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**DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN  
FINLAND:**  
How to attract Russian tourists to Kymenlaakso?

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<b>Abstract</b>		
<p>Finland is a unique tourist destination. Tourists worldwide are interested in its untouched nature, pristine wilderness, and leisurely lifestyle. Foreign tourists are intrigued by this country, craving to visit it one day. However, many tourists go to Finland regularly; Russians are loyal tourists in Finland. Due to their high demand for Finnish services and goods, local companies face increased competition. Therefore, those businesses, familiar with Russian consumer behaviour and can influence their decision-making will have a significant advantage over competitors.</p>		
<p>The primary purpose of this thesis was to discover ways of attracting Russian tourists to Kymenlaakso region and increasing their purchase ability abroad. The thesis research aimed to find improvements in the services segment in Finland, identifying cultural differences of Russian tourists, which influence their decision-making while travelling abroad, and suggesting innovative marketing strategies.</p>		
<p>To achieve these goals, multiple literature and online sources were reviewed to conduct the research. A combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods was implemented. The quantitative method included the conduction of an online survey, and the qualitative method focused on customer profile development.</p>		
<p>The RDI Department of the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk) commissioned this research. The Digileap project at Xamk University focused on helping travel companies improve their knowledge of digital marketing tools and customer satisfaction. Therefore, the findings of this research such as innovative marketing strategies and proposed improvements in the tourism sector, are beneficial for the local business owners interested in promoting their products and service to Russian tourists.</p>		
<b>Keywords</b>		
thesis, tourism in Finland, consumer decision-making, Russian tourists		

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Finland is an underestimated tourist destination: not all travel enthusiasts are familiar with this country. However, many tourists go to Finland regularly. For example, Russian tourists are among the most loyal visitors to Finland due to the common geographical country borders and a high interest in European lifestyle and goods. Therefore, those Finnish companies, that are familiar with Russian consumer behaviour and can effectively implement marketing strategies in order to influence their purchase ability abroad will be successful on the international market.

Many companies regularly conduct research to keep track of the changes and current trends in the tourism industry in Finland. For instance, Visitory is a Finnish service, that focuses on developing comprehensive reports and infographics on tourism sector in Finland. In 2019 an annual report was published that reviewed Russian tourists as a target group. Citizens of Russia are leading among other foreign tourists in Finland: 3.3 million Russian tourists arrived in Finland in 2019. In total they had 18,500 overnight stays in Finland in 2019. Over the same year, the number of trips across eastern border points from Russia to Finland, compared to 2018, increased by eight percent. While travelling to Finland, citizens of Russia are required to apply for the Schengen Visa. In 2019 comparing to 2018, the travelling visa applications increased by 18 per cent. In total, around 793,000 visa applications were submitted in Russia. Notably, 82 per cent of them were applied through the Saint Petersburg consulate. When it comes to the Kymenlaakso region in particular, the per cent of tourist overnight stays in this area increased by 6 per cent during 2019 (Visitory 2019).

By reviewing these numbers, it is visible that Finland is a popular and accessible travelling destination for tourists from Russia, leading by the Saint Petersburg region with increasing demand. Therefore, the scope of the research is restricted to the target group, which includes citizens of Russia (mostly those, who are originally from Saint Peterburg or Leningrad Oblast'), and who are familiar with travelling to Finland (primarily to the Kymenlaakso region) or have ever practised this type of tourism. The research of Finnish tourism mainly focuses on the

Kymenlaakso region – the main border crossing point between the European Union and Russia, which consists of 6 municipalities, three of which received the city status: Kouvola, Kotka and Hamina. This limitation is connected to the area of the research since the survey was conducted for the usage of local businesses of Kymenlaakso region.

The researcher chose the thesis topic due to the high interest in the tourism industry development between Finland and Russia. The travelling industry between these countries is developing each year. Therefore, innovations in the services sector and modern marketing strategies are needed for Finnish companies, aiming to attract Russian customers. The researcher, who is a citizen of Russia, with native language skills and many years of tourist experience in Finland, including Kymenlaakso area, was able to conduct the research that could avoid such challenges as language barrier, differences in analytical tools and inaccurate interpretation of research questions, therefore having a high value for Finnish companies.

### **1.1 Commissioning company**

The commissioning company of this thesis is the Research Development and Innovations (RDI) Department of South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk). Digileap project is part of the RDI Department of Xamk University. This project focused on helping travel companies of Kymenlaakso region improving their image and services in order to be more reachable for the target audiences. Therefore, since this research concentrates on the exploration of the marketing tools and methods that can attract Russian tourists to the Kymenlaakso region, research results will be highly useful for this project. For this reason, this thesis will be published for the utilization of local businesses that are interested in marketing their services for Russian tourists.

### **1.2 Statement of purpose**

The **purpose** of this research was to discover ways of attracting Russian tourists to the Kymenlaakso region and influencing their purchase ability in Finland.

Therefore, the **aims** of this research were to discover improvements in the services segment in Finland, identify cultural differences of Russian tourists, while travelling abroad, and suggest innovative marketing strategies. The research **question** is how to influence the decision-making of Russian tourists.

In order to achieve the established aims, the following objectives were identified: (1) Analysing relevant literature and Internet sources; (2) Getting feedback from citizens of Russia about their experience of travelling to Finland; (3) Developing customer profiles of potential customers from Russia.

To achieve the desired outcome, a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods was applied. The quantitative method included an online survey, aiming to gather data from citizens of Russia based on their experience while travelling to Finland and their familiarity with this tourism destination in general. The purpose was to get multiple responses to understand the general opinion and perception of tourism services in Finland. The qualitative method included interviews, aiming to gather very detailed descriptions of their experiences in Finland, helping to develop potential customer profiles. A more detailed explanation of implemented research methods is reviewed in chapter 3.

This study contains five chapters. Chapter 1 is introducing the purpose of this thesis as well as background of the commissioning company and the author. Chapter 2 is dedicated to the overview of the theoretical basis of this research. Chapter 3 is describing the methods of the research and proving the trustworthiness of it. Chapter 4 includes research analysis, introducing infographics and diagrams with the analysed data. Last Chapter 5 includes the research conclusion, including improvement and development ideas for further utilization.

## 2 TOURISM MARKETING

The thesis research begins with the analysis of literature and other theoretical topics from online sources. To get reliable and clear information, both Finnish and Russian sources were used to compare statistics and use confirmed facts and numbers. In this chapter, there are covered topics, creating the theoretical framework for the thesis. To begin with, the focus is on analysis of Russian tourists, travelling to Finland, including such concepts as their behaviour, age, customer journey map and budget that directly influence their decision-making process.

### 2.1 Tourist behaviour and decision-making

**Tourism behaviour** can be defined as the mindset and behaviour of individuals while traveling. First-time visitors utilize sources of information while planning their trips more than already experienced visitors. This behavioural pattern is connected to the fact that experienced consumers rely on memory and past behaviour to make decisions, while new visitors need information on which to base and justify their consumption decisions. In order to answer the research question, it is important to understand what the decision-making process is. The **decision-making process** begins before the actual decision on the travelling destination and continues until travel completion. Therefore, consumer behaviour is closely connected to the decision-making process since past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour (March & Woodside 2005, 3-149). In this section, the behavioural specifications of tourists while planning trips and being abroad are analysed.

Figure 1 represents nine questions commonly faced by tourists while decision-making. Questions asked in the Figure relate to the choice of destination, including the tourist background and consequences of their decisions.

**Proposition 1 (P1)**, described in boxes 1-2, assumes that demographics and lifestyle affect how visitors formulate leisure choices. **Proposition 2 (P2)** suggests that pre-planned trips issues might influence an activity choice.

**Proposition 3 (P3)** implies that internal and external stimuli affect the choice of

destination. **Proposition 4 (P4)** signifies that possible advantages and specifics, that can help to formulate the choice of leisure are connected to the choice of travelling destination. **Proposition 5 (P5)**, described in boxes 3-5, mentions that information, that was researched while planning the trip directly affects the final decision-making. **Proposition 6 (P6)** proposes that social interactions or external influencers might change the decision-making process of some individuals. **Proposition 7 (P7)** suggests that main activity drivers strengthen the choice of destination. **Proposition 8 (P8)** represents the connection between the key activity drivers and activities at the chosen travelling destination. **Proposition 9 (P9)** implies the interpretation of visitors about planned and unplanned activities. Last **Proposition 10 (P10)** concludes with the consequences of trip experience, resulting in good or bad overall impression (Wang & Pizam 2011, 57). To sum up, there are multiple factors influencing the decision-making of tourists. Therefore, in order to be able to influence the decision-making of Russian tourists while attracting them to the Kymenlaakso region, it is crucial to understand their behaviour and preferences that are reviewed in this chapter further.

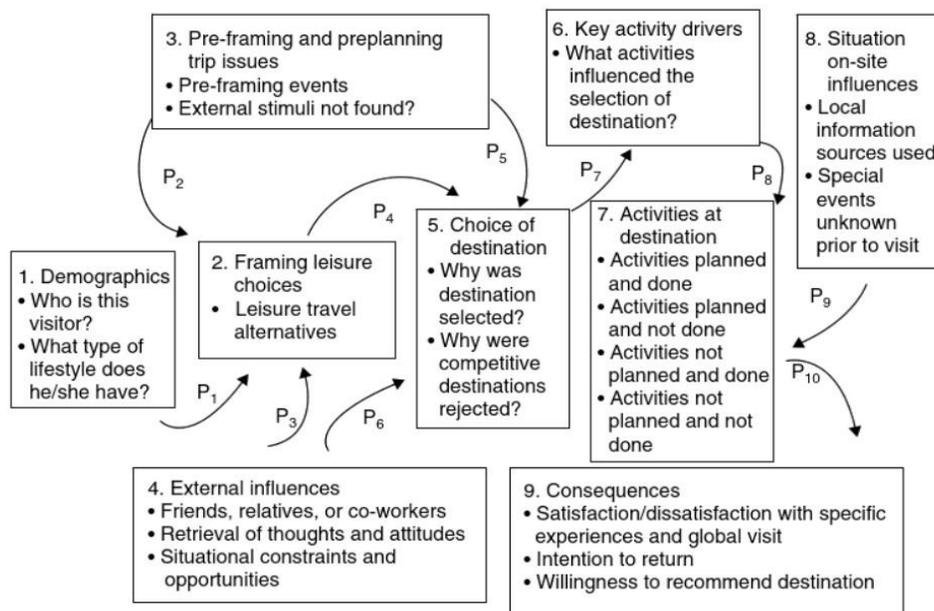


Figure 1. Tourist decision-making map (adapted from Woodside et al. 2004, and March & Woodside 2005 cited in Wang & Pizam 2011, 57).

Decisions of Russian people are often based on the opinion of people they trust e.g., relatives, friends, colleagues and celebrities (Vasilyeva 2019b). Therefore,

word-of-mouth is a powerful marketing tool in Russia. As George Silverman defines **word-of-mouth** in his book: it is a way of making the decision process easier by the encouragement of a trusted person to use a certain product (2001). The main word-of-mouth sources of information that influence the choice of citizens of Russia are online reviews (39%) and friends (32%). For instance, social media influencers or celebrities are role models for their followers, therefore their beautiful photos and emotional reviews directly influence the decision-making of people who follow them (Vasilyeva 2019b). Based on gender difference, men rely on recommendations of their friends and relatives more than women: 20 per cent of male respondents admitted that they trust the opinion of close people in the first place. Women, compared to men in this case, are slightly less likely to be guided by the recommendation of their friends and relatives in the decision-making – only 18 per cent of them do that (Blog.Ostrovok.ru 2019).

### 2.1.1 Target groups

In this section all Russian tourists as a group will be divided into the target groups in concordance with a geographic and demographic basis of segmentation.

Beginning with geographic basis of segmentation, it was found out that residents of Moscow and Saint Petersburg (52%) are more interested in travelling abroad than citizens of smaller cities (24%) (Aimaletdinov 2018). These statistics are also proven by the percentage of Russian tourists who are surfing the net to find relevant sources for trip planning: citizens of Moscow and Saint Petersburg are two times more often than citizens of other cities are looking for information about trips to Europe. Specifically, citizens of Saint Petersburg are six to seven times more likely to search for information about travelling to Finland than people from other regions of Russia (Yakovlev 2019).

Considering the demographic basis of segmentation, **Generation Z** or **buzzers** (people born in the period between 1995-2010) are the most active age group in travelling abroad – up to 46 per cent of respondents are looking forward to future trips, comparing to 15-35 per cent in other age groups (Aimaletdinov 2018). When it comes to the purpose of travelling, 47 per cent of Generation Z

representatives from Russia prefer their trips to be adventurous and, 56 per cent of these tourists plan to go hiking in hard-to-reach regions or experience paragliding and bungee jumping while travelling (Booking 2019).

Even though young people are in the leading age group among other travellers, other groups should also be reviewed, since their representatives are following different purposes while travelling as well as consuming different goods.

Over a few years, it was noticed that Russian **millennials** or **generation Y** (people born in the period between 1980-1995) prefer to spend their vacations close to nature in the fresh air. These types of trips are popular among millennials due to their need for relaxation from daily routine and noisy city life, which can be achieved by rebooting their mind in peace while being on vacation (Skolkov et al. 2019).

The Russians from **Generation X** (people who born between 1965-1980) are also very active travellers: about a third of them fly to other countries at least two times a year. In addition, this is the most economically independent group of travellers; therefore, they travel for such purposes as business trips and vacation (Tore 2021).

The **baby boomers** (people born between 1946-1964) have become the fastest-growing Airbnb guest group, with the highest percentage increase among other age groups in 2018. According to Airbnb statistics, older Russian tourists are the fastest growing group of independent travellers. In the period from 1 September 2017 to 1 September 2018, the number of older travellers increased by 78 per cent (2018). About 19 per cent of the elderly respondents who live in the biggest cities of Russia are planning on travelling in the future (Statista Research Department 2021). Their purposes of travelling are often connected medical to medical treatment abroad (NAFI 2019). Therefore, following healthy lifestyle is one of their personal goals, achievable by travelling abroad (Statista Research Department 2021). Therefore, such travellers often choose comfort and safety over anything else.

To sum up, even though Generation Z is the most active in travelling, representatives of Generations Y and X, as well as baby boomers, might be more interested in traveling to Finland, since they prefer a peaceful and quiet vacation to relax from their busy lifestyle in the city that is perfectly suitable for Finland as well as their financial independence.

### 2.1.2 Purposes of travelling

As mentioned in the previous section, there are many purposes for travelling abroad. Therefore, in this chapter, this topic is covered in detail since the purpose of travelling directly affects the decision-making process of tourists during their trip planning. In addition, various activities are classified into categories depending on the seasonal events in Finland.

As Maria Roschak said, a co-founder of Russian travel agency Artek: *“Active vacation is the best way to forget about the rhythm of the metropolis”*. Nowadays, the most common purpose of travelling usually includes relaxing from gadgets and the noise of city life, by changing the routine and environment while travelling. The best trip combination for many Russian travellers includes a good company of people, memorable adventures, and bright emotions. For example, hiking has always been popular among Russians (Skolkov et al. 2019). Tourism and goods consumption are also among the main interests of Russian tourists while travelling. Finally, they are also interested in learning about cultural events, educational opportunities, and medical treatment in Finland (Levada 2016).

Russian tourists who choose Finland as a travel destination can also be divided into groups taking into consideration their travelling purposes. VisitKarelia travel agency conducted the research and identified three main groups of tourists from Russia, considering their purposes of visiting Finland regions. The **first group** of tourists includes nature lovers who travel independently. They usually rent a house on their own and enjoy Finnish nature, as well as such activities as spa and hiking. The **second target group** includes lovers of active outdoor activities, such as skiing or snowboarding. These travellers usually stay at ski resorts. The **third group** includes tourists, who prefer spending time in cities: they enjoy

sightseeing, going to local cafes and restaurants, purchasing at shopping malls and markets. Usually, these tourists go for excursions around the city and plan their trips using the services of travel agencies (Vasilyeva 2020a).

Some types of travelling are gaining popularity recently due to the personal needs and lifestyle of tourists. For instance, a **weekend trip** is the type of travelling, which is easily organized to close-to Russia countries. These trips are usually spontaneous and very short, and they include various activities in a period of a few days. Another type of travelling includes **adventure travel** to unexplored routes and unpopular travelling destinations. Some tourists are interested in experiencing new emotions by staying in small towns and exploring old monuments and architecture. The demand for outdoor activities has been continuously increasing (Turpessa 2019). **Food tourism** is also gaining popularity among Russian tourists. The main reasons for organized gastronomic tours are caused by restrictions on some import products in Russia and the desire to explore foreign cuisines and cultures. The main target groups for such trips include families, people with restaurant-related professions and gourmets (Mertsalova 2019). According to Booking, the increase towards conscious and **environmentally friendly travelling** will increase in the future. For instance, 60 per cent of respondents from Russia want to spend their holidays in a more eco-friendly manner. Recently, more than half of Russian tourists will pay attention to the amount of waste produced and hence, the options for recycling during their trips. Russian travellers insist that the tourism industry should become more resilient in the long-term and provide better offers for off-season travel and arrange new destinations to avoid tourist crowds (Maslov 2020). For instance, when it comes to **camping** as a travelling activity, the key factor for its development in the recent period, is the tourists' preference for economically and environmentally friendly vacations (Vasilyeva 2020).

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this section, travelling purposes vary in different seasons throughout the year. Therefore, travelling demand depends on the season. The lowest rate of travelling activity is in November - early December period. Then the number of trips start to increase. The New Year period is a very

popular time for travelling due to long holiday vacations in Russia. In February, demand stabilizes or falls slightly, and in spring, it begins to grow again, reaching its peak in July – early August (Tylik 2018).

The **winter season**, which usually lasts up to 2 weeks from 31 December till 10 January, is a great opportunity for Russian tourists to travel abroad. According to Kommersant FM research, 30 per cent of citizens from Russia prefer to celebrate winter holidays abroad. In addition, 30 per cent of these travellers choose ski resorts with various winter sport activities: snowboarding, skiing, etc. as a travel destination (Zhdanova 2019). The **summer season** is preferred for outdoor activities. In 2019, the beach holidays were popular among those citizens of Russia, who live in cities with more than a million inhabitants (51%). In addition, such activities as hiking, fishing, and hunting were preferred with increasing interest by 6 per cent comparing to the previous year (RataNews 2019). One of the main Finnish attractions for Russian tourists is its nature. As reported by Visit Finland report, 50 per cent of Russian travellers choose Finland to enjoy summer cottages, swimming in the lake or sea and enjoy Finnish sauna (2018). The **autumn season** is a popular travelling period for tourists, who desire to decrease travelling costs, since many travel agencies offer discounts on travelling packages during this time. In the early autumn season (the period from September to October), sales of tours to different destinations in Finland increased by 20-30 per cent compared to 2018. In addition, there was an increase in demand for 4-5 stars hotels due to seasonal price reductions. The percent of last-minute bookings remains high – up to 20-25 per cent out of all sales, depending on destination and the discounts (Mertsalova & Kostyrev 2019). The gastronomic focused trips dedicated to food tasting and shopping are mostly happening in the autumn and **spring seasons**. For instance, Street Food Festival is usually arranged from June till September in Finland, while the fish market in Kotka annually happens in May and October.

To sum up, the first steps to motivate Russian tourists for visiting any tourist destinations should focus on the informational promotion of active tourism and

the benefits of investing time in new knowledge and experiences as well as eliminating stereotypes about the high cost of abroad trips (NAFI 2018).

### 2.1.3 Customer journey

**Customer journey** is a description of what customers do, think, and feel while they consume goods or services. **Customer journey mapping** is a tool used by customer service professionals as a method of documenting customer experience and understanding of how to utilize their experience to benefit both clients and businesses. Being able to look at the business from a customer perspective will lead to recognition of the tactical priorities of the company and their implications for strategic decision making. The customer journey map provides the direction to customer-led-growth as well as business development (Angrave 2020, 11-19).

The customer journey in tourism consists of 4 stages, as shown in figure 2: awareness, consideration or planning, experience, and advocacy. The following figure represents positive experiences (green) as well as negative experiences and challenges (red) throughout the whole customer journey.

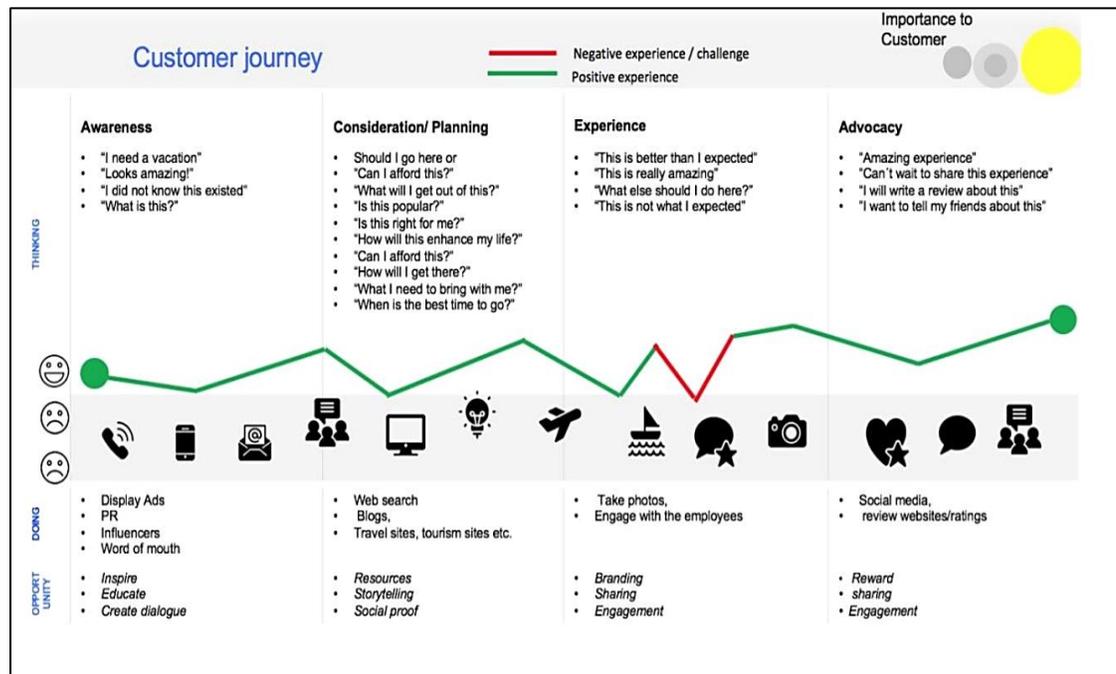


Figure 2. Customer journey map (Peters 2015, cited in Koskinen 2018, 22).

The **awareness stage** is a realisation period when potential customers come to the conclusion, that they would like to get a travelling experience. Their desires can be unconsciously caused by various ads, word-of-mouth influence or recommendations of social media influencers. In this stage businesses should educate and begin a dialogue with their potential customers about available goods and services. The **consideration** or **planning stage** is the research phase, where potential customers are considering possible ways of optimisation different processes of travelling. Sources of information that Russian tourists use while planning their trips are reviewed in detail in section 2.2.1. The main stage of any trip is an the **experience** itself. During this period, the customers' expectations of travelling outcomes are facing reality. The last stage of the customer journey is **advocacy**, which includes post-experience engagement of customers. After analysing the quality of their experience, customers come to a conclusion if they would like to go back to this place. In addition, experienced emotions and feelings during the trip directly affect customers' reviews during their social interactions with other individuals (Peters 2015, cited in Koskinen 2018, 22).

Analysts from Blog.Ostrovok.ru – a Russian online hotel booking service - conducted a survey to analyse which stages of the trip are considered the most problematic for Russian tourists (2019). The findings point out that the most challenging part of trip planning is the visa application process as 24 per cent of respondents considers it the most problematic. Choice of travelling destination is the second most difficult stage – 21 per cent of respondents declared that they experience problems with their choice. An almost equal number of tourists said that they experienced difficulties while looking for travel “buddies”. Surprisingly, men experience problems with the last two stages more often than women. Other acknowledged problems included booking of a hotel or other accommodation, developing trip routes, or selecting transport tickets. However, the least problematic stages were planning activities abroad (8%) and arranging a transfer from the airport or train station to the hotel (4%).

In the second part of this section, the journey planning and arrangement from Finland to Russia are analysed. There are several ways of travelling from one country to another: it is possible to reach Finland directly from many major cities of Russia, although Saint Petersburg is the most popular departure point for such trips since there is the widest range of available transport options. Therefore, it is not a surprise, that the most popular travelling destinations from Saint Petersburg are European cities, primarily the Baltic states. The distance between Saint Petersburg and Helsinki is 384 km; thus, there are many accessible travelling options between these cities: planes, trains, ferries, buses or minibuses, personal cars or even bicycles. The fastest way to get to the capital of Finland is by **plane**, where the duration of flights is a little over an hour. The price for such trips is higher than tickets to other transports; therefore, this type of travelling is not suitable for budget travellers. Another popular mean of transport is the **train**, especially due to the constant development of logistics between two capitals. Therefore, it is possible to travel to Finland from Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Vyborg, and other Russian cities. In 2010, the "Allegro" train was launched, whose name from the Italian language can be translated as "fast". Indeed, the train is accelerating up to 220 km per hour, making the trip duration not more than a few hours. Tickets for train trips are cheaper than for flights. Kouvola city that is part of the Kymenlaakso region is reachable by this mean of transport. The next available type of travelling is by **ferry**. There are regular direct sea routes from Saint Petersburg to Helsinki. This type of transportation is the most comfortable, but it is also the most time consuming as the trip approximately takes around 13 hours. However, tourists can enjoy this time on the cruise by shopping in duty-free shops, eating in the restaurants, listening to music, or sightseeing. The cheapest option is to travel to Finland by **bus**. Buses depart from Saint Petersburg regularly; the approximate travel time to Helsinki is 7-8 hours. Recently, an alternative type of bus travelling – **minibuses** – is gaining popularity. They are much faster than regular buses, and the number of passengers is less: the maximum number of seats is 17 per vehicle (Koskinen 2020). Travelling by **personal car** is the most common type of travelling from Russia to Finland since they are neighbouring countries. Around 75 per cent of Russian travellers revealed that they choose driving because of freedom of

movement within Finland and the opportunity to explore more. In addition, travelling by personal vehicles is also chosen by Russian tourists due to the satisfaction and privileges they get from this type of travelling – around 39 per cent and 34 per cent choose it because of economic reasons (Laskov 2019).

**Caravans** are also gaining popularity in Russia: in 2019, the demand for recreational vehicles increased by more than a quarter – these autos are equipped with everything needed for long journeys or camping (Volobuev 2019).

#### **2.1.4 Tourist expenditure and budget**

In this part, the tourism expenditure and budget of Russian tourists while travelling are analysed since it plays a big role in trip planning and decision-making of tourists in general. A proactive survey was conducted by NAFI Analytical Centre in December 2017. In total, 1,600 people over 18 years old were interviewed in 140 settlements in 42 regions of the Russian Federation. The numerical inaccuracy of their research did not exceed 3.4 per cent. According to this study, citizens of Russian are interested in spending more money on overseas vacation than on domestic travelling. Besides, place of residence directly affects the paying ability of citizens of Russia. Table 1 indicates the maximum amount that citizens of Russia are willing to spend on abroad trips per person. The amount of money is represented in euros, in accordance with the exchange rate of currency publishedvi on 18 January 2018, the date of article publishing (Free Currency Rates 2021).

It is visible that inhabitants from bigger cities, with a population of more than 950,000 people, are more willing to spend a larger amount of money on their trips. In contrast, inhabitants of smaller cities with a population of up to 100,000 people are willing to spend the minimum amount: up to € 578 or even less. The average amount of money that travellers from Russia are willing to pay for a vacation abroad (including transport, accommodation, etc.) is 884 € (2018).

Table 1. What is the maximum amount you are willing to pay for abroad a trip, including transportation, accommodation, and all other expenses? Indicate the amount per person, *in % of all respondents* (NAFI 2018).

	Moscow & Saint Petersburg	City with 950,000 inhabitants or more	City with 500,000 – 950,000 inhabitants	City with 100,000 – 500,000 inhabitants or more	City with 50,000 – 100,000 inhabitants	City with up to 50,000 inhabitants or urban district	Village
Up to € 578	8	12	15	10	22	7	6
€ 579 – 723	5	10	4	4	4	2	3
€ 724 – 868	3	5	2	2	2	1	1
€ 869 or more	10	11	2	9	4	7	5
Prefer not to say	26	6	8	5	7	10	9

When it comes to payment methods, in 2018 it was calculated that 2 out of 3 Russians do not use bank cards abroad, because they consider this method of payment not safe and expensive due to the currency rate. Only about 7 per cent of respondents use ATMs while travelling, mostly for withdrawing money (Tylik 2018). Furthermore, the economic situation influences the purchase ability of Russian tourists as well as their desire to travel abroad. For instance, the sanctions against Russia and the rise in the euro exchange rate had negative impact on the flow of Russian tourists to Finland (Shlapeko & Stepanova 2019).

While staying in Finland, the top expenditures of Russian tourists are spent on goods and services: shopping is the most interesting activity for Russian tourists in Finland (Visit Finland 2018). Russian people are characterized to follow the philosophy of consumer patriotism. In 2018 RMMA group (Russian Marketing and Advertising Agency), which specializes in travel and marketing communications with foreign clients, conducted the research by analysing the latest studies of the Russian tourism market and interviewing Russian tourists. According to the research findings, Russian people patriotically support Russian manufacturers while consuming most of the goods, e.g., food or medicine, although many of the citizens prefer to purchase from foreign manufacturers such goods and services as cars and travelling packages (Tylik 2018).

In addition, the interest in international shopping is driven by economic factors and offers, including duty-free shopping, discounts, and shopping in second-hand stores. However, the desire to purchase certain goods and services abroad, is connected to the good combination of shopping-tourism while enjoying leisure on vacation (Shlapeko & Stepanova 2019).

## 2.2 Destination marketing

Visitors from Russia remained the leading group among all foreigners in terms of the number of expenses in Finland in recent years. Figure 3 represents the number of expenses incurred by foreigners in Finland throughout the period from 2016-2018. From the figure it is visible that Russian tourists spent the biggest amount of money over that period. In 2018 this amount was 650 million euros. The total amount spent in 2018 exceeded 21 per cent of all foreign expenses, which are approximately € 3.1 billion in Finland in 2018 (Visit Finland 2018).

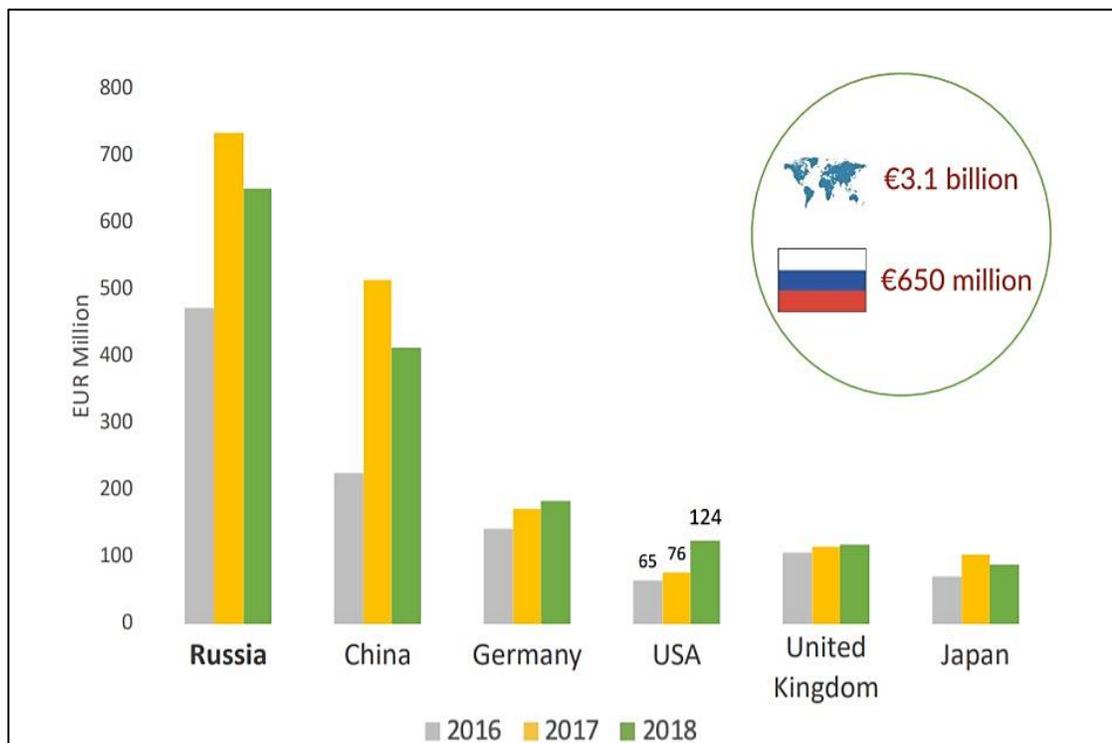


Figure 3. The expenditure of foreign tourists in Finland (Visit Finland 2018).

Therefore, in this chapter the concept of destination marketing is considered.

**Destination marketing** can be defined as a customer-centred approach to the economic and cultural development of a particular tourism destination that responds to the interests and needs of target groups including visitors, service providers and society in general. When it comes to tourism, the main goal of the destinations is to constantly improve, promote, and coordinate overall visitor satisfaction that consequently increases the economic value and outcomes and creates their desire to come back. The focus of destination marketers is to create and expand the variety of options suggested as well as target existing value packages to the matching customer groups. **Destination Marketing**

**Organisations (DMOs)** can be identified as organisations responsible for the marketing of a particular destination. The focus of DMO is to ensure cultural and economic development of the destination, balanced by the interests of all the parties involved. Every component of the tourism industry is extremely competitive; therefore, cooperation with DMO will be beneficial to launch a comprehensive and targeted marketing campaign for the audience. Hence, DMO is the most important marketing organisation in the community, representing an overall image of destination to various target markets (Wang & Pizam 2011, 3-19).

Since the research focuses on tourism development in Finland, the destination marketing concept can be implemented while analysing this region. Finland, as a travel destination, is represented as a pure and beautiful country with diverse nature, that is extremely valuable in the modern world. The main advantage of this country is connected to its small population, ensuring peaceful and quiet vacation for the visitors. When it comes to comparison with other European countries, Finland is an absolute leader in the percentage of forest area within the country. The healthy lifestyle and positive attitude of Finns are proven with the official status of the happiest nation in the world in the past three years, according to the United Nation's World Happiness Report. The close-to-nature lifestyle of local people has created an opportunity to develop unique travel services in the country (Finland Toolbox 2021).

**Visit Finland** is an official travel guide that promotes Finland as a tourist destination and improves the overall tourism image of the country. According to the company's official website, they have implemented several strategies to achieve mentioned objectives. **Familiarisation** or **FAM trips** are organized by Visit Finland in close cooperation with travel regions to promote destinations, products, and services. Tour operators, travel agencies, and other partners host FAM trips to participate in the sale and promotion of Finnish tourism products. **Joint promotions** are collaborative marketing campaigns between Visit Finland and their partners, that focus on the promotion of Finland as a travel destination. This type of promotion usually aims at the sale of local Finnish products and marketing of destination image. The **Finland Conference Bureau (FCB)**, as a part of Visit Finland contributes to investment in the Finnish tourism sector and popularizes Finland as a venue for international business events.

The image of a country and its perception are directly connected to the travelling experience as well as the attitude of tourists abroad. According to the survey conducted by Levada Analytical Centre, which focused on evaluation image of Finland among citizens of Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast', where a representative sample of 1,600 people over 18 years old took part, two-thirds of Russians have a positive attitude towards Finland and only 5 per cent have a negative opinion about it, while the rest of the respondents are neutral. Notably, in Saint Petersburg, the per cent of positive-minded people towards Finland in 2016 increased up to 93 per cent, and the negative-minded decreased to 1 per cent within the same year (Levada 2016). The citizens of Russia who live within accessible distance to Finland choose this country as an attractive travelling destination due to transport accessibility, developed tourist infrastructure and a wide range of high-quality goods at affordable prices (Shlapeko & Stepanova 2019).

Finland's popularity as a travel destination can be compared to other countries as competitors in the travel industry. According to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service, in 2018 the most popular travel destination among Russians was Turkey, mainly due to the affordable prices for plane tickets and

accommodation, as well as the popularity of the 'all-inclusive' travel package system, which is a common choice among Russian travellers. The next top destinations were Finland and China, due to the convenience of reaching these travel directions for inhabitants of border zones (Vasilyeva 2019c).

Anna Härkönen, the Destination Project Coordinator of VisitKarelia, defined the main goals of their company's marketing activity, as "an increase of the quality tourist flow", which means increasing the number of tourists who are ready to come back to Finland consume goods abroad (Vasilyeva 2020a). To conclude, the destination marketing concept can be effectively implemented in Finland, targeting Russian tourist if such aspects as target groups, if such concepts as target groups, purposes of travelling, time of the season and available means of transport are considered and used as marketing tools. In the next sections, traditional and digital marketing strategies are reviewed in detail.

### **2.2.1 Traditional media**

Traditional media has been the main source of information for people for a long time. In this section its influence on the decision-making of Russian tourists is analysed. One of the main areas of traditional media is **advertising** and **news**. While comparing, advertising is usually a business-focused approach, aiming to sell products or services and changing the behaviour of consumers, while the news is a source of information. The news is often presented by television, radio, and newspapers. Technologies have improved the profitability of media production, which more effectively reach different target audiences of advertisers. In addition, due to technological improvements, modern media is being produced in a faster and more efficient manner, becoming more accessible to people each day (Briggs & Cobley, 2002, 11-13).

Findings, that are represented further are based on the annual study of Deloitte CIS Research Centre, which was dedicated to the analysis of the trends in media consumption of Russian people in 2020. During their research, both qualitative (interviews and focus groups) and quantitative (national survey) methods were implemented. In total, 1,600 citizens of Russia from 8 federal districts and 200

localities, over the age of 14 years old took part in this study. According to discoveries published in their report, **media consumption** depends on education, professional and personal life, location, and age. It was noticed, that employed respondents consume media more actively than those who are unemployed. The lowest level of media consumption is among those respondents who live alone – around 47 per cent. In addition, respondents who graduated or finished higher education are more active media consumers than respondents who only finished secondary education. Based on the location, it was analysed that media consumption in cities with fewer than 500,000 people is below average (Tabakova 2020).

**Travel agencies** are specializing in the trip organization. As stated by Deloitte CIS Research Centre in their annual report, recommendations of travel agents are the least popular options – only 7 per cent of travellers use them while planning their journeys (Tabakova 2020). Surprisingly, an increasing number of tourists refuse to use the services of travel agencies and prefer to plan trips independently. Firstly, it is connected to the fact that this way of journey organizing is more pleasurable and exciting. Secondly, obstacles that forced people to use services of travel agencies, such as language barrier or lack of information available, are disappearing. People are learning the English language or using online translators to remove language barriers as well as utilizing navigation services and recommendations to navigate in a foreign country without any difficulties (Tylik 2018). However, Russians still use the services of travel agencies for personal travelling recommendations, e.g., while choosing a country of destination (Vasilyeva 2019a).

There are different available sources of information for tourists for independent trip planning. The first source of information to be reviewed is **Television**. On average, while searching for travel ideas, 11 per cent of respondents watch travelling programs. When it comes to written materials, the popularity of **printed media** continues to decrease, hitting the lowest decline in the past five years: just 38 per cent of Russian respondents have read printed media in the last weeks. The interest in text content also decreased: only 2 per cent of respondents use

printed travel guides and just 4 per cent read articles during trip planning. Another source of information involves audio content. **Radio** usage in Russia slowed down in 2019-2020. However, the radio audience in Saint Petersburg grew by 9 per cent in 2020, while the radio audience in Moscow remained the same. The interest in **podcasts** has increased, as well as the average time respondents spent listening to them (Tabakova 2020).

### 2.2.2 Digital marketing

The definition of **marketing** is a management process that focuses on recognizing, predicting, and fulfilling customer's desires profitably (CIM 2015 cited in Baines et. al 2017, 6). Even though marketing, especially digital marketing, is rapidly changing and developing, its fundamentals remain the same. For instance, it is still crucial for businesses to ensure successful communication by delivering personalized content and offers to target customers, since consumers make decisions based on personal preferences. **Digital marketing** can be defined as Internet marketing or E-marketing, that develops a relationship with customers, boosts sales and adds value to the products by running digital marketing campaigns via digital media channels (Chaffey & Smith 2017). In this section, the influence of digital marketing on the decision-making of Russian Internet users is revised.

**Online content** in the context of this thesis includes materials published online and used for travelling planning. The main advantages of online travel planning is an opportunity to compare and choose the best price (36%) and thereby save money or plan a trip on their own (20%). Tours – are the only travel services, where the Internet is used just for selection and not for service payment. Thus, 39 per cent of respondents choose tours online, but pay for them offline (Tylik 2018). Internet is increasing the number of its users and popularity with each year. Consequently, the main reason for accessing the Internet in Russia is for searching for information (98%). Around 84 per cent of Russian Internet users are very active online. Travel review websites are the most popular sources of information among female respondents – 27 per cent of female respondents search for information there, while 13 per cent use forums for the same purpose

(Blog Ostrovok 2019). Another innovative option of online reviews is recommendations from popular travel bloggers on their social media platforms – about 10 per cent of online users take them into consideration while planning their trips (Tabakova 2020). In addition, the Internet opens new opportunities for online shopping. The popularity of available services and products purchasing is caused by the easy access to these goods and the ability to compare offers to choose the most profitable one (Vasilyeva 2020b). When it comes, to **gadget** preference, it was calculated that 95 per cent of respondents own a smartphone, while 80 per cent of respondents have a laptop or Personal Computer (PC). The percentage of smartphone Internet connections increased up to 92 per cent in 2020, while laptop and PC Internet connections remained a bit behind with 77 per cent and 70 per cent respectively. The percentage of Russian people who regularly use tablets is 51 per cent (Tabakova 2020).

**Search engines** are playing a big role in the choice of online sources of information. The algorithms of the search engines lead online users to certain web pages. For instance, review websites are directly influencing the decision-making of Russian tourists due to the increase in users of younger generations. Some people cannot make a decision on their potential travel destination before going through reviews and comments on the Internet (Vasilyeva 2020b). **The webpage** is a presence of a company online. To effectively attract foreigners, it should be optimized in accordance with the target country, in this case Russia. Website optimisation does not need to affect webpage design - European outline is familiar to Russian Internet users. However, the translation of page content into the Russian language can be an advantage for a foreign company. In addition, due to the growth of smartphone users, Internet website needs to be optimized for mobile devices. Moreover, when it comes to the young audience, mobile site optimisation is one of the key tools to target your products to them via marketing strategy (Vasilyeva 2019a).

Top used **social media platforms** have not been significantly changing in recent years, and in 2020 the leading platforms were YouTube (87%), VKontakte (85%) and Instagram (59%) (Tabakova, 2020). VKontakte or VK, is the largest social

media platform in Europe: it has over 100 million active users. This platform can be used in various foreign languages. However, it is the most popular among the Russian-speaking community (Tilearcio 2016). Within Russia, this platform is mostly used by youngsters of 16-24 years old (91%) as well as Instagram (61%); however, Facebook is mostly used by people over 65 years old – about 34 per cent (Tabakova, 2020). It is also worth noting that, Finland is widely represented on VKontakte social media platform by the official active pages of its regions with various content, including films in Finnish languages, contests, national recipes, and language learning tips with many active Russian followers (Vasilyeva 2020b). TikTok is a video sharing online platform, which is gaining popularity all around the world. For instance, the number of TikTok users in Russia has almost doubled in 2020. In November 2020, the number of application installations exceeded 27 million, and predictably the number of users will continue to increase. The main audience of this application is users aged 13-17 years old in Russia, who will be in the major category of travellers in the near future (Vasilyeva 2021). Instant messenger applications are the most demanded smartphone applications among Russians, including WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram for communication (Tabakova 2020).

Due to the increased interest of social media platforms, **User Generated Content** or **USG**, should become the main part of the brand marketing strategy in 2021. Online users are not only interested in consuming anymore, but also in creating content. Through the tactical use of user-generated content, it is possible for travel brands to increase customer loyalty and engagement (Vasilyeva 2021).

Now the most popular types of **online content** among Russian online users will be reviewed. On average, videos and banners generate twice the return of investment than television, while social media platforms, as well as bloggers, are even more efficient marketing channels nowadays. The catchiest type of online content in 2020 are videos; 85 per cent out of all respondents usually spend their free time watching them (Tabakova 2020). In 2019, Brand Analytics – the best media analytics system chosen by users and experts in AdIndex rating 2020, and 2nd place in Europe in the international ranking G2 2020, conducted research.

According to their findings, online users attach a video to every sixth publication they post. For instance, on social media platforms such as Odnoklassniki and VKontakte the volume of video content has almost doubled over a year. Therefore, the growth of video content online leads to an increase in video consumption and the tendency of video content to become the leading communication format (Brand Analytics 2019).

Figure 4 represents the percentage of online publications consisting of video across leading social media platforms. From the figure, it is visible that across all social media platforms, the percentage of video content increased over a one-year period. The most significant growth was analysed on the Odnoklassniki social media platform, while other social media demonstrated incremental growth.

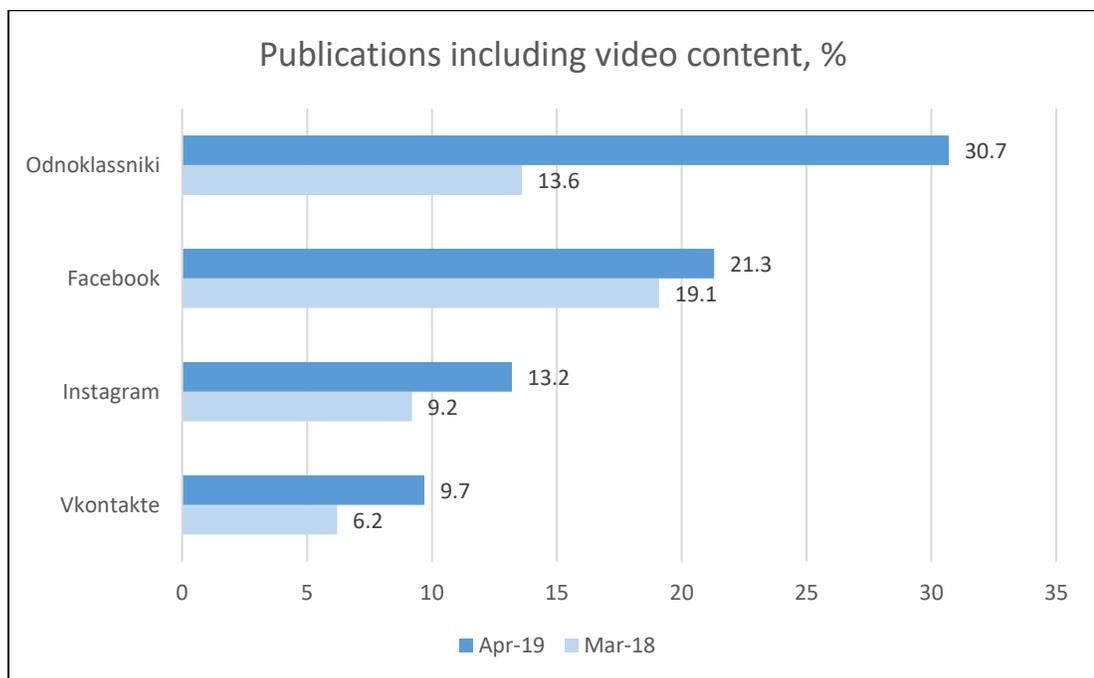


Figure 4. The percentage of all publications on following social media platforms in Russian language, including video content, % (Brand Analytics 2019).

At the end of this section, the insufficient online marketing strategies are reviewed. The findings represented below were published by Deloitte CIS Research Centre in their fourth comprehensive study of media consumption in Russia, where 1,600 online users of 18-55 years old from 46 regions of Russia participated. According to this research, Russian Internet users block online advertisements with increasing popularity. The percentage of ad-blocking tools

on computers/laptops is higher (44%), than on mobile phones (40%). The main reasons for blocking Internet advertisements are avoiding annoying ads and oversaturation from advertising online. The most annoying types of online advertisements are considered: full-screen banners, commercial interrupting videos, pop-up banners and video banners with sound (Tabakova 2018, 38-40).

To sum up, the following theoretical concepts that were overviewed in this chapter can be summarized in the conceptual framework represented below.

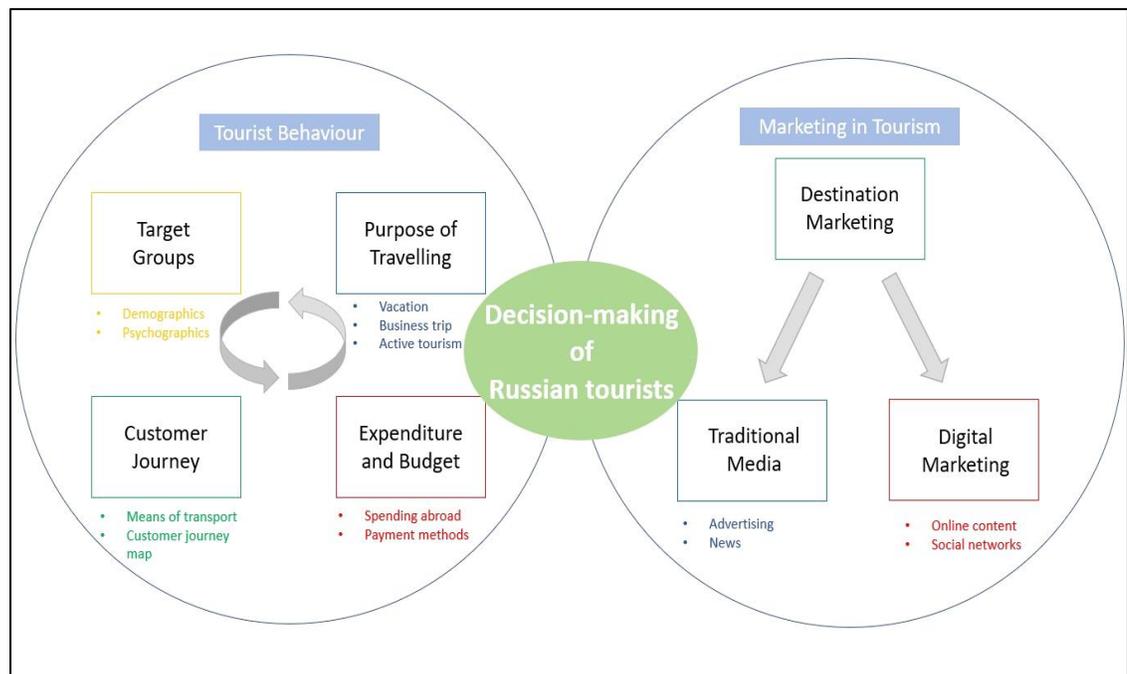


Figure 5. Thesis conceptual framework.

To efficiently influence the decision-making of Russian tourists many factors should be taken into consideration. On the one hand, such aspects as tourist behaviour, including target groups, the purpose of travelling, customer journey and budget, are strongly connected to cultural differences and preferences. Whereas on the other hand, destination marketing methods, including traditional media and digital marketing, are tools that can be implemented for advertising of locations, products, and services. By summarizing the reviewed statistics and marketing tools, Finnish companies can successfully compete in the Finnish market.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODS

After reviewing literature and online sources, it is visible that Finnish companies are interested in collecting data annually on the tourism situation with Russia. However, the sources of information included data about the tourists from Russia, who travel to Finland in general. Therefore, the analysis of the group of tourists from Russia, primarily from Saint Petersburg, who travel to the Kymenlaakso region should be considered independently. The research was conducted in 2019 under the supervision of Luova Yritysgeneraattori RDI project at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk) when the tourism industry was the most active in the past three years. Therefore, the research was conducted while analysing the most recent possible experiences of Russian tourists from travelling to Finland.

To collect reliable and complementary information, quantitative and qualitative research methods of data collection were applied. It was decided to use the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods or the so-called “mixed method” since all research methods have bias and weaknesses and by implementing the mix of various methods, a deep and comprehensive understanding of the field of study was provided (Creswell 2014, 14-15).

The aims of the qualitative research were to get an overview of travelling-related activities and preferences of Russian tourists, in particular citizens of Saint Petersburg, who visited cities in the Kymenlaakso area. The aim of qualitative research was to develop customer profiles of tourists from Saint Petersburg, who travel to Kymenlaakso region. The research was conducted in the Russian language, and after the end of data collection all the results were translated into the English language.

#### 3.1 Quantitative research method

Päivi Eriksson and Anne Kovalainen in their book “*Qualitative methods in business research*” (2016) compare both methods of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The main difference of the quantitative method that they

defined is its focus on statistical analysis, testing of hypothesis and explanation. Quantitative research is usually standardized and structured (Päivi & Kovalainen 2016).

After understanding the research method, the questions asked from the interviewees are reviewed in this section. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions: 8 multiple-choice questions, 1 Likert Scale question and 1 question with an open answer. Here are brief specifications of each question objectives based on the survey question list, represented in Appendix 1. **Questions 1** “Gender” and **2** “Age” were gathering the demographic data about the respondents. **Question 3** “Where do you search information for travel planning to Finland?” aimed to discover informational sources which are used by citizens of Russia while planning their trips to Finland. Option “Internet” in this question was leading to the additional **Question 4** “Can you specify, which Internet sources do you use?” about the online platforms which respondents prefer while searching for the travel-planning information. **Question 5** “What type of content do you find interesting?” focused on understanding the preferred online content which citizens of Russia review online. **Question 6** “Which language of the content is the most understandable for you?” analysed the preferred language of the content. **Question 7** “How do you plan trips to Finland?” intended to discover ways of planning which were used by citizens of Russia while they consider their trip to Finland. The answer “I do not travel outside Russia” was leading to the end of the questionnaire, since other questions were connected to the travel experience abroad. **Questions 8** “What is your purpose of travelling?” is a Likert Scale question, focused on analysing the frequency of travelling to Finland with particular purposes. **Question 9** “What kind of activities do you prefer in Finland?” analysed preferred activities while staying in Finland. **Question 10** “How do you travel to Finland?” discovered the transport used for reaching Finland. **Question 11** “What is your average daily budget per person while visiting Finland, in € ?” asked to receive the information about the average daily budget spent per person while travelling to Finland. **Question 12** “Which of these cities have you visited?” aimed to discover visited cities in the Kymenlaakso region: “Hamina”, “Kotka” and “Kouvola” (as well as other cities, which could be

written in the “*Other option*” section). Last **question 13**, “*What did you like/dislike the most about these cities?*” is an open-answer question, which aimed to receive information about the travelling experience in different parts of Finland. The following flowchart represents the quantitative research and data analysis plan:

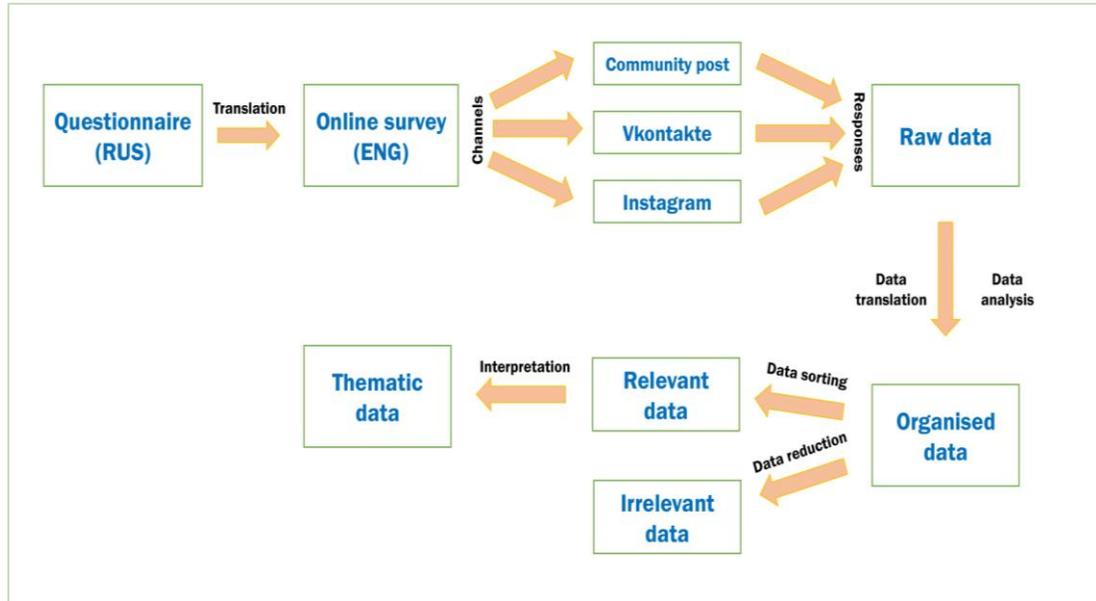


Figure 6. Quantitative research and data analysis plan.

Firstly, the original questionnaire was translated from English to the Russian language and put in the format of an online survey on the Survey Monkey and Webropol survey platforms. Secondly, the survey was distributed in two ways: by disseminating the link to the online questionnaire via social media platforms such as VKontakte and Instagram and by posting the link in the online community VKontakte “Visit Suomi” with more than 120,000 active users (<<https://vk.com/visitsuomi>>). The second offline way of questionnaire distribution was conducted by asking citizens of Russia the questions on the streets of Saint Petersburg. Received responses (in Excel) were analysed. Organised data was sorted out to reduce irrelevantly and pick up relevant data that was interpreted and used in the thesis writing as arguments and point prove. Translation and analysis of the survey results are represented in chapter 4.

This is the **accompanying text** (translated into the English language) that was distribute with community post in VKontakte online community and personal messages on social media platforms to survey respondents:

*“Dear friends, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences is conducting the research among Russian tourists visiting Finland.*

*A small request for you – spend a couple of minutes to fill in the online questionnaire at the link: <<https://xamk-survey.suora.host/>>*

*Thank you!”*

Following the quantitative research is evaluated and described in accordance with the following criteria, ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. The **credibility** of the questionnaire was ensured by developing all the questions under the guidance of a lecturer in the Business Administration Department at Xamk University, whose experience in statistical analysis was implemented in the questionnaire development. The link to the online questionnaire was disseminated among citizens of Russia by sharing the link directly and publishing the post including the link in “VisitSuomi” community on VKontakte social media platform, the target audience of the research was chosen randomly, yet all the participants were Russian speaking, who have already travelled to Finland or were interested in travelling to this country, ensuring the **dependability** of the research. Even though the link to the survey is already invalid, the post in the “Visit Suomi” community, as well as contact emails, are available online at <[https://vk.com/wall-29498661\\_159911](https://vk.com/wall-29498661_159911)>. The **understanding** of the research purpose while distributing the questionnaire online was ensured by providing a brief explanation of the research purposes and objectives, as well as the name of the researcher – Xamk. Respondents were aware that participation in the questionnaire is voluntary until they are interested in the topic and are ready to share their experiences.

### **3.2 Qualitative research method**

As the authors Päivi Eriksson and Anne Kovalainen describe in their book (2016) qualitative research methods are correlated with interpretation and understanding of data. The implementation of qualitative research is closely connected to the

study of social and cultural fields, striving for a holistic understanding of the topic. Commonly, the qualitative methods are being used to provide a 'big picture' of issues that have remained unclear during quantitative research. Therefore, the implementation of the qualitative research method in combination with quantitative research is logical and justified.

The type of qualitative interview chosen for the research is "emotionalists" (also known as subjectivists); interviewing research focuses on gathering information about the personal experience of participants. The guided and semi-structured questions focus on points of view, emotions, and perceptions of interviewees, while discussing pre-designed topics as well as the possibility to add variations to the discussion. This type of qualitative interview was chosen due to its advantages, which include a comprehensive and systematic way of data gathering, yet the comfortable and informal tone of the interview (Päivi & Kovalainen, 2016).

In the context of this thesis, the qualitative research method is implemented to receive more detailed information about target group representatives and develop potential customer profiles about their travelling experience in Finland. This aim is achieved by conducting qualitative interviews with citizens of Saint Petersburg.

As mentioned above, guided, and semi-structured questions were asked, which means that some of them were prepared in advance, and some questions were developed during the discussion, based on the personal understanding and experience of interviewees. **Questions** in block 1 *"How many times per year do you travel to Finland?"* and *"What is your favourite time of the year for trips?"* were asked to every interviewee to understand their frequency of travelling abroad as well as preferred time for trips. **Questions** in block 2 *"What means of transport do you use to travel to Finland?"* and *"Which one is the most comfortable for you?"* intended to analyse the means of transport used for reaching Finland from Saint Petersburg. **Questions** in block 3 *"Do you know a lot about Finnish culture?"* and *"Have you ever visited any interesting events in Finland?"* were formulated to analyse the awareness about Finnish cultural

events and activities before visiting the country. **Question 4** “*Where do you prefer to stay during your vacation?*” was asked to get information about the types of accommodation preferred by Russian tourists in Finland. **Questions** in block **5** “*How do you plan your trips to Finland?*”, “*Why do you choose Finland for your holiday spending?*” and “*Are there many criteria that influence your trip planning?*” were focusing on the sources of information used by tourists from Russia while planning their trips to Finland. **Questions** in block **6** “*What improvements in tourism area can you suggest?*”, “*Can you suggest any improvement ideas for developing the Kymenlaakso area?*” and “*What is inconvenient for you as a tourist in Finland?*” were intended to get feedback about positive and negative experiences while travelling to Finland, and improvement suggestions in the service sector. Last **question 7** was formulated during the conversation, focusing on the unique experience of each traveller and their personal experience.

Now the implemented qualitative research method is evaluated and described in accordance with the following criteria, ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative research. As it was stated before, the aim of the qualitative method was to develop customer profiles. Therefore, in order to ensure the **generalizability** of the research, 5 people of different age groups were chosen for participation in the interviews. Their experiences were different from each other, due to their occupation, purposes of travelling, activities in Finland, etc. The common confirmed thing they had was nationality – as all of them are citizens of Russia, living in Saint Petersburg. Since the interviews were conducted in the Russian language and translated into English, the analysed data can be **transferred** among local Finnish companies for use in business development and marketing campaigns. The **dependability** and **reliability** criteria were ensured by the native Russian language skills of interviewees and interviewer, which were helpful for interviewees in the interpretation of the questions as well expressions of personal experiences and perceptions. In addition, the interviews were documented simultaneously in the format of detailed transcripts. Two interviews were conducted in the presence of third parties, because interviewees were underage, therefore their parents were aware of the

interview purposes and information disclosure. The **integrity** criteria were followed, since all the interviewees agreed to take part in the research and were aware of its purpose. The interviewees were selected in relation to their demographic features and interviewed personally and separately from each other in a comfortable environment and informal manner. All the interviews were conducted in their home country – Russia. Therefore, interviewees were feeling comfortable to answer the questions and share their experiences. The interview questions and objectives were prepared and developed in advance. All the interviewees were informed that their personal information such as names, date of birth, photos would not be published. Therefore, they were able to share their experiences in an honest and detailed manner since the safeguarding of their **anonymity** was ensured.

## **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

In this chapter the results of qualitative and quantitative research are analysed and clarified. These results provided a relevant statistical overview of Russian tourists who travelled to Finland, including such topics as demographics, sources of information, marketing content consumed, transportation, budget and personal advantages and disadvantages evaluated while visiting Finland.

### **4.1 Quantitative method**

In total, 636 people took part in the online survey: 596 responses were received online, while 40 responses were received by asking citizens of Russian questions on the streets of Saint Petersburg. All the data analysed in section 4.1 is represented in easy-to-understand figures, which were formed after analysing exported Excel data.

Figure 7, in the form of a pie chart, shows the percentages of gender information of the respondents, where 100 per cent is the percentage of all answers of every option presented. As mentioned in section 2.3.2, most Russian women use online sources for travel planning. Therefore, it was not surprising that 80 per cent of all

the respondents were **women**, while only 20 per cent of all respondents were **men**.

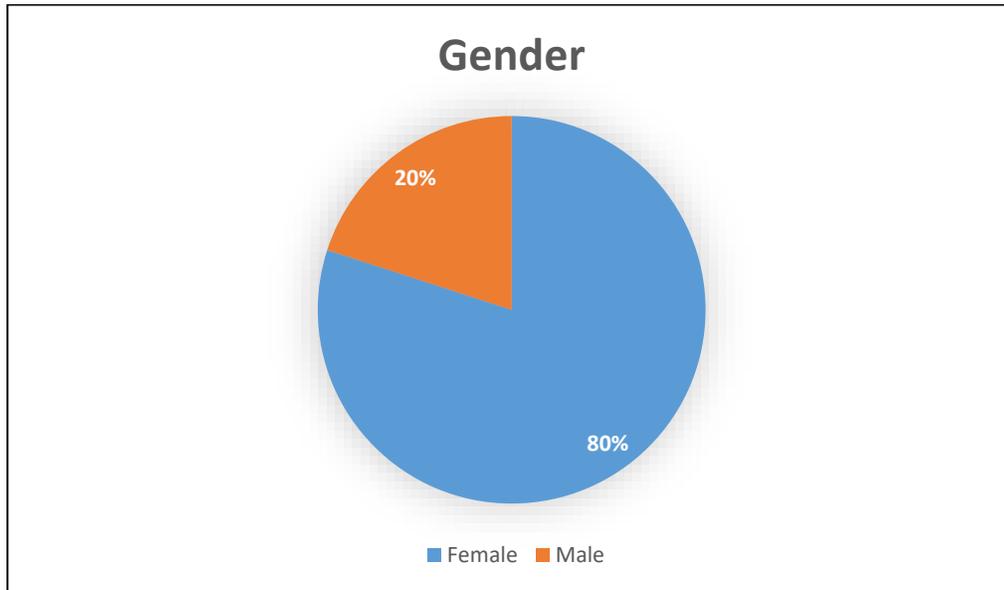


Figure 3. Gender of respondents.

Figure 8 represents the data about the age of questionnaire respondents.

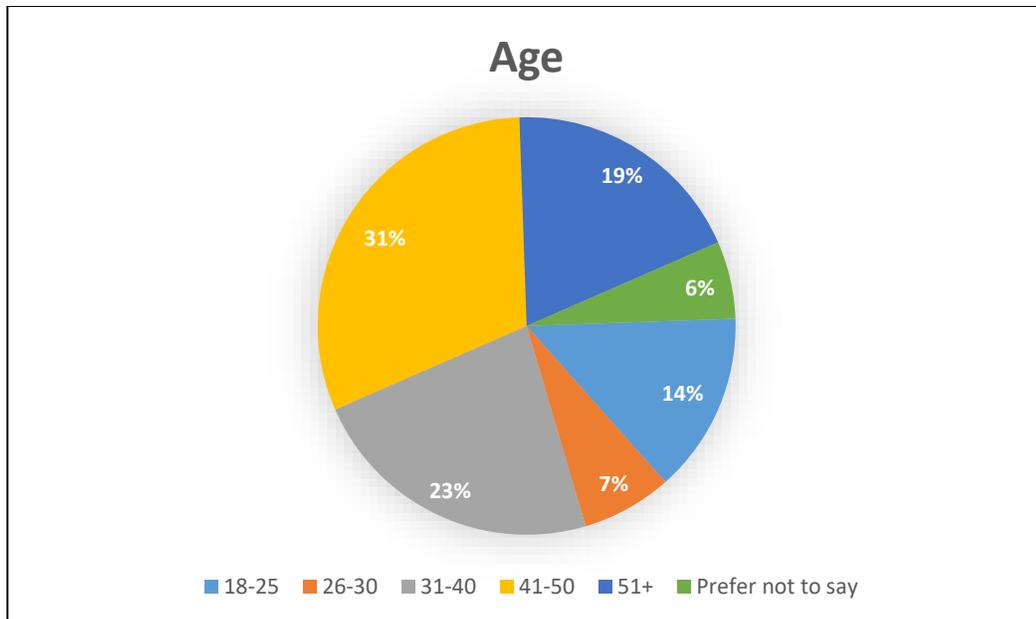


Figure 4. Age of respondents.

The biggest age group included respondents of **41-50 years old**. While the smallest age group included respondents of **26-30 years old**. However, it could be due to the small difference of the years in this age group. Respondents of youngest **18-25** and oldest **51+** target groups were 19 per cent and 14 per cent

respectively out of all participants. Therefore, the representatives of all target groups participated in the questionnaire.

Answers to question number 3, which are illustrated in Figure 9, were used to analyse the sources of information used for trip planning. Undoubtedly, the most popular answer included **Internet sources** of information as 82 per cent of respondents use them for trip planning. Content of **travel agencies** (5%) or **news and magazines** (4%) were not actively used as sources for trip planning. The most unpopular source of information was **television**; only 2 per cent of respondents use it for trip planning.

**Other variants** of sources of information (7%) included such variants as: *“recommendations of friends and relatives”* and *“working relations and colleagues”*. As mentioned in section 2.2.1, word-of-mouth is a very powerful marketing tool in Russia. Therefore, it is not a surprise that citizens of this country often count on the opinion of people they trust while planning trips to Finland, especially if their friends or relatives live abroad or travel regularly. One respondent takes into consideration information presented during *“the Day of Finland Festival in Saint Petersburg”*. This Festival is an annual PR event, which is organised in Saint Petersburg. This event is free of charge, where citizens of Russia can get familiar with Finnish companies, culture, and tourism activities (Businessfinland 2019).

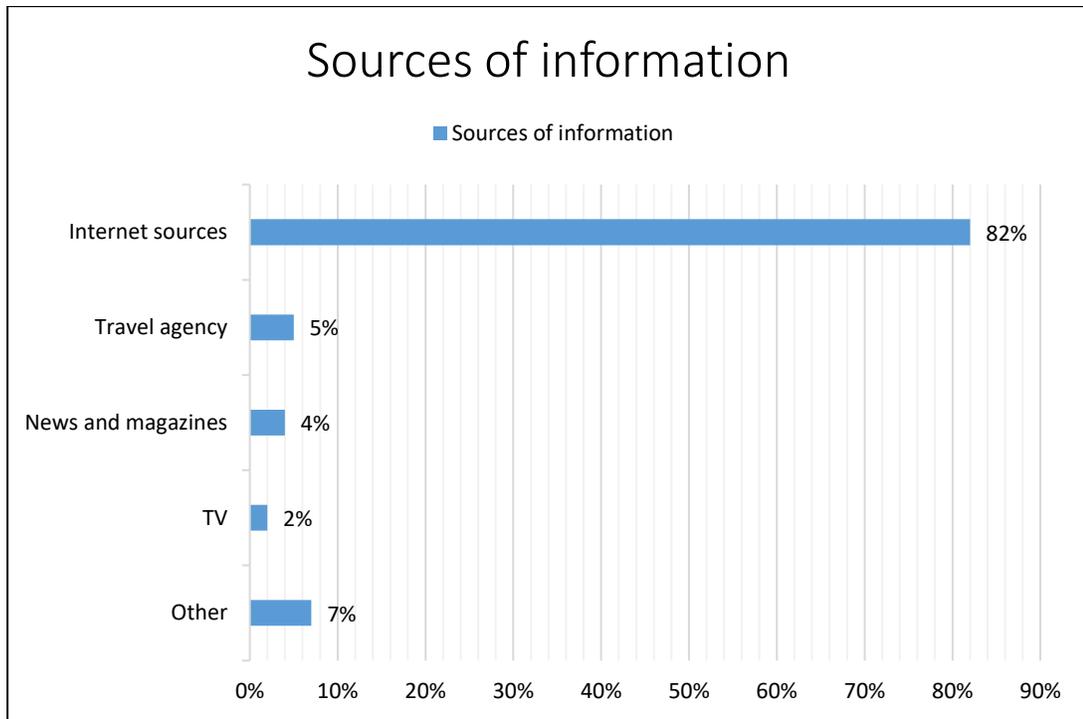


Figure 5. Sources of information used for trip planning to Finland.

All the respondents who answered that they use “*Internet sources*” for trip planning were asked the additional question about these particular Internet sources they use. Their results are represented in figure 10 below.

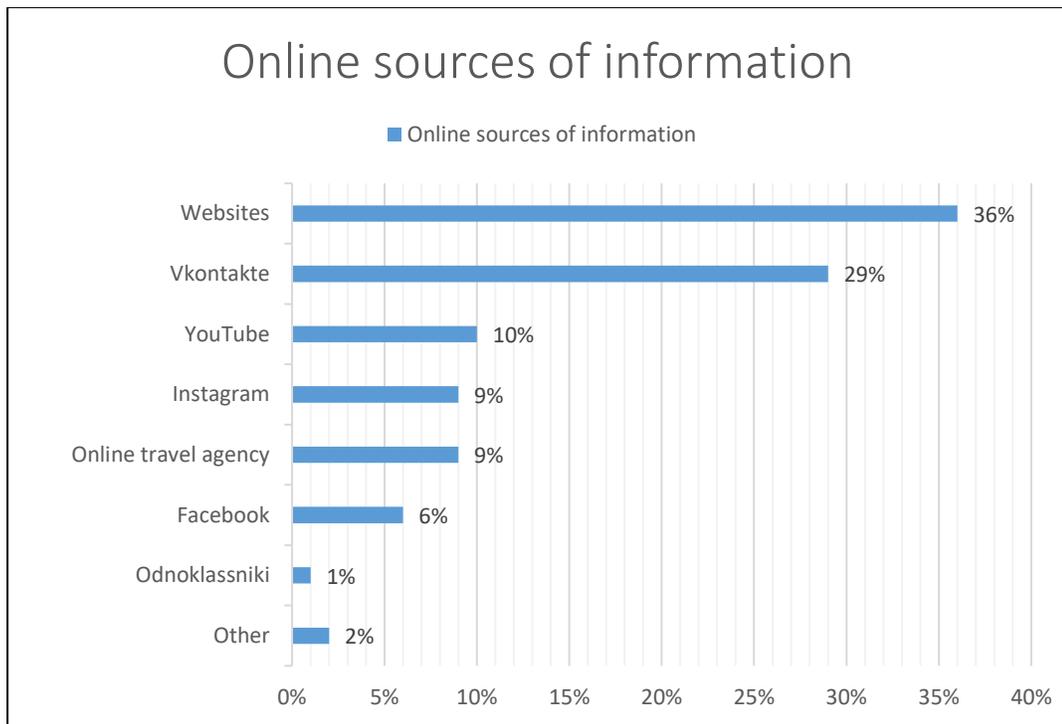


Figure 6. Online sources of information used for trip planning to Finland.

The most popular source of information are **websites** (36%) and Russian social media platform **Vkontakte** (29%). Other online platforms used for trip planning included **YouTube** (10%), **Instagram** (9%) and **Facebook** (6%). When it comes to the service sector, **online travel agencies** (9%) were a more popular source of information than **travel agencies** as it was clearly represented in the comparison of the results from questions 3 and 4: 107 respondents choose online travel agencies, and only 31 respondents confirmed that they use travel agencies while answering to the previous question.

Figure 11 represents the results about the preferred types of content that respondents review online. The most interesting type of content for citizens of Russia is **stories** (43%), while **videos** (29%) and **pictures** (26%) have an almost equal share of respondents that are interested in this type of content. **Games** (1%) is the least interesting type of content.

**Other variants** (2%) included: *“films”, “informational articles”, “reviews”* and *“blogs and forums”*. For example, respondents mentioned such websites as *“OurFinland”* and *“LittleOne”*. Many respondents preferred a combination of different content e.g., *“lists of places of interests with photos, in accordance with my personal preferences”*. One respondent used *“Google Maps”* while reviewing information about places to visit. Therefore, the presence of the company on this platform is expected to be updated and relevant. One respondent provided a detailed explanation of the type of written content they prefer: *“materials about places of interest, including opening hours, ticket prices and events, information should be clear and concise”*. Online users do not like wasting time reading unnecessary information; the most important data should be easily accessible and clear.

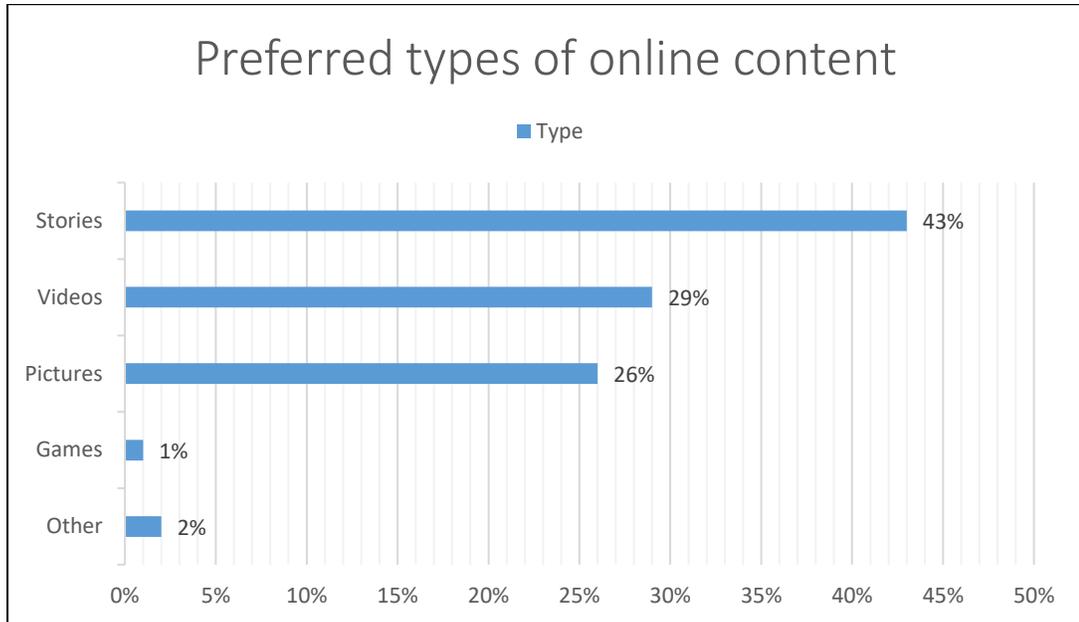


Figure 7. Preferred types of online content.

The next question was connected to the preferred language of the content. The most common option was predictably the Russian language (77%). Other options of foreign languages were English (4%) and Finnish (2%). Thus, it is visible, that the majority of citizens of Russia prefer the information to be published in the Russian language. However, for 16 per cent of respondents language of the content does not matter.

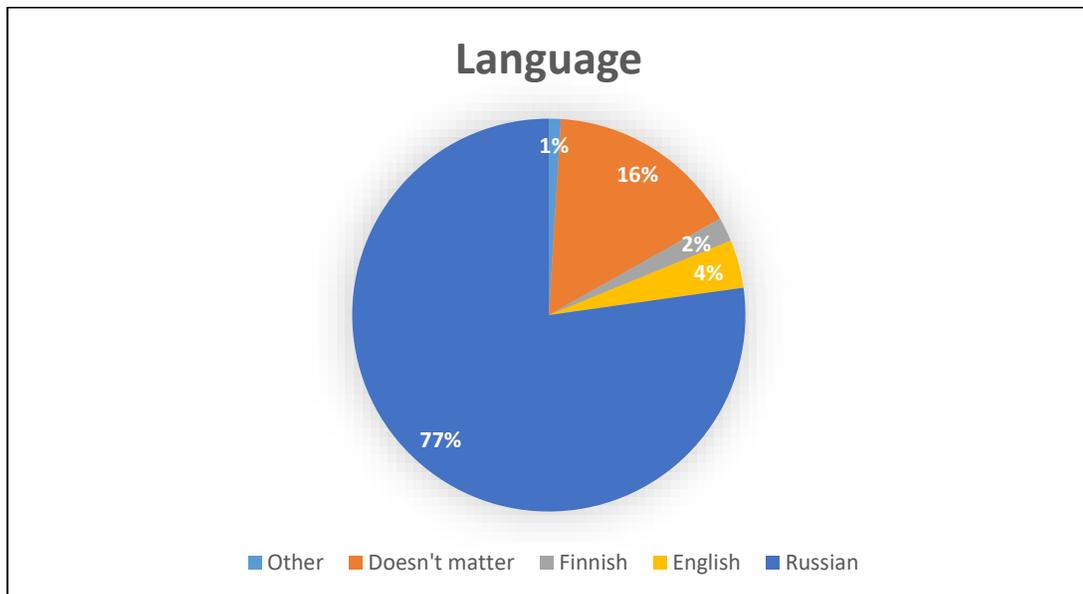


Figure 8. Preferred language of the content.

The last question in this block dedicated to trip planning, was about the ways of trip planning. As it is visible in figure 13, the majority of respondents (86%) plan their trips **by themselves, independently**. In opposite to the question about the sources of information, services of **travel agencies** (8%) were more popular than services of **online travel agencies** (2%). **Other variants** included “*help of friends*” or “*travel exchange*”. Those respondents (2%) who answered that they do not travel outside Russia, were sent to the end of the questionnaire after this question.

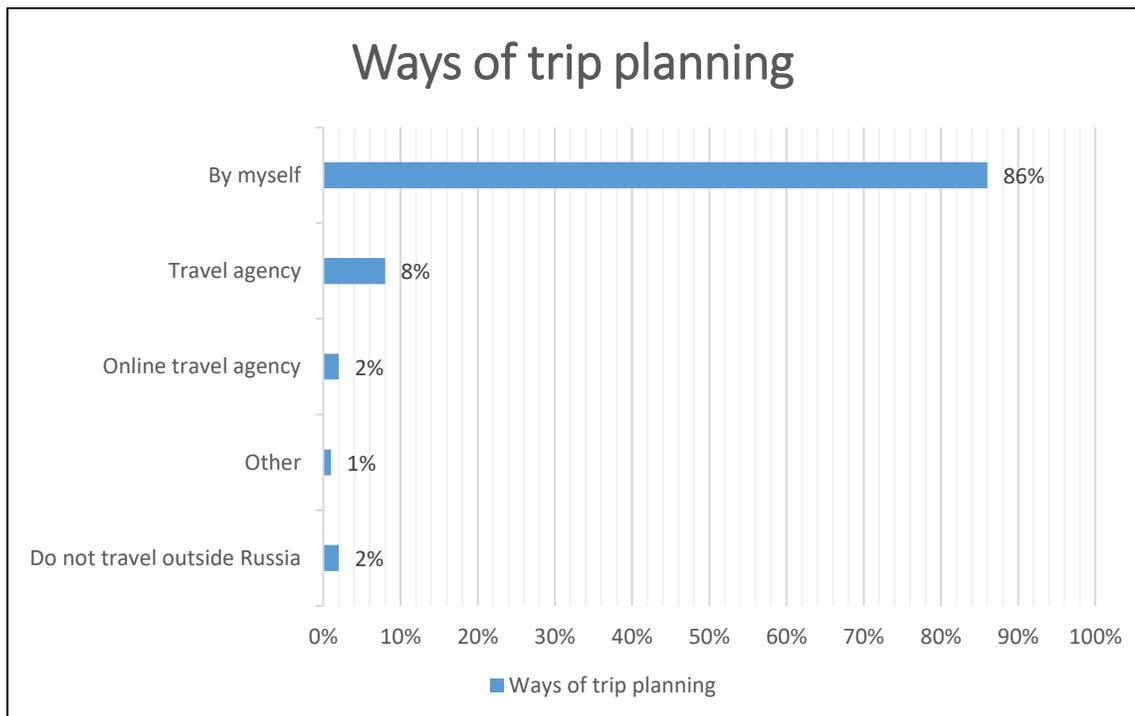


Figure 9. Ways of trip planning.

The next question focused on various purposes of travelling. As it is visible from figure 14, there were reviewed 3 suggested purposes of travelling: **business trips, active tourism, and vacation**, where respondents were able to choose the frequency of travelling to Finland for mentioned reasons.

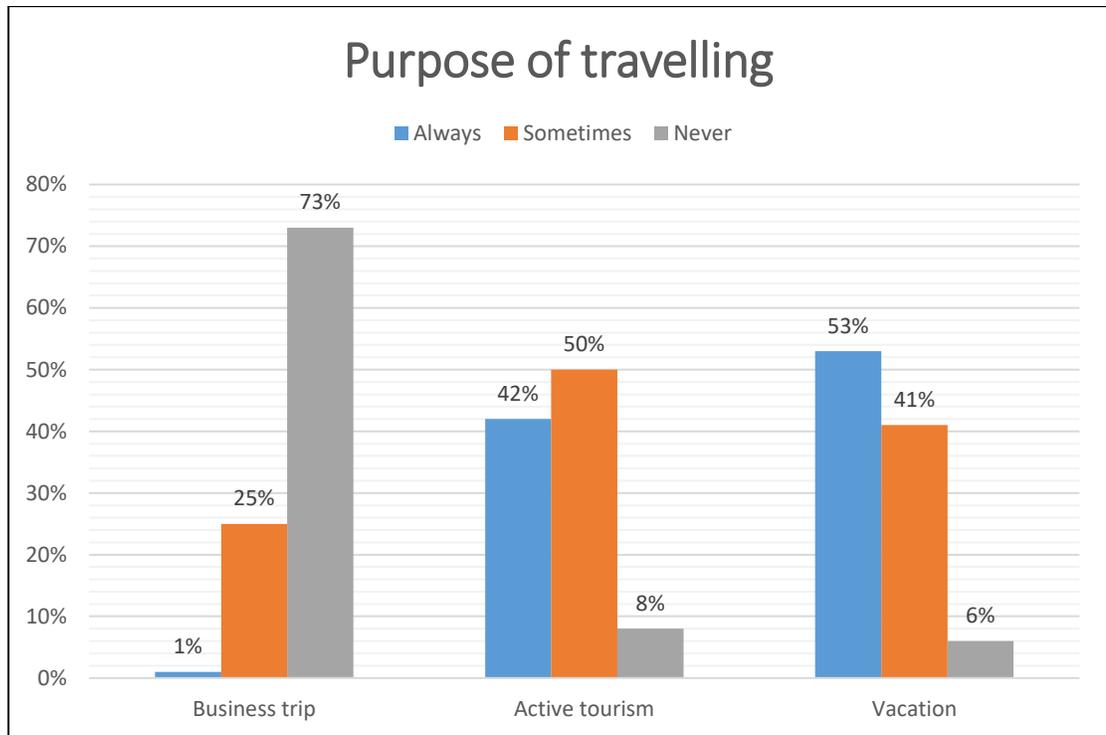


Figure 10. Purposes of travelling from Russia to Finland.

As it is represented in the figure, **business trip** to Finland was the least popular purpose of travelling among citizens of Russia, only 1 per cent of respondents always travel with this purpose, while 25 per cent only sometimes go to Finland for such purpose. When it comes to **active tourism**, the bigger percentage of respondents always (43%) travel to Finland on purpose for dynamic time spending, while 50 per cent of all respondents go to Finland partly because of this reason. The last purpose of travelling – **vacation** – is the most popular one: 53 per cent of respondents always travel to Finland with this purpose, while only 6 per cent never practice this type of travelling.

After analysing the purposes of travelling, the preferred activities were evaluated. Figure 15 illustrates the results of this question. The most enjoyable and common activity in Finland for Russian tourists (31%) was the **exploration of city life**. The next popular options included **enjoying nature** (29%) and **going shopping** (24%). In addition, 11 per cent of Russian tourists love attending **cultural events** during their stays in Finland. The least popular activities included **sport** (3%) and **beach leisure** (2%).

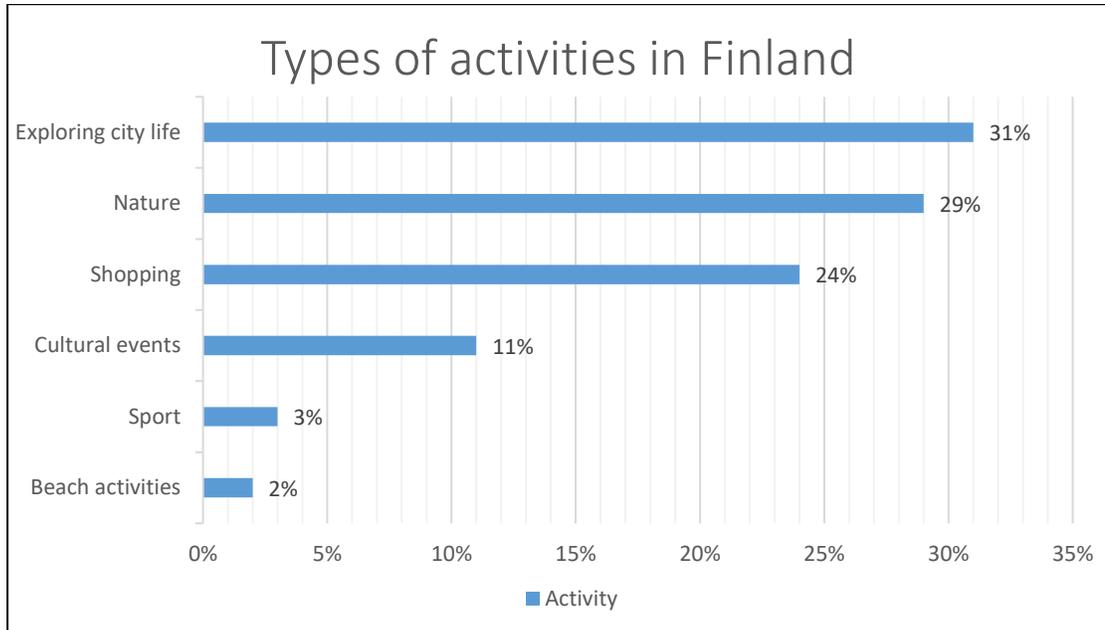


Figure 11. Types of activities in Finland.

Question 10 was focusing on the means of transport used by tourists while travelling from Russia to Finland. The most popular type of journeys from Russia to Finland was by **personal cars** (42%) and **busses** (34%). Travelling by **train** was chosen only by 14 per cent of all respondents. The least popular option included **ferry** trips (5%). Therefore, the ability to travel freely within the country is important in Finland. Hence, car journeys are the most popular.

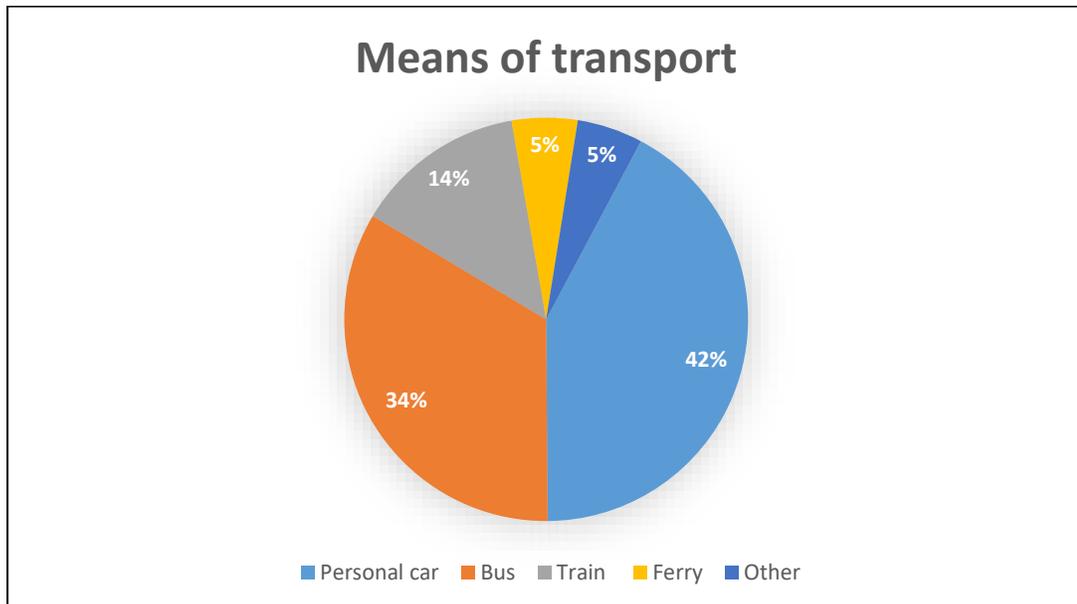


Figure 12. Means of Transport used for travelling from Russia to Finland.

The next sensitive question was asked to analyse the average daily budget per person, while visiting Finland. In figure 17 it is clear that the majority of respondents (70%) calculated their average daily budget per person **up to € 100**. Next, groups of tourists (28%) defined their average daily budget in the interval between **€ 101-500**. The most uncommon options were intervals between **€ 501-1000** (2%) and **€ 1000+** (1%). Therefore, the citizens of Russia needed a maximum of up to € 500 daily budget in Finland.

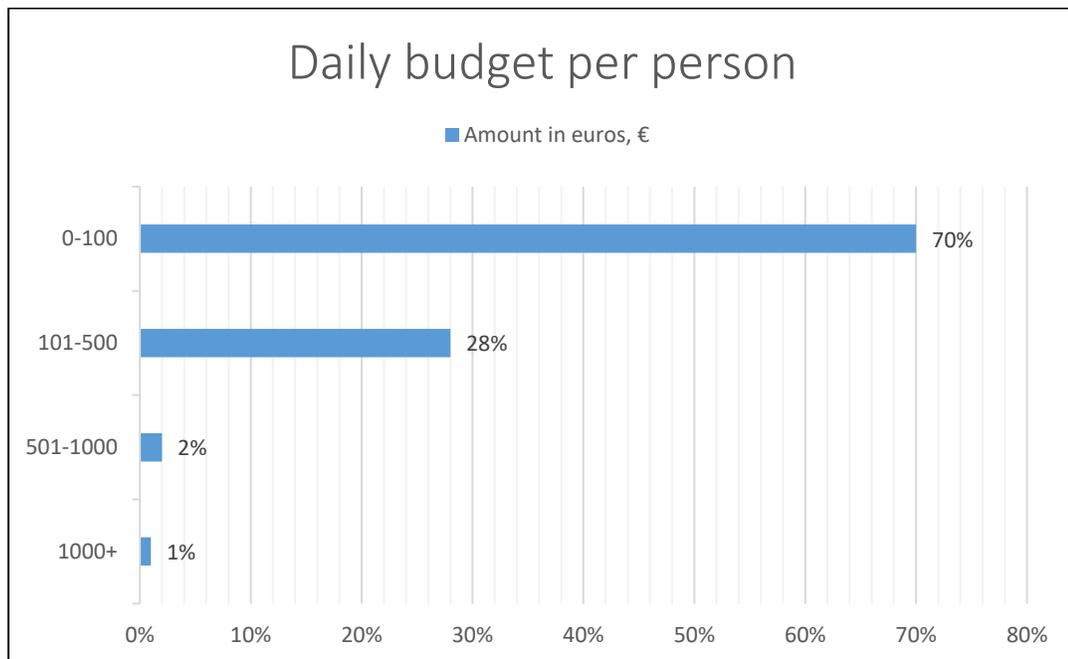


Figure 13. Estimated daily budget per person in euros, €.

The last multiple-choice question concerned visited cities of the Kymenlaakso region as well as other cities of Finland. As it is represented in figure 18, 36 per cent of visitors of Finland from Russia **have never visited** the biggest cities of the Kymenlaakso region: Kotka, Hamina or Kouvola. However, while comparing the popularity of these cities, 29 per cent of respondents at least once visited **Kotka**, and 20 per cent visited **Hamina**. In contrast, only 15 per cent of respondents visited **Kouvola**. These numbers can be connected to the location of the cities. For instance, Hamina and Kotka are located close to the Russian border; therefore, tourists who entered Finland and continue their journey in other directions, need to drive through one of these two cities. **Other** popular cities, which were visited by citizens of Russian are Helsinki, Lappenranta, Turku, Imatra and Tampere. According to their responses, smaller cities such as Imatra

or Lappeenranta attracted tourists, because they have “*cosy cafes, museums and beautiful sights*”, while the capital of Finland – Helsinki was seen as a “*busy, vibrant and cosmopolitan city*”.



Figure 14. Visited cities in the Kymenlaakso region and Finland in general.

The last question of the online survey with an open answer was asked in order to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of trips to Finland. All the respondents were able to express their opinion honestly and freely without any limitations. This part of the analysis is divided into four parts: **infrastructure of Finland, communication abroad, places of interest** and **expenditure and budget**. The advantages and disadvantages were reviewed and compared simultaneously.

**Infrastructure of Finland.** Advantages: Many respondents mentioned the “*cleanliness*” of Finland: “*Your country is very, very clean!*”. The infrastructure of cities was evaluated positively: “*I liked the infrastructure of the cities, the quality of services and the public transport*” and “*very convenient and organized rail travelling, modern trains and ferries*”. Some tourists enjoyed “*feeling safe in the cities I visited*”. Also, some citizens of Russia noticed that in Finland, they enjoy the “*silence*”, which is a great change from busy city life in Russia.

Disadvantages: However, a few tourists experienced difficulties with public transport: *“it was not clear from which platform the bus leaves”* or *“from which port the ferry leaves”*.

**Communication abroad.** Advantages: Many respondents noticed *“friendliness”* and *“tolerance”* of local people. In addition, Russian tourists were impressed by the active lifestyle of Finns: *“Everyone in Finland is so happy, people are cycling a lot and following active lifestyle”*. Some respondents noticed that it was a nice surprise for them to be served by *“Russian speaking sellers”*, followed by *“easy communication with the staff of hotels, cafes and museums”*. When it comes to other foreign languages, tourists were pleasant to get access to *“materials in English and Russian languages”*.

Disadvantages: However, *“sometimes there are products and signs only in Finnish and Swedish languages, without English”* which can possibly lead to confusion and misunderstandings while being in unfamiliar places: *“it would be much more convenient if there was information in Russian language on the signs, which point to places of interest”*.

**Places of interest.** Advantages: Many respondents noticed that *“in museums and cafes, a lot has been done for the convenience of visitors”*. Other places, that tourists of Russia are happy to visit are: *“swimming pools”*, *“parks”*, *“art objects”* and *“amusement parks”*. Multiple citizens of Russia enjoyed the *“architecture”* of Finnish towns, while wandering around *“beautiful buildings”* and *“streets that are pleasant to walk on”*. For many Russian tourists, the opportunity to enjoy *“fresh air”* in combination with *“beautiful nature”* is very important, as well as *“a possibility of hiking along the trails”* and enjoying *“bike paths and lakes”* with *“greenery”* near *“walking areas”*. In addition, a few tourists enjoyed the *“nightlife”* of Finland, while visiting *“rock bars”*.

Disadvantages: Many respondents were unhappy with the *“working hours”* of shops and other places in Finland: *“stores are closed on holidays”* and *“everything closes very early”*. In addition, those tourists, who visited small towns

in Finland were unsatisfied due to the lack of *“any interesting events, as well as museums and galleries”*. Some respondents noticed that in some towns or public places, there is *“not enough amount of (free) restrooms”*.

**Expenditures and budget.** Advantages: For Russian visitors *“shopping”* is very important. Therefore, *“a huge variety of favourite products”* and *“high-quality products”* are a big advantage of Finland. Also, many Russian tourists enjoy *“free public recreation areas”*.

Disadvantages: For some tourists *“prices for food and groceries are high”*, since there are *“no cafes/restaurants for economic tourists”*. In small towns, for some visitors, *“there is nothing to do if you do not have any money”*. While travelling with a big company, expenses are high: *“everything is very expensive, the difference between Russian and Finnish income is significant; I would like to travel more often and for longer periods of time, but the cost of accommodation, food, etc. are very high, not affordable for a family”*. When it comes to ways of travelling within Finland respondents noticed that they *“did not like the prices for public transport”*. Table 2 represents the summary of the main advantages and disadvantages for Russian tourists in Finland.

Table 2. The main advantages and disadvantages for Russian tourists in Finland.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Shopping opportunities (international brands, high-quality products)	High prices on the services and products
Cleanliness of cities and forests	Bad quality of roads in small towns and villages
Infrastructure of cities	Inconvenient working hours of public places
Friendly and helpful local people	Communication misunderstandings with local people while speaking the English language
Places for sports activities (ski resorts, cycle lanes, fishing zones)	Poorly developed cultural activities in small towns (museums, exhibitions)
Nature, parks, clean air, landscapes	Queues on the Russian-Finnish border
Pleasant architecture developed places of interest (aquaparks, amusement parks)	Not enough information in Russian or English languages about upcoming events
Silent and peaceful environment	

To sum up, even though Russian tourists experience some difficulties while being in Finland, they respect Finnish culture and try to adapt according to its customs. Most of the Russian tourists appreciate the identity and lifestyle of Finns, which is different from their own. That is why many respondents express their feelings towards Finland very emotionally with genuine warmth: *“I love Finland very much!”* and *“I cannot wait to come back!”*.

## **4.2 Qualitative method**

In this section conducted interviews with citizens of Saint Petersburg will be reviewed and developed into customer profiles. The personality of individuals can represent a set of characteristics that describe the whole consumer segment. The understanding of market segmentation into the target groups is an essential part of a successful marketing strategy. Personality differences are connected to the type of product bought and the frequency of purchasing (Gunter & Furnham 2015, 40-48).

In total, 5 people were interviewed:

### **Interviewee 1:**

Female, 61 years old, lives in Saint Petersburg, retired, travels with husband

### **Interviewee 2:**

Male, 43 years old, lives in Saint Petersburg, businessman, travels with family

### **Interviewee 3:**

Female, 39 years old, lives in Saint Petersburg, mother, travels with kids

### **Interviewee 4:**

Female, 17 years old, lives in Saint Petersburg, schoolgirl, teenager

### **Interviewee 5:**

Female, 11 years old, lives in Saint Petersburg, schoolgirl, travels with parents

All the answers were outlined precisely. The table below is representing the key themes with the direct quotations from the interviewees and decoding of their answers.

Table 3. Interviews analysis.

<b>Theme label</b>	<b>Sample Quotes</b>	<b>Decoding</b>
Choice of travel destination	“Travelling to Finland is the most available and comfortable kind of vacation we can dream of” <b>Int. 1</b>	Finland is one of the most easily accessible countries for citizens of Saint Petersburg.
	“In Finland I can enjoy the peaceful, secluded, and comfortable vacation on nature” <b>Int. 2</b>	
	“Finland is one of the safest countries, that is why I feel secured there” <b>Int. 3</b>	Finland is considered a good option for family trips.
Time of country visit	“We travel at least one time in every season” <b>Int. 1</b>	Each season in Finland is known for different activities.
	“... it depends on my school holidays” <b>Int. 4</b>	Pupils and students are available for travelling following Russian holidays and school vacations.
	“Trip usually depends on my school holidays” <b>Int. 5</b>	
	“I like Christmas atmosphere in Finland during winter holidays” <b>Int. 5</b>	Finland attracts tourist in the wintertime because of its holiday atmosphere.
	“During the winter holidays, I spend in Finland approximately up to 10 days” <b>Int. 2</b>	
	“My family and I sometimes celebrate winter holidays in Finland” <b>Int. 3</b>	
	“We prefer summertime for our longest trips” <b>Int. 2</b>	
	“We only travel by personal car” <b>Int. 1</b>	Car is the most common mean of

Cross-border journey	“We prefer car... (it) is very convenient for travelling around the country...” <b>Int. 2</b>	transport. It is convenient for free transportation within the country.
	“Travelling to Finland is the most available... vacation...” <b>Int. 1</b>	Distance availability and border-crossing possibility.
	“I choose Allegro train for business trips” <b>Int. 2</b>	Allegro train is preferred for independent, comfortable and quick travelling.
	“My favourite mean of transport is the Allegro train. It is not very cheap, but the quality of services is high I can avoid queues on the boards.” <b>Int. 4</b>	
Communication abroad	“I seldom experienced language difficulties while speaking to Finns in English” <b>Int. 2</b>	Basic knowledge of the English language is enough in most communication situations.
	“Fortunately, many Finnish companies have websites in English and Russian languages” <b>Int. 4</b>	The Russian language is preferred if there is an option.
	“...sometimes we could not find any information in the Russian language online” <b>Int. 1</b>	Communication is still considered problematic for some visitors.
	“Some service workers do not speak Russian or at least English language” <b>Int. 1</b>	
	“...sometimes I have language problems while talking to them (Finns)” <b>Int. 2</b>	
	“I actively use social media and all information I find from the internet” <b>Int. 4</b>	Younger tourists are active social media users.
	“I use Internet sources the most... I'd be happy if... (there are) accounts of	

Sources of information	events in Instagram or V Kontakte” <b>Int. 3</b>	
	“It would be great to get emails about festivals and other interesting events” <b>Int. 2</b>	Easy and not time-consuming way of information access
	“I read brochures about the upcoming events on – gas stations (e.g., ABC)” <b>Int. 4</b>	Available for every car owner source of information.
	“We take some brochures and free magazines on the fuel stations” <b>Int. 1</b>	
	“As a driver, I can notice billboards on the roads” <b>Int. 2</b>	
	“I am trying to follow their (locals) advice about festivals and cultural events in Finland” <b>Int. 2</b>	Local people can be the source of information for some travellers.
	“Sometimes we were not aware of upcoming event, so we attended them occasionally” <b>Int. 1</b>	No possibility to find out about events apart from aimed research in advance.
	“There is the diversity of international brands in shopping malls, which I cannot find in Russia” <b>Int. 4</b>	Exclusive foreign goods.
	“...working hours of the shops differ from Russian, that is why I experienced some difficulties...” <b>Int. 4</b>	Working hours of stores differ from Russian ones, therefore causing unpredictable challenges.
	“Many stores have a very short duration of working hours, e.g., Alko” <b>Int. 3</b>	
	“ABC and R-kioski are perfect for emergency cases because their working hours are more flexible” <b>Int. 2</b>	Availability of 24/7 services could be needed.
	We use a possibility of getting Tax Free every time” <b>Int. 1</b>	
	“I am trying to find discounts and profitable offers” <b>Int. 3</b>	

Shopping preferences	"...many discounts and a big diversity of products (about Lidl)" <b>Int. 1</b>	Russian tourists are interested in gainful offerings.
	"...(I) buy products in Prisma, because it is easy to find everything, we need there" <b>Int. 1</b>	
Expenses abroad	"My expenses depend on euro rate" <b>Int. 4</b>	Russian people follow the economic situation and plan accordingly.
	"I can delay my visit to Finland in accordance with the euro rate" <b>Int. 2</b>	
	"Prices in Finnish stores are relatively high, but we are satisfied with the quality of products and services" <b>Int. 1</b>	People are willing to pay extra for good quality.

To sum up, there were similar behavioural patterns noticed while analysing the interviews comparing to survey results. Different target groups have obvious differences in trip planning and travelling in general. However, some challenges they face abroad are common; therefore, complex solutions might benefit the majority of the Russian customers. However, some of the interviews provided useful insights that remained undiscovered in the online survey, e.g., names of the stores, gas stations, preferred time of travelling to Finland and budget planning. The following table 4 analyses result about the cities of Kymenlaakso region: Kouvola, Kotka and Hamina, that were visited by the interviewees.

Table 4. Analysis of Kymenlaakso region.

<b>Theme label</b>	<b>Sample Quotes</b>	<b>Decoding</b>
Kouvola	"I have all my favourite stores in Kouvola" <b>Int. 1</b>	Kouvola is known for its shopping opportunities.
	"I prefer Kouvola, because there is everything I need for good vacation: swimming pools, various shops, places for fishing and hiking" <b>Int. 2</b>	

	<p>“In Kouvola they often go to Repovesi National Park and Arboretum Mustila” <b>Int. 3</b></p>	
Kotka	<p>“I love going shopping in Kotka” <b>Int. 1</b></p>	Kotka has various places of interest.
	<p>“Kotka is beautiful, but crowded and busy city... there are not so many parking places in the centre” <b>Int. 2</b></p>	
	<p>“In Kotka my family visits Sapokka water garden and Maretarium” <b>Int. 3</b></p>	
Hamina	<p>“We prefer to drive to Finland through Hamina because roads there are very picturesque. Sometimes, we stop to walk in the centre or swim in the Gulf of Finland” <b>Int. 1</b></p>	Attending festivals and events can be the main purpose of trip.
	<p>“Hamina is a very small city with picturesque landscapes” <b>Int. 2</b></p>	
	<p>“Hamina was a perfect option for her parents and her during the summertime, in order to enjoy beach activities” <b>Int. 4</b></p>	

To sum up, since all the cities have different unique features for tourists. Therefore, every city can be advertised independently in accordance with target customer groups, providing information about its own places of interest, festivals, shopping places and location.

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER UTILIZATION

In the last chapter, the major findings of this thesis are briefly summarized and analysed. After that, there are suggested recommendations from the author that were developed after the research was carried out. Lastly, the utilization of the research results is mentioned.

Since the research question of this research was to how to influence the decision-making of Russian tourists, it was understood that decision-making in the context of travelling begins while planning the trip and continues until the compilation of the journey itself. Therefore, businesses in the tourism industry must consider all trip planning stages, while developing their marketing campaigns and promoting their products to potential customers. In section 2.1 all the factors that influence the decision making while preparing for the trip as well as going through it were analysed and explained in detail. For example, it included such crucial factors as the lifestyle of the customers, their budget and social interactions. When it comes to the analysis of the decision-making of Russian tourists, it was explained that **word-of-mouth** is the most common and successful marketing tool in this country, due to its accessibility in real life as well as online.

After that, some of the main factors, influencing the decision-making of tourists such as age, location, purposes of travelling and budget were overviewed. Firstly, **target groups** were analysed. Not surprisingly, it was found out that citizens of bigger cities, including Saint Petersburg, have more tendency towards travelling abroad than citizens of smaller towns. Thereafter, the demographic basic of segmentation was implemented in reviewing four various age groups of Russian tourists. Secondly, different **purposes of travelling** in section 2.1.2 were reviewed and analysed. Since Finland is a very accessible destination for Russian tourists, people can travel to this country frequently for different purposes, including short and spontaneous **weekend trips** or long and pre-planned **summer vacations**. Due to the increase in the value of close-to-nature time spending, **camping** is gaining popularity in Finland. Even though there is a big list of different activities abroad, they can be easily predicted by the season

and duration of the trip. In view of Finland tourism activities, in summertime tourists prefer spending time outside in nature, enjoying sports activities, swimming and grilling. While in the wintertime, they enjoy visiting ski resorts and participating in Christmas-related activities. Whereas such entertainments in Finland as sauna, shopping or hiking are always interesting for tourists. The same statistics were confirmed by the survey results: the most interesting activities for Russian tourists in Finland include exploring the city life of Finnish towns due to their interest in architecture, going shopping in foreign stores and enjoying nature and clean air.

The last factor that was considered in detail focused on **budget and expenditures** abroad. The budget and expenditures planning is directly connected to the income level, which is higher in bigger cities. That is why inhabitants of major cities of Russia, including Saint Petersburg, are willing to spend more on overseas vacation than other tourists. In general, Russian tourists are willing to spend up to € 884 on travelling abroad per trip, and their daily budget in Finland is on average between € 40-500.

Then, Finland was analysed as a travelling destination by defining the concept of **destination marketing**. From a business perspective, Finland is a unique travelling destination since it promotes not its activities, but the lifestyle of its inhabitants. Visitors are intrigued by Finnish customs, such as a sauna and every-day hiking, and they are interested in trying this lifestyle while visiting Finland. Thus, by highlighting the advantage and uniqueness of Finland, local companies can expect increasing interest towards unusual activities and lifestyle of Finns.

To develop the promotion of Finnish activities, various **marketing tools** were analysed. **Digital marketing** is an ultimate leader among other competitors. However, marketing strategy should be carefully considered from the customer's point of view by analysing their location, lifestyle and preferences before launching a targeted marketing campaign. The need for the services of travel agencies is slowly decreasing, while the recommendations of public figures are

playing a more important role for online users. Even though marketing trends are constantly changing, such platforms as **Vkontakte**, **YouTube** and various **websites** are the leaders among other online sources of information in Russia. The most interesting content includes **stories** and **videos** with brief and clear understanding information. Therefore, to attract more visitors to the websites and accounts of companies, the published content should be informative and entertaining as well as preferably in the format of stories or videos in English or Russian languages.

Since the aims of this research were to discover improvements in the services segment in Finland, identify cultural differences of Russian tourists, which influence their decision-making while travelling abroad, and suggest innovative marketing strategies, in this section, all recommendations and solutions are collected in order to confirm the achievements of established aims.

In order to attract Russian tourists to the Kymenlaakso region, businesses should develop thoughtful marketing strategies. First of all, the target audience of travellers should be chosen. Even though Generation Z is among the most active tourists, Generation Y and Generation X are more likely to choose Finland as a travel destination due to their purposes of travelling, including restful at the heart of nature vacation. Secondly, marketing channels should be considered. Luckily, there are various marketing tools available in Russia. However, foreign companies should learn how to use them effectively. It is a huge advantage for Finnish businesses to be present online within the access of Russian or English-speaking audience. The most common marketing tool in the form of word-of-mouth should not be disregarded, since Russian people rely on the opinion of trusted people a lot. That is why every comment can be used against the company's image.

The Kymenlaakso region is already a famous travelling destination due to its close-to-border location. However, every city of this region should be promoted separately, with a focus on its advantages and unique features. **Kotka** is a vivid and marine town with annual maritime festivals, ports and beautiful parks.

**Hamina** is a small town with access to the beautiful beach of the Gulf of Finland and valuable architectural heritage. **Kouvola** is a natural city, surrounded by forests with fishing areas and barbecue places, with many shopping places and convenient transport connection to Saint Petersburg via railway. Each of these cities is unique and attractive in its own way, which should be promoted separately to the audience that is happy to go there again and again.

Results of this thesis, which was conducted in the cooperation of RDI Department of the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, will be published for the use of future projects of this university with similar focuses and for local business owners in the Kymenlaakso region in general. The main goal of the commissioner of this research – Digileap project – was to teach companies from the Kymenlaakso region how to be more reachable for customers. Therefore, the results of this thesis can be beneficial for the local business owners who are interested in promoting their products and services for Russian tourists, since this research focused on the specifics of Russian culture, local marketing tools and personal experiences from travelling to the Kymenlaakso region. The service segment can be improved in accordance with the proposed recommendations, leading to the increase of the company's competitiveness in the foreign market.

When it comes to future research proposals, there are many potentials, since even though the research was conducted based on the latest informational sources, such topics as digital marketing or tourism trends are constantly developing; therefore, regular updates and research should be taken seriously in order to provide value to Finnish companies, service providers and society in general.

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Table 4. Analysis of Kymenlaakso region.

**LIST OF SURVEY QUESTIONS****1) Gender:**

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

**2) Age of respondents:**

- 18-25
- 26-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60+
- Prefer not to say

**3) Where do you search information for travel planning to Finland?**

- Newspapers/magazines
- TV
- Travel agency
- Internet => go to **Question 4**
- Other variant \_\_\_\_\_

**4) Can you specify, which Internet sources do you use?**

- Websites
- Online travel agency
- Instagram
- VKontakte
- Odnoklassniki
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Other variant \_\_\_\_\_

5) What kind of content do you find interesting?

- Videos
- Stories
- Pictures
- Games
- Other variant \_\_\_\_\_

6) Which language of the content is the most understandable for you?

- Russian
- English
- Doesn't matter
- Other variant \_\_\_\_\_

7) How do you organize trips to Finland?

- By myself
- Travel agencies
- Online travel agencies
- Other variant \_\_\_\_\_
- I do not travel outside Russia => Go to **the End** of questionnaire

8) What is your purpose of travelling to Finland?

- Business trip

Activity	Always	Sometimes	Never
Sport			
Nature			
Cultural events			
Shopping			
Beach activities			
Exploring city life			

9) What kind of activities do you prefer to do in Finland?

- Family vacation
- Tourism/Sport trip

10) How do you travel to Finland?

- Personal car
- Train
- Tourist bus
- Ferry
- Other variant \_\_\_\_\_

11) What is your average daily budget per person while visiting Finland?

- € 0-100
- € 101-500
- € 501-1000
- € 1000+

12) Have you ever visited any of these cities?

- Hamina
- Kotka
- Kouvola
- None of the above
- Other variant \_\_\_\_\_

13) What did you **like/dislike** the most about these cities?

\_\_\_\_\_

**LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS****Interview number one**

1. *How many times per year do you travel to Finland? What is your favourite time of the year for trips?*
2. *Which means of transport do you prefer?*
3. *Are there many criteria that influence your trip planning?*
4. *Where do you search information while planning your trips?*
5. *What are your main activities in Finland during the summer?*
6. *What do you think about cities of Kymenlaakso region?*
7. *What other important points should be mentioned in your opinion?*
8. *Are you planning to visit Finland again?*

**Interview number two**

1. *How many times per year do you travel to Finland? What is your favourite time of the year for trips?*
2. *Which means of transport do you prefer?*
3. *Why do you choose Finland for your trips?*
4. *How are you planning you trips? What can influence on your choice?*
5. *What are your favourite shops in Finland?*
6. *What are your main activities in Finland during summertime and wintertime?*
7. *Do you travel from Finland to other countries?*
8. *What do you think about Kymenlaakso region?*
9. *What is not very convenient for you as a tourist in Finland?*

**Interview number three**

1. *How many times per year do you travel to Finland? What is your favourite time of the year for trips?*
2. *Which means of transport do you prefer? Which one is the most comfortable for you?*

3. *Where do you prefer to stay during your vacation?*
4. *How do you plan your trips to Finland?*
5. *Why do you choose Finland as your holiday destination?*
6. *Since you are mother of 3 kids, is that comfortable for you to travel to Finland with your family?*
7. *Can you suggest any improvement ideas for developing Kymenlaakso area?*

**Interview number four**

1. *How many times per year do you travel to Finland? What is your favourite time of the year for trips?*
2. *Which means of transport do you prefer? Which one is the most comfortable for you?*
3. *Do you know a lot about Finnish culture?*
4. *Where do you prefer to stay during your vacation?*
5. *How do you plan your trips to Finland?*
6. *Why do you choose Finland as your holiday destination?*
7. *What improvements in tourism sector can you suggest?*

**Interview number five**

1. *How do you travel to Finland?*
2. *When do you visit Finland?*
3. *How do you spend your summer in Finland? What are your favourite activities?*
4. *What do you prefer doing in Finland during wintertime?*
5. *Have you visited any interesting events in Finland?*
6. *What is your favourite city in Finland?*
7. *Will you visit Finland again?*