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The effect of visibility of environmental friendliness in hotels

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The effect of visibility of environmental friendliness in hotels

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This research studies the visibility of environmental friendliness in the hotel industry and whether or not it can have a positive effect, especially with profitability. Two local hotels from Helsinki are included as practical examples, Scandic Marski and Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka. The research is conducted using both quantitative and qualitative research methods as well as literature review. Close ended questionnaires were sent out to two case hotels and Scandic Marski Front Office Manager and some of the Scandic Marski guests were interviewed, also observation in Hotel Katajanokka was carried out. The visibility, in this research, is studied as the visual information that reaches the customer. The relevant concepts include advertising, branding and visual marketing. Also, the use of social media has a great importance when the customer is reached in a visual way. Two social media platforms are included as representatives of the impact of social media, Facebook and TripAdvisor. The purpose of this research is to find out if visually marketing the environmental friendliness and sustainable practices of hotels can increase sales and create profit using the concepts mentioned above. Environmental friendliness is an important topic and should be incorporated to the business strategy of every company in order to preserve the depleting natural resources and reduce carbon footprint and industry waste. The profitability of adopting sustainable practices would make it more appealing for businesses.

The results acquired indicate, that even though the interest towards sustainability among customers is rather low, there is some level of interest, and even a demand, for environmentally friendly products and services. The majority of customers does not actively seek information about sustainable operations of hotels and often miss the discreetly placed information. The visual emphasis of incorporated environmental actions has the possibility to appeal to customers and attract them to the service provider and, therefore, increase the sales of that provider. In conclusion, more effective implementation of sustainable operations should be conducted and efficient visualization of these operations adapted to the marketing strategy.

The main problem of this research is with the customer survey. The amount of respondents was low compared to the amount of actual guests and, therefore, does not represent the overall opinions of the majority. As a suggestion for more accurate results a higher response rate needs to be achieved.

Keywords Visual communication, marketing, environmental friendliness, sustainability

Hernesniemi, Maria

Ympäristöystävällisyyden näkyvyyden vaikutus hotelleissa

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Tämä tutkimus tutkii ympäristöystävällisyyden näkyvyyttä hotellialalla ja voiko sillä olla myönteisiä vaikutuksia, erityisesti tuottoisuuden kannalta. Kaksi paikallista hotelliä Helsingistä sisällytettiin mukaan käytännön esimerkkeinä, Scandic Marski ja Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka. Tutkimus on suoritettu käyttämällä sekä kvantitatiivisia että kvalitatiivisia menetelmiä sekä kirjallisuuden arvostelua. Suljettu kysely lähetettiin kahdelle hotellille ja Scandic Marskin Front Office Manageria sekä Scandic Marskin muutamaa asiakasta haastateltiin, Hotelli Katajanokalla suoritettiin myös havainointia. Näkyvyyttä tutkitaan tässä tutkimuksessa visuaalisena informaationa joka saavuttaa asiakkaan. Oleellisiin käsitteisiin sisältyvät mainonta, brändäys ja visuaalinen markkinointi. Myös sosiaalisen median käytöllä on suuri merkitys kun asiakasta tavoitellaan visuaalisesti. Kaksi sosiaalisen median sovellusta sisällytettiin mukaan sosiaalisen median vaikutuksen edustajina, Facebook ja TripAdvisor. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää voiko visuaalisella ympäristöystävällisyyden ja ympäristöä suojelevien käytäntöjen markkinoinnilla lisätä myyntiä ja luoda voittoa käyttämällä yllä mainittuja käsitteitä. Ympäristöystävällisyys on tärkeä aihe ja pitäisi sisällyttää jokaisen yhtiön toimintasuunnitelmaan, jotta väheneviä luonnonvaroja voitaisiin varjella, pienentää hiilijalanjälkeä ja vähentää teollisuuden jätteitä. Ympäristöä suojelevien käytäntöjen tuottoisuus lisäisi käytäntöjen omaksumisen houkuttelevuutta yhtiöille.

Saadut tulokset osoittavat, että vaikka asiakkaiden kiinnostus ympäristöystävällisyyttä kohtaan on melko vähäistä, kiinnostusta kuitenkin on ja jopa kysyntää ympäristöystävällisiä tuotteita ja palveluita kohtaan. Suurin osa asiakkaista ei aktiivisesti etsi tietoa hotellien ympäristöä säästävästä käytännöistä ja usein eivät huomaa hienovaraisesti sijoitettua tietoa. Omaksuttujen ympäristöystävällisten käytäntöjen visuaalisella tehostamisella on mahdollisuus vedota asiakkaaseen ja houkuttaa heidät palveluntarjoajan luo, ja siten lisätä kyseisen palveluntarjoajan tuottoja. Johtopäätöksenä ympäristöystävällisiä käytäntöjä tulisi omaksua ja käytäntöjen tehokas visualisointi soveltaa markkinointisuunnitelmaan.

Suurin ongelma tässä tutkimuksessa on asiakaskyselyssä. Vastaajien määrä oli alhainen verrattuna hotellien todelliseen asiakasmäärään eikä siten edusta enemmistön yleistä mielipidettä. Ehdotuksena tarkempien tuloksien saamiseksi tulee saavuttaa korkeampi vastaajamäärä.

Avainsanat Visuaalinen viestintä, markkinointi, ympäristöystävällisyys, kestävä kehitys

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1 Introduction

The topic of this research is the visibility of environmental friendliness, especially in social media, of specific hotels in the Helsinki centre region and whether or not it has an effect from the customer's point of view for the site selection and preference. The visibility of environmental friendliness in this research refers to the practices implemented by businesses to reduce their own impact on environment and how that is visually apparent to customers. The implementation of sustainable practices is important due to the diminishing of world's natural resources and the negative effect pollution has on environment. Two hotels from the Helsinki centre region were chosen as examples to clarify the adopted procedures of hotel industry and their effectiveness. The hotels chosen for this study have different procedures when it comes to environmental friendliness and its visibility.

The first part of the report focuses on the theoretical background relevant to the research. Chapter 2.1 starts with an explanation of the global and domestic hotel industry and then proceeds to introduce the two case hotels. Their background and the reasoning for choosing them are explained.

Chapter 2.2 explains the concept of sustainability and environmental friendliness. Also the practices adopted by the case hotels are introduced. Even though environmental friendliness is incorporated to this research, it is not the core focus. The focus is on the visibility and the benefits it can bring, especially profit.

Chapter 2.3 defines the social media aspect. It is part of the research due to the high number of users and therefore the amount of possible customers a company can reach through the use of it. Social media platforms are introduced briefly and two of them were chosen to represent the use of visibility through them. These two were Facebook, due to its vast user amount, and TripAdvisor, due to its use as a customer evaluation platform of hotels in particular.

Chapter 2.4 is where the core focus of the research can be found. The concept of marketing is explained here and the use of visibility highlighted. Marketing is the main gateway for a company to be visible to a consumer and it is also a way for a company to gain more profit. The specific marketing strategies adopted by the case hotels are also demonstrated here.

The next part of the research, chapter 3, is about the framework. This part introduces the research plan, what was studied, why and in what timeframe. It also introduces the methodology; how the study was conducted and with which tools.

Chapter 4 goes through an analysis of an interview that was conducted in the case hotels for the customers. The aim was to figure out what were their opinions considering environmental friendliness and if they had noticed the visual marketing used by the hotels. This chapter also goes through additional interviews conducted for some of the hotel customers and for the Front Office Manager of one of the hotels.

The final chapters of the research introduce the findings and conclusions. They also offer suggestions for future research and for the hotels to incorporate into their marketing strategy. The report then offers a list of references for research check and future studies.

1.1 Research questions and goal

The aim of this research is to find out if the visibility of environmental practices, incorporated by a hotel, can have a beneficial effect for the hotel and if it can influence the customer decision making when choosing a hotel to accommodate in. The benefit here is measured mainly as a profit the hotel can make through the visible effect, the environmental benefits are explained but they are not the focus of the research. The aim is to find out how sustainable operations can benefit a hotel and make the implementation of these operations seem more appealing. The main research question of the research is: Does the visibility of environmental friendliness in a hotel have a positive effect on sales?

To help with the research, additional sub questions were added. First: Does advertising environmental friendliness acquire more customers? Acquiring customers means more rooms sold and more profit created.

Second: Do customers care about environmental friendliness? If customers do not care about the environment at all, it will not matter if a hotel is working in a sustainable manner and advertising it would just be a waste of time and resources.

Third and final question is: In what ways can environmental friendliness increase sales? Acquiring customers through advertising is one obvious way to create more sales, but to find out all the possible benefits environmental friendliness can aid in profitability, a deeper look is needed.

2 Theory

This section of the research sets the background and supporting base for the research. All relevant concepts and topics are explained and clarified to understand the topic and to create a basis for the research. Understanding the concepts, which support the research, is essential

for finding answers to the research questions. It also narrows down and sets the frame for the topic.

Theoretical topics are directly connected to the overall topic of the research and to the methods used in the research. The theory is based on the research literature and the review of previous studies in the field. The theory is introduced on a general level and specified more in the methodology and analysis part of the research, where the information is used to support the findings.

2.1 Hotels and service industry

This research and its results are focused on the hotel industry. Although the theory is explained on a general level and can be applied to other fields as well, its main focus is within hotels. Also, the results and suggestions are directed to that industry alone. This chapter describes what is meant by the hotel industry. The following subchapters focus on the two hotels that were chosen as examples for this research, their background and the reasoning behind their choice.

The hotel industry is part of the hospitality industry, which is a broad concept, covering almost every business that concentrates on customer satisfaction and operates on the leisure side of services. The hospitality industry does not just aim to satisfy customers, it needs it to also prosper. Businesses in this field offer more than just services that meet the basic needs. The industry requires the customer to have disposable income and free time, therefore it is usually the first industry to be affected by recession, where the customers' income and the amount of extra money is decreased. (Best hospitality degrees 2015)

The hospitality industry can be divided into three categories; food and beverage, accommodation and travel and tourism. The hotel industry is located in the accommodation sector along with any business providing lodging services (Reynolds 2015). The main functions of the hotel industry are to offer shelter, food, refreshment and relevant services and goods. Hotels have also adopted other kind of services, such as conference and meeting services, social environment, a place for public events and even permanent housing. (Sandoval-Strausz 2003)

In 2014, travelling for both business and leisure reasons was growing and accounted 9.6% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Leisure travel amounts up to 75% of global direct travel and tourism GDP (Hotel manager's group blog 2014). It is difficult to evaluate the hotel industry globally as a whole, due to the different stages of development and infrastructures in different areas of the world. The common understanding implies that the United Kingdom and North America would have the most developed industries and are the pioneers of these industries. (Hospitality net 2013)

In Finland, more than 140 000 people are working in the hospitality sector. It accounts for 3.8% of Finland's GDP. In 2014, Finland received 7.6 million visitors from abroad, most of them from Russia. (Finnish hospitality association MaRa 2015)

2.1.1 Scandic Marski

One of the hotels, which this research focuses on, is Scandic Marski in the centre of Helsinki. It is part of the Swedish Scandic hotel chain. The chain first started under the name Esso in 1963 and was changed to Scandic in 1984 (Scandic Group Hotels AB n.d. d). Today, Scandic consists of 224 hotels in seven countries, mostly in Scandinavia, but also in Germany, Belgium and Poland (Scandic Group Hotels AB n.d. b).

Scandic hotels are at the top of the list when it comes to environmental awareness. Sustainable operations have been incorporated in the chain's operations since the 1990's and are considered to be a "lever of success" (Scandic Group Hotels AB n.d. a). Adopting at least some amount of environmentally friendly actions into a business' activities has become a norm and Scandic still manages to stay ahead of the game by portraying its operations in a visible way and achieving several environmental labels and awards in several areas. (Scandic n.d. a)

The high input in sustainability is why Scandic was chosen for this research. Helsinki has five Scandic hotels, all located in or near the core centre. Out of those, Scandic Marski is on the 4th place when it comes to amount of rooms, which is 289 (Scandic n.d. d), and it is located right along the Helsinki central street, Mannerheimintie (Scandic n.d. c). Scandic Marski has plenty of both leisure and business travellers. During holiday seasons and weekends the amount of leisure travellers is higher. Most of the customers are Finnish nationals and the second biggest nationality group is Swedish. The central location and visible adoption of environmental practices had the most impact when choosing which hotel to concentrate on. (Halmela 2015. Personal communication)

2.1.2 Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka

The other hotel at the focus of this research is Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka. Hotel Katajanokka is namely part of the Best Western chain, but privately owned and operated by Finnish entrepreneurs. The "Premier" is the highest class of Best Western and it is equivalent to a four star hotel. The hotel building itself is a former prison and the prison theme has been visibly incorporated in the design of the hotel. The rooms have been named after old prisoners and constructions from the prison era, such as the church, is still used for events and meetings. The oldest parts are from 1837 and are protected from modification by the National Board of Antiquities (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka n.d. b).

Hotel Katajanokka is not the biggest of hotels with its 106 rooms, but it is fairly new; the hotel started operating in May 2007. The refurbishment work lasted five years and the main hall, outer walls and stonewall surrounding the yard needed to stay untouched (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka n.d. c). Hotel Katajanokka is located in Katajanokka, an island on the east side of Helsinki centre region (Katajanokkaseura n.d.).

Best Western International, Inc. is a global chain of independently owned and operated hotels. It is also the largest hotel family with 4046 hotels in over 100 countries on all the continents in the year 2014 (Statista 2015b). The Best Western chain was first started in 1946 as Best Western Motels by Merile Key Guertin in California, United States. The separate hotels were only connected through a referral system and members were not united under the same logo until 1962. Best Western first became the largest chain already in 1963 with 699 hotels. In 1974, the word 'motel' was dropped from the name and Best Western recreated its image to compete with other chains. The following year the chain expanded internationally to Australia and New Zealand and the next year to Central America. In 1977, Best Western started identifying itself as 'the world's largest lodging chain' and later 'the world's largest hotel chain'. In 1978, the expansion continued to Great Britain and Ireland, in 1981 to Austria, France, Sweden, Switzerland and Germany and over the next 20 years Best Western opened hotels around the world in Europe, South America, Africa and Asia. (Best Western International, Inc. 2015)

Best Western is the largest hotel chain in the world and also a great example of a basic hotel that does not particularly try to advertise its sustainable practices (Best Western International, Inc. 2015). It is a good contrast to Scandic, which finds environmental practices very important and incorporates that to its business in a visible way. These factors affected the decision to include Best Western to the research.

The majority of respondents to a questionnaire conducted in Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka were from Sweden and Germany. This does not deviate from the actual statistics. Especially outside the holiday season when business travellers form a majority of customers, Germans form one of the biggest customer groups along with the Swedish and Russians. The holiday season increases the amount of leisure travellers and the variety of customers from different nationalities. (Kääriäinen 2015. Personal communication)

2.2 Environmental friendliness and sustainable practices

This research focuses on the environmental side of hospitality business and whether or not it can be an advantage to a hotel. The advantages are research, on a general level, and also studies based on customer opinions and awareness. The focus of the advantages is on the

company point of view, what is beneficial to the company and not on the environment point of view, even though that is shortly described as well.

The following chapters introduce and define the different concepts required as background information to this research. These concepts are sustainability and environmental friendliness, the practices in hotels, the benefits and possible downsides of being sustainable, the concept of visibility to customers and in marketing and the particular practices of Scandic Marski and Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka, which are the target companies chosen as the examples of this research. All findings and explanations are based on literature research and research of the case companies.

2.2.1 Definition of sustainability

Andreas Hahn and Thomas Knoke (2010) begin their explanation of sustainable development with the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) definition from 1987. This definition is often referred to with the name of the WCED chairman, Gro Harlem Brundtland. According to this definition, sustainability is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The United Nations still uses this definition as the basis for sustainability. It can be further explained as improving the way things are done, for example, reducing poverty while preserving the environment, offering clean energy to everyone while protecting the climate or ensuring access to food, water and nutrition for everyone. (United Nations 2015)

The European Commission follows the same definition as United Nations: "meeting the needs of present generations without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (European Commission 2015b). At the centre of the ideology is to ensure better standard of living with both immediate and long-term actions. Practices alone will not enforce sustainable behaviour; a society should accept sustainability as a basis affecting daily decisions and it should also be incorporated to political and economic decision making. (European Commission 2015b)

According to Joseph Chen, Willy Legrand and Philip Sloan (2013, 19) the modern understanding of sustainable development originates from the ideologies of Hans Carl von Carlowitz from the 18th century; he was a German tax accountant and mining administrator and the inventor of the word 'sustainability'. Carlowitz did not approve the short-term profits made with the use of primary resources and he argued that harvesting of wood also called for a plan for reforestation. He was also an advocate for thermal insulation and energy efficient furnaces in construction.

Sustainability began to change from a small ideology into a wider model of actions in the twentieth century. The high use of natural resources started to create some movement in a range of environmental organisations. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reported about the situation of the environment in 1951. Two economists, Barbara Mary Ward and Kenneth Ewart Boulding, wrote essays in 1966 concerning the depleting reservoirs of resources on Earth. In 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created after a conference that studied the connections of environment and development; Conference on the Human Environment. (Chen et al. 2013, 19-20)

In 1991, UNEP, IUCN and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) further developed the 1987 WCED sustainable development definition in their publication *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living*. The new definition was that sustainability aims to improve quality of life, not exceeding the carrying capacity of ecosystems. With this, the core of sustainability shifted more towards ecological balance. The definition has since broadened. In 2002, The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) added social justice and fight against poverty to it. (Chen et al. 2013, 20)

The concept of sustainability also entails the concept of environmental friendliness. A business cannot be sustainable if it does not consider the environmental aspect. Being environmentally friendly is taking into consideration the impact that the company has on the ecosystems within its operations, facilities and products. (Chen et al. 2013, 25)

2.2.2 Sustainable practices in the hotel industry

This research focuses on the visible side of environmental friendliness in the hospitality field, hotels in particular. It also introduces the financial benefits that visibility can bring.

The Oxford quick reference dictionary defines hospitality as “friendly and generous reception and entertainment” (Brotherton & Wood 2008, 38). Since the definition refers to actions towards others, the definition of hospitality industry is also based on hospitable actions; however, this is only a part of the full description. Going deeper into the dictionary definition of friendliness and entertaining, it could be said that hospitality includes some level of supply of food or beverages or shelter. (Brotherton & Wood 2008, 39, 47)

Hospitality industry basically comprises of fields that offer hospitality to their customers. It is considered to have started from offering services to travellers. This includes the travelling and tourism fields, accommodation and also restaurants and other food and beverage offering businesses. Travellers might have started the hospitality industry, but it is no longer tied to out-of-town travellers; many businesses on the industry receive most profit from the local community. Hotels and the accommodation field are still highly dependent on travellers, but,

for example, restaurants, bars and cafés do not need to rely on visitors from far away. (Brotherton & Wood 2008, 16)

As defined in the previous chapter, the basis of sustainability is being able to fulfil your needs without overusing resources. In the hospitality field, being sustainable can be reached through managing resources in order to get the most economic, social and environmental benefit. In hotels the resources affecting these benefits need to be realised. The goal of environmental friendly hotels is to have as little negative influence as possible on the environment and society. (Chen et al. 2013, 22-23)

The hospitality industry started to implement sustainable practices in the 1990s after the awareness of high use of natural resources started to spread around. Codes of conduct were embraced around the industry and various certificates and eco-labels were created to encourage environmental actions (Chen et al. 2013, 24). Some of the most known labels in Europe are The EU Ecolabel (European Commission 2015a) and The Nordic Swan (Nordic Eco-labelling n.d.). There are more specific labels as well, for example, the LEED certification (U.S. Green Building Council 2015), which is awarded for green construction, design and management of buildings.

Up to 80% of the hotel business in Europe in the year 2013 was incorporating some level of environmental practices. The main focus areas in environmental programs are energy consumption, water consumption, green purchasing and waste management. The aspects that have an effect on sustainability can be identified through the definition and the life-cycle of an operation. All details of different processes need to work together with the environment and society and also create profit for the company. The different processes need to consider fabrication, interior design, food and beverage handling, waste processing and other daily operations. (Chen et al. 2013, 24-25)

In the hotel industry specifically the environmental aspect can be taken into consideration during the construction of the building, in fixture production and use, in food cultivation, in energy usage, in water usage and in waste management (Chen et al. 2013, 25). The energy usage in hotels depends on the size, category, amount of rooms, customer type, and location and also the extra services offered in the hotel. The most energy usage comes from lighting, heating, ventilation and air-conditioning. The way to influence energy usage is to use energy efficient lamps and products and upgrade technology into more efficient ones that use less power and need less maintenance (Chen et al. 2013, 52, 54). The usage of renewable energy sources is also one way to take the environment into consideration. (Chen et al. 2013, 42)

In the hospitality field, reusing, recycling and reducing waste are important. All waste is basically wasted resources (Chen et al. 2013, 71). Food creates a significant part of the waste in form of spoiled food, leftovers from the kitchen and leftovers from the consumer. Also, all the packaging for the food products and ingredients create waste (Chen et al. 2013, 72-73). One way to manage food waste is reusing food, for example, the excess food can be donated to homeless shelters or used as animal feed. Another way is composting (Chen et al. 2013, 77). Switching to more environmental friendly products and packaging, repairing broken furniture instead of throwing them away, switching to sustainably operating suppliers, using recycled and longer lasting products and using reusable containers where possible reduce waste (Chen et al. 2013, 80). Using environmentally friendly cleaning agents and local goods, so transportation costs are low, also have an effect on reducing the amount of waste. (Chen et al. 2013, 70)

The usage of water in hotels much depends on its size and what kind of amenities there are. A hotel with watered gardens, pools and spa facilities uses much more water than a basic hotel (Chen et al. 2013, 95). Watering gardens at night, using greywater, water conservation in cleaning and training staff in water usage help to reduce the water waste. (Chen et al. 2013, 97)

2.2.3 Benefits and downsides of sustainability

There are a multitude of benefits from sustainability and environmental friendliness, most of them towards the preserving of environment and natural resources. This research, however, does not focus on the benefits the earth and humanity has to gain, though mentions them briefly, but the benefits a company has to gain.

The pollution from the service industry is less visible than from manufacturing industry but that does not mean that there would not be any. Since the hotel industry consists of multiple operations, such as restaurant, accommodation, housekeeping and spa services, the need for sustainable policies and conserving resources is important. All these different operations use high amounts of different resources and create pollution. An average estimate of a hotel pollution rate indicates that up to 200 kilograms of carbon dioxide is released per square metre of a room in a year, one guest consumes 170-440 litres of water per night and the waste produced by the hotel per one guest is approximately one kilogram. (Chen et al. 2013, 14)

An InterContinental Hotels study of 26 hotels in 2007 revealed that their total carbon footprint amounted to 9 million metric tonnes. The carbon footprint calculates the total gas emissions affecting global warming. There is no definition that is universally accepted, mainly due to the difficulty of calculating all included emissions (Hoekstra & Ercin 2012, 4-5). The energy usage contributed the most, with 4.6 million tonnes and 4.4 million tonnes were caused by

indirect emissions through resource consumption. The study claimed that the carbon footprint was lower in their best performing hotel than it would have been at home. This shows that the carbon footprint could be managed with the adjustment of heating, ventilation and air conditioning. (Chen et al. 2013, 15)

According to Chen, Legrand & Sloan (2013, 15-16) hotels create the most pollution in the service industry, which creates a need for resource management, and reducing the carbon footprint is one way of doing that and being sustainable. The benefit of doing this is that it improves efficiency and company name. The most important benefit for any company is creating profit. It is essential to keep a company alive. Some environmental actions can be financially beneficial. Energy and water saving appliances can cut costs and environmental practices can enhance relations with stakeholders and clients and create better motivation within employees (Chen et al. 2013, 26). Most stakeholders these days have certain expectations towards companies and environmental practices are part of this. In order to keep the clientele interested, their expectations must be met. (Chen et al. 2013, VIII)

In a more general aspect, environmental practices can improve the local economy through support and development and the benefits will be distributed throughout the local society. Adopting sustainable policies can also provide a competitive advantage on the market, but only if they are implemented within the whole company and modified constantly according to competitors (Chen et al. 2013, 28-29). Since the prediction that in the next 40 years, more than half of the world's wildlife will be disappeared, the hotel industry should be more interested in preserving the environment and what it owns. It is only sensible in order to keep surroundings appealing for customers. (Hotel managers group blog 2014)

Due to the lack of one precise definition of sustainability and unclarity of the concept, there is some criticism as well. It is not a cure for the world, though it would help in making it last longer. There are also some costs included when transitioning into more environmental practices, which turn off many organisations, even though the long term operational costs would end up being lower. (Chen et al. 2013, 23)

2.2.4 Environmental practices in Scandic Marski

Sustainability is adopted in the company values and to the actions of the workers. Each hotel has its appointed manager for environmental issues and all energy, water and chemical use has been reported since 1996 (Scandic Group Hotels Ab. n.d. c). The roots of Scandic's environmental friendliness start from 1993 (Scandic Group Hotels AB n.d. d). Scandic was the first hotel chain to urge customers to hang up and reuse towels and to wash only used towels (Scandic Group Hotels Ab. n.d. c). This was one of the 1500 activities created to improve sustainability along with profound staff training. (Scandic n.d. b)

In 2004 Scandic Sweden received the Nordic ecolabel as the first hotel chain in the world. The first individual hotel to receive the label was Scandic Sjølyst in Oslo in 1999 (Scandic n.d. e). Today 80% of all the Scandic hotels an environmental label, including Scandic Marski. The aim is to operate all hotels with organic food, socially certified coffee and proper recycling. (Scandic n.d. b)

The hotels that have a Nordic ecolabel or EU ecolabel are committed to reduce energy use, use renewable energy sources, sort waste, use ecolabelled cleaning detergents, serve organic food, require environmental actions from suppliers, customize transportation and train the staff. To make sure the hotels are following the requirements, regular checks are performed. (Scandic n.d. e)

According to the Front Office Manager in Scandic Marski (2015. Personal communication), the Nordic ecolabel is the only certificate that Scandic Marski has. The hotel follows all the requirements of the label, like waste sorting and energy conservation through energy efficient lamps. Scandic Marski also uses local suppliers for food, uses reusable packaging for shampoos and breakfast products, uses ecolabelled chemicals in cooling machines and detergents, restricts the amount of water in toilet flushes and showers and follows WWF guidelines with ingredient procurement.

2.2.5 Environmental practices in Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka

When browsing through the web pages of Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka, there is no indication to what the environmental principles of the hotel are (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka n.d. a). The same story continues on the hotel's Facebook page (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka 2015). There is no mention of sustainability or environmentally proactive procedures. During an observation period, it became clear, however, that the hotel did indeed have sustainable practices and cared about the environment to some extent.

Observation was conducted in Hotel Katajanokka as part of a work placement period, starting from 12th of January and ending 14th of June 2015. In the beginning of the observation the rooms were presented. Regardless of room type, they all included a written note urging guests to reuse towels and therefore to reduce the amount of laundry, and energy and water consumption. All rooms also had another note asking the guests to leave any cans and bottles on the table rather than throwing them in the trash. This helped with recycling and separation of different types of waste. (12 January 2015. Observation)

All departments of the hotel are required to separate their waste at least to biodegradable, glass and energy waste. All bottles and cans are recycled, also in the hotel restaurant. To save paper and extend the use of office supplies printing is done on both sides of the paper when possible and only what is necessary is printed out. (22 January 2015. Observation)

To control the energy consumption, the temperature of the hotel and all rooms is set to a certain maximum. Also, when guests are in the room the keycard is needed to activate the electricity in the room, therefore, when the guests are out of the room the power is turned off and energy is saved. (2 February 2015. Observation)

2.3 Social media

This chapter introduces the social media platforms in general. The use of social media has increased in the past years and has gained importance in business use as well. This research focuses highly on visibility of environmental friendliness in hotels and social media platforms are a way to connect with existing and potential customers and to emphasize the visibility of a company. It can be used for marketing purposes or communication. The amount of different platforms online is vast and this chapter touches the general surface but the following chapters focus on two in particular, Facebook and TripAdvisor. Facebook was chosen as an example, due to its sheer amount of users. In 2015, the amount of users was 1.49 billion (Statista 2015a). TripAdvisor was chosen due to its use as an evaluation method of hotels in particular by the customers.

Westwood (2011, 94) defines social media platforms as micro-websites where a user can create a personal profile and use it to communicate and share content with other users. Some of the most popular social media sites in 2015 are Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Xing, Renren, Google+, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram and Vine (Socialmediatoday.com 2015). There are multiple others too, all focusing on sharing content with other users. The content can be videos, images, text or music (Westwood 2011, 95). The reason for social media popularity has been mostly the ease of communication, both in real-time and asynchronously. Nowadays the use of platforms varies greatly according to the interest of people. Facebook allows the user to share various forms of content from text to videos, while in YouTube the content is only videos and Pinterest focuses on picture collages. (Levy 2010, 1-2)

For a company, the ease of communicating with customers through social media platforms helps in creating a community of fans around it. The direct interaction with the customers brings humanity into the communication and allows the company to have personality. This would not be possible over the phone dialling through customer service robots. Humanizing a company allows the customer to relate with the company, create a relationship with it and forgive small mistakes easier. In addition to communicating, the social media can benefit the

company in other ways too. For example, the conversations that people have online about a company or a product can be easily traced and followed. This allows a company to reflect what the customers really think about it or what kind of improvements it should make. (Levy 2010, 3-4)

2.3.1 Facebook

Facebook was created by Marc Zuckerberg, a computer science student in Harvard University. When it was first created in February 2004 as The Facebook, it was only directed to Harvard University students. It was expanded to include few other universities only one month later and then spread out to cover most universities and colleges in The United States. In June 2004, The Facebook became a business with its first \$500 000 investment. The following year “The” was dropped from the official name. (Levy 2010, 5, 7-8)

Today Facebook has the most active users of all the social media platforms, 1.49 billion as mentioned before (Statista 2015a). In 2014, Facebook’s revenue was 12.47 million dollars (Facebook 2014). The problem with Facebook is that it is strongly a personal platform. People share personal content like holiday pictures and update their statuses about their personal opinions. Companies don’t find it professional enough as a platform to interact in and rather choose LinkedIn that is strongly emphasizing a professional atmosphere. This is functional for business to business communication, but due to the ever so growing population in Facebook companies need to find a way to communicate in that environment, if not for any other reason than to create awareness of themselves to customers and to interact with customers to create a loyal customer base. (Levy 2010, 42)

Many businesses wish to keep their professional and personal appearances separate. According to Justin Levy (2010, 42) to individual workers this can be even more important. However, mixing personal and professional profiles can allow workers previously unknown to each other to have a personal connection before meeting and working together. In many cases this eases the interaction and makes it more pleasant. Often people also put more effort in their work when they have a personal connection to co-workers. From a business’ point of view a Facebook profile can help in showing out the corporate personality, especially through the content the business chooses to share to its followers. (Levy 2010, 43)

Since Facebook has so many users, most companies definitely have a fan base living in the community even if they wouldn’t be aware of it. If the fan base is still lacking due to the company just been founded, or for any other reason, then Facebook should be looked at as a fountain of millions of possible customers. Joining Facebook allows these customers and fans to communicate with other customers about the company and products and also with the company itself. In today’s world and way of interacting, it is easier to merge the company

into the customers' world rather than to lure the customers to come to the company by visiting their web page. (Levy 2010, 43)

When a company joins a social media platform, like Facebook, it is important to make sure that the protocol of using it is unified throughout the staff. The company should be called the same by everyone and procedures should be understood by everyone so the company doesn't seem disorganised and having multiple personalities to customers. One corporate personality should shine through no matter which employee is the one communicating from behind the company logo. (Levy 2010, 44)

Facebook has different functions that can aid a company to connect with the customers, such as Pages and Groups. Pages can be formed for any public figure, celebrity, band, sports team, corporation, film, non-profit organisation and any private user who has more friends than the allowed limit. On a Page extra information can be added and modified and the creator can choose to allow or deny comments of followers (Levy 2010, 44). In order to get followers for the company Page, it must be promoted. The link to the Page can be added to the company email signature or advertised on Twitter, also the Page can be shared publicly on Facebook and ads can be placed on the side of the newsfeed or friends can be invited to like the Page, but this shouldn't be done too often because people might find it irritating and block the Page completely. Finally the link to the Page should be easily found on the company's own web pages. (Levy 2010, 56-57)

Facebook Groups have the option to be more private than Pages. Anyone can follow the Pages, but Groups can be controlled. Groups can be visible to everyone and in order to access them the administrator, or an existing group member, has to accept the applicant. It is also possible to have the group completely hidden from public and only the members can see and access it. Interaction is easier within the Groups than on the Pages and especially good when private group needs to communicate with its members. (Levy 2010, 59)

Facebook has an advertising function incorporated in its system and any user with an active account can use it. Facebook allows the advertiser to target any users based on eleven different filters: age, location, sex, birthday, keyword, education, workplace, relationship status, interests, language and connections (Levy 2010, 79, 84). The ads can be set to be on continuously or during a specific time period. (Levy 2010, 86)

To sum up, the main uses of Facebook for a company are building a community to strengthen the presence, marketing and promoting products, and special offers and directing potential customer to company web pages, and finally straightforward advertising (Levy 2010, 124-125). Promotion can be done by creating and sharing events and content on the company

wall, the usage of photos and apps can be helpful (Levy 2010, 130-131). In addition to the promotion, advertising should cover all events, launches of new services and products and spreading the Page or Group in hope of getting new followers. (Levy 2010, 132)

2.3.2 TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor is a social media platform dedicated to travellers. The site is based on reviews written by individual travellers, and also works as a booking and travel planning site. It is rated as the world's largest travel site by Media Metrix and composes of 290 million reviews concerning 5.3 million accommodations, restaurants and attractions. (TripAdvisor 2015a)

TripAdvisor is included to this research since it is the largest traveller site and mainly concerns accommodations. Reviews are all written by individuals and therefore offer a view of the regular consumer. TripAdvisor also operates 23 other travel and booking sites for flights and accommodations such as bookingbuddy.com, cruisecritic.com and jetsetter.com. (TripAdvisor 2015a)

TripAdvisor has received multiple awards globally. In 2015 it received four awards in the United States; Most innovative travel app, Webby people's choice awards, Innovative technology of the year and 2nd best app/website for booking your stay (TripAdvisor 2015b). TripAdvisor is good for reaching customers and emphasizing the visibility, the site has over 60 million visitors monthly researching for places to stay. The site includes descriptions of the properties and is linked to the businesses' own websites. (TripAdvisor 2015e)

2.4 Marketing

This chapter explains the concepts of marketing. This is where the core focus of the research is, since the environmental friendliness can only be visible to customers through the use of marketing. This research is an evaluation of the effect that visibility of marketing, branding and advertising has on the clients and what financial benefits it can bring. The following chapters explain branding and visual marketing and how they affect the visibility and profitability. Also, the marketing strategies of Scandic Marski and Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka are introduced and compared.

Marketing is defined in the dictionary as "the action or business of promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising" (Oxford university press 2015b). The American Marketing Association defines marketing as "processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers" (Guimaraes 2010, 3) and as management of stakeholder relationships to create advantages for the company. John Westwood (2011, 3)

mentions in his book, *Marketing Your Business*, that marketing is finding out the customer's needs and modifying the company's product to answer that need while creating profit.

Knowing the customer requirements and predicting what they might want next is the basis of successful marketing. The aim is to get the offered product sold. In many companies, the sales department is separated from marketing department to a different sector and under different management and Westwood (2011, 4) claims that it should not be so. These actions should, instead, work together, access the same information and share goals.

Flexibility is a key issue in marketing. The products need to change according to customer demands and new products need to be created fast when needed. It is important for companies to adapt and take over new markets where possible. A company's operations comprise of a marketing mix, also known as the four Ps. The four Ps are product, price, promotion and place. Promotion and place are about creating a connection with the clients and product and price are about meeting the needs of the clients. (Westwood 2011, 5-6)

Before any marketing plan can be made, some basics need to be researched. First, the company needs to identify what kind of field it operates on, what kind of products and services it provides and how. Next is the target market, who is the customer and what kind of customers the company wants to have. The following step is about the marketing, what kind of visual and verbal marketing methods the company is going to implement and how, what kind of image will the company have and how to get the customers to buy the product and service. (Nieminen 2003, 14)

Completing a market and marketing research helps in identifying these factors and finding out in what kind of environment the company is and could be operating. It also helps in allocating company resources in an effective way. Carrying out a frequent marketing research is essential, due to the changing nature of the market environment and customer needs. It aids a company to keep up and change when needed. (Westwood 2011, 16)

According to Westwood (2011, 124-125), in order to market its product and services in an effective way, a company needs to choose the proper marketing channels. Also, to make sure the products and services reach the customer fast and securely, the physical distribution process needs to be planned and monitored and the whole process requires good customer service to go smoothly and keep customers loyal. Six marketing channels are mentioned: direct sales, distributors, telemarketing, websites, e-mail/e-marketing and direct mail. Moving down the list the amount of personal contact diminishes.

The purpose of advertising is to provide customers with information, both, about the company and its products, to make the customer aware of the benefits of the product, to give the customer a reason to choose the product over others on the market and to strengthen the positive feelings in the customer (Westwood 2011, 143). Advertising can take place on national level, through television and newspapers or on local level, through local papers and radio channels or in cinemas and outdoor advertising. Outdoor advertising can mean static billboards, banners, ads in phone kiosks, ads on public transport, taxis, lorries or trains or ads in bus and train stations, airports, shopping centres and supermarkets. Advertising has moved much online in the past years and there are also companies that sell advertising space both online and in physical locations. (Westwood 2011, 144-145, 147)

Online advertising, first of all, requires that a company has a website so that the various adverts will lead the customers to the site and allow them to make a purchase. The adverts can be placed to affiliate websites, which direct customer flow to a company's website and charge a fee for a clicked ad or for a made purchase. As mentioned in the previous chapter of this research, social media provides effective platforms for promotion and advertising. Other forms of online advertising include banners, pay per click and search engine optimization. (Westwood 2011, 148-153)

Consumers have become increasingly aware of the environment and the impact companies and production have on it. This can have an effect on what the consumers choose to spend their money on and prompted the creation of green marketing in the 1990s, also called environmental or ecological marketing. In addition to promoting ecologically manufactured goods, green marketing has a broader meaning. For example, a company can promote its own environmental impact or connection to nature. Green marketing includes various actions, like product and production process modifications, packaging choices and suitability of adverts (Guimaraes 2010, 48). In 1994, Michael Polonsky defined green marketing as all the actions that generate exchanges aiming to fulfil human needs with as little effect on environment as possible (Guimaraes 2010, 50). The final aspect of green marketing is to limit the resources used to reduce the environmental impact and still be able to meet the company's sales objectives and other goals and to fulfil customer requirements (Guimaraes 2010, 51). Adopting green marketing as part of the company strategy can help in achieving specific goals, displaying the morals and social responsibility incorporated by the company and competing with other businesses. (Guimaraes 2010, 52)

Since the focus of this research is visibility, the visible side of marketing is opened up in more detail. The visible side focuses on the visual types of marketing and visualisation of the company, or branding. The following subchapters introduce these concepts in more detail.

2.4.1 Branding

The word brand is defined by the Oxford dictionaries (Oxford university press 2015a) as “a type of a product manufactured by a particular company under a particular name” or as “a particular identity or image regarded to an asset”. It is also referred to as a burned mark on livestock or as a piece of burning wood. This shows how the definition has evolved over time and adopted a commercial implementation. (Clifton with Ahmad, Allen, Anholt, Barwise, Blackett, Bowker, Chajet, Doane, Ellwood, Feldwick, Frampton, Gibbons, Hobsbawm, Lindemann, Poulter, Raison, Simmons and Smith 2009, 13)

A brand can be, in a visual sense, a name, letters, numbers, a symbol, a signature, a shape, a slogan, a colour, a typeface or a combination of any of these. According to Clifton et al. (2009, 15-16), the name is considered as the most important aspect and it should be kept unchanged, even though the other parts of the brand would change, like the logo. This does not mean that a company should trust the name alone, the visual boosters are important to distinctiveness; the Golden Arches of McDonald’s are a good example of the meaning of this to a brand.

As mentioned before, the name of the brand should not be changed, although this happens occasionally. Usually the reason behind it is the aim to reach a wider appeal on the market or to unify international branches of a company due to ownership change. Sometimes the original name might also not be working for a specific target market. Name change can be very risky and needs to be communicated well to all stakeholders. Adopting a completely new name to an already known brand might not be accepted by the stakeholders and poor communication might end up in loss of clientele. (Clifton et al. 2009, 16-17)

The people today have a huge variety of choices in different products. The amount of selection makes it difficult for producers and sellers to provide a wide range of good quality merchandise and at the same time stand out from the crowd. Branding is a good method of creating recognisability and product awareness. A brand makes a promise to a consumer that certain expectations are fulfilled, this creates trust towards the product and keeps the consumer loyal. (Clifton et al. 2009, 17-18)

For the most part of the 20th century, branding was predominantly associated with consumer goods and services, but since then has been adopted by industrial, business-to-business, public and voluntary sector and also by utilities and non-governmental organisations. It is common practice for football teams, political parties and celebrities to be branding themselves. Even churches are incorporating branding to their operations. (Clifton et al. 2009, 20)

How to brand

The first rule of branding is to protect the brand. The logo, name and colours of the company can be protected by law indefinitely. Patent laws protect the invented products for a number of years depending on the type of invention. Copyright laws protect artistic, literary and musical productions for as long as 70 years after the death of the creator. The brand should be protected on as wide scale as possible from the start. (Clifton et al. 2009, 23)

Another important aspect is respect towards stakeholders. Customers have certain expectations and requirements towards products and services. Employees desire a working business idea and want to feel engaged and that their work has a purpose. Shareholders expect good management and profits from shares. Trade partners want fair treatment and part of the reputation. (Clifton et al. 2009, 23)

Brand is definitely an important part of the company, but not the most important. The business strategy should be the leading force and the brand must work within it (Cheverton 2006, 57). The brand should always be relevant, current and attractive. This can be achieved through marketing and product development. Brand development can be a significant cost to a company, but should be thought of as an investment. In addition to product development, sharing the brand through co-branding, licensing and franchising is a good way to expand the brand exposure. (Clifton et al. 2009, 24)

Brand management is more than just marketing and some extra skills are needed for that, such as comprehending brand management from the stakeholders' point of view, internal communication, training and delivery of customer satisfaction. The basic tasks of briefing market-research companies, advertising agencies and designers and co-working with sales and distribution are still essential but not enough. (Clifton et al. 2009, 24-25)

Creating a strong brand requires clear and firm brand positioning that is adopted throughout a company on an emotional, intellectual and behavioural level. Good brand positioning means it is unique and enables growth and its execution is excellent (Clifton et al. 2009, 73-74). Another important factor is choosing a suitable name for the brand. A name can not describe the company explicitly so it should express a function of the company or its personality and values. (Clifton et al. 2009, 86)

How branding affects business and profit

Having a strong brand equals having regular loyal customers and also attracting new ones is much easier. A company becomes stronger through predictability of cash flow and easier development planning. Brand value also brings security with guaranteed income and attracts investors. (Clifton et al. 2009, 18)

Brands have an effect on what the consumers and other stakeholders choose to invest on and that power is vital due to the vast amount of options available on the market (Clifton et al. 2009, 27). A lack of a brand can make a company almost invisible to consumers (Cheverton 2006, 43). Strong brands also have a social effect through aiding economic growth. Brands create mass consumer loyalty which in turn creates regular income, investments and employment. This creates more wealth and allows the government to spend more on social goods. (Clifton et al. 2009, 45)

According to Peter Cheverton (2006, 54-55), strong brands are often more profitable than weak ones and successful branding in particular is what creates profit. The reasons why stronger brands are more profitable are that they can set the premium prices, gain new customers easier, gain loyal customers who are cheaper to maintain, create a competitive advantage and allow bigger presence in the market. In 2014, most growth is predicted to emerge from the major hotel groups. In 2013, hotels with strong branding grew with 3.2% and non-branded hotel growth actually decreased. (Hotel managers group blog 2014)

Clifton et al. (2009, 127) point out that “everything a brand does is communication”. Majority of the communication takes place in visual form, for example, advertisements and social media interaction, which leads the topic towards visual marketing (Clifton et al. 2009, 132). The following chapter introduces this concept.

2.4.2 Visual marketing

This research focuses on the benefits that the visibility of environmental friendliness can bring to a hotel. This chapter explains what is meant with visibility and how it can be used in order to create profit. The concept of visual marketing is introduced.

Visibility is defined as “the state of being able to see or be seen” or as “the degree to which something has attracted general attention” (Oxford university press 2015c). The origin of the word ‘visual’ is in the Latin word ‘visualis’ and the meaning is a phenomenon based on eye sight. Visualising basically means display through graphic images. (Nieminen 2003, 13)

The majority, up to 75%, of all received information enters the conscious and unconscious mind through the eyes. It is important for a company to realise this and use it to their advantage. Brand and product recognition do affect sales and profitability in a positive way (Nieminen 2003, 8). Adverts without images are easily neglected and that applies to other forms of communication as well. Hidden meanings in images create a joy of discovery, different colours can affect the mood and are also experienced differently depending on the culture (Nieminen 2003, 89). Humans process visual images much faster and easier than text.

Visualisation is more than information sharing, it creates feelings and can bring back memories and also has the ability to affect behaviour. (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 15)

According to Jessica Gioglio and Ekaterina Walter (2014, 23-40) the visual content can be divided into images, cartoons, GIFs, infographics, videos, presentations and aggregators. Images mean photographs, graphs, drawings, collages, word photos, memes, postcards and e-cards (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 24). GIFs are pictures in graphics interchange format. They are made out of video still frames and look like a short video clip (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 33). Infographics combine text and images to tell a story (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 34). Aggregator is a tool that helps to access and put together relevant content (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 40).

When visibility is used to promote a company and create awareness of a sales product, the concept of visual marketing is born. This sector of marketing literally means using visual stimuli to advertise a product. Visual marketing is part of marketing communications and acts together with sales promotion, advertising and personal sales. The purpose of visual marketing is to demonstrate the company identity and products, the product pricing, how and where to buy the product and also to present the company service culture and values through visual aids. When done successfully, visual marketing helps the customer to connect with the company and its products and the space surrounding them, and creates an emotional experience in the subconscious mind. The aim is to keep that experience positive in order to emphasize the will to buy. (Nieminen 2003, 8-9)

Gioglio and Walter (2014) refer to visual marketing as visual storytelling which gives the concept a much broader meaning beyond just marketing for profit. It creates a feeling of culture and dedication to incorporating visual design into the company's core operations. In their book, *The Power of Visual Storytelling* (2014, 9-10), they explain the emerging visual marketing as a development of social media platforms with customers and companies. Social media was born to organise the vast and highly visual content dwelling on the internet and created the opportunity for similarly thinking people to connect. The important factor is to figure out what are the needs and values of the people on different social media platforms, what brings them there and how that can be used to benefit a company.

Visual storytelling should include certain elements to thrive. These elements are design, personalisation, usefulness, personality, storytelling, shareworthiness and real-time amplification. The design should reflect the story and vision that a company has for itself. Interaction with customers should also change according to the channel used, pasting the same picture on every social media platform can be boring and uninspiring. The content that a company releases needs to be useful, this can mean sharing news or offers. Bringing personality to the company can improve the visual marketing. Creating a relationship with the customers can

arouse feelings and change the way customers think about a company. Visual marketing should tell a clear story to catch customers' attention and to communicate the company's ideologies. It should also have such content, which the customer feels like is worth sharing. The more customers share a company's post, the more people it will reach. Replying or reacting fast is growingly more and more important in the social media platforms. Having a library full of content that is ready to share makes it easier to react to situations quickly. (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 47-53)

How to apply visual marketing techniques

The first step of visual marketing, like in planning of any new step, is creating a strategy. A company needs to identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and set up clear goals. Next a thorough analysis of the current performance in the social media management is conducted in order to make sure that it is enabling the goals to be reached (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 126, 128). When the creation of the visual marketing takes place, the company should consider that all shared content is a part of the company's story and goal and forms a part of a bigger picture. The shared content should also have some variety and change between photos, videos, infographics etc. This aids in reaching variety of audiences (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 136, 140).

In visual marketing, as in any other area, company should have a plan for unexpected situations. For example, a sudden heatwave will lead into high sales of air conditioning equipment. In addition to weather, it is good to prepare for public holidays, special events or social media phenomena. A way to prepare is to fill up a library with relevant content about upcoming situations that will or might happen. (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 144, 146)

Visual marketing is most effective closest to the intent to buy. The company attempts to seem as pleasing as possible to the customer, improve its image and get the customer to choose its products over the competitors'. This can be achieved, for example, through product display, shop window advertising, in-store advertising, promotions, event marketing, trade fairs, exhibitions and product catalogues. (Nieminen 2003, 9)

In catalogues and online adverts, the products for sale are clearly on display for the customer. The information and features are available and allow a purchase decision to be made instantly either through an online store or via phone or mail. The only difference to a marketing of a concrete product is the lack of the physical contact with the product. In visual marketing, images of the products are always displayed in an illustrative and elegant manner, similar products and colours are fitted together to create a visually appealing demonstration. Coordinating the display of images in a certain way creates a marketing strategy for a company that can help it stand out from its competitors. (Nieminen 2003, 11-12)

A retail store provides a clear example of the how visual marketing works. The store is cosy and stimulating starting from the architecture and façade. The shop windows are impressive, the shop environment is intriguing and product display well planned. Products that are needed daily, such as dairy, are placed at the far end so the customer goes through the whole shop and is exposed to the visual display of all the other products as well. (Nieminen 2003, 12)

Part of visual marketing is creating a visual identity. This happens through modifying the graphic appearance of communication, name, logo, typography, colours, website, facilities and shop window (Nieminen 2003, 84, 90, 98, 103, 110, 121, 147). The company communication should be efficient and goal seeking. This sort of communication can be identified by factors like recognisability, positive image, differentiation from competitors, personality, distinctiveness, interest awakening and creates the will to buy and be active. (Nieminen 2003, 87)

The name of the company is where the visual design starts from. The name creates a mental image that can, in the best case scenario, describe the company field, products, actions and style. The logo of the company should always relate to the field that it operates on and describe the product values; something that simply looks appealing to one person might not suit the needs of the company at all. (Nieminen 2003, 91-92, 96)

The company colours should indicate what it wants to communicate on its most basic form. Colours together with the logo are a small insight to the company business idea, ideologies and values. Different colours have both optical and psychological influences on people and these should be acknowledged before adopting into use. (Nieminen 2003, 103)

The visual appearance of the company web pages should be in accordance with the rest of the marketing communications, this enhances the clarity of the corporate image in the customer's mind. The requirements for web pages have increased over the years and it is no longer enough just to have a basic site. The website needs to be visually appealing, stylish, functional and easy to use. (Nieminen 2003, 110)

Different businesses have different kind of facilities but to all it is important to demonstrate the company image through visual appearance. The architectural choices and surface materials are also dependant on whether or not the facilities are rented or owned. The main concerns, however, are to attract customers and to express the company's own vision. (Nieminen 2003, 121)

If a company wishes to be a leader in visual marketing, then more than just sharing pictures and videos to customers is required. Adopting visual storytelling and the use of social media can create more interaction with customers and even increase profit. The importance of images and visualisation has increased especially since social media pages and applications such as Pinterest and Instagram. Up to 80% of active internet users in the U.S. follow social media and blogs. It is also important to find the right channel for a company. Sephora, a cosmetics retailer, discovered that the people following the company on Pinterest spent 15 times more on the company products than the people following their Facebook page. The Calgary Zoo produced its annual report on Instagram through 55 photos of their achievements. (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 7-8)

The challenge for companies is to use social media to their advantage. Most users do not use social media platforms to seek out brands and businesses. They are used to interact with friends and communities and to share own content. In order to get the users to click on an ad or to spark interest towards a product companies must create such visual stimuli that achieves action. On Facebook, for example, it is possible to hide ads from certain companies or to stop a certain page from appearing in the newsfeed, so the ads should not be too frequent or irritating, but rather share content that is amusing and gets shared forward. (Gioglio & Walter 2014, 12-13)

Benefits of visual marketing

To a retail store, window advertising can be a highly important means of competing. Since the majority of information is absorbed visually through the eyes, a three-dimensional advert with physical products, price and availability all present is an effective marketing method. When designing a shop window, the company needs to once again remember to display its own vision and what kind of target market it has. (Nieminen 2003, 147-148)

What visual marketing aims to do is visually display the company's products, values, service culture and identity, to create awareness of the company itself and to reinforce the brand image, to increase the customer's will to buy and to increase the overall sales (Nieminen 2003, 9). Smells, colours, sounds and lights create feelings and experiences in a customer and can have an appealing affect that lead into action. The visual advertising uses this to its advantage with original product display and décor that change often. The goal is to seem appealing and catch the customer's eye in order to get sales. (Nieminen 2003, 210)

2.4.3 Marketing in Scandic Marski

This chapter introduces the marketing techniques and styles used in Scandic Marski hotel. The information is gathered from the hotel's and Scandic chain's web page, Facebook page, TripAdvisor and from the Front Office Manager via an interview.

The advertising of Scandic Marski is partly merged with the advertising for the whole Scandic chain. As a chain, all hotels share the same values and goals that are implemented in the marketing (2015. Personal communication). Scandic Marski has its own web page in connection with the chain web pages. The pages are easy to navigate on due to a quick menu at the bottom of each page and the layout is clear and neutral. The web page entails general information that a possible customer might be interested in and has several links to browse through the whole company and all relevant information connected to it. The page itself gives very little personal identity to Scandic Marski and instead, creates an image of a hotel that is just a part of a chain, identical with the other hotels and sharing the same identity. (Scandic n.d. d)

The sustainable actions of Scandic chain have their own section on the company web pages (Scandic n.d. b). The operations of the hotels are described and the eco labeling as well (Scandic n.d. e). All that information is, however, only located at the section dedicated to sustainability. The Scandic Marski's own page has no mention of its sustainable achievements, not even a picture of the Nordic ecolabel (Scandic n.d. d). Still, according to the Front Office Manager, the visibility of the ecolabel does bring more customers and especially conference customers. (2015. Personal communication)

Scandic has several Facebook pages. One is dedicated to the whole international chain (Scandic 2015a) and each country has its division, Finland as well (Scandic 2015b). Scandic Marski also has its own Facebook page, which is frequently updated. The content is relevant and promotional and shared on a nearly daily basis. During the summer months, the activity has been less frequent and content has been shared on a weekly basis. Also taking care of the customers in Facebook is handled actively. Most posts and questions shared on the Scandic Marski Facebook wall are answered during the same day. The amount of likes the page has is only 631 and 125 people have checked themselves present in the hotel on Facebook, which is rather low to a hotel of that size. The Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka, in comparison, has over 1600 likes and more than 4500 Facebook check-ins, even though it is clearly a smaller hotel. (Scandic Marski 2015; Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka 2015)

A link to TripAdvisor ratings is easily found on each hotels own page and also from the quick menu at the bottom (Scandic n.d. d). Scandic Marski has more than 800 reviews, most of them four points or 'very good' (TripAdvisor 2015f). When compared with Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka, which has over 950 reviews, the higher activity of the smaller hotel is once again highlighted (TripAdvisor 2015c).

As explained in chapter 2.4.2, the visual marketing also means creating a visual identity by shaping the graphic appearance of some attributes, like the name and logo for example (Nieminen 2003, 84, 90). In Scandic Marski the visualization is much based on the hotel chain branding and identity. The name is a combination of the company and the location, Marski is a nickname for the street that the hotel is located on, Mannerheimintie. It is a central and known part of the Helsinki city. The logo is implemented from the chain; the word Scandic follows the same design as the rest of the chain, and even though the word Marski is written with a different design it does not have anything distinctive in it that would make a customer remember it or associate it with the particular hotel.

2.4.4 Marketing in Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka

This chapter introduces the marketing techniques and styles used in Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka. The information is gathered from the hotel's and Best Western's web page, Facebook page, TripAdvisor, booking sites and through observation.

The Hotel Katajanokka web page is clear and simple and provides plenty of necessary information, for both customers and any interested person (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka n.d. a). The history of the hotel as a prison attracts more than just customers staying the night. Many walking tours in the summer time pass through the hotel to visit its original cells and passersby sometimes visit the premises. The hotel and its cells are open for all visitors. (8 April 2015. Observation)

The prison theme has been implemented in all advertisement and staff behavior. The outfits of the receptionists are prison shirts with the hotel phone number as the convict number. The shirts are also available for purchase, along with handcuffs, steel mugs, Jailhouse coffee and other theme related merchandise. The staff welcomes customers in with a phrase "welcome to prison", and the same phrase is used in emails. The hotel and its restaurant offer theme related events in collaboration with an event organizing company and many products are named according to the theme as well. (21 January 2015. Observation)

The theme inside is transmitted outside through marketing as much as possible, for example, through the email signatures, newsletters, the web page and while talking to customers by mentioning the prison in some way. Outside, in the immediate surroundings of the hotel, there are stands and posters advertising the upcoming events, the restaurant or the success of the hotel. (29 February 2015. Observation)

This year Hotel Katajanokka entered the TripAdvisor Hall of Fame (TripAdvisor 2015g), which is achieved when the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence is awarded five years in a row. The Certificate of Excellence requires consistent outstanding reviews (TripAdvisor 2015d). The

certificate is pinned on the Hotel Katajanokka web page and also functions as a link to read and give reviews (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka n.d. a). The TripAdvisor awards can also be seen on the hotel premises (10 June 2015. Observation).

The logo of Best Western is displayed in the membership card, outside the hotel and in the business cards, but the hotel strongly identifies itself as an independent prison hotel rather than as an identical chain hotel. Hotel Katajanokka has its own logo (Figure 1 below) that much differs from the Best Western logo (Figure 2 Below).



Figure 1: Hotel Katajanokka logo



Figure 2: Best Western logo

The hotel also identifies itself both as Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka and as Hotel Katajanokka. To customers it always is not obvious that the hotel is part of Best Western (5 May 2015. Observation). In communication, such as emails and newsletters and even in the speech of staff, the prison theme comes up more often than the chain recognition. (29 February 2015. Observation)

Even though the Hotel Katajanokka web page has a link to like the hotel on Facebook and share it on the users own wall, there is no link to just visit the page (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka n.d. a). The Facebook page of the hotel is updated sometimes once a week and sometimes more or less often. The updates are mostly about events in the hotel or in Helsinki or about current activities and holidays in the hotel. The Facebook page also includes a link to the TripAdvisor review app, linking the two together. (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka 2015)

3 Framework

This part and the following subchapters shortly describe the framework of the report. The research plan explains the construction of the research, research questions, what the aim is, what is being studied and why. The methodology part goes through all the methods used in data gathering and in the analysis of that data, in other words how the information is received.

3.1 Research plan

This research studies the visibility of environmental actions conducted in hotels and what kind of benefits the visibility can create for the hotels. The increased importance of environmental practices and sustainable operations are the reasons why this topic in particular was found important. The benefits of visibility in this research refer to the benefits for the hotel, which basically means profit. Therefore, the main research question of the research is does the visibility of environmental friendliness in a hotel have a positive effect on sales? The research starts with a theory base, which defines all concepts relevant to the research and outcome.

The focus areas of the research are hotel industry, environmental friendliness and its benefits and visibility. The visibility is broken down to marketing and social media. The theory helps in understanding all the topics and concepts relevant to the research. The marketing is divided into visual marketing and branding to open up all the aspects of visibility and how a company can be visible to a customer. The social media has an important part in this too and that is why it is included as well. Facebook and TripAdvisor are chosen as the focus platforms. Facebook was chosen due to its popularity and high user amount and TripAdvisor was chosen due to its connection to hotel industry as an evaluation platform.

To introduce some concrete evidence to the research, two hotels located in the centre of Helsinki were chosen as targets of the study. The hotels were Scandic Marski and Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka. Scandic Marski identifies itself as strongly sustainable while Hotel Katajanokka is part of the biggest hotel chain in the world but does not use environmental friendliness in particular to its advantage. A questionnaire was conducted in both ho-

tels for the customers in order to find out their opinions about the visibility of environmental actions and general attitudes towards the concept. The questionnaire was the same in both hotels and can be found at the end of this report as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Due to low response rate of the questionnaires, additional interviews were conducted for a few customers of Scandic Marski to gain a stronger research base. The interview questions can be found at the end of this report as Appendix 4. Also, the Front Office Manager of Scandic Marski was interviewed to understand the point of view of the hotel management and to see if it corresponds with the customer experiences. The interview questions for the Front Office Manager can be found at the end of this report as Appendix 3. After acquiring the answers, they were analysed with the help of an online survey platform.

The information gathered from Scandic Marski is based on online sources and the interview with the Front Office Manager. The information gathered from Hotel Katajanokka is based on online sources and observation conducted in the hotel during and before the start of the research process. The schedule for the research process is illustrated in the Table 1 below.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| January - June | Observation in Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka |
| May | Research process start, gathering info for theory, observation in Hotel Katajanokka |
| June | Planning surveys, observation in Hotel Katajanokka, placing surveys to hotels 29.6 |
| July | Gathering info for theory |
| August | Collection of surveys 17.8, writing theory |
| September | Writing theory |
| October | Writing theory, analysing surveys |
| November | Writing theory, interviewing hotel customers, interviewing Scandic Marski Front Office Manager, writing survey analy- |

| | |
|----------|---|
| | sis, writing framework, fixing report format, writing findings, conclusions, discussions and introduction, creating presentation, finalising report |
| December | Presentation |

Table 1: Research process schedule

3.2 Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodology and data retrieval methods, in other words, how the work was carried out. The tools used in information gathering and analysis are listed and clarified. The aim of the report and how it was accomplished are explained.

The research started with information retrieval for the theory. The information was found from various books related to the different concepts and also from relevant web pages and online journals. The books were mostly loaned out from a library or searched from various online sources. The retrieval of the theory and the background information took a long time, up to three months, before the actual writing process began.

For some parts, it was not possible to find information fully from books or online, such as the marketing and environmental processes of the hotels. The information gathered about Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka is mostly based on observation conducted as part of a work placement period that lasted from 12th of January till 14th of June 2015. The additional information from Scandic Marski was received through an interview with the Front Office Manager. The questions can be found at the end of this report as Appendix 3.

To find an answer to the customer opinion and preferences they needed to be contacted. This was done through a questionnaire, which was placed in both Hotel Katajanokka and Scandic Marski. The questionnaires were first taken to the hotels 29th of June 2015 and collected 17th of August 2015. In Hotel Katajanokka, the questionnaire was handed out to customers in check-in and returned to the reception when finished. In Scandic Marski, the questionnaire was available for customers in the lobby waiting area with a return box.

After the questionnaire, some additional insight was needed to clarify the decision making and observations of the customers while visiting the hotels. This was achieved by interviewing some of the Scandic Marski guests. The questions can be found at the end of the report as Appendix 4.

After the theory was concluded and the answers were received and analysed from all of the questionnaires and interviews, the results were then compared with the existing assumptions. The actual marketing tools and strategies used by the case hotels were compared with all the methods available and introduced in the theory part. The questionnaire answers are analysed in the next part of the research. The suggestions and conclusions, which then rose from the results and comparisons, are introduced in the later chapters five, six and seven.

4 Questionnaire analysis

This chapter focuses on the questionnaire conducted in two hotels in Helsinki and the analysis of the results. The aim was to gather information straight from the customers in order to understand what the overall opinion towards environmental friendliness amongst clients is. The questionnaire was in the form of a multiple choice survey and it can be found at the end of this report as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. Some of the hotel customers were also interviewed after the questionnaire was conducted to gather some additional insight.

The questionnaire was conducted in Scandic Marski and Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka for the customers in order to learn their preferences and opinions about the visibility of environmental friendliness in hotels. The questionnaire in Scandic Marski was available in the lobby for customers to answer while waiting and could be returned to a box once finished. In Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka the questionnaire was handed out by the staff from the reception to customers willing to answer and returned to the reception by the customer.

The response rate in both Hotel Katajanokka and Scandic Marski was low compared to the amount of people that actually visit the hotels. 14 answers were received from Scandic Marski and only 10 from Hotel Katajanokka. Scandic Marski has altogether 289 rooms (Scandic n.d. d) and has plenty of customers especially on the summer holiday season when the questionnaire was conducted. The survey was available in the hotels for seven weeks from the end of June until mid-August. Hotel Katajanokka has 106 rooms (Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka: Hotelli Katajanokka n.d.) which makes it noticeably smaller than Scandic Marski but should still give possibility to a higher number of answers. The low response rate can be caused by many reasons, the most common of which are the failure to deliver the survey to respondents and the unwillingness of respondents to reply. To maximise the response rate the questionnaire needs to be prepared and implemented properly. To increase the willingness to respond is a challenge. Respondents might find the questionnaire not essential or waste of time. What the low amount of responses implies is that the respondents might be too busy to answer, the topic of the questionnaire did not interest the respondents or there might have been a fault in the implementation of the questionnaire. (Baruch & Holtom 2008)

To help with the analysis of the questionnaire, it was recreated on an online survey site called Free online surveys (Free online surveys 2012). The answers received from the hotels were entered onto the site, which then calculated the overall percentages and created ready-to-use charts and pictures. These were then used to clarify the findings.

There was not much deviation on the gender of respondents. Slightly more women answered the questionnaire. In Scandic Marski the division was exactly 50% women and 50% men, while in Hotel Katajanokka 60% were women. This is illustrated in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Division of male and female respondents

Since the questionnaire was conducted during the summer season, most of the respondents were pleasure travellers. Overall, 75% of the people answering were travelling on holiday. In Scandic Marski the pleasure travellers amounted up to 85% and in hotel Katajanokka 70%. The observation in Hotel Katajanokka and interview with Scandic Marski Front Office Manager also supported this finding.

Also, due to the holiday season, the majority of guests, up to 67%, were from abroad. In Scandic Marski, more than 70% of respondents were foreign and 60% in Hotel Katajanokka. Most of the foreign respondents in Scandic Marski were from Sweden and USA and the rest were from Israel, Thailand, Japan and Malaysia. In Hotel Katajanokka, the majority were Swedish and German and the rest American and Danish.

Most visitors in both hotels were short term visitors. In general, almost 80% were staying 1-3 days and the rest 4-7 days. In Scandic Marski, 71% of the respondents stayed 1-3 days and in Hotel Katajanokka, the amount was 80%. None of the respondents stayed more than 7 days.

Approximately 88% of all the respondents stated that the location was the main factor when choosing a hotel. It was the top requirement for almost every respondent in both hotels. Half of the respondents also put price as a factor influencing their decision making and 16.7% valued reviews as a factor. In addition, another 16.7% mentioned quality of service and cleanliness as a criterion. Environmental friendliness was not chosen as a requirement by anyone. The division of answers is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

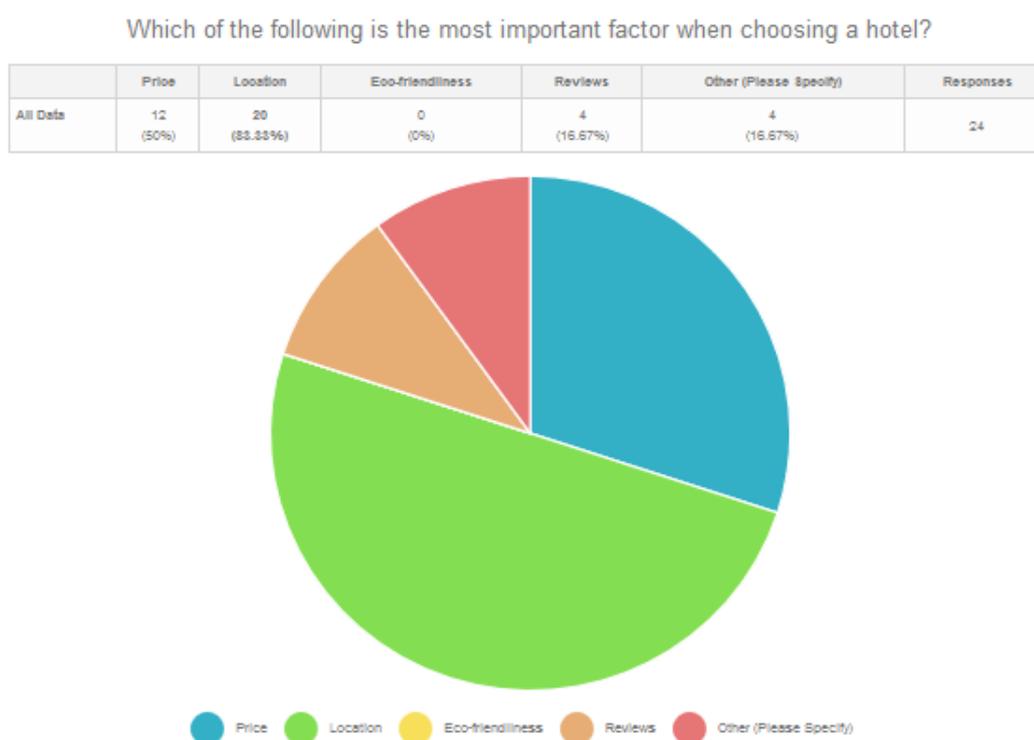


Figure 4: Factors affecting customer choice

Majority of the respondents, 50%, felt that the environmental friendliness is somewhat important and has some effect when choosing a hotel. 20% didn't think it had any affect at all on them and just under 30% didn't think about this at all. In Scandic Marski, 67% found environmental friendliness somewhat important and only 7% didn't think it had any affect. In Hotel Katajanokka, 40% thought environmental friendliness was somewhat important and the same percentage didn't find it affecting at all.

According to the overall answers, 50% of the customers were interested in choosing an environmentally friendly hotel if the price category and location were equally good compared to other options. The other 50%, however, did not think it mattered. No one answered that they

would not choose the environmentally friendly hotel, it simply did not make a difference what the hotel's style of operating was. In Scandic Marski about, 67% would rather go with the environmental option and in Hotel Katajanokka the amount was 40%. As the main reason for not currently choosing an environmentally friendly hotel, 47% of the respondents stated that they experienced that the price was higher. 33% said that they had not even been aware of the environmental friendliness of the hotels and 19% said the location had been wrong.

Many of the customers were unaware of the level of environmental friendliness of the hotel beforehand. In Scandic Marski, half of the respondents had no idea about the environmental actions of the hotel prior to booking and just over 28% didn't even think about it. In Hotel Katajanokka, 90% were not aware of the environmental actions before booking the room and 10% did not give any thought to this.

Most of the respondents had visited the hotel web pages and only 9.5% had noticed the environmental actions there. The majority, which was just under 62%, however, did not think about this matter at all. In Scandic Marski, 15% had noticed the environmental actions on the web pages, whereas the percentage for Hotel Katajanokka was 0. Especially if the booking was done through another company's web page, the visibility was unnoticeable and nobody thought to look for it. Only one respondent had noticed the environmental actions on another company's site, when booking a room from Scandic Marski.

Even in the hotel, the ecological actions were not noticed by everyone, up to 37.5% said they did not notice any actions. Nearly 71% of the respondents in Scandic Marski had noticed the environmental friendliness during their stay in the hotel and 50% of the respondents in Hotel Katajanokka said the same.

Most customers, 77%, said they like to use hotel web pages when getting to know a hotel. Second popular choice for information search was TripAdvisor and third Trivago. Only one respondent said they visited a company's Facebook page. The division of answers is illustrated below in Figure 5.

Which of the following do you use when finding information about a hotel? Multiple choices possible.

| | Facebook | TripAdvisor | Trivago | Hotel web pages | Responses |
|----------|--------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|
| All Data | 1 (4.55%) | 7 (31.82%) | 4 (18.18%) | 17 (77.27%) | 22 |

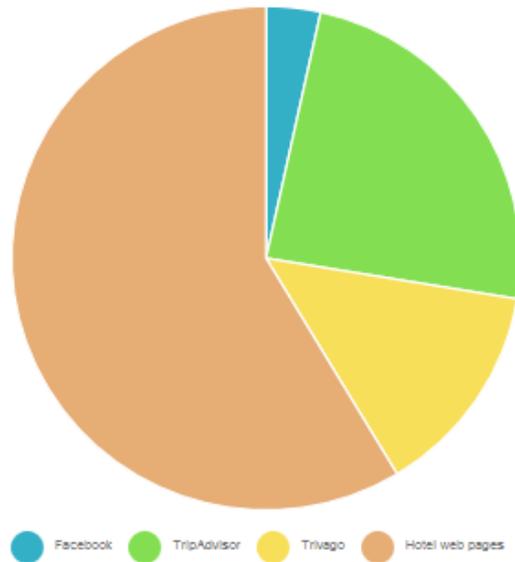


Figure 5: Sources of information prior to booking a room

5 Findings

This part of the research introduces all the findings and results. They are based on the theory search, the questionnaire and its analysis, the interview with Scandic Marski Front Office Manager and the interviews with Scandic Marski customers. The effect of the results for the research is addressed, and whether or not all the research questions were answered. The chapter is divided into parts according to the answers received from the theory, questionnaires and interviews and all research sub questions are gone through with each section. the main research question is answered in the next section, chapter 6.

The sub questions are:

1. Does advertising environmental friendliness acquire more customers?
2. Do customers care about environmental friendliness?
3. In what ways can environmental friendliness increase sales?

Theory

Question 1: To address the first question based on the theory included in this research, the best place to start is from the marketing chapter 2.4. Westwood (2011, 143) claimed, that advertising provides information and awareness about the product and the company to the customer and gives a reason to buy. With this claim any product or service could be sold if the marketing is done well enough. Therefore if the marketing of environmental friendliness is implemented well enough it can appeal to the customers and make them choose the advertised hotel over others on the market. The marketing needs to make the customer feel like it is the right choice for him/her. At least, advertising environmental practices has the possibility to appeal to a customer and their feelings and attract them to choose the advertised hotel. Not advertising environmental friendliness might not make the hotel lose any current customers, but it will certainly not appeal to those who are looking for this aspect in services.

As stated in chapter 2.2.2 around 80% of the European hotels are implementing some level of environmental practices (Chen et al. 2013, 24-25). The demand for these practices was originated by the depleting natural resources, but the awareness and the demand from the clientele was what pushed the service industry to implement the change. The customers are still the driving force in the service industry and hotels are not an exception. If the majority are implementing sustainable code of conduct, then they will not fail to mention it to their customers. This means that the competitors on the field are reaching a wider market and might have a competitive edge over those who choose not to be sustainable or choose not to advertise it.

Question 2: The fact that the sustainable practices exist and are being constantly developed is proof already that people do care about the environment. Since the 1990s sustainable practices have become a norm due to the depletion of natural sources (Chen et al. 2013, 24).

Question 3: First of all, in chapter 2.2.3 the benefits gained from environmental actions are presented. Chen et al. (2013, 15-16), explain that hotels are the biggest polluters on the service industry due to the multitude of different services they provide and the resources they use. When a hotel starts implementing environmentally friendly practices, efficiency improves. Expenses can also decrease with lower electricity and water usage. The next step for the hotel is to promote its sustainable practices to the public and improve the company name.

As explained in chapter 2.4, the average consumer is quite aware of the state of the environment and how businesses affect it. This leads to some of the consumers rather choosing environmentally friendly products (Guimaraes 2010, 48). Therefore, the customers should be provided with these products and make them aware of the environmental practices of the company. If the practices and the product information is not available, some customers might

not choose the product. Marketing has a great effect on what the customers buy and choose and it must also meet their requirements (Nieminen 2003, 8). The environmental friendliness can increase sales through marketing. It needs to be advertised and brought to the customers' attention. When they are aware of it, they have the opportunity to choose it.

Questionnaires

Question 1: The answer to the first question based on the questionnaire answers does not look very promising. First of all, nobody chose environmental friendliness as a factor affecting the decision making when choosing a hotel. If it does not have any effect on the customers, then promoting it would seem like a waste of resources.

On the other hand, the majority did feel that the environmental friendliness is important to some extent and it could have an effect on the customers. Half of the answers indicated that there was interest towards environmentally friendly hotels but the assumption was that they are more expensive, a third of the respondents also said that they had never noticed any indication of the sustainable practices in the hotels they had been getting familiar with. This would mean that there are many potential customers that have some level of interest towards environmentally friendly hotels and if they happened to be pondering between two options they might choose the more sustainable one, if it only showed that it was one. The advertising, branding or some level of indication of environmental friendliness needs to be extremely clear so that it can be seen instantly without looking for it on purpose.

Question 2: As stated in the first question, there are people that think environmental friendliness is somewhat important, though not important enough to be factor when choosing a hotel. People are aware of the environmental friendliness and sustainability and what it means, but still the attitude, at least among the respondents, is mostly indifferent.

Question 3: Based on the questionnaires, it might first seem that the customers are not interested of environmental friendliness and it does not have an effect on which hotel they spend their money on, since it is not listed as a decision making factor by any of the respondents. However, the majority of the respondents do find environmental friendliness important at least in some way and no one indicated any resentment of the ideology or answered that it would not be important at all. The ones, who did not seem to care about it, still did not say they would not choose the environmentally friendly option. The answers would indicate that there is a potential to increase the sales through acquiring customers who value sustainability, if only the sustainability is advertised clearly. Most of the respondents had no idea of the practices of the hotel or did not think about it. The more clearly it would be indicated, the more the customers would pay attention.

Interview with Scandic

Question 1: The first interview question to Scandic Marski Front Office Manager was the same as the first sub question. The manager's answer was that it does, especially with the conference customers. This has been confirmed through written feedback and by the sales department's studies. (2015. Personal communication)

Question 2: This was not addressed in the interview.

Question 3: The Scandic Marski Front Office Manager pointed out, that sales have been made based on the environmental practices and the Nordic Ecolabel that the hotel possesses. This had been especially appealing to the conference customers. The claim was based on written feedback and research by sales department.

Interview with customers

Question 1: The customer interview did not answer to the first question. Environmental friendliness had no effect on the decision making of the interviewed. They also were not aware of the environmental practices of Scandic Marski prior to their stay which means that they either did not look up information about the hotel beforehand or that they had not noticed any practices on the web pages.

Question 2: Based on the interview with the customers of Scandic Marski, the attitude towards sustainability in hotels is indifferent. The environmental factors were not searched before the stay in the hotel, one of the respondents did not even notice the practices inside the hotel while another respondent sharing the room did notice. It seems that sustainability is not something that penetrates the mind of the customers as something important, but rather as an extra service.

Question 3: The interviews indicated that the respondents did not make any decision about hotels based on their environmental friendliness. This would point that no sales could be achieved by advertising it.

6 Conclusions

The main research question for the research is: Does the visibility of environmental friendliness in a hotel have a positive effect on sales? The theory gathering would indicate that the overall awareness about the environmental issues is quite clear to today's consumers and that at least a part of them do care about these issues and wish to have environmentally friendly products and services.

A hotel can benefit from adopting sustainable practices by saving in operational costs and by acquiring more customers through advertising its practices. It doesn't seem like a hotel has anything to lose by being sustainable but does have something to gain. The deteriorating state of the planet, the depleting natural resources and the loss of wildlife and forests should already push companies towards environmental friendliness. Through it the nature attracting tourists can be preserved and the clientele widened.

The questionnaires for the hotel customers stated that the general interest towards the environmental actions is low, but it is there. All respondents were either positive or neutral about sustainability. There was no answer that showed negativity. The majority was interested of choosing an environmentally friendly hotel, but seemed to have an assumption that they were more expensive. This would indicate that the environmental promotion of hotels is ineffective. This assumption is reinforced by the majority of the respondents stating that they were not aware of the sustainable operations of the hotel, even in Scandic Marski, which is possibly the most sustainable hotel chain in Scandinavia.

The importance of the visibility through marketing and branding is highlighted in the chapter 2.4. Visibility has a great impact on humans and advertising has a great impact on sales. Since it is already demonstrated that there are customers wanting environmentally friendly products and that can benefit customers and company, environmental actions should be incorporated and marketed. The clientele exists and the way to reach it, and the profit it can bring, is through adoption of sustainability and visually demonstrating it. The research does indicate that if a hotel has a sustainable way of operating and visualises it to the customers through marketing, it has the possibility to bring in new customers and sustain the existing ones and increase the profit made. Adopting environmentally friendly practices is, in conclusion, profitable to a hotel, or any business, and should be implemented in the business strategy to attract more customers and to preserve environment.

There is interest towards sustainability amongst consumers, but it's rather seen as an extra service or vanity than as an actual need or requirement for a hotel. The importance of it has not yet struck people and therefore it is not showing strongly in the customer behaviour, yet. It is still showing to some extent and cannot be ignored by the hotel industry. Environmental friendliness is increasingly important and might become a basic requirement very soon in the future and it is better to be prepared for it in advance; that is just a good business strategy.

7 Suggestions

This research and its results concerning the customers' interest towards environmental friendliness of hotels are mainly based on the surveys conducted in the case hotels and their responses. The amount of responses does not reflect the majority of customers and therefore

a higher response rate could show different results. In case a new survey would be made, a higher response rate should be achieved to increase the validity of the research. This can be achieved by including a prize or lottery to the survey so the people answering have something to gain. An interview type of questionnaire can also achieve more answers, where the researcher is asking the questions directly from customers or is overseeing the answering process at the scene and encouraging people to answer. However, this sort of engagement with customers might not be approved by the hotels, since they do not wish to disturb their customers.

Based on the questionnaire analysis and findings and also the background research of the case hotels, it could be concluded that the hotels do not implement sustainability to their marketing well enough. Customers are not often aware of the sustainable operations and since majority does not actively look for information about it, hotels should be the ones actively informing the customers. The advertising, branding or any level of indication of environmental friendliness needs to be extremely clear so that it can be seen instantly without looking for it on purpose.

To improve the visibility of sustainable operations the web pages of the hotels should include clear pictures of the possible environmental certificates or achievements of the hotels. The pictures can then function as links to describe the operations in more detail. These picture links should also be added to any social media platforms the hotels are operating on. News articles, advertisements and other sort of publications by the hotels should include environmental logos and labels. Environmental signs and logos could also be incorporated to the company logo.

Scandic hotel chain claims to have environmental friendliness as part of its vision, but when looking at the vision and mission statements on their website it can not be seen. The sustainable implementations should be clearly stated here. (Scandic Group Hotels AB n.d. e)

The social media management of Scandic Marski could use some improvement. Though the Facebook page is regularly updated and content is promotional it sometimes disappears, for example, during the summer months. This can be due to only few people being responsible for the monitoring of the page. Placing more people to be in charge of the social media and putting more effort towards it can acquire more popularity amongst fans and can increase the overall interest of the customers.

Scandic Marski has updated its pages during the autumn 2015, and now they are divided into two different looking concepts, for example, the environmental pages are behind the old format (Scandic n.d. b) while the vision and mission are behind the new one (Scandic Group

Hotels AB n.d. e). At the moment, the pages lack in unity and seem slightly disorganised. Also, the link to Scandic Facebook page on the old version of the web page does not work. Hotel Katajanokka lacks the link to Facebook completely on its web pages, there's only a like button and a share button.

One way to also increase the visibility of environmental friendliness would be to include a filter on third party booking sites for "green hotels". The filter could only show hotels that brand themselves as environmental or that have some type of environmental certificates. This would also work as a promotion of sustainability itself, making consumers think about it in their decision making.

The final suggestion to improve visibility is in the hotel premises. Most hotels already have a note prompting customers to reuse towels but more can be done. Separation of waste could be done by the customer in the room already, for example Hotel Katajanokka asks its guests to leave bottles and cans on the table rather than in the trash can, to ease recycling. Different environmental certificates and labels should be visible in the hotel, not just in the reception but in the hallways and rooms.

8 Ethical consideration and reliability

The anonymity and confidentiality of the questionnaire and interview respondents is protected. The respondents and interviewees had the option to withdraw at any time.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the research and the results of the customers' interest towards the environmental friendliness of the hotels are mostly acquired from the questionnaires conducted in Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka and Scandic Marski. The amount of responses was low compared to the amount of rooms and actual visitors. For future research to be more successful a higher response rate should be achieved. This would increase the reliability of the research. A higher response rate can be achieved by including a prize to the respondents. An interview might also work better where the researcher encourages people to answer.

Also the Front Office Manager of Scandic Marski had very little time to answer the interview questions due to a busy schedule. A better timing would have helped in getting more and deeper answers.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire template in English

Dear customer,

I am a third year hospitality student from Laure University of Applied Sciences. I am writing a thesis about the visibility of environmental friendliness in hotels and its effect on customers' venue selection.

1. Are you: Male Female
2. Please state your age: _____
3. Purpose of travel? Business Pleasure Other, please specify _____
4. Nationality? Finnish Other, please specify _____
5. How long are you staying in the hotel? 1-3 days 4-7 days Over a week
6. Which of the following do you use when finding information about a hotel? Multiple choices possible
 Facebook TripAdvisor Trivago Hotel web pages
7. Which of the following is the most important factor when choosing a hotel?
 Price Location Eco-friendliness Reviews
 Other, please specify _____
8. Would you rather choose an environmentally friendly hotel if the price/standards/location were approximately the same as in a non-environmental hotel?
 Yes No It doesn't matter to me
9. What is the main reason for you not to choose an environmentally friendly hotel?
 Eco-friendliness wasn't visible / I wasn't aware of it Price was higher
 Location was wrong Other, please specify _____
10. How much does the environmental friendliness of a hotel affect your decision making?
 Very important Somewhat important Don't think about it No affect at all
11. Were you aware of the environmental friendly actions of your hotel before booking the room?
 Yes No I didn't think about it
12. Was the environmental friendliness visible on the hotel website (if you have visited them)?
 Yes No I didn't think about it
13. Was the environmental friendliness of the hotel visible on the site you used for booking (if different from hotels own site)?
 Yes No I didn't think about it
14. Have you noticed any environmentally friendly actions in the hotel during your stay?
 Yes No

Thank you for answering!

Appendix 2. Questionnaire template in Finnish

Arvoisa asiakas,
Olen Laurea ammattikorkeakoulun kolmannen vuoden restonomiopiskelija. Teen opinnäytetyötä ympäristöystävällisyyden näkyvyyden vaikutuksesta hotelliasiakkaiden kohdevalintaan.

1. Oletko: Mies Nainen
2. Minkä ikäinen olet? _____
3. Matkan tarkoitus? Työmatka Lomamatka Joku muu, mikä? _____
4. Kansalaisuus? Suomalainen Joku muu, mikä? _____
5. Kuinka pitkään viivytte hotellissa? 1-3 päivää 4-7 päivää Yli viikon
6. Mitä seuraavista käytitte etsiessänne tietoa hotellista? Voitte valita useampia
 Facebook TripAdvisor Trivago Hotellin nettisivut
7. Mikä seuraavista on tärkein hotellia valitessa?
 Hinta Sijainti Ympäristöystävällisyys Arvostelut
 Joku muu, mikä? _____
8. Valitsitteko mieluummin ympäristöystävällisen hotellin jos hinta/taso/sijainti olisivat suunnilleen samat kuin ei ympäristöystävällisessä hotellissa?
 Kyllä En Sillä ei ole merkitystä minulle
9. Mikä on pääsyy sille, että ette valitsisi ympäristöystävällistä hotellia?
 Ympäristöystävällisyys ei ollut näkyvää / En ollut tietoinen siitä Kalliimpi hinta
 Väärä sijainti Joku muu, mikä? _____
10. Kuinka tärkeää hotellin ympäristöystävällisyys on sinulle?
 Hyvin tärkeää Jonkinverran tärkeää Ei ollenkaan tärkeää En ajattele asiaa
11. Olitko tietoinen hotellisi ympäristöystävällisyyden tasosta ennen huoneen varausta?
 Kyllä En En ajatellut asiaa
12. Oliko ympäristöystävällisyys näkyvää hotellin nettisivuilla (jos olette vierailleet niillä)?
 Kyllä Ei En ajatellut asiaa
13. Oliko hotellin ympäristöystävällisyys näkyvää varaussivustolla (jos eri kuin hotellin omat sivut)?
 Kyllä Ei En ajatellut asiaa
14. Oletteko huomanneet hotellin huomioivan ympäristöä päivittäisessä toiminnassaan?
 Kyllä En

Kiitos vastauksistanne!

Appendix 3. Interview questions to Front Office Manager

1. Omasta mielestäsi, vaikuttaako Scandic hotellien (erityisesti Scandic Marskin) ympäristöystävällisyyden korkea näkyvyys myyntiin? Tuoko se lisää asiakkaita?
2. Onko olemassa konkreettisia todisteita siitä, että ympäristöystävällisyyden näkyvyys tuo lisää asiakkaita tai että se vetoaa mahdollisiin asiakkaisiin? (Kyselyt, tutkimustyö)
3. Käytättekö aktiivisesti ympäristöystävällisyyttä mainonnassa? (Marskissa tai Scandicilla yleensä)
4. Millaisia ympäristö sertifikaatteja Scandic Marskillä on?
5. Ovatko sertifikaatit asiakkaiden nähtävillä?
6. Tuoko ympäristöystävällisyys taloudellisia etuja?
7. Onko teillä enemmän työmatkalaisia vai lomamatkalaisia? Muuttuuko tämä eri vuodenaikoina?
8. Mikä kansallisuus on editen edustettuna asiakkaissanne?
9. Millaisia ympäristöystävällisiä käytäntöjä Scandic Marskissa on?

Appendix 4. Interview questions for hotel customers

1. Gender:
2. Age:
3. Nationality:
4. Purpose of stay (holiday, business...):
5. Length of stay:
6. How did you find out about the hotel?:
7. Which factors affect you when choosing a hotel? (Price, location, reviews...):
8. Were you aware of the environmental practices of the hotel prior to stay? If yes, how? (Web page, word of mouth, background check...):
9. Were they visible during the stay? If yes, give examples (Certificates, staff protocols...):
10. Does the level of environmental friendliness of a hotel affect your decision to stay in that hotel in any way?: