourist preferred to get information about Finland and South coast areas and by age ranges.

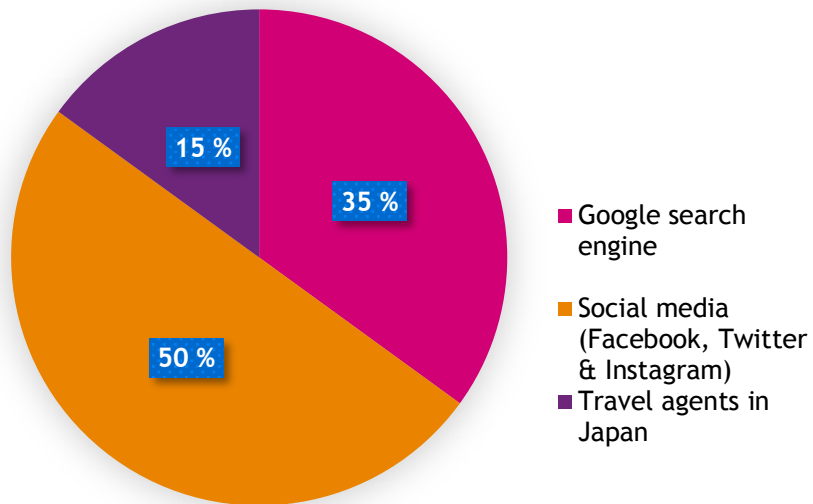


Figure 4: Japanese Tourist preferred information channels

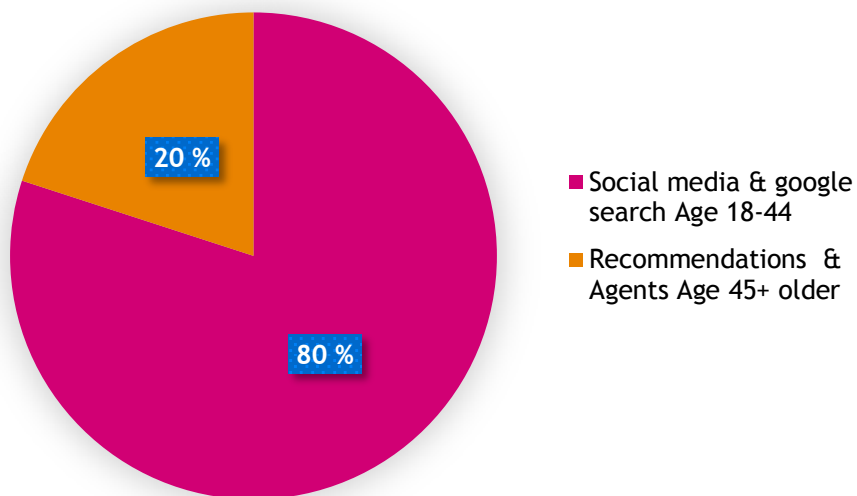


Figure 5: Preferred information channels used by age range

4 Theoretical Framework

4.1 Tourism

Tourism attractions can be either natural for example, National Park or built for example, the National Parliament House. They can also be human-based for example, dance company or special events linked to sport and / or celebrations and festival example the Olympic games. (Jennings 2001.) As South Coast Finland is a regional tourism place, that owned and operated by the local tourism companies in Finland. They look for the best possible tourist experience for their visitors every year. There should be an effective transportation and hospitality sectors catering for the needs of the tourists. The transport sector includes public and private transport networks and services which requires information on, for example: the development and evaluation of pricing, scheduling, safety and security issues, customer expectations and satisfaction, seasonality impacts and future forecasting of transport needs. Whereas the hospitality sector includes food and beverages and accommodation industries. These sectors require information on the quality evaluation and client needs in regard to services, amenities, facilities and their layout, stock control, health and safety issues, competitors and their products. (Jennings 2001). South Coast Finland companies and service providers need to take all these into consideration in order to satisfy and attract their customers and potential customers.

There has been provision setting for the recreation of rural area in many parts of the world for tourism activities which has not been considered as rural (Roberts and Hall 2001, 4). According to Roberts and Hall (2001,161), cultural tourism gives themes on things based on local or regional strategy. Its successful development is determined on the collaborative plan associate with a wide range of stakeholders.

4.2 Epic Content Marketing

Pulizzi (2014) describes epic content marketing process as the main objective for defining your audience or potential customer by understanding their demands, choosing the perfect content specific or clear area that will develop the company's content marketing mission statement. Pulizzi (2014) also states the six basic principles of epic content marketing is to "Fill a need, be consistent, be human, have a point of view, avoid sales speak, and to be best of breed".

According to Pulizzi (2014, 77-79), he further mentioned that the goal of epic content marketing is to drive the customer in a particular way. By affecting them in a meaningful way, capturing their attention and staying in touch with them at all the time.

Content marketing is developing and distributing the appropriate valuable and engage a meaningful information to a specific customer with the aim of getting new ones and expand profits from the existing ones (Pulizzi 2014, 5-6).

According to Moore (2017), she recommends that a good content marketing should not have too many features that can confuse the customers but should be easy and comfortable for people or users to use and understand.

4.3 Social Media and Online Marketing Strategy

Social media marketing is the form of internet marketing that involves the creation and sharing of company's contents on social media networks in order to achieve marketing goals. It is a powerful method for companies to reach customers and potential ones. Great marketing strategy on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and having activities like posting texts, images, videos and other relevant content will bring good prospects to the company's financial growth. (WordStream n.d.)

Barnhart (2018) highlights ways in creating a good social media marketing strategy is that companies have to build a platform and set goals that will solve their challenges, investigate and know their social media customers. By knowing and understanding their social media customers, it is essential for companies to learn about the buyers' behaviour and age groups in order to focus on the right marketing channels. Moreover, it is necessary to create and share an engaging and relevant social media content with the customers. It is always good for the companies to track and follow their efforts and improve the marketing strategies they used. Because if they do not track their effort, they will not know how to constantly analyse their work and customers.

Retargeting an essential information to the customer's journey will gain the attention of the target audience and acquire new audience will continue to grow rapidly. Companies need to have more efficient strategies in using social media to create customer journey. (Social Media Examiner 2018.)

Online marketing can be defined as the acts of investing on web-based media to pass on information and contents to customers about the company's products, services and brand. The aim of online marketing is to reach customers and potential ones through the medium they use for buying, reading, looking for information, or interacting with others (Optimizely 2018).

Optimizely 2018 further highlights the techniques involves in online marketing such as email, social media, advertisement and search engine booster. The advantages of online marketing are cost effective and helps evaluating customers through the different given media used by the customers (Optimizely 2018).

4.4 Managing the Customer Experience

Customer experience is a communication and interaction between a customer and an organization throughout their business relationship. It is a part of customer relationship management and its essential because, customers who have positive experiences are more likely to repeat purchases and become loyal once (MacDonald 2018.)

Smith and Wheeler (2002) said that customer “loyalty must be designed and created” and “the key to keeping your best customers is to know them”. Smith and Wheeler (2002) further states that creating this customer loyalty is by being intentional, acting accurately at all the time in a different and value ways.

Any business that succeed consistently in creating loyalty will always identify its target customers, by addressing the target customers values, driven consumers, loyalty behaviour and then build different brand assurances. Businesses have depended on the demography to divide and partition their customer’s needs. Moreover, focusing on satisfying target customers will help retain them and can turn them into advocates that lure or recommend others of the same value (Smith and Wheeler 2002, 43, 45.)

Fornell and Macmillan (2007) states that the more powerful the customers, there is greater responsibility by the companies and there are greater outcomes of customer satisfaction. He further said that where consumers do not have more control in the market world, they will appear to have less customer satisfaction. (Fornell and Macmillan 2007).

5 Methodology

5.1 Research approach and Design

Research approach can be defined as the plans and processes involved in every stage and details of the research method (Chetty 2016). Kadam, Shaikh, and Parab 2013 further mentioned that research approach is the overall decision making of which ways should be used to a specific research topic. De Leeuw, Hox and Dillman (2008, 7) states that it is good to construct the survey questionnaire very well in a clear and understandable language so that the respondents will be able to answer without any complication. Thus, using a clear and simple vocabulary will motivate the respondents to answer well and help to prevent or reduce survey error for analysis (De Leeuw et al. 2008, 7).

In this thesis, the research approach used were Quantitative and qualitative for data collection using questionnaires and interview for survey, and the data analysis of the data collected from the Japanese tourists and the travel agencies in the South Coast of Finland were SWOT, persona and benchmarking.

The questionnaires and interviews involved simple and short steps questions, so as to make it easy for the respondents to be able or willing to answer. There were two separate set of questions administered. One set for the Japanese tourist respondents with ten (10) questions and the other for the travel agencies with five (5) questions via phone interview and email.

The questionnaire and interviews to the Japanese tourists were administered in Finland in a period of three weeks in public places such as:

- Helsinki Centre railway station
- Vantaa Airport
- Shopping malls: Iso omena, Forum and Sello
- Parks: Esplanadi park and Kaivo puisto
- Senate square Helsinki

The questions were in a multiple choice, short answer and Yes or No forms.

- MC = Multiple Choice
- SA = Short Answer
- Y/ N= Yes / No

The nature of the questions is as follow:

The first three questions (1-3) described the demographic characteristics such as gender, age range and travel purpose respectively.

Questions 4 & 5 were about how clearly and where (which channels) they respondent finds information about Finland when they want to visit.

Questions 6- 8 asked the frequency, seasons and months, if the respondent or respondents ever visited South Coast part of Finland and if yes by which means of transportation used.

Question 9 is how likely they would recommend South Coast of Finland to others on a scale.

Lastly the 10th question was an open-ended one for the respondent to comment, or any concern about their travel channels available to them in Finland and which one they preferred the best and why.

The nature of questions to the travel agencies in the South Coast of Finland through phone calls and emails were as follow:

Asked if their services are easily available or accessible to the Japanese tourist visiting Finland and South Coast Finland.

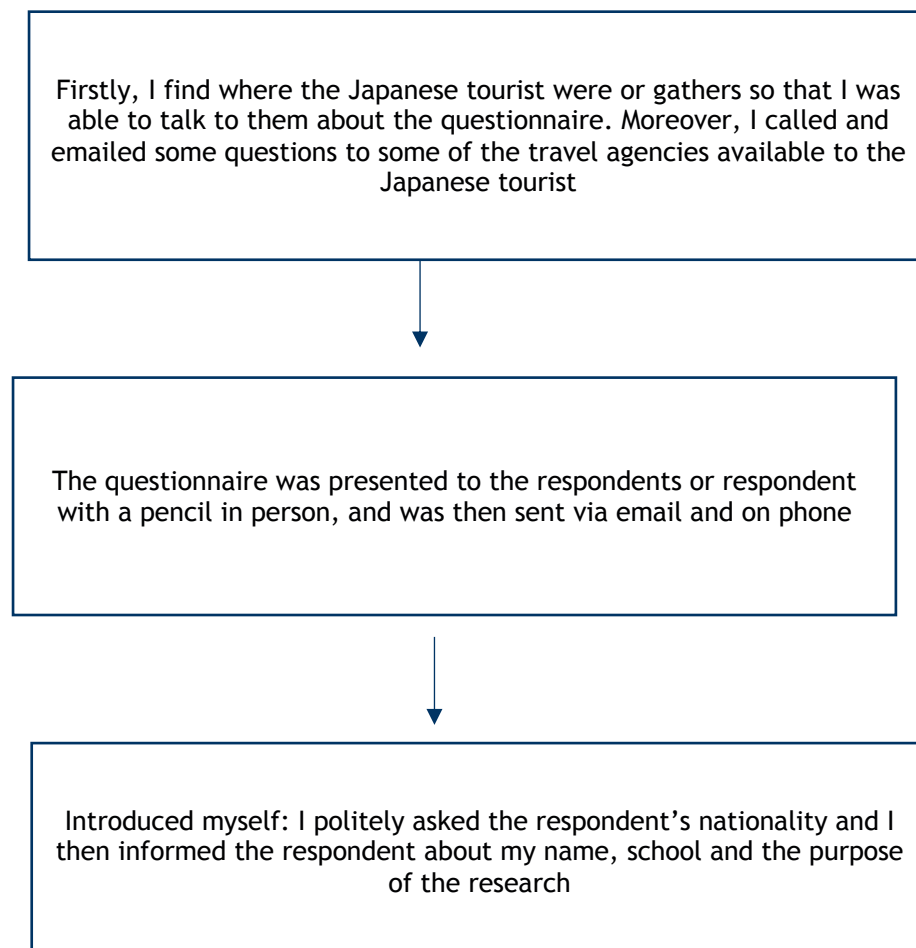
How often they get Japanese tourist visiting South Coast part of Finland.

If there is any Japanese language web page available to the Japanese tourist visiting South Coast Finland.

Do they have typical Japanese cuisine available for the Japanese tourists in the South Coast of Finland?

Any travel guides available to the Japanese tourist in English, Japanese or both.

The way the questionnaire was administered is shown in table 1 below.



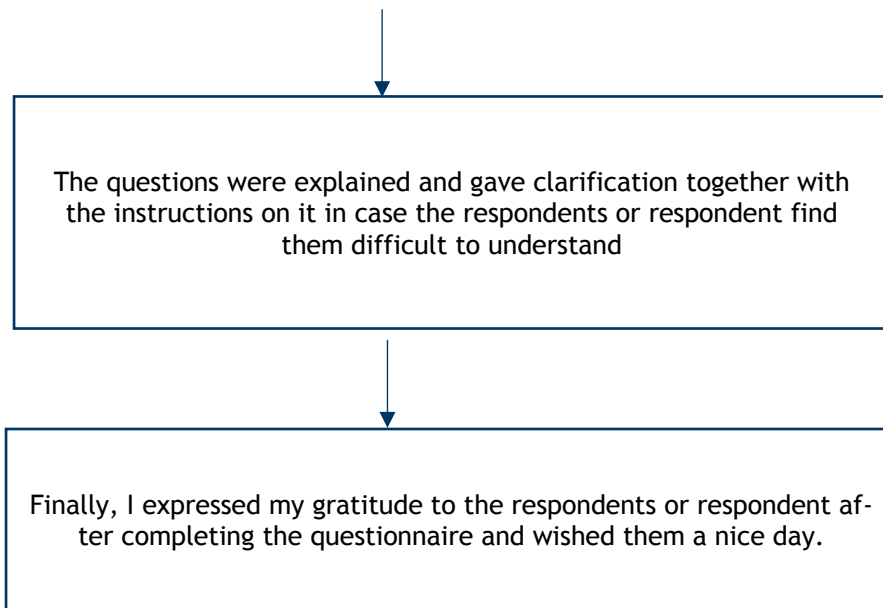


Table 1: Procedure involves in the administration of Questionnaire (Chetty 2016)

The research approach and design in this thesis are shown in table 2 below.

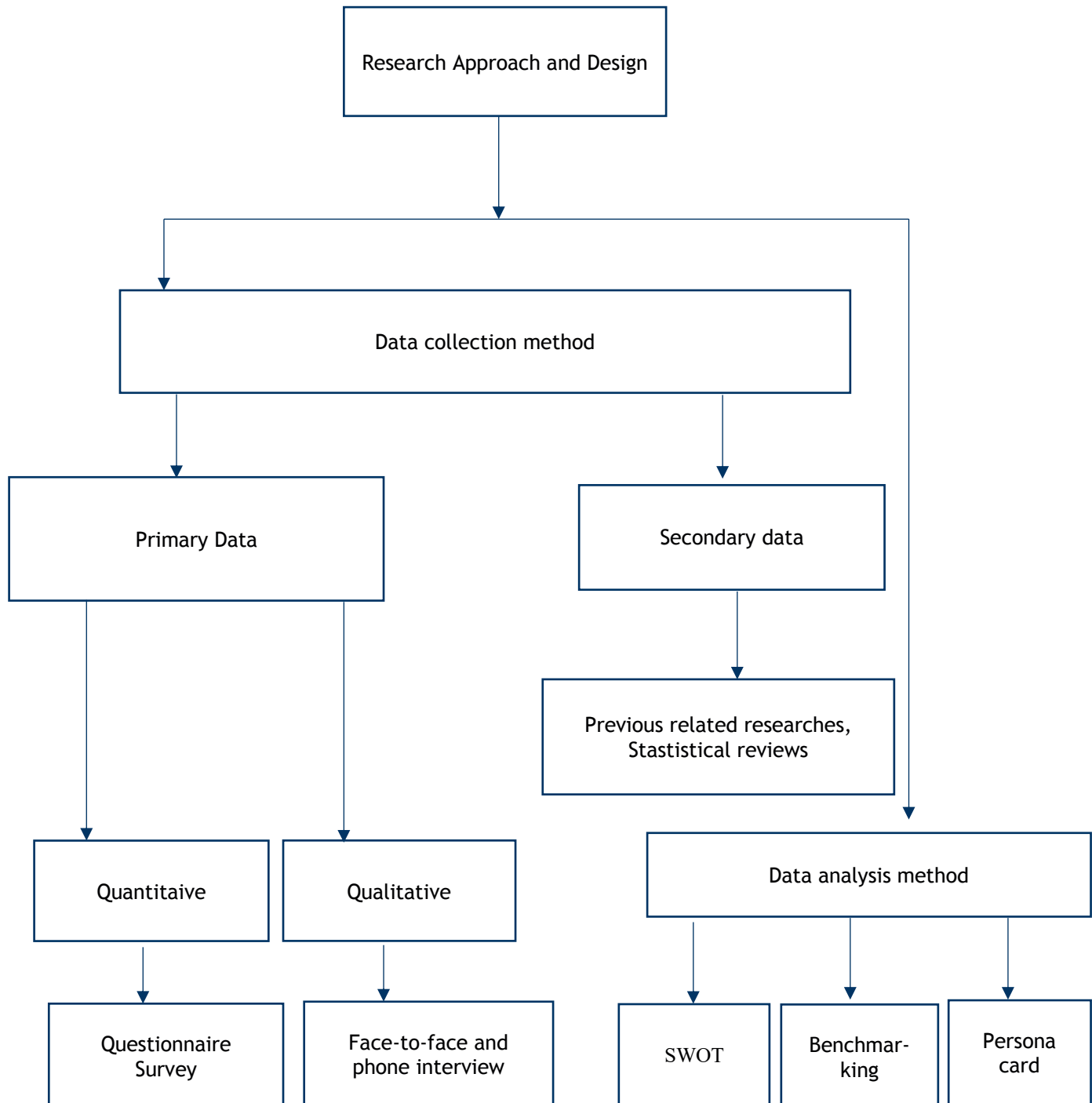


Table 2: Research plans, design and approach

5.2 Research method

5.2.1 Data collection Method (Qualitative & Quantitative)

Data collection is a useful way of evaluating any type of research and get an inaccurate data can influence the outcomes of the study (Data Collection Methods n.d).

The two data collection methods used were qualitative which involves phone and face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions with more detail information, and quantitative which involves survey in a form of questionnaire with closed-ended questions with numerical analysis through telephone, email and paper print.

The Primary data collection were questionnaire and interviews used to collect data for the survey analysis. The benefits of primary data collection are that it answers the research challenges, interpretation and reading is valid and there is much more control of the sample for analysis (Kadam, Shaikh, and Parab 2013).

Secondary data collection involves reading previous related researches literature reviews, Finland statistical database, Visit Finland visitor survey 2015, Visit South Coast Finland and Japan Market Review 2015 from the internet. Kadam et al. (2013) states that the advantage of secondary data collection gives more detail and clarification of the research question since it is easy to access. Secondary data increases the understanding of the research problems and give good comparison between the primary data collected. However, the secondary data collection contains margin of errors and must be examined thoroughly for validity purposes. (Management Study Guide n.d.)

5.2.2 Data analysis Method (Benchmarking, SWOT & Persona card)

Benchmarking

This thesis project looks at the significance of tourism sector in comparison with the Japanese tourism in Australia with the one in the South Coast of Finland. It shows how or where the Japanese tourists visiting find information about Australian and Finland and the South Coast regions. Benchmarking is the systematic and organize process of comparing measures with the aim of getting persistence growth in the company. Comparing your company to other competitors is the most important and strategic steps to strengthen financial growth (Noha and Yaha 2013.) WebFinance Inc

(2018) also states that benchmarking measures quality of the company protocols, plans, operations and services with same measures of its competitors. Table 3 below highlighted the advantages of Finnish companies in the south coast region and competitive advantages of the travel companies in Australia.

	Finnish travel companies in South Coast (Advantages)	Australia travel companies (competitive advantages)
Information channels by Japanese tourist	Information mostly received through social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), online search engines and from families and friend by the Japanese tourists	Tourist mostly get information from local agency in Japan, Guidebooks, brochures, internet and more.
Language channels	No local language available for communication during travelling or visit	There are some guidebooks available in local language for the Japanese tourists
Transportation	Means of transportation is easy and affordable	Availability of transportation for tourist
Identifying improvement for initiatives	There is a possibility of tourist investment in the travel market fair held in Turku 2018 according to Matka Nordic Travel Fair (2016) and Noto (2016). There should be more of tourism fair in the South Coast to promote rural tourism.	

Table 3: Benchmarking between Finnish companies in the South Coast and Australian travel companies

Table 4 below shows the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of the Finnish companies in the south coast regions of Finland.

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality products and services to customers • Well-preserved and beautiful nature • Customers satisfaction and loyalty • Availability of typical and good Japanese cuisine • Have a lot of great history architecture • Good transportation network for tourists visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantage of marketing more of product to the Japanese's tourist online and social media • Significant growth of tourism market demand in the rural area • Possibility of globalisation of South Coast regions • Huge possibility of customer based in the South Coast regions
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Japanese or few Japanese language available to the Japanese customers • Not many travel agencies available to the Japanese tourist • Lack of good marketing strategy to Japanese tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth of other companies in providing new services and products • Continuous changes in information media technologies

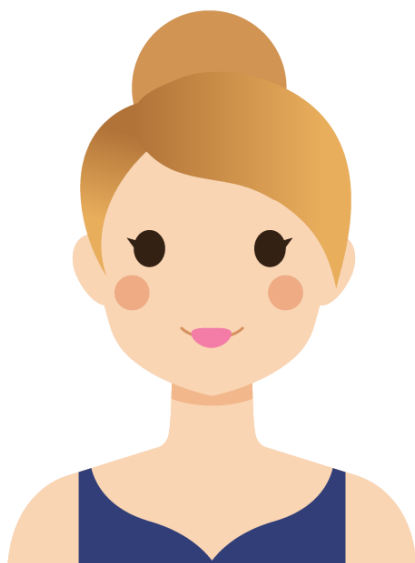
Table 4: SWOT analysis of Finnish companies in the South Coast regions

Personas

Moore (2017) states that buyer personas help companies to get good insight, target the right customers and connect with them by providing their needs. Furthermore, she mentions how the audience marketing strategy and procedure catches the online and social media rapidly. The main aim of creating buyer personas are to help gain deeper understanding of the customers and their buyer habit (Zambito 2018).

The traditional culture of the Japanese tourist is that they appear modern and travels around the world to connect and experience other country's culture and traditional life styles. They have variety of activities they are normally interested in during their visit in various seasons. Hiking, visiting ancient shrines, diving and surfing, skiing is some of their outstanding activities. (Lonely Planet 2018.)

The two personas cards in figure 6 below show and explain the Japanese tourist's purpose of visit and when it is normally done. Furthermore, it tells their goals, motivations, activities, frustrations and their preferred travel and information channels for visiting the south coast regions.



Age: 24

Gender: Female

Occupation: Sales staff

Marital status: married with 2 children

Resident: Nara

Quote: I travel 3-5 times a year for vacation to Finland and south coast regions.

I get information about Finland and South Coast regions through social media and from my families who have visited there before.

Goals and frustrations

I want to spend less time for booking my travel by narrowing my options quickly without spending hours searching.

My frustrations are spending too much hours searching for information about Finland and booking channels.

Preferred channels, activities and motivations

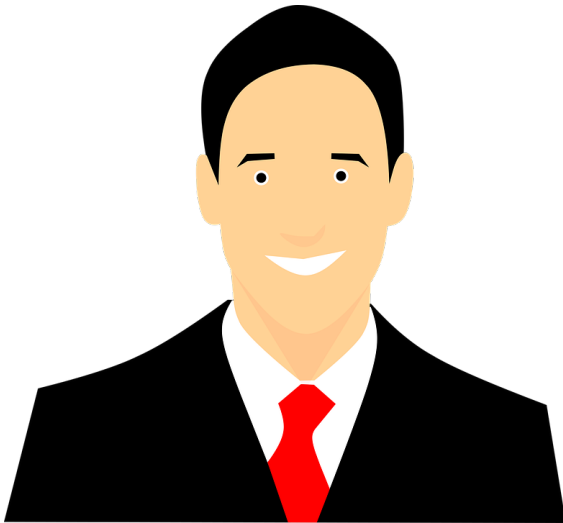
My preferred channels are social media such as Facebook, twitter and Instagram; google search and recommendations from friends and families.

I would also prefer to get more information and Ads about Finland and South Coast often through our local travel agents in Japan.

Mostly travel in Autumn, summer and Winter and like visiting shrines, taking pictures of them, skiing, Hiking.

I want to Experience Finnish culture, its beautiful nature, social life and relax from everyday busy lives back home.

Affordable price, easy access, comfortable and efficiency and moving around with local Japanese tourists motivates me.



Age: 35

Gender: Male

Occupation: management consultant

Marital status: married with 3 children

Resident: Nara

Quote: I travel 3-6 times in a year on a business trips to Finland and south coast regions.

I often get information from google search news, and twitter.

Goals and Frustrations

I travel to meet clients and potential ones when I visit Finland and south coast regions. Striving for revenue increase and sustainability of management.

Difficulties reaching clients and information about business events in Finland.

Preferred channels, activities and motivations

Business events information from social media like twitter, google search news and from brochures.

Attend business events to make perfect business strategies.

Mostly travel whenever there are business events, conferences in Finland.

Figure 6: persona card of Japanese tourists visiting South Coast Finland

6 Evaluation and Findings

Based on the outcomes of the questionnaire used in this thesis, Japanese tourists age range of 18-44 are the highest user of social media in seeking information than the older one's age range of 45 and older. However, this cannot be generalised because there were more 18-44 age range respondents compared to the age 45+ older ones. Figure 7 and 8 respectively show the age range of the Japanese respondents and how clearly they find information about Finland and the south coast regions prior to their visit.

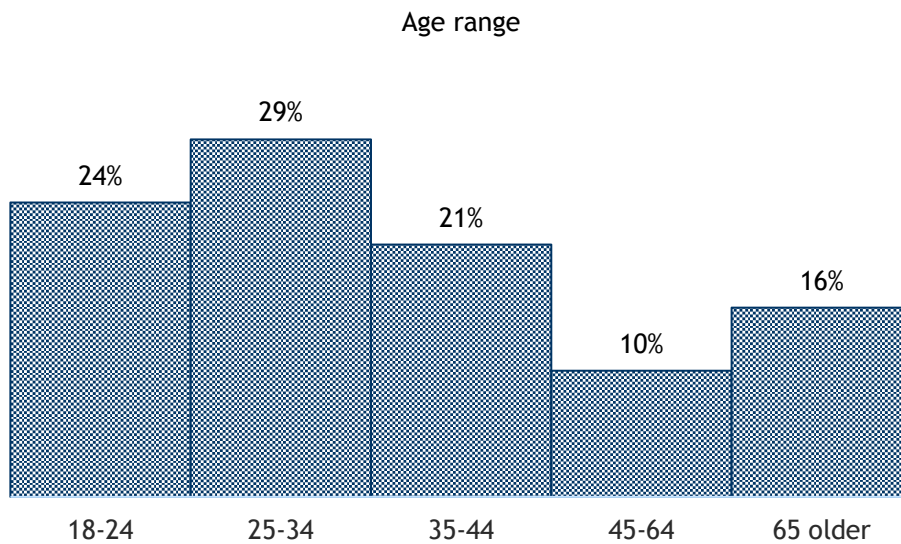


Figure 7: Age ranges of respondents

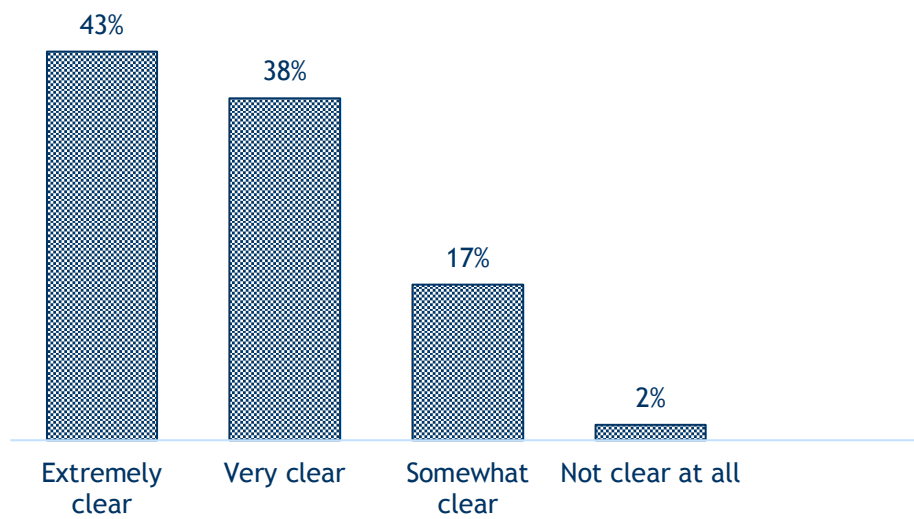


Figure 8: How clear the Japanese tourists get information about Finland and South coast regions

According to Wong (2004-2018), 65+ years old and retirees people spent less time on the internet for their purchase. Furthermore, their primary seeking information is via printed media source and mouth-to-mouth from others. The people age 20-60 have a higher purchase rate online and mostly use mobile devices as their primary source of information discovery (Wong 2004-2018).

Neely (2016) states that for the past three years in Japan, a statistical analysis shows there is a higher trend usage of Twitter compared to Facebook and Instagram.

Neely (2016) and Hill (2014-2018) show in the figures below an overall usage of the most popular social media by the Japanese population; Twitter, Facebook and Instagram in 2017 report and by age group and gender usage as of November 2018 respectively.

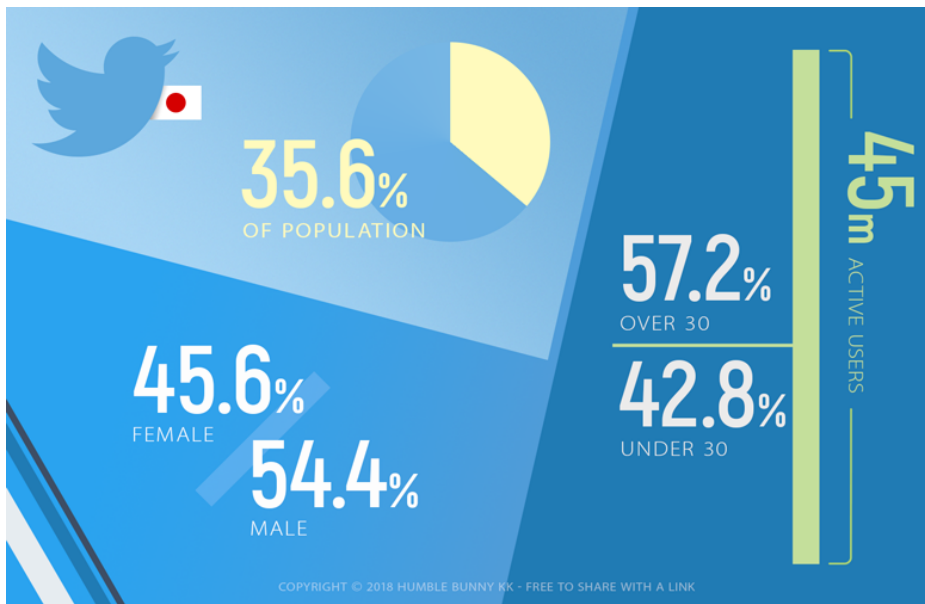


Figure 9: Twitter is the highest social media use in Japan in 2017 (Neely 2016).

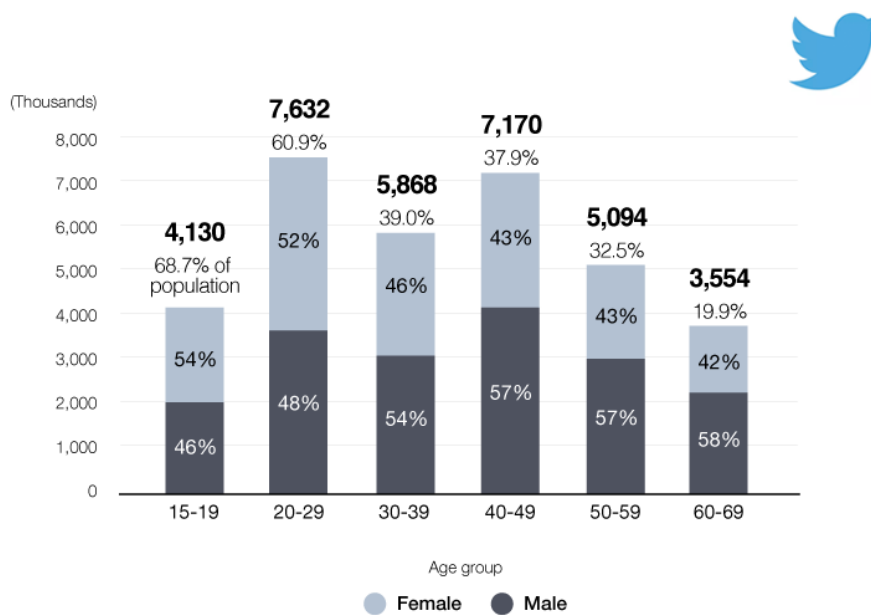


Figure 10: Twitter users in Japan 2018 as of November, by age, group and gender (Hill 2004-2018).

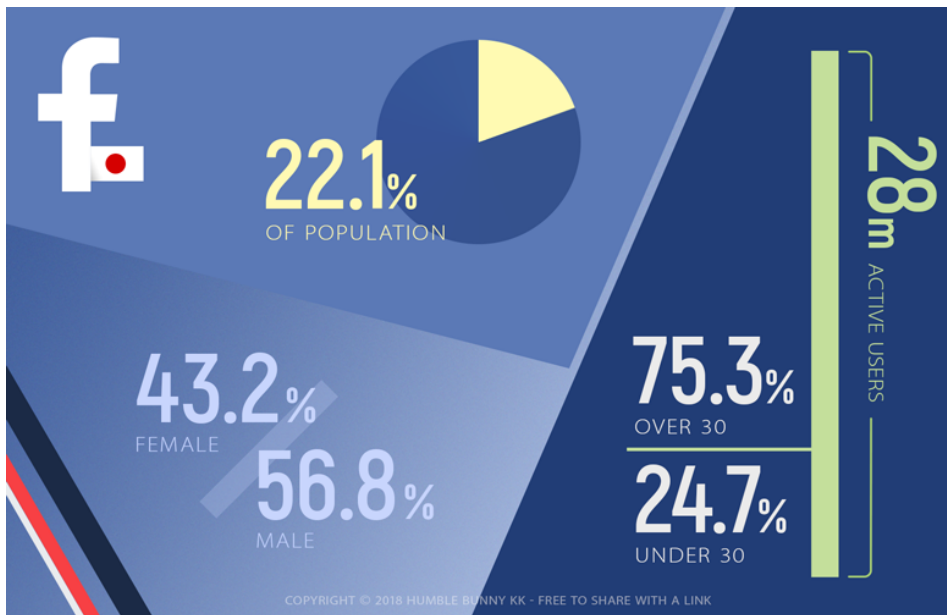


Figure 11: Facebook is the second highest social media use by Japan population in 2017 (Neely 2016).

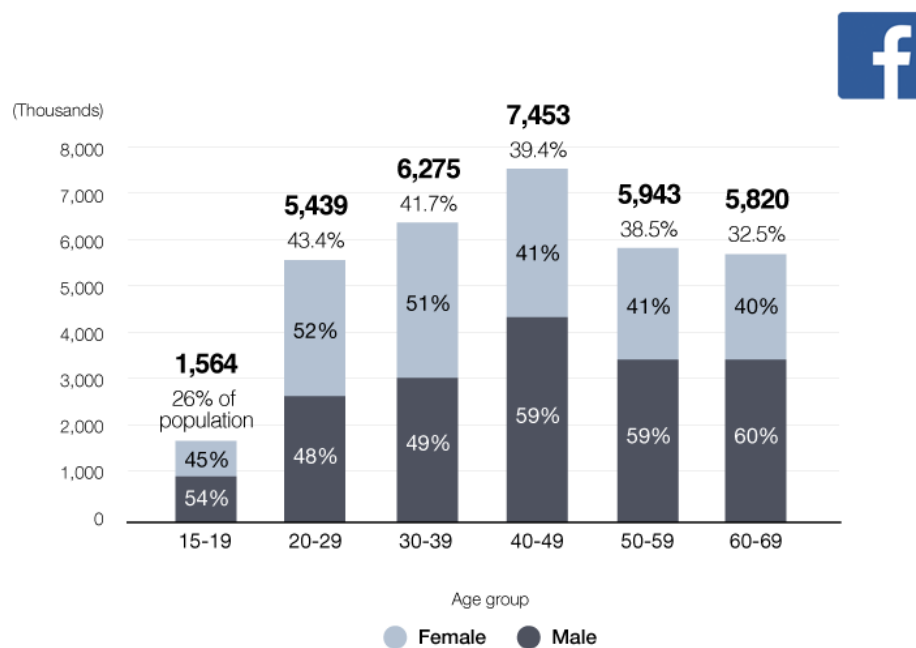


Figure 12: Facebook users in Japan 2018 as of November, by age, group and gender (Hill 2004-2018).

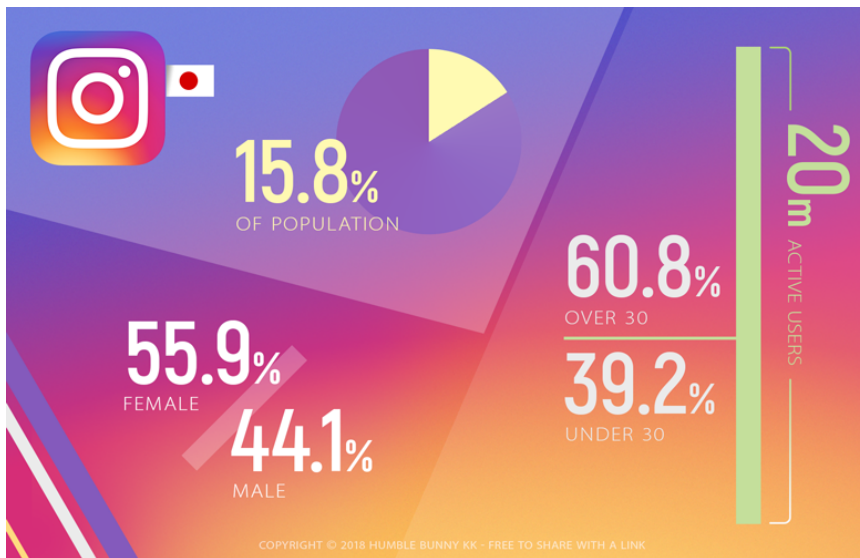


Figure 13: 2017 Instagram usage (Neely 2016).

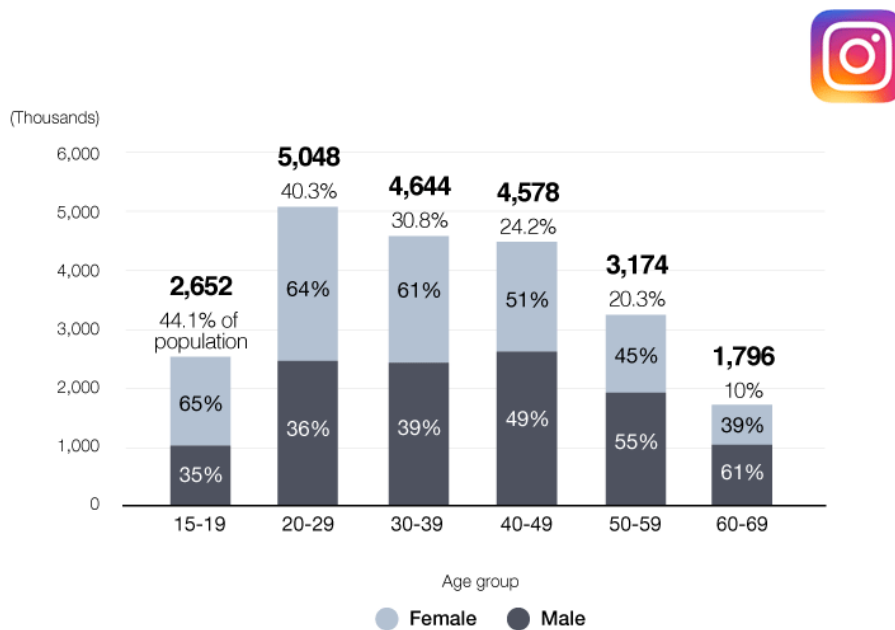


Figure 14: Instagram users in Japan 2018 as of November, by age, group and gender (Hill 2004-2018).

7 Results

There were 70 respondents of the Japanese tourists; 30 female and 28 males answered the questionnaire whilst 7 females; 5 males were interviewed in person. The pen and paper questionnaire data were manually entered into Microsoft excel and used pivot table to analyse it.

There were only two (2) responds from interviews through phone calls from travel agents and no respond from the emails sent.

The two private telephone interviews explained and confirmed that Japanese tourists used more of the travel agents and tour operators in Japan and that they like TripAdvisor and miki tours for their travel. And they mostly travel in summer and Autumn with travel package including transportation, accommodation, rental services and other tourism services like concert tickets and sports events. (Tumlare corporation and Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority (Kilpailu- ja kuluttajavirasto) 2018. Personal communication.)

Majority of the Japanese tourists get information about Finland and the South Coast regions through social medial networks mostly (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and from an online google search engine. Those are their most channels for retrieving information when they want to visit Finland and the South Coast. Moreover, the middle age 39-45+ and age 60+ uses guidebooks to picture Finland and South Coast well prior their visit. As the guidebooks gives them an in-depth insight of the destination place. Nishimura, Waryszak and King (n.d, 19) refers to study by McGregor in 2000 on the usage of guidebooks by tourists is that it can be used to verify information from the recommendation of other tourists about a particular place and assess the advantages. The Japanese tourists are more of individual mass tourists and explorer.

Although a report from Visit Finland Visitor Survey 2015 states that the Japanese tourists booked less from an online source for their trips but used tours operators or travel agents service point. However, that have changed a lot for the past years. This thesis survey shows that they now use more of social media for information about Finland compared to visit Finland report in 2015. There was another report; (ETC 2006, cited in Suvanto et al.2017,28) that shows 96% of young Japanese tourists used internet as their main source of information discovering.

8 Conclusion

This thesis main aim was to identify and choose the most preferred channels used by the Japanese tourists visiting South Coast Finland. Furthermore, to understand and highlight their expectation from the travel agency and information channels they used when they want to visit South Coast region. The result shows that they prefer easy channels to receive information such as social media and an online source and would expect them to provide more information from those preferred channels. There were young Japanese tourist travelling to South Coast Finland to experience the Finnish culture like sauna and life style such as skiing in winter.

According to Noto & Numata, (2018), the seasonal overnights in 2017-2018 during Winter in the Coast and Archipelego regions have increased to 52% in 2018 from 15% in 2017. Furthermore, there is huge prospects for autumn-winter season in 2018-2019. This is because the market share via

online travel agents will increase in demand as this will allow new products and services for the Japanese tourists such as cottage stay.

The Finnish companies in the South Coast needed to know that social media, online search and recommendations are the most favourable channels used by the Japanese tourists. The south coast companies needs to consider this information and create a perfect and suitable marketing strategy for their customers. A perfect marketing strategy especially for age range of 18-44 years old.

The south coast companies have to get an overall plan for addressing and reaching the Japanese tourist's customers and turning them into real customers of the services and products they provide. Marketing strategy contains the company's statement of why the targeted customers should choose their products and services through a key marketing messages and information. (Barone 2019).

9 Recommendation

Noto shown in the Japanese market review 2015 research that Finland is ranked number one destination among Nordic countries and compared to Australia, the companies in the south Coast have greater advantages attracting the Japanese tourists.

Analysing from the primary and secondary data, the most favourable channels used by the Japanese tourist are social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and online search engines. According to Noto (2017), Instagram is the main place for marketing opportunities especially among young and middle age people in Japan.

Therefore, my recommendation to the Finnish companies in the South Coast is that they should improve their marketing strategies through social media and online source for attracting young Japanese audience age range of 18-45. They should consistently post videos of their services and product, update their content like text, pictures, guidebooks, brochures and TV adverts about Finland and South Coast regions.

Moreover, they should create more business events for tourist's attraction, send relevant information about their services and products to travel agents and tour operators in Japan service point. Another thing they should consider is the language used on their web page for their customers and potential ones. They Japanese tourists would want information in local language for easy communication.

According to Noto (2016), the Japanese tourist's expenditure in Finland has increased by 12% in 2015. A recent statistic has shown that there has been a total increased of 55% in leisure trips to Finland and 12% of business trips and over nights (Statistics Finland 2007 and 2017). So, the south coast regions companies stand to gain more revenue if they commit to improve their services and marketing strategies via these ways and channels mentioned.

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