



Helsinki Airport – The Transfer Passengers' Airport Experience

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Abstract

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<p>This research thesis presents key elements of and suggests improvements to customers' experiences of transfer passengers at Helsinki Airport (HEL). This thesis is written by two students who have a long history of working in the aviation industry as Cabin Crew Members, Gate Service Agents and aircraft Loaders at Finnair with Helsinki as their home hub. Due their professions and they themselves belonging to the chosen target group of 18–35-year-old travelers, their wide experience, understanding and knowledge base helped to guide and conduct this research. With an enormous amount of curiosity, the authors suggested this research topic to Finavia, the airport operator, who were very keen on collaborating with the authors, due to their current lack of data on passengers in our suggested target group. The authors excitedly managed to collaborate together with Finavia's department of Passenger Service and Development as their commissioner.</p> <p>The underlying approach to this thesis was based on the theoretical framework which aimed to understand the behavior and decision-making process of the selected target group of this study and familiarize with the operators associated. This framework with the research conducted additionally found correlation between the results and recommendations for Finavia.</p> <p>The literature review of this research consisted of statistics, reports and other material provided by Finavia and additional professional sources from the field. To find answers to the main research question: "What are the needs of transferring passengers in the age group of 18 to 35 at Helsinki Airport?", the authors decided to use mixed research methods in a form of an online survey which was also utilized in face-to-face encounters held through Finavia's visitor passes at the airport terminal's gate area. The passengers were asked to fill in the research questionnaire on the authors' iPad. This online questionnaire was additionally shared on multiple social media platforms to gather as many answers from various respondents as possible.</p> <p>The research results presented that the target group of these transferring passengers did not have high demands when it came to the airport's services and were overall satisfied with the current offering. They mainly wished to enjoy more quiet seating areas, healthier food options and more charging outlets to electronic devices, especially on the Schengen side of the terminal. The detailed, quality results of the questionnaire presented enough information to write the research on.</p> <p>The thesis ends with future proposals reflecting the results of the research and the literature base collected as well as individual chapters of self-evaluation of both authors. The timeframe for this thesis was from January until July 2024 giving the authors time to work full time as Cabin Crew Members and execute this research thesis at the same time.</p>
Key words Airport, airport services, customer experience, Finavia, transfer passengers, motivational theories

Tiivistelmä

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<p>Helsinki Vantaan lentoasema on koronapandemian myötä menettänyt suuren osan strategisesti arvokkaista jatkomatkestajistaan. Niin Finnairin, Suomen suurimman kaupallisen lentoyhtiön, kuin Finavian operoiman Helsinki-Vantaan Lentoaseman Aasiaan tukeutuvat strategiat kokivat iskun toisensa perään Ukrainan sodan alettua ja Venäjän ilmatilan sulun myötä vuonna 2022. Pihla Karvonen ja Louise Lindström omaavat pitkäaikaisen ammattitaidon ilmailualalla niin nykyisinä Finnairin matkustamohenkilökunnan jäsenenä kuin kokemuksista porttivirkailijana Helsinki-Vantaan lentoasemalla ja kuormaajana Finnairilla. Tähän jo kartutettuun tietotaitoon perustuen heillä oli suuri mielenkiinto tutkia aihetta lähemmin yhteistyössä kotikentän operoijan Finavian kanssa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tutkimuksen tavoitteet asetettiin yhdessä Finavian yhteistyökumppaneiden kanssa ja tämän englannin kielisen tutkimustyyppisen opinnäytetyön päättökysymykseksi tuli "What are the needs of the passengers in an age group of 18 to 35 in Helsinki Airport?" (Mitkä ovat matkustajien tarpeet ikävälillä 18–35 Helsinki Vantaan lentoasemalla?). Tekijät valitsivat kvantitatiivisen tutkimusmenetelmän ja laativat sähköisen kyselyn, mikä jaettiin niin linkin muodossa sosiaalisessa mediassa kuin haastatteluissa kasvotusten tutkimusryhmään kuuluvien matkustajien kanssa lentokentän terminaalin puhtaalla puolella.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tietoperusta muodostui niin Finavialta saadusta aineistosta kuin tekijöiden itse keräämästä tiedosta useista lähteistä. Tietoperustassa tutustutaan syvemmin opinnäytetyön pääaiheisiin: asiakaskokemukseen ja sen tuottamiseen, Finaviaan, motivaatioteorioihin ja päätöksentekoon vaikuttaviin tekijöihin. Tietoperustan jälkeen esitellään tutkimusmenetelmät ja lopulliset tulokset kuin myös tekijöiden tutkimukseen ja tietoperustaan nojaavat tulevaisuuden kehitysehdotukset Finavialle. Opinnäytetyö päättyy tekijöiden päiväkirjan kaltaisiin kappaleisiin, missä he pohtivat henkilökohtaisia tavoitteitaan ja henkistä kasvuaan tämän projektin ajalta.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksissa nousi esiin jo Finavialla tiedossa olevia kehityksen kohteita, mutta myös uusia ideoita parantamaan matkustajakokemusta lentokentällä entisestään. Suurimmat epäkohdat matkustajat nostivat esiin, olivat rauhallisten istuinalueiden ja elektronisten laitteiden latauspaikkojen vähyys erityisesti terminaalin Schengen puolella. Monet toivoivat myös lisää terveellisempiä ruokavaihtoehtoja terminaalin ravintoloihin. Valtaosa kyselyyn vastaajista olivat tyytyväisiä kokemukseensa Helsinki Vantaalla ja osasivat tunnistaa sen kilpailukyvyyn kansainvälisillä markkinoilla.</p> <p>Tämä opinnäytetyö toteutettiin kevätlukukaudella 2024, alkaen tammikuusta ja päättyen heinäkuuhun.</p>
Avainsanat Lentoasema, lentoaseman palvelut, matkustajakokemus, Finavia, vaihtomatkustajat, motivaatioteoriat

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1 Introduction

Today's airports are competing in an extremely competitive industry due to their operational efficiency, capacity (size), safety, sustainability goals, services, and their passengers' satisfactory levels. This thesis will present the recently polished pearl of the Northern European hub, Helsinki-Vantaa Airport and the importance in understanding the customers' needs to be able provide memorable experiences and creating a loyal customer base at the airport. The authors researched how Helsinki airport is focusing on their passenger's comfort and airport experience. Therefore, how they are noticing upgradable pain points towards success.

The main research was made from the perspective of the transfer passengers traveling through Helsinki-Vantaa Airport. The definition of a transfer passenger is a passenger arriving and departing from the airport on a different aircraft or the same aircraft with a different flight number with the main purpose of transferring with a single ticket within 24 hours. (IATA, 2024.) The age range was specified between 18–35-year-olds to narrow down the customer target group and collect more detailed data. The research was executed in cooperation with the thesis commissioner, the airport operator Finavia, and their Passenger Experience and Development department.

Helsinki Airport has been renewed significantly since Finavia launched the investment of the Airport Development Programme 2013-2023 with stunning Finnish architecture, design, and modernized services for their passengers to enjoy. The stunning updated version of Helsinki airport can now serve up to 30 million passengers each year. It is mentioned on Finavia's website, that the expansion project of the airport is also bringing in economic and social benefits for the citizens of Finland in addition to the unique passenger experience. An international passenger survey of the airport quality and services showed that Helsinki airport was placed in the top rank amongst the airports globally which is showing the strength of the airport. (Finavia. 2024.) More detailed information will be presented later in the chapter dedicated to Helsinki airport and Finavia.

Both authors have experience within the industry as Finnair's Cabin Crew Members, one also previously as a Gate Service Agent, and Finnair Kitchen Loader at Helsinki Airport. Therefore, the authors are genuinely interested in cooperating with Finavia in aim to increase their knowledge of their airline's home hub. After the closure of Russian airspace, the airport lost its biggest competitive advantage, their geographical location, thus, the authors wanted to study its impact on Finavia's business strategy and the future focus points within their customer experience developments.

In addition, both authors have people-oriented personalities with an interest in customer experience and more specifically, conducting encounters with the transferring passengers at the airport as a qualitative data collection method which fits well with the subject. Due to these common interests, this thesis topic was chosen. The authors believed their professional understanding of the field will complement the research.

1.1 Background

With the loss of the aforementioned strategical advantage and COVID-19 pandemic, Helsinki Airport's annual passenger numbers experienced a significant drop from 21,9M (2019) to 15,3M (2023) according to Finavia Traffic Statistics, in 2024. Due to current circumstances, the authors believed that the key to the future growth lies in the customer experience development. Narrowing down the customer group was done in agreement with Finavia, since the authors found it important to accommodate their commissioner's needs. Finavia expressed a need for specified data of customer groups of young adults and elderly out of which the authors related the most to the age group of 18 to 35-year-olds, born between 1992 to 2006. Clarified by the Beresford Research (2024), these years belong to the Millennials and Gen-Z generations. The authors themselves represent the same generation and were most interested in determining opportunities for improving the experience for passengers in this target group.

As frequent social media users, both authors made note of the increased travel content across the platforms after COVID-19 travel restrictions had been lifted. The authors predicted this to indicate an increasing desire to travel due to constant exposure of travel content on various platforms and long quarantine months behind. However, this was found challenging to verify with valid statistics due the lack of reliable sources. Nevertheless, this finding acted as a contributing factor when choosing the customer section for this research due the possibility of young adults as a growing customer segment in the future for Helsinki Airport. As researched, European Millennial and Gen Z generation's travel trends focus on sustainability, technology, social media influencing and gaining meaningful experiences. (Skift Research, 2024.) This thesis will present a more detailed analysis of these groups' logic in their planning, destination choices and experiences, and loyalty considerations among other.

The modern aviation and airport industry is developing in a quick pace through rapid growth in passenger volumes. This is leading to designing the airports and airlines to most efficacy levels through technology and attracting potential passengers. Service providers at airports must concentrate on the quality of efficiency, safety, technologies, sustainability, and service. (Medvedev, Alomar, & Augustyn, 2017.) It is predicted that 16 billion and 4000 million tons of cargo will use air transport in 2050 and will continuously increase thereon. (IATA, 2011.) This

presents massive demand on the airports to grow for their passengers, co-operating aviation, and travel companies. In addition to the growth the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) are committed to Fly Net Zero. Hereby, the commitment of airlines to achieve net zero carbon by 2050 while following the environmental trends in the aviation industry and its airports. Some of the world's largest airports are embracing new innovative energy-efficient technologies and waste reduction strategies with the aim of becoming the world's greenest airports. (Birch, 2023.)

These competing European airports being ranked together with Helsinki Airport are inspiring, motivating and creating hard competition for Helsinki Airport to stay in the top ten best airports in the world. Within the world's best airports Helsinki Airport was in 10th place in 2023 and was additionally crowned as the Best European Airport of 2024 in addition to 2023. (Finavia, 2023, 2024.) With all these intriguing facts and future predictions in the industry together with Helsinki-Airport's new strategic environment this thesis subject fascinated both authors, thus, with our professional background was an obvious choice.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The objectives for this thesis were to find answers to how Helsinki Airport could increase their annual passenger numbers by enhancing customer experience and to achieve a deeper understanding for their unknown customer section of young adults. Therefore, this was the perfect opportunity for these passengers to present their unspoken opinions about the airport. The main research question was: What are the needs of transferring passengers in the age group of 18 to 35 at Helsinki Airport?

The sub-questions supporting the main goal were:

- How do passengers define a good airport?
- Why did passengers choose Helsinki Airport for transferring?
- How to achieve a loyal customer base as an airport?

With the research question above, this thesis aimed to determine the weaknesses within Helsinki Airport's customer experience strategy and how to develop it for the future growth.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This study is a research-based thesis which consists of five chapters beginning with the introduction, which presents the research topic, the influencing factors to choose from for this specific subject, and the research questions in addition to the main objectives of this thesis with the overlay matrix, which is presented below. Chapter two consists of a literature review creating a

theoretical base for the study conducted with the main topics: Finavia, customer experience (CX), motivational theories, and competitor study. The research methods are introduced in chapter 3 following with the data analysis and results in chapter 4. Finally, the findings and success of this study are discussed with future considerations and self-assessment in chapter 5.

This research used both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in forms of face-to-face encounters at the airport and an online questionnaire. These methods were chosen to widen the perspective of the research and to collect more variable data. While face-to-face encounters give opportunities to use full potential of the subject and achieve deeper understanding of one's experiences, quantitative research methods such as questionnaires provide more easily interpreted data while reaching larger audiences more efficiently. Qualitative data collection methods help to understand subjects on a more personal level, which answers the needs of customer experience within research. However, quantitative data supports these methods, by helping with data processing and finding answers to specific research questions. The Overlay Matrix in Table 1 below presents a summary of the research questions, theoretical framework, results, and both questionnaire and encounter questions being the same ones.

Table 1. Overlay Matrix

Investigative questions	Theoretical framework	Results	Questionnaire questions
What are the needs of transferring passengers in the age group of 18 to 35 at Helsinki Airport?	2.1	4.3	3, 9, 10, 11
Why did passengers choose Helsinki Airport for transferring?	2.1	4.2	7, 14, 15, 17
How do passengers define a good airport?	2.2	4.5	8, 9, 10, 11, 18
How to achieve a loyal customer base as an airport?	2.3 2.4	4.2 4.5	7, 10, 13,

2 Customer Experience Research

To execute this analysis with the best possible resources, the authors researched the key subjects of this thesis including the theory of Finavia and Helsinki Airport, customer experience, motivational theories, and a study of competitive airports and their actions. Two book sources were used in the customer experience study and online research through articles, official websites, and legislative documents was utilized more extensively in other sections especially for the theoretical research about Finavia due their excellent online data base. The authors found various resources which were important in creating a strong research base for the thesis.

2.1 Finavia – Helsinki Airport

Finavia is a Finnish airport operator with 20 airports around the country including the capital area's Helsinki Airport. With a value proposition of "For smooth travelling", the company practices sustainable operations being a forerunner among its competitors in themes such as environmental sustainability and customer experience. Finavia has won multiple awards for Helsinki Airport including SKYTRAX World Airport Awards, Best Airport in Northern Europe in its size class. (Finavia, 2024)

In 1997 Finavia set up a traffic database with detailed annual statistics available in their website. According to this database, in 2019 the total amount of passengers in Helsinki Airport was 21 861 082 million including 4 186 239 million transfer passengers. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the numbers experienced a significant drop however are now slowly recovering. This is illustrated with the amount of transfer passengers in Helsinki Airport between 2019-2023 as a chart below in Figure 1. converted from Finavia Corp. Passenger Statistics 2024 data.



Figure 1. Helsinki Airport Transfer Passengers 2019-2023 (Converted from Finavia Corp. Passenger Statistics 2024)

Recent increase can be explained with the removal of COVID-19 travel restrictions around the world and Finland's flag carrier airline Finnair restoring most of its pre-pandemic routes. However, the closure of Russian airspace due to the Ukrainian War forced the airline to change its Asia-based strategy, which has a direct impact on Finavia with an absence of 23 weekly flights to Japan and 33 to China when comparing summer season operations in 2019 and 2024 according to Finnair and Finavia websites.

In 2013 Finavia started a 10-year development project in Helsinki Airport, which included contractual changes to terminals to enhance the customer experience in Helsinki and strengthen its position among its competitors. In the non-Schengen area Finavia opened gates 50A-M, the South and West piers, the Plaza, and gate 52 as well as a new gate area 34-36. In addition, there were expansions of the border control area, baggage hall, Schengen area, gates 5-11, new parking hall, and a whole new departure hall. A map of airport expansions can be found in Appendix. 3. The planning was carried out with a "one roof"-concept, where all services and facilities were placed under the same roof to make them easily accessible, thus, enhancing customer experience.

Sustainability was also one of the important values Finavia wanted to include to the project through material choices, energy solutions, and use of local products. (Finavia's investment: Helsinki Airport Development Programme 2013–2023) The beautiful inner roof of the departure hall is hand carved by local carpenters. "Finnish nature and craftsmanship are present from the spectacular ceiling of the entrance to small details around the airport. The guiding principle of the billion-euro development programme is Finnishness. The domestic content of the development programme is 90%," (Hansson Henri, 2021). Finavia has deservedly been awarded for its new terminal building including Prix Versailles' Architecture and Design Award 2022, interior of renewed terminal (Award Winning Helsinki Airport, 2024)

2.1.1 Strategy

When inspecting Finavia's annual report 2019, the importance of customer experience development as a key strategic point is highlighted on multiple occasions, "Developing customer experience is at the core of Finavia's strategy" (Finavia, 2019). In addition, they named responsible operations and sustainable growth as two other operational values. With these focus points, they defined strategic goals including attracting new airlines to Helsinki Airport, providing excellent

customer service as a competitive differentiator, and reducing environmental impacts of all operations.

In 2019 Finavia successfully implemented its strategic goals to its operations generating excellent results. Overall, the annual report had a hopeful look to the future and an aim to follow a long-term growth plan. In 2022 Finavia's business environment experienced a drastic change due to the Ukrainian War. Passenger numbers that collapsed during the pandemic became harder to return to pre-pandemic level due longer flight times, higher ticket prices and reduced connections to East-Asia. In their annual report 2022 Finavia states their new strategy remains growth-oriented with new adapted goals: dedicated and motivated personnel, business growth and financially sustainable operations. Finavia adapted to the new operational environment while maintaining their ability to serve transfer passengers. Customer experience was not lost from Finavia's strategy, however, accompanied with stronger employee experience goals, "We will strengthen our open and appreciative corporate culture, develop the employee experience and enhance Finavia's attractiveness as a workplace" (Finavia 2022). In addition, financially sustainable operations were added as a new strategic goal to ensure Finavia's competitiveness and adaptiveness in the future.

2.1.2 Sustainability

Finavia is one of the world's leading airports with its strong climate programme. In 2019 Finavia reached carbon neutrality in all its 20 airports and now aims to net zero emissions by 2025. This goal means, Finavia will reduce its operational carbon emissions to a level as low as technologically and financially possible, in other words, nearly to zero. Helsinki Airport aimed to reach net zero emissions already by 2024. To compensate the minor remaining emissions, Finavia participates in projects to reduce carbon dioxide from the atmosphere like growing trees. They also state that these projects meet the criteria of the international Airport Carbon Accreditation (ACA) programme. (Finavia's climate programme, 2023)

In an airport environment, there are various energy consuming operation critical functions like ground vehicle fuel, lighting, heating, and cooling of terminals, and waste and water consumption and Finavia has solution for all of these. In all its airports, the company uses 100% wind and solar energy for electricity and locally produced renewable diesel made from waste for all airport vehicles. (*Finavia aims to reduce its carbon emissions to nearly zero, 2023*) Finavia also carefully considers all aspects of usage of anti- and de-icing liquids, by monitoring the quality of ground- and surface water in its surrounding areas. "Water acidity, chemical oxygen consumption, electrical conductivity and oxygen content are determined from samples taken from wells, groundwater pipelines, runoff drainage and water bodies in the vicinity of airports" (Finavia Corp., 2024). In addition, waste management is also a critical part of environmental sustainability, therefore Finavia

provides easy recycling for all its passengers and airport employees with clearly marked containers in all terminal areas. Separate contracts have also been made with businesses in the airport area to manage proper waste handling and recycling. (Circular Economy and Waste Management, 2024)

2.1.3 Media Presence and Website

Finavia and Helsinki Airport are present in social media through Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X, WeChat, LinkedIn, and in China Sina Weibo and Youku. As representors of the younger generations, the absence of TikTok and Instagram catches our eye. Finavia has a fresh and trendy style in their media management and clearly has the tools to produce content to on both social media channels. After the pandemic, travel content in media has increased and even though the research shows that the Millennials are seeking domestic adventures, the Gen Zs are highly influenced through social media platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat to seek their adventures globally with economic factors in mind such as airfare costs. Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook are channels used by the millennials when planning their future travels (Skift Research, 2024.), presented in Appendix 1. Therefore, the social media platforms are a key channel for Finavia and Helsinki Airport to reach their potential passengers.

A clear differentiator for Finavia is its website management. Compared to its many competitors like Frankfurt Airport, Finavia has a clear, easy-to-use website, full of information such as news articles, statistics, and annual reports. Everything is available in English and made accessible even to inexperienced users. Such online services are increasing their importance in modern customer experience, as self-service models like self-service check-in desks are becoming increasingly common and consequently decreasing human contact in a customer's journey.

Research by Skift presented a result that both Gen-Zs and Millennials prefer flexible online services and independency e.g. when booking their journeys through Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). Independent operation at the airports through customer interaction management software's such as phone applications, automated bag drop-off points, check-in to their flight by the gate and self-service check out cashiers at the tax-free stores are highly appreciated. In other words, Gen-Zs and Millennials are adapting to more and more digitalized, smart airports. (Qless, 2024.)

2.2 Comparable Airports

This chapter will present three airports executing same transfer hub strategy and will be compared with Helsinki Airport within the categories of capacity, location, destination connectivity, customer experiences-, and comfort and sustainability. The airports of our choice are London Heathrow

Airport (LHR), Frankfurt Airport (FRA), and Copenhagen Kastrup Airport (CPH). These airports were chosen because of their difference in size, capacity, on time performance (OTP) records, awards, services passengers can enjoy, and popularity presented when researching on them online.

Competitor analysis is one of the key elements in marketing and finding one's business strategy. Various tools can be used such as SWOT-analysis by Albert Humphrey on 1960s (remains debatable) to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats on one's business environment and competitors. The same matrix base can be used on both internal and external factors. (*SWOT-analysis*, 2023). This chapter aimed to study Helsinki Airport externally through comparison for three of its competitors. Comparing these similar characteristics owning airports gave great insight and understanding of Finavia and Helsinki Airport which further helped understanding its position on global markets.

2.2.1 London Heathrow Airport

When researching London Heathrow Airport's official website for their services, awards and their over 180 flight connections, they presented as an example an investigation how passengers from Sweden can use Heathrow Airport as a transfer hub instead of turning to their neighboring country's Helsinki Airport, which shares some of the same destinations through Finnair in the United States of America (US) and China. London Heathrow consists of five terminal buildings with over 67 million passengers traveling through the airport annually with a wide selection of 90 airlines flying them to 90 countries globally. (London Heathrow, 2024.) The airport also offers a wide selection of commercial services through popular restaurants and luxury tax-free stores and has convenient public transportation operators. Heathrow has popular lounges, hotels, and spas for their passengers to enjoy while traveling.

Heathrow Airport won the Skytrax World Airport Award for the World's Top Airport Terminal for their Terminal 5 back in 2019 and Terminal 2 in 2018. In addition to this award, the airport won the World's Best Airport Shopping multiple years in a row. (World Airport Awards Skytrax, 2019.) Even though Heathrow competes in a different size class as Helsinki Airport, its facilities accommodating the transfer passengers are one of the best in the world, thus an excellent research target for Helsinki to develop their own services.

Compared to Heathrow, Helsinki Airport has a clear geographical advantage with their three runways and more room for future growth. Heathrow Airport is located in a densely populated area; therefore, the government has imposed restrictions for the airport to not allowing any departures between 23.00-06:00. There are only 16 aircraft landing at the airport before 04:30am

with the aim to control pollution. Heathrow Airport is “not hiding the elephant in the airport”, which highlights their actions against climate change by executing their net zero plan by sourcing 100% renewable electricity to power their terminals, their sustainability strategy 2.0 which supports their service providers and employees to make more sustainable choices and their support in sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) and partnership with SAF SkyNRG climate-tech company CHOOOSE for passengers to cut their carbon footprints. (London Heathrow Airport, 2024.)

London Heathrow Airport’s official website has a modern design and is actively updated with destinations, cultures, traditions, and adventures. When comparing it with Helsinki Airport’s website it reminds one more of a combination of Finavia’s and Finnair’s websites, with their use of beautiful, inspiring, and professional images and fonts. Their social media awareness and activity is great on multiple platforms. The most popular channel is Instagram where they are presenting their employees and their duties on a weekly basis in a professional and fun matter which their 382K followers and passengers enjoy.

2.2.2 Frankfurt Airport

Frankfurt International Airport is the largest airport in Germany with flights to over 300 destinations in 90 countries globally for passengers to transfer through its genius and largest catchment area in the heart of Europe. The airport is operating up to 59.4 million passengers in 2023. Frankfurt airport is offering bus tours of the apron and other aviation industry activities at its visitor’s center for passengers to experience while waiting to start their journeys. Their advanced technology provides information and help screens with live connections to customer services for passenger’s convenience and automated biometrics allow passengers to save more than thirty minutes at the airport. The airport invested in quiet resting areas, movie theaters, lounges, restaurant areas and luxury shopping at the tax-free shops. Terminal 1 is devoted to Star Alliance and terminal 2 for One World Alliance airlines and lounges connected with a speed tunnel for passengers to have as short connecting time as possible. Conveniently, there is a variety of public transportation to the airport. (Frankfurt Airport, 2024.)

Frankfurt Airport was nominated to Europe’s Leading Airport in 2003 (Frankfurt Airport, 2024.), the World Travel Award presented their Air Cargo Excellence (ACE) award to the airport in 2013 and won the Travel Innovation Award for Digital Transformation in 2021. (Frankfurt Airport, 2024.)

Frankfurt Airport’s carbon emissions for the entire corporate group are planned to be reduced to zero by 2045. Their sustainability report 2023 highlighted the importance of taking actions that must be considered and covered within the following categories such as air quality, climate protection, protection of local environment and nature, and noise abatement. The airport

additionally mentions that their Agenda 2030 for their sustainable developments are built around United Nations (UNs) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They also highlight on their website that the airport would not be successful if it was not for their employees working hard and they want to reward them with providing them with an occupationally healthy and safe environment to work within. (Frankfurt Airport Annual Sustainability Report 2023.)

Frankfurt Airports official website has a more outdated design, which can be seen through their use of blurry images and older fonts. They present themselves from an operator point of view and unlike previously mentioned airports are not presenting destinations, cultures, traditions, and adventures. Their social media awareness and activity is likewise outdated, as it does not have the feel of being posted with today's users' content, edits, music, or fonts in mind. We believe that their online presence is not competitive enough for our target group, who would find them first on Instagram then on Google. They have a lot of potential but it is lacking in this marketing service department.

2.2.3 Copenhagen Kastrup Airport

Copenhagen Kastrup Airport is the largest airport in Scandinavia (Denmark, Sweden and Norway). Copenhagen Airport is the hub for Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) and operates to over 170 destinations in 50 countries with 27 million passengers in 2023. (Copenhagen Airport, 2024.) The airport consists of three terminal buildings with terminal 3 being the largest, handling most of the long-haul destinations, largest aircraft passenger bridges and airlines. The terminals are equipped with self-service devices to speed up the check-in and security processes. The airport has multiple lounges, restaurants, and shopping areas representing famous Scandinavian design brands to enjoy before the flight. There are also convenient train and metro connections to the airport landside from both Denmark and Sweden through the underwater tunnel.

Copenhagen Kastrup Airport won SKYTRAXs awards for being the World's Best Security and Best Airport in Northern Europe back in 2019. The Best Airport in Northern Europe has since been awarded to Helsinki airport annually, nevertheless, Kastrup is a worthy competitor.

As did Helsinki, Copenhagen Airport became carbon neutral in 2019. Now it is aiming to become an emission-free airport with additional emission-free transport to and from the airport. (Copenhagen Airport, 2024.) Copenhagen Airport is affected by the Swedish movement called "Flight Shame" which is aiming to inspire people to fly less and to motivate to be aware of the environmental impact flying has on earth. (Ozturkcan. S & Ozdinc. M. 2024.) This specific category of passengers is molding the airport to be more sustainable than their competitive airports in aim to keep their catchment area to fly greener. Thus, flying domestically in Scandinavia – Denmark,

Sweden, and Norway – has a noticeable reduction from over 40% of all seats in 2019 – a combined decrease of 1.5%. (Copenhagen Airport, 2024.)

Copenhagen Kastrup Airport's official website is simple, clean, and clear with mostly information about the airport and its services. It is not as inspiring and colorful as London Heathrow Airport's website, as it partly resembles an online travel agency with its inspiring content. On the other hand, their social media awareness and activity is great on multiple platforms. Their most popular channel is Instagram where they are mostly presenting video reels of their employees and passengers on a weekly basis in a professional and fun matter which their 32,7K followers and passengers enjoy. Surprisingly, the people appearing in their reels are mostly Millennials and Gen Zs. Based on one of the authors' own experiences at Copenhagen Airport as a passenger and as a Cabin Crew Member at Finnair on turnarounds, many young adults are working within the cleaning companies, the cafes and restaurants at the airport while setting a fun, cheerful, hardworking, and friendly atmosphere.

As for the significance of environmental and social considerations, the research executed in 2023 presents that Millennials' interests lie within sustainability, tourism's impact on local communities and the option to work distantly, which have to be options at the destinations when planning their travel journey and destination. (Skift Research, 2024)

2.3 Customer Experience

As conductors of this research, the concept of customer experience as a part of a business strategy must be understood first. The authors studied this subject mainly through four books, *Designing Experiences* (2019) by Duerden and Rossman, *Strategiana Asiakaskokemus* (2020) by Saarijärvi and Puustinen, and *Fundamentals of Airline Marketing* by Ambrose and Waguespack and *The Power of Moments* (2017) by Heath Chip and Dan. These books dived deep in the subject with professional cogitation, thus, are excellent material to study. Following sections will showcase our knowledge in both theoretical level and in practice with examples from airport environment.

2.3.1 What is Customer Experience

Customer experience (CX) is a wide concept which often is associated with face-to-face customer encounters which are only a small part of the whole concept. At the airport, customer experience lasts through the whole customer journey, and in an airport environment it starts from the point of purchasing the flight ticket to, from, or through that facility; How convenient of a connection time or network can the airport offer? What services are available at the airport and are those easy to find and prebook online? Is the airport easily accessible? The final stage of customer experience would be boarding facilities, slots for departing aircraft (do they need to wait for permission to taxi and

take off), car park or pick up station, or possible post-delivery for delayed check in luggage. From a customers' point of view, in an airport they often have a hybrid experience, meaning a compilation different brands, products and companies forming the whole customer experience. This is creating a particular challenge for influencing parties to help the customer connect right experience to the correct company.

To produce excellent customer experiences a deeper understanding of the concept and one's customers is crucial. As people, customer experience is a multidimensional subject with cognitive, emotional, social, and sensory characteristics (*Strategiana Asiakaskokemus* 2020). Meaning there are factors such as culture, age, previous experiences, education, expectations, personal needs, and current mindset affecting to each individual's experience. Everyone also evaluates their experiences in both rational and emotional ways, thus, making it challenging to businesses to create great customer experience for all.

When the understanding of the complexity of the concept is reached, a customer-oriented mindset must be implemented to the management style and become the leading theme in the company's operations and marketing (*Strategiana Asiakaskokemus* 2020). To maintain successful services, constant research of the changing trends and the needs of the customers is crucial. Many companies conduct surveys or use HappyOrNot system in stores or other physical locations. Dividing customer experience into different sections such as: brand, service experience, mobile platforms, and the usage of the product or service could help companies to focus on different aspects, and determine the weak points, thus, develop their services. A trusted brand is a result of great customer experiences and the beginning of prosperous operations.

2.3.2 Five Types of Customer Experience

As stated, there are various personal factors influencing an individual's customer experience which highlights the importance of situational awareness in providers. As a consequence, customer experiences can be divided into five categories: prosaic, mindful, memorable, meaningful, and transformational experiences (*Designing Experiences* 2019, 76). Every category has their key characteristics which are significant for mastering customer experiences. These are illustrated below in Figure 2. amended from *Designing Experiences*.

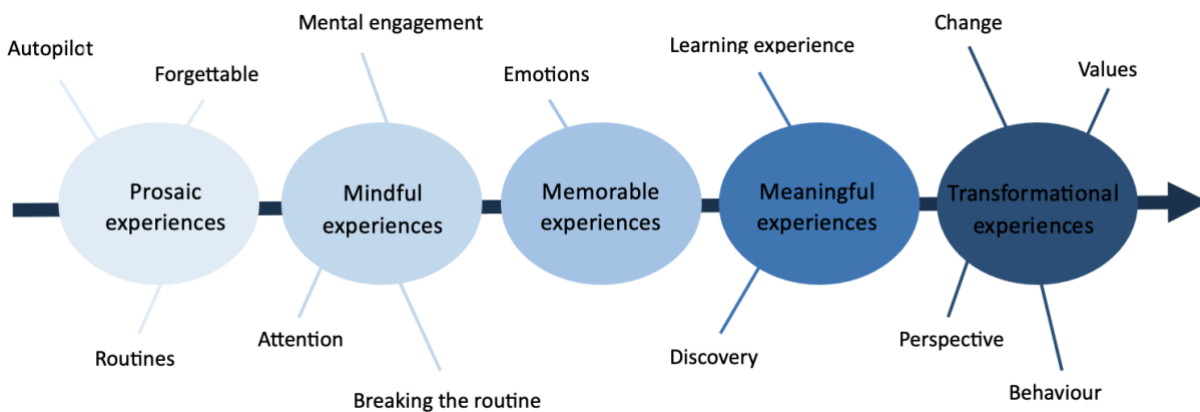


Figure 2. Five Customer Experience Types (Adapted from *Designing Experiences*, 2019)

Prosaic experiences mean everyday routines and actions that are easily forgettable like brushing your teeth or doing laundry. For instance, even though one uses the same laundry detergent many times a week one wouldn't necessarily remember what color it is or whether there were flowers or bubbles on the side of the can, because it's routine and easily forgettable. "Kahneman documents that our brains are lazy and reluctant to invest more effort than necessary; that's why they shift into autopilot during prosaic experiences" (Duerden, Rossman 2019, 66). In practice, Finavia at Helsinki Airport should consider clear signs and markings to customer parking garage to enhance the experience by helping customers effortlessly recall where they left their cars since parking a car is one of these routine actions that often is done with brains on "autopilot".

When something unexpected happens and our routine breaks, our brain switches off the "autopilot" and it becomes a mindful experience. Therefore, the key characteristic is cognizant thinking of the situation, and the key action is to break the routine, to get the person's attention. For Finavia as an airport operator this could be the change to the security check procedures due to new equipment. Of course, to some customers airport's security check isn't prosaic experience, however, to the frequent flyers it might be. Thus, new procedures break the routine and get the customer attention to the situation resulting, hopefully, to a positive customer experience.

As Duerden and Rossman challenged us, we would like to challenge you to think about five most memorable experiences in your life. Why do you think you still remember those? For an experience to become memorable it evokes strong emotions. In an airport environment, this could be a situation of a short transfer time. The customer probably has strong emotions of stress fearing they will miss their connection flight; however, the gate could have ended up being closer than expected or a nice worker may have given the customer a ride with their assistance vehicle and in the last

minute made it to their flight resulting in strong emotions of relief. Such an experience would be remembered.

Meaningful experiences have many similarities with memorable ones with one key differentiator, discovery. These experiences teach us something new about ourselves or the world (Duerden, Rossman 2019, 72). Customers could have a meaningful experience in an airport if they encounter overbooking of flights for the first time. For some spontaneous travelers this could even be a positive experience with big compensations and for others a strong negative one when suddenly left out of their flight. Causing this type of experience, however, is out of airport operator's hand but Finavia for example would have a chance to positively influence this event with services available in the airport.

The final type of customer experience is the most memorable one and almost impossible to produce, transformational experience. To achieve this deep of an impact something must significantly change in oneself leading to changes in behavior, perspective, or personal values. Duerden and Rossman used an example of surviving a heart attack as a transformational experience leading to changes in a person's behavior according to health or a deeply influential TED Talk which leads to a change in a person.

2.3.3 Achieving a Loyal Customer Base as an Airport

This chapter is based on the knowledge gained from the book Fundamentals of Airline Marketing by Ambrose and Waguespack. The authors have reflected it to the airport model instead of the airline which is written in the book.

In the airport industry, delivering high service quality is done by exceeding customers' needs and will lead to satisfied customers whom most could become loyalty customers, even if the airport is not in their home country. This generates the airport more repeat business and greater profitability. The airport should additionally take relevant outside factors into consideration since negative experiences from e.g., airlines, airport weather maintenance reputation and struggling public transportation might affect the customers satisfaction. Airports need to measure and manage their service quality and customers' satisfaction levels and aim to find flaws and polish them into a working service model. Sympathising with customers and understanding their needs is a crucial skill in creating a loyal customer base. Loyalty programs encourage customers to join and start to collect points or climb levels to earn benefits such as to enjoy lounges, speed lanes and parking benefits at the airport. Helsinki Airport can, in addition to Finavia's existing research, find their customers preferences and dislikes through social media channels and by following the

discussions around their partners and close operators. Through care and understanding, the customers will feel valued and cared for.

Airports and airlines support each other. The effects of the decisions made by a major operating airline have straight effect to the airport. For example, when Finnair was forced to quit majority of their flights to Asia it had a straight effect to Helsinki Airport's passenger numbers as previously proven. Some of these lost passengers were forced to choose another airline and travel through another airport instead. Ultimately, to achieve excellence in service quality the provider must deliver high standard performance that consistently meets or exceeds customers' expectations (Wirtz and Lovelock, 2018). This generates purchase decisions, happy and lasting memories, and could even create transformational experiences for the customers which creates more loyalty customers. The following chapters on motivational theories will clarify how the human mind works in customer service encounters.

2.3.4 Peak-end Rule

Peak-end rule is a common theory used in designing customer experiences. It was discovered that customers assess an experience based on two key moments: the best or the worst moment, known as the "peak" and the ending. The length of the situation has no such importance for the experience since people tend to forget or ignore it creating a phenomenon called "duration neglect". Peak-end rule can be applied to many kinds of experiences, only in longer ones, the importance of the ending tends to fade or mix up with the beginnings. When changing jobs for example, does one remember the ending or the beginning or both? Beginnings are important too, in some memories more than in others. For example, it has been researched that most of the memories from university where from the first months of the study years. As beginnings and endings have equal importance, they should be called "transitions". (*The Power of Moments* 2017, 11)

When walking inside Helsinki Airport, one can see how Finavia has utilized this theory in the new terminal. The escalators to the departure hall rise to a beautiful view of skilled Nordic architecture of the hall. On the other hand, when arriving to the airport the first view of the arrival hall is a gorgeous arrangement of genuine local flora with light shining through the opening to the second floor. A picture is presented in Appendix 6. These architectural decisions have clearly been made to enhance the customer experience through the beginning or ending of their Helsinki Airport experience.

2.4 Motivational Theories

This chapter presents motivational theory factors affecting passengers' decisions when creating and executing their travel journeys. These motivational theories go hand in hand with customer experience management while being key factors to consider in execution. Motivational theories should be implemented to one's customer experience strategy with thorough understanding of the chosen customer segment.

2.4.1 Content & Process Theories of Motivation

Content theories of motivation are focusing on the factors which motivate a human being's behavior by receiving rewards, which is simply the content a person needs in their life. This is called the need-based theory of which the biggest motivational factor is to achieve a desired goal by having the eyes on the price. Process theories, on the other hand, present the clarity on how the motivating factors affect the behavior, psychological choices and executed acts. These motivating factors start, sustain, and stop the human mind when making choices, thus starting to motivate human behavior. The most well-known theories are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Vroom's Expectancy theory, which are presented later in the thesis.

2.4.2 The Drive Theory

The human mind considers motivations as *drives* when the physiological characteristic of the mind is out of balance, therefore, the mind starts to create desired goals to achieve. (Lawrence, Carver & Scheier, 2002.) The Drive Theory is working the human mind through a *drive state* which is motivating the person to obtain the desired phenomenon e.g., a dreamy summer vacation one has been waiting for, hereby, motivates the organisms to fulfill goals of the mind. Affective psychological processes such as emotion and motivation are influencing the human to move forward in life. Today's society's humans are extremely addicted to constant and never-ending influence by the social media.

2.4.3 Self-Determination Theory

The theory of self-determination (SDT) is presenting the knowledge of humans having three basic needs: autonomy motivation and controlled motivation, competence and relatedness which supports the human growth and development within learning, performance, living thorough experiences and psychological health. (Ryan. R. & Deci. E. 2000.) This motivational theory states that the best way to get human beings to perform their task e.g., working as airport staff, to stay motivated enough to keep a high-level service is to reinforce their behavior with rewards such as a good working environment, a just-cultured industry, suitable working hours and salary, negotiable

days off requests and schedule planning through shift change possibilities, promotions, and bonuses.

2.4.4 Vroom’s Expectancy Theory of Motivation

This theory is based on the idea that human behavior and emotions result from choices which maximize pleasure and minimize negativity. (Vroom. 1964.) From the employees’ point of view, they would be motivated to maximize the chance of achieving recognition and rewards through extra performance. In these cases, the best employee will come out as the one who follows the rules perfectly and even invents new ideas with the goal to meet customers’ needs and make their airport experience the best one possible. An employee should be rewarded by the hard work effort and presented potential for more within their department such as through a promotion.

2.4.5 The Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The Theory of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs by Abraham Maslow is built from the studies of the pyramid of the human mind’s priorities. The order of humans’ needs is; physiological, feeling of safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization. The human mind goes through these categories when making decisions. It is crucial to understand the basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfillment needs of humans and to adapt them into the customer experience services using consumers’ motivation to create loyal customers. Figure 3 shows the Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs pyramid presented thorough the airport experience point of view.

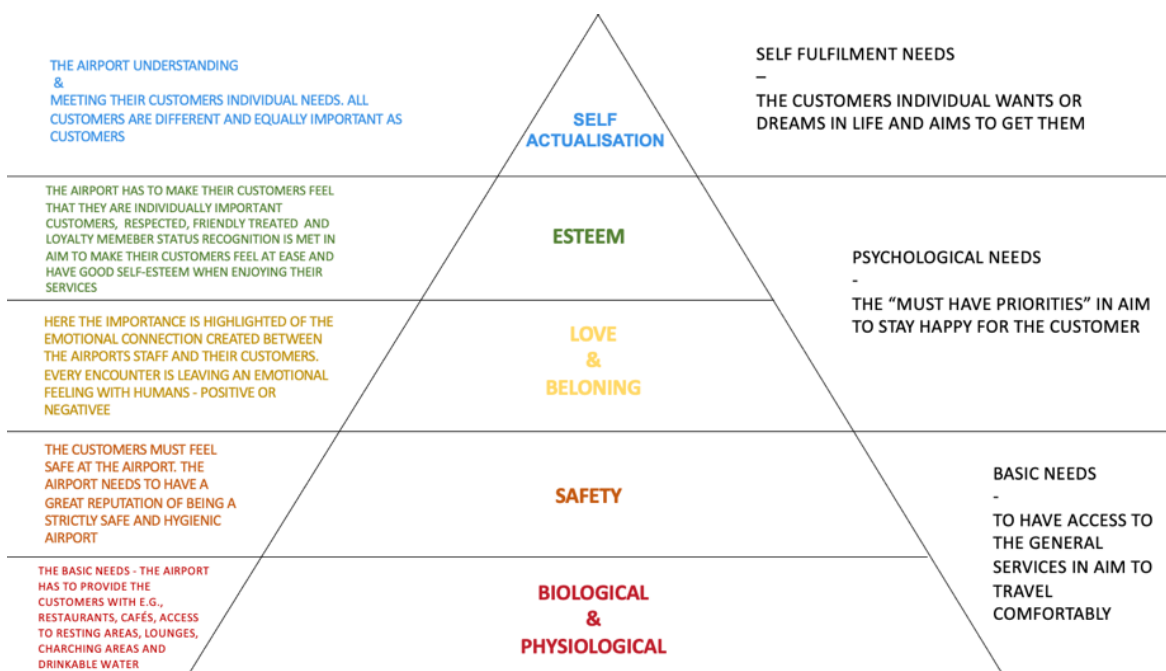


Figure 3. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs adapted from *Simply Psychology*, 2024.

2.4.6 The Customer Focus Theory

The Customer Focus Theory is emphasizing the importance of understanding and satisfying the customer needs in order to achieve a successful business. Companies that are more customer focused are most likely more profitable in long-term and can adapt to the changes more easily since they know how the organizational performance has an impact on the customers. (Theory Hub. 2024.)

The airport can create emotional connection to the customers by constructing ways to pleasantly surprise them, and thus meeting their needs. Whether it is done through services and products tailored to personal must-haves, advanced digital services or smooth transfers to connecting flights etc. Airports which prioritize and aim higher within the customer experience gain loyalty, build resilience, and successfully future proof their organization. (McKinsey & Skift Research, 2021.) Good and fun experiences at the airport will remain as magical memories for passengers when reminiscing on the successful moment well spent. The Peak End Theory chapter above presented the Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman's research on his Peak End Theory. This theory highlights how human beings form memories and therefore create decisions from the peak point until the end of their customer journeys. Therefore, yet again, the importance of understanding and noticing the differences between customers' needs is the key element of success.

Additionally, some of the most important factors at the airport are the ambiance, cleanness of the facilities, freshness of the restaurants, hassle free tax-free shopping areas, entertainment activities such as bars and lounges, Wi-Fi, Security and the smoothness of the border control process, and lastly the human factors based on analyzing studies. (ACI World's Airport Service Quality Programme. 2023.)

3 Methodology

In this chapter, the authors present the general methodology used in their research as well as execution and questions used in the data collection process for this thesis. The main goal is to get an understanding of the choices leading to decisions taken by adults in the age group of 18-35 who are transferring via Helsinki Airport. The experience at Helsinki Airport from a traveler's point of view is also close to the authors hearts as cabin crew members at Finnair. The data was collected through a Google Forms survey which was distributed online via social media, Haaga-Helia University's student communication platforms and on Finnair's internal cabin crew platforms. The authors also reached out to their friends and families across the world to gain more suitable participants. In addition to the online participants, the authors conducted encounters with passengers in person at Helsinki Airport using the same survey as distributed online to ensure data comparability. Authors entered the airport's clean side with visitor permissions provided through a collaboration with Finavia, thus, passengers were able meet the authors on both Non-Schengen and Schengen sides to get a larger sample size to the data.

3.1 Method Theory

The empirical material consists of 83 responses from which 53 responses were collected through the online survey, and 30 passengers were met face-to-face in Helsinki Airport for more detailed information. The plan behind the execution of this research survey and its questions, their style and methods leading to the outcome will be presented in the following chapters below.

3.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The aim of the survey was to collect clear closed-ended statistical answers in addition to more detailed answers through the open-ended questions as the research questions used as the research method for this thesis.

The main research question was: What are the needs of transferring passengers in the age group of 18 to 35 at Helsinki Airport?

The sub-questions supporting the main goal were:

- How do passengers define a good airport?
- Why did passengers choose Helsinki Airport for transferring?
- How to achieve a loyal customer base as an airport?

With the research questions above, this thesis aimed to determine the weaknesses within Helsinki Airport's customer experience strategy and how to develop it for future growth. The results can be

used to improve customers' satisfaction when transferring and experiencing Helsinki Airport leading to increasing commercial outcomes together with greater status as Europe's best airport.

3.3 Research Approach

The three most common approaches used when conducting research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods when collecting data for research purposes (Williams. C. 2007. v5, n3). Creswell (2002) stated that quantitative research is the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing results of a study, while qualitative research is the approach to data collection, analysis, and report writing differing from the traditional quantitative approaches. The chapters below will present how the authors benefitted from these methods in addition to clarifying how the mixed methods were included as a research method in this study along with the support of the three basic approaches when executing empirical research: the statistical method through our survey, case study methods while researching the existing information online and through documents and reports provided by Finavia, and the comparative method researched and analyzed through the participants, passengers and the pre- and post-pandemic and the closure of the Russian airspace comparison of the airports situation within the passenger numbers.

All these methods benefitted the authors by allowing them to identify and distinguish research techniques that worked well or not so well for their purpose. For instance, they allowed the authors to perform comparisons of Helsinki Airport with other competitive airports in Chapter 2.

This thesis highlights the research subjects, i.e., the participating travelers and their various viewpoints depending on their individual experiences within the airport's services. The participants expressed their thoughts clearly and confidently.

3.4 Determining Our Method

This case study thesis research consisted of a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The authors valued the characteristics and differences of both in the collected data. This research required both methods with the aim to be as rich of information as possible. The authors are people-oriented and work within the aviation and customer service industry, covering extensive knowledge within this area, therefore, they felt the excitement to interact, connect and understand the participating passengers at Helsinki Airport for the face-to-face encounters. The primary data collected from the survey supported the quantitative research method and provided a bigger picture of the numerical category through the charts created from this important data.

The justification behind this combination was to get the most effective data within the time allocated to the thesis process. Along with the survey shared online, the individual encounters were held for more detailed and imaginative answers with the aim to help inspire the authors and their commissioner Finavia on how to improve Helsinki Airport. The encounters were based on the online questionnaire; however, the open-ended questions were filled in with more detailed answers since the authors enjoyed small talking with the participants which painted a bigger picture of the topic in question. To keep the encounters short and effective, the authors filled the online questionnaire for them so that the discussions stayed on topic and were concerned with the questions. Therefore, the main data collection method was quantitative with features of qualitative methods such as encounters utilized in face-to-face encounters to collect as precise, high-quality data from the survey questions as possible.

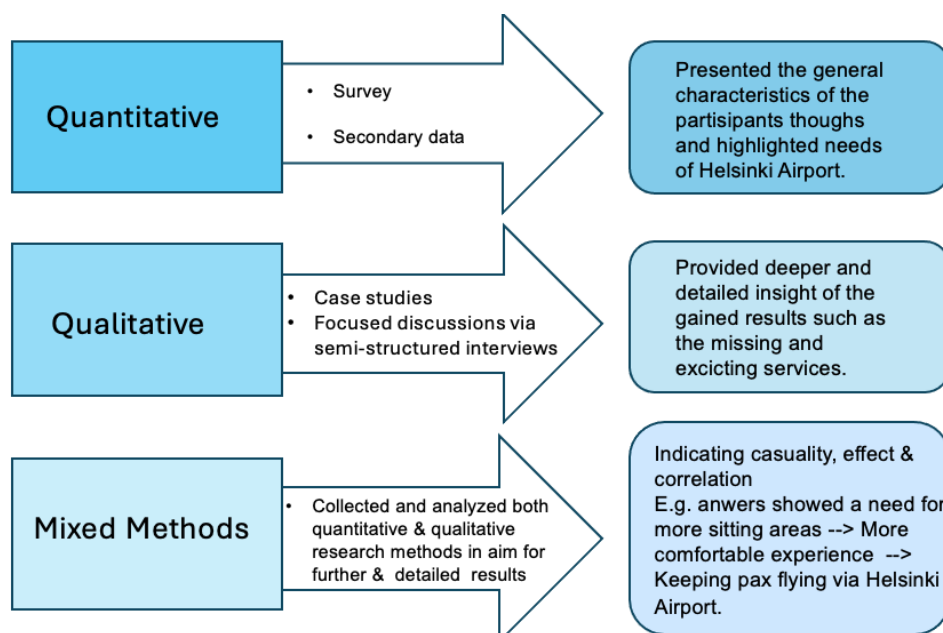


Figure 4. Key Components of Research adapted from *Methodology*. 2022

3.4.1 Quantitative Research

Quantitative methodology is the most commonly used research framework. The collection of quantitative information allows researchers to conduct simple to extremely sophisticated statistical analyses that aggregate the data, e.g. averages and percentages, show relationships among the gathered data or compare across aggregated data. (Coghlan. D, Brydon-Miller. M. 2014)

Surveys are one of the most common quantitative data collection methods, nowadays often executed in online form. The authors also decided on this method and due the need of large number of responses, decided to distribute the survey online in addition to face-to-face encounters

at the airport. In this thesis the survey consisted of both open- and closed-ended questions. The decision and value behind having both types of questions are to collect numerical values through the clear and closed-ended questions while the open-ended questions offer the respondent to write detailed answers with information that cannot perhaps be predicted or ideas that do not already exist. Each question gathered in-depth information about the respondents needs, positive and negative feedback and suggestions to the airport's services. This data was gathered and analyzed and is hereby presented in the chapter 4, "Data Analysis and Results".

3.4.2 Qualitative Research

Rather than executing logical and statistical procedures, the qualitative research method allows researchers to create frames through smaller focus groups, one-on-one encounters, research within existing case studies, ethnographic research, observation, and record keeping.

The User Testing Group is powering 3000 of the world's top brands such as HP, Microsoft and Walmart. Their research website stated that qualitative research is a behavioral research method which seeks to understand the undertones, motivations, subjective interpretations inherent in human behavior. All these factors were beneficial for the topic of this case study thesis. The authors needed information for the why and how questions combined with the numerical questions. Clear, simple yet effective questions needed to be formulated for the data collection process. The choice of the specific target group was needed to be able recruit enough participants for the research project and set clear frames. The encounters at the airport were the methods used to collect the data. The data analysis of the results identified needs, certain themes of the participants' likes and dislikes and behavioral patterns leading to decisions were highlighted and helpful. These will be presented more in detail in the chapter of the results of the analysis.

3.4.3 Mixed Method

The mixed research method was the most convenient for this case study. The authors wanted to combine both elements by executing qualitative and quantitative methods since detailed answers were needed. Combining both methods is considered challenging and more time consuming, however, the authors thought of no other option to find the best understanding of their research problems and phenomena. The mixed method for this thesis did not have as clear of a contrast between different data collection methods as for some. As stated earlier, the qualitative questions were used only in helping passengers to answer the designed quantitative survey questions and not as an interview on their own. All answers received were for the carefully thought survey questions since those were designed to answer the defined research questions. The data received

was categorized and organized with the purpose to find connections when creating the successful solutions to the research problem.

Before beginning to analyze the data, the quantity and quality of the data should be considered and distinguished from the meaningful and meaningless data that should be left out when needed. There should be a clean and clearly categorized and organized layout that helps to identify the purpose of the analysis. Hereby, it is simple to explain and present the findings within the data.

3.5 Conducting the Survey

When creating a survey, clear and short questions with minimal time to answer will maximize the efficiency and amount of research data reserved as well as maintain the quality of the answers as the participants will not get bored. All the survey questions must answer the data requirements and defined research questions. The authors created a pre-tested draft for the survey and used it while asking their families and friends who were suitable and belonged to the target group. During these test discussions the technical features of the survey were polished to perfection to ensure a seamless experience for the participants and the authors when published.

The authors were happy to share the survey on the platforms within the aviation industry through their connections at Finnair and their commissioner Finavia while entering as visitors at Helsinki Airport along with the students of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. These channels were appropriate to publish the survey and successfully collected 83 responses in two weeks' timeframe. Additionally, the authors used their personal social media to reach more potential respondents since the authors have lived abroad adding valuable overseas friends and have relatives and friends in northern Finland who transfer at Helsinki Airport when traveling by aircraft. All data was handled according to the EU General Data Regulation (GDPR) and the respondents remained anonymous.

3.5.1 Survey Design

When designing the survey's layout and convenience, there must be questions that all of the respondents can and would like to answer as a transferring passenger:

- The respondent has transferred to another aircraft or destination at Helsinki Airport.
- The respondent has spent a minimal amount of time at the airport by e.g., walking from a gate or passport control further away from the arrival gate at Helsinki Airport. It is even more preferable if the person exited the arrival hall and checked in again via the security control in addition to using other services available at the airport e.g. assistance services for people with disabilities and reduced mobility.

The survey conducted for this thesis consisted of 18 questions, from which 6 were yes and no options combined with 4 multiple choice and 8 open-ended questions. The questionnaire is presented as images in Appendix 7. The authors were satisfied with the number of respondents and their detailed responses which would refer to a great maturity of the research questionnaire. To see if there is any correlation the authors decided to ask for the respondent's gender. The ages were categorized in groups of three from 18- to 35-year-olds. The authors found researching the passenger's experience, interactions with the airport staff and general opinions of the airport fascinating due to the many similar responses that were received. The authors decided to use English as the language for the survey since most of the respondents were English speakers and it was more convenient to discuss with the passengers only in English to have one common language throughout the data. The survey was created on Google Forms since it was a well-known tool for the authors and is commonly used for other purposes making it an easy platform for the respondents as well.

3.5.2 Passenger encounters at the airport

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, the authors decided to meet transferring passengers at the airport where they provided the possibility to fill in the online questionnaire while feeling the airports and passenger's atmosphere at the same time. This was helpful for many passengers to understand the questions when their first language was not English. The research aim was to find out how the young adult transfer passengers enjoy Helsinki Airport since their personal and detailed experiences were valuable and produced a large range of information. The encounter lasted for approximately 10 minutes with each passenger for 3 hours in total. The authors decided to read the questionnaire questions from the Google Form survey to each passenger from their iPad and wrote down the answers. This was a time efficient solution and after the COVID-19 pandemic, hygiene was considered remarkably. A positive, calm and collected moment with was spent with each passenger and smoothly followed the line up of the survey's questions; however, the conversations gave an excellent opportunity for additional conversation within the topic. The authors also wanted to minimize the errors occurring when filling in the questionnaire, therefore, filled it in for the passenger during their conversation.

4 Data Analysis and Results

This section presents the results of the passenger experience survey introduced on previous chapter. The questionnaire successfully collected 83 high quality answers which were deemed to fulfil the need for this research competently. Every answer was studied carefully and with the help of Microsoft Excel, most charts were built of the results. As mentioned, the survey had mainly open-ended-answer questions due the authors need for more specific data rather than what the multiple-choice questions could have provided. This method proved the authors with successful and various answers.

4.1 General Participant Data

The survey begun with a question “What country are you from?”. The authors decided to phrase the question more specifically to get similar data and make the processing more efficient. Nevertheless, the answers were a mix of typos and different styles of writing the country name resulting to mixed chart such as “Italy, Italian, Uk, UK, United Kingdom, Korea, south korea, Fanlsnd, Suomi”. After careful counting the survey got answers from total of 18 different countries. The variety in ethnicities delighted the authors bringing more cultural aspects to the research. In addition to previously mentioned countries such as Libya, Singapore, Japan, Canada, and US added a great mix to many European countries. However, the cultural aspects did surprisingly not make as noticeable difference in answers as thought beforehand. Participants from US who departed from Dallas and New York, and some from the British Islands who used London Heathrow praised Helsinki Airports safety, cleanliness, and quietness which varied from answers received from Japanese, Korean and Singaporeans who valued Nordic design and architecture most of all. These preferences were expected since the authors have deep understanding of cultural differences and various airports around the world. Overall, Helsinki Airport received many praises which didn’t come as a surprise after multiple awards won within the customer experience department.

The authors decided to ask the gender of the participants to see if there is any correlation. This question was marked as not mandatory and provided as an option to mark “prefer not to say” to avoid old fashion gender related expectations. All participants answered either a man or a woman, however, two left the question unanswered resulting in total of 81 answers. Overall, no variability in answers was detected to be caused by gender while cultural differences created the most correlation. As a conclusion, studying gender related correlation requires more specifically targeted research of the subject.

In the questionnaire, the age group 18-to 35-year-old was divided in three parts for the question “How old are you?”. This added more variables to the data and offered an opportunity to study correlation inside the chosen target group. Age division was more equal than expected with 33.7% of 18-24, 25.3% of 25-30, and 41% of 31-35-year-olds, which is visualized in Figure 5 below. After studying the data, it could be concluded that while older participants appreciated calmness, clear signage, and available workspaces with tables for their laptops, the younger participants generally focused more on the services such as restaurants and the visual aspects of the terminal. What were equally mentioned in all age groups was the appreciation for the free Wi-Fi and a need for more charging opportunities for electronic devices.

How old are you?
83 responses

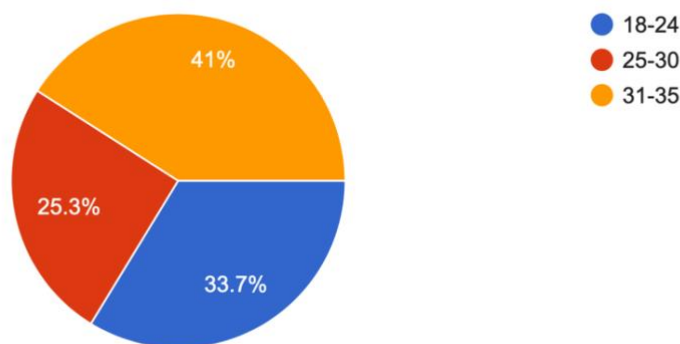


Figure 5. Age division N=83

4.2 Passenger Decision Making

One of the most important questions in addition to passengers’ experiences in the airport was to find out why the participants chose to travel through Helsinki Airport, “Why did you decide to fly through Helsinki Airport?”. After carefully studying the 83 answers and entering them to Microsoft Excel, the following results were presented more clearly. Passengers chose Helsinki as a transfer airport due two leading reasons, short and convenient connection time and Finnair, the Finnish flag carrier airline with Helsinki Airport as their HUB. Some participants specified the airline as a dominating reason due collecting Finnair’s loyalty programs tier point and One World alliance Avios points in addition to the airline’s new modified travel classes and the trustworthy brand image. From the amended chart below, it can be stated the two main reasons are highly dominating with leading percentage of 34% for connection time and 32% for Finnair. Some passengers also stated the suitable flight ticket price (17%) and Helsinki Airport being the only option for them (13%) as

the main reasons for their decision making. Here we can already conclude the strong national commercial airline, Finnair, and the convenient size of the airport which enables efficient transferring as the two of the most important global competitive advantages for Helsinki Airport in the commercial aviation industry especially in Europe.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO FLY THROUGH HELSINKI AIRPORT?

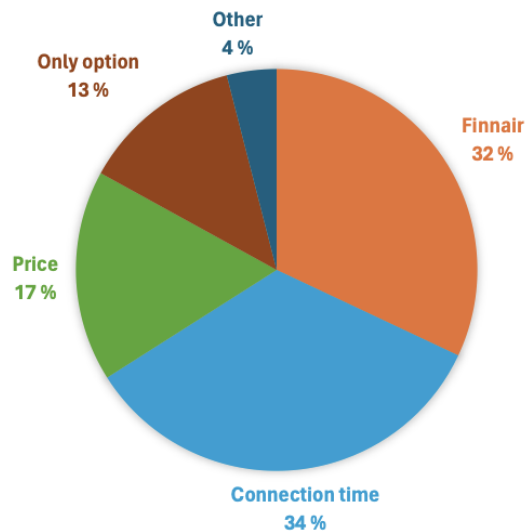


Figure 6. Passengers' decision-making N=83

The Content theory is motivating peoples' decision making when e.g., receiving rewards, therefore, influenced these passengers to choose Helsinki Airport due to the interest to reach Finnair's loyalty program higher levels by flying with the airline. Content theory's biggest motivational factor is to achieve the wished goal, i.e., having the eye on the price. Surprisingly, price was only the third most important factor which clearly shows the authors how passengers seem to value efficiency even over the price.

Finavia lost most of its transfer passengers during the Ukrainian War. Therefore, to understand the participants of this study better and to collect intriguing route data, the survey asked both the first departing point and final destination. After entering the data to Excel to create two charts, which are presented below, it can be seen that the structure is similar within Europe and expectedly leading on both charts, Asia being strongly second and domestic destinations only a few percentages ahead of North America. This data was not of course comparable to all current transfer passengers at Helsinki Airport, however, providing this research with good additional data.

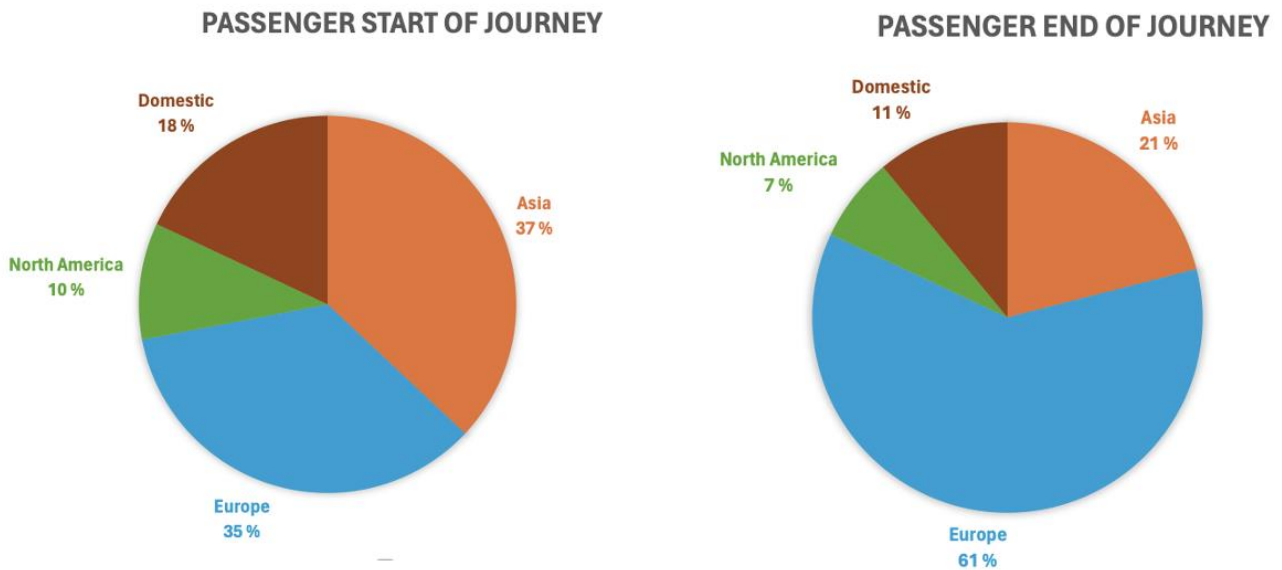


Figure 7. Passengers start and end of journey N=83

4.3 Likes and Dislikes

As an excellent customer experience research should, the participants were asked about their likes and dislikes they had of Helsinki Airport with free text questions. This provided them a chance to answer as fully as they preferred. This subject was researched with following questions: “What do you enjoy the most about the airport?” and “What could Helsinki Airport do better?”. When analyzing the comments, The Theory of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs can be seen in most of the answers, thus, could be said travelling being an experience guiding the main focus to the basic needs of food, rest, health, and safety. From the chart below, distribution of comments is highlighted. The architecture and newly renovated terminal are Finavia’s pride, and many praised the airport’s modern, Nordic visuals and beautiful architecture presented in the chart with 24%. Closely in second place, the restaurants with 22%, being praised especially by the passengers on Schengen side. Many were extremely satisfied of the new restaurant area and its offerings.

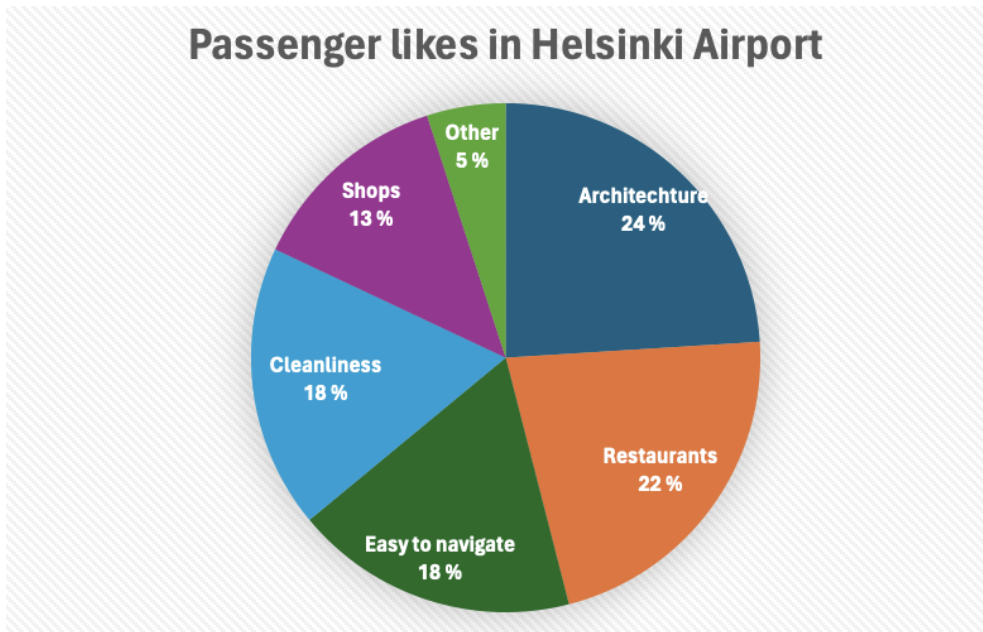


Figure 8. Likes in Helsinki Airport N=83

As mentioned, cleanliness was mainly highlighted by passengers who came from airports in US and UK, however, mentioned in other's comments as well. It seems something quite simple and default to have clean premises, however, clearly not as invested in in some other airports as in Helsinki and Finavia's passengers truly knew how much to appreciate it.

In an airport like Helsinki with tight connection times easy navigation and clear signage are one of the keys to provide excellent customer experience. With the new terminal renovations Finavia decided to take "one roof" approach having everything under one roof to simplify the layout for the passengers. This decision was mentioned in the results with 18% of the answers.

"It's compact and easy to navigate in comparison to larger international airports, it also has a cozy atmosphere that you can only find in smaller ones but still has all the services of a larger international airport."

Moving on to dislikes and improvement ideas which the participants provided the authors with through the survey. In the first discussion with the commissioner and Finavia's contact person, the lack of seating areas in Schengen corner gates were acknowledged, therefore, the authors expected it to appear in the results. This showcases Finavia's great customer knowledge since the lack of proper seating and relaxing areas on Schengen side rose over all the others concerns with rattling 41% of comments. Second topic was restaurants with 22%. This came as a surprise due same support percentage in likes section, however, when inspecting the samples more closely, the lack of restaurants was not the main reason. It was the provided selection. Most of the answers highlighted the need for more healthy food options since many felt there

were currently mostly fast-food options available. Young generations clearly appreciate a healthy lifestyle when travelling. Some also wished more special beers as the restaurants' selections and wider wine collection to choose from.

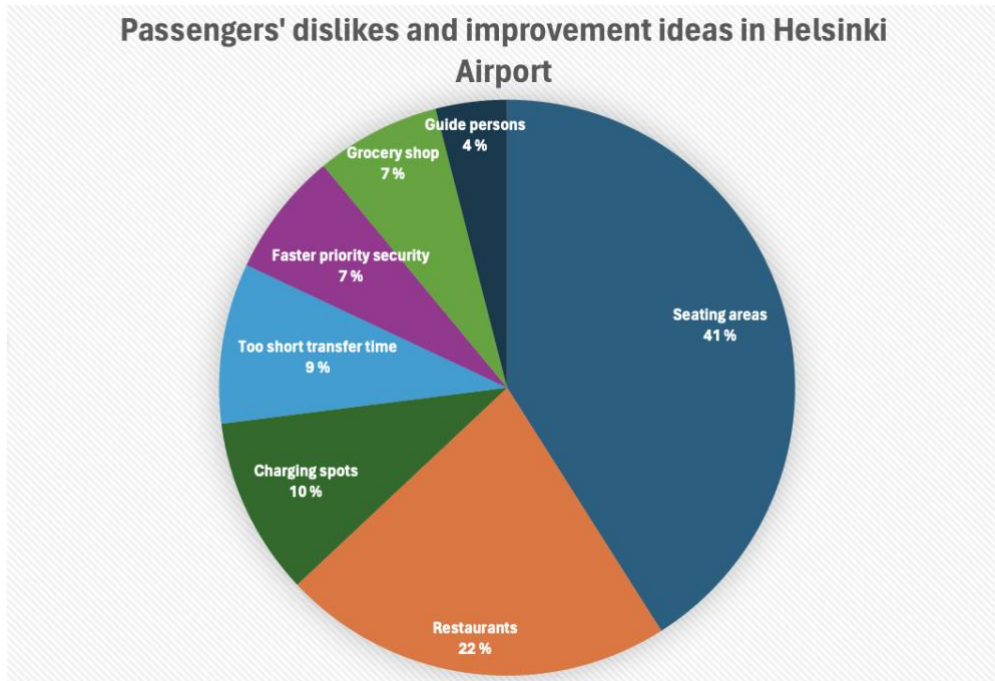


Figure 9. Dislikes and improvement ideas N=82

In addition to seating areas, charging spots for electrical devices was also discussed with Finavia beforehand and acknowledged as a place of improvement. Surprisingly, it appeared in third place with 10% of the comments. The contributing factor could be the participants answering from non-Schengen side who appreciated the number of available charging spots at that certain side of the airport and that the complaints only came from the passengers met at the Schengen gate area.

Too short transferring times with current long gate distances was mentioned along with the wish for faster priority security lanes and better possibilities for short connection speed lines. The passengers mentioned that the airports the authors compared Helsinki Airport in chapter 2, provided them with these fast lanes for connecting passengers and Helsinki Airport did not. Even though passengers praised easy navigation in the airport many seem to think the connection time provided is too short for some distances. Many specifically mentioned when transferring from Schengen to non-Schengen side the distance were too long to cover. This category, however, cannot be measured properly with this research due passengers the authors met at the airport had longer transfer times. On a global scale, Helsinki Airport is competing in a

different size class compared to the biggest ones in the industry. However, when provided too little time, even Helsinki Airport can feel bigger than it is.

Few passengers additionally mentioned the wish to have a grocery store on the gate side of the airport. When told the airport has one but on the arrival hall, they said with shorter connection times it would be convenient to have it at hand. It is understandable with short a connection time it might not be possible to exit the gate area. One comment also wished for more greenery e.g., living green plant walls in the airport which could go well with Finavia's sustainability goals and nature focused strategy.

“Boost marketing abroad (it's design, offering, convenient transfer to the city...) and make the airport a destination itself. The secondhand store idea is cool; things like that draw attention. You want people to come “experience” the airport and offer something unique. Maybe look into creating more “wow” elements or something “crazy” that makes the headlines and people want to come see it themselves. Helsinki Airport should encourage travelers to extend their layover for ‘a first touch’ of Finland. Also maybe look into creating a luxury experience to attract wealthier international passengers (going to Lapland in most cases) that guarantees a luxury experience throughout the whole journey.”

This comment above clearly seeks for Finavia to achieve one of the three top types of customer experiences: memorable, meaningful, or even transformational experience in Helsinki Airport. As mentioned, these create lasting customer relations and strengthen the brand image globally. All these three require those unique “wow” elements the comment was describing and are difficult to achieve. After participants expressed their thoughts, they were asked if they would choose Helsinki Airport again. The answer was 100% yes. Even though there were many dislikes, passengers were overall incredibly satisfied with the airport and no major faults were found.

4.4 Social Media

Social media has grown its influence throughout the years and strengthened its position as one of the leading marketing tools. Also in this research, social media's influence in customer decisions is given high value making it important platform to research. As previously stated, according to the current research by Skift Research, Gen Zs and Millennials use social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube when planning their travels. In this thesis, the authors aimed to study their target group's social media presence and how it correlates to Helsinki Airport's visibility and the passengers' travel decisions.

This subject was studied with asking “What media platforms do you use?” and “What platforms have you seen Helsinki Airport on?”. The two questions were provided with options of most popular applications and “other” option for the participants to add something else they use if not found on the list. They were allowed to answer multiple platforms in case they use more than one. The results did not surprise with their predictability. Overall, the question below received 82 answers having Instagram a winner among the options.

What social media platforms do you use?

82 responses

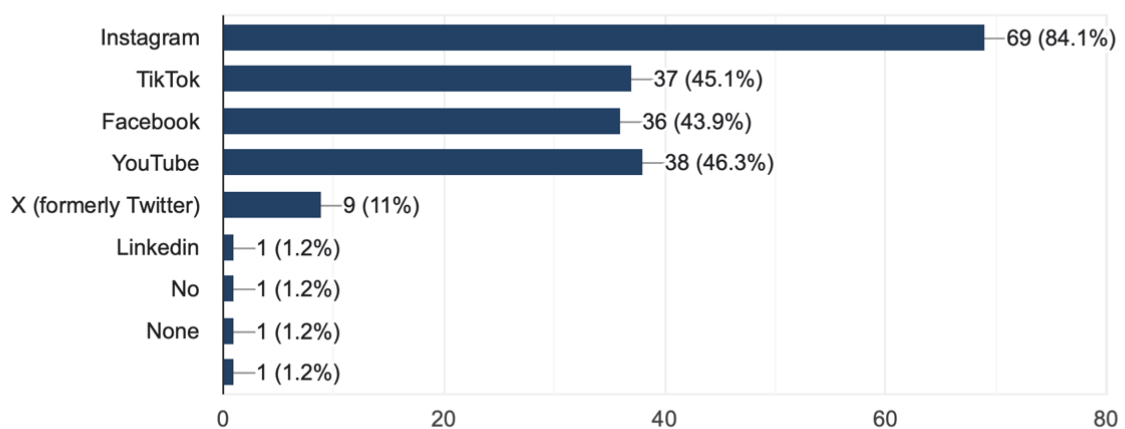


Figure 10. Social media platform usage N=82

Following, they were asked whether they had seen any Helsinki Airport related content on those platforms. This content includes Finavia’s marketing content and any other post about the airport on any account. The purpose was to find out what kind of visibility does the airport have. The question had yes or no answer options from which 58% has seen some content and 42% had not. The following question aimed to specify on what platforms that content was seen. This question only received 48 responses which could indicate the unsurety of the respondents and unreliability of the data.

As on the previous question the participants were provided with an option to choose multiple choices or add something else on the chart. The chart is provided below on Figure 11. The addition “mainoksia eri alustoilla” translates to “on various platforms” which again indicates the uncertainty of the respondents of where exactly they have seen the content. The answers also followed the same pattern as the previous question having a similar division between the platforms. Here one could conclude that a future development target for Finavia could be a stronger social media presence such as London Heathrow Airport.

What platforms have you seen Helsinki Airport on?

48 responses

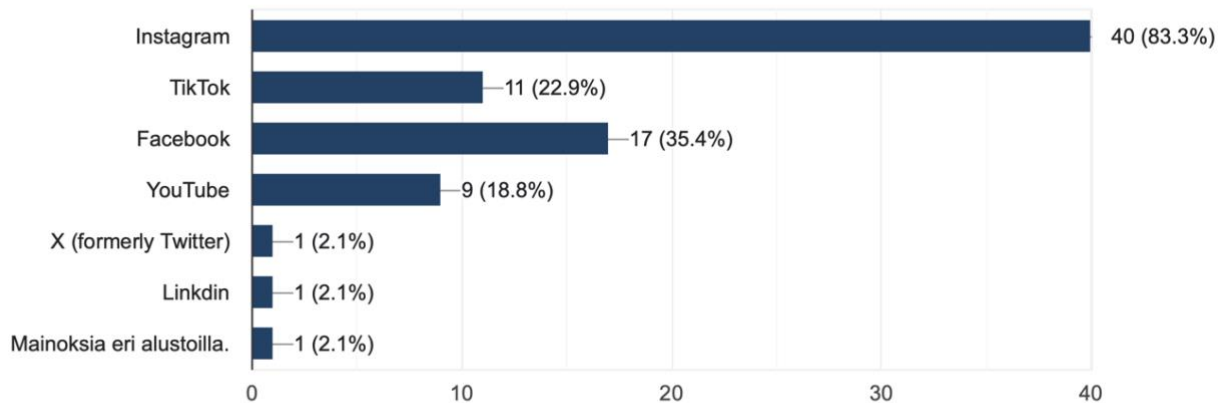


Figure 11. Social media platform appearance N=48

4.5 Global Scale Comparison

Final question on the survey was probably the toughest. The participants were asked to name other airports they had travelled through and compare them to Helsinki Airport, “What other airports have you used before and how would you compare Helsinki Airport to them? “. The survey was filled with quality results from which are listed here below.

“I’ve been to many airports; I feel like it depends on the size of the city/country. I think the design at Helsinki is clean and modern, has everything you need. I like when airports have good signs (so u know where to go) and is fresh, has options for food/toilets and charging spots. Some airports do lack the modern feel and options for food, reating spots etc.”

“I’ve used many, but I’d say HKI has been the most functional, cleaner and easiest one to access/navigate. In a hurry, you appreciate that.”

“I have been to alot of different airport, but they are usuallymuch more chaotic and not as easy to navigate through”

“Many different airports. Like Helsinki, because it is of high standard and is very clean. Welcoming.”

“Heathrow, complex and slow, Arlanda suprisingly limited food options, Riga missing services and food, Split crowded and lacking food, glasgow oldish but fast, Barcelona crowded and slow, Milan really slow and long distances”

“JFK, Doha, Haneda. Helsinki is better in terms of Wi-Fi. Also, the signs are clear. It’s easy to walk inside the airport.”

“Hong Kong Airport - it was worst. Service, public order, cleanliness...etc Doha airport - totally different atmosphere, but well organised and high-tech like Helsinkis Airport Other Airport in Europe - Each country had its own advantages. However, Helsinki airport was the best in terms of service, smooth procedures, newness of machines, design, cleanliness, friendliness of staff, comfort, and everything else!”

“Copenhagen: Compared to Helsinki, a less modern more "traditional" airport. I find Helsinki much brighter, smooth but both offer similar quality of services.”

“I've been many airports around the world. After the renovation of Helsinki airport, I think the interior design is one of the top also there is no need to dispose liquid when passing through security control which is very convenient for people.”

As can be interpret, Helsinki Airport has achieved multiple customer experience awards and is globally a great competitor. The passengers are able to recognize the differentiating factors and appreciate Finavia as the airport’s operator. They are aware of their needs and can value a good airport while offering further development ideas and criticize the airport objectively with comparison to competitors.

4.6 Summary of Results

Table 2 defines the results by summarizing the answers gathered with the survey conducted. The results to main and sub-questions are determined succinctly.

Table 2. Summary of survey results

Main research question:
What are the needs of transferring passengers in the age group of 18 to 35 at Helsinki Airport?
<p>Passengers expressed the need for more calm seating areas for Schengen gates, healthier food choices, charging spots, and shortness of provided transfer time due long distances was criticized. Faster priority security line, grocery store to the gate side and more guides were also suggested as good future development areas.</p> <p>The Nordic architecture, clean premises, and good signage were praised as well as the new restaurant area on the Schengen side. Most of the participants were pleased about the atmosphere the freshly made architectural changes have created to the terminal.</p> <p>Overall, the key words for a good airport experience seem to be: effortless, clean, calm, and variety (regarding restaurants and shops).</p>

Sub-questions:
Why did passengers choose Helsinki Airport for transferring?
<p>The dominating reasons for the participants to choose Helsinki Airport for transferring were Finnair, shorter connection time, and the most suitable price of the flight tickets. Some also stated the route through Helsinki to have been their only option, mostly passengers connecting to domestic flights, and few had personal reasons like stopping to meet their family or friends living in Helsinki.</p> <p>Many participants could afford to care about the airline they were flying with, making Finnair the Finnish flag carrier the biggest reason along with the shorter transfer time than competitors.</p>
How do passengers define a good airport?
<p>From the data collected it can be concluded that the most important features making a good airport are clear signage, modern spaces and equipment, and clean premises, while offering wide selection of quality services.</p>
How to achieve a loyal customer base as an airport?
<p>Successful experience is the utter minimum with achieving a loyal customer base. For Helsinki Airport, some passengers don't have any other route choice, but for the ones that do, they most likely would not choose Helsinki again if they have a bad experience and miss their connection flight. As determined by the data collected, the most important purpose for the transfer airport is the continuation of the passenger's flight route and stick to the original plan.</p> <p>In addition, to create a stronger loyalty base, the provider should aim to produce even stronger experiences like introduced in Figure 2 on chapter 2.3.2 <i>Five types of customer experiences</i>.</p>

5 Discussion and conclusion

This final chapter of the thesis will present the discussion surfaced from the results of the executed research in addition to a combination of future development ideas and authors professional knowledge from before. The final sub-chapter presents the authors' experience gained from the thesis project, their personal goals and learnings together with self-evaluation and final thoughts.

5.1 Interpretation of the results

The topic for this thesis was chosen out of the interest and curiosity towards Helsinki Airport and Finavia. The final target group was specified and agreed upon with Finavia's representatives. The main objective was to gather a understanding and familiarize the authors with the needs of a younger passenger within the age group of 18-35-year olds and discover new possibilities which Finavia might not be aware of yet. Questionnaire was determined as the most efficient data collection tool for this research, thus, was executed both fully online and face-to-face with passengers inside the airside of the terminal of Helsinki Airport. The questionnaire data was handled according to EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and all the answers were anonymous.

To conduct research about the lacking's within the customer experience at Helsinki Airport was challenging due the awareness about the awards Helsinki Airport has won as the best Northern European Airport Finavia's. Nevertheless, the authors were eager to accept the challenge and try to find new development ideas Finavia might appreciate. Passengers participating through the questionnaire provided valuable data with good quality answers with information about their age group's preferences and thoughts on how to improve their travel experiences. The following section will evaluate the quality of the answers and the success of the research.

To refer to what has been mentioned in the chapters before, the main research question for this study was to determine the needs of transferring passengers in an age group of 18 to 35 in Helsinki Airport. Answers to this question were relatively easy to find with Finavia's already thorough knowledge about their general passenger base and clear correlation for the expectations. The most expected points of more calm seating areas for Schengen gates, charging spots, and shortness of provided transfer time due long distances were mentioned supporting Finavia's research methods and proving their reliability. The survey also answered to the demanded need for more specific data revealing the need for more healthier food choices, faster priority security line, grocery store and more guides to the gate side.

Helsinki Airport also received much praise from the participants, who viewed it as a strong competitor on a global scale. The participants were impressed with the architecture and expressed their immense satisfaction with the cleanliness of the premises and good signage, which made navigation inside the terminal easy. Most of the participants were pleased about the atmosphere the freshly made architectural changes have created in the terminal.

5.1.1 Reliability and Validity

This sub chapter will present the reliability of the research questions and the collected results. Since the main question of this thesis aimed to present suggestions on how Helsinki Airport could improve their premises for their passengers' comfort and services which might still be missing even though the airport has won prizes of their well-executed customer experience strategy.

Many transfer passengers traveling via Helsinki Airport were content with the airport and did not seem too demanding or picky with services offered for their travels. The expression the authors had when meeting the passengers at the airport was very humble, most needs were met, and the passengers praised the architecture, cleanliness and quietness of the airport especially when they compared Helsinki to other airports globally. The authors were pleasantly surprised that the theory gained from online research before the executed questionnaire was accurate and correlated with the survey results.

Even though the answers were clearly well thought, and the participants' thoughts correlated with Finavia's research and the literature on the subject, the reliability of the data should be questioned. Roughly 67% of the answers were collected completely online through shared questionnaire link posing issues with the data quality. Can the researchers trust people to answer correctly and truly belong to the correct target group? If the participants answer later after their travel and reflect their experience on their memories, are the answers reliable? These two questions raised concerns, thus, the authors aimed to increase the reliability of the data by also meeting with the research subjects face-to-face inside the terminal building. This cancelled out many factors causing uncertainty like confirming the correct target group and increasing the possibility of more reliable answers without later memories influencing the truth.

The answers collected were mostly positive with minor alternations suggested to improve the transfer experience even more. Most know issues like lack of seating spaces on Schengen area as well as charging spots were mentioned. However, as Finnair Cabin Crew Members and previously as a Gate Service Agent at the airport, the authors are aware of many passengers' transfers experience suffer with short connection times and missed flights. As employees of the industry, many unfortunate events are encountered almost every day were sweaty and stressed transfer

passengers run through the long distance to their transfer gate or airline delays and still miss their connection flight even though they had the promised transfer time. Too short transfer time can also cause the airlines delay minutes which is reflecting badly on both them and the airport in question. This information was gained while on duty within the last years and via our commissioner at Finavia, and its existence was agreed upon. Even though this showed in the data of this research, only 9% agreed the transfer time to be too short. This number is not comparable to the reality due the passengers which the authors met with had a longer transfer schedule. To acquire more accurate data, specified research in collaboration with operating airlines should be done. Continuing problems with connection times could lead passengers to choose a different airport in the future.

Overall, the quality of this research pleases the authors and fulfilled the research goal of the face-to-face encounters while exceeding the expectations with the depth of the freely written answers on the survey. The authors took risk placing multiple free written questions to the survey which was mostly distributed online. Even though there were many yes, no, and I don't know type answers, the quality of many long and well thought ideas were perfect for this research and overrode the need for more answers.

5.1.2 Key Recommendations

As stated, both authors and participants for the study recognize the value of Helsinki Airport and its strengths in global competition. However, development can always be made and through this study few future focus points were found.

As discovered from the study by McKinsey, only 59% of global passengers are happy with their pre-flight experiences at airports. Additionally, these passengers highlighted the importance of investing in new technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) which would improve the experience at airports. (Bajpai. A. 2019.) With the new security check technology Helsinki has already taken steps to develop with the industry's global digitalization. This received compliments also in the research questionnaire executed. However, the industry is continuously growing and as could be seen, 80 out of 83 respondents of the survey said to use some social media platforms with their digital devices. The market share of the digital natives will increase in the future as well as airport technology such as digital identities and automated border crossings will dominate the aviation industry's technology (SITA mega trends 2023). "Younger travelers demand a more integrated digital journey, and the industry will be forced to respond. They will accelerate the digital way of life and popularize fringe technologies by 2027" (SITA, 2023).

Therefore, Helsinki Airport should focus on technological growth as a part of fulfilling passengers' needs on efficiency and more specifically the mentioned faster priority security. Keeping up with the megatrends of digitalization compliments the airport's brand image and interest as well as attracts passengers when widely marketed.

With digitalization social media becomes more important. It is constantly evolving powerful marketing tool that should be utilized to its full potential. Many of the participants remembered seeing Helsinki Airport related content or marketing on social media but were unable to name the specific platform or whether it was targeted marketing or someone's personal posts. This indicates the growth for potential social media marketing for Helsinki Airport especially in the future when digitalization will increase the usage of such tools.

As stated, the too short transfer time was mentioned among the survey answers, however, with this research the data did not correlate to reality. The problem is believed to be larger, thus, Finavia should focus on to determine specific disadvantages and advantages with the current set minimum transfer time at Helsinki Airport. As discovered in this research the shorter transfer time was one of the main reasons for majority of the passengers the authors met with had chosen Helsinki as their transfer airport. This proves it as an important competitive advantage, however, how many in reality have it too short and miss their connection flights. Does the advantage of passenger decision making while purchasing their flight tickets still beat the amount of damage cause to the passengers with missed connections? Or could slightly longer transfer time still beat the competitors and result to more good experiences and even growth of revenue with passenger spending longer time in the terminal and utilize the already provided services?

5.2 Learning and Self-Evaluation

This final section is dedicated to both author's individual chapters revealing their thoughts and personal growth during this thesis process. These chapters are honest, diary like writings picturing the authors' experiences and feelings about their thesis project.

5.2.1 Louise Lindström

With the support of the introduction course for this thesis and its clear guidelines, I felt very pleased with how my parts of the chapters ended up nicely and clearly written. After reading through the thesis multiple times and spending time on correcting the grammar during July. I actually enjoyed challenging myself and learning more about how to write correctly in the academical English language and researched online within right techniques to build the sentences with correct word order. I noticed how correcting small details took surprisingly long and was efficiently educating.

Additionally, I wanted to learn how to correctly use and mark the online -, and book sources, markings the images and how to create and mention figures or charts, which is easier for me now.

It was lovely how we helped each other with co-working, editing and checking each other's chapters with additional content was something I really valued. I am a planner and team work kind of person and this thesis was performed excellently for me since we both enjoy working in teams. The first and the last chapters were written together and all chapters were cross checked by each other to get a fresh pair of eyes reading and adding missing content. I did consider writing my thesis on my own when I started my bachelor studies, however, getting severely sick last year did not make it that easy to execute it on my own since I am still healing. Therefore, I was happy and now grateful that I had Pihla as my thesis partner, and how much fun we had doing it together. The entire project was planned and balanced perfectly and we did not face any stress and stuck to the timeline, even though we flew at the same time we managed to find time to work together. My study leave helped me personally very much with having one week off every month devoted to the thesis. Pihla and I have worked in multiple school assignments and lived together during our exchange in South-Korea, and now were colleagues and close friends beyond all this, therefore we know each other perfectly. Her family faced a hard loss last year and her starting a new job as cabin crew member is not the easiest to combine with a huge research like a thesis. This is why I asked her to join me and we enjoyed every moment of it and supported each other when the other one had less strength and time.

I enjoyed the topic we chose and the research within it since working as a cabin crew member for Finnair led me to encounters with transfer passengers in the past that had me curious until this day to know more about how they experience Helsinki Airport while catching their connecting flights. Coming up with this the topic was fun and I had to be creative from another angle and challenge myself excitedly when Finnavia accepted to be our commissioner. This gave me a great opportunity and I felt that I wanted to learn more about our HUB airport.

Along side with creating the layout of the thesis chapter topics and exploring the research questions the entire journey was very fun and surprisingly challenging to keep it simple and within a frame. I realized it is very easy to go too wide instead of keeping it more summarized within a certain topic. Previous teachers complemented me on having an eye for keeping my assignments neat and using nice color palettes in my previous assignments, therefore, I took the initiative to suggest myself as the editor within this department and Pihla appreciated it since she is present in these matters as well.

It was fun to see how my gained knowledge from the years and courses and its provided tools were working and supporting me during this thesis. I feel more confident to suggest and point out

things within assignments and get excited to hear new great points along the way from the others. Pihla taught me a lot as well with telling her view points. This time I did not feel like there was as many confusions as during the previous semesters when things were new to me, which is a great and a motivating sign. It makes me eager to learn more and feel less stressed about the upcoming courses. This supports my excitement and motivation to continue with my Masters degree studies. Today, I see the aviation industry in a wider way. I am very happy to have found an industry that makes me excited to dive deeper into and see what else is out there. It feels great to discuss with my colleagues, classmates and other aviation industry people about the topics that I have learned about so far!

It was a pleasure to work on this thesis! The courses during these two years supported the key learnings and knowledge one needs to have before writing a thesis. I enjoyed how the topics within this thesis were new, informative and important to know about with the aim to understand the airports operations within the customer experience and if the transferring passengers needs are met or if they have been taken into consideration.

I did very much enjoy working with our advisor, I could very much tell her enthusiasm towards the topic and us, being familiar students of hers, definitely gave me great motivation and comfort. The topic closest to my heart is definitely the passenger encounters and motivational theories part. I am definitely a people, face-to-face person and maybe that is the reason for being most interested in developing our thesis research topic. Working as a cabin crew member this is a subject that we do not discuss about enough with the passengers who might have been running to catch the connecting flight when taking off from Helsinki Airport. Thus, I wanted to learn more about it.

Even though it has been tricky to have moments to work together at the same time, we chatted and called actively and replied as soon as we had a day off to help each other. We both had a positive attitude towards this thesis and truly had fun while working on it. I learned a lot from Pihla, we each had strengths within different in addition to same areas. Therefore, we taught each other's very much while complementing our writing style. We had a respectful and equal amount of work. If sometimes the other person felt like there was no writers block, they let the text writing slow and the next month it was the other ones turn to write more. There was a nicely balanced atmosphere between us with a fun hint to it.

I would like to thank my thesis partner, our advisor and commissioner for a great thesis journey and experience! The content of this thesis is excellent, and I cannot wait to use this newly gained knowledge someday in my future work life within the aviation industry!

5.2.2 Pihla Karvonen

My first thought when starting to plan the thesis for this degree was to do it alone. During the past semesters we did a lot of group assignments, and don't get me wrong I love working as a part of a team, however, I thought it would be a nice change and a challenge to execute my thesis completely by myself. However, as they say, a life happened. Something horrible came to an even more horrible end just last autumn when I was supposed to start the thesis process and my focus was completely on the most important, my family.

So, when Louise my dear friend suggested we do the thesis together I immediately agreed. Not because I thought I would have less to do this way absolutely not I have high morals thank you very much, but because she has always been the most encouraging and supportive friend I have ever had. She is my colleague, classmate, dear friend and an important support on anything I encounter in life. She truly understands me. Therefore, I wanted to do this thesis with her because I didn't believe I would get anything done by myself. Usually, I am very goal-oriented person with good time management skills, this time however, I wasn't sure I could have the right mindset to write the whole thesis alone and keep all the strings in my mourning hands.

When we first started writing this thesis, I was quite overwhelmed. There were so many rules how to do something and what we should do and when. I have always been freer writer and not so caring about what specific marginals or font to use and so on. Of course, I have always followed the provided writing guidelines but especially the thesis felt strict having more things to consider than a regular course essay. Therefore, this project was very educational for me since I had to first find the correct instructions and then learn how to use them. How properly use sources and references intext or how to build figures, were something I hadn't paid that much attention before. The most difficult part for me was to understand the idea behind all the rules that felt pointless for me. Why should it matter if a reference has a comma or dot or why does it have to be placed like that?

I am still not sure why most of the writing guidelines are so polished to the tiniest detail, or annoying someone could say, but maybe it's to teach us how to use the programs, search information, focus, and simply how to follow rules. Writing a paper like thesis is not just about opening the first google link, copy-paste the information with citation marks and be done. It's learning time management, self-restrain and using all the technical tools needed to build clean entirety compiling all requirements. Or maybe it's like football. If every player would have their own rules the whole game would fall apart and no-one would know how to judge, what are the rules and who won.

Our main goal was to make this thesis a pleasant and stress-free experience to both. Thus, we set deadlines while we progressed and did not make a strict schedule on the very first day. I feel like we both liked it and this method also worked well with our full-time work schedule. We wrote when we had time and felt energized to produce text and always afterwards made notes for the other what we had done and what questions and thoughts raised. Then the other read the part and could freely edit and add their own ideas to the text. I feel like we both complimented each other with our knowledge and skills and were able to distribute the workload evenly during the whole process.

As said, my goals for the thesis changed quite dramatically right in the beginning. I thought the thesis would be my personal growth, well, something else forced me to grow instead. Despite my personal struggles during the time, I am happy I can now be proud of myself and my amazing writing partner who did an amazing work with this thesis and supported me during this project. We both gave all we could to do our absolute best and worked hard while keeping a good atmosphere and cheering each other on. I want to also thank our partner Finavia with great communication and opportunities they provided us during the process. Maybe I should use a word “commissioner”, but I don’t feel like it suits the case. Finavia supported our project not to just benefit from our work, but they made us feel like they truly wanted to help us with our thesis. Thank you so much for the great experience and collaboration.

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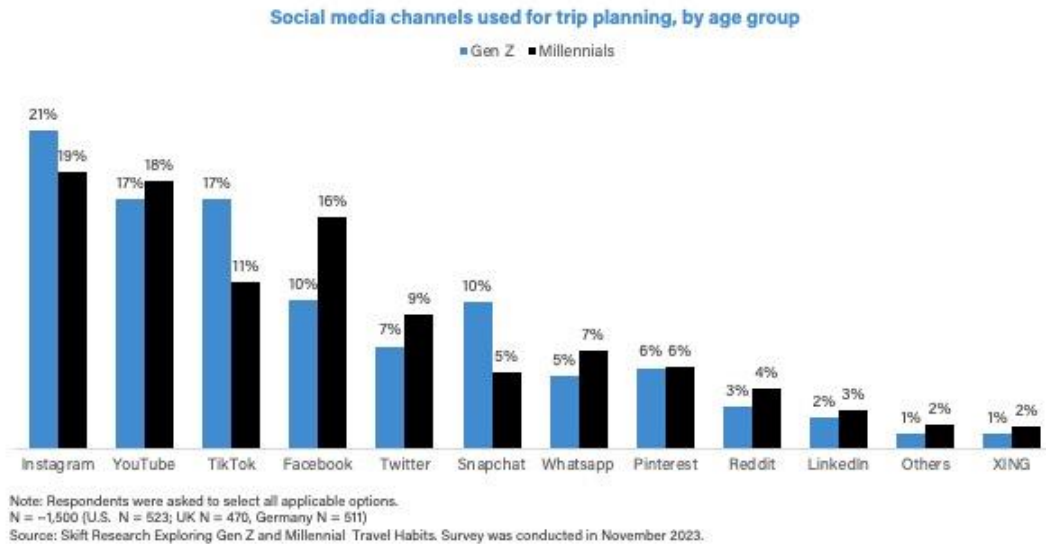
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Appendices

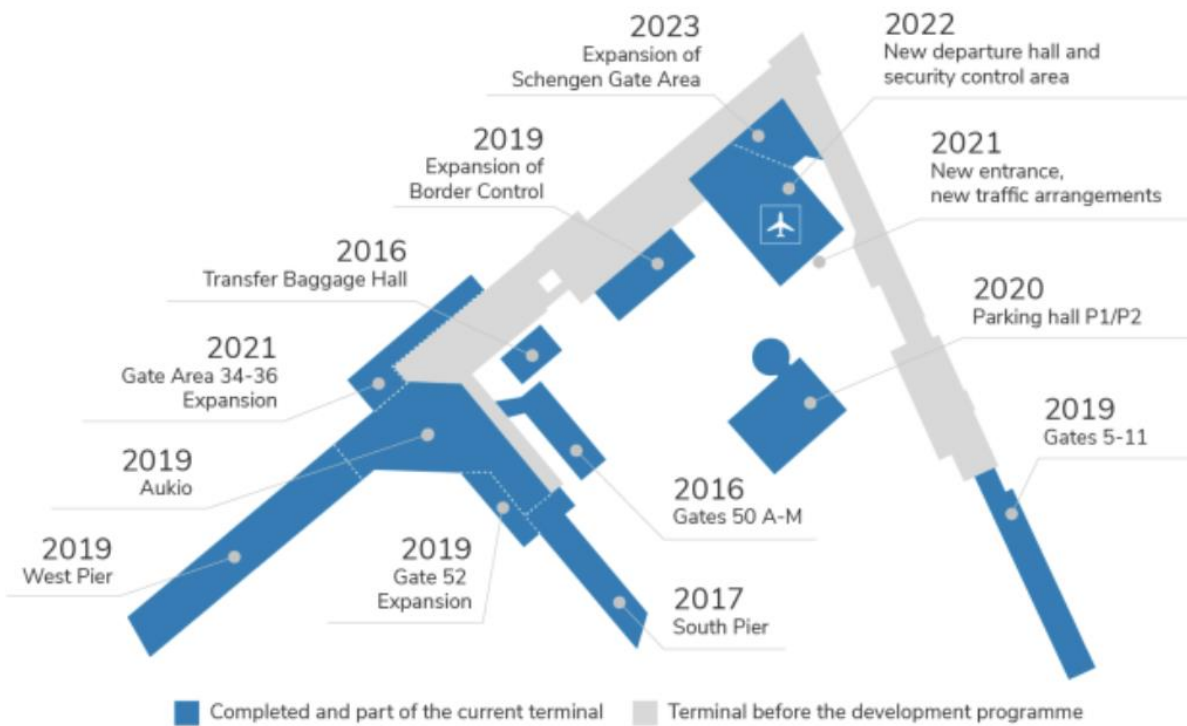
Appendix 1. Social media platforms used for travel planning by the Millennials and Gen Z generations, Skift Research 2024



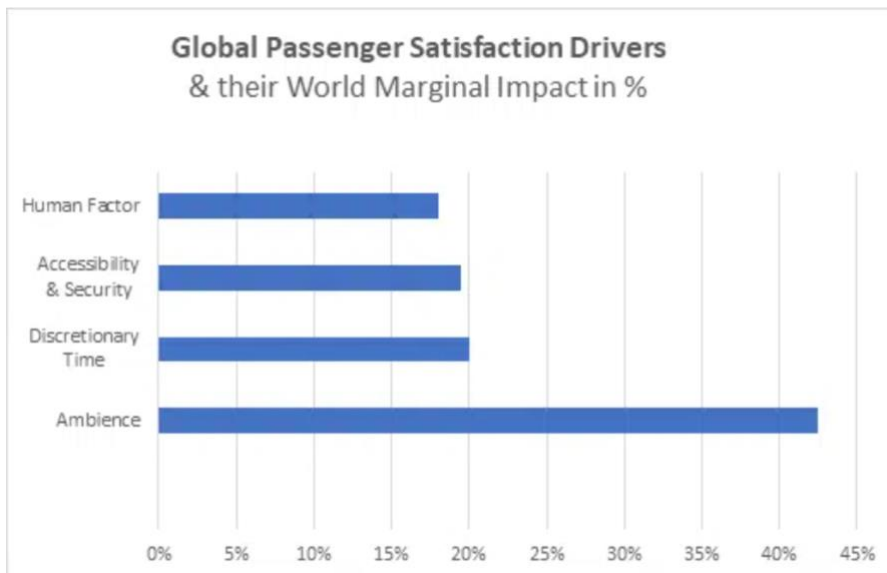
Appendix. 2 Generations defined by name, birth year and ages in 2024 Beresford Research

Generations	Born	Current Ages
Gen Z	1997 – 2012	12 – 27
Millennials	1981 – 1996	28 – 43

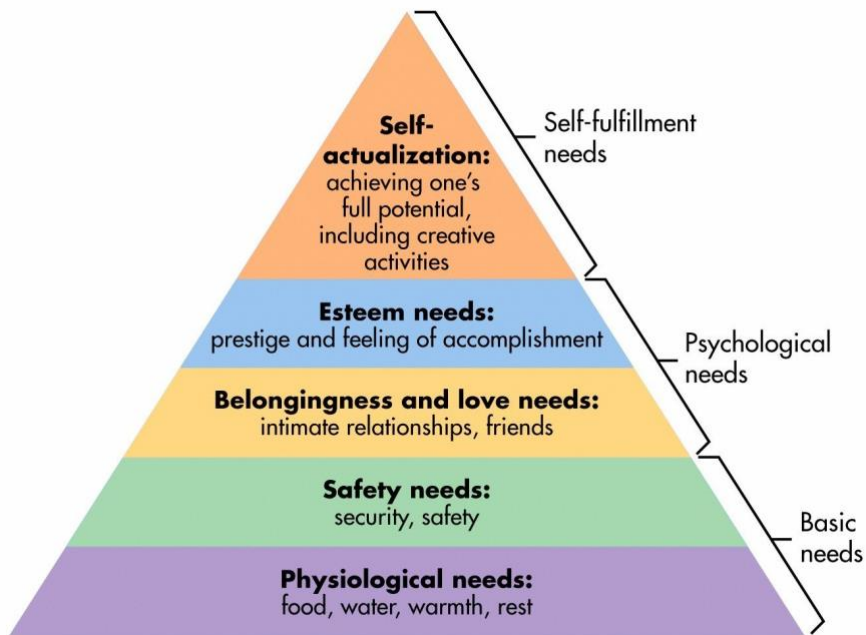
Appendix. 3 Map: Helsinki Airport and its services are being enhanced in different areas of the airport, Finavia 2024



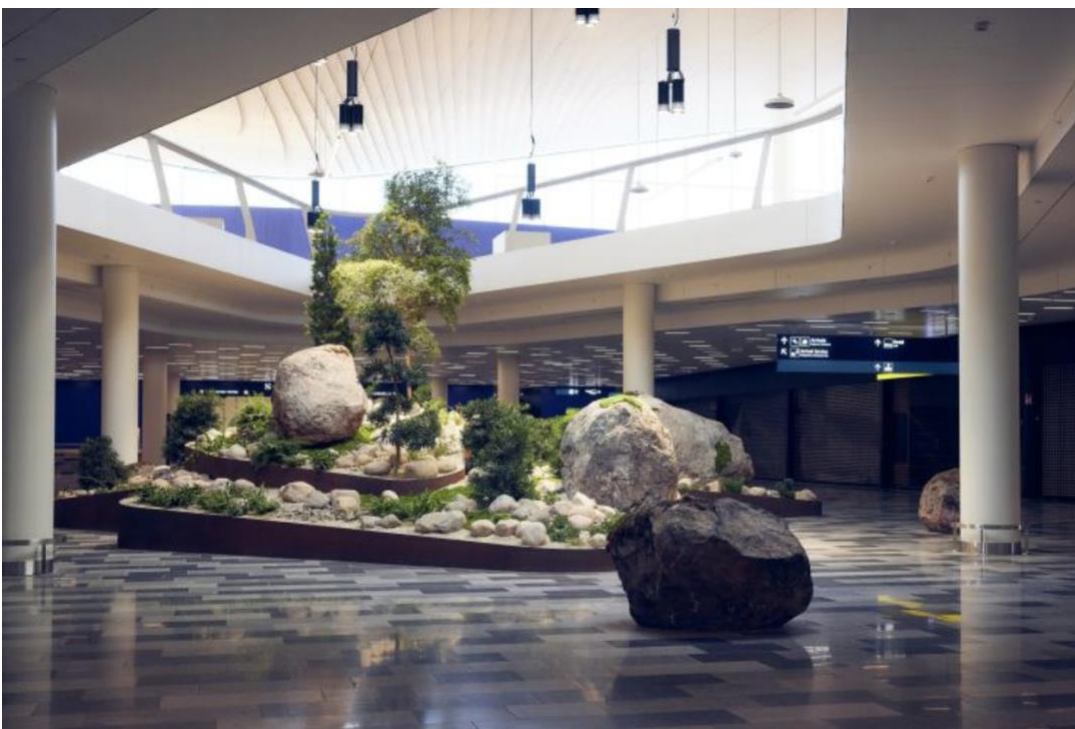
Appendix 4. Global Passenger Satisfaction Drivers, ACI World Airport Service Quality Programme 2023



Appendix. 5. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid, Simple Psychology 2024



Appendix 6. Helsinki Airport Arrival Hall, Finavia 2022



Appendix. 7. The Survey Questionnaire Images

Helsinki Airport Customer Experience Survey 2024

This research survey is collecting data for a Bachelor Thesis, studying customer experience of 18 to 35-year-old transfer passengers at Helsinki Airport in collaboration with our commissioner, Helsinki Airport, Finavia.

All data are handled according to EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the answers are anonymous.

lo_anna@live.se [Vaihda tiliä](#)



Ei jaettu

*** Pakollinen kysymys**

1. What country are you from? *

Oma vastauksesi

2. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

3. How old are you? *

- 18-24
- 25-30
- 31-35

4. From what airport did you start your journey? *

Oma vastauksesi

5. What is your final destination airport? *

Oma vastauksesi

6. Is Helsinki the only transfer airport to your destination? *

Yes

No

7. Why did you decide to fly through Helsinki Airport? *

Oma vastauksesi

8. What do you enjoy the most about the airport? *

Oma vastauksesi

9. What could Helsinki Airport do better? *

Oma vastauksesi

10. Are your needs met with the services available at Helsinki Airport? *

Yes

No

11. If your needs are not met, what services would you wish Helsinki Airport to offer?

Oma vastauksesi

12. Is it your first time visiting Helsinki Airport? *

Yes

No

13. Would you come back for your next travels? *

Yes

No

14. Do you belong to any of the following Airline Alliance Loyalty Programs? *

- OneWorld
- Star Alliance
- SkyTeam
- No I am not part of any of these programs.

15. Did you choose your travel route to collect loyalty points? *

- Yes
- No

16. What social media platforms do you use?

- Instagram
- TikTok
- Facebook
- YouTube
- X (formerly Twitter)
- Muu: _____

17. Have you seen any Helsinki Airport related posts on social media? *

- Yes
- No

18. What other airports have you used before and how would you compare Helsinki Airport to them? *

Oma vastauksesi