



My Geisha

Affordable luxury concept. A new customer experience

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Bachelor's Thesis

2023

Abstract

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Degree Hospitality, Tourism and Experience Management
Report/Thesis Title My Geisha- Affordable luxury concept. A new customer experience
Number of pages and appendix pages 32+3
<p>The Geisha brand represents an ongoing story of success, which inspired many others and led to the expansion of the company. Therefore, the idea of establishing a Geisha store in Finland has been generated.</p> <p>My Geisha brings to the attention of fans of oriental fragrances seductive, absolutely delightful scents and very persistent formulas, such as fragrant oil or perfume extract. Moreover, Korean and French skincare products can be found in the store`s portfolio.</p> <p>The theoretical framework consists of one chapter, with two main subchapters, in which the researcher discusses about the franchising (types of franchise, principles, limits, advantages and disadvantages) and customer experience, having as a central concept the customer, the core of any business.</p> <p>This thesis explores the viability and potential feasibility of introducing the My Geisha franchise in Helsinki, Finland, utilizing a survey-based research methodology as the primary investigative tool. The fundamental aim of this study is to assess the market readiness and receptivity towards establishing a My Geisha store within the unique socio-economic landscape of Helsinki.</p> <p>The methodology involves collecting data on customer perceptions, familiarity with the My Geisha brand, interest in its product line, pricing expectations, and preferences for beauty shopping experiences. For this purpose, a survey consisting of ten questions was developed.</p> <p>The results of this research will serve as a valuable resource for shareholders considering investment in the beauty industry and contribute to the understanding of consumer behaviour and preferences in the Finnish market.</p> <p>Yet, the study had some limitations-it could only test one objective-if My Geisha could come to Finland- therefore future research is recommended and could focus on the availability of shopping centres to welcome this new concept and also on the deeper understanding of the “affordable luxury” concept adapted to Finnish costs of living.</p>
Key words Customer experience, customer journey franchise, franchisor, success, affordable luxury

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1 Introduction

My Geisha, celebrated for its innovative fusion of Asian-inspired beauty and fragrance traditions with contemporary aesthetics, epitomizes the marriage of ancient secrets and modern formulations. It offers a transformative experience, where the realms of scent and skincare converge to create a captivating narrative of self-care and cultural richness.

The current thesis is a research-oriented study with the objective of exploring the feasibility of launching a My Geisha store in Helsinki.

Chapter 1 introduces the research topic, presents the background of My Geisha, outlines the objective and methodology of the study and names the keywords in this study.

Subsequent chapters delve into franchising and customer experience, methodology, the research tool used, the survey and continues with the fourth chapter, which analyses the survey results and graphs. It concludes with recommendations for stakeholders interested in the franchise's expansion into Helsinki.

1.1 Who is My Geisha?

The My Geisha brand could serve as a prototype for other business models that are currently under development or may even represent a new business model itself.

The company experienced rapid growth in a relatively short period, attracting numerous customers who became loyal supporters and enthusiastic promoters of the brand. Furthermore, the online purchasing system enables the company to reach a substantial portion of prospective buyers who do not currently have access to a physical Geisha store in their locality.

Thus, it can be considered a reputable market model and a well-designed management approach, as it rapidly gained popularity among the general public. The substantial crowds witnessed during the openings of My Geisha stores have been extensively documented on social media.

In accordance with the founder's statements, the initial investment was 500 euros, and this amount was invested in the year 2018. My Geisha has experienced a significant surge in online visibility, with the brand gathering widespread recognition on social media platforms, as well as on their own website, where customers can place product orders. In this regard, at this moment my Geisha is identified in a number of over 60 stores, both in Romania (9 of them in Bucharest, 2 in Constanta, Cluj, Timisoara, Brasov, Bacau, Piatra Neamt, Craiova, Satu Mare, Slatina, Sibiu, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Targu Jiu, Suceava, Arad, Oradea, Ploiesti, Deva, Targu Mures) as well as internationally

(Hungary, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Moldova, Austria, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Qatar, Taiwan).(My Geisha 2022.)

1.2 Methodology

In this thesis, a survey serves as the chosen research method, falling within the realm of quantitative research.

Quantitative research involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting numerical data to establish relevance and formulate generalizations for theoretical frameworks. The tools employed in quantitative research are specifically crafted to gather data in a manner conducive to numerical analysis.

1.3 Keywords

Throughout the thesis, we will determine and elaborate upon the following pivotal notions: customer experience, customer journey, franchise, franchisor, franchisee and affordable luxury.

Customer experience can be described as the comprehensive assessment and impression formed by customers regarding a brand, product, or service, which arises from their interactions and encounters across the entire spectrum of their customer journey.

Customer journey is defined as the sum of the entire range of interactions and touchpoints that customers encounter when they engage with a specific product, service, or brand. This includes becoming aware of the product, conducting research and evaluation, making a purchase decision, and experiencing post-purchase satisfaction. (Customer Journey Map: Everything You Need To Know - Forbes, (no date))

James A. Mandey defines franchise as:

"Simply put, it is a method of distributing goods or services-a unique selling concept that fits hand-in glove with our highly mobile, service-intensive society."

Also, franchising is a relationship between an organization seeking to franchise its business - a franchisor - and an individual seeking to acquire and operate the franchise - a franchisee.

The franchisee typically pays fees or royalties to the franchisor in exchange for the use of their established brand, ongoing support, and access to a proven business system. Franchisor is the entity or individual that owns or controls a business concept, brand, or trademark and grants the rights to others (franchisees) to operate their own businesses using that concept, brand, or trademark. A

franchisee is an individual or entity that enters into an agreement with a franchisor to operate a business using the franchisor's brand, products, services, and business model. (Sherman 2004,11-15)

Affordable luxury is a marketing and consumer term used to describe products or services that offer a level of quality, elegance, and exclusivity typically associated with luxury goods, but at a more accessible price point. It bridges the gap between standard, everyday items and high-end luxury items, making upscale experiences or products available to a broader range of consumers. (Mundel,Vodermeier&Huddleston,2017)

2 Franchising and customer experience

The next subchapters describe the franchise business speaks about conditions of owning a franchise, advantages and disadvantages but also about the customer and customer experience.

2.1. Franchising - general notions

Over time, the franchising system of large companies, and not only that, has been in continuous expansion. Currently, more and more brands and companies are turning to the possibility of franchising their companies. Purchasing a franchise offers a great opportunity for business growth as franchises experience rapid growth and expansion across many countries. The concept of franchising, in its most comprehensive sense, refers to the possibility of an individual or group purchasing the right to market a product or service from an established enterprise, with the ability to utilize the company's brand and name. Conditions, however, refer to the strict observance of the legal and regulatory systems as well as the sales system they practice and promote. In order to benefit from these, the franchisor is required to pay a certain amount or offer percentages throughout the franchising period, depending on the contractual provisions. (Libava,J. 2011,96-98)

Entrepreneurs use various forms of strategic alliances, and among them, franchising is the most popular one worldwide. Franchising can also be explained by:

"establishing, on a contractual basis, a long-term marketing relationship between two companies, through which the larger company (the franchisor) grants the second one (the franchisee) the right to use its name and system of marketing, in exchange for the payment of an amount, which is paid continuously" (J. Stanworth, 1993).

It should be noted that in order to obtain a franchise, it is essential to have high-quality goods and exceptionally successful products in the market. This is precisely the case with My Geisha's product lines, as they are highly sought-after in the beauty and skin care industry. Franchising is also associated with a long-term relationship, which is ensured through legal, managerial, motivational, and commercial means.

To highlight My Geisha's attention to detail in terms of style, design, and transparency, it is worth noting that in all the countries or regions where the company operates through franchises, it is made clear that the franchisor is responsible for organizing or converting the business. The franchisor establishes and organizes the business system, which the franchisee subsequently takes over. To ensure the franchisee's proper and adequate acquisition of the system, the franchisor provides training and guidance. This is why My Geisha stores have a consistent and impressive appearance.

2.1.2 Franchise types

The concept of franchising is known all over the world, moreover, it is practiced quite often and represents a real success most of the time. Both for the franchisor and the franchisee. This fact also applies to My Geisha, the business growing more and more with its franchising in other countries than the one from which it originates. (My Geisha 2022.)

The franchise and the franchising system is recognized by those who show interest in this field, having several types.

Thus, as the specialized writings in this field show, franchising can be:

a. Manufacturer – retailer franchise.

This relationship is of a strategic type and has as its characteristics the fact that the producer of the products or services is actually the franchisor and offers the right to a certain merchant who practices retail trade to sell his products directly. This fact can only be achieved if certain conditions imposed by it are met. Moreover, the franchisee can only carry out this business or can use it as a distinct component within the business he owns. This form of franchising is very widespread in the oil field, as well as in the field of truck transport.

b. Producer – wholesaler franchise

This relationship is approximately identical to the one presented previously. The difference between the two is given by the fact that the franchisor is represented by a merchant who deals with wholesale trade. Thus, in this type of franchise, the franchisee can represent a small or even medium-sized enterprise.

The franchisor in this case is represented by a large company, very strong on the market and very well known. Hence the possibility to conclude contracts with equally strong merchants on the market. This system is very well known and widespread in the case of non-alcoholic beverages.

c. Trademark franchise (name or license) – retailer

This type of franchise has expanded especially in the last decades, in the current period of socio-economic development.

In this type of franchise, the franchisor owns a product or service that is marketed under a brand name. In general, this occurs through standard retail outlets.

Moreover, it possesses a strategic advantage, which becomes evident from the quality of the service as well as the continuous assurance of its performance. In essence, this type of franchise is based on cloning, a process most commonly used in the fast-food industry. (Mazero & Seid 2017,37-42)

2.1.3. The principles of the franchising system

The franchise business model operates based on a set of important principles, similar to any well-designed system. These principles are typically outlined in the franchise's operational manual or contract, which the franchisee must adhere to. Among these principles, the principle of cooperation stands out as a defining attribute of the system as a whole. The basis of any contract of this type is cooperation. With the freedom of leadership offered through this type of business, through responsibility and through strictness and respect for the represented brand, the franchisor and the franchisee, regardless of their number, have cooperation as a basis. The importance of collaboration in business development is evident in the case of My Geisha, as demonstrated by the uniformity of its physical stores located in various locations worldwide. The consistency of their design, product placement, ambiance, and fragrance serves as concrete evidence of this collaboration.

Franchisees, on the other hand, function under the franchisor's emblem and brand, yet maintain their status as independent entrepreneurs. Their earnings reflect the business's profits. The franchisor demonstrated the business's potential for profitability by initially testing it in the market, starting with just one perfume product.

The franchisee possesses and is responsible for the physical business location. Financial responsibility also falls upon the franchisee.

The franchisor has the duty to facilitate the transfer of knowledge to enable the franchisee to effectively manage the business.

Franchisors will charge a monthly fee to the franchisee who purchases the operating license and rights to operate in the franchise system- The franchisee has influence on the type, diversity and openness (towards the client) in the business managed by him. (My Geisha 2022; Seid & Thomas 2006,163-166).

2.1.4 Franchise limits

Franchising is a method of expansion, especially when the product is well-known, good and in accordance with what it proposes to offer to the consumer. At first, the franchise developed very quickly in the field of fast food, but later it focused on specific market niches.

As a result, the franchise can be seen as exhibiting a number of tendencies and limitations, as well as a number of advantages that will be discussed later.

There are multiple franchises. More importantly, a franchisee can open more than one unit in a large territory. An additional benefit of this situation is that the franchisor only needs to train one franchisee to manage all units across different territories, instead of having to train multiple franchisees for the same number of units. (Scarborough, 2009,97.)

Currently, the benefit is the fact that the franchisees are much better prepared and more competent. The majority of these individuals come from corporations and have studied business, marketing, management, etc.

There is a wide range of opportunities internationally. Often, franchisors look for franchisees on the international market, so franchisors must adapt the business to the local market requirements, taking into account consumer preferences and culture.

With the increase in production costs, most franchisees are looking for locations that are small in order to keep costs at an optimal, not expensive level.

There is the possibility of multi-brand franchising. Thus, some franchisors associate with others who sell complementary products or services, resulting in increased sales, respectively profit.

On the other hand, within this specific industry, there are a variety of advantages to consider. These include the ability to enter a business that already possesses a well-established reputation, the opportunity to benefit from market research carried out by the franchisor to enhance product development, access to knowledge and support for business growth through consulting and training, the possibility of commencing a business with a relatively small initial capital investment, and the potential to substantially decrease various expenses, such as those associated with promotions, advertising, and research (Pavlin 1994, 554-558; Kirby 1998, 53-64).

In summary, there are both advantages and limitations associated with the franchising system. However, in the case of My Geisha, it has undeniably achieved substantial success, and the terms and conditions for franchisees are designed to be as accessible and favourable as possible,

considering the extensive number of franchisees not only within the country of origin but also in the broader European context.

2.1.5 Succes and failure in franchise business

Choosing the appropriate investment method is one of the most crucial decisions that entrepreneurs and future entrepreneurs will make.

The choice can have an impact not only on the financial outcomes but also on the recognition of the business at regional, national, or even global levels. Moreover, this type of investment comes with a series of advantages that can influence the social-economic level, on a broad level, such as the increase in the number of employees, the decrease in the number of unemployed people, the increase in domestic or even foreign tourism, as well as the latter, the possibility to increase the quality of businesses that are indirectly involved, such as transport companies, hotels, guest-houses, travel agencies, etc .

This subchapter provides an overview of the benefits and advantages that a lender may be able to offer to an entrepreneur interested in beginning an enterprise under the My Geisha franchise system.

2.1.6 The advantages of investing in a franchise business

It is important to consider the interdependent relationship between the franchise and the franchisor when discussing the advantages in this field. It is imperative to consider the franchisor because as his benefits increase, so do the benefits of the franchise. The more his knowledge, the more prosperous the franchise. The more people buy the franchise, the better for the franchisor, and so we could continue. Thus, to extract the basic idea, the advantages of the franchisor are the advantages of the franchise, and vice versa.

Therefore, the specialized literature in this field brings into consideration the following advantage (Scarborough, 2009,97.):

The method by which the brand draws in customers involves the franchisor, who is the recipient in this scenario, obtaining permission to utilize essential components that contribute to the business, including the company name, logo, brand, registered trademark, and so forth. Those purchasing

the franchise are not permitted to alter any aspect of its concept, whereas the franchisor retains the flexibility to make any desired modifications aimed at enhancing the product or facilitating more effective sales and business growth. (Mutulescu 2009,69.).

Franchisors receive valuable aid, training, and support encompassing both technical and commercial aspects. This support may take various forms, including in-person assistance, phone consultations, or online communication channels.

For entrepreneurs purchasing a franchise, a significant advantage lies in receiving comprehensive initiation into all facets of the respective business or brand. In the case of My Geisha, its founder, Denisa Tanase, is legally obligated to offer assistance and guidance to franchisees. This assistance can be viewed as a form of support aimed at enhancing the business, ensuring its success, and preserving the integrity of the established brand name without alterations.

An advertising campaign is generally conducted by the franchisor, in this case, Denisa Tanase, who holds exclusive rights to all distinctive signs throughout the franchised network. On the other hand, the participation of franchisees from a financial point of view cannot be excluded. Instead, locally, those who bought the franchise can make individual advertisements.

The franchisees have the responsibility to respect the standards and quality in each service offered. In this sense, franchisors can carry out periodic checks or inspections. If one of the franchisees would work below the standards already imposed by the contract, the whole image will deteriorate. Which will directly affect the entire franchising system and all the other aspects that it already involves and which we have previously discussed.

The majority of franchisors stagger the payment of their franchises so as to show their commitment to the franchisee and to facilitate the process of growth on the market, offering the buyer the opportunity to grow as well.

The franchisee benefits from all the techniques and methods towards success in an already existing business. (Franchisor vs. Franchisee: What's The Difference? - IFPG, (no date))

My Geisha achieved its success starting from a single online store, but the demand being very high, the physical store concept was developed. Large franchise chains have the immediate advantage because they are already known. New companies need some time to be known, as was the case with My Geisha, but once it was known, it charmed many people.

The franchisee also has the advantage of the fact that the selection of the location according to the franchisee's preference and its protection at the territorial level is ensured. Thus, if a store could be

opened in Helsinki, for example, in a central district, no one will be able to open in the same district because it may lead to the loss of the clientele that the other franchisee has already acquired.

The risks of failure of a franchise business are considerably lower than those encountered in the case of opening a new business, from scratch. (Libava 2011,98-103). The exceeding success of all My Geisha stores across a substantial part of Europe can be attributed to this.

2.1.7 Disadvantages of buying a franchise business

Following all the advantages presented previously, as in any system in which there is a lot of interaction with the client, with the environment and with social, economic and operational changes, a series of disadvantages also emerge. These are inevitable, but each of those who decide to approach this type of business know them beforehand, some of them, some they may meet over time, practicing.

Accordingly, according to authors who have studied this topic in depth, there are several disadvantages associated with operating under a franchise system (Stokes, 2006; Scarborough, 2009).

A first disadvantage could be related to the fact that each of the franchisees is forced to pay either monthly or annually a series of taxes to the franchisor. On the other hand, this fact is already speculated from the contract between the two parties, each franchisor imposes the taxes and part of the annual income of the franchisees.

The second drawback pertains to the need for rigorous adherence to established protocols within the network. It is imperative for all the individuals involved in driving the network's success to exercise great caution in their interactions with consumers. Uniformity and consistency in the external presentation of the franchise will result in a positive perception of the brand by customers. Any inconsistencies, however, may lead to a blurred and distorted brand image.

The term uniform image refers to the franchisor's need for a consistent and coherent brand image without the necessity of explicitly defining every minute detail. This includes aspects such as location, construction, interior and exterior design, offered products and services, product display, staff clothing, and advertising methods. Franchisees are required to adhere strictly to these established rules. (Eroglu & Kaufmann 1999,75-77)

Another disadvantage is the fact that there may be some restrictions regarding the supply, so that, due to the conditions imposed by the franchisor, there may be difficulties regarding the purchase of

equipment, their repair, the purchase of products, etc. These are usually done only from certain suppliers, those who are recommended by the franchisor.

In addition, each franchisee and implicitly the franchisor, according to the contract that they have signed, the franchisee can only sell products and services that are stipulated in the franchise contract, that is, it comes with a limited product line.

Territorial protection is provided by certain franchisors to prevent market saturation or oversaturation. This measure is designed to prevent such situations from arising. However, in most cases, franchising contracts are standardized, and the franchisor does not engage in discussions or negotiations regarding the terms of the agreement with the franchisee.

Finally, another quite relevant disadvantage in this sense is represented by the fact that franchisees benefit from a low, or non-existent, freedom of action. Consequently, franchisees need to accept and assume any kind of desire to change or somehow innovate their business, because most of the time these aspects are prohibited from the contract. Thus, it is possible that some of them often feel that they cannot be creative, that they cannot express themselves in their own business, but these rules are not made to keep a person in place, or his business, but on the contrary, are made to remain a high-standard business, with the same uniform image. (Seid & Thomas 2006,41-43)

Having said that, it is clear that there are a number of advantages and disadvantages regarding franchise operation.

However, all of these actions are aimed at growing the market, as well as ensuring that the customer remains interested and loyal. Franchisees need to be fully and correctly informed from the beginning, in order to know these relevant aspects.

2.2 Customer Experience

The purpose of this section is to address the most important aspects of any business: the customer, the customer experience, and the customer journey.

2.2.1 The Customer

The fundamental concept underlying the thesis is the customer-centric approach, which forms the basis for the entire theoretical as well as practical research.

The researchers have written extensively, from various perspectives, about the client in their specialized literature.

Therefore, in commerce, sales or economics, a customer is the recipient of a good, product, service or an idea which was obtained from a seller, supplier or vendor via an exchange for money or financial transaction or some other valuable consideration. Also, another definition of this concept refers to "A customer is a person or business that buys goods or services from another business. Customers are crucial because they generate revenue. Without them, businesses would go out of business." (The Economic Times, n.d.).

Additionally, the customer is an important factor to consider when developing supporting, and transforming a business, since in order to maintain economic activity, it is necessary to meet a significant percentage of the consumer's requirements and wishes.

Specialists in the field have analysed, over time, the way customers make decisions regarding the termination or continuation of the use of some services, the way they choose to access some services, and so, they outlined these aspects in an economic-social field which is entitled "customer behaviour". Therefore, by definition, customer behaviour refers to :

"all the decision-making acts carried out at an individual or group level, directly related to obtaining and using goods and services, in order to satisfy current or future needs, including the decision-making processes that precede and determine these documents" (Cătoiu 1997,7.).

When all the previously discussed points are taken into account, it is possible to identify the difference between a consumer and a customer. It is crucial to comprehend the boundaries between the two concepts to attain a comprehensive understanding of the topic, as there exists a distinct separation between the two concepts. So, what is the difference between a consumer and a customer? Several distinguishing features of the two terms have been identified by expert practitioners in this field. Thus, it can be asserted that:

"A customer always purchases a product or service but might not be the end user. A consumer is always the end user of a product or service but might not have purchased it. A customer becomes a consumer if they make a purchase and use the product or service themselves." (Needle 2022).

In other words, the consumer stands out through a series of behaviours that, together, designate the behaviour of the consumer of services and goods offered by a brand, a service, etc. A very important consideration in this regard is to not confuse the buyer and the consumer.

The buyer represents that individual who carries out a transaction. He is not obliged to consume the product he purchased. For that reason, we return to the definition of the consumer and

remember that a consumer corresponds directly to a situation in which a certain product is clearly used. Also, directly proportional to what was previously presented with reference to the buyer, this time, the consumer does not have the obligation to be the one who purchased (Cristache 2010,11.).

At the same time, the consumer and his behaviour represented a subject of real interest among the experts who interact directly with them, out of the need to understand them, to attract them, sometimes also out of the need to help and please them. Ever since the last century, a number of authors have tried to name and explain the consumer, his behaviour but also his preferences and the way to interact with him. On that account, it was summed up as

Of all the previously highlighted, the most important idea and one of the biggest advantages that some brands have managed to achieve, is the close connection with the consumer, namely with his desire to repurchase a certain product, especially the need for it and the feeling of lack or discomfort of a physical or psychological nature in connection with its absence. The consumer needs to go through a series of stages such as awareness of the need, searching for information about it, evaluating other available options, making the actual purchase and the evaluation after the actual purchase process.

2.2.2. Customer experience

The customer experience is one of the most important benchmarks of a business, regardless of the system in which it is designed. Authors, advertisers, tourism and food experts as well as established experts in sales, customer relations, advertising, and tourism often bring to the forefront the customer experience -within a company, service, or individual business.

On a different note, most definitions with reference to the concept of customer experience, focus more on the entire process, from the delivery of the product and the level of stress involved by those who make the delivery possible (employees, team-leader, or owner) to the personal interpretation of each individual who benefits from the entire service process, who interacts with the key points of the brand and who also influences other customers. Thus, in a more succinct but more concise way, the customer experience can also be understood as the result of the interaction between the services of a company and the customer (Ding 2010,96-110; Csikszentmihalyi 2000,267-272.).

In addition, specialized works in this field indicate that customer experience can also be defined by the terms of interaction and relationship. More specifically, customer experience refers directly to the interaction between the customer and the company, including the interaction with the staff, the self-service service (online service, technology) the environment and manner of service. This

interaction not only influences in an extraordinary way what the customer feels and believes about the brand, but also strengthens the relationship with this brand and increases the level of loyalty towards it (Johnston 2008,83-90.)

Discovery, engagement, and delivery constitute the fundamental elements of the customer experience. Should any of these aspects be neglected or inadequately addressed, it will undoubtedly have a direct impact on the overall customer experience, thereby influencing any brand's reputation.

It's essential to understand that a strong customer experience doesn't materialize out of thin air. Instead, it is intricately linked to the calibre of your interactions with customers and the level of trust you manage to build with them. (Belford, 2022)

Creating a positive customer experience requires a customer-centric approach, where the needs and preferences of the customer are at the forefront of all business decisions. Companies that prioritize customer experience tend to see increased customer loyalty, higher customer lifetime value, and improved overall business performance.

2.3.2 Customer journey

The term customer journey encapsulates the entire spectrum of interactions and points of contact that a customer encounters when engaging with a specific product, service, or brand. These interactions span from the initial discovery of the product or service to the extensive process of research and evaluation, the critical moment of purchase decision-making, and finally, the post-purchase experience. (Miranda &Watts 2022)

Customer journey is not linear; it is a complex and multifaceted process that is shaped by various touchpoints and stimuli along the way. The customer experience journey begins when a potential customer becomes aware of a brand's existence. This stage can be triggered by various factors such as marketing efforts, word-of-mouth recommendations, or online research. It is essential for businesses to make a positive first impression during this stage through compelling marketing messages and a strong online presence.

In the purchase stage, customers finally make the decision to buy and complete the transaction. This is often seen as the culmination of the customer journey and is a critical moment for businesses. They need to ensure a smooth and seamless purchasing process, provide excellent customer service, and address any concerns or obstacles that may arise. However, the customer

journey doesn't end with the purchase. The post-purchase stage is equally important, as it determines customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Customer feedback is invaluable for businesses seeking to enhance their customer experience continually. Encouraging customers to share their thoughts and actively listening to their suggestions can lead to product/service improvements and better customer satisfaction.

Last stage of the customer journey is the Advocacy Stage. When customers are not just satisfied but enthusiastic about a brand, they become advocates. They voluntarily promote the brand to their friends, family, and social networks. Harnessing the power of these advocates can boost brand credibility and expand the customer base. (The customer journey-definition, stages, benefits. Adobe, 2023.).

Furthermore, the understanding of the customer journey serves as a wellspring for innovation and improvement within businesses. Through the meticulous mapping of the customer journey, companies gain invaluable insights into customer behaviour, preferences, and motivators. Importantly, the customer journey transcends the confines of interactions with a specific brand or product, encompassing the entirety of the purchasing journey, including external influences such as advertising and media contexts.

Utilizing powerful tools like customer journey mapping, businesses can attain a comprehensive view of the customer experience and discern areas where they can implement enhancements. By employing targeted marketing strategies aligned with various customer journey stages and touchpoints, the overall customer experience is elevated. This enhanced understanding empowers businesses to craft personalized, tailored experiences for their customers, nurturing deeper relationships and bolstering customer loyalty. (Baker & Hart 2007, 497-499)

In addition to, by aligning marketing tactics with the specific needs and preferences of customers at different junctures of their journey, businesses can optimize their strategies for maximum impact. Recognizing the touchpoints that customers find most valuable at different times, across various devices, and in various contexts allows businesses to augment the customer experience and stimulate favourable reviews.

Moreover, customer journey mapping serves as a vital tool for businesses to identify and rectify any gaps or inconsistencies in their service delivery. This holistic approach enables organizations to refine their operations and provide a seamless customer experience. (Richardson 2010)

In conclusion, the customer journey is a pivotal aspect for businesses to grasp and refine. Through a profound understanding of customer motivations, behavioural patterns, and touchpoints

throughout their journey, companies can elevate the overall shopping experience, elevate customer satisfaction and loyalty, and ultimately foster repeat business. Tools like customer journey mapping are indispensable in this endeavour, enabling businesses to enhance their marketing strategies and optimize the customer experience. In a rapidly evolving business landscape, prioritizing the customer journey is not just beneficial but essential for sustainable growth and success (Amoako, Doe & Neequaye 2021)

3 Methodology

This chapter offers an explanation of the selected methods and how they were applied to the research process. The main concern of the study is to find out if the My Geisha franchise can be brought to Finland, Helsinki. A survey is developed, and it will be used to investigate the main objective of the thesis.

3.1. Research methodology

There are two main research approaches commonly used in the field of social and scientific research: qualitative research and quantitative research.

Qualitative methods provide in-depth insights and understanding of human behaviour, attitudes, and motivations. Qualitative research primarily involves collecting non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, focus groups, or open-ended surveys. (Allibang 2017)

Quantitative research is an approach that involves gathering, analysing, and interpreting numerical data to establish relevancy and develop generalizations for theory. The research instruments used in quantitative research are designed to collect data in a way that allows for numerical analysis. These instruments may include surveys, questionnaires, experiments, or observation protocols. By utilizing these research instruments, researchers are able to gather quantitative data that can be quantified and analysed statistically. (Scott 2011)

In this study, a questionnaire was employed for this method is clear in implementation and for the ease of reaching respondents, in order to establish if a My Geisha franchise can and will be welcomed in Finland.

A questionnaire is a research methodology that involves a set of inquiries and prompts aimed at collecting information from individuals or respondents. These questionnaires are typically structured for the purpose of statistical analysis of the gathered survey responses. Questionnaires offer several advantages compared to other survey methods, as they are cost-effective, demand less effort from the surveyor and frequently include standardized response options, simplifying the data compilation process. (Allibang 2017)

3.2 Survey

This subchapter provides an overview of the survey method and findings used in the study on bringing the My Geisha franchise to Finland, concerning the survey design, data collection, and data analysis methods employed in the research.

The survey aimed to gather information on the potential viability of introducing the My Geisha franchise to Finland, with a focus on Helsinki. It sought to determine the level of interest and demand for this type of store concept among the local population. The survey received a total of 65 completed responses from participants.

3.3 Survey design

The survey was developed and administrated using Webropol and the participants were clearly notified about the confidentiality of their responses, guaranteeing their anonymity and privacy.

While developing the questionnaire, the aim was to design a simple and easy to answer survey, with interesting and intriguing questions that would engage the respondents into finalising answering. It consisted of ten questions, nine of them had three answer options and one gave the respondent the option of writing his own answer. The type of questions used for the survey is the multiple choice questions, which allows the respondent to select one or two options from the ones provided by the researcher.

All of the answered questions will lead to a deeper understanding of what people living in Helsinki and surroundings need in connection with what this brand, its services and products can provide as a novelty.

Before answering the first question, the respondents are asked to watch a short video(which was provided to the researcher by the My Geisha staff) in which it is presented one of their flagship store, beautifully and luxuriously designed. The video is designed to initiate curiosity, captivate, and encourage the viewer to explore the brand further by participating in the survey.

Additionally, within the survey, participants will come across an exceptionally inspirational quote by the brand's founder, Denisa Tanase, which provides a more profound insight into the significance of the brand's name, "My Geisha."

The survey is available in Appendix 1.

3.4 Data collection

The first step in data collection for this study involved using Webropol as a platform to distribute the survey. The questions of the survey are made to be simple, to gather information regarding the view of the customers about opening a My Geisha store in Helsinki, regarding the products, the willingness to try them.

A number of 93 respondents opened the questionnaire, 67 started responding and 65 of them completed the survey. This shows that some of the persons asked to complete the survey, did open it but lost interest and didn't complete it. Factors such as the timing of the survey, lack of interest in the survey topic, and uninteresting question design can all play a role in the lower response rate of a survey.

3.5 Survey distribution

Survey was distributed via sharing Webropol public link, through different social media platforms, WhatsApp, emails. The respondents were targeted as people living in Finland, in the metropolitan area of Helsinki, aged between 27-45 years, that received the survey online, during September and October 2023. All the respondents were provided with information about the survey, the necessary time to complete it, what it serves for and that the survey is completely anonymous. During the process of collecting answers there was a short while when no respondents were assessing the survey.

Finally, the researcher received the desired number of completed surveys and following this, started analysing the survey results.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the viability of launching a My Geisha store and franchise in Helsinki, with a particular focus on understanding public opinions regarding the establishment of such a business.

In the following sections, the statistics and findings of the survey will undergo analysis to discern their implications for establishing a business in Helsinki.

4.1 Survey graphs and analysis

The survey aimed to measure public interest and receptiveness towards the establishment of a My Geisha store in Helsinki, directed on aspects of interest, preferences, and potential customer base.

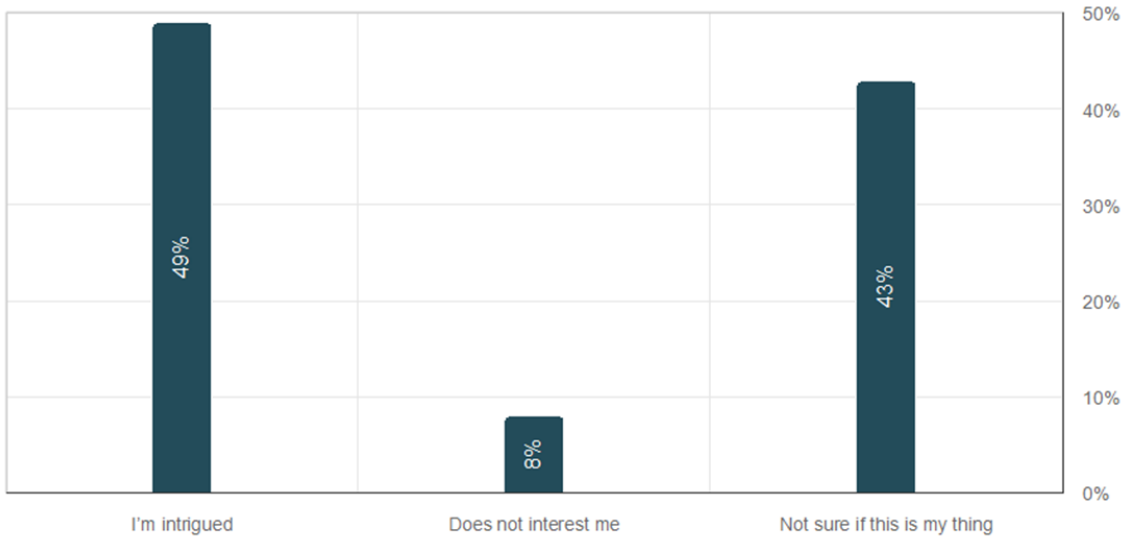
The results of the survey indicated positive responses in several key areas, suggesting that opening a My Geisha beauty store in Helsinki could be a success.

The survey was distributed online using Webropol and various social media platforms, over a period of two months gathering a total number of 65 completed surveys.

Individuals were inquired about their knowledge of the My Geisha brand, their level of interest in beauty products and services, and their inclination to visit a potential store if it were to be set up in Helsinki.

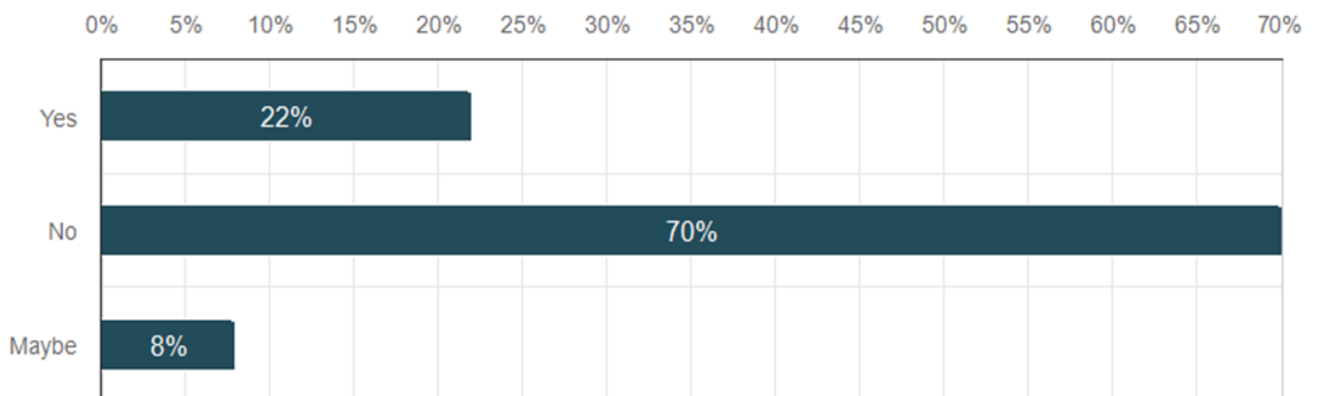
General results of the survey showed that this type of store and concept could be interesting for Helsinki and metropolitan area and that people are willing to at least try the brand's products.

Following, the answers submitted by the respondents will be analysed.



Graph 1 . Question nr 1-"How do you feel about the video you just saw?"

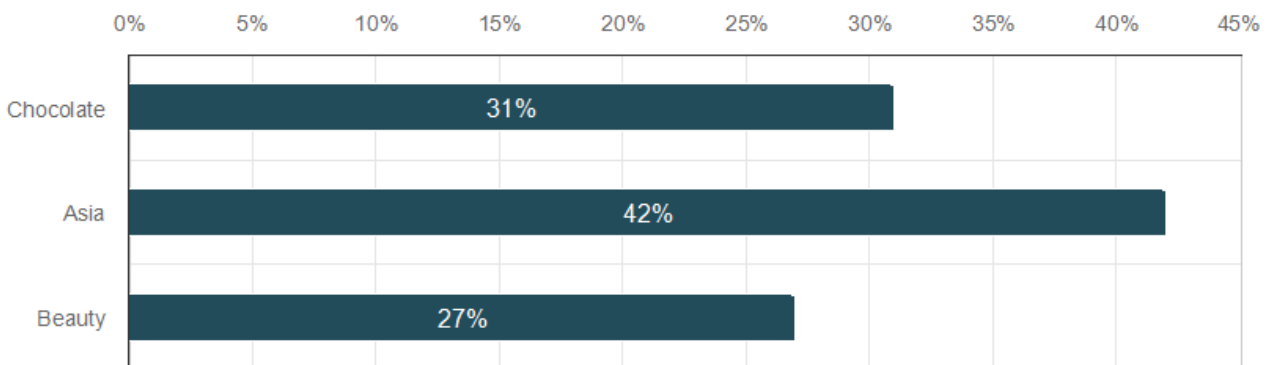
The first question requires from the respondents to share their opinions about the presentation video they have just watched. The store's design and furnishing represent a completely novel landscape for Finland, prompting the researcher to present the video as a demonstration of this unique aspect. 49% of the respondents are intrigued by the store looks ,while 43% answered that this might not be their style and only 8% said that it does not interest them. This suggests that, if the shop would be opened in Helsinki there is a good chance people would enjoy the new concept. The store design eludes luxury-black and gold- and also ,even if it can not be felt from the video, stepping into the store is a true experience for all your senses.



Graph 2. Question nr 2.-" Are you familiar with the brand?"

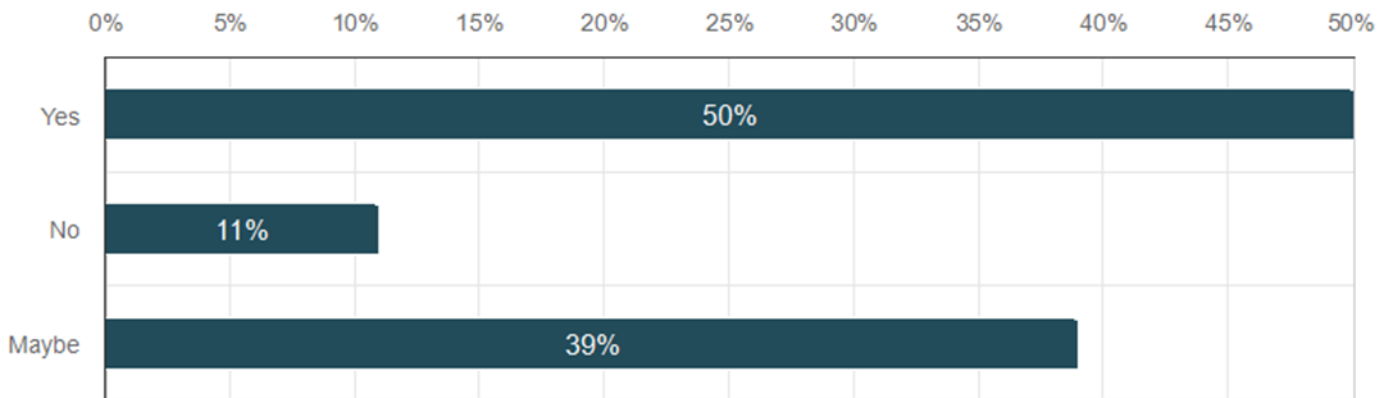
The second question tries to find out if this is a known brand. Since this is a Romanian brand that has expanded in Europe, the chances to be known in the Nordics is quite small, fact also suggested by the respondents who, in their majority(70%) answered that they do not know the brand ,22% are familiar with it and only 8% might know it, which emphasizes the novelty element.

This could become an opportunity for the potential franchisee, as novelty attracts.



Graph 3. Question nr 3-“ What is the first association that comes to your mind when you hear the word Geisha?”

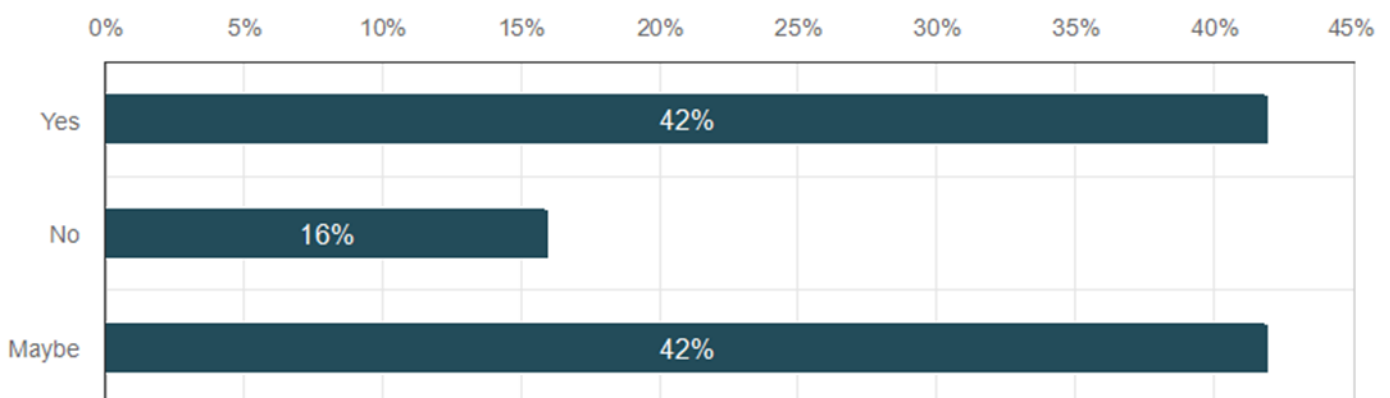
The third question tests the respondents understanding of the brands name ,provided that in Finland exists Fazer Geisha chocolates. My Geisha means your own personal beauty routine inspired by Geishas beauty secrets. Almost half of the respondents attributed the name to Asia, while 31% thought is connected to chocolate and only 27% thought it might be connected to beauty.



Graph 4. Question nr 4-“ If this new concept would come to Finland ,would you like to visit the shop?

The answers to question number four evokes the willingness of the questioned people at least to visit the shop. As seen in the statistic, half of the respondents answered positively, 39% are unsure, and only 11% are not willing to visit the store.

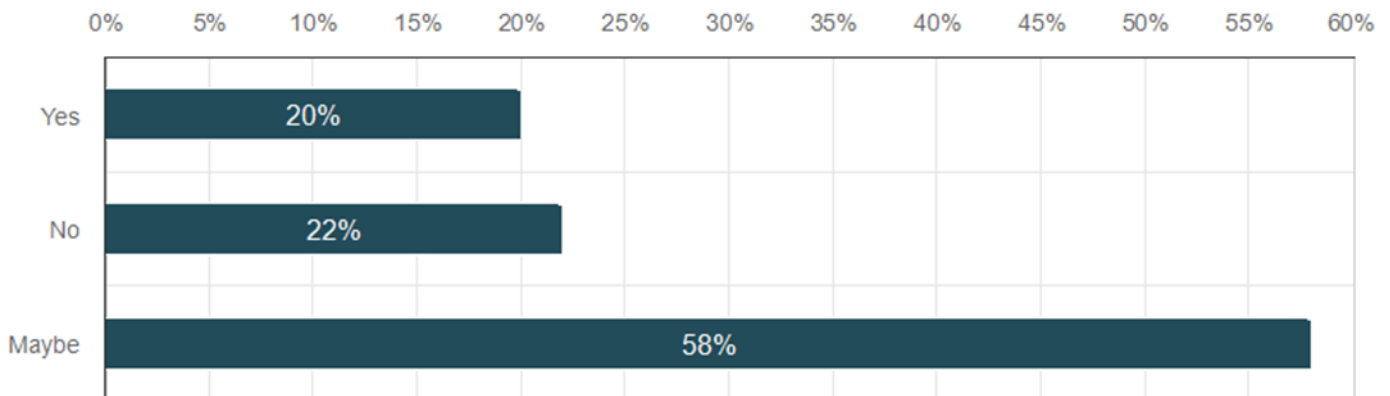
This is a very important turning point in the thesis objective, for the reason that once a person is willing at least to visit the new store, he becomes immediately a potential customer. The beauty adviser can present different essences, skincare products, can provide samples-which in this case represents memorabilia, something to remind the potential customer of the sensations experienced in the shop. Given this, the prospective customer is open to persuasion.



Graph 5. Question nr 5-“ Would you be interested to test/buy their products?”

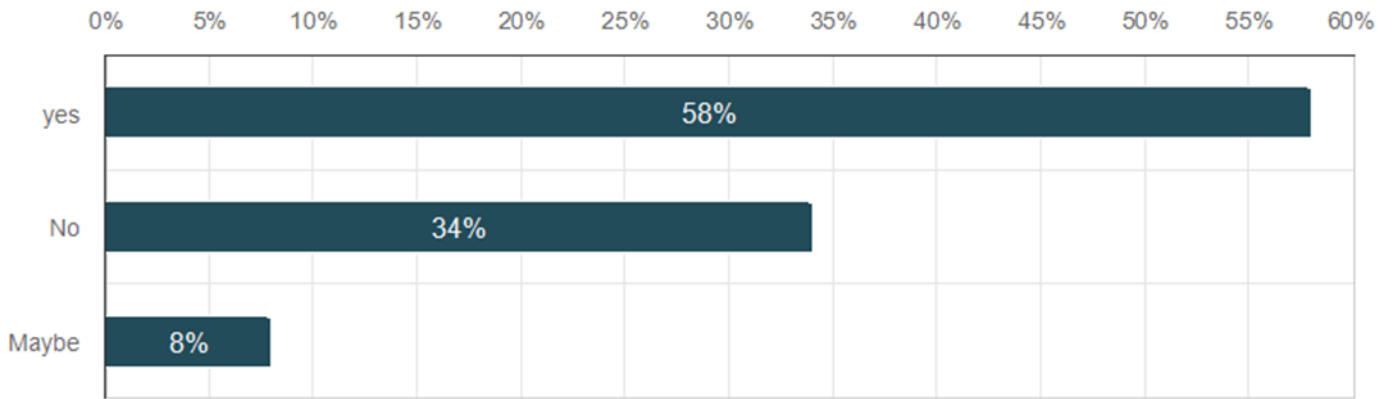
This graph shows in which manner the respondents would try the new products, 42% said yes, 42% said maybe and only 16% are not going to try or buy the products should the shop come to Finland.

As the previous question, this question tests a very important aspect: "are they willing to try the products?" ,to give a chance to the products, to the new concept ,to this shop in Finland; because in the end, the first element in any business is the customer.



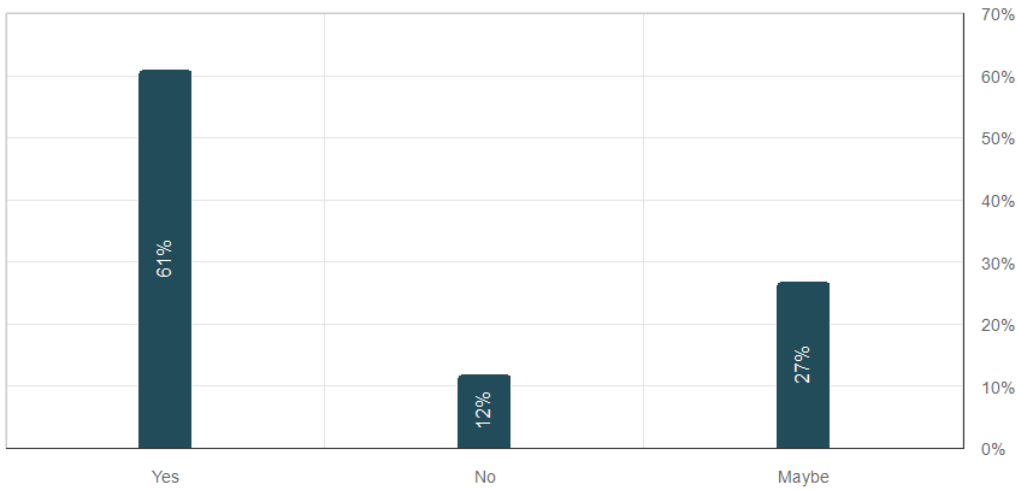
Graph 6. Question 6-“Will you be willing to replace the products that you are currently using, with buying new ones from My Geisha?”

If marketed correctly and if the products deliver what they promise, then we have happy ,loyal customers. In order to do so, question six aims to probe if the respondents are willing to replace the products that they are already using: 58% might be willing to do the change, 22% are not willing and 20 % answered yes to this question. This statistic evokes a positive view towards the novelty of this brand. Generally, changes are not made easily and so even if more than half answered “maybe” to this question, it implies that at least they are considering it.



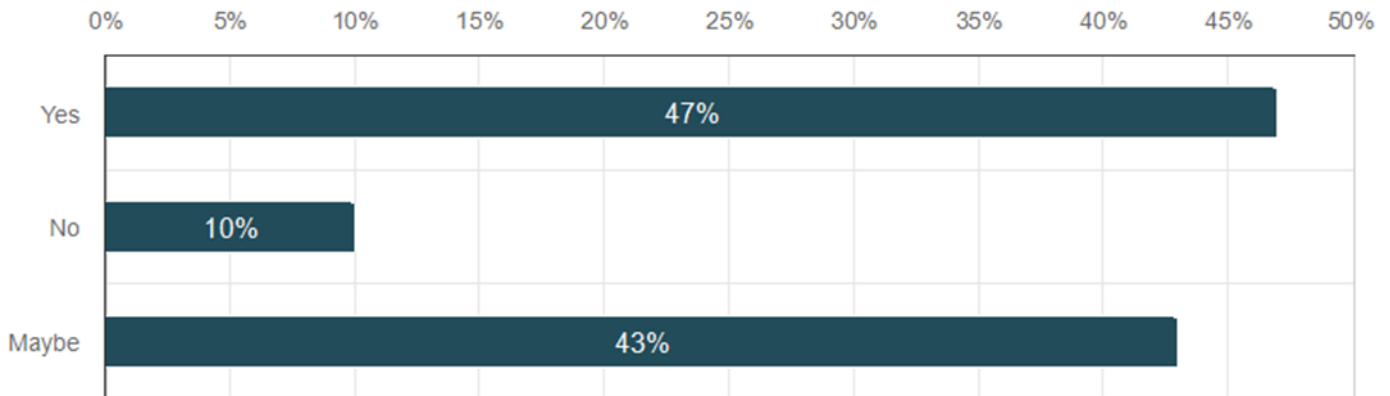
Graph 7-Question 7-“ Are you familiar with the concept of “affordable luxury”?”

My Geisha aims to provide to their customers the affordable luxury, meaning that through My Geisha customers have access to high end products at a reasonable price. The graph shows that 58% of the respondents are familiar with the concept, which is more than half of the respondents know what the concept means ,34% do not know and only 8 % are unsure.



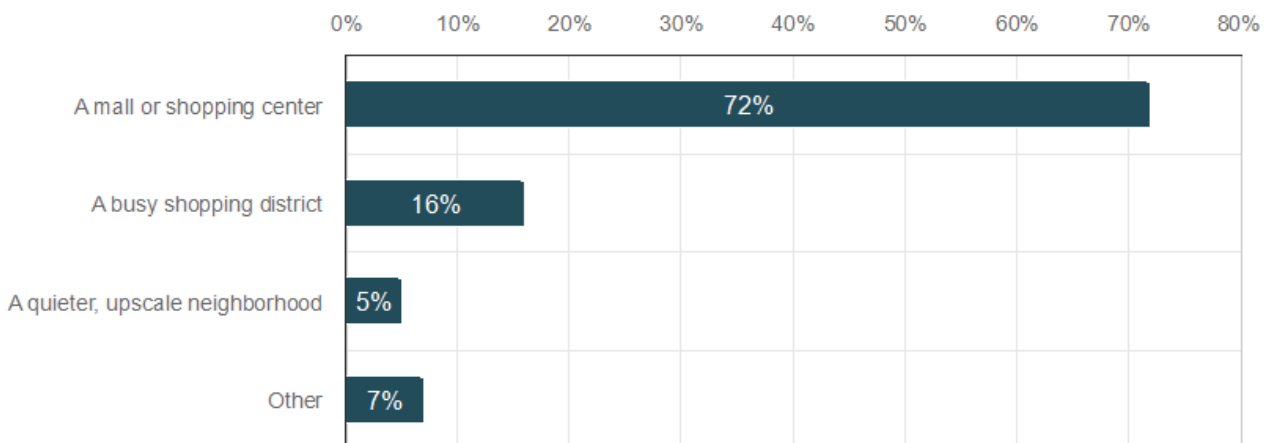
Graph 8.Question 8-“ Is price a strong factor in buying cosmetic products?”

For most of the respondents the price is a key factor in choosing different products, this applies also for My Geisha products, as shown in graph eight; for 61% is important,12% answered is not important and 27% ,maybe.



Graph 9. Question 9-“ Do you think there is a demand for personalized skincare consultations and advice in Helsinki?”

One of the most important factors for a beauty routine to be effective is to be suited or tailored to the customer`s needs, therefore the answers to this question show how the respondents feel about personalized skincare consultation in Helsinki:47% feel that there is a demand for it in Helsinki, while 43% are not sure and only 10% think it is not a demand for personalized skincare consultation in Helsinki.



Graph 10. Question nr 10-“ Would you prefer the My Geisha beauty shop to be located in:”

The My Geisha franchise has strict rules regarding the location of the store/island and therefore it should be situated either in a shopping centre or with opening to a very busy central street. The potential customers think that it would be convenient to find My Geisha in a shopping centre (72%), shopping district(16%), quiet, upscale neighbourhood (5%) and other places -7%.

Vastausvaihtoehdot	Teksti
Other	I'm not drawn to it so I would have no opinion where it is.
Other	I wouldn't be interested so I don't know
Other	Easy access

4.2 Suggestions

Although the results of the survey indicate that bringing My Geisha to Finland it might be a success, further research is needed to validate these findings and gather more comprehensive data.

One question that has come to the forefront is why the presence of My Geisha, a popular franchise, is noticeable in many European countries but not in the Nordics. Additionally, it would be beneficial to engage in a discussion with the My Geisha brand to gather more information and insights before making a decision on whether to purchase the franchise.

Initiating early discussions with shopping malls and present survey findings is crucial to determine their willingness to welcome such a concept. The franchise imposes stringent guidelines regarding the store's location, construction specifications (such as an island-type store) and furnishing. If any of these elements are not permitted, investing in the franchise would be futile.

Moreover, given Finland's higher cost of living, establishing the concept of "affordable luxury" in this context and pre-calculating potential expenses associated with acquiring this business form a solid foundation for conducting more in-depth research.

4.3 Conclusion

Starting a new business is challenging and demanding but it can lead to great successes, as it was the case of My Geisha. In light of this, the thesis tries, via the created survey, to establish the reception of this franchise within the Finnish market.

The survey results indicated a significant level of interest among respondents concerning the My Geisha brand and its unique combination of oriental beauty traditions with modern skincare routines. There is an apparent curiosity and willingness among possible customers in Helsinki to explore the offerings of a My Geisha store.

The study also highlighted several challenges and factors essential for the successful founding of a My Geisha store in Helsinki. Aspects such as adherence to franchise-specific guidelines, the need for an innovative store design, and the constraint for strategic location within shopping malls or retail centres have surfaced as crucial elements for the venture's viability.

Moreover, the study emphasized the importance of aligning the concept of "affordable luxury" with the Finnish market's cost of living. Comprehending consumer expectancies involving pricing, product range, and shopping experiences is fundamental for a My Geisha store to resonate with the local consumers.

In conclusion, while there exists a promising level of interest and enthusiasm for the My Geisha brand and its probable introduction in Helsinki, the success of such an effort is reliant upon meticulous planning, adherence to franchise provisions, strategic partnerships with shopping malls, and a deep understanding of the unique market dynamics in Finland. The insights collected from this research provide a valuable ground for strategic decision-making and further exploration into the feasibility of establishing a My Geisha store in Helsinki.

4.4 Thesis process

The journey began with the fundamental phase of topic selection and proposal development. During this time, wide research interests were explored, and the important point of inquiry emerged.

The decision was made after the researcher watched a video interview of Denisa Tanase about the start of her business, My Geisha franchise, which was impressive and inspiring at the same time. The owner of My Geisha spoke about starting the business with little investment but with a strong will and faith in her dreams, spoke about how in the early stages she was the only employee and she was the only one handling the large number of online orders.

To the author of this thesis, this was the most inspiring and motivational success story.

In the initial phase of the thesis, instructors were consulted about the suitability of the topic, and fortunately, it gained positive feedback.

The supervising teacher approved the project plan by January 30th, 2022, marking the commencement of the research phase.

In April 2022, the researcher aimed to immerse themselves in the customer experience at My Geisha stores and consequently visited several locations across various cities in Romania. The following months the researcher focused on retrieving theoretical information from various sources such as books, journal articles, interviews, studies, websites. This was the most challenging part of

writing the thesis, because of the lack of time needed to read and evaluate the sources. It took a long while until this thesis phase was done.

By the beginning of March 2023, the first chapter had been finished. Unfortunately, shortly after, the supervising teacher retired, causing a communication gap between the student and any counselling. However, by August 2023, a new supervising teacher was appointed, providing invaluable support to the researcher in completing the project. In September and October 2023, the student conducted and distributed a survey to set the methodology and research aspect of the thesis. The following three weeks were dedicated to investigating survey findings and completing the final chapters and subchapters. The time limit for thesis completion is December 1st, with the presentation scheduled for December 5th.

Overall, it was a long and slow process but, in the end, it offered the student the chance to really research the possibility of bringing My Geisha franchise to Finland. As the author is passionate about beauty industry but also about customer experience, My Geisha represents a potential opportunity to work with both.

4.5 Learning outcomes

Although the process of writing this thesis took longer than expected, the researcher gained important learning outcomes which will be discussed in the following sections.

The first to mention is application of theory to practice: writing the thesis meant applying the theoretical knowledge achieved during academic studies to real circumstances, such as better understanding retail tactics while discussing the franchise particularities, conducting research by surveying a pool of respondents in order to find out how My Geisha would be welcomed in Finland.

Next, writing this thesis gave the student the opportunity to improve research skills by conducting comprehensive research related to the business model, customer experience, customer views upon the opening of My Geisha store in Helsinki.

One other precious learning outcome for the author, was cultivating professional relationships, very important-learning from mentors-, and also understanding and experiencing the importance of mentorship in academic pursuits. The researcher experienced both writing with guidance and without, which emphasized the importance of being guided during the process of building the thesis which led the student to one other important outcome, which was navigating challenges caused by changes in supervising teachers, showing adaptability, and problem-solving skills to make sure the completion of the thesis within the specified time frame.

This thesis explored the multifaceted world of My Geisha beauty stores, providing a comprehensive understanding of their presence in the market, the experiences of their customers, and the strategic strategies they employ in the Romanian retail industry and not only. Throughout careful research and analysis, this study not only sheds light on the details of consumer behaviours, but also reveals important insights into the successful integration of beauty, culture, and retail. As this thesis comes to an end, it serves as a testament to the complex interplay between innovative retail strategies and the ever-changing desires of a diverse customer base. My Geisha's story unfolds within these findings, presenting a captivating narrative of adaptability, market impact, and the art of indulgence, ultimately contributing to the broader discussion on retail excellence and customer-centric business practices.

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Appendix 1 -Survey

Watch this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/pPDVa3bz6Zo>

1. How do you feel about it??

- a. Interesting
- b. Not interesting
- c. Not sure about it

2.Are you familiar with the brand?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

3.What do you think of products with this name-My geisha?

- a. Chocolate
- b. Asian
- c. Beauty

"I hope that my Geisha will help you to discover in yourself the beauty, confidence, sensuality and power that geishas carry so naturally. Because beyond several essences put together, my Geisha is a story. A story that I hope will help you too, to write your own!"-Denisa Tanase

The brand name "My Geisha" alludes to the hidden beauty secrets of geishas, which are made accessible to you through our brand's retail stores. My geisha -refers to the opportunity to create your OWN personal geisha inspired beauty routines.

Now:

4.If this new concept would come to Finland, would you like to visit the shop?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

5.Would you test any of their product?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

6.Will you be willing to replace the products that you are currently using, with buying new ones from My geisha?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

7.Are you familiar with the concept of “affordable luxury”?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

8. Is price a strong factor in buying cosmetic products?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

9. Do you think there is a demand for personalized skincare consultations and advice in Helsinki?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Not sure

10. Would you prefer the My Geisha beauty shop to be located in:

a. A busy shopping district

b. A mall or shopping centre

c. A quieter, upscale neighbourhood

d. Other (please specify)