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**INTERNATIONAL TOURISM AND MARKETING DEVELOPMENT:
CASE BREAK SOKOS HOTEL BOMBA**

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Abstract

Tourism and travelling is a fast growing industry and it is becoming more globalized. It is affected by many issues such as the ongoing trends, economic downturns, globalization and the changes in needs and wants of the consumers. The goals of this thesis were to determine the development needs in marketing and find out what international tourists are expecting and wanting from Break Sokos Hotel Bomba as a destination.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in collecting primary data which was supported with secondary data findings. The main focus was on strategic and digital marketing and the ways of improving marketing towards international tourists. The data was collected with a questionnaire targeted towards international tourists visiting Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and the results of the questionnaire were supported with interviews. The respond rate was low but most of the responds supported the theoretical knowledge found.

Based on the results of the research and the findings on secondary data, suggestions concerning marketing and especially digital marketing were made for Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. It was found that there was a lack in using digital marketing tools to promote the destination to foreign visitors and a detailed marketing plan was missing. In the future, a research could be made comparing the international marketing and the number of international visitors of Break Sokos Hotel Koli and Break Sokos Hotel Bomba.

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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Aim	5
1.2 Outline of the report	6
1.3 Northern Karelia Co-operative Society (PKO)	7
1.4 Introduction of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba	8
2 KNOWLEDGE BASE	8
2.1 International tourists in Finland	8
2.2 International tourists in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba	10
3 MARKETING OF BREAK SOKOS HOTEL BOMBA	14
3.1 Marketing actions	14
3.2 SWOT Analysis	15
4 STRATEGIC MARKETING	17
4.1 Overview of strategic marketing	17
4.2 Segmentation	18
4.3 Targeting	18
4.4 Differentiation	19
4.5 Positioning	19
4.6 Challenges in strategic marketing	20
5 DIGITAL MARKETING	21
5.1 Overview of digital marketing	21
5.1.1 Search engine optimization	21
5.1.2 Pay-per-click	22
5.2 Digital marketing tools	23
5.3 Content marketing in digital channels	23
5.3.1 Social media marketing	24
5.3.2 E-mail marketing	26
5.3.3 Blog marketing	27
5.3.4 Website marketing	28
5.4 Measuring the effects of digital marketing	28
6 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	29
6.1 Cultural differences affecting consumer behaviour	30
6.2 Tourism and travel trends	31
6.3 Globalisation and rural tourism	32
6.4 TripAdvisor	32
6.5 Other feedback sites	33
7 RESEARCH METHODS	34
7.1 Methodology	34
7.2 Data collection	35
7.3 Validity and reliability	35
7.4 Limitations to the research	36
8 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	37
8.1 Results	37
8.2 Development ideas	38
8.2.1 Digital marketing recommendations	39
8.2.2 Use of feedback sites	40
8.2.3 Use of English language	41
8.2.4 Organised group activities	42
8.3 Conclusions	42
REFERENCES	44

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Research questionnaire

Appendix 2 Interview questions

Appendix 3 Questionnaire results

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a growing industry worldwide and the travel and tourism gross-domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow around 4% each year until 2022 according to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2011, 3). Already in 2017, the tourism and travel industry grew by 4.6% which is above the predicted average growth according to WTTC and accounted for one tenth of all jobs in the world (2018a, 1).

International tourism is also developing in North Karelia where the case hotel Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is located. North Karelia is a part of Lakeland and lake Pielinen is one of the biggest lakes in Finland. On the other hand, Nurmes where Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is located is a part of Pielinen Karjala. (Visit Karelia 2018.) As the tourism industry in Finland is strongly affected by the trends in global travel and tourism it is important that Finnish tourism companies keep up with the changes in consumers' needs and wants. The competition in the tourism industry is tough and many of the Finnish companies have the same target group of international tourists.

This is the reason why this thesis is about the development of international tourism and international marketing in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. This thesis is commissioned by Northern Karelia Co-Operative Society (PKO).

1.1 Aim

The aim of this thesis and the study conducted for it is to find out how to attract more international customers, how to target marketing for them and find out what they wish from Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. As the refurbishments of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba finished in 2017 there is a need for branding in order for the customers and the hotel and spa destination to find each other. The goal is to come up with suggestions to improve international marketing in order to gain more international visitors in the future. For reaching the goals the research conducted for this thesis focuses on the wants and changing needs of international customers and finding marketing tools to increase awareness.

The theoretical part aims to describe the trends in strategic and digital marketing which might offer solutions for marketing in the future. The theoretical part focuses on the importance of digital business and marketing and the tools used to market international companies. This thesis aims to combine data from the tourism industry as well as from the field of international business.

The results and discussion part aims to open up what international customers of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba now think of the hotel and what kind of marketing channels they are following. The research questions concerning this thesis are the following:

1. Why international tourists want to come to Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and what do they want more from it?
2. How could marketing of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba be developed?

1.2 Outline of the report

This report consists of eight parts. The first chapter focuses on introducing the situation of the tourism industry in the world, focusing on the aim of this thesis, the research questions, introducing the commissioned company Northern Karelia Co-operative Society (PKO) and the target destination of this research Break Sokos Hotel Bomba in Nurmes, Finland.

Chapter two consists of two parts which focuses on the international tourists in Finland and in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba in the past years. Data concerning the number of international tourists is shown through figures and secondary data. The marketing of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and the actions done for marketing Break Sokos Hotel are explained in chapter three. Also, SWOT analysis of the Bomba destination is introduced and a part of the personnel of PKO focusing on the marketing and sales side of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba are introduced.

Chapter four determines what strategic marketing is and how it can be used to help companies in increasing awareness. It introduces the four main basic terms in strategic marketing which are segmentation, positioning, targeting and differentiation and evaluates

these with Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. At the end of the chapter the challenges connected with strategic marketing are defined.

Digital marketing and digital marketing tools are described in chapter five whilst focusing specifically on social media marketing and content marketing in the tourism industry and how these tools can be used. Also, the measuring of the effectiveness of digital marketing tools is demonstrated.

Consumer behaviour, its effect on tourism and travelling, effect of different cultures, the changing tourism trends and introducing the feedback sites used in collecting reviews from customers are pointed out in chapter six. Specifically, the importance of active use of sites such as TripAdvisor and their value in marketing is shown with the help of secondary data.

The research methodology and the secondary and primary data used in this thesis are introduced in chapter seven. The results and the discussion on the development ideas for Break Sokos Hotel Bomba are explained with the help of the research results in chapter eight.

1.3 Northern Karelia Co-operative Society (PKO)

Northern Karelia Co-Operative Society (PKO) is part of the nation-wide S-Group which was founded in 1904. PKO started on small co-operatives which later formed PKO in the beginning of the 1900 century. (PKO 2018a.) PKO is a strong operator in North Karelia in various fields such as hotel and restaurant industry, department and grocery stores. In North Karelia PKO has four hotels of which two are part of the Break Sokos Hotel concept: Break Sokos Hotel Koli and Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. The other two hotels are Original Sokos Hotel Vaakuna and Original Sokos Hotel Kimmel located in Joensuu.

The whole idea of the co-operative S-Group is to have loyal customers through their customer program. Through purchasing products and services from S-Group owned shops the customers earn bonus points and can gain up to 5 percent money back from the total amount spend in a month. (PKO 2018b.) This bonus systems works with the green S-card and the principle is simple: the more you spend the more you gain back.

1.4 Introduction of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba

The story of Bomba began in 1978 when the house of Bomba was opened. It is a mock up from a house in Russian Karelia region and it was built in a traditional Karelian way. Later on, a whole Karelian village was built surrounding the house of Bomba creating different tourism services. The house of Bomba was originally a restaurant and it is still used on various events and special occasions. The Karelian village offered accommodation for tourists visiting the house of Bomba before the new hotel was built. Karelian cottages are still possible to book for accommodation. (Visit Karelia 2017.)

PKO bought Bomba's premises and the Karelia village premises from Jukola co-operative store in the beginning of 2016. The renewals of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba began in 1.8.2016 and finished in 30.8.2017. The whole spa, reception, the hotel's restaurant and the façade as well as some of the Karelian village were renovated and in total 6 million euros were used for the renovations. (PKO 2017.) This is one reason for renewing the brand of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and developing its marketing.

The spa situated in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba was originally built in 1991. The renovation work began in 2016 because the spa was in a bad condition. Spa Bomba was reopened at the end of August in 2017 after major construction work was finished. (Koukkunen, 2018e.) The spa includes three saunas, pools such as cold and hot pools and special showers. The whole atmosphere brings up the Karelian culture and nature with sounds and smells. All in all, Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is a hotel and spa holiday destination which has a lot to offer and many opportunities to develop its actions.

2 KNOWLEDGE BASE

2.1 International tourists in Finland

In Finland the number of international visitors is predicted to grow by 7.4% during 2018 (WTTC 2018b, 5). Already in June 2018 the nights spend in hotels by foreign tourists

increased by 1.6% compared to June 2017 whereas the overall number of foreign tourists decreased (Statistics Finland 2018). At the same time the effects in North Karelia were worse: the number of foreign tourists has decreased by 4% compared to 2017 as seen in figure 1 (Statistics Finland 2018).

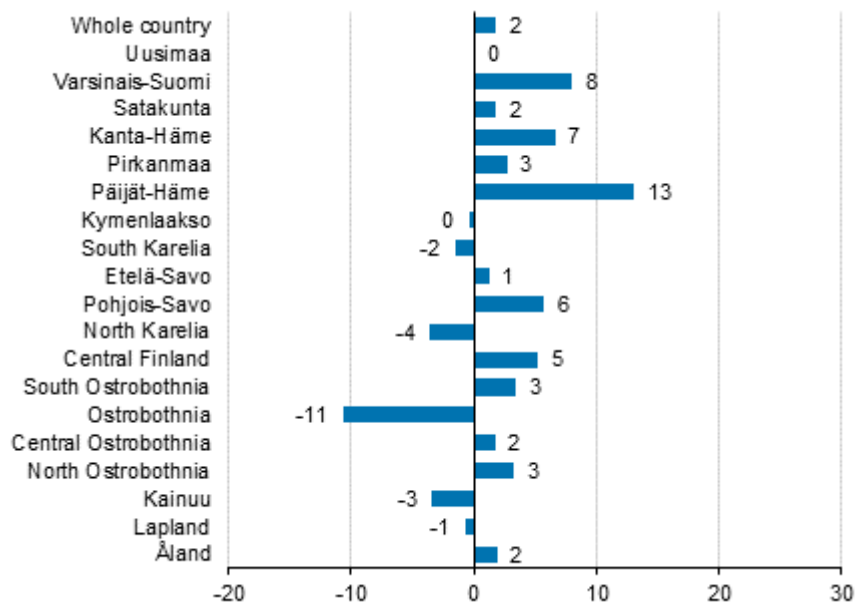


Figure 1. Change in overnight stays in June by region 2018/2017, % (Source: Statistics Finland, 2018).

According to Visit Finland's yearly statistics the number of international tourists' overnight stays has risen 17% from year 2016 to 2017. The five main countries of origin of the international tourists in Finland are Russia, Germany, China, United Kingdom and Sweden (Visit Finland 2018a, 3-4.) This same trend can be seen in the origin of international tourists in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. They have had an increase in Chinese and British tourists as mentioned earlier. The biggest change in Finland has been the rise of tourists from China and Hong Kong by 33% (Visit Finland 2018a, 4).

The decrease in Russian tourists in 2014-2015 had a negative effect on the total of international tourism growth in Finland but it has slowly started to grow again. From 2016 to 2017 the number Russian visitors increased by 17%. The overall interest towards Finland as a holiday destination has increased and nowadays both summer and winter months are popular visiting times. (Visit Finland 2018a, 4-5.)

International tourists bring a lot of money to Finland and in 2017 the amount spent was 2.6 billion euros. Tourists from China and Russia bring in the most money and overall 2.5% of Finland's gross domestic product (GDP) comes from tourism. (Visit Finland 2018b.)

2.2 International tourists in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba

The overall progress of visitors in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has been positive when comparing year 2016 to 2018. From 2016 to 2017 the number of visitors increased by over 4000 visitors per year and already during January to August 2018 the number of tourists rise to 18 625 as seen in figure 2. That is 9.8% more than in 2017 and 32% more than in 2016. (Koukkunen 2018a.)

However, as the total number of visitors in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has increased the number of international tourists decreased from year 2016 to 2017. In 2017 there were 413 international tourists (figure 4) and in 2016 the number was 480 (figure 6). Now in 2018 from January until August the number of international visitors was already 408 (figure 2). (Koukkunen 2018a.)

Finnish people visit Break Sokos Hotel Bomba by far the most compared to other nationalities. In 2017 over 98% of the visitors where Finns as seen in figure 4. Throughout 2016 to 2018 the biggest international group came from Denmark followed by China, Estonia, Great Britain, France and Austria to name a few. The number of Danish tourists from all the international tourists visiting Break Sokos Hotel Bomba was 43% in 2016, 38% in 2017 and 58% from January to August 2018 as seen in figures 3, 5 and 7. A remarkable difference can be seen in the rise of Chinese tourists. Already from January until August 2018 there were 52 Chinese tourists which is more than in 2017 and 2016 altogether. (Koukkunen 2018a.) The rise of Chinese tourists should also be seen in targeted marketing.

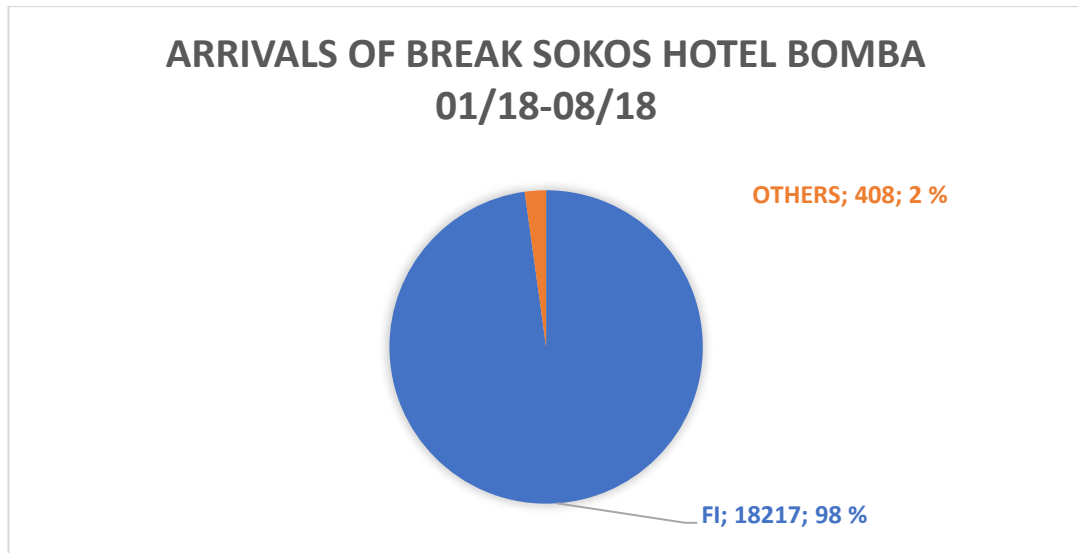


Figure 2. Arrivals of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba 01/18-08/18 (Source: Koukkunen 2018a).

From January to August 2018 there has been over 18 200 Finnish tourists which accounts for 98% of all the tourists. The biggest international group was Danish tourists which accounted for 58% of the international tourists. (Koukkunen 2018a.)

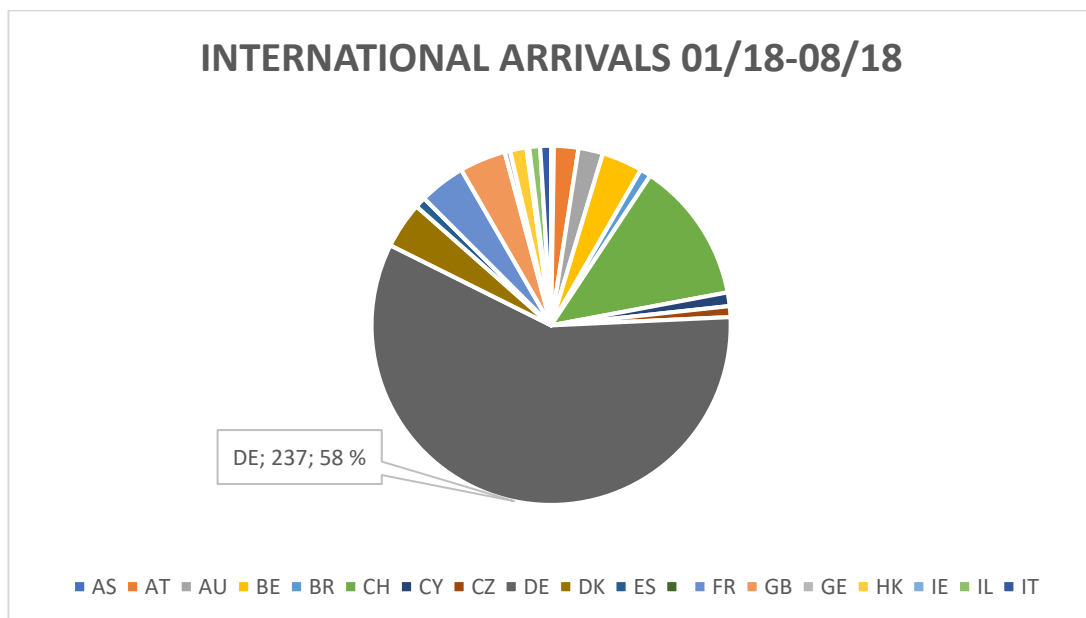


Figure 3. International Arrivals 01/18-08/18 (Source: Koukkunen 2018a).

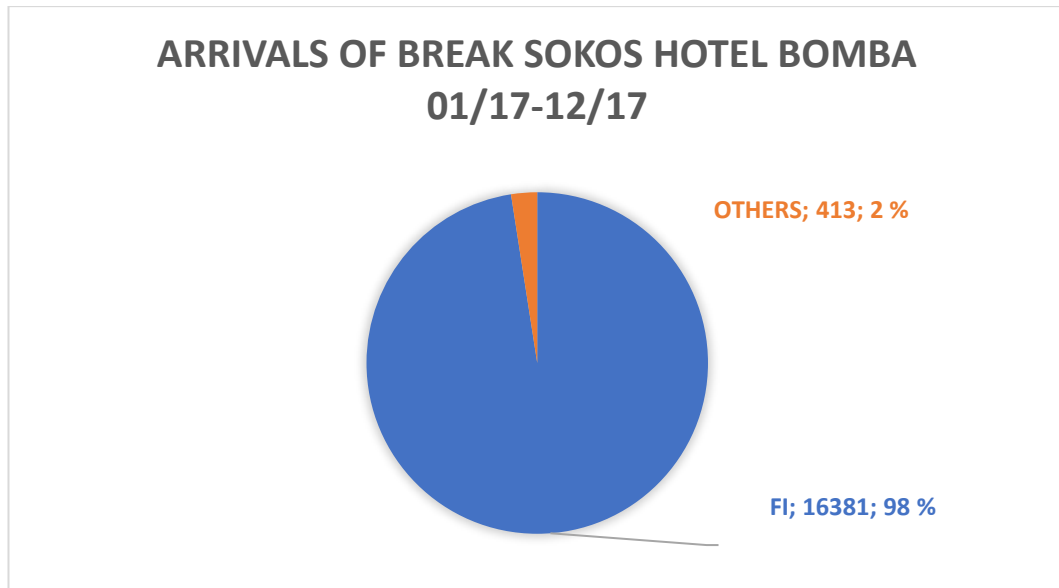


Figure 4. Arrivals of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba 01/17-12/17 (Source: Koukkunen 2018a).

In 2017 the number of tourists was lower than in 2018. This was influenced by the renovations which took place on Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. There were in total 413 international visitors from which 38% were Danish. (Koukkunen 2018a.)

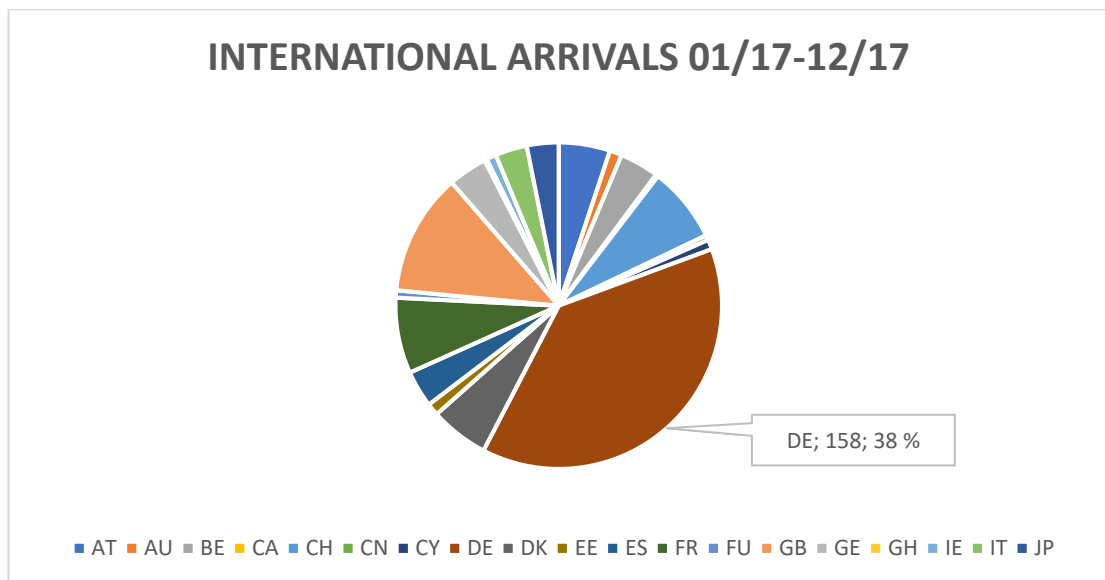


Figure 5. International Arrivals 01/17-12/17 (Source: Koukkunen 2018a).

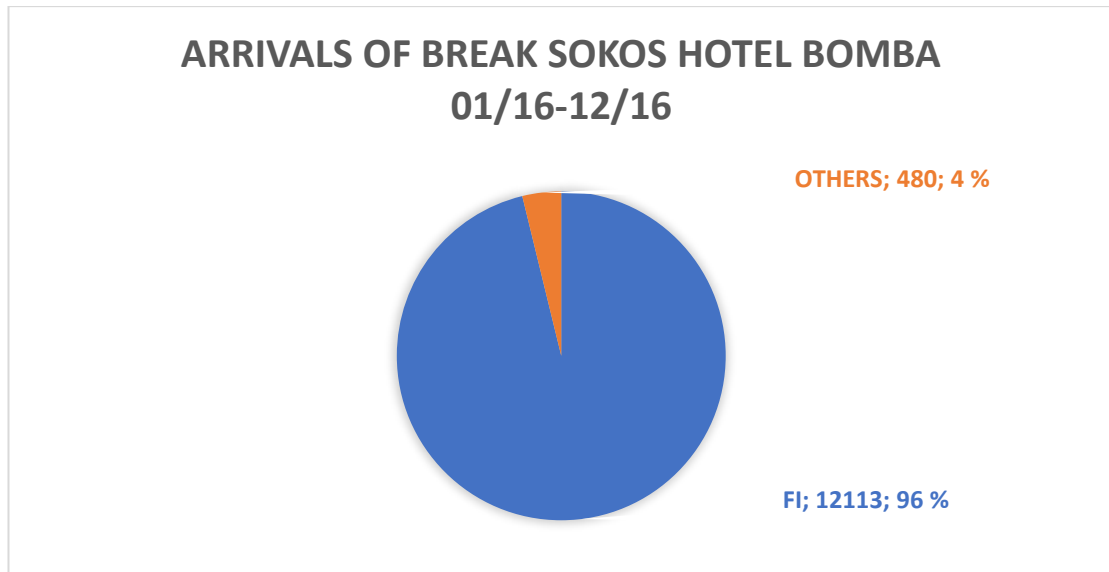


Figure 6. Arrivals of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba 01/16-12/16 (Source: Koukkunen 2018a).

In 2016 the number of international tourists was higher than in 2017 but the number of Finnish tourists was significantly lower; only 12 113. There were in total 480 international visitors and again the biggest group came from Denmark. (Koukkunen 2018a.)

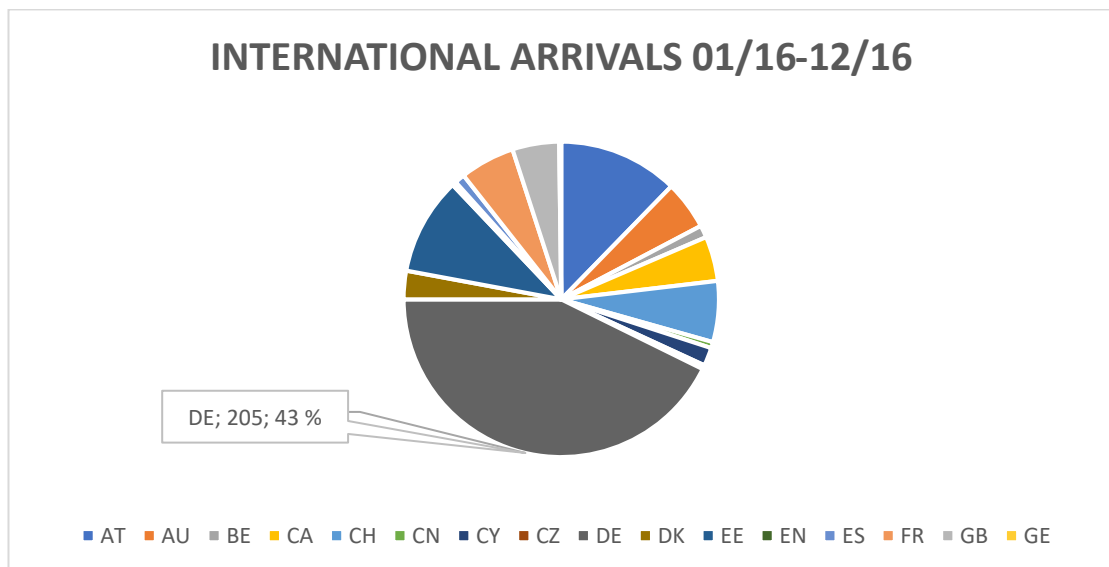


Figure 7. International Arrivals 01/16-12/16 (Source: Koukkunen 2018a).

3 MARKETING OF BREAK SOKOS HOTEL BOMBA

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is marketed as a beautiful and unique hotel and spa destination by the lake Pielinen. The calmness of the surrounding nature and the Karelian atmosphere is highlighted, and the destination is set to inspire, relax and offer activities for the customers. (Koukkunen 2018a.)

The mission of the renewed Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is to offer relaxation and the goal is that the customers will leave the destination more energised than when arriving. Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is aiming to share the Karelian sincerity and kindness and that is the focus point in their marketing. Breaking of the pattern, development, caring and responsibility are the shared values of the S-groups Break Sokos Hotel brand. (Koukkunen 2018a.) These same values are followed by Break Sokos Hotel Bomba.

These values and marketing plans have been implemented by offering, for example, activities such as a possibility to go skiing, golf course close by the hotel, a spa with the accessibility to beauty services such as the hairdresser and a beauty salon, delicious food experiences in Trattoria Pielinen and a possibility to go and see a theatre show during the summer in the Bomba's summer theatre. The hotel and spa destination also offer a variety of events such as pre-Christmas party packages, retreats offered by the PKO's Uumen brand and concerts to mention a few (Koukkunen, 2018a).

3.1 Marketing actions

PKO is working on marketing Break Sokos Hotel Bomba as well as Break Sokos Hotel Koli for foreign tourists with the help of fairs, exhibitions, travel organisers and general marketing. Henna-Riikka Oksman is the Sales Manager of the tourism and she is responsible for international tourism and leisure sales of PKO's four hotels: Sokos Hotel Kimmel, Sokos Hotel Vaakuna, Break Sokos Hotel Koli and Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. In her work she meets a lot of travel agents and organisers and does direct selling. In order to raise the awareness of both of these hotels in North Karelia, exhibitions and fairs play

an important role. Henna-Riikka visited, for example, China's leading outbound travel exhibition COTTM in Beijing and met up with travel organisers in Hong Kong. (Oksman 2018.) As the number of Asian tourists in Finland increases the knowledge on Asian markets is important to know.

Lauri Koukkunen is the Front-Office Manager of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and he manages the accommodation and the spa Bomba. He manages and supports the staff of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba enabling good results, well-functioning daily activities and helps to guarantee customer satisfaction. All in all, his job is to guarantee effective and successful operations of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. (Koukkunen 2018b.) Together with Henna-Riikka Oksman and the hotel manager Pasi Tolonen of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba they develop the marketing actions of Bomba.

The divisional director of tourism and hospitality business Mikko Hautasaari states that the goals of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba are to stabilize the actions and the quality of the service to a set level and strengthen the customer experience. The long-term goals include the increase of visitors in Bomba and the development of the area as a part of the tourism in Pielinen Karjala. The increase of international tourists and finding of paying customer groups to whom Break Sokos Hotel Bomba can offer unforgettable experiences and services is one their targets. The goal is to increase the financial performance of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. (Hautasaari 2018.)

The strategic marketing and digital marketing tools used by Break Sokos Hotel Bomba are described in detail later in this thesis with the help of secondary data collected. These tools can help Break Sokos Hotel Bomba in increasing its financial performance.

3.2 SWOT Analysis

One of the strengths of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is the surrounding lake Pielinen and nature which offers great outdoor activity opportunities. The renewed spa and the beautiful view of the lake offer a relaxing atmosphere. PKO as the owner of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba offers strong support which helps in the market position, development and marketing itself. The various premises such as the Karelian village and different meeting spaces offer great opportunities for meetings and events. For example, PKO has a brand

called Uumen, which offers wellbeing and relaxation events such as yoga, retreats and lectures. This is a definite strength of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. (Koukkunen 2018b.) The premises offer a full year-round of services for the customers and the staff is well trained and have the required know-how which is a strength of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba (Hautasaari 2018).

The remote location can be considered as a weakness and as a strength as the destination does require more effort to get there, for example from Joensuu or from Helsinki where most international tourists would first fly to, but it offers peaceful and rural surroundings (Koukkunen 2018b). After the renovations, the brand of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is still in creation as the customers are now starting to find this hotel rather than opting for Break Sokos Hotel Koli. That is why all the possible customers are not yet familiar or aware of this destination which can be seen as a weakness.

Break Sokos Hotel Koli can be seen both as a competitor as well as a partner. Break Sokos Koli is the part of the same chain as Break Sokos Hotel Koli but due to the image Koli has as a beautiful destination with a national view it is difficult to compete with it. Not only Koli but other hotels and destinations in North Karelia compete with the same target group; international tourists. The nature in Lakeland area of Finland is fairly similar offering quietness, lakes and forests which means differentiation with the help of nature is more difficult on a national level.

Also, the danger of not developing enough and settling in the situation now is a threat. Constant development, meeting the customers' demands and needs and following the trends in tourism and travelling is important. (Koukkunen 2018b.) Developing operations offers a clear competitive advantage in the industry.

With the help of the renovations Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has the perfect opportunity to renew its brand and attract new customers both within Finland and abroad. With the help of strategic and digital marketing Bomba has an opportunity to attract tourists worldwide for example with social media or targeting marketing towards travel organisations.

4 STRATEGIC MARKETING

4.1 Overview of strategic marketing

Strategic marketing is an important factor on the global and highly competitive tourism industry. The goal is to have a competitive advantage and to answer to the consumers' changing demands and needs. When talking about strategic marketing, decisions made in the company play an important part. A strategic marketing plan guides the company in decision-making and marketing actions, for example in digital marketing sector. (Tsiotsou and Goldsmith 2012, 32-35.) Budgeting, trends, competitor evaluations and customers all are a part of strategic marketing plan and the goal is to implement the plans and gain the wanted market position (Drummond, Ensor and Ashford 2007, 12-15).

Strategic marketing includes strategic planning which refers to long-term plans and to the development of certain actions. Usually strategic plans are made for more than three years at a time. (Metaxas 2009, 2.) However, as time goes by the company's mission might change due to growth, changing customer base, new markets and new products and services. Then the company needs to renew its mission and think about how they create value, who are their customers, what the customers want and need and why their business exists. In order to figure out the mission the company can create a mission statement which guides the staff in their work. (Kotler, Bowen and Makens 2014, 101-102.)

Nowadays marketing is very strategic, and it is crucial to know the market. The important roles in strategic marketing include figuring out the market segments and targeting them, choosing of the specific strategic path, making an offer to the market, supporting and evaluating the process, and development. (Caescu, Constantinescu and Ploesteanu 2012, 1-2). These roles are also be known as segmentation, targeting, differentiation and positioning which all together create value for the customers (Kotler 2013, 203). Together these four elements create a basis for strategic marketing.

4.2 Segmentation

Segmentation can be done in multiple different ways, for example, segmenting customers by country, specific region, age, income, social class or by attitude. The four segmentation categories involve geographic, behavioural, psychographic and demographic segments. (Kotler 2013, 204-213.) Segmentation is a way to divide a group of people based also by their needs and interests which helps to target strategic marketing (Matias, Nijkamp and Sarmiento 2013, 330).

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba wants to attract customers from Central Europe, Russia and Asia. The main focus lately has been on attracting Central European tourists to visit North Karelia and Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. (Oksman 2018.) Segmenting the customers based on geographic location helps with targeting the strategic marketing as well as targeting digital marketing to these groups.

4.3 Targeting

Nowadays, mass marketing has changed into target marketing in most companies. The idea behind market targeting is about choosing one or a few market segments in which the company wants to enter. The decision is made according to the size of the market, the development or future development of the market, company's resources and the entire attractiveness of the market segment. The company needs to look into market segments it is planning to enter carefully and evaluate for example the growth, sales, possible competitors and purchasing power of the customers. (Kotler 2013, 203-214.)

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba wants to offer relaxation and it is targeted towards couples as a peaceful retreat. This is also based on the values of the whole Break Sokos Hotel brand which drives to differentiate from other hotels as relaxing and inspiring destination. As said previously in the segmentation section Break Sokos Hotel wants to target their international marketing towards tourists from Central Europe, Russia and Asia.

4.4 Differentiation

Differentiation refers to how the company will stand out from the market with its products or services and gain a competitive advantage. In order to do this the company needs to form a differentiation strategy. The goal is to create value for the customers in the chosen market. (Kotler 2013, 221-222.) Basically, the goal of differentiation is to separate from the competitors in the eyes of the customers.

For Break Sokos Hotel Bomba differentiation to Break Sokos Hotel Koli is important as Koli is one of their closest competitors inside the chain. Break Sokos Hotel Bomba brings out the Karelian atmosphere and the surrounding nature and the spa in Bomba is more diverse than the one in Break Sokos Hotel Koli. Other competitors of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba are hotels based nearby such as Hyvärilä tourism center in Nurmes. (Koukkunen 2018e.) Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has the support of the chain which increases the competitive advantage and helps in marketing of the destination.

4.5 Positioning

Positioning stands for how the customers in the chosen segment identify the company's product or service and it also refers to the value proposition of the brand. Value propositions include, for example, the idea of offering more for more or more for less. These attributes are used to help in gaining competitive advantage. (Kotler 2013, 221-226.) On the other hand, positioning also refers to developing the company's image and its goal is to reach and affect to the target group (Bunakov and Rubtzov 2016, 5101).

In other words, Break Sokos Hotel Bomba needs to fulfil the gap in the consumers' minds and position themselves so that when consumers are considering a rural holiday Break Sokos Hotel Bomba would be considered as an option. However, this takes time locally but especially when trying to affect to the mind space of international tourists globally.

4.6 Challenges in strategic marketing

One of the biggest challenges in strategic marketing in tourism industry is the changing demands of the customers. Travelling is seen as a want rather than a need and, for example seasons and income elasticity affect the customers' purchase decisions. The customer might postpone travelling if other more expensive purchases such as a new car is seen as a more important purchase. Tourism and travel industry also consist of different service providers which causes challenges as their experiences from one service provider affects the overall experience of the entire holiday. This also affects customer loyalty. (Tsiotsou and Goldsmith 2012, xxxii-xxxiv.)

Customer loyalty is difficult to achieve in tourism industry as the want for discovering new places is usually greater than visiting the same places. That is why it is difficult to have loyal customers in the hotel industry which makes strategic planning and implementation a challenge. A global brand has the ability to develop loyal customers in attracting them to purchase from the same service provider where ever they are. (Tsiotsou and Goldsmith 2012, xxxii.) However, as the S-Group is a national brand and PKO operates only in North Karelia it is not possible to affect customer loyalty like a global brand can.

Globalisation itself can be seen both as a challenge as well as an exciting opportunity. Ongoing trends affect the global market which is also a key factor in strategic planning. (Tsiotsou and Goldsmith 2012, xxxii.) Globalisation increases competition which causes challenges for local companies.

Also, in some hotels and hotel chains it is a challenge to manage strategic marketing and planning as the main focus might be in the front-desk operations and the general management of the daily hotel operations (Kotler et al. 2014, 118.) In this case the challenge is to educate the staff accordingly to follow a strategic plan or to find a specific person to take the lead in implementing the plan.

5 DIGITAL MARKETING

5.1 Overview of digital marketing

Digital marketing, also known as e-marketing, is a marketing strategy which uses different media platforms such as social media, emails and newsletters in order to interact with consumers. Digital marketing is connected to digital business which is a broader term referring to automated processes, for example in sales, marketing and distribution. (Chaffey and Smith 2017, 13.)

Digital marketing uses digital media channels such as search-engine optimisation (SEO) and customer relationship management (CRM) which are important parts of digital business and marketing together with social media and web marketing. Also, search engine marketing is a part of digital marketing which includes search-engine optimisation and pay-per-click marketing. (Fierro, Gavilanez and Alonso, 2017, 244). Digital marketing includes paid and owned media as well as earned media. Paid media refers to media tools such as search-engine optimisation or display or banner ads whereas owned media is something the company can fully control such as their website. On the other hand, earned media means something that is created by the audience, such as word-of-mouth marketing. (Hemann and Burbary 2018.)

The general marketing mix of price, place, product and promotion apply also to digital marketing. As well as in traditional marketing digital marketing requires a strategy on how the company will meet their goals as not all the digital marketing tools are suitable for each company. (Ryan 2016, 31-32.) For instance, a digital marketing that works in Asia might not work in Finland and vice versa.

5.1.1 Search engine optimization

One part of Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is Search-Engine Optimization (SEO) which refers to ranking the search-engine results which consists of different tasks so that a

company can have a top ranking when consumers search for, for instance certain keywords. The main goal of SEO is to attract as many customers to the company's webpage as possible through search-engines. (Lee 2016, 198.) SEO covers so called organic rankings. The content of the webpage affects to the search-engine position as organic rankings are positioned based on the suitability whereas paid links appear usually in the beginning of the search-engine page without considering the suitability of the content for the search. (Berman and Katona 2013, 644.) This information tells that a company can affect their search-engine listing position with content marketing such as actively creating new content on their webpage or by having a company blog. However, search engine optimization deals with altering the algorithms so that a company can have a higher organic listing in search engines (Berman and Katona 2013, 644).

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba uses Search-Engine Optimisation mainly on the Sokos Hotels website rather than on their own webpage (Koukkunen 2018d). Nonetheless, using SEO also on Bomba's own website would be beneficial in creating more traffic to their webpage.

5.1.2 Pay-per-click

The other part of Search-Engine Marketing is Pay-Per-Click (PPC) marketing which is described as an advertisement consisting of a text that has a link to a webpage. This advertisement is found in search engines when a phrase or a word is written in the search box. However, even though both SEO and PPC are commonly described to be a part of search engine marketing they are still very different as SEO is not a part of paid media. (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 384.)

PPC only costs to a company when a customer clicks on the sponsored link which is why it differs from general marketing (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 384). This is also an easy way for a company to test if search-engine marketing is an effective way of promoting.

5.2 Digital marketing tools

Digital marketing tools are a part of inbound marketing which means connecting with the customers through quality content and media (Patruti-Baltes 2017, 62). Personalised email marketing, brand's webpage, online advertising and social media are interactive digital marketing tools used to create value for the brand and for the customers. It enables direct contact with the consumers as well as commenting and giving feedback creating online brand communities. However, these tools do not offer a direct competitive advantage. It matters how advanced the company is in using these tools and how actively they use them in order to meet their goals. (Taiminen 2016, 392-399.)

Digital marketing includes online advertisements which can be interactive or passive. This is also referred as push and on-demand marketing. Emails and for example newsletter are a part of push marketing whereas search-engine optimisation is part of on-demand marketing. (Taiminen 2016, 394.) Both of these techniques create value for the company.

Through globalisation and the constantly changing demands consumers want more targeted marketing such as offers specified for them. With digital marketing tools, for example with social media, companies have the opportunity to get more detailed information about their customers and target their marketing better. Different client databases have been created to help companies offer individualised offers. (Zsarnoczky 2018.) This is also something Break Sokos Hotel Bomba could use more even though they do use email marketing such as newsletters, their websites and social media as digital marketing tools (Koukkunen 2018f). Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's use of digital marketing tools is elaborated in following sections and the development ideas for digital marketing are explained in results and discussion part of this thesis.

5.3 Content marketing in digital channels

The purpose of content marketing is to engage the audience, offer information and help the customers rather than solely selling a product or a service. Content marketing is strongly linked with digital marketing and it is used with digital marketing tools such as

blogs and websites. (Gattis 2014, 52.) It creates value for the customers and it is something every business can do regardless of the size of the company (Ryan 2016, 207-208).

Content marketing is also a part of strategic marketing. A plan where strategic content will be published and finding the resources for activating media channels needs to be looked into before exploring all the possible marketing channels. Focusing on a restricted amount of digital marketing tools used to share content gives better results rather than splitting the focus on multiple channels. (Gattis 2014, 53-54.) That is why it is better to start with one channel and then after successfully creating content expand into other media channels.

Content marketing is not to be mixed with copywriting. Content marketing aims to increase customer loyalty, inform and engage whereas copywriting aims to find the target. (Baltes 2015, 111-112.) Content marketing has to offer engaging information through text, games, applications, podcasts or videos to mention a few (Chaffey & Smith 2017, 36). Damian Ryan (2016, 215-216) clarifies that the content created needs to be linked with the brand and share a story and that is why content marketers should be creative.

Social media is also interlinked with content marketing as much of the advertising takes place on sites such as Facebook. Videos and links online engage customers in a different way than solely counting on sharing information about offers. (Ryan 2016, 215-216.) Blogs, interviews, news and photos are also an example of content marketing. This includes, for instance, updating the company's website actively, keeping up with regular blogposts, adding pictures to the company's social media pages and to create other relevant content. Online videos are a way to offer different kind of content and they engage customers in a different way than normal marketing texts. (Ryan 2016, 220-222.)

5.3.1 Social media marketing

Social media has enabled electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWOM). This takes place in online brand communities, review sites such as TripAdvisor, blogs and other sites where consumers can read about other people's experiences. Usually people read about different destinations before choosing their holiday destination and they tend to trust more to the opinions of fellow tourists rather than the opinions of companies. Companies social

media pages, for instance Facebook and Instagram are popular among consumers to share their views and interact with the companies by offering feedback. (Minazzi 2015, 15-17.)

Social media is usually used to guide customers to the company's webpage to buy products and services (Ryan 2016, 39). In this case social media posts can attract customers to book a holiday in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. Some companies use social media as their main way to attract customers to their website rather than using traditional marketing tools. Social media offers also feedback directly from the customers which enables the development of for example the company website towards a more user-friendly platform. It could be said that the more people interact and see posts online, the more customers the company will gain. (Ryan 2016, 121-124.) However, the activity of the company in social media marketing affects also to the activity of the customers.

Facebook is considered the most important social media tool used in the tourism and travelling industry because tourism and travelling related posts are the most popular subject by over 42% of the Facebook users and because Facebook can attract the most attention due to its vast network (Amara 2018). However, younger people are most likely to be a fan of a brand online. According to study conducted on the internet usage and engagement with brands 48% of young 14-29-year-olds are followers or even considered as fans of a company online. (Kleine-Kalmer 2016, 6.) In Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's case they want to attract customers from all walks of life offering activities and services for both families, couples and younger visitors. In the future, Break Sokos Hotel Bomba wants to increase its popularity among couples and the offering of couples' quality time without forgetting its other target groups.

According to TripAdvisor (2016, 21) 73% of tourists use online sites for searching information on holiday destinations. This includes webpages such as TripAdvisor but also social media sites. Nowadays positive online feedback can be far more effective than traditional advertisement in increasing consumers purchasing power (Sezgin, 2016, 8). Activating social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram can be crucial for international tourism growth in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba.

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has a Facebook and an Instagram account and Vkontakt account for Russian tourists but they are not used to their full capability. Their Instagram page has over 360 followers but only 37 posts starting from 15th of May in 2018 compared to the fact that their competitor inside the chain, Break Sokos Hotel Koli, has over 1540 followers and over 1000 posts on their account (Instagram 2018ab). Of course, Break

Sokos Hotel Koli has been around for longer and has a clear brand as a hotel situated in the picturesque national park of Koli. In Facebook Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has over 5800 likes on the page but the amount of engagement through comments and likes by the followers varies. Most of the posts gather likes but lacks comments. The overall activity of posting is very different from month to month, for example, in August 2018 there were 7 posts but in September there were only 2 posts on the Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's Facebook page. (Facebook 2018.)

5.3.2 E-mail marketing

E-mail marketing is an effective way to connect with customers. Newsletters are a common way for companies to interact with large customer groups by simply adding people to their sending lists given that those people have purchased products or services from the company previously. Through e-mails companies have an opportunity to send out targeted offers and share information with the customers, for example, with the help of automated marketing. (Ryan 2016, 153-154.)

The content of e-mail marketing is usually connected with offers, selling ideas or informing about the company's new products or services to their customers. The goal is to keep the customers interested in your company or brand and engage with them. Through software systems even mass e-mails can be personalised, for instance by offering specific deals based on their purchase history or by personalising the e-mail by speaking to the customer by their name which also helps in creating trusts. (Ryan 2016, 155-157.)

However, as the use of digital marketing tools increases the amount of e-mails customers receive from various companies increases which affects the rate customers are willing to open the e-mails. The companies are competing against each other when it comes to getting the customers attention with e-mail marketing. The risk is that the customers get annoyed with constant inflow of marketing e-mails and find the information irrelevant which might lead to signing off from the e-mail posting list. That is why the pace of sending e-mails needs to be carefully thought. E-mails should not be sent too often to not to cause the customers getting annoyed but also a too slow pace can make the company lose customers. (Ryan 2016, 154.) For instance, Break Sokos Hotel Bomba could start by

sending monthly newsletters to their customers on a specific subject and see what kind of respond the e-mails would receive.

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba uses e-mails as a part of their marketing. However, booking confirmations are sent only if the customers wishes and after the stay in the hotel a customer feedback questionnaire is sent automatically. (Koukkunen, 2018f.)

5.3.3 Blog marketing

Individuals as well as companies can use blogs as a marketing tool and for sharing content online. Blogs help a brand become more easily approachable, they create followers and also increases word-of-mouth marketing. If a brand does not have a blog of its own, then reaching out to popular bloggers is a good idea if the brand wants to utilize the audience by doing collaborations between the company and the blogger. (Ryan 2016, 130-131.) It is exactly the online communities whose attention companies want and aim towards with blog marketing. According to a research done by Angela Dobele (2015) there is a clear connection between the content shared and the number of comments received in blog marketing. The study shows that product related posts created more interaction with the followers than marketing or networking related posts. (Dobele 2015, 1087-1096.) However, this tells only the results of one study that investigated a software company's blog-posts and the interaction between the company and the audience.

In blog marketing there has been a shift into having more paid advertising and collaborations with brands. The rising popularity of social media has made companies question the effectiveness of blog marketing. It is being said that blog marketing is one owned media platform that affects positively on the success of the marketing whereas the content on social media sites is not entirely controlled by the company. Blog content will appear on search-engine rankings, but social media content will not. (Scott 2017, 79.) Break Sokos Hotel Bomba does not have a blog of their own. However, a blog could help to attract new target groups and a possibility to interact and guide the conversation about the hotel and spa through engaging by commenting and following conversations in other blogs.

5.3.4 Website marketing

Website marketing is a part of both strategic marketing as well as digital marketing. Website can be seen as advertisement and as a connection tool for the company (Taiminen 2016, 393). According to Dave Chaffey (2014, 558) important parts of website marketing are design, content and structure of the webpage especially now when mobile devices are commonly used to view webpages. Personality of the website consists of the layout, colours and fonts used to captivate the attention of the customers and the personality should reflect the target group's needs in Chaffey's opinion (2014, 558-559). On the other hand, Damian Ryan (2016, 52) emphasizes the structure of the information on the website more than the design itself as it affects to the success of the website.

Break Sokos Hotel has two websites: one under the Sokos Hotels chain's website (sokoshotels.fi/en/nurmes/sokos-hotel-bomba) and one of its own (bomba.fi/en/). Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's webpage under Sokos Hotel's brand has basic information about the hotel, accommodation options, meeting venues and offers whereas Bomba's own webpage offers more detailed information about the spa, activities and restaurants in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and in Nurmes area (Break Sokos Hotel Bomba 2018; Bomba 2018.) Bomba.fi webpage offers more information in English than the Sokos Hotels page of Bomba.

The structure of the Sokos Hotels website is the same for every hotel in the chain offering the basic information, pictures, details of the rooms and activities and most importantly it offers the place where customers can book their holiday. On the other hand, Bomba's own webpage does not offer the possibility to directly buy your holiday from the webpage but the booking site is linked to it, so it is still easily found by customers. Where the chain's webpage is limited to a certain structure, Bomba's webpage has a more creative layout and use of pictures and fonts which makes it more appealing to the eye.

5.4 Measuring the effects of digital marketing

When using digital marketing tools, it is important to measure the return on investment (ROI) to figure out if digital marketing is beneficial for the company. Measuring the

effectiveness of digital marketing can mean for example the quality or the costs. Digital marketing is known to be more affordable than traditional marketing but the effectiveness of it is based on the knowledge and effort put on it from the company. With the help of metrics and, for example key performance indicators (KPI) the effectiveness of digital marketing can be assessed. The metrics used in digital marketing evaluation should be chosen before implementing the marketing plan. (Flores 2013, 3-9.) This helps to analyse the findings.

Digital marketing campaigns can be evaluated, for example based on the clicks and views. This can apply to digital marketing tools such as emails and social media advertisement however it is not necessarily the best measure of interaction and effectiveness because it does not measure how it affects the brand itself. (Flores 2013, 11.)

The evaluation of digital marketing tools, such as websites can be tracked in multiple ways. Web analytics such as Google Analytics measures the number of visits, views on the page and the time spent on the page. It also tells where the visitors come from as in if they come directly to the webpage, through Google search, through social media sites or others. (Flores 2013, 12-14.) In addition to Google Analytics there are other web analytic sites such as SimilarWeb which analyses traffic by gathering data and using metrics (O'Leary 2014). The measuring services are commonly used by companies to follow their traffic in order to develop their services and marketing.

6 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Consumer behaviour is a vast term which includes, for instance decision-making process, the values of the customers, expectations and reality, personality traits, attitudes, values and beliefs and customer loyalty. Before implementing a strategic marketing plan, it is important to know the customers. (Cohen, Prayag and Moital 2013, 875.) Tourism consumer behaviour refers to the acts and buying behaviour of tourism products and services and also to the consumers' behaviour after the buying process. Knowing how the consumers react and behave helps the management in their decision-making process, strategic planning and meeting the customers' demands. (Fratu 2011, 119.)

Digital consumer behaviour is a new term which differs from the traditional consumer behaviour. A digital consumer uses technology and explores different opportunities rather than staying loyal with one brand or one company. The search of information happens online, for example through blogs or videos. (Belinger 2011, 27-28.) This creates a new challenge for traditional companies as they should take into consideration both the traditional as well as the digital consumer behaviour.

For Break Sokos Hotel Bomba the change in international tourists' behaviour can be also seen in the number of nights spent in the destination. In 2016 the total number of nights spent in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba was 18 339 and in 2017 it was 24 324. That is an increase of over 32 %. (Koukkunen 2018a.) Tourists are more willing to spend several nights in a rural destination like Break Sokos Hotel Bomba rather than only staying for one night. Also, as the total visitor amount has risen the total nights spent also rose.

6.1 Cultural differences affecting consumer behaviour

Culture affects consumers buying behaviour and the general consumer behaviour greatly because culture defines the consumers' perspective (Solomon 2013, 529). Culture itself refers to for instance to the traditions, behaviour, values, beliefs, religion and attitudes of people from a certain area. As culture affects many walks of life it is important to acknowledge in marketing.

Consumers make assumptions based on their cultural perspective and the country-of-origin affects their purchase decision (Schiffman, Kanuk and Hansen 2012, 367-368). For instance, consumers might associate Finland with reindeers, cold weather and forest whereas France might be seen as the country of wine and fashion. These assumptions are also based on the values of the consumers and it affects what kind of brands consumers are willing to choose. The country-of-origin especially affects the purchase decision when the consumers aren't otherwise familiar with the country or don't have their own experiences. (Schiffman et al. 2012, 368.)

The challenge for companies is to take in account the attitude that consumers have about the country of origin, in this case about Finland, and market the destination based on its qualities rather than focusing on general assumptions. In Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's

case it is important to focus on Northern Karelian atmosphere and nature rather than marketing the destination the same way hotels in Lapland do. However, affecting to consumers attitudes before they have even visited the destination can be difficult as also tourism trends and globalisation play a part in consumers buying behaviour.

6.2 Tourism and travel trends

Tourism consumer behaviour has changed in Europe and it has been affected by the financial crisis, changes in nature and other economic downturns. This has caused consumers to book shorter trips, spend their money carefully, look for discounts on holidays and opt for short-distance locations. Also, business tourism has decreased and leisure tourism and the demands for holidays has increased. (Fratu 2011, 123-124.)

There has been a definite change in consumers' needs and wants when it comes to the selection of accommodation: consumers wanted more value for the money they paid. This was influenced by the global recession and by the effect of information and feedback found from online sites and social media sites had on consumers worldwide. (Yesawich 2012.)

According to Momondo's report on rising trends in 2018 tourists will travel less to crowded cities and look for authentic experiences in travelling and food. Activity holidays and challenging oneself are also becoming trends as well as social holidays where tourists have the chance to enjoy hotel's communal places. In 2018 the trend is set to be family holidays and creating new memories together rather than solo travelling trend like in 2017. (Fanelli 2017.) However, not all the tourists follow the trends in tourism and travelling. That is why it is also important for the companies to consider the affect of cultures on consumer behaviour.

Winter travelling has also increased its popularity for example in Lapland. The temperature of the destination does not necessarily play an important role in decision-making process. Also, tourists are ready to travel to more remote locations and social media has a big effect on tourists finding out about these remote destinations. (Shabada 2018.)

6.3 Globalisation and rural tourism

Globalisation affects the tourism industry greatly when air travelling becomes more affordable and frequent, technology enables the access to more information on foreign destinations, travel times get shorter, people make more money and foreign countries interest more than domestic destinations. (Holowiecka and Grzelak-Kostulska 2013, 50.) It also affects consumer behaviour and all aspects of tourism but especially rural tourism which has many descriptions. One of them refers to tourism that takes place on rural areas such as the countryside (Onoyko 2017, 50). Rural tourism destinations have distinctive characteristics which differs from urban destinations such as location, activities and the surrounding environment (Dashper 2014, 3-5). Break Sokos Hotel Bomba can be counted as a rural tourism destination as it is situated far from bigger cities such as Joensuu and it is surrounded by forest and a lake.

Rural tourism is also affected by global changes, for example, in transportation, culture and consumers demand. Whilst transportation and mobility around the world has increased and become easier, tourism has changed into more globalised phenomenon. (George, Mair and Reid 2009.) As the tourism industry changes the demands of customers change. The expectations from rural destinations is not only to offer relaxation and quietness but also the demand for activities such as sports has increased. (Dashper 2014, 5-6.) The customers are longing for new experiences.

6.4 TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor is a platform offering recommendations, reviews and complaints of accommodation and destinations around the world given by the general public (Vásques 2011, 1709). Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has received both positive and negative feedback on TripAdvisor. The overall score was 4 out of 5 and there are in total 80 reviews of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba from which 26 is in English. (TripAdvisor 2018a.)

4 of the 26 English reviews were from 2018. Break Sokos Hotel Bomba was described, for example as beautiful, comfortable and modern. On the other hand, the Karelian village

was described awful, vintage and disappointing. The hotel and the Karelian village have the opposite reactions on customers based on TripAdvisor reviews. One international review was given on the 2nd of August 2018. The customer was very pleased with the renovated parts of the hotel and was happy with the received service from the staff. Interestingly, the customer compared the Karelian village cottages to others he had stayed in Finland and felt that he didn't get value for his money in the same way than in the other places. He gave Break Sokos Hotel Bomba 2 out of 5 stars which is below the average. (TripAdvisor 2018a.)

Surprisingly, only 8 of the 26 English reviews were written by foreigners and the rest were Finnish people. There were also 11 Russian, 4 German, 1 Dutch, 1 Polish and 1 French review found at the time of the search. However, the amount of Finnish reviews (36) is lower than all the international reviews altogether. (TripAdvisor 2018a.) This low level of reviews shows that either there is a lack of international tourists or the international tourists visiting Break Sokos Hotel Bomba are not familiar or active in TripAdvisor. However, TripAdvisor has over 60,000,000 members around the world and it is considered the biggest travel website offering reviews (Barrie 2015). According to TripAdvisor's research (2018b) 74% of online bookers use TripAdvisor. It offers companies an opportunity to show they care about the feedback given and by improving their services based on the reviews they show good customer service. Companies can also use TripAdvisor as an advertising platform as it attracts the target groups hotels, restaurant and holiday destinations are interested in. (Ryan 2016, 128.)

6.5 Other feedback sites

In addition to TripAdvisor feedback of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is also collected from Google, Booking.com, Hotels.com, Expedia and Agoda where customers can express their views on their holiday experience. There were in total 147 reviews of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba through these sites from 16th of April to 29th of September 2018. 30 of these reviews were from Booking.com, 2 from Expedia, 3 from Hotels.com, 1 from Agoda and the rest from Google. (Koukkunen 2018c.)

Many of the reviews include only star rating on average from 2 to 5 stars. Customers described Break Sokos Hotel Bomba as awesome, good, very good and exceptional to mention a few. Only a few negative comments were found and some of them concerned the price of the spa. One customer wished that the spa would be included in the price of the hotel night rather than paying for it separately. (Koukkunen 2018c.) This refers to Break Sokos Hotel Bomba being marketed as a spa hotel which is why it would be expected to have the spa included in the price of the hotel night.

7 RESEARCH METHODS

7.1 Methodology

This section describes the methods used in the research conducted for this thesis. A combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods was used to collect data concerning the international tourism and marketing development. The main way of collecting data was through a questionnaire and then in addition to that interviews were held to support the gathered secondary data.

Generally, questionnaires are used to collect information directly from the consumers in quantitative research whereas qualitative research does not focus on analytic answers. However, a mix of both of these research methods can be used to support the findings such as following questionnaires with qualitative research methods. (Barney & Glaser 2008.) This is why both methods were used in this research to increase the reliability and to support the findings.

7.2 Data collection

Both primary and secondary data are used in this thesis. A questionnaire was used in order to collect primary data from foreign customers visiting Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. The questionnaire link was open from 25th of August to 31st of October 2018. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) included 13 questions concerning what the customers would like from Break Sokos Hotel Bomba, how did they find the hotel and spa destination and finding out if they had visited, for instance Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's social media sites or webpages prior to their arrival.

In addition to the questionnaire interviews were held on the 26th of October in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. At that time a group of German tourists were staying the night in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and in total three Germans agreed to take part in a group interview. Also, one Canadian tourist who answered the questionnaire was also interviewed through Facebook on the 27th of October. The selection was done based on their voluntarism.

Secondary data was searched through different databases such as EBSCO Host, Academic Search Elite and many others. The secondary data used in this thesis covered books, articles, reviews, webpages and reviews. As the tourism and travelling is a growing industry there are a lot of articles, books and research connected to it worldwide. This thesis combines the theoretical knowledge on tourism and international business.

7.3 Validity and reliability

Validity refers, for instance to a questionnaire and its ability to measure what it is supposed to measure (Institute for Work and Health 2016). In other words, is the chosen research method suitable for the research subject. Reliability on the contrary means is the results worth trusting for, for instance would the same or similar results achieved if the questionnaire was repeated again (Institute for Work and Health 2016). Both validity and reliability were considered when conducting this research. In order to collect information from foreign tourists a questionnaire was the most valid method when the visiting

times of the tourists were infrequent, which made personal interviews harder to organise. Even though there were only a few responds to the questionnaire the interviews increased the reliability of this research.

The questionnaire conducted was an anonymous and voluntary and it was carefully done by using Webropol programme. The questionnaire questions were looked through with Lauri Koukkunen, the Front-Office Manager of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and the Sales Manager Henna-Riikka Oksman which helped to specify the questions to the target group. As the questionnaire was in English it was easier to target the answer group to only foreign visitors.

The questionnaire respond rate was low, so the research results were supported with individual interviews. However, due to the lack of international tourists the number of interviews remained low which affected to the validity of the research. However, most of the answers confirm the secondary data findings and support the development suggestions.

7.4 Limitations to the research

Unfortunately, only two international tourists answered the questionnaire. This was due to multiple reasons such as that the questionnaire link was opened at the end of August when the main summer season was already slowing down. Also, as mentioned earlier the number of international tourists has been only 2-3% of all the visitors in 2016-2018 which affected to the respond rate as it was harder to reach the foreign visitors when the percentage of them was already low compared to the number of Finnish tourists. Because of the low respond rate of the questionnaire interviews were held to international tourists to support the findings.

As the questionnaire did not involve a competition the answer rate remained lower than if the questionnaire had included a lottery where there was a possibility to win a price. This was due to the fact that it was difficult to come up with a price that would benefit the foreign customers. For instance, the opportunity to win a free night at the hotel would attract Finnish customers to take part in the questionnaire but the same would not work for foreign visitors due to the long distances. Also, there was another questionnaire

conducted at the same time by another student from the University of Eastern Finland which involved both Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and Break Sokos Hotel Koli. This might have also lowered the answer rate of the questionnaire conducted for this thesis.

The new GDPR regulation also affected negatively to the respond rate as the questionnaire linked could not be sent to the customers due to the fact that most of the international customers came through a travel agent. This is why the questionnaire had to be printed as a link and a QR code to papers which were shared to international tourists at the reception as well as sharing the questionnaire links directly to their hotel rooms.

The language also caused challenges as not all the international visitors of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba knew English well enough to take part in the survey as the questionnaire was only in English. For instance, Chinese and Russian tourist groups visiting Break Sokos Hotel Bomba had poorer knowledge in English which possibly affected the willingness to answer to the questionnaire (Koukkunen, 2018f).

Also, the visiting times of international groups was sparse. It was difficult to find a good time to go to Break Sokos Hotel Bomba to make interviews with foreign tourists as there were only a few groups visiting Break Sokos Hotel Bomba during this autumn. Also, because of the long distance it was impossible to be there to interview every international group.

8 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

8.1 Results

Through the questionnaire and the interviews conducted a lot of positive comments and feedback were received from customers. Some of the same adjectives used to describe Break Sokos Hotel Bomba were found in Tripadvisor comments as well as the information received through the research. Break Sokos Hotel Bomba was described for instance like this in the anonymous questionnaire results:

“Nice, calm and close to nature. It is a nice place for a family vacation” (Appendix 3).

“Great place. I expected it to be what I experienced” (Appendix 3).

The German tourists were on an organised trip which included multiple stops around Finland. The group arrived in Helsinki by a ferry and continued to Imatra and then to Break Sokos Hotel Bomba in Nurmes (Cuxliner German group 2018). Three group members took part in the group interview, but they wanted to remain anonymous. These tourists described Break Sokos Hotel Bomba as a beautiful place and the Karelian village which they stayed in they described as an okay accommodation as they were staying there only for one night (Cuxliner German group 2018).

According to the questionnaire answers and interviews none of the international tourists who took part on it visited Koli as seen on Appendix 3 and only one person visited the Spa Bomba (Cuxliner German group 2018). All in all, everyone that answered the questionnaire would recommend Break Sokos Hotel Bomba and also the interviewed people were pleased with the destination. One tourist who answered to the questionnaire said that she would recommend Bomba because “it is a nice place for a family vacation” (Appendix 3).

8.2 Development ideas

Based on the secondary data found and the results of the research there are clear development ideas for Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. A marketing plan for Break Sokos Hotel Bomba can offer guidelines which helps to meet the goals. The marketing plan focuses on how the company can reach its goals after determining what the goals are. It supports the marketing actions by offering a framework and different milestones leading up to the goals. (Wood 2013, 4.) This is why it is important for Break Sokos Hotel Bomba to create a more detailed marketing plan which includes a part on the use of digital marketing tools and the development of engagement with customers through online communities.

Other fields that require development are the use of digital marketing tools, engagement in feedback sites such as TripAdvisor and the general use of English in marketing materials. These development suggestions are explained in the following sections.

8.2.1 Digital marketing recommendations

There is a significant lack in the use of digital marketing tools such as Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), social media, full usage of the websites and effective content marketing. Break Sokos Hotel Bomba should use more Facebook paid advertising as well as free advertising meaning of creating more posts on their account. According to a study done on Facebook advertising (Palma 2016, 24-25) creating free advertisement also affected positively on the revenue created for the company. This shows that not all Facebook advertisement needs to be paid.

The lack of social media marketing can be seen in the research done for this thesis. According to the questionnaire results none of the respondents had visited none of the social media pages of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba referring to their Facebook and Instagram accounts as seen in Appendix 3. Also, none of the interviewed German tourists had not visited any of the social media sites nor the websites of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba (Cuxliner German Group 2018). This can be due to the lack of interest towards Break Sokos Hotel Bomba or it can be also seen in the reason why these tourists opted for coming to Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. The German tourists simply stopped by because it was part of their organised group trip, the French tourist was on a business trip and the Canadian tourist visited the hotel with a Finnish friend that had recommended the place. This tells that the reason for visiting Break Sokos Hotel Bomba was not initially their own decision which might affect to the lack of visiting social media sites and the websites of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba.

Also, Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is lacking in using SEO. Search-engine optimisation (SEO) and advertising across different channels such as display advertisement together can bring better results for the company rather than opting for only advertising in search engines (Dinner, van Heerde and Nesling 2014, 529). Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has social media accounts as mentioned earlier but the cross-channel marketing still needs work. Using search engine optimization on both of their websites could generate traffic and

increase awareness and in the long term bring new customers. Also, the tracking of where the traffic to their websites is important and can give guideline on which digital marketing tools Break Sokos Hotel Bomba should invest more. This can be done for instance with the help of Google Analytics or other web analytic services.

The use of e-mail marketing as well as website marketing should be developed by creating new content. Regular newsletters and offers sent to customers can generate new bookings and engages with the customers so that Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is not forgotten after the visit. For example, in most cases sharing videos and pictures of the destination on their websites attracts customers more than simply text. Especially short videos are used in digital marketing which is something Break Sokos Hotel Bomba should try and use this content both on their social media sites as well as their webpages as it creates impressions on the customers' minds.

8.2.2 Use of feedback sites

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba also has a lot to develop in their use of TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor's page for Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is linked to their webpages but the use both from the customers' side as well as Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's side is lacking. As mentioned earlier there were in total 80 reviews of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba found on TripAdvisor by September 2018. However, the engagement with customers in TripAdvisor was poor. For instance, none of the 26 English reviews left on TripAdvisor were answered by the staff of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba (TripAdvisor, 2018).

There are ways to increase the number of reviews received on TripAdvisor which some of them Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is already doing. Break Sokos Hotel Bomba has already linked their TripAdvisor page to their webpages which is a way to increase reviews when the site is easily found by customers. Bomba could also add the TripAdvisor link to their Facebook pages and make posts regarding the use of TripAdvisor and encourage their customers to write reviews.

The interviews revealed that two of the German tourists had used TripAdvisor previously when searching for information about a destination, but they had not looked at Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's page in TripAdvisor. Also, they were not planning on writing a

review on Break Sokos Hotel Bomba as their stay was very short. (Cuxliner German Group 2018.) This same answer was received from a Canadian tourist:

“I don’t use TripAdvisor and I am not planning on using TripAdvisor” (Canadian tourist 2018).

This answer was affected by the low respond rate as the secondary data findings support the use of feedback sites such as TripAdvisor. However, despite the research results referring to the lack of TripAdvisor use it doesn’t mean that there isn’t a need in developing the use of TripAdvisor from Break Sokos Hotel Bomba’s side. The active use of feedback sites can affect to the customers willingness to write more reviews concerning their visits to TripAdvisor.

8.2.3 Use of English language

During the search of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba’s marketing the shortage on English marketing material in digital marketing, for instance in social media was noticeable. The posts made in Facebook were all in Finnish rather than using both Finnish and English (Facebook 2018). This is an issue when Break Sokos Hotel Bomba is hoping to attract foreign customers who use online as a part of their decision-making process.

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba could first start of by posting both in Finnish and in English in their Facebook and Instagram page. Both of their websites offer information in English but the information in English is scarce compared to the information in Finnish. For the international tourists to be able to find enough information and engage with the hotel the information must be found at least in English but preferably also in Russian, German and Chinese as Break Sokos Hotel Bomba wants to attract customers from Central Europe, Asia and Russia as mentioned by Sales Manager Henna-Riikka Oksman (2018).

Also, when visiting in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba it was noticeable that marketing brochures were found in the lobby were in Finnish and Russian but none in English. Some of the signs found in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba’s area were only in Finnish and a few were also in English and Russian. In the future all the signs should be found in English and Russian as a part of developing the customer service targeted towards international tourists.

8.2.4 Organised group activities

One of the questionnaire answers acknowledged that activities and events could be marketed when arrived at the hotel and that there is an interest towards organised group trips starting from Break Sokos Hotel Bomba. However, this is only the opinion of one Canadian tourist and, for instance a French tourist was not interested in organised trips nor the marketing of them at their arrival (Appendix 3).

On the other hand, when interviewing the group of three German tourists they mentioned that they were interested in the wildlife in Nurmes area and they asked what kind of animals it is possible to see in the nature (Cuxliner German Group 2018). Especially in the peak times of international tourists Break Sokos Hotel Bomba could come up with organised group trips to the nature and bring out the traditional North Karelian nature. For instance, organised hiking trips and berry picking in the end of summer and beginning of autumn would offer international tourists authentic Finnish experiences in nature.

8.3 Conclusions

The goal of this thesis was to figure out what international tourists want from Break Sokos Hotel Bomba as a holiday destination and how Break Sokos Hotel Bomba could develop their marketing in order to attract more foreign visitors. Multiple development ideas were found considering strategic and especially digital marketing which aims to help the hotel and spa destination to attract more international visitors in the future by raising awareness and increasing the engagement with customers.

Development could be done in the field of digital marketing especially in social media sites, websites, content marketing, feedback collection and engagement with customers and to improve the marketing plan and make it more detailed. Most of the research results supported the secondary data findings despite the low level of responds to the questionnaire. In order to collect more questionnaire answers the questionnaire could have been released sooner and preferably it would have included a competition which would have increased the participation rate. However, most of the answers received from the questionnaire as well as the interviews supported the gathered secondary data.

All in all, this thesis provides development recommendations for Break Sokos Hotel Bomba which have a positive impact on generating more traffic to their webpages, increases awareness and brings new customers based on the secondary data findings. In the future a research concerning the differences in international marketing and the number of international tourists between Break Sokos Hotel Koli and Break Sokos Hotel Bomba could be conducted which would benefit especially Break Sokos Hotel Bomba in developing its actions.

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Research questionnaire

1. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
 - d. Do not want to tell

2. Which country are you from?

3. When did you visit Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?
 - a. January
 - b. February
 - c. March
 - d. April
 - e. June
 - f. July
 - g. August
 - h. September
 - i. October
 - j. November
 - k. December

4. From where did you find out about Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?
 - a. Social media
 - b. Through a travel agent
 - c. From a friend/family
 - d. From sokshotels.fi
 - e. Other, where?

5. Did you visit Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's webpages prior to your arrival?
 - a. Sokshotels.fi/nurmes/sokos-hotel-bomba
 - b. Bomba.fi
 - c. Both
 - d. Neither

6. Which Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's social media pages have you visited?
 - a. Facebook
 - b. Instagram
 - c. Both
 - d. Neither

7. What did you expect Break Sokos Hotel Bomba to be like? Describe in adjectives.

8. Did you visit Spa Bomba?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

9. Did you feel that something was missing from the hotel, spa or the whole area? If yes, what?

10. Did you visit Break Sokos Hotel Koli or Koli region during your stay?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

11. Would you like that more activities and events held at or near Break Sokos Hotel Bomba would be promoted to you at your arrival?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

12. Would you be interested in organised group trips starting from Bomba?
 - a. Yes, what?
 - b. No

13. Would you recommend Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?
 - a. Yes, why?
 - b. No, why?
 - c. Not sure, why?

Group interview questions

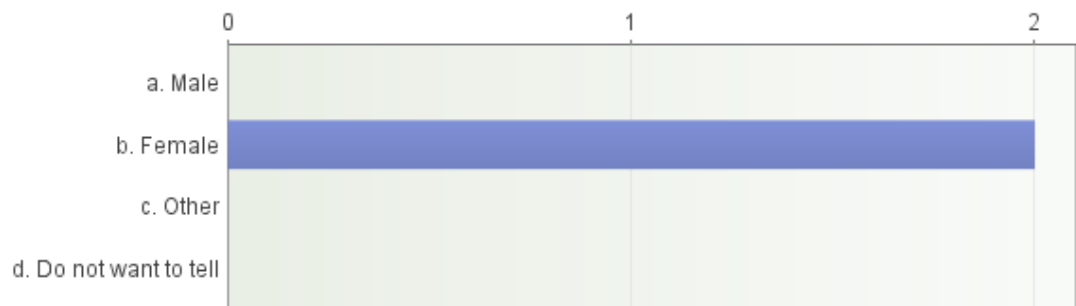
1. What made you come to Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?
2. What is your first impression of Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?
3. What are you planning to do on your stay in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?
4. Where did you find out about Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?
5. Did you visit Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's webpages prior to your arrival?
6. Did you visit Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's social media pages to your arrival?
7. Do you use TripAdvisor?
8. Are you planning on writing a review about your stay in Break Sokos Hotel Bomba to TripAdvisor?

Questionnaire results

Break Sokos Hotel Bomba

1. Gender

Vastaajien määrä: 2



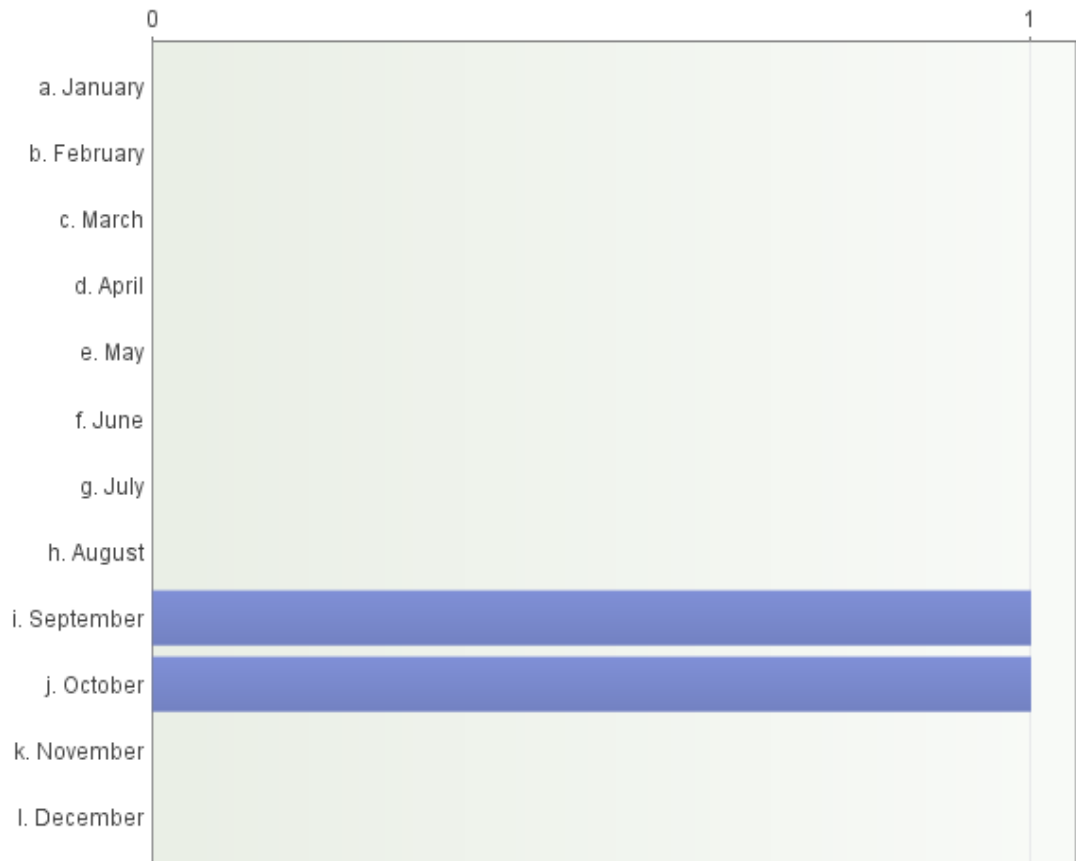
2. Which country are you from?

Vastaajien määrä: 2

- France
- Canada

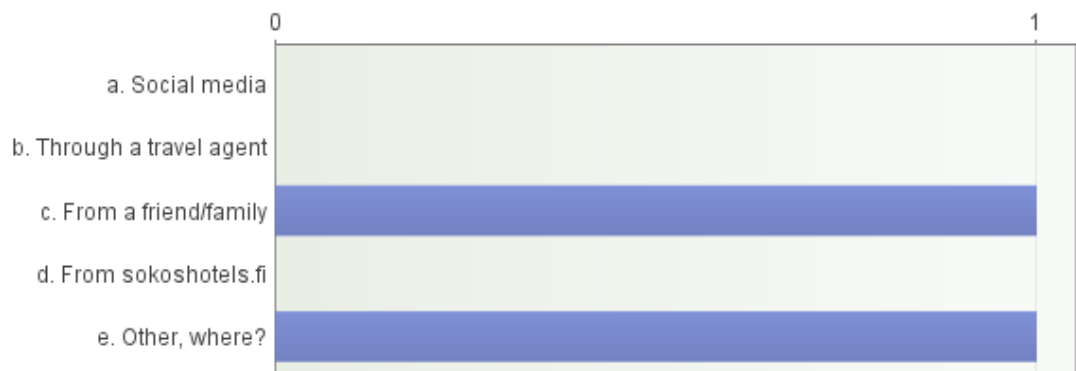
3. When did you visit Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?

Vastaajien määrä: 2



4. From where did you find out about Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?

Vastaajien määrä: 2

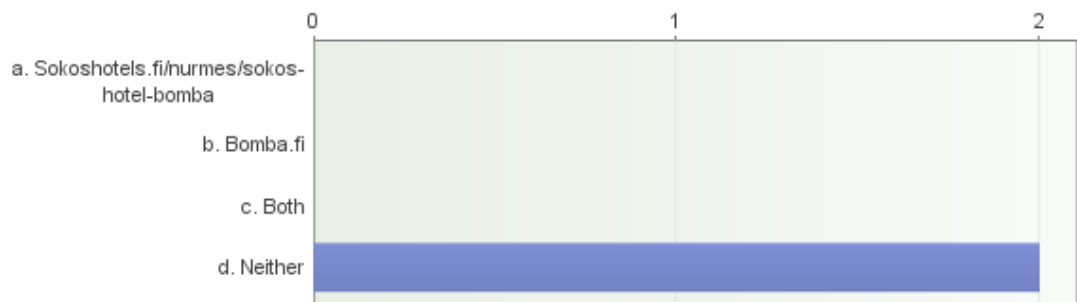


Avoimet vastaukset: e. Other, where?

- COST action meeting organization committee

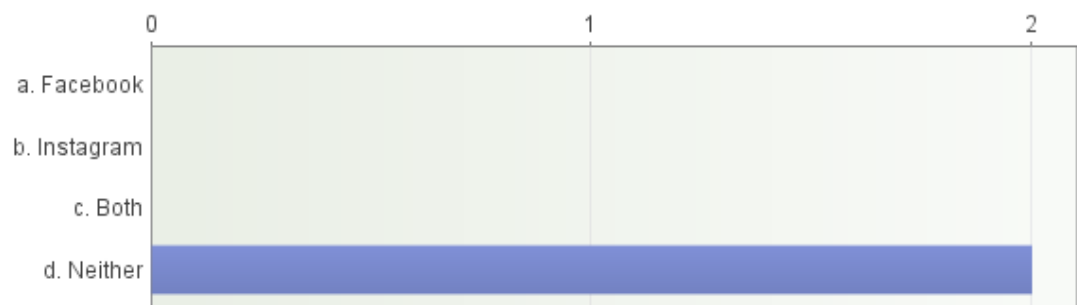
5. Did you visit Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's webpages prior to your arrival?

Vastaajien määrä: 2



6. Which Break Sokos Hotel Bomba's social media pages have you visited?

Vastaajien määrä: 2



7. What did you expect Break Sokos Hotel Bomba to be like? Describe in adjectives.

Vastaajien määrä: 2

- Nice, calm, close to nature
- I expected it to be what I experienced.

8. Did you visit Spa Bomba?

Vastaajien määrä: 2



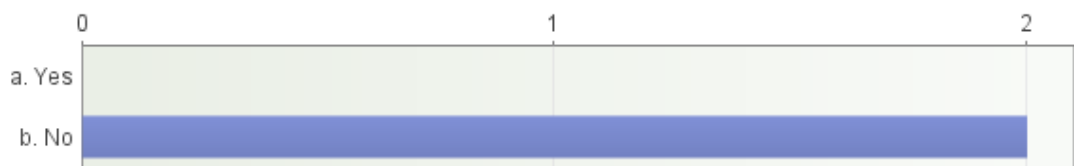
9. Did you feel that something was missing from the hotel, spa or the whole area? If yes, what?

Vastaajien määrä: 2

- Our days were fully occupied with trainings and meetings. We didn't have a lot of free time to enjoy the hotel and surrounding areas.
- No was great

10. Did you visit Break Sokos Hotel Koli or Koli region during your stay?

Vastaajien määrä: 2



11. Would you like that more activities and events held at or near Break Sokos Hotel Bomba would be promoted to you at your arrival?

Vastaajien määrä: 2



12. Would you be interested in organised group trips starting from Bomba?

Vastaajien määrä: 2



13. Would you recommend Break Sokos Hotel Bomba?

Vastaajien määrä: 2



Avoimet vastaukset: a. Yes, why?

- It is a nice place for a family vacation
- Great place