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**SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET MARKETING'S INFLUENCE ON DECISION MAKING  
PROCESS OF GERMAN NATURE TOURISTS**

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PROCESS OF GERMAN NATURE TOURISTS**

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## ABSTRACT

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The commissioner of the thesis was Finnish Rokua Geopark Co. which belongs to worldwide Geopark network. The corporation works in Rokua national park area in the field of nature tourism and provides a large range of wellness and welfare services as well as nature activities. The purpose of this research was to map out how well German cross-country skiers and hikers can be reached through Internet marketing and social media. Moreover, consumer buying process and motivational factors on traveling after a hobby were discovered. The theoretical foundation presented the background for the afore-mentioned subjects and formed a basis to empirical research which consisted of email interviews that were done in accordance to qualitative research methods.

The research results showed that the best way to reach German nature tourists through Internet marketing is to co-operate with the German organizations and associations that are focusing on nature tourism. On the other hand, the hobbyists believed that social media can be primarily used for reaching younger hobbyist groups. For instance, organization's own blog was perceived efficient, especially if there is a possibility to find it in one's own language. The motivational factors of the hobbyists when choosing a certain destination were diverse but the most important motivator was mentioned to be friends or relatives' recommendation on a certain travel destination.

This research works as a report for the commissioner on what are the ways to reach German target groups more efficiently through Internet marketing as well as social media by focusing on answering their needs. The obtained results can be utilized to develop current marketing tactics in order to get foreign target groups to find Rokua Geopark easier and become interested in it as a travel destination. Overall, this thesis is only directional due to its small amount of participants and thus, additional research is needed in order to reach a generalized overview. The future research could possibly be conducted with quantitative research method. However, through this study a specific development proposal was revealed as a need of increasing co-operation with local organizations and travel agencies. Therefore, foreign companies have a chance to stand out from the masses on German's wide-spread nature tourism market.

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Keywords: nature tourism, national park, social media, Internet, motivation, German tourists

## TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämän opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajana toimi maailman laajuiseen Geopark verkostoon kuuluva suomalainen Rokua Geopark konserni. Konserni työskentelee Rokuan kansallispuiston alueella luontomatkailun parissa ja se tarjoaa laajan valikoiman hyvinvointipalveluja sekä luontoaktiviteetteja. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli kartoittaa saksalaisten hiihtäjien sekä vaeltajien tavoitettavuus Internet markkinoinnin ja sosiaalisen median kautta. Lisäksi selvitettiin asiakkaan ostoprosessiin ja harrastusmahdollisuuden perässä matkustamiseen vaikuttavia motivaatiotekijöitä. Teoriaosuus käsitteli edellämainittujen käsitteiden taustoja ja toimi pohjana empiiriselle tutkimukselle, joka koostui laadullisten tutkimusmenetelmien mukaisesti tehdyistä sähköpostihaastatteluista.

Tutkimustulokset osoittivat saksalaisten luontomatkailijoiden olevan parhaiten tavoitettavissa Internet markkinoinnin kautta ulkomaisten yritysten tehdessä saksalaisten organisaatioiden ja yhdistysten kanssa yhteistyötä. Sen sijaan harrastajat uskoivat sosiaalisen median olevan parempi väline nuorempien harrastajaryhmien tavoittamiseen. Muun muassa yrityksen oma blogi miellettiin tehokkaaksi erityisesti tietojen löydyttyä omalla kielellä. Harrastajien motivaatiotekijät erityisen matkakohteen valinnassa olivat monialaiset, mutta ensisijaisena motivaattorina pidettiin ystävien ja sukulaisten suositusta tietystä kohteesta.

Tämä työ toimi selvityksenä toimeksiantajalle siitä, kuinka saksalaisia kohderyhmiä voisi tavoittaa tehokkaammin Internet markkinoinnin sekä sosiaalisen median kautta keskittymällä heidän tarpeidensa vastaamiseen. Saavutettuja tuloksia voidaan hyödyntää nykyisten markkinointitaktiikoiden kehittämiseksi niin, että ulkomaiset kohderyhmät löytäisivät Rokua Geoparkin helpommin ja kiinnostuisivat siitä matkakohteena. Kaiken kaikkiaan tämä opinnäytetyö on vain suuntaa antava pienen otoksensa vuoksi, joten jatkotutkimukselle on tarvetta. Seuraavan tutkimuksen voisi mahdollisesti tehdä määrällisellä tutkimusmetodilla. Tämän tutkimuksen myötä kävi kuitenkin ilmi yhteistyön lisäämisen tarve paikallisten luontomatkailuun keskittyvien organisaatioiden ja matkanjärjestäjien kanssa. Näin ollen ulkomaalaisilla yrityksillä on mahdollisuus erottua massasta Saksan laajoilla luontomatkailumarkkinoilla.

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Asiasanat: luontomatkailu, kansallispuisto, sosiaalinen media, Internet, motivaatio, saksalaiset matkailijat

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Finland's geographical location has always interested people, and especially Finnish national parks have become more and more popular among nature tourists. However, national park tourism is not a new thing since from the first protected areas, national parks have been given a dual role of nature conservation as well as recreational and tourism areas (Tyrväinen & Tuulentie, 2007.) On the other hand, natural parks do not only offer experiences within protected areas but also help maintaining regional economies as well as employment, and thus positively influence on attitudes towards nature conservation.

As national parks have gained a point where number of the visitors has grown, and they have strengthened the position in a recreation and tourism market, there is a reason to look further into their chances outside domestic markets. The main goal of this research is to study how incoming travelers, more specifically German cross-country skiers and hikers, look for as well as find out information from social media and through Internet marketing about nature tourism destinations. The idea about segmenting the target group to German nature tourists came from GoArctic (Eskola 15.12.2011, email inquiry) which has in-depth knowledge of foreign groups that visit Finland and about tourism in Oulu region. The commissioner wanted the study to concentrate on the above mentioned target groups, cross-country skiers and hikers.

## 1.1 Commissioner

This research was commissioned by Rokua Geopark which is the northernmost geological destination under protection of UNESCO (Rokua Geopark 2012a, date of retrieval 12.2.2012). Rokua Geopark belongs to a worldwide Geopark network. The study was done in accordance to their need for a research of international cross-country skiers and hikers.

Rokua Geopark, is located within Muhos, Utajärvi and Vaala municipalities which belong to Northern Ostrobothnia and Kainuu provinces. Rokua Geopark provides services which are high on quality, and are competitive in terms of pricing. Therefore, its co-operative businesses form valuable service packages which contain several sports activities provided all around the year, spa, and accommodation among other things.

## 1.2 Geological destination

In order to become a geopark, there is a list of general requirements that nature areas have to fulfill. For instance, they include having a geological heritage of the area, economic activity within the area, and a thorough business plan which has to contain detailed financial information (European Geoparks 2011, date of retrieval 12.2.2012). However, geoparks are not only about geology but they also provide diverse aspects to the areas' natural, cultural and intangible heritage.

In addition to that, the parks give an opportunity for different activities all around a year within an extraordinary natural environment. For instance, Rokua Geopark area contains numerous formations of the latest ice age such as Finland's greatest kettle, dunes, cliffs and riverbanks (Kejonen 2007, 114.) Furthermore, as a destination it provides ideal conditions for both summer and winter activities such as cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, hiking, mountain biking and safaris. The tracks are well-maintained and –marked and the area has trails that are made in order to keep all user groups in mind (Rokua Geopark 2012b, date of retrieval 12.2.2012).

## 1.3 Nature tourism

According to Hemmi, nature tourism is a form of tourism that takes place in a natural environment and aims to follow the principals of sustainable tourism which state that the carrying capacity of nature cannot be exceeded or its biodiversity should not regress. In practice, these rules work in rather wild areas to which nature tourist are usually heading. In such regions there is a possibility

to study nature, landscape, animals, plants, exceptional geological formations, or discover the culture of the nature (2005a, 333).

Partly due to these factors, some parts of Finland are called the last wildernesses. In the field of international tourism the whole of Finland can be kept as a remote wilderness compared to other urban European countries as it combines space, tranquility of nature, forests and swamps that form a treasury of nature experiences (Vuoristo & Vesterinen 2009, 33). Many of the Finnish national parks represent those values and they bring up the diverse aspects of the domestic culture. Furthermore, the importance of national parks as tourism contributors is continuously increasing and thus, thorough preparations on implementation of nature tourism are essential.

#### 1.4 Research questions

The purpose of this research is to study two issues; social media and Internet marketing as information search tools, and German customers' motives of choosing their destination of interest. In order to receive more in-depth information concerning the usage of social media and Internet in marketing, some Finnish long-time operators from the field of tourism are contacted. Then again, by interviewing German nature tourists' motivational factors as well as studying their behavior in terms of tourism when choosing and purchasing services, Finnish national park's attractiveness as a destination can be figured out. The research questions of this study are as follows:

- What is the best way to reach German cross-country skiers and hikers through social media and Internet marketing?
- What are target customers' motives when choosing a destination?

The objective is to find as comprehensive answers to the research questions as possible, and give out ideas how to improve Rokua Geopark's approachability through the findings.

## 2 GERMAN TRAVELERS' PURCHASING BEHAVIOR

According to a study done by Finpro, Germany was ranked as the largest economy in Europe and the fourth largest in the world in 2010. It has a reputation of being a country with a highly competitive and service-saturated market, in which both domestic and foreign companies need to replace others in order to survive. Hence, finding a unique selling point and the most suitable segment is rather important and therefore, it would be even better if a company is able to find a niche for its products or services (Finpro 2010, date of retrieval 15.3.2012).

Additionally, as different services have several competitors the situation is quite the same in nature tourism market. Germany has a wide range of nature tourism destinations and numerous organizations providing tours as well as recreational opportunities but when traveling abroad Germans seek something they do not have a chance to experience in their home country. For instance, the Finnish Tourist Board states that from welfare and wellness trips German tourists expect to get into a comfortable environment (MEK 2005, date of retrieval 14.3.2012).

Consequently, market segmentation becomes even more important factor in order to attract the precise group of consumers. Market segmentation is a basic procedure of classifying key groups or segments through demographic, psychographic, and behavioral dissimilarities among the consumers. Additionally, Kotler states that in evaluating diverse market segments the organization there are two particular attributes that have to be considered; the segment's overall attractiveness as well as the organization's objectives and resources (2009, 268). Through profiling marketer can make a decision which segments possess the greatest benefits. Therefore, with the purpose of having a rational study, accurate and sufficient narrowing has to be done.

## 2.1 Consumer profile

Both, German companies and consumers are demanding, meaning that they want high quality and environmental questions have to be taken care of. Therefore Finnish companies have particularly good opportunities, for instance, in the field of adventure tourism and other experience tourism as these criteria are well-met (Finpro, date of retrieval 15.3.2012).

According to the Finnish Tourist Board, some of German travelers have already found Finland to be a potential destination as in 2010 there were 363 000 German visitors in total of which 35% were on leisure travel. Majority (41 %) of the German visitors stayed one to three nights in Finland, 33 % four to fourteen nights, and 17 % of the travelers were on a one-day trip. Almost half of the visitors stayed in a hotel or a motel mainly due to work-related traveling, and 19 % stayed with their friends or relatives (MEK 2011, date of retrieval 14.3.2012).

As Germans are truly price-aware consumers they tend to search for destinations where they are able to receive numerous experiences without irrational spending. This was also found in 2010 when German travelers spent approximately 157 million Euros in total while staying in Finland. The average amount of money used per day was 49 Euros and 433 Euros during one trip. 22 % of those visits were package trips (MEK 2011, date of retrieval 14.3.2012).

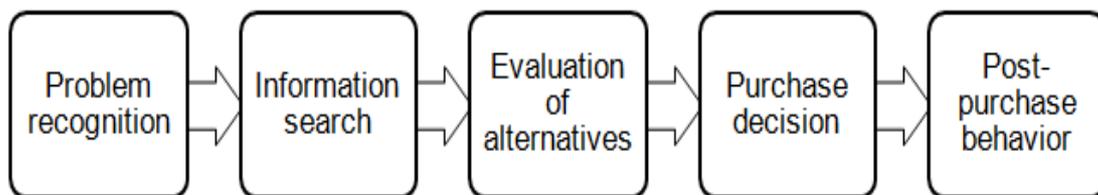
Not only in package trips but also self-arranged trips attributes of products or services are important to German travelers as they prefer high quality, and are demanding on it. Additionally, they appreciate well-mannered and personal customer service, and the expertise of the service provider. Even though quality is an important decision making criterion for German consumers, prices cannot be high as they are not ready to pay any additional fees compared to other service providers' services (Finpro 2010, date of retrieval 15.3.2012).

However, in a study done by the Finnish Tourist Board it is stated that German nature tourists rank nature values slightly above pricing as they appreciate biodiversity and significant environmental differences compared to their domestic conditions (MEK 2005, date of retrieval 14.3.2012). In 2003 nearly

70 % of German travelers were interested in wellness and welfare holidays for their stay in Finland, and to ready-made travel packages they were willing to include Finnish traditions and culture, possibility to travel around Finland as well as having sport activities. The members of this study's target groups, German cross-country skiers and hikers, also travel after wellness and welfare. Approximately half of Germans take an interest in hiking on their spare time, and in 2002 it was ranked as the most important hobby in Germany. Besides hiking, cross-country skiing has a settled group of hobbyists and it is one of the popular sports in Germany as well (MEK 2005, date of retrieval 14.3.2012.)

## 2.2 Consumer behavior during purchasing process

There are many internal and external aspects that affect to traveler's behavior as a customer. For instance, personality and self-concept, lifestyle, motivation, as well as emotions are counted as internal factors while situational influences, social and cultural influences as well as group and family decision making are the external factors involved in consumer behavior. Hence, many of the tourist products and services are frequently expressed in terms of the attributes the product or service possesses. Thus, the choice consists of an evaluation and selection process where different product alternatives are compared by their attributes (Pizam & Mansfeld 1999, 105-111.)



*FIGURE 1. Model of the consumer buying process. (Kotler 2009, 208.)*

Figure 1 presents the basic five-stage model of the consumer buying process. Customers go by five stages; problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. However, the buying process begins even before the purchase decision and it has effects subsequently. Additionally, not many consumers follow this pattern from stage to stage as they might pass or overturn some phases. All of these

stages and attributes belonging to them are gone through in accordance to Kotler who presents all the stages of consumer buying process thoroughly.

### 2.2.1 Problem recognition

The purchase process begins with a problem or a need recognized by the consumer and usually both of them are triggered by internal or external influence. Internal influence affects to the normal need, such as hunger, so strongly that it becomes the driver for obtaining to fill the craving. External influence works through outer factors which mean that consumers discover something they truly want to have (Kotler 2009, 208.) For instance, consumer sees an advertisement on television of a vacation in a popular nature tourism destination. Consumer begins to search more inspiration and further travel ideas as the interest towards the vacation increases continuously and willingness to travel reaches a high level.

Nowadays, the traditional media is not the only source by which the consumers are triggered to pursue for certain products or services. Internet and social media have also a deep influence on the consumers' problem recognition as many of them belong to online population. Therefore, the consumers are exposed to vast amount of information and marketing overflow as almost every Internet site includes some sort of advertising. This usually results either in impulse buying or subconscious urge to have a certain product. The latter is caused by internal or external influence.

### 2.2.2 Information search

After the consumer has found out the need for a certain product or service they become stimulated to search for more information on it. Kotler states that the stimulation to information search can be divided into two groups; the first level called heightened attention and the second level called active information search. At the first level the consumer is more open to information about the needed product or service and at the second level the consumer becomes involved in the actual information search (2009, 208.) At this stage consumers start to look for literature and gather experiences from friends or relatives.

However, while going through all possible sources and searching for the most dependable ones consumer becomes familiar with several different brands. Essentially the competitive brands have the same product or service only with different features but they bring alternatives for the consumers who are willing to find the best solution to their problem or need.

### 2.2.3 Evaluation of alternatives

According to Kotler, consumers have individual opinions which attributes are the most relevant to the product or service they need (2009, 209). Therefore, the least suitable alternatives are eliminated and they concentrate to the brands whose product or service's features bring the required benefits. Additionally, the following points are considered; which alternative provides the best cost-effectiveness, which is the simplest to use or arrange, and what are other users' experiences. In the situation, wherein the consumer is evaluating different tourism destinations, available time and assets have rather high importance as they are willing to get to the destination with the least amount of time and the lowest possible expenses.

Thus, for a marketer it is important to realize and study the attributes of offered products or services that interest the target customers the most. Therefore, it is possible to modify the supply to answer better the consumers' problems or needs and the wanted features can be brought up more efficiently through marketing. Additionally, the most effective marketing tactics can be found through studying the rivalry – which channels are the most essential to use in order to reach the most ideal group of customers.

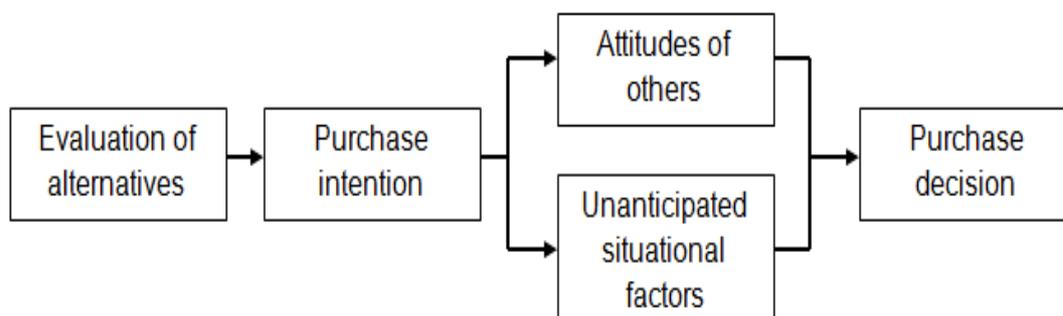
### 2.2.4 Purchase decision

Kotler mentions that during the evaluation phase the consumer forms preferences amongst the remaining brand alternatives (2009, 212). Nevertheless, there are two aspects which can interfere between the purchase intention and purchase decision; attitudes of others and unanticipated situational factors. Attitudes of others is a level to which other person's negative attitude towards the product or service from a certain brand or reluctance to meet the terms of supporting the purchase intention reduces the consumer's

willingness to proceed (Kotler 2009, 213.) Additionally, the situation becomes more complex when numerous people close to the consumer hold conflicting opinions and the consumer would like to please them all.

Unanticipated situational factors form the second factor that may burst and cause change to purchase intention. For instance, there might come an unexpected other purchase that has higher importance compared to the product or service the consumer was firstly stimulated to buy. According to Kotler, preferences or even purchase intentions are not completely reliable predictors of purchase behavior (2009, 213).

Consumers tend to reduce the risks of purchasing an unsatisfactory product or service and therefore they start to avoid decision making, gather even more information from their friends and relatives, and prefer already known brand names and guarantees. However, some products and services involve a smaller amount of decisions and less deliberation. For instance, after eliminating all possible risks and hinders the consumer makes the decision to purchase a trip to a well-known tourism destination as the other alternatives were not as satisfying.



*FIGURE 2. Steps between evaluation of alternatives and a purchase decision. (Kotler 2009, 212.)*

As a summary, the figure 2 above presents a simple model of the stages consumer is supposed to go through before making the actual purchase decision. In general, that would be the final stage on which the consumer does

not make any more changes to their decision and they move towards using and evaluating the chosen product or service.

#### 2.2.5 Post-purchase behavior

*“Marketing communications should supply beliefs and evaluations that reinforce the consumers’ choice and help them feel good about the brand.” (Kotler 2009, 213.)*

After purchasing the product or service, such as a trip, the consumer experiences some levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Through personal findings and opinions they make a decision whether to buy the service again or not. Customers share the experiences to their friends and relatives and possibly in the social media where the personal review reaches outsiders.

#### 2.3 Motivational factors

Different motivational factors of consumers also drive and make changes to their purchasing process. These factors help organizations to acknowledge which aspects motivate customers to act in a certain way, build a marketing strategy around them and integrate it into suitable marketing tactics. For instance the basic needs of people affiliate closely to motivation which means goal-oriented activity. In tourism the needs of customers are the reasons that influence their travel decisions. Simultaneously customers are setting hopes and expectations on their trip, and on the products and services they will use during it (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 97.)

Moreover, there are needs and motivation types that discuss how traveling can be seen as a satisfying attribute, and while examining them, tourism theory’s central views of traveling motives are used. These are classic motives of tourism, escape and search motives of tourism, and socio-psychological and cultural motives of tourism. All the motivational attributes as well as viewpoints are gone through in accordance to Suontausta & Tyni as they present well-rounded and interesting theories on the travel motives of nature tourists. Furthermore, their views are supported by numerous other authors whose ideas are linked to the literature.

### 2.3.1 Classic motives of tourism

In tourism motives can be classified in two categories; motives that make us travel and motives that guide us to certain type of holiday in a specific place and period of time. These motives state the actual purpose of the trip, the reason why people intend to travel somewhere (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 98). Therefore, the classic motives of tourism contain six stages of different external motive types as the factors affecting to the purpose or reason are truly wide-ranging.

#### **Work related motives**

Work related motives include business trips of private and public sectors, conferences, business meetings, exhibitions as well as short-period courses or training happenings. Also traveling away from home due to work-related reasons belongs to this group (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 99).

#### **Physical and physiological motives**

Physical motives are mainly related to sport activities and having numerous opportunities and possibilities of outdoor activities. For instance hiking and cross-country skiing are considered to be strong physical motives. In addition to physical motives, there are several physiological motives, which support the highly active ones, such as taking part to health and welfare activities (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 99).

#### **Cultural, psychological and personal development related motives**

These motives consist of different kinds of happenings and personal interests such as taking part to festivals, going to theatre or taking part to other cultural occasions. Also participating to happenings which have high personal interest and require mental or physical capabilities, and other spare time activities belong to these motive types. Additionally, visits to destinations due to their cultural, traditional or historical value are counted as important motivational factors (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 99.)

### **Social, relationship and ethnic motives**

Suontausta & Tyni state that these motives are based on relationships between people and self-searching. Important factors to these motives are visits to friends and relatives or traveling with them in order to spend time with them, social responsibilities such as weddings or funerals, traveling along with family member due to their business trip or other vacation, and visiting place of birth or searching own routes (2005, 99.) To these motives travel agencies, alongside with friends and relatives, have high influence concerning recommendations of destinations.

### **Entertainment and pleasure related motives**

Entertainment and pleasure motives are “lighter” types of motivation compared to the other factors. They consist of participating sport and other spectator events, visiting theme and amusement parks, and shopping trips. Additionally, price ranges as well as quality of accommodation and different services are strongly related to these motives (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 99.)

### **Religious motives**

Religious motives are truly spiritual and the people driven by these motivational factors are highly committed to their journey. These motives include pilgrimages, retreat, meditation, and study trips for religious reasons (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 100).

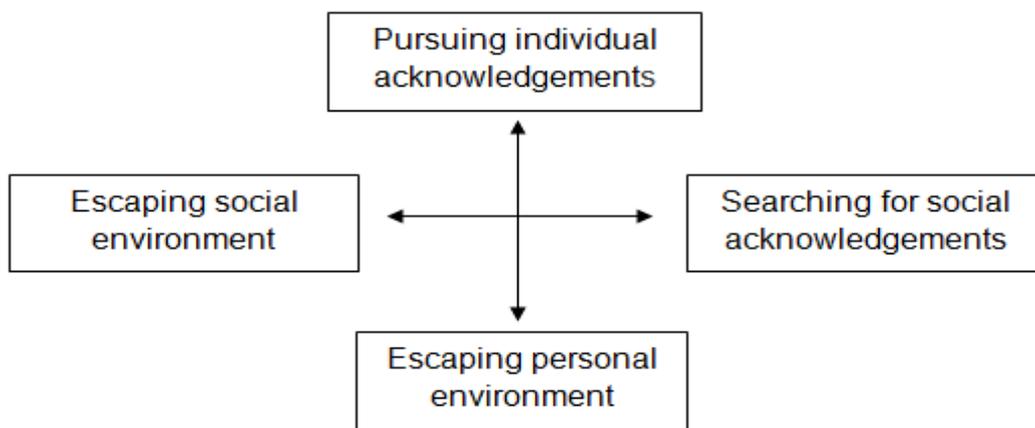
All in all, classic motives of tourism include many aspects that Rokua Geopark already provides for its different visitors. There are possibilities for diverse activities depending on the customers' needs; hobbyists are able to find either their interests or dissimilar sports to try out. Rokua area provides a chance for experiencing nature's culture and other possibly new aspects of natural environment for the people that are driven by self-development.

Then again, for those who are traveling after social motives Rokua Geopark offers a family friendly environment. However, there are activities and services

for different age groups and tastes such as Husky and snowshoe safaris, and spa. Thus, people traveling after entertainment have a chance to enjoy these activities that are reasonably priced in accordance to their quality.

### 2.3.2 Escape and search motives of tourism

Escape and search motives of tourism includes two strong internal factors which affect to the behavior of traveler at the same time. On the other hand escape motives drive people to leave their personal environment or daily social environment behind, and then again search motives are based on individual's desire on psychological rewards and experiences of success while participating in tourism activities (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 101-102.)



*FIGURE 3. Model of escape and search motives in tourism. (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 102.)*

Figure 3 encapsulates one of the key ideas of wellness- traveling: pursuing individual acknowledgements which means enhancing personal well-being in terms of tourism. Assuming that hectic and stressful everyday life does not provide enough tools to carry out needs, tourism is almost seen as a necessary mean for enhancing personal welfare.

Overall, escape and search motives of tourism can be met in Rokua Geopark. Travelers have a chance to escape their hectic lifestyle to a remote natural environment where they can either test their skills in different kinds of activities or relax and pamper themselves. Rokua Geopark's services are built to

concentrate on visitors' wellness and welfare. Thus, this could be an ideal destination for people traveling due to leaving personal environment behind even for a while.

### 2.3.3 Socio-psychological and cultural motives of tourism

According to Suontausta & Tyni, travel motives are divided into two categories; socio-psychological and cultural. Socio-psychological motives are general and independent-of-the-target in nature meaning that they work as push factors which cause willingness to travel. Cultural motives are partly dependent-of-the-target which means that they are both push and pull factors. This classification consists of seven socio-psychological motive types (2005, 103.)

#### **Escaping everyday-environment**

According to these motive types, people travel because everyday life and familiar surroundings feel boring or monotonous. To travelers that are searching for wellness on their trips, environment has the greatest value as it has to produce peace of mind or at least give an opportunity to it. Furthermore, the traveling has to provide active welfare and an environment for independent, challenging activities. Additionally, new environment and long-distance to home may help travelers to find their everyday-life rather enjoyable (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 103.)

#### **Self-searching and –evaluation**

In proportion to self-searching and –evaluation motives, people travel because they expect new surroundings and situations to stimulate the searching for own image or personality. Meditation, diverse self-development, and even changing are key elements to travelers who are motivated by these motive types. Thus, searching and evaluating as well as modifying own personality naturally belongs to this process and all of this happens during the period of traveling. However, new surroundings and situations do not necessarily enhance this process but it is not even pursued as travelers expect travel agencies to provide these favorable conditions (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 103-104.)

## **Relaxing**

In accordance to Suontausta & Tyni, traveling and taking part to different activities enable people to relax and reduce stress. Hobbies and other activities are one of the main forms of relaxation, and during a trip, travelers dedicate more time to those than they would normally do. In addition to effective activities, total relaxation is part of stress management and it can be learned during a trip. Traveling is considered to be physically and mentally relaxing factor for a traveler; the actual goal for traveling is to achieve a balance between rest and exercise (2005, 104.)

## **Raising status**

Through traveling experiences enables receiving appreciation from other people as, in these days, it is considered to be one element of civilization. Traveling to trendy and popular destinations people can raise their status but it is not thought to be the most important factor affecting decision making. However, trips and their contents are somewhat significant topics among travelers but rather than raising one's status people consider it conveying knowledge and experiences (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 104-105.)

## **Opportunity to act without boundaries caused by daily roles**

During the travel period people are allowed to do things and behave in a way that would be otherwise considered objectionable. Especially in the mass-tourism destinations it is acceptable and even suitable to act childishly or irrationally. For instance, childlike acting may be a part of the elements acquired during the trip, and in the background lays the idea that life itself is fun and it is intended to provide positive and pleasant experiences (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 105.)

Then again, irrational behavior is not the greatest attraction factor for a wellness-traveler as it is construed to include substance abuse and absurd risk-taking. However, some coups that offer a safe adrenaline spike can be part of experience-searching traveler's repertoire but there too play has to be present.

To summarize, the motive is not to do things that would be perceived offensive and cause trouble in one's life but to focus on well-being and healthy choices (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 105.)

### Condensing family relations

People who are motivated by this factor mainly want to travel with their family members with an intention of bringing them closer together. While traveling, housework and other similar obligations are secondary and therefore there is more time for socializing and mutual hobbies. Developing social relations further is essential for family-related traveling (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 106.)

### Increasing the number of social contacts

Traveling around enables one to create new relationships with local people in other cities or foreign countries as well as fellow travelers. Depth of the interaction varies from superficial chatting to long-lasting relationships, especially when the accompanying person has either the same situation in life or is interested in same matters. Therefore, the level of interaction can be truly profound as for people who have familiarized themselves with same matters it is relatively easy to begin a new acquaintance or friendship (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 106.)

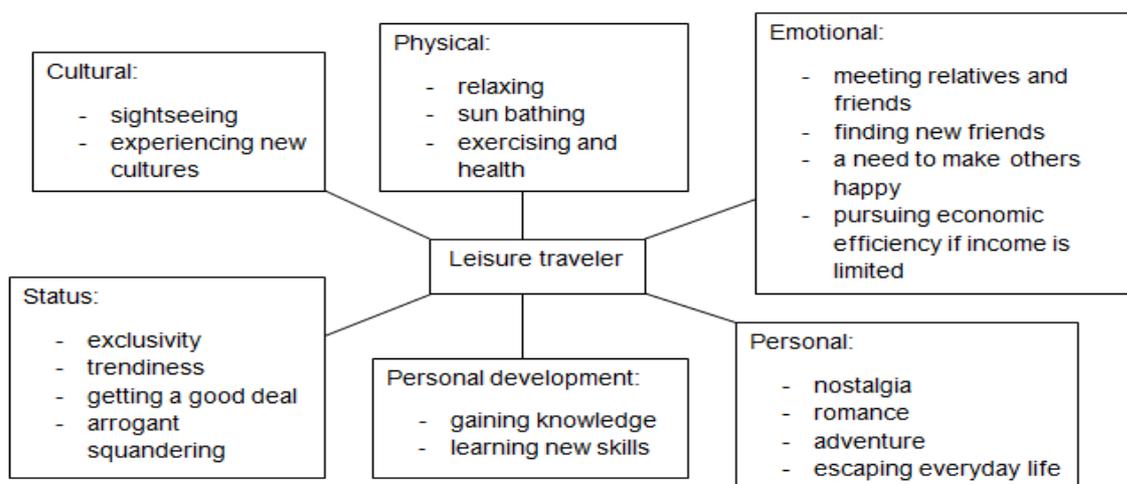


FIGURE 4. Motivation types of a leisure traveler. (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 107)

To summarize previously discussed traveling motives, figure 4, presented by Suontausta & Tyni, demonstrates the primary motive types of leisure traveling. Classification proceeds into deeper needs of traveler who set clear expectations for their holiday and experiences. At an individual level people's personalities, lifestyles, earlier experiences, stage of life-cycles, perception of own abilities as well as image which a person wants to give out affect to travel motives.

Altogether socio-psychological and cultural motives of tourism consist of factors that are concentrated on leisure traveling. Rokua Geopark presents experiences and possibilities in a peaceful natural environment which is ideal for people that try to leave their daily routines behind. Also groups and families that are interested in departing from their everyday housework have a chance to fully benefit from the vacation to Rokua Geopark as there are no obligations for daily routines; people have time to focus on mutual hobbies. Finding new social contacts and strengthening existing ones is not impossible either when traveling to Rokua Geopark. There are things to do both young and elder people and therefore, there is a chance to find new contacts with similar interests and it is rather easy to get in touch with people when going on a hike, for instance.

### 3     MARKETING TACTICS

Nowadays marketing can be seen everywhere, hence marketing tactics take part in people's everyday life in many different forms; TV advertisements and shows, movies, magazines as well as newspapers. Moreover, there are rather new advances to marketing tactics which are challenging the traditional media such as two of the key points in this study; Internet marketing and social media marketing. These tools provide companies an opportunity to reach their customers more directly as they are driven into more accurate and emphasized relationship building. Thus, this way of marketing is able to create more personal feeling among consumers which Germans appreciate in particular (Finpro 2010, date of retrieval 15.3.2012.)

However, according to Hemmi, the most of European travel agencies arranging trips to nature tourism destinations still rely on traditional marketing tactics (2005b, 542):

- special references in general brochures
- word-of-mouth
- fairs and exhibitions
- Internet pages
- co-operation with travel guides in order to create customer loyalty
- frequently appearing publications
- targeted mailing
- inserts in special magazines that affiliates to provided services
- articles
- and using associations and organizations related to services provided.

Nevertheless, the current trend in both traditional and new nature tourism marketing is to plea on consumers' emotions and ambiance. Thus, company providing nature trips and services should perform a customer behavior literacy which is based on the ability to comprehend a variety of different targets of

experience-longing. That is quite crucial in order to be successful in image marketing (Hemmi 2005b, 544).

### 3.1 Internet marketing

Internet marketing includes all possible marketing tactics that can be used through any sort of electronic device (Dann & Dann 2011, 8). Not only these tactics contain basic stages of marketing planning such as customer engagement, banner ads on specific websites and mobile advertising but also marketing activities happening via e-mails and gathering digital customer data. Therefore, through Internet marketing businesses are enabled to define original target groups, and they have noticed its benefits to be more efficient compare to the traditional styles when building new customer relations.

The efficiency of Internet marketing is essentially based on the fact that it extends everywhere in the world. That factor is also used in contextual marketing activities; the message is provided straight to the consumers at the same moment they need knowledge, certain products or services. Ahola, Koivumäki & Oinas-Kukkonen state that marketing is shifting gradually into consumer-focused style and that raises expectations of meeting the needs of every individual customer (2002, 53). Therefore, some marketing activities, such as managing supply and outsourcing customers as well as investing in consumer-centered organization, reach a higher level of importance.

Nevertheless, Internet marketing can be comprised to increase the value of digital consumer relationships. This is due to the typical attributes of electronic and digital marketing which are defined as follows:

- power shifts from suppliers to consumers
- increasing speed of information-sharing
- losing the meaning of distances
- and global accessibility.

All in all, Internet marketing requires a multidisciplinary approach, innovation, imagination, creativity and entrepreneurial thinking; intellectual resources are more important in Internet marketing compared to money. However, consumers must be handled with a similar expertise as in face-to-face situations in order to create sustainable competitiveness to the organization (Ahola, Koivumäki & Oinas-Kukkonen 2002, 54).

1	Google - google.de
2	Facebook – facebook.com
3	Google – google.com
4	YouTube – youtube.com
5	eBay International AG – ebay.de
6	Amazon.de GmbH – amazon.de
7	Wikipedia – wikipedia.org
8	Spiegel Online – spiegel.de
9	Bild.de – bild.de
10	Yahoo! – yahoo.com

*FIGURE 5. Ten of the most visited websites in Germany. (Alexa, date of retrieval 14.5.2012)*

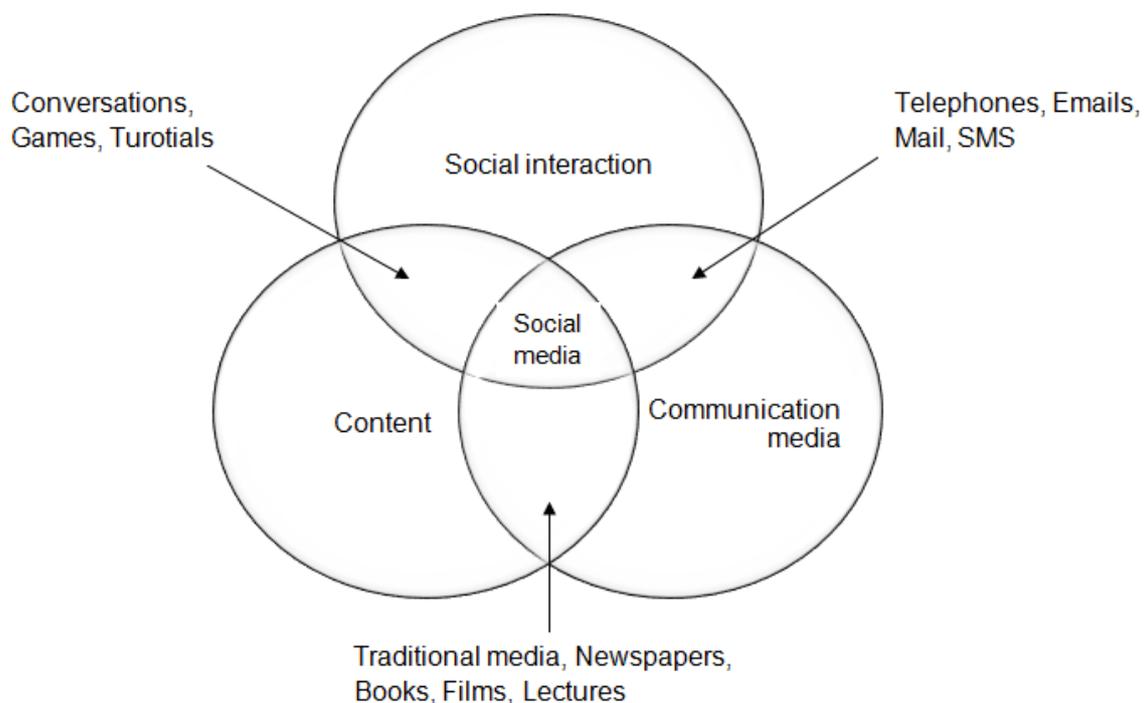
In 2011 there were 55.6 million online users in Germany and the number is growing at the same phase as the Internet is evolving (European Travel Commission, date of retrieval 14.5.2012). According to figure 5, many of these Internet users tend to primarily use search engines while surfing online and just secondly their time is spent on social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Websites providing online shopping possibilities are popular among German Internet users and the country was ranked as the second largest ecommerce market in 2011 (European Travel Commission 2012, date of retrieval 14.5.2012). According to European Travel Commission, Germans aged 25 – 34 were the most likely people to do shopping online.

Figure 6 also shows that Germans use the Internet for searching information on secondary sources such as Wikipedia on which the founded information cannot

always be trusted. Then again, the users read e-newspapers such as Spiegel which is the most popular news magazine in Germany and Bild (Magazin-Deutschland.de 2009, date of retrieval 14.5.2012).

### 3.2 Social media

There are different characteristics to social media; nonetheless the supplementary and interrelated key elements are communication media, social interaction and content. Dann & Dann explain that each of these three factors has to be present in order to place a functional social media structure online. (2011, 345)



*FIGURE 6. Social media components. (Dann & Dann 2011, 345.)*

Figure 6 demonstrates the interaction between these three elements as well as the linkage between other categories that interact with each other in order to support consumers' connection to social media. According to Dann & Dann, the relation between social interaction, communication media and content can provide various supplementary advantages from a perspective of end-user behavior as correct positioning of social media can form quite a new experience set (2011, 346).

Social media is basically formed upon the interconnected categories illustrated in the figure 6 which are commonly known as traditional media and traditional marketing tools; text, audio, video and photographs. However, social media is more convenient and efficient way of spreading information compared to traditional media and thus, more and more companies are utilizing it as a marketing channel. They are integrating social media into marketing activities as it is growing popularity at an increasing extent. Furthermore, through media visibility companies are able to create more approachable image, and possibly bring awareness among new customers as well as retain existing consumer relationships.

Although social media is considered to be an efficient way of spreading information to a wide-spread audience, the popularity of it among Germans is rather low as only 46.1 % of the 55.6 million Internet users are using the networks it provides (European Travel Commission 2012, date of retrieval 14.5.2012). The most important reason behind this might be that German Internet users find social media too unsecure for sharing personal thoughts or information on themselves. For instance, there are rather strict privacy laws in general and in 2010 Facebook was attacked because of the site's loose privacy regulations (Social media delivered 2010, date of retrieval 14.5.2012 ; Time World 2010, date of retrieval 14.5.2012.)

Due to security issues the information shared on the social media sites are not considered too dependable and Germany is believed to be approximately five years behind some other developed countries when it comes to adapting social media activities as part of everyday life and information sharing (Social media delivered 2010, date of retrieval 14.5.2012).

## 4 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to present the commissioner ideas whether it is recommended to improve Internet marketing as well as increase usage of social media in order to reach more nature tourists, especially cross-country skiers and hikers from Germany. This chapter presents the diverse methodologies as well as the research design used in this study.

### 4.1 Research design

This study concentrates on solving two problems; are Internet marketing and using social media good ways to reach target customers, and what are these customers' motives when they are choosing a travel destination. The principle is to create a cohesive perception to the factors that might be effective to people's decision making. Therefore, the said issues are handled from the target groups' point of view although a few Finnish tourism companies are involved in order to receive in-depth knowledge on the subject.

#### **Finnish companies**

The Finnish tourism companies that were contacted for the research were pre-selected; Finnature and Wild Brown Bear in accordance to suggestion given by Oulun Matkailu (Laurila-Seluska 11.1.2012, email inquiry) and Lapland Safaris as well as Erä-Susi due to their strong relation to the same field of business on which the commissioner of this study operates – nature tourism.

First contact to the companies happened via email in order to find out their willingness for participation. The interview request (appendix 2) firstly introduced the author and the commissioner, presented the research topic, and reason for contacting them. Second, they were acknowledged about the maximum number of questions on the interview, the estimated time for answering, as well as the fact when the interview questions would be sent to

them if interested in participation. Approximately one week were given to the companies for replying.

During the week only one company confirmed their participation. Therefore, the rest of the possible participants were contacted by calling. As a result, all the companies confirmed their participation in the study but none were interested in telephone interview due to other engagements or busy schedules. Accordingly, they were allowed to send their answers back to the author via email.

There were two types of question sheets provided for the companies; one in English (appendix 6) and one in Finnish (appendix 5). The reason for that was that the participant had a chance to choose which sheet felt more natural to answer to. All in all, the interview for the companies includes six questions in total which handle their customers; what kind of things they book when traveling to Finland, how much are they willing to spend, are the trips self-organized or booked through tour operators, and insight to the factors affecting their customers' decision making. Additionally, there are two specified questions regarding their marketing activities on the Internet as well as social media, and have their customers found them through the Internet.

For answering the interview questions the companies had two weeks of time. During that time the author sent reminders via email and called the companies through concerning the deadline.

### **Target groups' organizations**

The method for reaching the target groups was modified numerous times before finding the most suitable one. There are several cross-country skiing and hiking organizations, associations as well as schools in Germany and therefore, it was rational to try reaching the participants through them. Furthermore, this idea included additional value; whether the amateurs were not interested in participation there might be volunteers in the organizations. Thus, there was a chance for professional answers.

The interview request for the hobbyist organizations was first designed in English (appendix 3) and then translated to German (appendix 4). The latter version of the request was sent to all of the hobbyist organizations, 9 hikers (appendix 13) and 9 cross-country skiers' (appendix 12), and additionally they were contacted in German. The request consisted of the same background information than the one sent to Finnish companies but in addition to there was information on the needed amount of participants. More importantly, the fact that interview will be conducted in English was brought up, and they were introduced to several options how the author could contact them whether the interview was to take place. The organizations were given approximately one week of time for replying to the request.

During the replying period, the author received two negative replies due to other engagements and customer protection, one uncertain participation reply from a cross-country skiing organization, and one strong confirmation from a hiking organization. Hence, from both target groups' organization lists the author randomly picked five organizations. Due to calling the organizations, two more hiking organizations confirmed their participation and two cross-country skiing organizations were also interested. Then again, only one of the organizations wanted to have a telephone interview and therefore, the other participants were allowed to reply via email.

The target groups' interview (appendix 7) consisted of ten questions in total which aspired to discover German nature tourists' knowledge of Finland, the importance of travel packages, their actions on different stages of buying process, opinions on Internet marketing and usage of social media, as well as factors affecting to their decision making.

The author chose to use semi-structured interview (theme interview) as an interview technique. The created interviews were suitably formed in order to be semi-structured; both proceeded through pre-selected main themes and focus-questions that were depending on them (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 75). According to Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, the focus-questions do not have to be in a specific form or order and still they are able to create a big picture of the

phenomenon in hand. Theme interviews are especially used when studying social sciences as it serves many attributes of qualitative research (2007, 208).

As the interview questions were based on the theoretical framework of the study the theory part was structured on literature related to consumer buying behavior, motivation in terms of tourism, and Internet marketing as well as social media. The relevant secondary data to this study was found from a variety of academic books, previous studies from the Finnish Forest Research Institute (METLA) and the Finnish Tourist Board (MEK), and other thesis material such as electronic sources. The link between founded theory and interview questions is one of the principles for a semi-structured interview (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 75). Therefore, email interviews of the Finnish companies and the hobbyist groups form the base for primary data to this study.

Since the interviews were conducted via email, they are part of the data collection method called online interviews. According to Quinlan, some interviews conducted online are counted as asynchronous interviews which mean that the researcher sends the interview sheet to the selected interviewees and the participants respond later, before a scheduled deadline (2011, 222). Asynchronous interview type was used in this study.

However, there are both advantages and disadvantages to asynchronous interview. The greatest advantage to conducting research through this is giving the interviewees time to properly reflect on the questions which can improve the quality of their responses. On the other hand, the hinder with a long period of response-time can make it hard to keep the participants motivated during the interview process (Quinlan 2011, 222.)

After all the interview results are received they are analyzed through comparative analysis between theoretical framework and empirical data, as well as analyzing the data through themes which is a common method with semi-structured interview results. Analyzing according to different themes means structuring the data and then creating a general concept out of it (Aaltola & Valli 2010, 43).

Overall, the research design the author chose was rather flexible in order to have freedom during data collection process. The main reason for using flexible design in this study was that it suits better the qualitative research method. Then again, the attributes studied in this research cannot be fitted into fixed design or measured quantitatively.

#### 4.2 Qualitative research

Tuomi & Sarajärvi state that qualitative research is not intended to statistical generalizations. It is rather used for describing some phenomena or events, understanding certain kind of action, and giving theoretically meaningful interpretation for a phenomenon. Therefore, it is a principal of a qualitative research to collect data from people who are familiar with the phenomenon in hand and have relatively broad knowledge on the matter (2009, 85.)

Regarding the nature of the study, the author decided to use qualitative research method. The rationale on the choice was the need for in-depth knowledge from people who have experienced the phenomena related to the research topic; how German cross-country skiers or hikers feel about the Internet marketing and social media's role on their hobbies. Therefore, the study needed to be communicative in nature, especially when it did not include face-to-face communication with the respondents.

Therefore, the participants were engaged to this study with an interview handling their fields of expertise. The questions were made with semi-structured technique and it mainly included open-ended questions in order to receive fully considered responds. The questionnaire also included one multiple-choice question with an intention of finding the most important factors (motives) affecting to the decision making process.

## 5 RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of qualitative analysis on three different data collections; Finnish tourism companies, German hikers, and German cross-country skiers. Firstly, Finnish tourism companies' usage of Internet marketing and social media as well as these tactics' effectiveness in reaching target customers is handled. Secondly, the data describes the target groups' experiences on Internet marketing and social media. Additionally, their motivational factors on traveling are opened up.

### 5.1 Finnish tourism companies

Although all four Finnish tourism companies were engaged to the study only two companies ended up answering the interview questions; Finnature and GoArctic which took place over the Lapland Safaris.

Through the empirical data received from Finnature and GoArctic can be told that the majority of the travelers coming to Finland are individual tourists who are mainly students or people traveling due to their work. Although the travelers are arranging their trips to Finland individually they are willing to book supplementary weekly programs after they have arrived to Finland. For instance, GoArctic stated that these programs include different kinds of safaris such as snowshoe walking and snowmobiling. Additionally, accommodation and meal arrangements, transportation to different places and guidance are popular basic components to book among tourists coming to Finland in accordance to both of the companies.

According to both companies, the travelers usually come to Finland after their hobby or an interest and on a trip they spend approximately two to five days. The length of the trip and the different components determine the budget of the travelers but the estimation given by the companies was 90 – 1 500 Euros.

From the tourism companies' point of view the most important factors affecting to their customers' decision making process when choosing a destination are firstly meeting friends or relatives and recommendations by friends or relatives, secondly number/possibilities of outdoor activities and price category of the destination, and thirdly escaping everyday life and historical as well as cultural aspects of the destination.

In order to attract suitable consumer groups the companies send newsletters to domestic customers and provide their homepages as a source of information. However, on their official web sites they are only providing information in Finnish and English so language choices should be expanded, for instance to German. Social media is well-implemented to companies' activities as using it is thought to be rather crucial and efficient when reaching customers. Still, most of the social media activities are focused on Facebook but they are actively maintaining and updating their pages with the purpose of keeping their customers engaged to the experiences they are providing.

Besides, the consumers are using diverse search engines, such as Google, on the Internet for finding more information on the companies they have heard of. Thus, through successful search engine optimization companies are able to guide customers to their homepages and social media sites. The pages include different marketing tactics that are effective to the consumers such as banners of weekly programs, a possibility for email correspondence with travel guides, and updated photos of activities as well as information of the company.

## 5.2 German hikers

The following sub-chapter handles the analysis of empirical data received from two German hiker organizations, Wanderverband and Fernwege. Both respondents took part to the study as individual travelers and hobbyists not in behalf of an organization. They answered questions related to different stages of purchasing process and Internet marketing sources' influence on their decision making process.

### 5.2.1 Purchasing process & Internet marketing sources

Through the warm-up questions on the participants' knowledge on Finland was founded that a participant from Wanderverband had travelled to Finland and felt willingness to come back again as the experiences were highly appreciated. Nonetheless, even the participant from Fernwege who had not visited Finland before was interested about it as a future travel destination. However, none of the participants had yet heard about Rokua Geopark from any channels but there was knowledge on some other Finnish national parks and their hiking opportunities.

For the hiking trips the participants did not find it important to be offered travel packages as they prefer organizing holidays individually. However, whether they wanted something special for their holiday they contact the local tour operator that would be specialized on providing different nature activities.

#### **Purchasing process**

Individual hikers are often ready to travel after hiking opportunities in foreign countries as a trip after a hobby is rather easy to organize for an individual compared to groups. However, organizing a hiking trip for a group of adults or a family with older children is also easy when traveling abroad but a hiker family with small children prefer trips within their home country or to their neighboring countries as well as numerous side-activities for the children in addition to hiking opportunities stated the participant from Fernwege.

According to the respondent from Wanderverband, the most common things that trigger longing for a hiking holiday were pictures from different hiking destinations shared by their colleagues, friends or family members as well as word-of-mouth – someone's suggestion. Also advertisements of untouched nature without mass tourism were mentioned to be effective triggers.

Moreover, when searching more information on the possible travel destination the participants primarily rely on recommendations of their friends and family, the Internet and newspaper as well as the destination's local tourist center's

information. Secondly, suitable information of the destination is gathered from different travel guides, hiking maps in order to see changes of the terrain and routes' level of difficulty.

During the information searching people end up finding several different alternatives they might be interested in. However, there are some factors that elevate a certain destination above others such as simple transportation system, weather forecast for the duration of the trip, and estimated total price of the trip. Also, the more information there is on and provided by the destination the better. For instance, hikers are willing to find out how often the routes are maintained as well as how well they are marked, and what are the camping possibilities during overnight hikes along the route and what kind of resources they have there to use. Altogether, hikers prefer untouched nature and trips away from masses so therefore, destinations located on rather remote areas are popular.

Nevertheless, the participants mentioned some things that might affect to the final decision whether to purchase the flights and other components of the trip. Mostly these decisions are based on unexpected factors such as natural catastrophes (volcanic eruption, earthquake or rainstorms). Despite latter mentioned aspects, hikers do not usually make changes to their final purchase decisions especially if they have relied on their friends or relatives' suggestions based on earlier experiences. Nevertheless, if someone says that other destination would be better than the primarily chosen, the hikers would follow that recommendation to their up-coming vacation plans.

Sharing positive and negative experiences on the trips is important to hikers as they are able to provide valuable in-depth information on the visited destination and its services. Typically the information is shared with friends, family members, colleagues at work and other personal networks. Although the personal experiences are shared rather widely, the both hobbyists prefer using word-of-mouth rather than social media.

## **Internet marketing sources**

When hikers are searching suitable travel destinations or information of a certain destination on the Internet there was especially one thing found that attract them the most through Internet marketing; good offers on hiking tours on the destination's homepage, co-operative organizations' homepage or other sites providing information on the destination. The importance of co-operation with foreign organizations was thought to create trustworthiness on the provided information.

Not only plain co-operation is enough but from the destination's homepage the hobbyists also expect to find links on the articles written of the destination if there are some, comprehensive information of the hiking regions and routes, detailed descriptions of different one-day and overnight hiking options, as well as contact persons of the destination and their information in order to have someone to answer questions concerning the trip. There is a concerned opinion on companies' homepages; it would be preferable to have an option to search the destination's official website in German rather than in English. That would be especially ideal thinking about elderly people. Additionally, it would be easier for all German hikers to find the image and cultural meaning of the destination through the marketing activities; what the key points to the place are and how popular it is.

Furthermore, the responded from Fernwege brought up an idea of having Internet marketing targeted to small hobbyist groups straightforwardly. Therefore, proper segmentation and probably concentrating on a niche market have to been taken into consideration in order to survive in a competitive foreign nature tourism market.

Although implementing Internet marketing is crucial in order to reach a wider group of customers, hikers' perception on the usage of social media is not that strong. However, using different aspects of social media is thought to be efficient when targeting younger hikers and other suitable networks, for instance, Facebook is considered to bring word-of-mouth on a new level. Then again, blogs and forums that are not related to the certain destination are only

considered to bring slight additional value to the decision making in the form of valuable hints such as what are the things that must be experienced. Especially forums are used cautiously as one cannot be hundred per cent sure whether to rely on the written information or not as they are anonymous writings in general.

### 5.2.2. Motivational factors

There are multiple different motivational factors that affect to consumers' decision making process, especially when they are planning a trip and choosing a certain destination. For hikers the most effective motive for choosing some destination or going for a trip is a recommendation of friends or relatives. This motivational factor belongs to classic motives of tourism, more specifically to social, relationship and ethnic motives. According to Suontausta & Tyni, friends and relatives have high influence on person's decision making (2005).

The second important motives are defined to be number/possibility to different outdoor activities and destination's historical as well as cultural aspects. These motivational factors belong to classic motives of tourism as well; however, the afore-mentioned motivational factor goes to physical and physiological motives, and the latter one to cultural, physiological and personal development related motives (Suontausta & Tyni, 2005). For instance, hiking is considered to be a strong physical motive, and visiting places due to their cultural or historical value is thought to be important motivation wise.

Thirdly, the hikers are motivated by a chance to escape their everyday life and other personal aspects to traveling such as uniqueness of landscape on the destination, status of nature's protection and diversity of the nature. Escaping everyday life is included to socio-psychological and cultural motives of tourism. Thus, the person motivated by this factor is willing to get away from their daily routines which might feel boring (Suontausta & Tyni, 2005).

### 5.3 German cross-country skiers

Overall nine cross-country skiing organizations were contacted during the research process, and two of them were interested in participation. However, no replies were received from these organizations during the given answering period which was set to be two weeks. Within the two weeks they were reminded about the deadline twice through email due to the fact that none of them wanted to have a telephone interview. First reminder was sent a week before and the other one a few days before the deadline. Additionally, the author tried to reach the participants by calling them; the calls were not answered neither they were returned to.

The possible hinder with the afore-mentioned participants and lack of success with their engagement to the study might have been that they did not provide the person's information who could have answered to the interview questions. The author had only to rely on info- offices' telephone numbers as well as email addresses.

By the reason of not having required amount of participants, three additional cross-country skiing organizations were contacted. These organizations were found to have previous experience on arranging trips and offering travel packages to Scandinavian countries, including Finland, and therefore it was thought that they would have been particularly interested in the opportunity of taking part to the research in hand. As there was no time for sending interview requests beforehand and waiting for the replies, the organizations were contacted by calling straightaway. Nonetheless, these organizations did not answer to the phone calls neither did they return to the subject although all of them were left with short contact requests in German.

Lastly, in accordance to a suggestion by MEK Visit Finland's representative who works in Germany, one more organization with an existing contact person was contacted. Unfortunately there was no success on reaching this person but on the other hand, the author was told that in advance that the interest towards replying might be rather low as there are other studies in progress.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the perception of German cross-country skiers and hikers' on Internet marketing and social media's practicality for information search. Furthermore, their buying behavior process and the most important motives for choosing a travel destination were studied. Thus, the thesis reflected on Internet marketing, social media, consumer buying process and tourism motivation theories by applying them into practice. As German cross-country skiers were not engaged to this study, this chapter presents the findings by focusing on the best ways of reaching German hikers through Internet marketing as well as social media, and their motivational factors.

Currently the use of Internet marketing is considered crucial to be implemented in a company's marketing activities as it has a chance to reach the target customers more widely compared to traditional media and it is more cost-efficient way of marketing. Moreover, different social media aspects are expected to be taken as a part of company and their marketing tactics. Both of these tactics are more and more commonly used on marketing activities and they have a strong role alongside to traditional media.

From the findings on Internet marketing sources can be concluded that German hikers are paying more attention to Internet marketing when they are searching for a suitable travel destination compared to their regular use. Especially good offers on hiking trips raise the interest towards a certain destination as Germans are price-aware consumers and travelers.

Something that has to be taken into consideration when improving Internet marketing and social media activities is the fact that German travelers prefer information received on their own language. For instance, the majority of the exploring hiking destinations through search engines are done with German keywords. Thus, they are able to find the most dependable information for them as there are no language barriers.

Therefore, the best way for a foreign company, such as Rokua Geopark, to reach German cross-country skiers and hikers through Internet marketing is creating co-operation with local travel agencies, organizations and associations that can promote Rokua Geopark's homepage as well as their diverse nature related activities which are one of the motivational factors to German hikers. Thus, the target groups receive information through trustworthy sources with higher probability to receive it in their own language. Additionally, they could easily find out the specialty of Rokua Geopark as it has strong historical status due to original formations created by the second ice age, and it provides nature tourism experiences in remote surroundings. Those are values and motives for German hikers to travel further away from home.

Then again, social media is not convincing for reaching desired groups as it is not primarily used for searching information on destination compared to overall internet marketing. However, social media can be implemented in the following way; a company could create own blog with a multiple bloggers when it is a question about a company with a wide network such as Rokua Geopark, and in addition to that, use different social network sites efficiently meaning frequent updating on upcoming happenings. This creates buzz among rather young hobbyists, especially if they are able to find Rokua Geopark's social network through search engines with keywords in their own language such as German. Thus, social media has not yet an attribute that elevates above others but they form an efficient combination when used correctly.

Through the findings can be summed up that the best way to reach the target customers via Internet marketing is to create contacts and possible co-operation with different hobbyist organizations in order to receive visibility. Hence, it is possible to improve the visibility in social media particularly when the hikers who have already visited Rokua Geopark have a chance to join all the social networks and offer their own experiences. Additionally, this could result in more efficient word-of-mouth in a smaller scale as German hikers are the most motivated to choose a certain destination or travel in accordance to their friends or relatives' recommendations.

## 7 DISCUSSION

The overall research process was interesting as there were challenges and problems to solve as well as times of success. Qualitative research method might have not been the most suitable way of doing this kind of research as there were slight difficulties to reach the target groups although there are numerous cross-country skiing and hiking organizations in Germany. Nonetheless, the thesis partly gave answers to the research questions and through them the commissioner is able to find hints for improving the Internet marketing and implementing the social media on a new level in the future when it is time to focus on foreign markets. The findings of the research brought up that it is rather crucial to co-operate with hobbyist organizations and associations on the foreign target market in order to reach such a level. Lastly, the findings of the hobbyists' motivational factors can be used for focusing on attributes that truly push consumers to travel after their hobby, and bring them up in the marketing activities on a certain Internet marketing or social media source.

The total expectations which the author had on the thesis were not completely met as the research questions were not fully answered due to the lack of cross-country skiers' responds. However, semi-structured interviews that were conducted after all gave good insight on the topic; the data received from the Finnish companies and hiker organizations was comprehensive and it supported as well as filled in the study. Although continuous contacting and communication seemed to be necessary in order to keep even these respondents interested in their task they were well-rounded with their final replies and experiences on the phenomena.

Overall, the research forms a good base for further research as the current findings are only directional due to relatively small sample size and concentration on the main topics in a general level. Future study could be conducted with qualitative research method in order to reach larger number of participants and more advanced information. Hence, by choosing this type of

method, a couple of hinders of qualitative research method can be avoided which is trying to develop several ideas for keeping a few participants engaged to the study and contacting them frequently. Such side-activities might be rather time-consuming and they can disturb concentration on more necessary parts of the research such as continuing the overall writing process.

Towards the end, forming of the theory for the thesis was relatively straightforward as the literature and other sources were diverse and easy to find. Nevertheless, it would have been great to find more literature or other updated sources on usage of the Internet and social media in Germany. The other parts of the theoretical background were moderately satisfying as they consisted of numerous different sources and provided a solid foundation for forming the questionnaires. Quite many of the founded academic books were published within four years and other sources within a couple of years.

Other thing that could have been done differently is related to finding the target groups of the study. It would have been better to start going the hobbyist organizations through from the beginning rather than mapping out bloggers or other social media users writing about their hiking or cross-country skiing experiences. Nevertheless, many of the hobbyist organizations were found and contacted during the research process. Although all of the hobbyists were not reached, failing on something is also a way of learning – learning to do some things differently next time.

In the future, it is good to take the possible drawbacks on contacting the target groups or organizations into consideration. If the homepage of an organization is not providing sufficient contact information it is always risky to wait for their reply; if there is an info email address but the information is lacking telephone number to the office and a contact person's name there is no guarantee that any replies will come. Furthermore, although the author of this thesis contacted the possible participants in their own language (German) many of them might have been unsure to take part as it was clarified to them that the interview will be conducted in English. The hinder could have been language barrier as some of the organizations were located to smaller parts of Germany. Thus, the low level of interest towards telephone interviews can be explained as well.

To sum up, the research topic and the entire process was interesting as it was related to the current marketing activities and different aspects nature tourism. The outcomes of this small-scale study were directional in order to realize the importance of Internet marketing, social media and understanding motivational factors of the consumers that influence on their travel decisions.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

Finnish companies that provided sources to the study

<p><b>Matkailun edistämiskeskus (MEK)</b></p> <p><b>Finnish Tourist Board</b></p>	<p>The Finnish Tourist Board is responsible for Finland's international tourism's development as a national expert of tourism industry and an active operator.</p> <p>It supports companies and corporate groups on the industry on developing and marketing tourism services that are targeted to international markets.</p> <p><a href="http://www.mek.fi/w5/meken/index.nsf/(Pages)/Index">http://www.mek.fi/w5/meken/index.nsf/(Pages)/Index</a></p>
<p><b>MEK Visit Finland</b></p>	<p>MEK Visit Finland is the Finnish Tourist Board's branding campaign for international markets. The idea is to clarify Finland's image and potential as a tourism destination.</p> <p>There are several people from MEK Visit Finland working in different countries for this cause.</p> <p><a href="http://www.visitfinland.com/travel-trade/">http://www.visitfinland.com/travel-trade/</a></p>
<p><b>Finpro</b></p>	<p>Finpro is an organization operating worldwide that aims to build growth of Finnish companies and create success for them on the international markets.</p> <p>The organization is networking for the best of their clients and co-operators both in domestic and international markets.</p> <p><a href="http://www.finpro.fi/web/english-pages/frontpage">http://www.finpro.fi/web/english-pages/frontpage</a></p>
<p><b>Metsäntutkimuslaitos (METLA)</b></p> <p><b>Finnish Forest Research Institute</b></p>	<p>The Finnish Forest Institute is a specialist and research organization that intends to create solutions to the challenges and questions on maintaining, using, products, services and intangible values of forests.</p> <p><a href="http://www.metla.fi/index-en.html">http://www.metla.fi/index-en.html</a></p>

Interview request for Finnish tourism companies

Hei,

Olen Henriikka Heikkinen Oulun seudun ammattikorkeakoulusta Liiketalouden yksiköstä. Opiskelen viimeistä vuottani kansainvälistä liiketaloutta, ja teen tällä hetkellä opinnäytetyötäni Rokua Geoparkille (<http://www.rokuageopark.fi>). Tutkimukseni käsittelee sosiaalisen median ja internet markkinoinnin vaikutusta kansainvälisten luontomatkailijoiden päätöksentekoon kohdevalinnassa muiden motivaatiotekijöiden lisäksi. Tutkimussegmenttiini kuuluvat saksalaiset murtomaahiihtäjät ja vaeltajat.

Kattavan laadullisen tutkimuksen saavuttamiseksi haluaisin haastatella suomalaisia luontomatkailuyrityksiä kohderyhmieni edustajien lisäksi.

Haastattelu koostuu max. 6 kysymyksestä liittyen sosiaaliseen median ja internetin hyödyntämiseen luontomatkailun markkinoinnissa. Kysymyslomake on suunniteltu niin, että vastaamiseen ei tulisi mennä 15 minuuttia kauempaa. Ollessanne halukas ottamaan osaa haastatteluun, lähetän kysymyslomakkeen ennakkoon viikon 13 aikana. Tällöin teillä on aikaa tutustua kysymysten aihepiireihin, ja haastattelua varten otan yhteyttä puhelimitse viikolla 15 teille sopivana ajankohtana.

Toivon kuulevani teistä pian!

Ystävällisin terveisin

Henriikka Heikkinen

Interview request for German hobbyist organizations, in English

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Henriikka Heikkinen, I am a Finnish student from Oulu University of Applied Sciences' School of Business and Information Management. I am studying International Business for the last year, and I am currently working on thesis which is commissioned by a Finnish company Rokua Geopark (<http://www.rokuageopark.fi/en>). My study handles social media and Internet marketing's influence on decision making process of international nature tourists when they are choosing a destination of interest, in addition to other motivational factors. My research segment consists of German cross-country skiers and hikers.

The purpose of this study is to interview at least three (3) people from each group, and I was hoping to get in touch with people interested in cross-country skiing / hiking through your organization, or have a chance to interview you in order to get an expert opinion.

The interview contains max. 10 questions and they are related to the usage of social media and Internet marketing when searching for nature tourism destinations, as well as motivational factors related to tourism. If the hobbyists / you are willing to take part to the interview, I will send the questionnaire to you beforehand. Notice that the questionnaire is in English. There will be one week of time to get to know the topics of the questions, and I will contact the interviewees via e-mail, Skype, or other way what they / you may prefer the next week (week 16) after receiving the questionnaire.

I hope to hear from you soon.

With best regards,

Ms. Henriikka Heikkinen

Interview request for German hobbyist organization, in German

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

Mein Name ist Henriikka Heikkinen. Ich bin eine Studentin der School of Business and Information Management der Oulu University of Applied Sciences in Finnland. Ich studiere International Business im letzten Jahr und derzeit schreibe ich an meiner Abschlussarbeit, die von einem finnischen Unternehmen Rokua Geopark (<http://www.rokuageopark.fi/en>) beauftragt wurde. Meine Studie behandelt den Einfluss von Social Media und Internet Marketing auf den Entscheidungsprozess der internationalen, naturverbundenen Touristen, wenn diese ihr Reiseziel aussuchen, sowie ihre Motivationsfaktoren. Mein Forschungsgebiet beinhaltet Langläufer und Wanderer aus Deutschland.

Die Absicht dieser Studie ist ein Interview von mindestens 3 Menschen jeder Gruppe. Ich hoffe, durch ihre Organisation mit Menschen an Langlauf oder am Wandern interessierten in Kontakt zu kommen oder die Chance zu erhalten, Sie als Experten zu befragen.

Das Interview besteht aus max. 10 Fragen und diese sind auf die Benutzung von Social Media und Internet Marketing bezogen, wenn es um das Aussuchen des naturverbundenen Reisezieles geht, sowie die dazugehörigen Motivationsfaktoren. Wenn die Interessierten/Sie bereit sind teilzunehmen, werde ich einen Fragebogen schicken. Bitte nehmen Sie zur Kenntnis, dass der Fragebogen in englischer Sprache ist. Danach wird ein paar Tage Zeit sein, um sich mit den Themen der Fragen zu beschäftigen bis ich die Interviewten via E-Mail, Skype oder auch gerne durch andere bevorzugte Wege (Wege 16) erneut kontaktiere.

Ich freue mich von Ihnen zu hören.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,  
Ms.Henriikka Heikkinen

Interview questions for Finnish companies, in Finnish

Hyvä osanottaja,

Tämä kysely on tehty opinnäytetyötäni varten, jonka toimeksiantajana on Rokua Geopark. Tarkoitukseni on selvittää mitkä ovat parhaita keinoja tavoittaa saksalaisia murtomaahiihtäjiä sekä vaeltajia sosiaalisen median ja internet markkinoinnin kautta, kuin myös mitkä ovat ne motivaatiotekijät, jotka vaikuttavat heidän päätöksentekoonsa luontomatkailukohdetta valittaessa.

Kysely sisältää kaiken kaikkiaan 6 kysymystä. Suosittelen, että luette jokaisen kysymyksen huolellisesti läpi, ja tarpeen vaatiessa minuun voi ottaa yhteyttä..

Jos mieleenne tulee aiheeseen liittyviä kommentteja tai muuta tärkeää tietoa, mitä haluaisitte lisätä, voitte kirjoittaa ne kyselylomakkeen loppuun (1 tyhjä sivu).

Ystävällisin terveisin

Henriikka Heikkinen

- 
1. Minkälaiset saksalaisryhmät / yksin matkustavat saksalaiset vierailevat luonanne vuosittain? Mikä on heidän vierailunsa keskimääräinen pituus?
  2. Mitä komponentteja asiakkaanne varaavat eniten Suomen vierailulleen?
  3. Asiakkaidenne matkustusbudjetti: Kuinka paljon he ovat keskimäärin valmiita kuluttamaan pakettilomiin? Järjestävätkö he matkansa omatoimisesti vai ostavatko he valmiita paketteja matkatoimistoilta?

4. Määrittele kolme (3) tärkeintä asiaa, jotka vaikuttavat asiakkaidenne päätöksentekoon. Laittakaa ne tärkeysjärjestykseen numeroimalla vastausvaihtoehdot. Esimerkiksi seuraavanlaisesti:

**k. muu: hauskanpito 1**

(1 = tärkein, 2 = toiseksi tärkein, 3 = kolmanneksi tärkein)

- a. kohteen suosio
  - b. matkatoimiston suositus
  - c. ystävien/sukulaisten suositus
  - d. ystävien/sukulaisten tapaaminen
  - e. pako arkiympäristöstä (pitkä välimatka kotimaahan)
  - f. ulkoilma-aktiviteettien määrä/harrastusmahdollisuus
  - g. uusien asioiden/taitojen oppiminen
  - h. historiallinen ja kulttuurillinen näkökulma
  - i. kohteen hintataso
  - j. majoituksen/aterioiden laatu
  - k. muu:
5. Mitä markkinointitaktiikoita hyödynnätte internetin välityksellä, ja kuinka sosiaalinen media on yhdistetty markkinointiinne? Jos sosiaalista mediaa ei vielä hyödynnetä, kuinka alkaisitte toteuttaa sitä?
6. Kuinka asiakkaanne ovat löytäneet yrityksenne internetin kautta ja mitkä seikat on mainittu olevan kaikkein vaikuttavimpia keinoja huomion saamisessa?

Interview questions for Finnish companies, in English

Dear Participant,

This is a questionnaire done in accordance to my thesis work commissioned by Rokua Geopark. My purpose is to find out what is the best way to reach German cross-country skiers and hikers through social media and Internet marketing as well as which are their motivational factors when choosing the destination of interest.

There are 6 questions in total. I would kindly suggest that you read through each question carefully, and in case assistance is needed please contact me.

If there are specific comments or any important information that you would like to add, please do not hesitate to mention them at the end of the survey (1 empty page).

With Best Regards

Henriikka Heikkinen

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1. What kind of German groups and individuals visit you annually? What is the average length of their stay?
2. What components do your customers mostly book when traveling to Finland?
3. Travel budget of your customers: How much are your customers willing to spend approximately for travel packages? Do they organize their trips on their own or do they buy ready packages from tour operators?

4. Define three (3) most important factors in the decision making of your customers. Put them in order of importance by marking the number next to the option. For instance, you may do it as follows:

**k. other: having great time      1**

(1 = the most important, 2 = second important, 3 = third important)

- a. popularity of the destination
- b. recommendation of a travel agent
- c. recommendation of friends/relatives
- d. meeting friends/relatives
- e. escaping everyday life (long distance to home residence)
- f. number/possibility of outdoor activities
- g. learning new things/skills
- h. historical and cultural aspects
- i. price category of the destination
- j. quality of accommodation/meals
- k. other:

5. What marketing tactics are you using through the Internet? How is social media integrated to your marketing activities? If it is not, how would you start implementing it?

6. How have your customers found your company through the Internet? If they have, what do they mention to be the most effective way?

## Interview questions for hobbyists

Dear Participant,

This is a questionnaire done in accordance to my thesis work commissioned by Rokua Geopark. My purpose is to find out what would be the best way to reach nature tourists, such as cross-country skiers and hikers, through social media and Internet marketing as well as which factors motivates them to choose a certain destination.

There are 10 questions in total that are subdivided into two parts according to each category. I would kindly suggest that you read through each question carefully, and in case assistance is needed please contact me..

If there are specific comments or any important information that you would like to add, please do not hesitate to mention them at the end of the survey (1 empty page).

With Best Regards

Henriikka Heikkinen

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### First section: Finland & nature activities

1. Have you visited Finland before? If not, would you consider choosing it as your nature travel destination?
2. Have you heard about Rokua Geopark from any sources, e.g. your local travel agencies, social media, Internet, travel magazines?
3. How important is it for you to be offered travel packages including nature related activities or do you prefer organizing everything individually?

Second section: Factors affecting decision making, social media and the Internet

4. Do you often travel to foreign countries to explore HIKING / CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING opportunities? What usually triggers the need to travel after a hobby?
5. What or who are the primary sources of information when searching suitable destinations?
6. Evaluation of different alternatives before making the final purchase decision. If you have more than one suitable alternative as a nature tourism destination of which to choose from, what would be the factors affecting on your decision?
7. Final purchase decision. Although you would have chosen a certain destination to travel among other alternatives, would there still be something that might affect negatively to your decision and result in cancelling the trip (not buying it), e.g. something more important to buy comes up? Kindly give some examples.
8. Where (e.g. social media, face-to-face) and to whom do you share your experiences on the travel experience? Do you share both positive and negative experiences?
9. What do you consider to be the best way to attract nature tourists on the Internet? How effective do you perceive the usage of social media, e.g. blogs, forums or Facebook, in reaching German HIKERS / CROSS-COUNTRY SKIERS? Kindly give some examples.

10. Define three (3) most important factors that affect your decision making when choosing a nature destination. Put them in order of importance by marking the number next to the option. For instance, you may do it as follows:

**k. other: having great time      1**

(1 = the most important, 2 = second important, 3 = third important)

- a. popularity of the destination
- b. recommendation of a travel agent
- c. recommendation of friends/relatives
- d. meeting friends/relatives
- e. escaping everyday life (long distance to home residence)
- f. number/possibility of outdoor activities
- g. learning new things/skills
- h. historical and cultural aspects
- i. price category of the destination
- j. quality of accommodation/meals
- k. other:

## Answers from GoArtic

- 1. Minkälaiset saksalaisryhmät / yksin matkustavat saksalaiset vierailevat luonanne vuosittain? Mikä on heidän vierailunsa keskimääräinen pituus?**

Yksittäiset matkustajat käyttävät meiltä lähinnä viikko-ohjelmaretkiä tällä hetkellä. He ovat usein opiskelijoita tai työnsä puolesta Oulussa vierailevia. Jonkin verran selkeästi turisteja. Viipymän pituutta emme tiedä, koska he ostavat lähinnä yksittäisiä retkiä. Ryhmät ovat lähinnä opastusasiakkaita eli Oulusta ohikulkevia ryhmiä, jotka pysähtyvät Oulussa hetkeksi. Ilmakitaran MM-kisoihin myymme kokonaispaketteja, joiden kesto on 2-5 vrk.

- 2. Mitä komponentteja asiakkaanne varaavat eniten Suomen vierailulleen?**

Siis viikko-ohjelma retkiä; lumikenkäretkiä, huskysafareita, moottorikelkkasafareita jne.

- 3. Asiakkaidenne matkustusbudjetti: Kuinka paljon he ovat keskimäärin valmiita kuluttamaan pakettilomiin? Järjestävätkö he matkansa omatoimisesti vai ostavatko he valmiita paketteja matkatoimistoilta?**

Pakettilomista en siis osaa oikein sanoa. Ilmakitarapaketit ovat hinnoiltaan keskimäärin 90-300 e/hlö.

- 4. Määrittele kolme (3) tärkeintä asiaa, jotka vaikuttavat asiakkaidenne päätöksentekoon. Laittakaa ne tärkeysjärjestykseen numeroimalla vastausvaihtoehdot.**

k. muu: hauskanpito 1

(1 = tärkein, 2 = toiseksi tärkein, 3 = kolmanneksi tärkein)

- a. kohteen suosio
- b. matkatoimiston suositus
- c. ystävien/sukulaisten suositus
- d. ystävien/sukulaisten tapaaminen 1
- e. pako arkiympäristöstä (pitkä välimatka kotimaahan)
- f. ulkoilma-aktiviteettien määrä/harrastusmahdollisuus 2
- g. uusien asioiden/taitojen oppiminen
- h. historiallinen ja kulttuurillinen näkökulma 3
- i. kohteen hintataso
- j. majoituksen/aterioiden laatu
- k. muu:

**5. Mitä markkinointitaktiikoita hyödynnätte internetin välityksellä, ja kuinka sosiaalinen media on yhdistetty markkinointiin? Jos sosiaalista mediaa ei vielä hyödynnetä, kuinka alkaisitte toteuttaa sitä?**

Lähetämme uutiskirjeitä, mutta tällä hetkellä vain kotimaisille asiakkaille. Sosiaalista mediaa hyödynnämme sekä kotimaan että ulkomaan markkinoilla.

**6. Kuinka asiakkaanne ovat löytäneet yrityksenne internetin kautta ja mitkä seikat on mainittu olevan kaikkein vaikuttavimpia keinoja huomion saamisessa?**

Googlettamalla varmasti – Oulu activities, oulu tourism jne. tyypisillä hakusanoilla. Oulun kaupungin matkailuneuvonnan sivuilta – viikko-ohjelmabannerit ja sähköpostikirjeenvaihto matkailuneuvoja kanssa.

## Answers from Finnature

**1. Minkälaiset saksalaisryhmät / yksin matkustavat saksalaiset vierailevat luonanne vuosittain? Mikä on heidän vierailunsa keskimääräinen pituus?**

- Lintuharrastajat ja lintu- ja luontovalokuvaajat
- Keskimääräinen vierailun pituus on 5vrk

**2. Mitä komponentteja asiakkaanne varaavat eniten Suomen vierailulleen?**

- majoitus
- kuljetus
- opastus
- valokuvaajat piilokojun
- ruokailu

**3. Asiakkaidenne matkustusbudjetti: Kuinka paljon he ovat keskimäärin valmiita kuluttamaan pakettilomiin? Järjestävätkö he matkansa omatoimisesti vai ostavatko he valmiita paketteja matkatoimistoilta?**

- keskimäärin noin 1500€
- osa tulee matkanjärjestäjän kautta, mutta suurin osa on omatoimimatkailijoita

**4. Määrittele kolme (3) tärkeintä asiaa, jotka vaikuttavat asiakkaidenne päätöksentekoon. Laittakaa ne tärkeysjärjestykseen numeroimalla vastausvaihtoehdot.**

**k. muu: hauskanpito 1**

(1 = tärkein, 2 = toiseksi tärkein, 3 = kolmanneksi tärkein)

- a. kohteen suosio
- b. matkatoimiston suositus

- c. ystävien/sukulaisten suositus 1
- d. ystävien/sukulaisten tapaaminen
- e. pako arkiympäristöstä (pitkä välimatka kotimaahan) 3
- f. ulkoilma-aktiviteettien määrä/harrastusmahdollisuus
- g. uusien asioiden/taitojen oppiminen
- h. historiallinen ja kulttuurillinen näkökulma
- i. kohteen hintataso 2
- j. majoituksen/aterioiden laatu
- k. muu: mahdollisuus nähdä ja kuvata heille erilaisia lintulajeja

**5. Mitä markkinointitaktiikoita hyödynnätte internetin välityksellä, ja kuinka sosiaalinen media on yhdistetty markkinointiin? Jos sosiaalista mediaa ei vielä hyödynnetä, kuinka alkaisitte toteuttaa sitä?**

- Sosiaalisen median (lähinnä Facebook) hyödyntäminen on erittäin tärkeää ja hyvin toimivaa. Käytämme sitä aktiivisesti lisäämällä sinne ajankohtaisten lajien kuvia ja kertomalla niiden kuvaus- ja näkemismahdollisuuksista. Sosiaalisen median käyttö vaatii aktiivisuutta ja kohderyhmälle mielenkiintoista näkemistä ja lukemista. Kotisivut ovat myös tärkeä informaatiolähde. Pitäisi varmaan käännettää saksaksi?

**6. Kuinka asiakkaanne ovat löytäneet yrityksenne internetin kautta ja mitkä seikat on mainittu olevan kaikkein vaikuttavimpia keinoja huomion saamisessa?**

- Suuri osa asiakkaistamme tulee internetin välityksellä ja heidän saavuttamiseksi täytyy olla hyvin suunnitellut ja kattavat verkkosivut ja onnistunut hakukoneoptimointi. Hyvät ja houkuttelevat kuvat saavat asiakkaat pysähtymään ja katsomaan useita sivuja.

Answers from Wanderverband

### First section: Finland & nature activities

- 1. Have you visited Finland before? If not, would you consider choosing it as your nature travel destination?**

Yes, I travelled to Finland some years ago and did several overnight hikes in the northern part of Finland (in Urho-Kekkonen National Park and Lemmenjoki National Park). It was great, so I will come back.

- 2. Have you heard about Rokua Geopark from any sources, e.g. your local travel agencies, social media, Internet, travel magazines?**

No.

- 3. How important is it for you to be offered travel packages including nature related activities?**

Usually I organize my holidays on my own – I never book travel packages. But almost all my holidays include nature activities, especially hiking trips – that is very important to me.

### Second section: Factors affecting decision-making, social media and the Internet

- 4. Do you often travel to foreign countries to explore hiking opportunities? What usually triggers the need to travel after a hobby / an interest?**

Yes I travel very often to foreign countries to explore hiking opportunities. Lots of my friends and colleagues at work are enthusiastic hikers, travel guides for companies or do work in the environmental field, too. So I

watch very often pictures of their trips/work abroad or we are talking about Landscapes, nature reserves and hiking opportunities. Those are my main triggers. 95% of my trips and travels are hiking and nature trips.

**5. What or who are the primary sources of information when searching suitable destinations?**

- Recommendations/references of friends
- Travel guides like the lonely planet or Stefan loose travel guide, hiking guides of the area (i am searching for it in the internet)
- Local tourist information/visitor centers of protected areas, contacted via e-mail or i just walk in
- Usually I buy hiking maps – i order them in a book store, hiking equipment stores or via the internet
- Sometimes i search in the internet for further information.

**6. Evaluation of different alternatives. If you have more than one suitable alternative as a nature tourism destination of which to choose from, what would be the factors affecting on your decision?**

- If it's reachable by public transport
- Good hiking information like hiking maps, suggestions for (overnight) hiking routes, very well marked trails
- Offering of basic campgrounds or self-supply huts with pit toilets and fresh water sources
- I want to get away from people – I would prefer the more unspoiled Landscape, the wilder it is, the more I like it
- Weather – if rain is forecasted maybe I would chance my plans and would go to a forest landscape instead of using a coastal trail

**7. Final purchase decision. Although you would have picked a certain destination to travel among other alternatives, would there still be something that might affect negatively and result in cancelling the trip (not buying it), e.g. other people's opinions about the destination or something more important to buy comes up? Kindly give some examples.**

- Usually I do not change my opinion after picking the best alternative, often I just buy them after decision-making
- Next time I could take another trip if someone recommends me something "better" compared to my current choice
- I trust recommendations so I have no need to make changes afterwards when I have found someone's trip suggestion interesting
- One reason I might change my mind on purchasing is the unexpected factors like volcano eruption, this has actually happened on one of my trips when I was supposed to go to Italy

**8. Where and to whom do you share your experiences on the travel experience? Do you share both positive and negative experiences?**

To Whom: Friends, family, colleges at work, private networks and networks at work (I am member in different environmental and political associations/groups and at the German hiking association = Deutscher Wanderverband (employer))

Where: at work, usually I invite friends, family and acquaintances to watch my pictures

Yes I share positive and negative experiences.

**9. What do you consider to be the best way to attract nature tourists on the Internet? How effective do you perceive the usage of social media, e.g. blogs, forums or Facebook, in reaching German hikers? Kindly give some examples.**

If there are good offers to prepare my hiking trip I would use the internet information and would recommend the web side to my friends, family and meshes (good offers= online maps for hiking regions (printable in scale 1:25.000), descriptions/suggestions of day-hike and overnights options, current information of the trail conditions, contact details of a person to ask further questions, easy booking options). For most of my family members it would be so much easier to get the information in German.

I don't use Facebook. I rarely use blogs or forums – I read the articles of other people in blogs or forums, but never write something in a blog or forum. Usually I don't trust 100 % the information in a forum – you never know if the information is correct of the writer, because you don't know the person. But I value it as a hint if it is an interesting hiking region or not. I prefer the information of official homepages and articles linked there.

I think lots of my friends are using new media as information sources. I think, 50 % of all Germans have a Facebook access – so I think it is a very important media for advertising a region.

Personal networks work very well for sharing information concerning experiences so word-of-mouth is taken very seriously. It has happened that friends or relatives choose to go to a destination I have recommended.

Maybe it would be good to connect Rokua Geopark's homepage to big outdoor equipment stores like Globetrotter, to associations like the Deutscher Wanderverband or to the web sides of German nature and hiking magazines.

**10. Define three (3) most important factors that affect your decision-making when choosing a nature destination. Put them in order of importance by marking the number next to the option. For instance, you may do it as follows:**

**k. other: having great time      1**

c. recommendation of friends/relatives 1

f. number/possibility of outdoor activities 2

k. uniqueness of a landscape, status of protection, Are there interesting plants, animals, nature formations?

(1 = the most important, 2 = second important, 3 = third important)

- a. popularity of the destination
- b. recommendation of a travel agent
- c. recommendation of friends/relatives
- d. meeting friends/relatives
- e. escaping everyday life (long distance to home residence)
- f. number/possibility of outdoor activities
- g. learning new things/skills
- h. historical and cultural aspects
- i. price category of the destination
- j. quality of accommodation/meals
- k. other:

Answers from Fernwege

### First section: Finland & nature activities

- 1. Have you visited Finland before? If not, would you consider choosing it as your nature travel destination?**

I haven't been in Finland until now. But (of course) it would be a possible destination

- 2. Have you heard about Rokua Geopark from any sources, e.g. your local travel agencies, social media, Internet, travel magazines?**

No. Nothing

- 3. How important is it for you to be offered travel packages including nature related activities?**

Normally I plan my (nature) holiday by my own so local travel packages are not important. However: if I were interested, I would look for a specialized tour operator, like Wikinger Reisen.

### Second section: Factors affecting decision-making, social media and the Internet

- 4. Do you often travel to foreign countries to explore cross-country skiing / hiking opportunities? What usually triggers the need to travel after a hobby / an interest?**

Since we have little children we travel normally in Germany or in the Netherlands. But when the children grow up we would like to visit other

countries, perhaps also Finland. The favorite type of accommodation is a camping site or holiday houses (no hotels or hostels). In the case we travel with our children activities suitable for children are important, such as fishing, canoeing or simply swimming in a lake. In the days when I was a single the “image” of a country was important. Especially in the case it means: looking for “untouched” nature without mass tourism.

I'm running one of the leading internet platform in Germany concerning walking ([www.fernwege.de](http://www.fernwege.de)). Of course I often the question arise: why is one walk popular, but not the other? Some say, that the “quality of a touristic offer or destination” is important. I don't think so. A lot based on the image of region. This is the main decision. Than in the second step the people look for special activities, the price, what another person say.

**5. What or who are the primary sources of information when searching suitable destinations?**

Internet and newspaper. Perhaps for the first step: information from the official tourist site of the country.

**6. Evaluation of different alternatives. If you have more than one suitable alternative as a nature tourism destination, what would be the factors affecting on your final decision?**

The estimated total price and the weather forecast. The image of the Scandinavian countries is still, that traveling in this country is very expensive.

**7. Final purchase decision. Although you would have picked a certain destination to travel among other alternatives, would there still be something that might affect negatively and result in cancelling the trip (not buying it), e.g. other people's opinions about the destination or something more important to buy comes up? Kindly give some examples.**

No need for changing decision after making it. But if something happens before leaving to holiday then it changes plans. Perhaps result in cancellation.

**8. Where and to whom do you share your experiences on the travel experience? Do you share both positive and negative experiences?**

I share the experience with my family and my friends (old fashioned: face to face. I never would post my holiday experiences in a social network).

**9. What do you consider to be the best way to attract nature tourists on the Internet? How effective do you perceive the usage of social media, e.g. blogs, forums or Facebook, in motivating to try a new nature destination? Kindly give some examples.**

Well. You ask me what is the best way to promote a location in the internet. If I had the key to that, I would be a rich man. What is the key factor that one video on YouTube has 1.000.000 clicks and the other has only a few? What I can say in the context of walking is: it is very difficult to promote a new location if you have no anchor points. Nature tourism is something special, just the opposite of mass tourism. So per definition (in my point of view) you can reach only a smaller group and young people. Smaller than those, who are looking for much sun as possible and lying on the beach. From my point of view, the "image" or the "legend" of a destination is important. The best example for that is the Jacob's pilgrim walks to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. A lot of people heard about that, but have now precise information. But they all want to go this walk, although some parts of it are very horrible. What is the "legend" or "image" of Finland? Big forest, lonely lakes, a lot of insects and expensive. A nice place to camp on a lake, go canoeing and live in a small wooden house, beside Nokia and Aki Kaurismäki of course. Sorry this sounds very stupid, but this seems to be the image of Finland. Creating an image that everyone says: Hey, at least in my life I have to go to Finland, needs a lot of time or a lot of money placing banners, ads, posts in blogs and so on.

**10. Define three (3) most important factors that affect your decision-making when choosing a nature destination. Put them in order of importance by marking the number next to the option. For instance, you may do it as follows:**

**k. other: having great time      1**

(1 = the most important, 2 = second important, 3 = third important)

- a. popularity of the destination
- b. recommendation of a travel agent
- c. recommendation of friends/relatives      1
- d. meeting friends/relatives
- e. escaping everyday life (long distance to home residence)      3
- f. number/possibility of outdoor activities
- g. learning new things/skills
- h. historical and cultural aspects      2
- i. price category of the destination
- j. quality of accommodation/meals
- k. other:

## Company cards, cross-country skiers

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## Company cards, hikers

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