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TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED TOURIST EXPERIENCE: INSIGHTS FROM TOURISM COMPANIES IN ROVANIEMI

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Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been transforming the tourist experience drastically and given birth to the so-called technology enhanced tourist experience where cutting-edged ICTs can enhance the tourist experience throughout the entire travel process. Technology can be considered the key instrument for the enhancement of the tourist experience since it facilitates and empowers the co-creation between the tourist and the service provider in order to generate added values for them. The main aim of this thesis project was to consider how some micro and small tourism companies in Rovaniemi practice and perceive technology enhanced tourist experience through their websites and related online sources. The purpose was to support the thesis's commissioner by providing an overview in terms of the practice and perception of the tourism business in Rovaniemi concerning the topic of technology enhanced tourist experience.

A rich literature review was generated to provide a firm background for the empirical research. The main themes of cutting-edge ICTs utilized to enhance the experience for tourists were drawn from the related academic theory. The main data sources were the websites and related online sources of the participating companies and one in-depth interview. The method of qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data.

The study found that almost all the companies studied practice and have good perception regarding the themes of interactive website, social networking site, review site and video. The theme of online reservation is limitedly practiced and perceived by most of the companies. The theme of cross-platform website, weblog, games and gamification as well as other technologies are practiced and perceived only by one or two of the companies studied. The theme of virtual travel community, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality as well as recommender system are not practiced by any of the companies studied. Besides, it was also found that becoming a Smart Tourism Destination could be an optimal solution for Rovaniemi tourism development.

Key words   <tourist experience, online experience, co-creation, transforming, technology enhanced tourist experience, cutting-edge ICTs >

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1   INTRODUCTION

Tourist experience is a key issue for both tourism academic research and business world (Uriely 2005, 199). It is especially pivotal to understand about the issue of "experience" in tourism industry because experience is what travellers are searching for (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 2). During the past decades, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been transforming the tourism industry worldwide (Buhalis–Law 2008, 609). The advancement in ICTs has, above all, revolutionized the nature of tourism (Neuhofer–Buhalis–Ladkin 2012, 38) and thus changed the traditional way of forming the tourist experience by changing the "traditional roles, structures and processes" of tourist experience (Neuhofer 2014, 90). ICTs, particularly the Internet, empower tourists to identify, customize and purchase tourism products (Buhalis–Law 2008, 610). For example, with the huge information source from the Internet (websites and social media) potential travelers can easily collect ideas, become inspired, plan their vacation and book everything online. Tourists nowadays are highly informed and empowered to decide what they want and how they want to realize their holiday.

In the context of abundant information, the competition that tourism providers and destinations have to face is fierce (Gretzel–Fesenmaier–Formica–O'Leary 2006, 120) and thus they have to be after the consumers, listen and co-create values with them (Prahalad–Ramaswamy 2004, 7). This leads to the fact that tourists nowadays are actively co-creating their own experience with the tourism providers (Prahalad–Ramaswamy 2004, 5). In the experience co-creation process, ICTs act as the mediated factor (McCabe–Sharples–Foster 2012, 1) and support tourists throughout their travel journey and enhance their overall tourist experience (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 5).

As a result, the impacts of ICTs on tourist experience are enormous. In fact, ICTs have not only fundamentally transformed and revolutionized tourist experience but also led to the emergence of new types of tourist experiences namely technology enhanced tourist experiences (Neuhofer–Buhalis–Ladkin 2013a, 1). Hence, it is very important for tourism businesses to understand this new type of tourist experience in order to "create and deliver competitive experiences" (Zehrer 2009, according to Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 1).

The obvious role that ICTs play in the formation process of tourist experience and the emergence of the new type of tourist experience make it worth carrying out this study. Rovaniemi is an internationally known tourism destination. However, no study regarding the topic of technology enhanced tourist experience has been carried out yet so far. This study aims to answer the two research questions of how some micro and small tourism companies in Rovaniemi, through their websites and other related online sources, use technology to enhance experience for tourists and how they perceive technology enhanced tourist experience through their practices. The main sources of information data are the company websites and other related online sources.

The commissioner of this thesis is the Foresight Approach to Tourism Product Development project. The project is aimed to strengthen the competitiveness of tourism product development (TPD) know-how by the integration of foresight, five dimensions of responsible tourism and meaningful experiences into TPD. The main focus of this thesis is on the experience approach in tourism which coincides with one of the commissioning project's themes and aims. Therefore, this study was carried out mainly to support its commissioner by providing findings for the "experience" theme. The thesis findings give an overview in terms of the practices and perception of some tourism companies in Rovaniemi concerning the main topic of technology enhanced tourist experience. Through this thesis, the commissioning project is provided with the development ideas in order to apply to their work which can support the achievement of the project's aims. Therefore, even though the scale of this study is limited in the number of companies studied, it gives an overview and a starting point when examining tourism businesses in Rovaniemi regarding the topic studied.

2   TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED TOURIST EXPERIENCE

2.1 Defining Tourist Experience

2.1.1   Experience

Experience is a complicated and multi-faceted issue. Experiences arise from activities, from the environment and the social contexts embedded in the activities. (Ooi 2003, 1.) According to some researchers, experience is a term that covers various subjective reactions, moods and feelings (Otto–Ritchie 1996, 165; Chhetri–Arrowsmith–Jackson 2004, 31). Carù and Cova (2007, 38) discussed the immersion concept of consumer in the "experiential context" and argued that:

> An experience is a subjective episode that customers live through when they interact with a firm's product or service offer. A firm can therefore offer experiential contexts that consumers each mobilize in order to immerse themselves and thus to (co)-produce their own experiences.

Pine and Gilmore, the authors of "The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage" (1999) stated that experience has always been at the heart of entertainment; however, experience should be viewed more than just as entertainment. They asserted that the richest experience should cover aspects of the four different realms of a consumption experience: entertainment, education, escape and estheticism. (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 2.) Accordingly, the guest may be engaged in an experience in any number of dimensions from which the two most important dimensions are considered. The first dimension corresponds to the levels of guest participation, which are passive participation or active participation. The second dimension concerns the environmental relationship which combines the customer with the occurrence. One end of this dimension is absorption while the other is immersion. The aforementioned four realms of experience and two main dimensions are connected, forming the Experience Realms (see Figure 1). Further, according to Pine and Gilmore, entertainment realm of experience occurs when people passively absorb the experiences through their senses. On the other hand, educational experience occurs when people absorb the event by actively participating into it. The escapist experience is perceived

when people actively participate in an immersive environment. In contrast, esthetic experience arises when people immerse themselves into the event but remain passive. (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 29–39.)
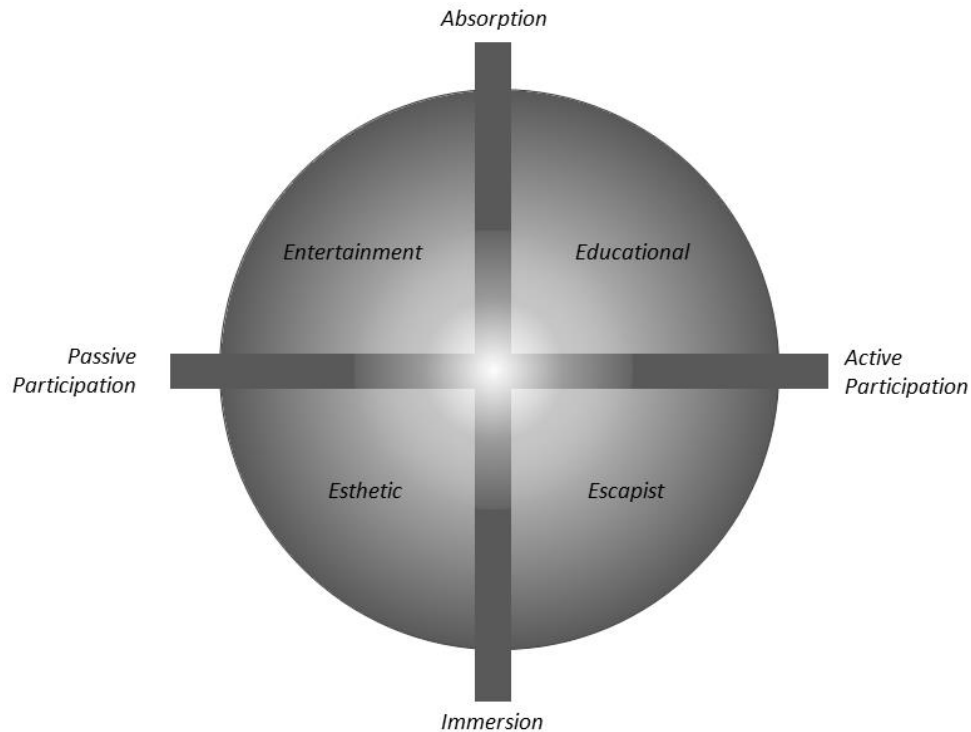
Figure 1. The Experience Realms (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 30)

In the same work, Pine and Gilmore were successful in arguing for experience as "a new source of value" when experience is considered "a fourth economic offering" besides commodity, good and service. Experience is as distinct from service as service is from goods. (Pine –Gilmore 1999, 2.) Also, these authors introduced the concept of staging an experience and stated that the "Experience Economy" is a new stage of economic offering. Experience emerged as the next step after commodities, goods and services which Pine and Gilmore named as "The Progression of Economic Value" (see Figure 2).
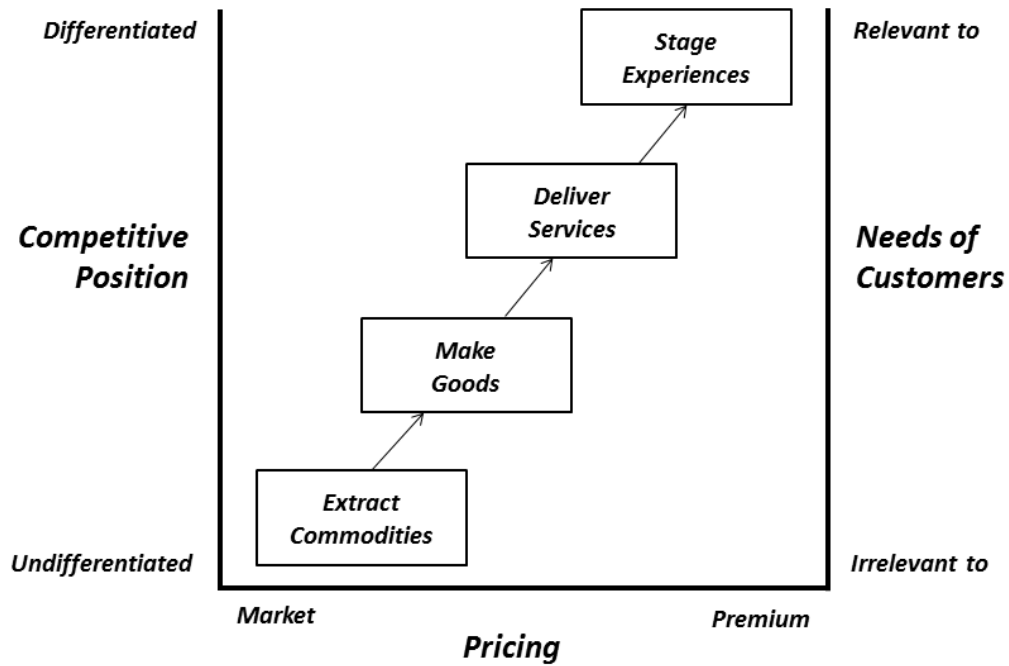
Figure 2. The Progression of Economic Value (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 22)

As according to Pine and Gilmore, experience offering occurs whenever a company intentionally uses their service and product to engage an individual with rich sensations. In doing so, the company is considered as a stager and the buyer will be the guest. Experience includes events that highly involve individuals in a personal way and therefore experience is memorable, which is different from commodities, goods and services. Experience is inherently personal while all prior economic offerings remain outside of the buyer. This is because experience occurs within any individual guest who has been engaged in an "emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual" level. Furthermore, the value of experience lingers and lasts for a long time even though the work to create experience has perished. Experience offering thus has all economic distinctions in comparison to the offerings of commodity, goods and service of all prior economies (see Table 1). As a result, Pine and Gilmore added that companies must experientialize their products and services in the experience economy. (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 12–18)

Table 1. Economic Distinction (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 6)

Economic Offering	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences
Economy	Agrarian	Industrial	Service	Experience
Economic function	Extract	Make	Deliver	Stage
Nature of offering	Fungible	Tangible	Intangible	Memorable
Key attribute	Natural	Standardized	Customized	Personal
Method of supply	Stored in bulk	Inventoried after production	Delivered on demand	Revealed over a duration
Seller	Trader	Manufacturer	Provider	Stager
Buyer	Market	User	Client	Guest
Factors of demand	Characteristics	Features	Benefits	Sensations

Sharing the same opinion of "experientialize" with Pine and Gilmore, Tarssanen and Kylänen (2007) introduced a two-dimensional framework model for "experientialization" of tourism products namely "Experience Pyramid" (See Figure 3).
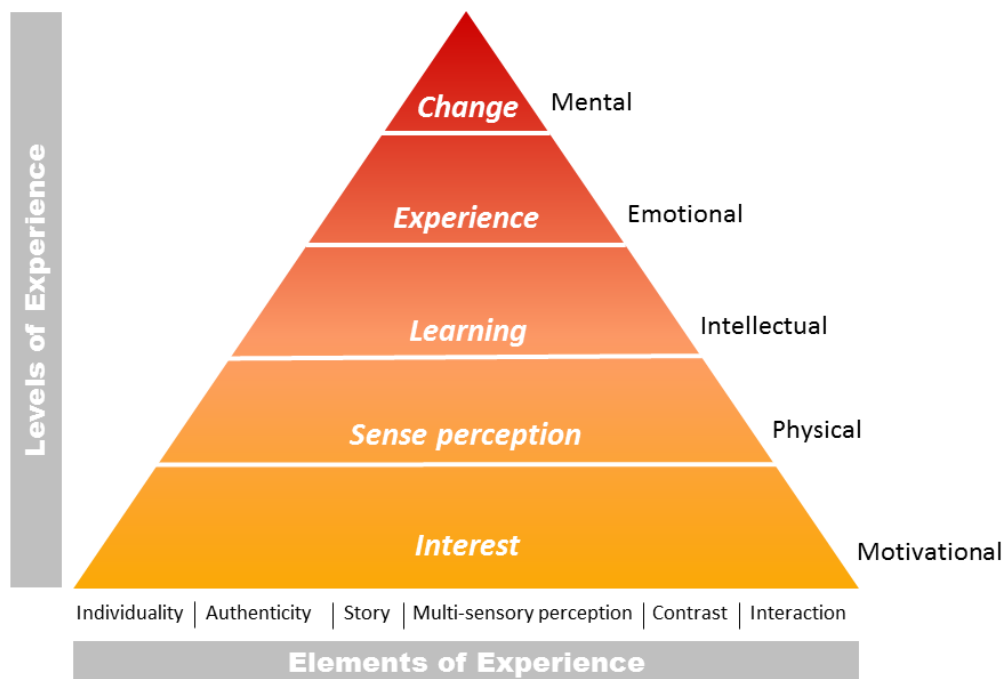
Figure 3. Experience Pyramid (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2007, 139)

The "Experience Pyramid" model examines the customer's experience from two dimensions: in the horizontal axis lies the "elements of the experience" and the vertical axis describes the "levels of the experience" that the product can bring to the customers. In the elements of experience, "individuality" refers to the uniqueness of the experience that the product brings to customer. Authenticity relates to the credibility of the product. Story links the experience with reality and is closely related to authenticity. Multi-sensory perception means that the product should be designed, produced and offered in such a way that the customer could experience it with as many of the senses as possible. Contrast refers to the fact that the product should offer the customer a different experience from everyday routines. Finally, interaction element represents the interaction among the customer, the guide as well as other participants. (Tarssanen– Kylänen 2007, 140–146). The vertical axis hierarchically describes the levels of the customer's experience formation which include motivational level, physical level, intellectual level, emotional level and mental level. According to Tarssanen and Kylänen (2007, 147), all six elements of the experience should be involved on each level of the experience in a good and functional experience tourism product. These authors stated that one level of experience can lead to the next one of which the highest level is the mental level. This mental level can bring about changes in one's own life as a human being. (Tarssanen– Kylänen 2007, 149). The "Experience Pyramid" model can offer a background for product design which can create the "true meaningful experience" for customers (Tarssanen– Kylänen 2007, 138).

Despite various research attempts to approach and conceptualize experience, many scholars agree that there is a challenge of how to measure experience and there is no common definition for experience existing (Richie–Hudson 2009, 121–123; Morgan 2010, 218–220).

2.1.2 Related Aspects of Tourist Experience

Tourist experience has been a key research issue in the past many years (Vittersø–Vorkinn–Vistad–Vaagland 2000, 432). It is especially important to understand the so-called "experience" in tourism industry (Otto–Ritchie 1996, 165) since experience is what travellers are increasingly striving for today

(Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 2). Travellers are willing more than ever to pay for luxury experiences (Gretzel–Fesenmaier–O'Leary 2006, 9). In fact, tourism has been considered by many researchers as being in the business of selling experiences (Li 2000; Mannell–Iso-Ahola 1987; Ooi 2002; Prentice–Witt–Hamer 1998; Waitt 2000, according to Ooi 2003, 1).

Some authors have made attempts to define tourist experience as:

> A complex combination of factors that shape the tourist's feeling and attitude towards his or her visit (Page–Brunt–Busby–Connell 2001, 412).

This definition is closely related to the Experience Pyramid presented above. Subsequently, the "complex combination of factors" can include the factors of individuality, authenticity, story, multi-sensory perception, contrast and interaction. The "tourist's feeling and attitude" towards the visit can be compared to the levels of the experience that the tourist acquires. The tourist's feeling and attitude would depend mainly on the combination of those factors which will form the level of the tourist experience.

Further, tourist experience is regarded as all that happens during a tourist event, including things happen before the tourist travels to site, on-site activity and the return travel (Cutler–Carmichael 2010, 8). Cohen (1979, 181–194) distinguished tourist experience into five different modes including the recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental and existential mode. The experiential tourist experience mode deals with the search for experiences and the authenticity of life of others. It can be recognized from Cohen's viewpoint that different types of tourist have different reasons and motives for traveling (Shaw–Williams 2014, 140) and experience acquiring is one important motive for which people are traveling.

Tourist experience involves numerous influential elements including individual elements and the tourism product per se. Individual elements such as knowledge and self-identity are important factors that can affect the outcomes of the tourist experience. The various types of tourist products and services as well as the quality of these offerings would equally determine the experience result. (Cutler–Carmichael 2010, 8–9.) Sharing the same opinion, Nickerson (2006) contended that the traveler and the product are among the

influential factors that shape the experience outcome. The traveler would come to a destination with various individual influences. The traveler's social construction of a certain destination is influenced by the media which results in the traveler's expectation of that destination. The activities of the destination in which the traveler takes part would remarkably influence the traveler's experience. (Nickerson 2006, 227–232.) Hence, touristic service providers need to take the traveler factor into consideration in designing their offerings. Above all, they need to experientialize their product and services, as claimed by Pine and Gilmore, in order to bring about better quality and enhance the experience outcomes for tourists.

As regards the process of forming the holistic tourist experience, many authors share the same viewpoint when trying to divide the formation of the whole tourist experience into different phases or stages. Several decades ago, Clawson and Knetsch (1966) had classified the experience of a tourism event into five different phases chronologically commencing with anticipation, travel to site, on-site activity, return travel and recollection phase. Thus, tourist experience refer to both the experience that the tourist has at a destination and all the experience related to the planning and preparation phases before the tourism event starts as well as the experience through the recollection and communication of the event after the tourist returns (Clawson–Knetsch 1966, according to Cutler–Carmichael 2010, 4–6). Similarly, Craig-Smith and French (1994, according to Jennings 2006, 8) provided a model of tourism experience formation which consists of three linear phases: anticipatory phase, experiential phase and reflective phase. According to these authors, in this formation process, the previous experiences would inform the future experiences. Likewise, Vittersø et al. (2000, 434) mentioned the pre-travel processes, on-site experiences and post-travel processes when conducting an empirical study to demonstrate the overall limitation in the general satisfaction measurement of the tourist by measuring the on-site affective experiences. In these recent years, several authors (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012; Neuhofer–Buhalis–Ladkin 2013b; Neuhofer 2014) also utilised the aforesaid phases when discussing about the related issues of the tourist experience construction: pre-phase tourist experience in

pre-travel stage, on-site phase tourist experience in during travel stage and post-phase tourist experience in post-travel stage.

In this study, the author applies this "three phases" concept of the tourist experience formation process when discussing about technology enhanced tourist experience in the next parts of the study. The pre-phase experience refers to all the preparations and activities the tourists have prior to their arrival at the destination. The on-site phase experience concerns all the touristic activities and happenings the tourists have and encounter at the destination. The post-phase experience includes all activities such as the reflection and sharing which are related to the touristic trip after the tourists leave the destination.

2.2 Forces Transforming Tourist Experience Formation

ICTs have been transforming the tourism industry globally (Buhalis–O'connor 2005, 7). As early as 1999, Pine and Gilmore claimed that the world economy has been moving towards to the so-called experience economy which is partly thanks to technology that powers so many experiences (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 5), and that "the Internet is the greatest force of commoditization ever known to man for both goods and services" (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 10).

Today, the Internet is a central channel for communications and transactions in the tourism industry. The Internet gives the users the ability to access information which is fundamentally changing the tourism industry in terms of how people use information sources. People use the Internet as their first place for information search, for buying products and services online, for connecting with friends and for obtaining information on the spot by using location based services. (Goossen–Meeuwsen–Franke–de Jong Alterra 2014, 897.) It can be said that the Internet mediates the tourism at a more extended level than other media since "it provides interactive opportunities for the audience and the media" (Wang–Park–Fesenmaier 2012, 373).

When talking about the Internet and ICTs in tourism, one should not forget to mention the vital role of web 2.0. The tool of web 2.0 is the constitution of different technological elements which allows users to generate content that

can be shared, revised and discussed with other users through web-based services; whereas web 1.0 is sender-controlled with poor opportunities for interaction (Liburd–Christensen 2013, 100). Web 2.0 empowers Internet users to actively participate and collaborate with other Internet users to produce, consume and diffuse information and knowledge distributed through the Internet. Hence, web 2.0 technologies are tools that help realize and exploit the full potential and the role of the Internet. In tourism, web 2.0 is referred to as "travel 2.0" (Xiang–Gretzel 2010, 180). Since information is an essential part of the tourism industry, the use of web 2.0 technologies has a pivotal impact on both tourism demand and supply. (Sigala 2007, 1.)

After the Internet, mobile technologies are today most pervasively influencing the tourism industry (Egger–Jooss 2010, according to Schieder–Adukaite–Cantoni 2014, 19). Tourism has been a popular application area for mobile information systems. Mobile phones and other portable devices are becoming more advanced. (Brown–Chalmers 2003, 335.) The advance in technology has given birth to the new field of tourism: mTourism or mobile tourism which concerns tourism industry and new technologies to obtain tourist information (Rodriguez-Sanchez–Martinez-Romo–Borromeo–Hernandez-Tamames 2013, 4154). Today, mTourism is linked closely to the increasing worldwide penetration of smartphones, tablets and related mobile applications (Schieder–Adukaite–Cantoni 2014, 19). Indeed, it can be easily observed that smart devices embedded with various mobile applications are becoming increasingly indispensable devices among tourists.

The tourism industry provides the land and motivation for ICTs development. At the same time, the cutting-edge ICTs are changing the nature of tourism fundamentally. One of the excellent applications of ICTs in tourism is that tourists nowadays can experience the real physical environment of a destination and at the same time stay connected in the online world thanks to the innovative technology combination of Internet, web 2.0 and mobile technologies (Neuhofer et al. 2014, 342).

As a result, ICTs are considered one of the major forces which currently transform our perception on the formation process of the tourist experience. ICTs, especially the online communication media, are functioning as the

mediated factors in the process of creating the tourism products and forming the tourist experience (Tussyadiah–Fesenmaier 2009, 36–37; McCabe–Sharples–Foster 2012, 1). The proliferation of ICTs has been integrated enormously into the creation, production and consumption of tourism products (Buhalis–Neuhofer 2012, 2). Thus, ICTs play a crucial role in changing the way how people experience the tourism. In fact, this idea was well recognized by the academic studies previously. For instance, while discussing about the tourists and modernity, Lash and Urry (1994) asserted in their work of "Economies of Signs and Space" that:

> The post-tourist does not have to leave his or her house in order to see many of the typical objects of the tourist gaze. With TV and the VCR [Videocassette Recorder] most such objects can be gazed upon, compared, contextualized and gazed upon again. The typical tourist experience is anyway to see named scenes through a frame, but this can now be experienced in one's living room at the flick of a switch, and it can be repeated again and again. (Lash–Urry 1994, 275)

This argument of Lash and Urry has indeed been reinforced and enhanced by the time. Today, it is undeniable that the proliferation of ICTs is one of the most important factors which has transformed and revolutionized the nature of tourism (Neuhofer–Buhalis–Ladkin 2012, 38). Technologies have been postulated as having a major role in supporting the tourists throughout their touristic activities. In other words, technologies nowadays support the tourists at the very beginning stage when they search for information, to the planning, decision making, online reservation and communication, retrieval of information as well as post-sharing of experiences stage. Hence, ICTs such as interactive websites, recommendation systems, virtual communities, social media networks as well as mobile technologies are utilized to support the tourist experience throughout their touristic activity process which includes the pre, on-site and post consumption phases. (Gretzel et al. 2006, 10–11.) The factor of ICTs is, therefore, can be considered as the mediated factor in the process of forming the tourist experience. In like manner, Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009, 25) asserted that basing on the temporal dimension of the tourist experience, the mediated factors of ICTs exist at the planning phase, the on-site experiential phase and the reflective phase. Furthermore, many studies argue that ICTs support new types of touristic activities which will

transform the tourist experience as well as creating new types of tourist experiences (Gretzel–Jamal 2009, according to Neuhofer 2014, 90).

Besides being technology-mediated, the idea of being co-created has also changed our perception on how the tourist experience can be formed. The idea of co-creation represents the fact that tourists nowadays are empowered and are active in the process of co-creating their own experience (Prahalad–Ramaswamy 2004, 5). The autonomy of companies and service providers in designing, developing, creating and selling of the products and services has been being challenged by the informed, empowered and active consumers (Prahalad–Ramaswamy 2004, 6). The consumers nowadays try to obtain their influence in every part of the business system (Prahalad–Ramaswamy 2004, 6) as they are increasingly striving for experiences (Neuhofer 2014, 94) and empowered by the proliferation of ICTs (Neuhofer–Buhalis–Ladkin 2014, 340). The empowered tourist has been recognized as the central element in the co-creation process which determines value and experience creation (Neuhofer et al. 2014, 340). Experiences which are unique, meaningful and memorable and engage people in a personal way (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 12) are in search of the consumers (Morgan–Lugosi–Ritchie 2010, according to Neuhofer 2014, 91) since these experiences can generate added value to them (Neuhofer 2014, 90). In the meantime, unique and memorable experiences do not only bring about benefits to the consumers (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 4) but also become crucial competitive advantage for companies and service providers (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 11–15).

The idea of co-creation is described as involving the customer participation as much as possible while customizing the product or service that requires the "collaboration with customers for the purpose of innovation" (Kristensson–Matthing–Johansson 2008, 475). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, 8) also stated that the co-creation idea is "about the joint creation of value by the company and the customer. Hence, the process of co-creation emphasizes the customer-centric view and the value co-creation between the company and the customer (Chathotha–Altinay–Harrington–Okumus–Chan 2103, 13). By active participation in the process of creating a product or services with the providing companies, the consumers can create their

personal experience since they "personally affect the performance or event that yields the experience" (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 30). Nowadays, the Internet and ICTs would support, facilitate and empower the consumers' and the tourists' active participation since it provides them with easy and cheap access to various information sources (Rifkin 2000; Windham–Orton 2000, according to Gretzel et al. 2006, 10). Besides, the Internet is an "active medium" that provides social experiences and values for people, which are the results of the active connection and conversation online (Pine–Gilmore 1999, 34). Active and empowered consumers are no longer totally dependent on companies' communication but can choose the company they want to have a relationship with based on their subjective views of perceived value and experience (Prahalad–Ramaswamy 2004, 6). Therefore, it is indispensable for companies to provide high-quality interactions which enable tourists to co-create their unique experiences (Prahalad–Ramaswamy 2004, 7) for the mutual benefits of both companies and tourists.

It can be said that today the tourism product and services which bring about the personal experience for the tourists are the result of the co-creation process between the providing companies and the active and empowered tourists. This process of co-creation, therefore, changes the way people experience the tourism which in turn changes the formation process of their touristic experience. Thus, ICTs as being the catalyst (Neuhofer 2014, 92) or the mediated factor and the idea of co-creation in tourist experience are the two major forces transforming our perception on the formation process of the tourism product as well as the tourist experience.

2.3 Tourist Online Experience

2.3.1 ZMOT: Zero Moment of Truth

The concept of Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT) was introduced by Google in the e-book "Winning the Zero Moment of Truth" published in year 2011. The ZMOT refers to all the researching moments that consumers perform online through their laptops, mobile phones as well as some other wired devices to learn about a product or service before making any further decision. It can be said that the ZMOT is an obvious phenomenon resulting from the cutting-

edge ICTs, especially the Internet and mobile technologies. The Internet has empowered the consumers to know more about the product they are going to buy than the person or company who is selling the product to them. According to Google, the consumers today live, learn and make decisions differently. They check out information of the product and services from ratings and review websites, from friends on social media networks, at home and on the go as well as more than ever from videos. The consumers nowadays learn from their "search results, user reviews, four-star ratings, text ads, image ads, news headlines, videos and even good old-fashioned official brand websites" (Lecinski 2011, 11). In short, the consumers today learn and make their decision at the ZMOT.

According to Google, the Internet has changed the traditional three-step mental model of marketing which consists of the stimulus step, the first moment of truth (FMOT) at the store and the second moment of truth (SMOT) when the customer experience the bought product. Today, with vital new addition of the ZMOT, the traditional model has changed. With the advanced mobile technology and the growth in its usage, all mobile devices function as the moment of truth machines that converge the zero, the first and the second moment of truth. The Internet and the mobile devices make everything happening so fast that the shared experiences on the review websites, which is the SMOT of someone, can immediately become the ZMOT of someone else.

In the tourism industry, the ZMOT can be viewed as the factors and information source which form the pre-phase tourist experience. All the experience that the tourists have during the pre-phase is very important because it is a crucial part of the decision-making or the pre-decision necessity (Ho et al. 2012, 1470). Since the majority of tourists nowadays plan their visit over the Internet (Fernandez-Cavia–Rovira–Diaz-Luque–Cavaller 2014, 5), the pre-phase tourist experience thus happen online. This is different from the traditional practice when the travel agency functions as the major information source on the formation of the tourist pre-visit experience (Frias et al. 2008, 164). Today, the tourists are doing the ZMOT prior to their purchasing or booking decision. The tourists do the ZMOT by going online

checking out different websites of tourism destinations or touristic service providers, reading reviews, interacting with different people through social media networks, considering ratings and watching videos. The Internet and ICTs have provided the tourists with unlimited information sources and benefits and therefore enhance and add value to their holistic tourism experiences (Tussyadiah–Fesenmaier 2009, 25). In the phase of pre-traveling, for instance, the tourists nowadays are able to know more than ever about a destination even before their actual being to the destination with information from different websites, social media networks, watching video or taking a virtual trip to that destination.

2.3.2   Website & Online Service Quality

The ZMOT is closely related to the tourist online experience. The tourist online experience is an important contribution to the entire tourist experience. The components of the website quality and online service quality play a crucial role in the process of forming the tourist online experience.

The web 2.0 technologies with features such as interactivity, online recommendations among customers, online word of mouth and user generated content advance the potential direct-interactions between online service providers and customers (Rose–Clark–Samouel–Hair 2012, 308). As a result, the rapid advance of ICTs and their increasing significance in the tourism industry have enormously increased the online communication opportunities (Stavrakantonakis–Toma–Fensel–Fensel 2014, 665). Nowadays, the majority of the tourists from anywhere around the globe plan their holidays, make their bookings and purchase services over the Internet (Fernandez-Cavia–Rovira–Diaz-Luque–Cavaller 2014, 5). Thus, an important part of the experience that contributes to the entire experience of the tourists is the tourist online experience. In other words, all the interactions and transactions that the tourists have online with, for instance, destination's website and touristic service providers' website are extremely important since these will constitute a great part of their overall experience.

According to DeLone and McLean (2003, 18), an online information provider, which is a website, serves a dual role of an information provider that

produces information and service provider that delivers information services together with providing necessary service support. Hence, the provider's website must, at the same time, provide precise information, operate reliable and secure systems as well as guarantee satisfactory service accomplishment (Ennew–Binks 1999; Novak et al. 2000, according to Ding–Hu–Sheng 2011, 508).

Rose et al. (2012, 308) stated that the "identification of the components of website quality provides a start-point for the exploration of online customer experience". Fernandez-Cavia et al. (2014, 6) synthesized the aspects which are important in any website including technical, communicative, relational and persuasive aspects. Technical aspect relates to the usability, positioning as well as the information architecture (Fernandez-Cavia et al. 2014, 6). The website should be easy to handle and the user can easily navigate even "with no mental effort" (Kim–Fesenmaier 2008, 4). The information overload can result in confusion and stress (Frias–Rodriguez–Castaneda 2008, 167). Therefore, a website must be well-organized, concise in the amount of text to read and intelligible (Goossen et al. 2014, 899). Communicative aspect means the amount and quality of content and language selection (Fernandez-Cavia et al. 2014, 6). According to DeLone and McLean (2003, 15), information quality is measured by accuracy, timeliness, completeness, relevance and consistency. Goossen et al. (2014, 899) shared the same opinion on the loading speed factor when asserting that "Internet users do not want to wait and so the outcome or results have to be delivered quickly". Relational aspect concerns the interactivity, or in other words, the use of web 2.0 tools (Fernandez-Cavia et al. 2014, 6). Interactivity is considered an important factor which can create numerous opportunities for service provider to persuade online consumers (Noort–Voorveld–Reijmersdal 2012, 223). Indeed, the tourists nowadays are interacting with the service provider' websites through the interactive platforms of social media networks. With regard to persuasive aspect, it is about the brand image and options for marketing the products and services provided by the website (Fernandez-Cavia et al. 2014, 6). As aforesaid, one of the roles of the website is to sell services together with providing necessary service support. Therefore, it is important to convince the potential tourist to purchase the offers on the

website (Fernandez-Cavia et al. 2014, 6). Researchers have found out that narrative use of text, pictures and sounds can "enrich information, foster immersion and encourage a deeper and more extensive processing of content" (Lee–Gretzel 2012, 1273); thus, these elements play an important role in persuasion. Koufaris (2002) asserted that it is almost impossible for online consumers to use their five senses to make online purchase decisions; online consumers are, instead, challenged by photographs and text descriptions. Online customers are responsive to well-designed websites and powerful web features such as recommender systems and one-click checkouts. (Koufaris 2002, 206.)

Besides, other features which concern the system issues are also highly important to online customers. Therefore, the customers' interactions with the website both as a store and as a system interface are important to online customer satisfaction. (Finn–Wang–Frank 2009, 210.) Also concerning the system interface, Pan et al. (2011) ascertained by their empirical study that the "users' information search is mostly utilitarian" and that "the complex interface and advertising messages either confuse or were ignored by most users". Thus, a simpler and more intuitive website interface is more efficient. (Pan–Zhang–Smith 2011, 354.) As a result, the tourists' intention to use or purchase an online service would depend on "their perceived performance of the online customer–firm interface" (Ding at al. 2011, 510).

In addition, with the advanced mobile technologies and the penetration of smart devices in tourism, the mobile communication becomes not only a choice but also a necessity for touristic service providers. This means that the websites of touristic service providers should be cross-platform in order to be adapted for the online communication using mobile devices. In other words, there should be the website version to be browsed by using smartphones and tablets, different applications for mobiles as well as the using of compatible operating systems. (Fernandez-Cavia et al. 2014, 8.)

As regards online service quality, the quality of the online system is important which includes the "important characteristics of an information system, invariant of system usage or applications such as accessibility, flexibility, integration, reliability, and timeliness" (Wixom–Todd 2005, according to Ding

et al. 2011, 509). The quality of information should be considered crucial because it entails accuracy, completeness, timeliness and the presentation effectiveness (Nelson et al. 2005, according to Ding et al. 2011, 509). In addition, several dimensions such as service convenience, customer service and service fulfillment are very important influencing the quality of online service. Different stages throughout the service process haves certain value to the customers. Factors such as sincerity and responsiveness are considered important quality measurement of customer service. Similarly, the order delivery, price and item presentation are important elements to access the quality of service fulfillment. (Ding et al. 2011, 510– 511.)

Besides, Choi and Au (2011, according to Alford–Duan–Taylor 2014, 638) asserted that "trust" is considered as a key factor influencing customers' decision of purchasing holidays online. Customer's perception of trust is influenced by different factors such as the security icons and the currency of information of the website itself as well as customer's individual differences. Sanchez-Franco and Rondan-Cataluna ascertained by their study regarding the examination of the involvement and design variables in the affective acceptance of online services that visual aesthetics and usability had an important influence on the users' satisfaction of online service. (Sancherz-Franco–Rondan-Cataluna 2010, 172 –178.)

To sum things up, according to Finn et al., the important e-service dimensions which were identified in many studies would include website features, security, responsiveness, reliability, accessibility, information, communication and customer support. Many researchers found that these dimensions have a significant contribution to the measures of overall service performance such as online customer satisfaction. (Finn et al. 2009, 210.)

2.4 Understanding Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience

The word "enhance" is defined by Merriam-Webster (2014) as "to increase or improve in value, quality, desirability or attractiveness". According to this semantic definition, "technology enhanced tourist experience" could be understood in a simple way as the tourist experience is improved in value and quality with the help of technology. As aforementioned, the tourist

experience has been transformed in nature due to the impact of the cutting-edge technologies which empower the tourists to actively co-create their own experience with the providing company (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 5). Above all, the integration of ICTs has "particularly benefited the facilitation of experiences". Also, the development of ICTs and the idea of co-creation between the providing company and the customer as discussed above are considered "critical potential contributors to the enhancement of experiences". (Neuhofer et al. 2013a, 1–3.) In order to understand the concept of technology enhanced tourist experience, it is important to understand the role that ICTs play in all phases of the tourist experience: pre, on-site and post phases (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 3). Several recent studies have indicated that ICTs are utilized throughout different phases of the tourism experience consumption process (Brown–Chalmers 2003; Fritz–Susperregui–Linaza 2005; Tussyadiah–Fesenmaier 2009; Wang–Park–Fesenmaier 2012). The proliferation of ICTs has brought the tourist experience into new levels in which ICTs support the tourist along their journey and enhance their experience (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 5). Thus, ICTs have become an integral part of the entire journey throughout which tourists use technologies to generate richer experiences (Gretzel–Jamal 2009, according to Neuhofer et al. 2013b, 290). Neuhofer et al. (2013a, 1) ascertained by their empirical study that new technologies have been giving birth to new types of touristic activities which transform conventional tourist experience and result in the emergence of new types of tourist experiences: technology enhanced experiences. These authors linked the intensification of two important forces of co-creation and technology to classify the new technology enhanced experiences into different types (Neuhofer et al. 2013a, 7). According to them, the most intensified enhanced experience is called "technology-empowered multiplier experience" which "requires technology as the core part of the experience while allowing for a multiplier level of co-creation" throughout all phases of the tourism experience consumption process (Neuhofer et al. 2013a, 8).

In 2012, Neuhofer and Buhalis conducted a research paper to explore the dynamic technological advances in the tourist experience with the aim to understand how ICTs can enhance the tourist experience throughout three

phases of the tourist's travel process and conceptualized the new phenomenon called "technology-enabled enhanced tourist experiences". The authors concluded that technology is the key tool for the enhancement of tourism experiences since it facilitates and empowers the co-creation between the tourists and the providing company and thus generating added value for the tourist. Taking the multi-phase nature of the tourist experience into account, technology enhances the physical tourism space on-site as well as facilitating the engagement and experience co-creation in the virtual space before and after the travel in the tourist's home environment. Thus, the authors proposed a conceptualized model of "technology-enabled enhanced tourist experiences" (see Figure 4) by conflating tourist experience and technology. (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 4.)
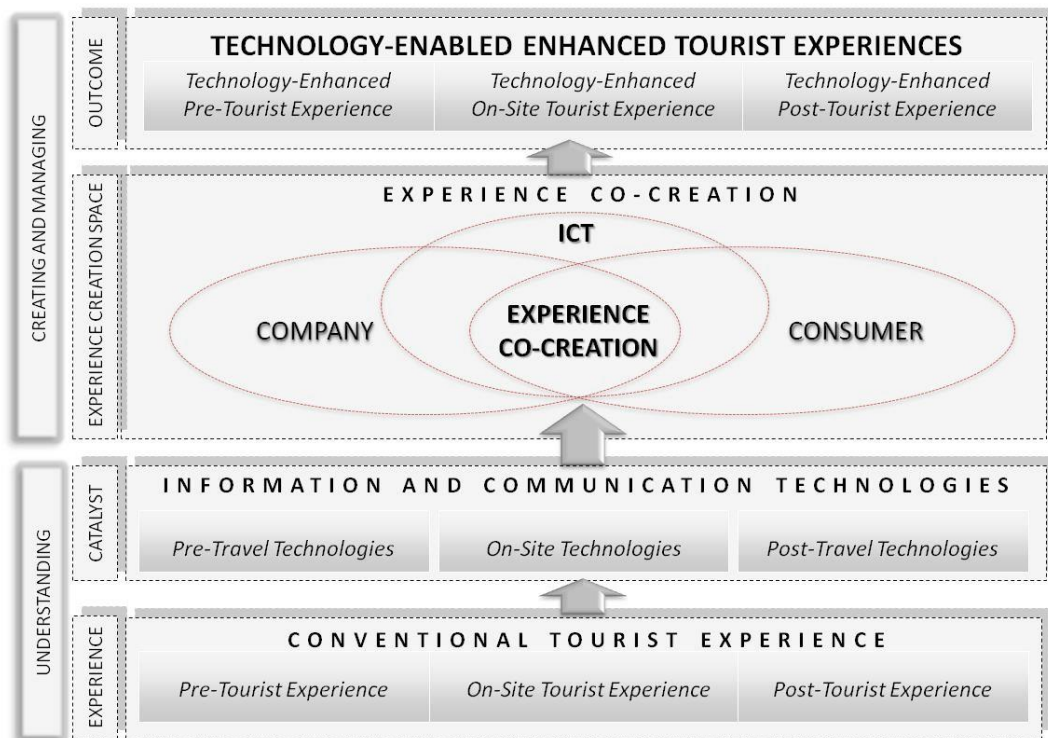
Figure 4. Conceptual Model Technology-enabled Enhanced Tourist Experiences (Buhalis-Neuhofer 2012, 4)

In 2014, Neuhofer carried out another study with the overall aim to discover how tourist experience can be enhanced by ICTs through consumer-company experience co-creation throughout three phases of the traveling process. With the qualitative mixed methods design, Neuhofer amalgamated three elements of the tourist experience, ICTs and the experience co-creation

process into one study in order to develop a conceptual framework which graphically describes the process that leads from our current understanding of tourist experience to the new understanding of the so-called "technology enhanced tourist experience" (see Figure 5). (Neuhofer 2014, 92–93)
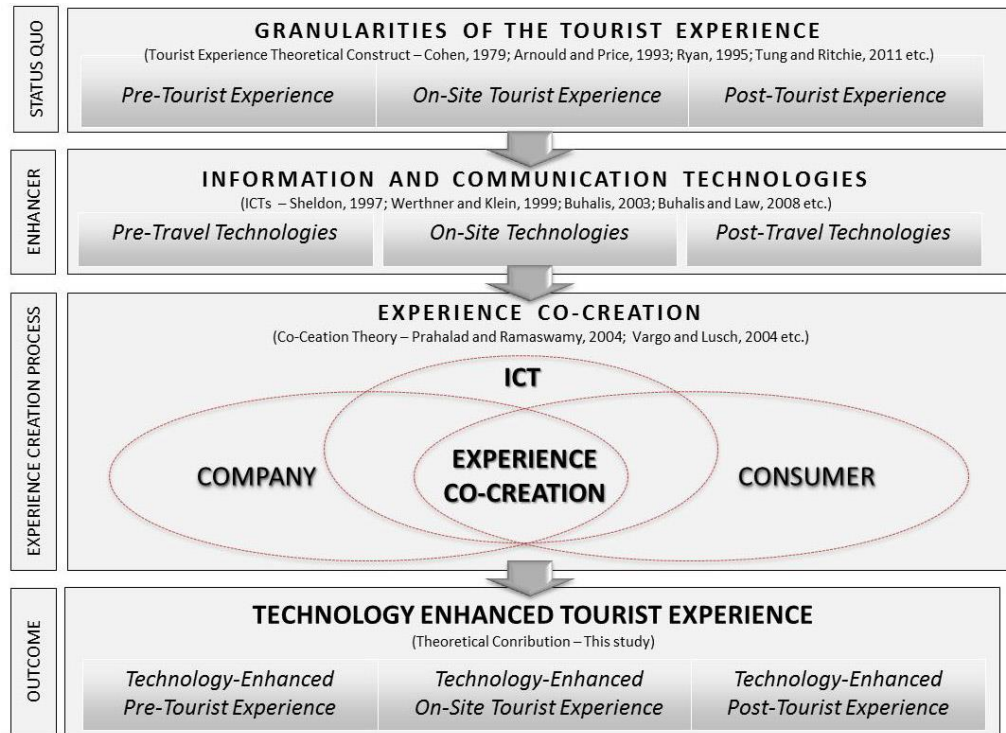
Figure 5. Conceptual Framework Technology Enhanced Tourist Experience (Neuhofer 2014, 93)

As aforesaid, it is pivotal to understand the role that ICTs play in all phases of the tourist experience in order to understand about the concept of technology enhanced tourist experience. Tourism is very much a social activity (Brown–Chalmers 2003, 340). The pre-phase of the tourist experience is characterized as a socially intense phase with the active involvement of the tourists (Gretzel–Jamal 2009, according to Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 3). Today, the Internet provides people with a new medium for social activities (Kim–Lee–Hiemstra 2004, 343) and serves as a "new information source on the formation of the tourist's pre-visit image" (Frias et al. 2008, 164). The Internet is considered as a rich environment for potential travelers to look for the information and resources needed (Ho et al. 2012, 1468). Thus, the emergence of the Internet and ICTs have enabled the tourists to virtually experience and assess a destination before their physical travel to the destination (Cho et al. 2002, according to Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 3).

The on-site phase of the travel process is the actual physical traveling phase to the destination. The cutting-edge ICTs, especially mobile technologies, are impacting all phases of the tourist experience including the on-site phase. Smartphones and mobile applications help the tourist become flexible and spontaneous at the destination as well as augment "their contextual temporal and spatial awareness" and hence enrich the overall experience for the travelers. (Schieder et al. 2014, 19.) The advanced mobile technology and the ubiquity of mobile services enable the access to information as well as allowing the information retrieval regardless spatial and temporal dimensions (Balasubramanian–Peterson–Jarvenpaa 2002, 352). These ubiquitous mobile services bring about enormous potentials to enhance the experience for the tourist at the tourism destination (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 3).

With respect to the post-phase of the traveling process, Neuhofer and Buhalis (2012, 3) asserted that the experience sharing through the Internet assist the tourists in recollecting and remembering of the "previously undergone travel". Adding to this opinion, Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009, 26) stated that the shared images and pictures support the tourists at the post-phase of the travel in the "recollection process and the remembrance of past experiences". Therefore, the post-phase of the tourist experience formation process is crucial which should be taken into account, together with the pre-phase, in the entire process of the tourist experience enhancement (Gretzel–Jamal 2009, according to Neuhofer–Buhalis 2012, 3).

As a result, the tourist experience can be taken to the new level with the integration of the advanced ICTs. The availability of ICTs' devices and services accompanying the tourists anytime and anywhere opens up new ways to create technology enhanced experiences throughout the travel process for the tourists. ICTs support the tourists in all traveling phases throughout various activities, such as "inspiration, preliminary information search, comparison, decision making, travel planning, communication, engagement, retrieval of information as well as post-sharing and recollecting travel experiences". With the integration of ICTs, the tourist experience can be dynamically created in both physical spaces of the on-site phase and virtual spaces of the pre and post-phases. A summary of technology

enhanced tourism experience throughout three phases of the traveling process is presented in Figure 6. (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2014, 2.)
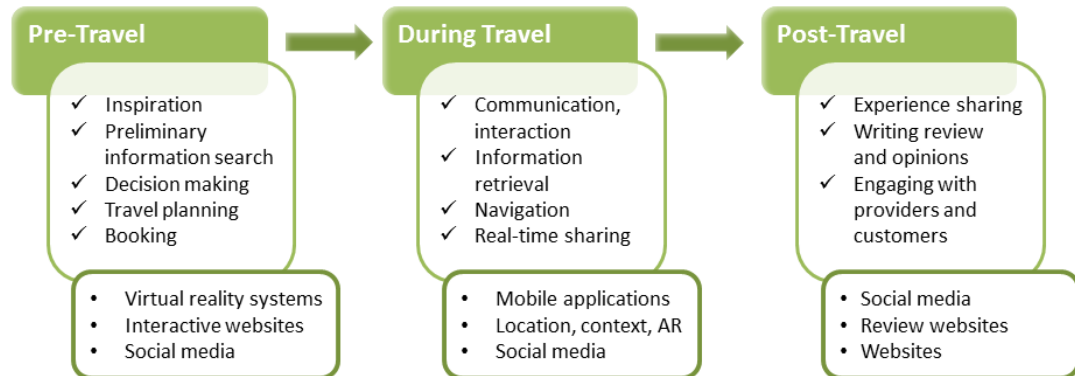
Figure 6. Technology Enhanced Tourism Experience (Neuhofer–Buhalis 2014, 2)

In the following parts, this study continues to discuss about "technology enhanced tourist experience" with the focus placed on the most cutting-edge ICTs utilized to enhance the tourist experience throughout the three phases of the traveling process. These cutting-edge ICTs serve as the main themes and core background for the empirical research process.

2.5 Cutting-edge ICTs Utilized for Tourist Experience Enhancement

2.5.1 Interactive & Cross-platform Website

The potential of World Wide Web in businesses, including the tourism industry, has been noted in academic research since the launch of commercial Internet applications more than two decades ago. Nowadays, the website is considered a valuable tool for both suppliers and consumers to disseminate information, communicate and purchase product and services online. (Law–Qi–Buhalis 2010, 297.) With the advanced technologies of web 2.0 as discussed earlier in this paper, websites nowadays are interactive websites which allow the users to interact on the web in two general ways of gaining or giving information from and to the web as well as communicating to other people through the web (Macias 2003, 37). Interactive websites allow users to go beyond reading text and viewing images; instead, it allows users to alter the website's display, interact with friends online and achieve different tasks. (wiseGEEK 2014.) To this extent, interactive websites help the users optimize the information retrieval process. In tourism industry,

interactive websites are very useful in the orientation phase of travel planning for tourists (Goossen et al. 2014, 898). Indeed, interactive websites can be considered as the company's official source of information and communication for consumers. It is, therefore, vital for businesses to maintain an effective interactive website in order to strengthen the relationship with customers (Law–Qi–Buhalis 2010, 297).

In the previous part of "website and online service quality", the author of this study has already discussed about the features, including the feature of interactivity, which determine the quality of an effective website in relation to the tourist experience formation. Besides, the necessity of having a cross-platform website to be browsed by mobile devices has also been discussed. In the case of this study, it is important to also consider, in particular, whether or not the website of a touristic service provider offered the possibility for the users to reserve the product or services online when being at the provider's webpage. Online reservation possibility can benefit both touristic service providers and customers by "reducing costs and providing real-time information to both parties" (Kim–Kim 2004, 382). Online reservation has gained its importance with the increasing demand from consumers as research has showed that traditional travel agencies are losing ground in favour of online booking (Mouakket–Al-hawari 2012, 46). Nowadays, touristic service providers such as hotels are using two types of online reservations: reservations made directly with company-owned website and reservations made using third-party website (Morosan–Jeong 2008, 284). The ease of information search as well as the simple and credible transaction are the two factors which significantly affect the customers' intention to use online reservation (Kim–Kim 2004, 391). The possibility of making the reservation online can improve the reservation experiences for the customers (Morosan–Jeong 2008, 285). Hence, it can be said that the online reservation possibility will enhance the purchasing experience for tourists, and thus enhance the overall tourist experience.

2.5.2 Social Media

Social media is considered as an entire online environment which is built on participant's contribution and interactions (Zeng–Gerritsen 2014, 28). Social

media exist in variety of forms and serve numerous purposes (Xiang–Gretzel 2010, 180). They are applications based on web 2.0 technologies (Leung–Lee–Law 2012, 54). Some applications include collaborative trip planning tools, social networking sites and multi-player online social games which make it possible for tourists to participate in all business operation processes (Sigala–Christou–Gretzel 2012, 1). Hence, social media have gained an enormous popularity among tourists (Neuhofer et al. 2012, 39). In using social media, the tourists document and comment traveling information and experiences on different social media websites (Gretzel 2006, 9). This form of information is called user-generated content (UGC), created by consumers and shared among themselves (Xiang–Gretzel 2010, 180). The UGC facilitates the distribution and accessibility of tourism information (Ho et al. 201, 1470). This UGC is considered as "collective travel intelligence", which is a great source of information for travelers (Gretzel 2006, 9) and useful for touristic service providers for "informationalising and improving the effectiveness of business operations" (Sigala–Christou–Gretzel 2012, 1). For instance, touristic service providers can utilize the UGC on social media to enhance their customer complaint management process and improve their environmental scanning abilities (Sigala–Christou–Gretzel 2012, 1). As for the tourists, social media play an increasingly important role of an information source which supports the tourists in all phases of the travel journey. As a result, social media have brought about major changes in tourist behavior regarding their organizing the travel, the actual travel as well as the post-travel behaviors (Parra-Lopez–Gutierrez-Tano–Diaz-Armas–Bulchand-Gidumal 2012, 171).

Virtual community is one form of social media (Xiang–Gretzel 2010, 180) which is defined as "a group of people who share common interests, feelings or ideas, or pursue similar goals over the Internet" (Techopedia 2014). In the tourism industry, virtual travel community is considered as an efficient way of obtaining informal information for the tourists such as the travel experiences and recommendations from other tourists (Ho et al. 2012, 1470). Therefore, virtual communities are very influential because travelers "increasingly trust better their peers rather than marketing messages" (Buhalis–Law 2008, 612). Examples of virtual community such as LonelyPlanet and Virtual Tourist

allow the tourists to exchange information, opinions and experiences on different topics of common interests (Xiang–Gretzel 2010, 180). These virtual communities function as the enhancer for customers' travel information searching experience since these communities make it easier for travelers to "obtain information, maintain connection and deepen relationship" (Sancherz-Franco–Rondan-Cataluna 2010, 171–172).

Social networking site is another form of social media. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and many more are very popular and have an enormous influence on how tourists nowadays organize and consume tourism experience (Sigala 2007, 3). Among these sites, Facebook and Twitter are the most popular of which Facebook is the most used site for the number of visitors and total minutes spent (PhoCusWright 2012, according to Minazzi–Lagrosen 2014, 146). Social networking sites help the tourists engage, interact, exchange as well as share experiences with friends, family and peers and even with a wider network of followers (Neuhofer et al. 2012, 43). By being interconnected to social networking sites, tourists can easily share and co-create with friends, touristic service providers and other consumers while still being on-site for vacation (Tussyadiah–Fesenmaier 2009, 25–26). Social networking sites can also enhance the experience for potential travelers by allowing them to organize their trip online with friends and being reassured about their choice by other users with similar profile. For service providers, the adoption of social networking site as a tool for customers to collaborate with each other to organize their holiday can help inspire travel and enhance travel experience for customers. (Sigala 2007, 3.)

Another form of social media is weblog or blog. Weblog can be described as an online journal which is published on a website and distributed through trackback technologies to keep the creator informed of comments or replies received. (Sigala 2007, 2.) Weblog allows the creators to describe their tourism experiences by words, images and sound (Pudliner 2007, 49). Besides, this form of social media offers the readers the opportunity to immerse in the writer's experience and live vicariously through the acts of others (Pudliner 2007, 57). Therefore, weblog is an important source of

information for international travelers to get traveling advice, suggestions, traveling inspiration as well as to foster an action or decision. As for touristic service providers, weblog can support them, for instance, to gather feedbacks from customers as well as to communicate with and keep their customers up-to-date. (Sigala 2007, 2.) Today, many websites also allow video blogging so users can "simply capture the moment or scenery and upload it directly to their blogs". (Tussyadiah–Fesenmaier 2009, 26.)

Online video has become a popular form of social media. The most popular website to upload and share video today is YouTube.com. According to Google, YouTube is "the second-most-used search box in the world" (2011, 51). A recent study pointed out that 70% of potential travelers now use YouTube to search for videos related to a particular destination. Video is believed to be well-suited for the preliminary information search and inspiration phase since it "offers local color and insight on a place that can inform further searches". (Vivion 2014.) Video is an efficient way to help potential travelers experience a "travel experience" before the purchasing decision of an actual travel package. Many service providers use videos to communicate with their potential customers, make guiding videos for travelers to download to their mobile devices and use while being on-site visiting the destination. Video can thus enhance the experience for tourists at different phases of the experience. (Sigala 2007, 3–4.) Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009, 26) asserted that videos act as "non-personal mediators for the tourist experience, particularly in the anticipatory and reflective phases". Today, the popularity of mobile phones which can show and take video makes the "zero moment of truth" become visual. According to Google, video is an excellent tool for business providers to attract, persuade and win potential customers at the ZMOT as well as enhance their pre-phase of a consumption experience. (Lecinski 2011, 52.) Google also found that online video has become the constant companion of travelers (Google 2013, 3). Travelers engage with all kinds of travel videos and videos become the key throughout the travel funnel (Google 2013, 27–28).

Review website is one of the most important and popular forms of social media today. Review websites such as TripAdvisor or Zoover are very

popular since tourists often doubt about the objectiveness of other information sources such as information provided in magazine, newspaper, tourist campaign and program on television (Goossen et al. 2014, 897). According to Google, reviews are "digital word of mouth" about products and services which can easily reach millions of people (Lecinski 2011, 32). Consumer reviews are a "one-to-many" form of communication (Yoo–Gretzel 2009, 38). TripAdvisor is considered as a prominent digital word of mouth within the travel industry (Vermeulen–Seegers 2009, 123). It is the world's largest travel site with more than 170 million reviews by travellers worldwide (TripAdvisor 2014). Indeed, this website is an enormous source of information for travellers nowadays. Reviews are tremendous resource for most consumers and businesses. For consumers, reviews act as decision-making driver which help to reinforce and reassure their purchase intention. For businesses, reviews tell them what customers say about their products and how satisfied their customers are, and thus help them improve their business accordingly. (Lecinski 2011, 34.)

2.5.3 Mobile Applications

The ubiquitous use of mobile devices nowadays has driven an amazing growth in the development of mobile applications in the tourism industry to support travellers (Fuentetaja et al. 2014, 31). Various recent studies (Lamsfus et al. 2013; Dickinson et al. 2012; Wang–Fesenmaier 2013; Kramer et al. 2007, according to Schieder–Adukaite–Cantoni 2014, 19) have shed some light on how mobile technologies in general and mobile applications in particular are mediating the tourist experience and behavior.

According to Wang et al. (2012), mobile devices such as smartphones are considered as a new kind of media which can provide tourists a wide range of information services in order to support them throughout their travel process. This would include the pre, on-site and post-phases with both travel main activities such as planning and reserving and travel "micro-moment" such as finding a gas station. Mobile entertainment applications allow tourists to "plot photos onto a map immediately after photo-taking" and share them on social networking sites. In doing so, tourists are able to keep their friends up-to-date as well as enjoy feedbacks about their on-going travel experiences.

(Wang et al. 2012, 376–377.) As a result, smartphones and mobile applications significantly ease travelers' planning behavior, provide them with more flexibility and spontaneity during the on-site phase, augment their contextual temporal and spatial awareness, and thus enriching the overall travel experience (Schieder–Adukaite–Cantoni 2014, 19). It can be said that the increasing use of mobile devices and applications in the tourism industry enhances tourist satisfaction by "improving their overall experience in particular settings" (Lee–Ryong-Lee–Ham 2014, 59).

2.5.4 Virtual Reality & Augmented Reality

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies have been effectively utilized in the tourism industry. Technically, VR is a term used to describe "a three-dimensional, computer generated environment which can be explored and interacted with by a person". VR can bring about multi-sensory experience since VR systems are "added by various sensory stimuli such as sound, video and images which form part of most VR environments". (Virtual Reality 2009.) VR technologies have been applied into different areas of tourism such as management, marketing, entertainment and accessibility. For instance, VR creates the virtual experience which tourists might consider as a substitute for the real visit to the threatened or inaccessible sites. (Guttentag 2010, 637.) According to many scholars, VR technologies have been evolved and grown during the past years and will continue to advance in the future. Thus, VR applications within the tourism industry will continue to increase. (Guttentag 2010, 640.) AR is a variation of VR. While VR replaces the real world, AR enhances the real world. (Susperregui–Linaza 2005, 2.) AR aims to duplicate the world's environment in a computer. The system creates a composite view, which is the combination of the real scene viewed by the user and a virtual scene generated by the computer that augments the scene with additional information. (Webopedia 2014.) The advance in mobile technologies such as smartphones provides new opportunities to AR systems and applications (Marimon et al. 2010, 1). In the tourism context, for instance, tourists can experience both reality and virtual realms through the innovative technologies of smartphone applications (Lee–Ryong-Lee–Ham 2014, 60). Various AR applications embedded in smartphones have been

designed to utilize in the tourism industry including applications for outdoor navigation and information browsing (Reitmayr–Schmalstieg 2004). Besides, in the museum context, AR has enormous potential to actively involve tourists in learning and experiencing various museum settings and artefacts (Buhalis–Yovcheva 2014, 3).

In addition, the location-based AR technologies have been integrated into games to provide interactive features by "augmenting virtual game characters and game elements for the player" (Weber 2014, 4). Thus, these location-based AR games have proven "motivating and engaging for tourists" (Buhalis–Yovcheva 2014, 5). This issue will be discussed further in the following part "games and gamification".

2.5.5 Games & Gamification

Games have become more and more popular and the number of people playing games occupies more than one third of the world population (Rigby–Ryan 2011, 5). One of the reasons why games have become so pervasive nowadays is the fact that reality is not well designed enough to make people happy and effectively motivated. Reality cannot offer people thrilling challenges, pleasures and social power to maximize their potential. Thus, in comparing to the experience people can get from the virtual world of game, the real world seems to be broken. (McGonigal 2011, 2–3.) Most recently, the tremendous growth of mobile technologies and usage is an important factor which allows the emergence of pervasive games (Linaza–Gutierrez–Garcia 2014, 499). Modern innovative mobile technologies enable the users to play game everywhere, resulting in mobile games the fastest growing game segment (Weber 2014, 3). Games are created for versatile purposes and contexts, including travel and tourism industry. According to Linaza et al. (2014, 507), pervasive augmented reality games can be used to deliver an "engaging tourism experience". Furthermore, when combining the education and entertainment, the game concept applied to tourism industry can help tourists engage with history and culture of the visited destination through location-based gameplay (Ballagas–Kuntze–Walz 2008, 244). Recently, the term "gamification", which first appreared in 2008 (Deterding–Dixon–Khaled–Nacke 2011, 9), has gained significant attention among practitioners and

game scholars (Huotari–Hamari 2012, 17). The concept of gamification is defined as "the use of game design elements in non-game contexts" (Deterding et al. 2011, 9). In tourism industry, gamification can be applied into the process of experience co-creation between tourists and the tourism companies (Xu–Weber–Buhalis 2014, 525). In this process, gamification can be used to encourage tourist engagement and enhance their experience (Huotari–Hamari 2012, 21). Xu et al. (2014, 533) stated that the benefits of gamification in tourism include tourist engagement encouragement, tourist exprience enhancement and tourist loyalty improvement.

In order to illustrate for the concept of gamification in tourism, the example of the gamification in transmedia storytelling, the case of "Travel Plot Porto", can be considered. This gamification example uses social media platforms and other interactive networks to create a narrative and deliver a story. In this kind of game, participants can alter the game story at any time and according to their own ideas. Thus, players can be very intensively involved within the storyboard, creating their individual stories in real-time while they are still at home in the pre and post-phases of the travel process or on-site at the destination. Game designers interact with the players by guiding them to their next plot-based challenges. The games use different kind of social media platforms in order to best transfer the story via videos, pictures and interactions. (Weber 2014, 8.) Travel Plot Porto game is a fun and engaging way to visit Porto city. In this game, an English tourist is on a mission to save Port Wine. The only way for this English tourist to be successful is to have the help from other tourists and locals (participants). With the support of the new media (iPhone app, map or website), participants will find the possible locations where the treasure is hidden while real-live events and social networks will allow the interaction between all. (Travel Plot Porto 2012.) This example can help destination management organizations engage tourists in the entire three-phase travel process (Weber 2014, 8). At the same time, it help tourists virtually experience the destinations in the pre-phase travel, be engaged in the on-site phase and share their stories in the post-phase travel with friends and others through various social media platforms.

2.5.6 Recommender Systems

The technology of Recommender Systems (RSs) has been widely utilized as a means of coping with information overload and offering recommendations to tourists. RSs were originally found successful in e-commerce websites (Gavalas–Konstantopoulos–Mastakas–Pantziou 2014, 319–320.) and are popular in online shopping (Häubl–Trifts 2000) and online travel planning (Mahmood–Ricci–Venturini 2009). RSs are software tools which function as "interactive decision aid" that assist consumers by making recommendations based on the provided information of the consumer own preference (Häubl–Trifts 2000, 4). The process of RSs includes three core steps. Firstly, the user preferences are collected, processed and analyzed. Next, the RSs will base on the conclusion of the first step to commence the recommendation. Finally, the user will provide feedback to the RSs so that the system can update the user preference information. The interaction between the RSs and the user can be divided into explicit and implicit methods. (Kuo–Chen–Liang 2009, 3544.) In other words, the system obtains the user preferences, explicitly or implicitly, in order to propose relevant products.

In the travel context, RSs can propose interesting travel products according to the user's attributes so that to allow the user to build their travel plan and book their preferred products (Mahmood et al. 2009, 149–150). Thus, RSs are intelligent applications which allow travelers to become their own travel agent (Zanker–Fuchs–Höpken–Tuta–Müller 2008, 25). AS a result, RSs help enhance the overall experience for tourists.

2.5.7 Summary from Academic Researches

In light of the review from the researches presented above, the author of this study now summarizes the findings into Table 2 which serves as the reference table for the empirical research. The first column of the table includes the main themes of cutting-edge ICTs utilized to enhance the experience for tourists. These themes are used as the coding categories of the website and interview analysis in the next parts of the study to discover about the company's practices and perception regarding the topic studied. Indeed, the fact how the companies practice the themes examined through

the analysis reveals their perceptions on the matter. The second column mentions the phases of the travel process as when the theme is utilized. The last column lists the tourist experiences that can be enhanced by the theme during the travel process.

The theme "other technologies" mentioned in Table 2 relates to any other ICTs that are found to be relevantly utilized in the companies studied in order to enhance the experience for tourists during the travel process. This depends on the specific business context of the companies and the experience enhancement that ICTs can bring to the tourists.

Table 2. The Reference Table

Themes utilized: Cutting-edge ICTs	Phases (pre, on-site, post)	Experiences Enhanced during the Travel Process
Interactive & Cross-platform Website	pre, on-site, post	• Traveling planning • Information obtaining & sharing • Communication & interaction
Online Reservation	pre	• Reservation & purchasing experience • Cost reducing • Real-time information obtaining
Virtual Travel Community	pre, post	• Preliminary information search • Information exchange • Opinions & experience sharing • Recommendations obtaining • Relationship maintaining and deepening
Social Networking Site	pre, on-site, post	• Travel inspiration • Preliminary information search • Travel organizing • Choice reassurance • Communication, interaction • Engaging with tourism companies and other customers • Experiences real-time sharing
Weblog	pre, on-site, post	• Travel inspiration, advices, suggestions • Fostering travel decision • Writing travel diary online • Experiences writing and sharing

Video	pre, on-site, post	• Travel inspiration • Preliminary information search • Pre-experience the travel experience • On-site guide • Constant travel companion • Experience reflection & sharing
Review Site	pre, post	• Travel inspiration • Preliminary information search • Decision-making driver • Experiences & opinions writing and sharing
Mobile Application	pre, on-site, post	• Information search and retrieval • Planning • Reservation • Communication • On-site' micro moment: flexible & spontaneous • Experience sharing
Virtual Reality & Augmented Reality	pre, on-site	• Travel inspiration • Multi-sensory experiences • Subsitute virtual experience • Augmented reality scene with additional information • Outdoor navigation • Information browsing
Games & Gamification	pre, on-site, post	• Inspiration • Engaging in pre and on-site phases in experience co-creation with tourism companies
Recommender System	pre	• Travel planning
Other Technologies	on-site	• Versatile experiences • Experience co-creation

3 ROVANIEMI TOURISM COMPANIES' PERCEPTIONS & PRACTICES OF TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED TOURIST EXPERIENCE

3.1 Thesis Process & Methodology & Commissioner

3.1.1 Thesis Process

The author was inspired to this thesis topic with the Advanced Training when working as a trainee for The Foresight Approach to Tourism Product Development project at Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI). The topic was initially suggested by the project team's members since it concerns one of the project's themes that could support closely the project's outcomes. The author considered the topic suggestion, studied related materials as well as a possible approach of the topic to the Rovaniemi region. It was found that there is a great potential to apply this topic to the Rovaniemi region since no prior thesis project was carried out concerning this topic in Rovaniemi.

Additionally, the author became gradually interested and motivated with the proposed topic during the training time. The author personally wanted to find out the related issues regarding the proposed topic in Rovaniemi region. As a result, practical applications of the topic, personal interest and curiosity motivated the author to carry out the said thesis topic for The Foresight Approach to Tourism Product Development project.

3.1.2 Qualitative Content Analysis & In-depth Interview

As prior mentioned, the purpose of carrying out this study is to find the answers to the research questions of how tourism companies in Rovaniemi, through their websites and other related online sources, use technology to enhance experience for tourists and how they perceive technology enhanced tourist experience through their practices. The process of doing research to find out the answers is time-consuming (Holosko 2010, 349) and it requires from the researcher much preparation and effort. Above all, using the right research methodology and methods is crucial in order to gain optimal results.

According to Kothari (2004, 8), research methodology is "a way to systematically solve the research problem". Research methods, meanwhile,

may be understood as all the methods used for conducting a research by the researcher (Kothari 2004, 8). According to Kothari, there are two basic research approaches: quantitative and qualitative approach. Quantitative approach generates data in quantitative form that can be subjected to strict quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion. On the other hand, qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior. (Kothari 2004, 2–5.)

This thesis project is carried out with qualitative approach since it would bring about a profound understanding into the matter. Qualitative approach allows the researcher to examine people's experiences by using methods such as in-depth interview, observation and content analysis. This approach can help the researcher identify issues from the point of view of the participants and better interpret participants' behaviour. (Hennink–Hutter–Bailey 2011, 8–9.)

In this thesis project, the method of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) is used to examine the websites and related online sources of the companies studied in order to obtain the knowledge regarding companies' practices and perceptions of technology enhanced tourist experience reflected through their websites and related online sources. According to Schreier, QCA is:

> A method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame. (Schreier 2012, 1)

The categories of coding frame for the QCA are the themes mentioned in Table 2. The company websites and other related online sources are visited thoroughly. Next, relevant information is classified as per the categories in the coding frame (see Table 3). This information is considered and analysed on the basis of the topic studied. According to Schreier, there is no right or wrong way to structure the research material. Everything would depend mainly on the research question and the researcher. (Schreier 2012, 66.)

The findings of each analysis are summarized into a table namely QCA Results table. The discovered themes from the QCA of each website speak for the practices of the company and the fact how the company practices the discovered themes reveals their perception regarding the issue. The perception revelation is discussed thoroughly. Finally, an overall result

regarding the company's practices and perceptions is drawn into the Overall Result table of each company.

Table 3. QCA Predefined Coding Categories

No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Categories	Interactive & Cross-platform website	Online Reservation	Virtual travel community	Social networking site	Weblog	Video	Review site	Mobile application	Virtual reality & Augmented reality	Games & gamification	Recommender system	Other technologies

QCA method suits the most in this case of analysing company websites and other online sources. Firstly, this method allows the interpretation with different degrees for describing the materials. Since qualitative research data usually requires some interpretation, QCA is suitable here. Secondly, data for QCA can be generated by the researcher collecting from interviews or sampling from different sources such as from the printed documents or the Internet. Also, QCA method can be applied to various forms of materials such as interview transcripts, textbooks, company brochures, diaries, websites, and entries on social network sites. In addition, QCA is also suitable for both verbal and visual materials. Hence, using QCA in this step allows precise results. The utmost purpose of QCA is to systematically describe the meaning of the research material according to certain aspects specified by the researcher. (Schreier 2012, 2–3.)

In this study, the method of in-depth interview is also used complementarily. This method allows the interviewer and the interviewee to discuss specific topics in depth. Thus, in-depth interview can be considered as a purposeful conversation (Hennink et al. 2011, 109). Since this thesis is meant to discover the companies' practices and perceptions, having an in-depth discussion about the topic is the best option to uncover the innermost of the issue. Besides, the interviewer could gain the best insight into certain issues using semi-structured interview guide (Hennink et al. 2011, 109). Semi-structured interview guide serves as an orientation for the interviewers (Flick

2011, 112). Thus, some core questions (see Appendix) are prepared beforehand and used during the interview flexibly. The interview is recorded on digital voice recorder and transcribed. The same method and process of QCA is applied to classify and analyse the content of the interview transcription as it is carried out for the websites.

The companies whose websites are studied in this thesis project are local companies of micro and small size in Rovaniemi which offer touristic services such as accommodation, catering and program activities. Some basis information of these companies is showed in Table 4.

Table 4. Analyzed Websites' Basic Information (YTJ 2014)

No.	Website	Company Name	Company Form	Since (year)	Main Line of Business
1	http://www.arcticsnowhotel.fi/	Arctic Snow Hotel / Snowflake Oy	Limited company	2008	Reservation service and related activities (hotel, catering, activities)
2	http://www.arcticlifestyle.fi/	Arctic Lifestyle Oy	Limited company	2005	Reservation service and related activities (program services)
3	http://kaisuslappland.de/	Kaisus Lappland / Kaisa Alatalo	Private person carrying on trade	2013	Tour operator activities
4	http://www.safartica.com/	Safartica Oy	Limited company	2002	Reservation service and related activities (program services)

3.1.3 Commissioner

The commissioner for this thesis is the Foresight Approach to Tourism Product Development project, which is co-funded by European Social Fund and administered by Lapland University of Applied Sciences and University of Lapland. The project started on 1 June 2013 and lasts until 31 December 2014, supplementing the knowledge and expertise gained previously during the Integrative TPD project carried out in the years 2008–2011. (Matkailualan tutkimus- ja koulutusinstituutti 2014.)

The Foresight Approach to Tourism Product Development project focuses on studying the foresight thinking and the product development know-how in tourism. In other words, the project is aimed to strengthen the competitiveness of TPD know-how by the integration of foresight, five dimensions of responsible tourism and meaningful experiences into TPD. One of the project's main objectives is to develop a comprehensive TPD

expertise by co-operating with versatile tourism stakeholders and partners. During the project, different benchmarking and networking trips will be carried out in Europe in order to learn about the best practices of tourism companies and stakeholders in integrating foresight, responsibility and experience to TPD. Besides, the project is also aimed to commence and strengthen the cooperation between the Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI) and international partners in TPD as well as to integrate the knowledge gained from the project into education and research and development at MTI. Another important project's goal is to achieve an overall TPD expertise which will help strengthen sustainable tourism development and pro-active business regionally, nationally and internationally. (Matkailualan tutkimus– ja koulutusinstituutti 2014.)

The project's concrete results include three teaching cases as an outcome of the benchmarking trips, some theses, the piloting of the results from MTI to the tourism entrepreneurs in the Lapland region and the commencement of the cooperation between MTI and international partners in TPD. Besides, the project also enables referee article writing which is based on the knowledge gained during the project. (Matkailualan tutkimus– ja koulutusinstituutti 2014.)

This thesis would support the Foresight Approach to Tourism Product Development project closely since its main focus is on the experience approach in tourism, coincides with one of the project's themes and aims. The thesis studies how technology can be used to enhance tourist experience; therefore, its results will benefit the project in terms of giving more ideas to the project's aim of TPD based on the empirical study from existing companies in Rovaniemi region.

In addition, the results of this thesis would bring about some insights from some tourism companies in Rovaniemi regarding the topic of technology enhanced tourist experience. This topic, which is currently pivotal in tourism and receives much intention worldwide, is carried out for the first time in the Rovaniemi region. The study would, therefore, raise the awareness as well as the interest of related stakeholders in the field. Hence, the thesis findings could also benefit educational organizations such as Lapland University of Applied Sciences and University of Lapland in terms of the curriculum

development in the coming years so that it would adapt to the current situation and tendency in the tourism field.

3.2 Rovaniemi Tourism Destination Overview

Rovaniemi is the administrative, commercial, educational and cultural center of Lapland province, Finland. It is situated on the Arctic Circle in Finnish Lapland. Rovaniemi has the total area of more than 8.000 square kilometers and a population of over 60.000 inhabitants. The climate in Rovaniemi is mild, subarctic, and characterized by extreme seasonal changes between darkness and light, cold and warmth (BLC2011, 1). Rovaniemi is a modern dynamic city which offers a unique combination of undisturbed nature, Nordic culture and urban activity. The unique nature of Lapland and the rich cultural heritage create an excellent framework for versatile tourism services. Rovaniemi is one of Finland's main destinations for foreign travelers. It attracts visitors from all over the world. In recent years, Rovaniemi has featured prominently in several international rankings. For instance, in 2013, Lonely Planet ranked Rovaniemi the world's second best holiday destination for families. (Rovaniemi Marketing & Tourism Ltd. 2013, 3–4.)

Tourism has always played a significant role in the economy of Rovaniemi and has grown during the past many decades. The main touristic season is winter season, starting from November and lasting until April. The winter season is crucial for the city's economy which accounts for nearly 60% of the total number of visitors. The accommodation occupancy rate in Rovaniemi reached a new record high in 2012 at 51.6 %, which is higher than the occupancy rate in Finland as a whole (49 %). Christmas tourism is one of the most important attractions and has shown significant growth in the last years. The most important attraction of Rovaniemi tourism is Santa Claus. However, the growth of Christmas tourism is mainly based on the Christmas programs and activities offered by touristic service providers in the area as well as the Christmas season events. The most popular activities for the winter tourism are skiing, snowmobiling, reindeer and husky dog safaris as well as winter driving schools. (Rovaniemi Marketing & Tourism Ltd. 2013, 7–8.) As for the summer tourism, there has been positive development recently, but this is still the challenge for the region. The most important elements of summer

tourism are the brightness of summer night and the waterways surrounding Rovaniemi. (Rovaniemi Tourism Strategy 2007, 8.)

The growth in tourism volumes in Rovaniemi has been good since many recent years in comparing to the rest of Finland. In Lapland, Rovaniemi has managed to retain its market share. However, on the international level, Rovaniemi is slowly losing its market share to other destinations. The critical factor in Rovaniemi tourism is the fact that there is a lack of a distinctive driving tourism company and that tourism enterprises are too dependent on tour operators due to the companies' small size and the insufficient cooperation. In order to be less dependent, it is crucial for tourism enterprises in Rovaniemi to look for direct distribution solutions in the future as an alternative to current distribution channels. For example, tourism enterprises can sell their products directly through the Internet. However, this method would require the commercialization of services and larger service entireties. (Rovaniemi Tourism Strategy 2007, 4.)

As aforementioned, Rovaniemi tourism is seasonal with winter being the main season (Rovaniemi Tourism Strategy, 4). Seasonality has become an increasing challenge for Rovaniemi tourism since everything depends heavily on nature and weather conditions. In nowadays' situation with global warming, climate change and other negative impacts worldwide, seasonality indeed posts many problems to the area's tourism. It can be, for instance, very vulnerable with the impacts that the climate change is having on the snow conditions during the winter. Regarding the tourism image, Rovaniemi has experienced positive development during the past years. However, among domestic tourists the Rovaniemi image has not experienced any significant positive change. The largest tourism volumes for the Rovaniemi region come from abroad. (Rovaniemi Tourism Strategy 2007, 4.)

3.3 Perceptions & Practices Insights Reflected Through Websites

3.3.1 Arctic Lifestyle

Arctic Lifestyle is a safari house and program service company based in Rovaniemi, Finnish Lapland. The company has been in operation since 2005 (YTJ 2014). Its businesses mainly focus on winter and summer activities,

specializing in individual and private groups. (Arctic Lifestyle 2014.) The website of Arctic Lifestyle and other related online sources were visited thoroughly in September 2014 and examined as according to the coding categories in Table 3.

The website is organized in a simple manner to communicate all the company's services to the visitors. The adoption of web 2.0 technologies allows the utilization of text, images, videos, links and Facebook widget to communicate and interact with the viewers. The organization of the pages is simple and easy to follow. Hence, the website supports the information retrieval and travel planning for the visitors through informative text, pdf-file link for brochures, images and videos. Besides, the images and videos regarding the company's own activities also play an important role in the travel inspiration for the visitors. The website also offers some level of interactivity to the visitors through videos, Facebook embedded interface, the changing of different languages and the contact form. In general, the website of Arctic Lifestyle can enhance the pre-phase experience for the visitors. However, this website does not support the browsing from mobile devices since there is no mobile version of the website available. It is not cross-platform in this case.

The QCA found that the most preferred way that the company wants to be requested for its services online is to send an email. The company's email address is found under each and every package's detailed page. Besides, this fact is also emphasized in the company's pdf-brochure which is linked on the website. The website also offers a "contact us" page where visitors can leave an offer request in the ready-made form. This contact form, however, is not linked to the service package pages. Thus, the only possibility for visitors to complete a reservation online is by email correspondence.

As for social networking site, Arctic Lifestyle only has presence on Facebook. The interface of the company's Facebook page is also embedded on its website. Through its communication and interaction on Facebook, the company is found to be active and engaged on this platform. Entries in the timeline are realized in the form of text, photos and videos of the related-activities as well as links to other online sources. The photos and videos

shared are attracting and inspiring. Some related events and the program packages are also announced here. The company is quite active in responding to the followers' comments to its entries. However, entries are posted irregularly and the page is not updated often. In the about menu, a Google map is embedded showing the company's location and the opening hour is marked as "always open". This fact shows that the company claims to be always available for customers' contact. There is also a review menu and reviews of the company's previous customers are found. With such practice, Facebook can be considered as the main platform where Arctic Lifestyle communicates and interacts with the customers in order to support and enhance their experience throughout the travel process.

Regarding video, Arctic Lifestyle has one Vimeo video and several YouTube videos. Each video features one safari activity that the company offers such as snowmobiling, paintball game, tank safari and motorbike safari. These videos are shared on the company's website illustrating the related packages. However, the YouTube logo and link are not mentioned on the website's homepage. The company does not have its own YouTube channel and videos are posted randomly on YouTube. There are only few comments or none at all to these videos. The similar videos are also shared on the company's Facebook page. Hence, to some degree, Arctic Lifestyle utilizes videos to communicate its services to potential customers. This practice helps the company enhance the virtual experience in the pre-phase travel for the visitors and thus inspire traveling to the destination.

As regards reviews, TripAdvisor and Facebook reviews are found. However, there is no TripAdvisor link and logo on the company's website. The link to TripAdvisor review is only available on the company's Facebook page. This fact affirms that Arctic Lifestyle communicates with its customers mainly through the Facebook platform but not from its own website.

The QCA discovered the availability of game-like safaris at Arctic Lifestyle such as "paintball" game and "team-building" program activities. All these activities are organized in team so they require the participation of more than one individual customer. The company has all the standard devices necessary for these "games". For example, a well-equipped play area is

available for the paintball game. The "team-building" program includes activities such as "Arctic Olympic games" and "Adventure race". These activities are basically similar to the traditional safaris such as skiing and snowshoeing. However, the "competition" characteristic makes the activities become more game-like that can engage customers in a different way and create a unique experience for the participants. Hence, these game-like safaris offer the customers a unique personal experience and thus enhance the on-site experience for the customers.

The QCA also found that Arctic Lifestyle applies and integrates advanced technologies into its program packages delivered to the customers on-site: "*our snowmobiles are the newest sport models on the market and we provide to our customers top class clothing equipment. Equipment: Our snowmobiles are BRP's 2014 Lynx brand.*" (Arctic Lifestyle 2014.) The company's utilization of such advanced technologies can optimize the quality of its services and therefore enhance the on-site experience for the customers. A summary of the QCA result of the company's website and other related online sources is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. QCA of Arctic Lifestyle Website & Related Online Sources

QCA Results of Arctic Lifestyle website & related online sources					
Interactive & Cross-platform Websites	**Online Reservation**	**Virtual Travel Community**	**Social Networking Site**	**Weblog**	**Video**
Interactive: Yes + Web 2.0 + Information obtaining & travel inspiration (text, photo gallery, video, brochure links (pdf file), Facebook) + Traveling planning (pdf brochure links for package information) **Cross-platform: No** - No mobile version	**Yes** ***(not a complete reservation system)*** + Via "Contact form" on "Contact us" page - "Contact form" not linked directly to package pages - Offer request & inquiries made mainly by sending email *(email address available after each package detail information)*	**No**	**Yes** (only on Facebook) + Facebook (interface also embeded on website's homepage) + Engaged communication on Facebook (menus: Timeline, About, photo, videos, reviews) + Google map embedded in "About" menu (Facebook)	**No**	**Yes** + Several own safari videos (Snowmobiling, paintball, tank, motorbike) posted on Vimeo & YouTube and shared on website + Only few or no comments to these video - YouTube logo & link are not mentioned on "homepage" *(Youtube videos are posted in pages of package information)* - No YouTube channel
Review Site	**Mobile Application**	**Virtual Reality & Augmented Reality**	**Games & Gamification**	**Recommender System**	**Other Technologies**
Yes + TripAdvisor & Facebook reviews + Link to TripAdvisor from Facebook (from Timeline post) - No TripAdvisor logo & link on website	**No**	**No**	**Yes** *(Game-like safaris & activities)* + Paintball game (with equipped play area) +Team-building: Arctic Olympics games, Adventure race (Incentive winter season packages)	**No**	**Yes** + Using the newest snowmobile models on the market (coded from data on website) *("Our snowmobiles are the newest sport models on the market"* *"Our snowmobiles are BRP´s 2014 Lynx brand")*

Table 5 shows that the categories of virtual travel community, weblog, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality as well as recommender system were not found during the examination of the company's website and related online sources. Hence, the revelation of practices and perception of the company regarding these themes are unknown during the QCA process.

The utilization of web 2.0 in the company's website shows that Arctic Lifestyle is aware of the necessity to communicate online by an interactive website nowadays. However, the visitors to the website are more or less passive due to the limited interactivity. The offered packages are ready-made and there is no "internal" search box. The possible interactivity only includes interaction with the video, the Facebook widget, the languages changing and the "contact form". The contact form, however, only exists on one specific "contact us" page and is not linked from anywhere on the website. The unavailability of the website mobile version affirms the limited interactivity of the website. This also reveals the limited awareness of the company regarding the ubiquitous use of mobile devices in tourism nowadays.

The packages that Arctic Lifestyle offers are many and its customer segments range from individuals to groups. However, a complete online reservation system on the company's website is not available. Besides, there is no possibility to make the reservation through a third-party website. The company's preferred way for reservation is by email contacting. Hence, it reveals that the company is not at all aware of the increasing demand from the consumers regarding the online reservation possibility as well as the pre-phase tourist experience support and enhancement of the online reservation system as discussed in the literature review.

The company's engaged practice of Facebook speaks for its awareness of the popularity and the powerful impact of this social platform on users nowadays. It understands that most users on Facebook are customers (Eye for Travel 2014). However, the fact that the company does not have presence on other social platforms reveals its limited perception regarding social media networking sites. Besides Facebook, there are also many other popular and influential platforms. In the competitive context of the advanced

online environment nowadays, the company should be ready for customers wherever there are customers.

The availability of both Vimeo and YouTube videos shared on company's website and Facebook page shows its high awareness of the increasing importance, popularity and strong influence of video on consumers nowadays. However, the company is not totally aware of the strong influence of YouTube since it does not mention about YouTube or provide the link to its YouTube videos on the homepage.

The company's practice of review site reveals its awareness of the powerful influence of reviews in tourism industry. However, the company only mentions about TripAdvisor reviews on its Facebook page but not at all on its website. This fact, once again, affirms for the fact that Facebook is the main online communication channel of the company. It also implies that the company might not appreciate enough the powerful influence and the crucial role that the review website TripAdvisor has on potentials customers and the tourism industry nowadays as pointed out in the theoretical review.

The company's practice of game-like safaris delivered to the customers on-site shows its creativeness and innovativeness in its services. Game-like activities allow the co-creation between the company and its customers in the process of creating the tourist experience. Besides, game-like activities also encourage the customers' engagement and thus enhance their experience. To this point, it reveals that Arctic Lifestyle is aware of the enhancement advantage of games and gamification in the overall tourist experience.

Lastly, the company's utilization of other advanced technologies speaks for its awareness of the advantage that ICTs can offer to create added value and thus enhance the experience for tourists, especially during the on-site phase. The overall result of Arctic Lifestyle is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Overall Result of Arctic Lifestyle

	Practices	Perception
Overall Result of Arctic Lifestyle		
1	Interactive Website	Aware of the necessity of web 2.0, passive users, limited interactivity (text, image, video, "contact form", Facebook widget), not responsive (no mobile version), limited awareness of ubiquitous use of mobile devices nowadays
2	Online Reservation *(only by email & resquest form)*	Not at all aware of the increasing demand (no complete online reservation system vs. numerous packages offered), not aware of its benefits for customers (pre-phase tourist experience support & enhancement)
3	Social Networking Site	Awareness of popularity and powerful impact of Facebook (engaged practice), understands Facebook is where most users are customers (main communication channel), limited perception (only uses Facebook)
4	Video	High awareness of its increasing importance, popularity and strong influence (Vimeo & YouTube videos, share on website & Facebook), not totally aware of the strong influence of YouTube (no logo link on homepage, not own channel)
5	Review Site	Awareness of its powerful influence in tourism industry (TripAdvisor & Facebook reviews), not appreciate enough the crucial role of TripAdvisor in tourism industry (TripAdvisor not mentioned on website but only on Facebook page)
6	Games & Gamification	Creativeness & innovativeness in services (game-like safaris), aware of the enhancement advantages of games & gamification in the overall tourist experience
7	Other Technologies	Awareness of the advantage of advanced ICTs (added-values for on-site experience)

3.3.2 Arctic Snow Hotel

Arctic Snow Hotel is a family-owned snow hotel in Rovaniemi which is located around twenty kilometers from the city center (Santatelevision 2014). The hotel is an entire world of snow as well as an experience destination that provides exotic possibilities to spend the night sheltered by snow and surrounded by unique Lappish nature. Besides accommodation, the hotel also provides catering services served in the Ice Restaurant and Ice Bar. Additionally, there are also other ice and snow structures such as ice sculptures, snow sauna and a snow chapel. Since the hotel is a unique sight by itself, there is also day trip available for tourists to discover the exotic

destination. (Arctic Snow Hotel 2014.) Arctic Snow Hotel has been operating since 2008 (YTJ 2014). The website of Arctic Snow Hotel and related online sources were visited thoroughly in August 2014 and examined as according to the coding categories in the Table 3.

General speaking, the website of Arctic Snow Hotel gives the user the first impression of being simple, rather well-organized and visibly possible to find needed information. Some content found on the website reveals that the website was renewed in 2012; more photos and a presentation video were added in order to improve the communication of its services: "*We have renewed our website and we hope to offer you better overview of our services as well as more photos and a presentation video*" (Arctic Snow Hotel 2014). As a result, this fact can enhance the information obtaining and travel inspiration for potential tourists.

The website utilizes web 2.0 technologies which allow the user to also interact directly with the web interface in addition to obtaining information by reading text and seeing images. The user can interact with Google map embedded on the site to find the location of the company and to search for other "attractions" nearby by a "scrolling list" available under the Google map feature. The location of the hotel is marked stable on the map, and each time the user choose an attraction nearby, the map will show the distance from the hotel to the attraction. This function can help potential tourists organize their activities in Rovaniemi including the visit to the snow hotel.

The website displays the social networking site logos of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google+. Among these, only the logo of Facebook and Pinterest function as a link leading the users to the new window of the company's Facebook and Pinterest page. On these pages, people can read text and see pictures posted by the company, see the comments, watch the shared video and other pages' links as well as interact with the company and other users. In addition, Google map is also embedded on Facebook page in the about menu for better information retrieval and obtaining. The logo of Google+ is only for the viewer to click on in order to publicly recommend the content on Google. Likewise, the logo of Twitter is only for the viewer who has an account on Twitter to "tweet" the content. The company's Twitter page

is unfound on Twitter website. Hence, the company is not communicating on Twitter platform. Under every content posted on the website, there are "Like", "g+1" and "Tweet" buttons for the viewer to click on. To this extent, the company uses Facebook and Pinterest as a tool to provide travel information, to stimulate and inspire travel and therefore it can enhance the virtual experience – the pre-phase travel – for their potential customers.

Furthermore, some content posted on the company's Facebook account reveals that advanced technologies are utilized in the production of the experience offered on-site. Scrolling through the content posted, it is basically about the announcement of the hotel opening and closing, as in this example: *"It's April again and time to close snow hotel. Thank you all for this winter."* (Facebook, Arctic Snowhotel, 2014.) Indeed, the snow hotel is very particular since it can only be built and served the customers during winter season in Rovaniemi. Another content posted by a client as a review on TripAdvisor also supports this conclusion: *"Rooms are small and quite similar – and obviously re-built every year"* (TripAdvisor, 2012). These Facebook and TripAdvisor message show that the hotel is re-built every year; and that technologies such as "advanced cold technologies" are needed so that the snow hotel can be realized and functioned as a normal hotel, as asserted by the company in their Facebook message: *"Even if there's -40C outside, the temperature inside SnowHotel stays around -2 to -5. Heating expense -0 EUR."* (Facebook, Arctic Snowhotel, 2012.)

To this extent, the snow hotel itself can be considered as the core element of the offered experience as discussed earlier by Neuhofer et al. Furthermore, some other content examined from Facebook also shows that the company is trying to take advantage of other technology to create added value for customers when they consume the experience on-site. For example, an alarm system is used at the hotel's new glass igloos in order to wake up the client if Northern Light appeared on the sky in the middle of the night. The added value created by the Northern Light alarm system can lead to an emotional and memorable experience for the customers. The hotel really uses their service to engage the customers to their offer at this point as

discussed in the experience theories; therefore, the on-site tourist experience can be enhanced in this case.

As far as the online reservation possibility is concerned, the website provides a ready-made offer request form where customers can send a request and will be contacted by email as well as a complete online reservation possibility through Travius system. The Travius online reservation system is linked from the hotel's homepage by the button "Book Here" and is opened in a new window if clicked on. Customers can reserve for accommodation and activities. While examining the online reservation, an accommodation reservation simulation was made by the author of this study. The reservation went through several steps such as choosing the kind of accommodation, date and additional products. When it came to payment, online banking with Finnish banks as well as VISA cards were accepted. The reservation process went smoothly with reasonable steps and clicks. The Travius online reservation system helps the potential tourists plan better their holiday as well as reduce time and cost in comparing to doing the planning and booking through a travel agency as pointed out in the theoretical review. Hence, this fact can contribute to the enhancement of the pre-phase experience.

Regarding video, the website examination found videos with similar content made for the hotel available both on the company's website and on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=arctic+snow+hotel). The content of the video shows that it is made with the purpose of communicating what the hotel offers. It features the snow hotel and other stunning snow structures available such as chapel, restaurant, bar and sauna, the clients and activities as well as the happy atmosphere at the hotel. It is clearly that the hotel uses the video and the current most dominating website to post video – YouTube – in order to communicate virtually and visually the most unique things that the company offers. In doing so, the company allows potential customers to visit the place virtually in order to inspire travel. Indeed, the positive content of the comments for the Arctic Snow Hotel video posted on YouTube shows that the video has achieved its travel inspiring purpose. In addition to the company's own video, several user-generated videos with different time duration and content concerning the snow hotel

destination were also found available on YouTube. However, the number of views and comments are only a few, and no reaction from the company to these videos was found. Furthermore, the company also shares others' videos with the content related to its business on its Facebook page. Thus, video is also utilized on the company's social platform to inspire travel in the pre-phase virtual travel experience for potential customers.

Reviews for the snow hotel are available on the company's Facebook page in Reviews menu. Some positive content of these reviews show that not all the people who made the reviews had visited the snow hotel, as showed in this message: *"Never been there but looks incredible"* (Facebook, Arctic Snowhotel Reviews)*.* This fact reflects that the company's communication through Facebook has actually enhanced the virtual travel experience for potential tourists. Besides, links to reviews on Foursquare and TripAdvisor are also available on the Facebook review interface and these links are opened in new windows. Hence, reviews are found for the snow hotel on the most popular review website today: TripAdvisor. However, this is not mentioned or linked anywhere from the company's website. There is no sign of TripAdvisor showed on the homepage.

The website of Arctic Snow Hotel is generally an interactive website supporting the information obtaining and travel planning of the tourists including the complete online reservation possibility. However, the snow hotel website is not a cross-platform website that supports mobile devices since there is no website mobile version available. A summary of the QCA result is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. QCA of Arctic Snow Hotel Website & Related Online Sources

QCA Results of Arctic Snow Hotel website & related online sources					
Interactive & Cross-platform Websites	Online Reservation	Virtual Travel Community	Social Networking Site	Weblog	Video
Interactive: Yes + Web 2.0 + Information obtaining (text, photo, video) + Traveling planning (via Travius system) + Interaction with Google map & "Attractions nearby" scrolling list under Google map **Cross-platform: No** - No mobile version	**Yes** + "BOOK HERE" button → Travius system: possible to make complete reservation online + "Contact us" button: possible to send an accommodation offer request	**No**	**Yes** + Facebook → logo link, opened in a new window, "Like" button + Google maps embedded in "About" menu (Facebook) + Pinterest → logo link, opened in a new window + "Tweet" button	**No**	**Yes** + Own video embedded on homepage, under the video are social networking site buttons: "Pin it" , "Like" , "g+1" and "Tweet" + Own video on YouTube + Others' videos shared on Facebook page
Review Site	Mobile Application	Virtual Reality & Augmented Rearlity	Games & Gamification	Recommender System	Other Technologies
Yes + Facebook review, Foursquare, TripAdvisor (Foursquare & TripAdvisor reviews are linked from company's Facebook page) + TripAdvisor reviews can be searched directly on TripAdvisor website - No logo, no link to Tripadvisor reviews & other reviews from homepage	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**	**Cold technologies**: re-design and re-build the hotel every year (coded from data on Facebook and TripAdsivor) + *Facebook: "It's April again and time to close snowhotel. Thank you all for this winter! [...] 20th of Dec we will open new lovely snowhotel!"* + *TripAdvisor: "Rooms are small and quite similar - and obviously re-built every year!"* **Automatic alarm system** (coded from Facebook data) + *Facebook: "When staying at our new glass igloos, you can be alarmed for aurora borealis in the middle of the night!"*

It is visible from Table 7 that several categories examined including virtual travel community, weblog, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality, games and gamification as well as recommender system are found unavailable on the company's website and related online sources. Hence, the revelation of practices and perception of the company regarding these themes are not found anywhere during the QCA process.

The company's practice of web 2.0 reveals that it is well-aware of the necessity to have such website nowadays in order to communicate online.

However, the interactions that the users can have with this website only include things such as reading text, viewing images and video, interacting with Google map and through Travius booking system. Most of these features are basic which can be found in any website using technology 2.0 nowadays. Besides, it also reflects that the interactivity offered by the website is very limited since the users can only consume and gain the information posted by the company but cannot interact by initiatively giving information to the website or communicating to other people through the website interface (Macias 2003, 37). To this extent, the website makes the users become more or less passive users. In addition, the limited interactivity of this website is also proven by the fact that the website is not cross-platform, which means it does not support the browsing by mobile devices. In the context of the ubiquitous use of mobile devices nowadays (Fuentetaja et al. 2014, 31), the website without a mobile version could be, indeed, a disadvantage for the company. For people who plan the holiday with the mobile devices, it would be difficult to obtain information and make reservation through the company's website. The online experience of the potential tourists in this case is not supported. As for the company, it is likely to lose potential customers.

On the other hand, the availability of a complete online reservation system reveals that the company is well-aware of the increasing demand (Mouakket– Al-hawari 2012, 46) from the consumers of being able to make the holiday reservation online. The fact that the company's reservation system works thoroughly with reasonable steps and clicks shows that the company understands the importance of having an efficient and user-friendly system.

The company's practice of social networking site reveals that it is aware of the popularity as well as the powerful impact of social networking sites on users nowadays, especially Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. However, the fact that the company mentioned Twitter on its website but does not communicate at all on Twitter shows its incomplete perception as its level of practice is limited. Social media platforms are where most of customers interacting nowadays (Fisher 2009, 190); thus, solely mentioning and having the logo of a social networking site on the company's website is not enough. Instead, the company has to be actively engaged with the chosen social

platform to support the tourist throughout the travel process as pointed out in the literature review.

The company's adoption of video communication both on its own website and YouTube since 2012 shows its awareness of the increasing importance, popularity and strong influence of video on consumers today. Other people' videos that the company shared on its Facebook page also speak for its awareness about the matter. However, the company should also pay attention to the user-generated videos that the visitors made about the destination and posted on YouTube. Since the user-generated content is very influential (Lecinski 2011, 30), the company should show its engagement with these videos. In addition, it should encourage and support the visitors to create videos and share them on platforms such as YouTube.

Reviews are powerful and functions as the decision-driver during the consideration and pre-travel phase of the potential travellers (Lecinski 2011, 31). However, the snow hotel does not mention on its website about the reviews on TripAdvisor and other platforms. Thus, even though reviews are available on TripAdvisor, the company is not actively engaged with it. On the other hand, its adoption of the reviews menu on Facebook page reveals its awareness regarding the issue. However, TripAdvisor is the most popular and influential website where people often search for tourism-related reviews nowadays. To this extent, it might imply that the snow hotel might not aware of the powerful influence and the crucial role that the review website TripAdvisor has on potentials customers and the tourism industry nowadays.

Finally, the company's practice of some other technologies proves that it is, to some extent, aware of the advantage that advanced technologies can offer to create added value and thus enhance the experience for tourists, especially during the on-site phase. The overall result of Arctic Snow Hotel is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Overall Result of Arctic Snow Hotel

Overall Result of Arctic Snow Hotel		
	Practices	**Perception**
1	Interactive Website	Well-aware of the necessity of web 2.0, basic & limited interactivity (text, image, video, Google map, Travius booking system), passive users, not responsive (no mobile version), limited awareness of ubiquitous use of mobile devices nowadays
2	Online Reservation	Well-aware of the increasing demand, understand the importance of user-friendly system
3	Social Networking Site	Aware of its popularity and powerful impact, incomplete perception (limited practice: Twitter)
4	Video	Aware of its increasing importance, popularity and strong influence, no attention paid on user-generated videos
5	Review Site	Awareness about the issue (reviews menu in Facebook page), might not aware of the powerful influence & crucial role of TripAdvisor nowadays (not mention at all about TripAdvisor on own website vs. TripAdvisor reviews for the hotel available)
6	Other Technologies	Aware of its advantage (on-site phase)

3.3.3 Kaisus Lappland

Kaisus Lappland is a recently established company in Finnish Lapland. The company form is a "private person carrying on trade" (YTJ 2014), functions as an independent tour operator. It offers authentic experiences of Lappish culture to middle-age tourists coming from German speaking countries. Kaisus Lappland offers approximately 10 different packages year-round, based on the time frame of Lappish culture festivals. The company business is still at its beginning stage and has not yet received any customer until the implementation of this thesis project. (Alatalo 2014.) The author of this study visited thoroughly the website of Kaisus Lappland as well as other online related sources in August 2014. All information was examined as according to the coding categories in the Table 3.

It can be seen from the website of Kaisus Lappland that it is realized with the WordPress content management blogging system (CMS). This CMS is finely appropriate for web 2.0 technologies. Hence, the website gives the visitor the feeling of visiting a very interactive blog with many entries, comments and

social networking platforms. Since Kaisus Lappland is a recently established company that offers tour operating activities in Lapland, the content of the blog entries as well as the content in other pages are basically about Lapland: nature, culture, tradition, climate, way of life and activities. It focuses on presenting what the destination offers and thus arouses the targeted customers' interest to visit the destination.

The blog appears to be an important part of the company's website as its homepage is directed straight to the blog page. Blog entries are posted by the company with the real-time content. Images are used to accompany the text in each entry to enhance the information transmission. Readers can leave their comments under each entry; their name and email address are required to complete this function. Reader's comments are visible on the website and accessible to other readers. Besides, there is also a possibility for email subscription if readers would like to be notified by email of new comments – a form of Newsletter. In addition, "Like", "Tweet", "g+1", "Pin it" and "Email" buttons available under each blog entry for readers to click on to share, like and recommend the content. By this supportive and interactive form of communication, the company's blog inspires potential customers to come and visit the destination.

Besides the blog part, the website also includes an introduction about Kaisus Lappland, a gallery of photos, contact page and detail information pages of different program packages available for the current year 2014. With the personal photos and information of real life activities as well as the combined use of text and images, the website in generally can help potential customers obtain information and inspire travel.

In addition, the website features social networking sites including Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, RSS and YouTube. There are links from the website to these social platforms. Besides, the interfaces of the company's Facebook and Instagram page are embedded directly on the website, making it visible for the visitors right on the company's website what are happening on these company's social pages. Thus, the photos posted and the number of followers and "like", for example, can inspire readers to go to the company's Facebook and Instagram page to check out more and interact

with the company and other users if interested. Even though the company is found to communicate on different social networking platforms, it is especially active only on Facebook and Instagram. To this extent, it can be concluded that Kaisus Lappland is using social networking sites to communicate, inspire and interact with potential tourists in order to support their tourist experience, especially for the pre-phase experience.

As for RSS feed and YouTube, these links are found to be error thus these functions do not work when clicked on. However, an internal "search box" is available on the website to help the users find easier and quicker the information content that they want to look for. This function can support the information searching process of the users.

Regarding online reservation, there is no complete online reservation system on the website. However, it is possible for the users to send an offer request through the "Kontakt & Impressum" [contact] page. The company will then contact the users by email. Hence, it is possible for potential customers to make the reservation online by emailing.

Video is not available on the company's website. However, the information examination on other online sources found one retweeted video by Kaisus Lappland on Twitter (https://twitter.com/KaisusLappland). The video is made by a tourism destination management in Rovaniemi with the content relevant to the business line of Kaisus Lapland. The video features winter tourism activities in Rovaniemi such as snow mobile excursion and northern light hunting. Hence, with the video retweeted on its Twitter page, the company helps inspire and enhance the pre-phase virtual experience for potential tourists on this social platform.

The website of Kaisus Lappland utilizes very well the interactivity and collaboration characteristics of web 2.0 technology with weblog and social networking site features. Thus, it supports and enhances the pre-phase experience for potential tourists through information obtaining and travel inspiration. Nevertheless, the website is also found to be cross-platform with the available version for mobile devices. With this feature, the company also supports the users accessing the website through mobile devices such as

tablets or smartphones. A summary of the QCA result of the company's website and other related online sources is presented in Table 9.

Table 9. QCA of Kaisus Lappland Website & Related Online Sources

QCA Results of Kaisus Lappland website & related online sources					
Interactive & Cross-platform Websites	**Online Reservation**	**Virtual Travel Community**	**Social Networking Site**	**Weblog**	**Video**
Interactive: Yes + Web 2.0, WordPress CMS + Information obtaining (text, photo, blog, social networking platforms) + Interactive communication & travel inspiration (blog post & comments) + Search box for internal content + Email subscription for blog's update (Newsletter) + RSS feed (but link doesn't work) + "Like", "Tweet", "g+1", "Pin it", "Email" button under each blog entry **Cross-platform: Yes** + Mobile version	**Yes** *(not a complete reservation system)* + Via "Kontakt & Impressum" page: possible to send request for offers available on website	**No**	**Yes** + Facebook: → Facebook page's interface embedded on website & logo link (opened in a new window) + Instagram: → Instagram page's interface embedded on website & logo link (opened in new window) + Pinterest → logo link, opened in a new window + Twitter → logo link, opened in a new window	**Yes** + Embedded on website, homepage of the website + Entries posted by company, possibility for readers to leave comments after each entry (reader's email & name are required before sending comments), possibility for readers to be notified of new comments via email	**Yes** *(not on own website)* + One retweeted video of Lapland Safaris on Twitter page - YouTube's logo (supposed to function as a link to YouTube site, but link doesn't work)
Review Site	**Mobile Application**	**Virtual Reality & Augmented Reality**	**Games & Gamification**	**Recommender System**	**Other Technologies**
No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 9 shows that the categories of virtual travel community, review site, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality, games and gamification, recommender system as well as other technologies were not available during the examination of the company's website and other related online sources. Thus, the revelation of practices and perception of the company regarding these themes are unknown during the QCA process. However, as for the review site, the company is a newly-established one so it might be possible that this theme has not been important so far.

On the other hand, the company's practice of an interactive website using the WordPress CMS, which is appropriate for web 2.0 technologies, shows that it is very well-aware of the recent development in advanced web technology. In addition, the company also perceives very well the necessity to have a suitable website platform as according to the advancement in web

technology and as according to the need of the company's business. Kaisus Lappland is a recently-established independent tour operator, so choosing a blogging system website to deliver information and inspire travel is totally fitting. Besides, the availability of the mobile version reveals that the company is well-aware of the ubiquitous use of mobile devices and the increasing need of consumers to surf the Internet with tablets and smartphones in addition to computers.

The company's practice of the weblog reveals its awareness of the advantages that blog can bring about for both tourist and service provider. Blog is an important source in tourism for travel information, suggestion and especially for travel inspiration for potential customers (Sigala 2007, 2). As for Kaisus Lappland, the "comment" and "newsletter" options help the company to gather feedback from customers, keep them up-to-date and maintain a relationship with them.

The company's practice of ubiquitous social networking sites reveals its awareness regarding the popularity as well as the powerful impact of social networking sites on users nowadays. It understands that social networking platforms are where most consumers are today, so being present and ready for consumers on these platforms is necessary, especially during the consideration and pre-phase of a purchase or an adventure (Lecinski 2011, 50). Besides, the company's active engagement on the two most popular platforms of Facebook and Twitter shows that it is well-aware of the current tendency of social networking sites nowadays.

A complete online reservation system on the company's own website is not available. Besides, the possibility to make an online reservation through third-party website is also not available. This fact shows that the company is not well-aware of the increasing demand from the consumers regarding online reservation and the pre-phase experience enhancement of the system.

As regarding video, the only retweeted video found on the company's Twitter page reveals somehow its awareness of the impact that the video can have on consumers. However, the company does not have its own video made to communicate with potential customers. Besides, YouTube's logo is available

on the website and supposed to work as a link to videos on YouTube site; however, the link displays only error message. Blog is an important part of the company's website but the company does not combine video to any of its blog entry. Video blogging (Tussyadiah–Fesenmaier 2009, 26) is an efficient way to inspire potential tourists with virtual pre-phase travel experience and people today tend to watch tourism-related videos more than ever (Google 2013, 3). However, video is not found anywhere on the company's website. It can be understood that the company has limited awareness of the increasing importance, popularity and strong influence of video on consumers today. The overall result of Kaisus Lappland is presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Overall Result of Kaisus Lappland

Overall Result of Kaisus Lappland		
	Practices	**Perception**
1	Interactive & Cross-platform Website	- Very well-aware of the recent development in advanced web technology (WordPress CMS) and the necessity to have a suitable website platform (according to the advancement in web technology and the need of the company's business) - Well-aware of the ubiquitous use of mobile devices and the increasing need of consumers (surf the internet with tablets and smartphones in addition to computers)
2	Online Reservation (*only by resquest form*)	Not well-aware of the increasing demand (no complete online reservation system), not aware of its benefit for customers (pre-phase tourist experience enhancement)
3	Social Networking Site	Aware of its popularity and powerful impact, understand the necessity of being present and ready for consumers (present in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest), aware of the current tendency of these platforms (actively engaged on Facebook & Twitter)
4	Weblog	Awareness of its advantage for tourist (information, travel suggestion and inspiration) and for service provider (gather feedback, keep customer up-to-date, maintain customer relationship)
5	Video (*only one retweeted on Twitter*)	Awareness somehow of its impact on consumers (one retweeted video), limited awareness of its increasing importance, popularity and strong influence on consumers today

3.3.4 Safartica

Safartica is a full service safari house and destination management company in Rovaniemi and Ylläs in Finnish Lapland. The company provides all-year round program activities. (Safartica Facebook page 2014). Safartica has

been in operation since 2002 (YTJ 2014). For this analysis, the author visited thoroughly the website of Safartica as well as other online sources in August and September 2014. All information was examined as according to the coding categories in the Table 3.

The website of Safartica is very informative regarding the program packages that the company offers. It uses images to illustrate for different packages and package information is explained further with text. Since Safartica operates its business in two different destinations, the website is full of program packages which are presented in both "homepage" and "safaris in Lapland" page. Besides, some accommodations in Lapland are also offered on the website. Indeed, the website might give the visitor the feeling as if it was mainly utilized to present the packages that the company offers. The website also provides extensive Lapland-related information by direct text on its website and links to other websites. The utilization of web 2.0 technologies makes Safartica website an interactive one. There are logo links which lead to the company's social networking platforms, Google map, Google+ and link to give feedback. However, the "Google+" logo link is opened to "Google map" instead and the "give feedback" link does not exist when being clicked on. The Twitter page interface is also embedded on the website.

In general, the website of Safartica, as being interactive and informative, can support potential customers in obtaining travel information and travel planning by text, photos, information found from linked websites, detail program packages offered as well as information obtaining from social networking sites. Remarkably, the active engagement of the company on social networking platforms with numerous photos, posts and many of other interactions can positively inspire travel for the followers. The website of Safartica is also cross-platform when having a mobile version available for visitors to browse by tablets and smartphones.

Besides the positive features, the navigation of the website, on the other hand, is found somehow confusing, especially the navigation to the program packages offered in "homepage" menu and "safaris in Lapland" page menu. In these both menus, program packages can be found. However, there are many different package layers behind each menu as well as the presentation,

the number and kinds of packages are different. For example, the "homepage" menu presents "Rovaniemi New Year", "Christmas in Rovaniemi", "Summer safaris in Rovaniemi", "Rovaniemi autumn safaris" packages and the two destinations of Rovaniemi and Ylläs. After each of these packages, there are also many different packages behind to choose from before visitors can actually reach the package detail information. As for the "Safaris in Lapland" menu, it presents many different packages in Rovaniemi and Ylläs of which each package consists of many further sub-packages before visitors can reach the final information needed. This, at the same time, means that the visitors have to do at least three clicks in order to arrive to the page where there is actual detail information of an offer. This "there click" feature is not recommended for the sake of website quality, online service and customer satisfaction as discussed in the literature review part. In addition, the way of presenting the menu is over-whelming because it uses the box-shape to present each package and thus the page is filled with boxes due to the numerous packages offered. As a result, it can give the visitors the feeling of being over-whelmed of too many "similar" program packages which can be found from different places on the website. The visitors can easily be confused and lost among packages because they might not know where they actually are on the website and whether they were in the right place to find all the available offers. Thus, the confusing navigation and over-whelming package menu design could reduce the pre-phase online experience of potential customers.

As for online reservation, there is no complete online reservation system on Safartica website. It is only possible to send an offer request via the "Book Now" button. This button is available on the website's footer and on the detail information page of each offer. When receiving the request, the company will contact the customer either by telephone or email to proceed with the reservation. Thus, it is only possible for potential customers to complete the reservation online through email corresponding with the company.

Safartica is actively engaged on social networking platforms. It presents on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and Instagram, and is especially active and engaged on Twitter and Facebook. Logo links to the company's pages on

these platforms are available on the company website and are opened in a new window when being clicked on. Besides, the interface of the company's Twitter page is also embedded on the company's website. Regarding its Facebook page, the company is actively communicating and engaging with different Facebook menus. In the timeline, Safartica posts entries almost daily and sometimes even several entries per day. It communicates in real time with its followers what are actually happening with its business activities and in the destinations. Announcement of news and special events are also made here. Numerous photos related to its customers and the company's activities are shared on Facebook page. Besides, Safartica usually shares links to other sources such as videos and pages. The company reacts quickly to the followers' comments to its posts. In the about menu, it shows the real-time opening hour, which helps the users on Facebook know if in real time when the users are online, the company's office is open or not. This would support the customers if they intend to contact the company at least by phone. Google map is also embedded in about menu. Facebook review menu and "App" menu are also available.

In the "App" menu, three different applications for Facebook: Facebook App for "TripAdvisor Traveller Reviews", "Twitter" App and "Book now" App. The first App is a free one, illustrated by the logo of TripAdvisor and dedicated for businesses. It is aimed, most of all, to help companies drive more reviews by giving its previous customers an easy way to submit TripAdvisor review without having to leave Facebook page (TripAdvisor for Business 2014). By adopting this App on its Facebook page, Safartica eases and enhances its customers' post-phase travel regarding the posting and sharing of their tourism experiences. The second App – "Twitter" App – is meant to connect Safartica Twitter account with Facebook in order to share its Tweets with its Facebook friends on Facebook interface. This App helps the company combine its communication and interactions with its customers from two different social platforms. Thus, it would enhance the information obtaining for its potential customers. The "Book now" App is currently announced as unfinished. When this App will be completed, it is utilized for online booking of hotel room through Safartica Facebook page. Therefore, the App supports the potential customers' online reservation process, particularly for hotel

room. As a result, the company's utilization of Facebook applications would support and enhance the tourist experience for customers throughout the entire travel process.

With such utilization, it can be said that Facebook is the main platform where Safartica mainly communicates and interacts with its customers and potential customers. Hence, Facebook is the most important online communication channel that the company uses to support and enhance the experience for its customers throughout the travel process. Other platforms such as Twitter, Flickr and Instagram are mainly used for the pre-phase travel inspiration and post-phase travel experiences sharing.

Regarding video, Safartica has its own official video of year 2014 posted on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0nDmF-tcGU) and shared on its Twitter and Facebook pages. The video features generally the process of the program packages offered, starting from picking up the customers at the Rovaniemi airport, receiving the customers at the company's office, customer preparation (putting on the gears) for going on safaris and different safaris activities in nature in the winter time. The activities featured in the video include the snowmobiling, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, ice-fishing, husky riding and traditional Finnish meal. Besides, the company also has a YouTube channel where several other videos are posted such as Safartica husky on ice and Safartica day in Sampo ice breaker. However, the number of views to these videos is only a few and there is no comment from the viewers. In addition, there are also YouTube and Vimeo videos of other people and companies retweeted and shared on Safartica Twitter and Facebook pages. The information and link regarding the company's videos posted on YouTube are, however, not mentioned at all on the company's website. To this extent, Safartica chooses to combine only its social networking platforms with video in order to communicate and inspire travel for potential customers.

Reviews for Safartica are available on TripAdvisor review website. The link to these reviews is available on the company website with TripAdvisor logo. The link is opened in a new window when being clicked on. However, these reviews are dedicated for "Safartica Ylläs – Day Tours" only. Besides, the

company also has the "TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence" year "2014 winner" presented on its website. This certificate also functions as the link to "Safartica Ylläs – Day Tours" TripAdvisor reviews. This fact proves that the company receives mostly positive reviews. As TripAdvisor is one of the most influential review website nowadays, the fact that the company posted its Certificate of Excellence on its websites can increase positively the credit of the company in potential customers and thus support the customers' pre-phase experience in information search and decision making. Besides TripAdvisor reviews, Facebook reviews are also available on the company's Facebook page. In addition, Foursquare reviews are also found and they are linked from Facebook page. A summary of the QCA result of the company's website and other related online sources is presented in Table 11.

Table 11. QCA of Safartica Website & Related Online Sources

QCA Results of Safartica website & related online sources					
Interactive & Cross-platform Websites	Online Reservation	Virtual Travel Community	Social Networking Site	Weblog	Video
Interactive: Yes + Web 2.0 + Information obtaining - very informative (text, photo, links to other related websites, social networking platforms, Google map) + Traveling planning (detail program packages, Lapland information) + Traveling inspiration (actively engaged in social networking platforms) - Confusing navigation (confusing safaris menu between "homepage" & "Safaris in Lapland" page → easily to be lost & confused) - Over-whelming & confusing package menu design - Several clicks to reach actual needed information (3 clicks to reach a package from homepage) - Google+ icon but link opens to Google map - "GIVE FEEDBACK" link but doesn't work (linked page doesn't exist) **Cross-platform: Yes** + Mobile version	**Yes** *(not a complete reservation system)* + Via "BOOK NOW" button under each program package information : possible to send a booking request	**No**	**Yes** + Twitter, Facebook, Flickr & Instagram (Logo link to be opened in a new window) + Twitter page's interface embedded on website + Actively engaged in Twitter & Facebook platforms + Actively communicating and engaging with Facebook's menus (Timeline, About, Photo, Reviews & Apps) + Apps (modules) for Facebook page: TripAdvisor Traveler Reviews App, Twitter App, "Book Now" App (unfinished) + Google map embedded in "About" menu (Facebook)	**No**	**Yes** *(not on own website)* + **Own video** (official 2014 video) posted on YouTube & shared on Twitter & Facebook + YouTube own channel (several videos of activities, only few views, no comments) - No YouTube link & logo from website - Own video not posted on own website + Retweeted YouTube video on Twitter page + Others' YouTube & Vimeo videos shared on Facebook page
Review Site	Mobile Application	Virtual Reality & Augmented Reality	Games & Gamification	Recommender System	Other Technologies
Yes + TriAdvisor review: logo link on website (link opens to reviews for Safartica Ylläs - Day Tours) + TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence (2014 Winner) on website + Facebook review + Foursquare review (linked from company's Facebook page)	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**

Table 11 shows that the categories of virtual travel community, weblog, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality, games and gamification, recommender system as well as other technologies were not found during the examination of the company's website and related online sources. Therefore, the revelation of practices and perception of the company regarding these themes are unknown during the QCA process.

On the other hand, the adoption of web 2.0 technologies shows that the company is aware of the necessity to have an interactive website to communicate online. However, the interactions between the users and the website only include the interaction with Google map, links to the company's social networking sites and different "clicks" to learn about the packages. Packages are ready-made and all that the potential customers have to do is to click until finding the actual detail information. An "internal" search box is not available. Hence, the visitors to the website are more or less passive since they can only read the text, see the images and make their decision as according to ready-made packages. The "Book Now" button allows potential customers to send their request to the company. However, the whole interaction cannot be completed in real time since the customers have to wait until the company contacts them by email. In addition, the "Give Feedback" button, which is meant for customers' information and opinion contribution, does not exist when being clicked on. As a result, possible interactivity with the company's website is very limited. Indeed, the website of Safartica is mainly used to present the company's offers, receive an offer request from its potential customers and offer a "shortcut" to Safartica social platforms. Besides, the availability of the mobile version for tablets and smartphones shows that the company is well-aware of the ubiquitous use of mobile devices and the need of consumers to surf the Internet with mobile devices nowadays in addition to computers.

As aforementioned, the website of Safartica is mainly utilized to present all the packages that the company offers. Packages are many since the company operates all-year round and in two different destinations. This means that the company's website is basically aimed for the "selling the packages" purpose. Customer support before sale is very limited, and the

support of after sale does not exist. Despite this "solely selling" purpose and the numerous of packages available, Safartica does not have a complete online reservation system on its website. Furthermore, the company does not offer a possibility to make the reservation online through a third-party website either. To this extent, it reveals that the company is not at all aware of the increasing demand from the consumers regarding the online reservation possibility as well as the pre-phase tourist experience support and enhancement of the online reservation system.

The company's active and engaged practice of ubiquitous social networking sites reveals its high awareness of the popularity and the powerful impact of social networking sites on users. The utilization of Facebook as the main online communication and interaction channel in real time affirms the company's consciousness of the current tendency that Facebook is the most used site among social networking sites (PhoCusWright 2012, according to Minazzi–Lagrosen 2014, 146). Also, the utilization of different Facebook applications speaks for the company's good perception of how to take advantage of this social platform to support and enhance the whole travel process experience for customers. Their active engagement on other platforms (Twitter, Flickr and Instagram) shows its understanding regarding the importance of being actively engaged on social platforms and the fact of "solely being present" is not enough.

The availability of an official video made to communicate the company's business activity shows its awareness of the increasing importance, popularity and strong influence of video on consumers nowadays. The adoption of a YouTube channel to post all the videos reveals the company's consciousness of the strong influence of YouTube video in the travel industry today. The active sharing of other people's videos on the company's social platforms helps reinforce its awareness regarding the matter. However, the fact that the video is not posted or mentioned at all on the company's website affirms its limited communication and interaction through its website. To this point, it can be understood that the company's official website has a less important role to the company's communication with its potential customers.

The company's practice of review site reveals clearly its high awareness of the powerful influence of reviews in tourism industry today. When mentioning about TripAdvisor logo and the Certificate of Excellence – 2014 winner – on its website, the company shows its consciousness of the powerful impact that TripAdvisor has on potentials customers and the tourism industry. The overall result of Safartica is presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Overall Result of Safartica

Overall Result of Safartica		
	Practices	**Perception**
1	Interactive & Cross-platform Website	- Aware of the necessity of web 2.0, passive users (ready-made text, image, packages), limited interactivity ("Book now", error "Give Feedback" link), is a "shortcut" to social networking platforms, less important role to the communication with customers (official video not mentioned on website) - Well-aware of the ubiquitous use of mobile devices and the need of consumers (surf the internet with tablets and smartphones in addition to computers)
2	Online Reservation *(only by resquest form)*	Not at all aware of the increasing demand (no complete online reservation system vs. "solely selling" purpose of numerous packages, not aware of its benefits for customers (pre-phase tourist experience support & enhancement)
3	Social Networking Site	High awareness of its popularity and powerful impact (active & engaged on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram), consciousness of current tendency (Facebook: the most used site → Facebook as the main communication channel), good perception of how to take advantage of Facebook (different Facebook Apps), understanding the importance of being actively engaged & "solely being present" is not enough
4	Video	Aware of its increasing importance, popularity and strong influence (recently official video & older videos, retweeted & shared videos), conscious of strong influence of YouTube (YouTube channel available)
5	Review Site	High awareness of its powerful influence in tourism industry (TripAdvisor & Facebook reviews), consciousness of TripAdvisor powerful impact (logo link & Certificate of Excellence on official website)

3.4 More Insights of Kaisus Lappland from In-depth Interview

The interview was carried out for Kaisus Lappland because it is a recently-established company. The company is at the beginning stage of its business,

it has not yet received any customers and the website is not yet completed (Alatalo 2014). Hence, the data found from the company website and online related sources as analysed earlier may not suffice in comparison to other companies studied. On the other hand, the language used on the website is German so not all information is comprehensible for the author of this study. Thus, an in-depth interview was carried out with the company's owner in order to discover more insights into the matter.

The interview took place on 7 July 2014 and lasted for about 40 minutes. During the interview, the discussion was focused on the topics of Rovaniemi tourism destination, tourist experience, ICTs used in tourism and the company perception of technology enhanced tourist experience. Some core questions of the interview can be found in the Appendix.

The owner of Kaisus Lappland is well aware of the importance of ICTs in tourism. The owner insisted that ICTs play an important role in supporting the company business and their potential customers in the pre and post-phase of the tourist experience. The company realizes its packages by staging the experience process for the customers. (Alatalo 2014.)

As regards Rovaniemi tourism destination, Kaisus Lappland believes that the destination is too engaged with Santa Claus image while there are many potential tourists that do not care for this image. The region should develop its destination to the direction of culture-based tourism since there are many exceptional features in Lappish culture. (Alatalo 2014.)

Kaisus Lappland considers the service and the people to be crucial factors constructing the holistic tourist experience. Besides, the online experience is an important part of the tourist experience nowadays. In the case of Kaisus Lapland, this is especially pivotal. This fact explains the company's adoption of the blog-page content website. With the content offered, the company aims to arouse people' interest and inspire them to travel. The online experience that Kaisus Lappland offers through its blog is an important part forming the pre-phase tourist experience for the potential customers. In addition, the online experience is also important in the post-phase experience when the customers share their experience through the company website

and related social platforms. This post-phase experience also helps them prepare for other trips in the future. (Alatalo 2014.)

According to Kaisus Lappland, ICTs is an "important part of work" that exists everywhere. In tourism, the fact that a company is not present on the Internet means that it does not exist. It is important for Kaisus Lappland to have an attractive web-presence and offer inspiring web-content of their services to potential customers. The content posted on the website plays an important role in changing the people' feeling about Kaisus Lappland and the destination and thus enhance their pre-phase experience of the possible trip. In order to complete the company website, Kaisus Lappland is finalizing a simple online reservation system with instructions for its potential customers. Through the reservation system, potential customers are informed about the details of the package offered with the rich content, terms and conditions, the possibility to ask for more information, order the package and pay directly online in real time. Online payment is enabled with PayPal and different credit card systems. This complete online reservation system supports the pre-phase experience for potential customers. In addition, Kaisus Lappland plans to adopt TripAdvisor as soon as possible as the main review platform. It is also possible for the customers to give feedbacks and recommendations directly on the company website. In doing so, the company supports and enhance the post-phase experience for the customers. Besides, the company plans to utilize a portable photo-printer to serve the customers along the trip so that they can print out photos related to the trip at any time to add to the beforehand-provided "journal book". This fact could enhance the on-site experience for the customers and also the post-phase when the customers share the photos and experience about the trip. (Alatalo 2014.)

Kaisus Lappland considers the company utilization of the WordPress content website, social media platforms, own email system, the upcoming web shop and TripAdvisor review platform the integration of ICTs into the company business. With these applications, Kaisus Lappland supports and enhances especially the pre and post-phase experience for the customers. According to the owner, ICTs help enhance the experience for tourists by "adding something on top of the tourist experience". (Alatalo 2014.)

To sum up, the practice of experience staging by Kaisus Lappland corresponds to the concept of staging experience presented by Pine and Gilmore. In the company's context of offering culture-based tourism, this method allows the company to engage the customers with the cultural activities which might lead to the escapist experience for the customers. Besides, the company is well-aware of the advantages of ICTs in tourism, has good knowledge regarding ICTs and learns from real-life example of ICTs utilization in tourism. ICTs help to create better products and services as well as the credibility online by good content, proper language and exact information on the company website and other social platforms. However, Kaisus Lappland believes that it is not worth it to integrate too much technology into the packages offered because the target customer group of the company is people of over 50 years of age who are not so well-acquainted with ICTs. Nevertheless, ICTs help make better availability of the company to its potential customers and enhance the pre and post-phase experience for the customers. (Alatalo 2014.) The additional findings of Kaisus Lappland through the interview are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Kaisus Lappland In-depth Interview Findings

Theme	Practice	Perception
Online Reservation	Upcoming web shop with simple complete online reservation system (book & pay in real time)	Well-aware of the increasing demand, understand the importance of user-friendly system
Review Site	Upcoming own feedback system through website, as-soon-as-possible TripAdvisor	High awareness of the powerful impacts of TripAdvisor & reviews
Other Technologies	The portable photo-printer for on-site use along the trip	Awareness of the advantage of ICTs (added-values & enhance the on-site & post-phase experience)

3.5 Empirical Finding Summary

3.5.1 The Most Utilized Cutting-edge ICTs & Companies' Perceptions

Table 14 summarizes the practices reflected through the websites and related online sources of tourism companies studied in utilizing technology to enhance the experience for tourists. In this summary, the theme "interactive

and cross-platform website" is divided into two themes of "interactive website" and "cross-platform website".

Table 14. Summary of Practices

Themes practiced	Arctic Lifestyle	Arctic Snow Hotel	Kaisus Lappland	Safartica
Interactive website	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cross-platform Website	No	No	Yes	Yes
Online Reservation	Yes*	Yes	Yes**	Yes*
Virtual Travel Community	No	No	No	No
Social Networking Site	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Weblog	No	No	Yes	No
Video	Yes	Yes	Yes***	Yes
Review Site	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes
Mobile Application	No	No	No	No
VR & AR	No	No	No	No
Games & Gamification	Yes	No	No	No
Recommender System	No	No	No	No
Other Technologies	Yes	Yes	No**	No

Note: Yes* =   Not a complete reservation system, only possible to place an order online

Yes** =   So far only possible to place an order online but simple complete online reservation system coming soon

Yes*** =   Not own video & not found on own website

No*   =   Not available so far but feedback on own website & TripAdvisor utilization as soon as possible

No** =   Not available so far but coming soon

The practices of the companies reveal their perception regarding the topic studied. Table 14 shows that the themes of interactive website, social networking site, review site and video are practiced by almost all the companies studied. Even though there are differences in how each company practices these themes, it speaks for their well-awareness of the advanced technology of web 2.0, the popularity and powerful impact of social networking sites and review sites as well as the increasing importance and strong influence of video regarding the enhancement of the experience for tourists throughout the travel journey.

The theme of online reservation is mostly practiced by all companies studied with the mere possibility of placing an order online. There is only 1 out of 4 companies studied that adopts the complete online reservation system. This

fact shows that the companies are mostly not aware of the increasing demand of customers regarding the possibility to both reserving and paying for the order completely online in real time. Besides, it also reveals that the companies are not aware of the pre-phase tourist experience support and enhancement of the online reservation system.

The theme of cross-platform website is practiced by 2 out of 4 companies studied. This means that only half of the companies are aware of the ubiquitous use of mobile devices and the increasing need of the consumers to surf the Internet with tablets and smartphones in addition to computers as pointed out in the theoretical review. Hence, by having a cross-platform website, the company can better enhance the overall experience for tourists.

The theme of other technologies is practiced to some extent by 2 out of 4 companies studied. The practices are focused mainly on the on-site phase of the travel journey. Besides, 1 company also plans to integrate ICTs of a small scale into the on-site phase of the service offered. This speaks for the companies' awareness regarding the advantage such as added-values that advanced ICTs can bring about to the customers during the on-site phase.

The theme of weblog is practiced only by 1 out of 4 companies studied. This fact speaks for the practiced company's awareness regarding the advantages of the weblog in supporting and enhancing the experience for tourists. On the other hand, it also reveals that most of the companies studied are not aware of the matter.

Likewise, the theme of games and gamification is practiced to some extent only by 1 out of 4 companies studied. The way the company applied this theme to its offered services reveals its creativeness and innovativeness as well as the awareness of enhancement advantage to the overall tourist experience of game and gamification. This finding also shows the unawareness of the other companies studied regarding the matter.

Finally, the themes of virtual travel community, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality as well as recommender system are not practiced by any of the companies studied. The most important findings of the practices and perceptions on technology enhanced tourist experience of

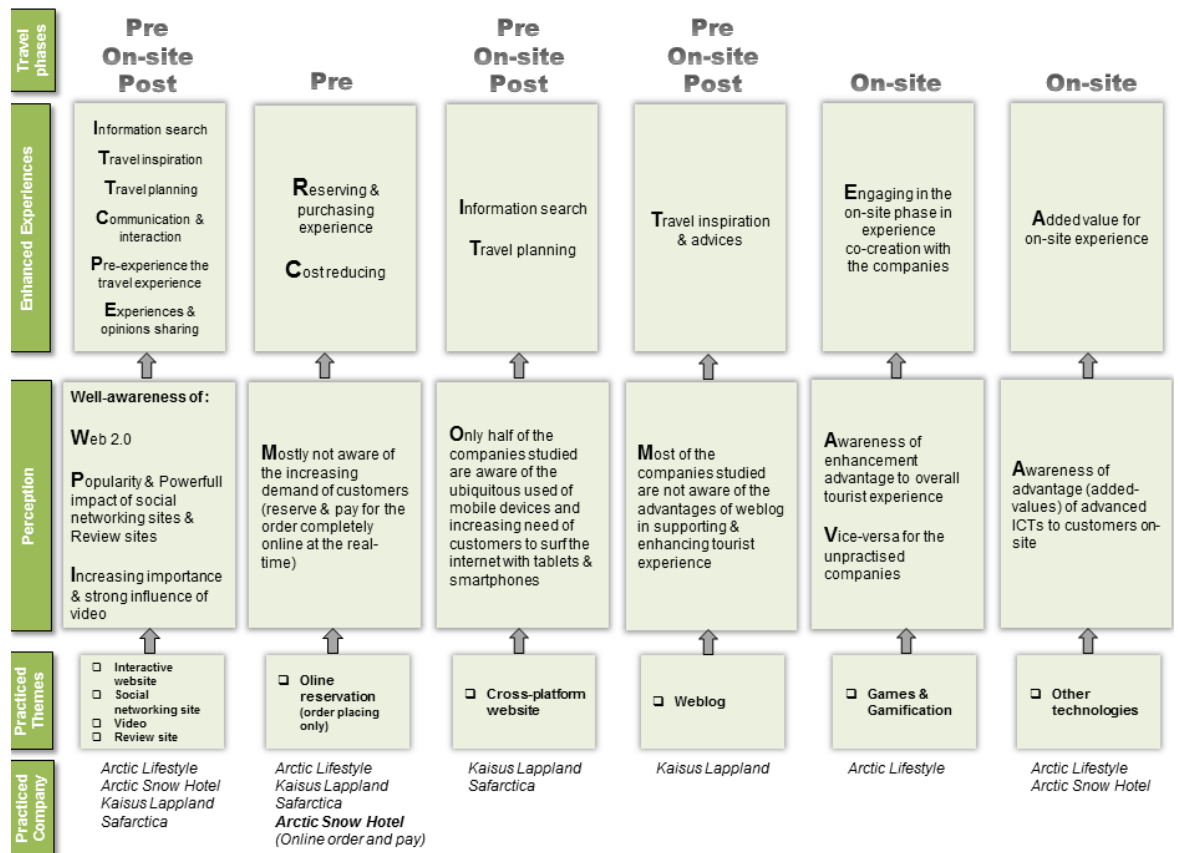the studied companies reflected through their websites and related online sources are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Practices & Perceptions Result Summary

3.5.2 Finding Discussion

The literature review of this thesis has discussed the concept of staging an experience proposed by Pine and Gilmore. In the experience economy, companies must experientialize their product and services in different stages in order to engage an individual with rich sensations so that to create a memorable experience for the guest. Hence, it can be understood from the viewpoint of Pine and Gilmore that the tourist experience is constructed by different stages of the experientialized product and services. In addition, the three phases – pre, on-site and post – of the tourist experience formation process have been utilized throughout the discussion in this thesis. Indeed, the three phase concept corresponds to the staging concept of Pine and Gilmore. The pre, on-site and post phases of the tourist experience formation process can be considered as the main stages in the process of staging an experience of which each main stage can consist of other sub-stages.

The aim of staging an experience is to bring about a memorable experience for the guest. Hence, in creating the experience, every stage in the process should be directed towards the memorable experience aim. Taking the Experience Pyramid model of Tarssanen and Kylänen into account, the most memorable experience should reach the "mental" level of the experience, which is the highest level of the experience pyramid that can result in changes in one's own life as a human being. In order to reach such level, Tarssanen and Kylänen proposed that all six experience elements of individuality, authenticity, story, multi-sensory perception, contrast and perception should be involved and combined in an optimal way. At this point, the role of ICTs is revealed. Indeed, ICTs bring about positive influences to support and enhance each and every experience element in different stages of the experience formation process as analyzed and discussed throughout this thesis in both theoretical and empirical parts.

For example, the individuality element of the experience, which refers to the uniqueness of the experience that the product brings to customer, can be enhanced by games and gamification concept as in the case of game-like safaris offered by Arctic Lifestyle. The gamified activity engages the participants in a personal way and creates a unique experience for the tourist. The authenticity element, which relates to the credibility of the product, can be enhanced by the website presence with good content, proper language and exact information as discussed in Kaisus Lappland case. The story element, which links the experience with reality, can be enhanced by tools such as weblog and video featuring different real life stories as practiced by Kaisus Lappland and other companies studied. The element of multi-sensory perception, which means that the product should be designed, produced and offered in such a way that the customer could experience with as many of the senses as possible, can be enhanced by tools such as video, virtual reality and augmented reality where tourist can experience the tourism product by hearing, seeing and feeling. The element of contrast, which refers to the fact that the product should offer the customer a different experience from everyday routines, can be enhanced by technology as a core tourism product per se as in the case of the sleeping experience in the snow hotel. Sleeping in a room covered with ice and snow is indeed once in a life time

experience. Finally, the element of interaction, which represents the interaction among the customer, other participants and the company, can be clearly enhanced with tools such as interactive website and social networking sites as discussed in the case of all companies studied.

As a result, with the integration of ICTs to the experientialized tourism product by staging the experience process, the overall tourist experience can be enhanced to different levels. The utmost technology enhanced tourist experience can be achieved when ICTs can optimally enhance every experience element in every stage of the tourism product so that the tourist can obtain the mental level of the experience. In order to do so, in the range of this thesis's context, the literature review suggests that the tourism companies should integrate and utilize all the cutting-edges ICTs themes as discussed. Indeed, it would be ideal if the tourism companies could realize such practice. In reality, everything would highly depend on the specific context of each company such as the business aim and investment capacity. The issues such as mobile applications, virtual reality and augmented reality technologies require high investment level. In the context of the micro and small tourism companies studied, these technologies might sound impracticable and unsuitable. After all, ICTs are efficient but expensive tools.

3.5.3 Smart Tourism Destination as an Option for Tourism Development

The concept "Smart Tourism Destination" (STD) emerges from the development of Smart City which represents an environment where ICTs are embedded within the city (Buhalis–Amaranggana 2014, 553–554). In this environment, ICTs synergize with social components to improve the quality of life of citizens and at the same time improve services efficiency in the city such as optimizing the use of energy (Vicini–Bellini–Sanna 2012, 56). Cohen (2012, according to Buhalis–Amaranggana 2014, 556) has defined six indicators of the smartness dimensions including Smart Government, Smart Environment, Smart Mobility, Smart Economy, Smart People and Smart Living which serve as a tool to support the development of Smart City strategies and tracking its progress. Therefore, Smart City is considered socially and environmentally sustainable (Vicini et al. 2012, 56). As a result, the development of Smart City could also encourage the development of

STD since it can at the same time generate added-values to tourists visiting the city. For example, tourists can acquire real-time information access on the public transportation network. (Buhalis–Amaranggana 2014, 554.)

According to Buhalis and Amaranggana (2014), the fact that technology is embedded on all organizations and entities allows destinations to "exploit synergies between the ubiquitous sensing technology and their social components to support the enrichment of tourist experiences". Therefore, tourism destinations could increase their competitiveness level by applying the smartness concept to meet the needs of tourists throughout their travel process. (Buhalis–Amaranggana 2014, 553.) These authors suggested that the ultimate aim of STD is to enhance tourism experience and to improve the effectiveness of resource management so that to maximise the destination competitiveness and consumer's satisfaction in a sustainable manner (Buhalis–Amaranggana 2014, 557). Table 15 explains further about the tourism applications in STD.

Table 15. Tourism Applications in Smart Tourism Destination (Buhalis–Amaranggana 2014, 557)

Tourism Applications in Smart Tourism Destinations	Utility Function	Destination Components	Smart Tourism Destination Dimensions
Augmented Reality enables visitors to experience digital recreation of tourism sites and time travel (Chillon 2012, according to Buhalis 2014, 559)	Interpretation	Attractions	Smart people, Smart mobility
Vehicle tracking system provides a real-time information of transport network and could be distributed to end-user devices (Arup 2010, according to Buhalis 2014, 559)	Planning	Accessibility	Smart living, Smart mobility
Hotel should be able to predict energy demand for building and perform energy audits based on their environment management (Metric System 2013, according to Buhalis 2014, 559)	Sustainability	Amenities	Smart environment

A multi-language application that provides range of services such as electronic travel guide which also offers numbers of available packages for tourists (Jordan 2011, according to Buhalis 2014, 559)	Guidance	Available packages	Smart people, Smart mobility
Near Field Communication (NFC) tags and QR codes to access information about nearby points of interest through mobile devices (GSMA 2012, according to Buhalis 2014, 559)	Proximity marketing	Activities	Smart mobility
Tourists are able to register their complaints through a Complaints Management System supported by various ICT channels such as SMS or mobile applications which could directly route them to appropriate officials (Metric Stream 2013, according to Buhalis 2014, 559)	Feedback	Ancillaries	Smart living

Therefore, becoming a smart destination would be an excellent option for tourism development of a destination. As for Rovaniemi, this would be an optimal solution to some major challenges that the destination is facing.

In the first place, seasonality is the main characteristic of Rovaniemi tourism (Rovaniemi Tourism Strategy 2007, 4) which means that the tourism industry in Rovaniemi would depend highly on nature and weather conditions. It would be difficult for dependent touristic service providers to be active or proactive, to plan their business and to make decision precisely. For example, all of the snowmobiling tours scheduled for the month of November would have to be cancelled if the snow did not come in time. It would directly affect the companies such as Safartica and Arctic Lifestyle whose major packages are winter safaris. Worst of all, Arctic Snow Hotel would be seriously affected if the snow came too late and the winter period were shortened since the business of this company is entirely dependent on the snow and winter. Therefore, a solution to be independent from nature and weather conditions would be an ideal answer to seasonality. Building Rovaniemi to become a smart destination would be an excellent option in this case. Tourism in

Rovaniemi would always depend mainly on winter and snow; however, if becoming a smart destination, which means that more advanced ICTs would be utilized for the sake of tourism development, the impact of unwanted nature and weather conditions would be reduced. For instance, an artificial snow park could be built to use for snow-based activities if the real snow did not come in time. Besides, smart destination with cutting-edge ICTs could be designed in order to offer as a core tourism product with technologies being the core part of the experience (Neuhofer et al. 2013a, 7). According to Rovaniemi tourism strategy set until 2016, tourism product development should focus on the low seasons of spring, summer and autumn (Rovaniemi Tourism Strategy, 5). Besides, Lapland's Tourism Strategy 2011–2014 also pointed out that developing year-round tourism activity is one of the most important development themes in the region (Lapland's Tourism Strategy 2011–2014, 64). Hence, having ICTs as the core of the experience would facilitate the development of other supplementary products accordingly in order to form new creative tourism products. As a result, tourism companies in Rovaniemi, including those companies studied, would have year-round customers and thus boost up the tourism industry in Rovaniemi as a whole.

Secondly, becoming a smart destination would offer a unique creative image to Rovaniemi tourism destination. Nowadays, Rovaniemi is having some distinctive strong images such as the official hometown of Santa Claus, Christmas destination, winter destination and town in the heart of pure nature (Rovaniemi Tourism Strategy 2007, 4; Rovaniemi Marketing & Tourism Ltd. 2013, 3). The added "smart" image would distinguish and enhance the Rovaniemi image as a whole on national and international levels.

Furthermore, the smart destination image would be an excellent unique competitive advantage for Rovaniemi tourism in particular and Lapland tourism in general. As a matter of fact, the closest competitors in the tourism industry of Finland are Sweden and Norway. As for the provincial level, the closest competitors of Lapland tourism are Northern Norway and Northern Sweden. (Lapland Tourism Strategy 2011-2014, 9.) Due to the natural similarities of geography and climate as well as cultural similarities such as reindeer herding and Sami culture, these two competitors of Lapland offer

almost the same products such as challenging winter activities, dog sledding, snowmobiling and hunting for Northern Lights as well as Sami culture (NordNorge 2014; VisitSweden 2014). Therefore, an outstanding unique image is needed to differentiate Finnish Lapland destination so that it can stand out from all its competitors. Smart destination could be an excellent choice. This would add a unique selling point for Rovaniemi tourism companies regarding their products and services. Rovaniemi could start to implement this concept as an example for other destinations in Lapland. The destination should combine the advanced ICTs with its existing traditional tourism products in all levels of business operation to create added values and enhance the entire tourist experience for visitors. In doing so, it would be possible for Rovaniemi and Lapland to compete against similar destinations, attract more tourists and increase its international market share.

Summing up, smart destination would be an optimal option for the development of the tourism industry in Rovaniemi. It offers an intelligent solution to be independent and active when it comes to seasonality; it allows the development of creative tourism products for all year-round with ICTs being the core or the supplementary element of the experience; and it enhances the destination's image as well as offer unique competitive advantage for Rovaniemi tourism on national and international levels. According to Lapland's Tourism Strategy 2011-2014, the region of Lapland is making little use of the Internet and technologies for its tourism development (Lapland's Tourism Strategy 2011-2014, 42). Certainly, utilizing technologies in tourism development can be realized in different levels. Building a destination to become a smart destination could be considered to be in the utmost level of ICTs utilization. In the case of Rovaniemi, it should always be taken into account that the current existing products are vital for its tourism which identify Rovaniemi destination in Finland and abroad. Therefore, when utilizing ICTs for the sake of tourism development, it should be planned, designed, organized and integrated in a way to support and enhance currents tourism situation in order to add value and enhance the entire tourist experience for visitors. The smart destination image should improve and enrich the Rovaniemi tourism image in a positive way but not replace or take away any good image that Rovaniemi already has.

4 CONCLUSION

ICTs have been transforming the tourist experience drastically. The development of advanced ICTs has given birth to the new form of tourist experience namely technology enhanced tourist experience where cutting-edged ICTs can enhance the experience throughout the entire travel process. Indeed, technology can be considered the key instrument for the enhancement of the tourist experience since it facilitates and empowers the co-creation between the tourist and the service provider in order to generate added values for them. Hence, it is very important for tourism businesses to understand this phenomenon of technology enhanced tourist experience in order to achieve competitive and efficient business operation.

The main aim of this thesis project was to consider how some micro and small tourism companies in Rovaniemi practice and perceive technology enhanced tourist experience through their websites and related online sources. The thesis focused on the experience aspect of the tourist experience. The purpose was to support the thesis's commissioner – the Foresight Approach to Tourism Product Development project – by providing an overview in terms of the practice and perception of the tourism business in Rovaniemi concerning the topic of technology enhanced tourist experience.

The literature review was richly generated to provide a firm background for the empirical research. The concept of staging an experience, the three phases of the experience formation process and the Experience Pyramid model were used as the main references throughout the thesis. Besides, the main themes of cutting-edge ICTs utilized to enhance the experience for tourists were drawn from the related academic literature. These themes include interactive and cross platform website, online reservation, virtual travel community, social networking site, weblog, video, review site, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality, games and gamification, recommender system as well as other technologies.

The websites of the participating companies and other related online sources were utilized as the main data source for the empirical part. Besides, one in-depth interview was also carried out with one company due to some practical

reasons in order to gather equal data for all participating companies. The method of qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data. The ICTs themes served as the reference and the coding categories for the data analysis. For each company studied, the result tables of the company's practices and perceptions were presented. All the results were summarized and presented in one table as the main findings of this thesis project.

It was found that almost all the companies studied practice and have good perception regarding the issues of interactive website, social networking site, review site and video. They are well-aware of the enhancement advantages of these technologies to the tourist experience throughout the travel process. However, the issue of online reservation is limitedly practiced and perceived by most of the companies with the mere possibility of placing an order online. The issues of cross-platform website, weblog, games and gamification as well as other technologies are practiced and perceived only by 1 or 2 of the companies studied. The issues of virtual travel community, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality as well as recommender system are not practiced by any of the companies studied. This fact might be comprehensible due to the micro and small scale of the companies which can lead to the irrelevance of, for instance, the practice of recommender system. Besides, mobile application, virtual reality and augmented reality might require big investment and practicability. Also, the issue of virtual travel community might be a challenge for the companies because it is basically meant for the travellers but not for the intervention of the travel companies.

This thesis project is the first one in Rovaniemi to study the topic of technology enhanced tourist experience. Therefore, even though it was carried out with a few participating companies, it provides an overview for the commissioner and for any related stakeholder who is interested in examining the tourism businesses in Rovaniemi regarding the matter. The topic of this thesis is very interesting. However, a larger scale research with more participating companies is required in order to achieve a more generalized result regarding the tourism businesses in Rovaniemi. On a larger scale, the method of in-depth interview should also be carried out with all participating companies so that to obtain optimal results regarding the matter.

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APPENDIX

In-depth Interview Questions

1. Could you please give a short introduction about your company?

   o Some questions concerning company's background: culture, goal, vision, operating philosophy, etc.

   o Rovaniemi as a tourism destination in Finnish Lapland

     ▪ What do you say about tourism operating environment in Rovaniemi?

     ▪ Where do you position your company among other similar tourism companies in Rovaniemi or in Finnish Lapland?

2. Tourist experience and the formation of tourist experience

   o What do you say about the holistic tourist experience? (*Suggestions to probe for answers if needed: nature of tourist experience, main elements, influences, outcomes, and so on*)

   o Do you think online experience is a part of holistic tourist experience?

   o In your opinion, what is the process of forming the experience for tourist?

   o Do you think there are different phases of tourist experience?

3. ICTs used in tourism and company's perception regarding technology enhanced tourist experience:

   o What do you say about ICTs?

   o What do you say about the relationship between ICTs and tourism?

   o How important is ICTs to your company and your product?

   o Can you still operate your business without ICTs? If no, then why not?

   o What do you say about your website?

   o Is there any special thing about your website that you would like to share?

   o How did you realize your website?

- What included/employed in your website that reflects the applications of ICTs?

- Can you give some examples, if any, regarding your using ICTs to enhance tourists experience in different visit phases – employed in your website or elsewhere in your company (for instance, in your products when delivering them to your customers on-site)?

- How do you understand the word *"enhance"* or *"enhanced"* in English?

- How do you understand this phrase: "technology enhanced tourist experience"?

- Can you give some examples for this so that you could explain it in a practical way?

- Do you know other examples in real life of this "technology enhanced tourist experience" both in Finland and abroad?

- Do you learn from these examples?

- Please tell me if these following things do ring a bell to you: interactive website, recommender system, virtual reality, augmented reality, social media networks, review website, mobile application, and interactive game?

- Do you think ICTs really help to create better products and services?

- Do you think ICTs can enhance the experience for tourist?

- Is there any possibility for customers to use ICTs when giving feedbacks?

- Which types of feedback is important to your company? For instance, Trip Advisor?