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UTILIZATION OF HUMOR IN A TOURISM SERVICE ENCOUNTER WHEN CREATING A SERVICE EXPERIENCE

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Utilization of humor in a tourism service encounter when creating a service experience

The motivation for this research is to explore how humor is utilized in a tourism service encounter when creating a service experience. The aim of this study is to link an understanding between theory and empirical data, and construct a framework that answers the research questions. The aim is also to increase awareness of how a company can utilize humor in creating a new service. The delimitation has been made by studying one phenomenon, which is the humorous service encounter situation that takes place between the tourists and service personnel. Santa’s Hideout Cabin is the service under scrutiny. This is a new service provided by Ranua Wildlife Park. Ranua Wildlife Park is the case company with whom this project has been done in cooperation with. This research is also part of a TEKES funded project, called HURMOS.

The empirical research has been conducted as a case study. Data consists of interviews, which is a form of qualitative data. Consent of all participants was received prior to the interviews. Two focus group interviews were made, consisting of a total of ten participants, from seven different countries. In addition, four Finnish employees were interviewed. One of the employee interviews was made over phone, as an open interview. The rest of the interviews were semi-structured interviews. All interviews were transcribed, color-coded, and analyzed with a qualitative data analysis.

The theoretical framework composes of a broad literature overview of scientific and academic journals, books and some online sources. Although humor is rather a difficult subject to study, it was possible to grasp an initial understanding of it. Service experience is understood through a model of four experience realms. Service encounter is understood to be the interaction between the customer and service provider. The perspective taken in this research, is the customer’s point of view on the service experience and service encounter situation. A service encounter can be understood to be composed of positive emotions, such as warmth and friendliness during service transactions. In addition, spoken language, non-verbal communication, and socially accepted facial expressions and tones of voices affect service delivery. Time dimension, service experience realms, and the appearance of humor from customers’ point of view are linked together with a framework constructed by the researcher.

The results indicate, that humor appears in the service encounter situations from customers’ point of view, although the customers wish for more humor. Humor in this study appears in the behavior, actions, words, and non-verbal communication of the service personnel. Humor also appears as a smile, a laugh, a joke and funny behavior and the ease of approaching a service personnel. Humor is utilized to ease the customers’ comfort levels during their stay. The theoretical contribution with the constructed framework, is to give a better way of perceiving the linkage between time dimension, different service experience realms, and the role and appearance of humor. This study makes practitioners aware of the existence of humor and the possibility it holds as a tactical tool. Secondly, practitioners realize which factors account for a successful service encounter. Third, the interviews provide honest perspectives that the test customers and employees hold toward the service experience situation. Although, the sample size is rather small, it is possible to generalize, that humor is an important addition that tourism businesses can utilize in their services, to provide a memorable experience for the tourists.

Keywords
Service experience, service encounter, humor, tourism
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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to understand in what ways humor can be utilized in a service encounter situation when creating a service experience. This thesis is conducted as a case study for Ranua Wildlife Park, while scrutinizing the new service, Santa’s Hideout Cabin. This thesis is made in cooperation with a TEKES-funded project called HURMOS. This chapter portrays background information for this research and explains the motive, purpose, and objective of the research. Also, the research questions are outlined in this chapter, followed by key concepts and the methods used.

1.1 Background

This study explores how humor can be utilized in a customer service encounter situation. It further investigates how humor can create a memorable service experience for its customers. The concept of service experience has been researched to some extent (Pine & Gilmore 1999, Helkkula 2010, Aula et. al 2004, Liedes & Ketonen 2004, Perttula 2004, Heikkinen 2004, Rintala 2004). Humor is a new aspect that can be added to a service experience (Ross: 2016 & Evey 2012). Service experience has been researched by characterizing it as phenomenological, process-based, and outcome based (Helkkula 2010), but this research rather understands service experience by grouping it according to Pine & Gilmore’s (1999) four realms of service experience: entertainment, escapist, aesthetic, and educational. This model is important, when it comes to understanding that there are different ways of categorizing service experiences. Later, this model is linked together with humor and the sense of time (beginning, middle, and the end of a service).

Furthermore, humor has been researched in the arena of marketing and advertising to some degree (Spielmann 2014, Cline et al. 2003, Spotts et al. 1997 & Fugate: 1998) and also humor in customer service and customer encounters has been explored (Söderlund & Rosengren 2008, Odekerken-Schroeder et al. 2000, Bergeron & Vachon 2008, van Dolen et al. 2004). However, utilization of humor in a touristic context while producing positive tourist experiences has been researched to modest degree (Pearce 2009, Mitas et al. 2012, Frew 2006, Io 2013). These studies investigate how jokes within tourists and tour guides; team spirit within the tourists; tourists’ emotions;
and tourists’ revisit intentions relate to their positive tourist experiences. Chen et al. (2014) explore how touristic experiences alleviate stress, help detach from work, and create life satisfaction. Chang et al. (2014) explore creative tourism which involves researching tourists’ motivation, experiences, and perceived values and revisit intentions. The aim of this study is to understand more fully the link between humor and a service experience. The approach to this study is unique since international test customers’ views as well as service employees’ perceptions are taken into account, when trying to understand the role of humor in a service experience and service encounter.

The link between smile and service encounter (Lin & Lin 2010) has already been researched. Humor usage and sales encounter has also been researched (Bergeron & 2008). Service experience in a restaurant context has also been researched (Walter et al. 2010). Also tourism and humor has been researched (Frew 2006). However, linking all of these together in one research provides a new perspective. Especially when trying to understand humor, some psychological theories are portrayed to grasp a deeper understanding of the role of humor from theoretical aspect.

The justification for conducting research in the arena of humor in a Finnish business context is something rather new, when we compare the use of humor to be rather widespread in the promotion of US goods and services (Fugate 1998). However, Finnish companies tend to be far behind international tendency when it comes to enjoying work and utilizing humor in sync with business practices (OBS 2015). The literature is lacking a perspective, how humor can be integrated into a service experience and into a service encounter in Finland. Finnish business context offers a fresh cultural perspective.

1.2 Motive of research

This research got its initial idea and topic from a TEKES-funded research project. The project is called HURMOS, with duration from 1.3.2015-31.5.2017. The main idea of HURMOS is aiming to grow understanding and validity of how to utilize humor strategically in Finnish companies. The research has been done for this thesis in cooperation with University of Oulu (HURMOS – project) and with Ranua Wild Life
Park, as the company case study. The idea is also to create and develop new practices and business opportunities, growth and internationalization. (OAMK 2015). The Research partners are University of Oulu (Oulu Business School and Faculty of Education), as well as Oulu University of Applied Sciences (School of Business and Information Management and School of Culture). The company partners are: Ranua Zoo, Kaleva, VirtaAvain, Ponsse, motiMind, Kaleva, Powerpark, Tiedekeskus LUUPPI, Oulun kaupunginteatteri, and Siivittäjä. (OBS 2015: 3).

The reason for conducting scientific research in the field of service experience, service encounter, tourism and humor is to explore and understand how humor can be utilized in service encounter when creating a service experience in a touristic context. Integrating humor into the service can be an important part in service encounter, since for example smiling from the part of service provider can bring better customer satisfaction compared to a neutral worker (Söderlund & Rosengren 2008). One reason, why humor is important in the business context and in the context of services, is that it is a natural stimulus for innovation and creativity (Roos 2015). Also, it is the motive of this research to increase awareness of how a company can utilize humor tactically when developing a new business practice or service, especially in Finnish business context. Finnish companies tend to be far behind global measures when it comes to enjoying work and utilizing humor as part of business practices. (OBS 2015: 3).

Some companies internationally already integrate humor and a chill working environment for their workers, which could be stated to increase the customers’ enjoyment when dining or using the services provided by the company. Hard Rock Café is an example where humor and a chill working atmosphere is already present (Brooks 1999). As well, Söderlund and Rosengren (2008: 552) argue that the smiling worker produces a higher level of customer satisfaction than the neutral service worker, regardless of the sex of the service worker.

Also Taco Bell is using humor in its marketing message, by having a Taco Bell Chihuahua inform the audience, “Yo quiero Taco Bell”. Consumers across U.S. remember and repeat the tagline and keep “Taco Bell” in their minds. It is important for a company to mix its marketing message up; makers of marketing campaigns should understand that jokes get old faster than other messages. When consumers start
finding the jokes annoying, the ads can start to work against the company. For that reason, it is a good idea to launch a flexible campaign that can be easily changed around. Holding on to a theme is important, but not always using the same punch line. (Henderson 2015). Humor plays a role in advertising, although there are risks related with the use of humor. According to Spotts et al. (1997: 17), over 150 billion dollars is invested in national (U.S.) media on a yearly basis, with between 22, 5 - 45 billion dollars aimed to be invested on ads that are intended to be humorous. Although the effect of humor in advertising has been researched, still many advertisers make the decision based on faith. In the study mentioned above, researchers try to understand the appropriate use of humor in advertising, by looking at: the humor mechanisms, the way in which humor relates to the ad or product, and the type of product advertised. From the descriptive results, it can be indicated that many advertisers employ incongruity-based humor in a humor-dominant context (Spotts et al. 1997). The study makes it understood, that that current advertising practices might not be the most effective in terms of advertising performance.

1.3 Objective, purpose and research questions

The main objective of this research is to understand the phenomenon of service encounter situation during a service experience and what role humor plays in it. The intention is to unravel an understanding of the concepts of humor, service encounter, service experience, and tourism, first from a theoretical point of view, and in the empirical part, understand these from a subjective point of view of the test customers. This research aims to answer the main research questions: How is humor utilized in a service encounter situation when creating a service experience? And two of the sub questions:

- How does humor appear in the service encounter from point of view of customers during the service experience?

- What are the key elements of a humorous service encounter that contribute to a successful service experience?
1.4 Key concepts defined

A service in the world of marketing, can be understood as act of serving. Services are described as: intangible, perishable, heterogeneous and simultaneous (Kandampully 2002, Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons 2001, Dawes and Rowley and Zehrer 2009: 334). These aspects of services are not be explained further, since they are the very basics in the world of marketing and should be understood by the reader.

Two English dictionaries (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003 & Webster’s Dictionary, 2001 via Helkkula: 2010) define “experience” as “event,” “process,” “phenomenon,” or “change.” An individual, a community, a nation, or humankind can be the subject of an experience. An experience can be a single event or a process of events. It can be “real” and physical, or “virtual” and observed. A service experience can be understood as phenomenological, process based, or outcome-based according to Helkkula (2011). Service experience can also be seen according to four different realms according to Pine and Gilmore (1999:33). These realms are: entertainment, esthetic, escapist, and educational. A service encounter can be understood as the interaction between the customer and the service provider. Humor is a cognitive and unconscious process. Laughter and smiling are the most obvious indicators of humor experience (which are important in determining the occurrence of humor). (Apte 1985: 14.)

1.5 Research methods

This study is conducted as a case study, in which qualitative data will be gathered, since it is best suited for the needs of this research. Both individual interviews, and focus group interviews are chosen as a method, since these better allows to understand how mostly international customers experience the new service, what opinions they want to share, and how the humor appeared in the services, and what parts of the service need to be developed. Customers need to be given the opportunity to and explain the situation from their point of view (Perrien and Richard 1995). However, quantitative data does not allow customers to express their true feelings about a certain situation, so it is not possible to understand what really happened in a situation, without
the use of qualitative data (Perrien et al. 1994.) Deeper justification for methods chosen are explained in the methodology chapter.

1.6 Structure of the study

In chapter one, introduction to the research is made, which includes: the background of the research, the motive behind the research, the purpose and portrayal of research questions. Also key concepts are defined in this section at an elementary level, and also the research methods are presented. In the second chapter, the concept of humor is explored. The meaning, and evolutionary roots of humor are introduced. The essence and role of humor is understood through the explaining the general acceptance of humor, portraying humor theories, understanding humor as a serious and respected matter, and linking briefly together humor and tourism. The next chapter, chapter three, explores the meaning of a service experience in the context of a tourism environment. Tourism product is explained, components of a service experience are introduced. Criteria of a good service is covered. Two models of understanding service experience are portrayed (Pine & Gilmore 1999 and Helkkula 2011). Customer experience is also defined, and the drivers of a customer experience, since it is closely related to service experience.

Chapter four includes service encounter and its definition. Different phases of service encounter, and also drivers of service encounter. Also effective staff management is covered briefly. Chapter five portrays the research methodologies, explaining the research approach, data collection method, and data analysis method. Chapter six, explains the empirical research data gathered and what the data means. The results of the study are portrayed as the quotations from interviewed people; the quotations are categorized according to models portrayed in this chapter. The results are reflected upon Pine II and Gilmore’s (1999) four experience realms, as well as the aspect of time dimension of a service (beginning, middle, and an end), is taken into account. The role of humor is brought upon in these discussions as well, with the support of Apte’s (1985) and Bradley’s (2015) views on humor. The framework has been built. Chapter seven, includes the concluding chapter. This chapter includes, the contribution with the current theoretical framework, the limitation of research and suggestions for future research, as well as managerial implications and the reliability of data.
2 DESCRIBING THE CONCEPT OF HUMOR

Humor is a cognitive and unconscious process. (Apte 1985: 14). Laughter and smiling are the most obvious indicators of humor experience (which are important in determining the occurrence of humor). These differ from humor that smiling and laughing are observable (anatomically and psychologically). Humor has not been fully recorded, described, analyzed and interpreted in even a single culture. (Apte 1985: 14.) Humor has been explored and studied much in the field of marketing and advertising and to some degree also in customer service situations customer encounters. (Odekerken-Schroder et al. 2000 & Bergeon and Vachon 2008 & van Dolen et al 2004.)

2.1 What does humor mean?

Britannica Academic (2015) defines humor as a form of communication in which the stimulus produces diversion. It can be agreed upon that the stimulant here could be a joke, a smile, a funny act, or a funny comedy strip. Britannica Academic states that humor can be simply defined as a type of stimulation that evokes the laughter reflex. It is also stated here that laughter is a reflex, with no apparent biological purpose; they even state that laughter might be called even a luxury reflex. The only purpose (of laughter) seems to be, to provide relief from tension. However, Psychology Today (2015) states, that humor is a serious matter.

2.2 Evolutionary roots of humor

Although this is not a paper made for the department of psychology, neither biology, it is aimed to explain some basic theories and concepts behind humor, to form the understanding of the overall idea of humor in the context of this writing, since it is also a big part of this research and the focus of study. It will be also aimed to tie humor into the use in a service experience of a consumer. First of all the concept of humor, what humor is, and how it is defined, is characterized by controversy (Greengross 2012: 443). However, most people might have a sense of what humor might be, but according to Greengross (2012: 443), for researchers it is a struggle to come up with
one definition of humor, that includes the various ways that people consume and use humor in each day.

Greengross (2012) brings about an aspect that humor and laughter have evolutionary roots as well. It is stated that laughter and humor form a part of every society and can be dated, as to the development of a particular group of organisms, such as to apes and even as far as laughing rats, although very remotely (Panksepp 2007 via Greengross 2012). He goes into depth of evolutionary theories, but these will not be discussed here, since this is not a research paper of biology. But some such theories are offered as to explanation for why humor has been evolved due to evolutionary reason. Rather, we will focus on non-evolution explanation, which focus on mechanisms that can be covered very briefly, so as to understand the phenomenon of humor, it can be understood through the mechanisms that elicits joy, the emotions associated with the enjoyment of humor, or with the conditions under which humor is likely to prevail. One of the most popular humor theories is the incongruity-resolution theory, (Greengross 2012:444) which is described next:

“Laughter seems to arise from the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage.” The object of laughter is “two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage.” (Beattie 1778 via Greengross 2012: 444.)

The definition offered, although, might sound like a fair one, is too broadly defined. This theory is in relation to the incongruity-resolution theory. Even though, the definition provided might be a broad definition, it can be stated that it gives us some initial understanding of why there is humor and why even evolution involves a certain aspect of humor in its part. Maybe humor is here to help us get through our daily routines, with a little bit of alleviation from stress. It is said, that laughter enables longevity (Mozes 2012). Also this article states that optimism and active social life, account for longevity, also important aspects to be taken into account. Maybe if there were more social interactions, and more optimistic people around, also more humor would be seen and transparent in daily lives.
2.3 Essence and role of humor

Bradley (2015) offers solutions as to finding out how humor can be used in graphic design. She writes about how humor can further one’s career by finding funny clients and colleagues, and becoming a more relatable manager, a better collaborator and feel less stressed out at work. The book takes a rather American viewpoint in discussing where humor is seen today. Humor is found in every form of visual media from television commercials to mobile apps to magazines. The first animation ever recorded, was a comedy, and the first films ever (also a comedy). Adults too, face with comical marketing, so that in order to amuse us enough into buying boring grown-up items, for example car insurance or window cleaner. (Bradley 2015: 16.)

2.3.1. Acceptance of humor

However, it needs to be understood, that there has been a mixed cultural acceptance of funny imagery. Although humor has always be an accepted part of culture, and in many cases celebrated, in some periods of time, humor has not been accepted (Bradley 2015: 17). There is also long history behind humor and where it arises from. In the past decade the research that has been made in studying humor has increased dramatically, partly due to our increased understanding of the human brain. Neuroscientists, cognitive psychologists, evolutionary biologists and many other scholars are putting a lot of time and effort in figuring out what exactly is a sense of humor and what the overall purpose it might serve for humans is. (Bradley 2015: 22.)

Humor enables for human to enjoy life’s misunderstandings rather than being enraged by them, a skill to be able to possess. It might be compared to the feeling of love or friendship we feel. Much of humor she argues is built on the same basic platform: incongruity, tension and release, the element of surprise, and the clash of context. When a person laughs, the same type of good feeling is released. (Bradley 2015: 22-23.)
Figure 1: Different parts contributing to humor experience (based on: Apte (1985), Bradley (2015), McGhee (1979), Britannica Academic (2015), Psychology Today (2015)).

Figure 1 is a compilation of what humor is seen to mean to the researcher based on the literature in the theory part. The figure relates how she sees humor to appear as. Humor is basically seen physiologically by smiling and laughing, and humor is stimulated by a joke or a funny act. Humor is a cognitive and unconscious process, and rather a serious matter. It has a context in which it appears, and some of the characteristics within the context are: playfulness, absurdity, wit, amusement, and funniness. And usually humor is built on incongruity, tension and release, and an element of surprise and the clash of context. And of course humor has its theories, seen above, but rather interesting to know is that it has no real biological reason, but rather is there to overcome misunderstandings and get a good feeling. The figure is built with arrows, showing the way that the relation is going. This figure is here to demonstrate, thoroughly the meaning of humor in the light that it is seen in this research.

2.3.2 Humor should be seen as a serious matter

Humor should be seen rather a serious matter, and those with the talent of having humor should be respected. In relation to the design world, humor is rather a design tool, not a solution. “Funny for funny’s sake alone won’t cut it in the design world.” This relates to that, humor could be a tool for business to use in their business strategy,
but not a final solution. Being “funny” for the sake of funny, might not be the final solution. (Bradley: 2015.)

2.3.3 Humor in a tourism context

The occasional experiments into the study of the roles of humor in tourism have not been closely linked to the dispersed and dauntingly varied generic literature on humor (Pearce, 2009). We can then ask, what kind of a role does humor play in the context of cross-culturalism? What role of humor plays in the context of tourism? Is there cross-culturally shared ways in which humor stimuli are generated and humor is appreciated? He also asks whether there are categories and types of humor that occur in many societies. Also he asks, weather humor serves similar purposes in many societies? He asks if there are indigenous explanations of the phenomena of humor that appear to be similar across cultures. It should be taken into account, that there are cross cultural variation in the conceptualization, form, substance, and function of humor. We cannot and will not answer all the questions he presents in his book, but these questions should be kept in mind, when thinking of making a humorous script when making or creating a service. It may be read in his book, how he decides to answer those questions. (Apte 1985:15).

Apte states (1985: 16) that even if humor is a cognitive experience for an individual, it must have a cultural niche, and it cannot occur in a vacuum. It is hard though, from the researcher’s personal experience, to for example, understand American humor, if not being in the culture for a while. From personal experience of the researcher, Americans are loud, outgoing, very talkative, and they possess a certain kind of humor. What will Ranua do if a set of American tourists come to Ranua? What kind of script do they pull out then? Even understanding Finnish humor, for the researcher, since the researcher has lived abroad eight years of her life, has its challenges, since coming back to her own culture after spending time away from her native culture, made it hard to understand some comedies, shows, or even friends’ jokes (in Finnish), since the researcher had been in totally different environment, such a long time that understanding humor also takes time and needs to happen in the right time and space.
McGhee (1979: 6-8 via Apte 1985: 14) also determines and defines the semantic boundaries of the following terms to share at least some semantic properties with the term “humor”: “wit”, “comic,” “incongruity”, “amusement”, “absurdity”, “ludicrousness”, “ridicule”, “mirth,” “funniness” and “playfulness.” These are usually used in scholarly discussion on the topic of humor. This means that humor shares some of those semantic and linguistic characteristics of funniness, playfulness, and ridicule, and others as described above. In Apte’s writing (1985: 16), he emphasizes the ways in which kinship, age, sex, role, status, and so on underlie the form, substance and function of humor. And he states that where expressive culture is concerned, the focus on language, religion and folklore are seen as a modality for the initiation and expression of humor. This can be understood, in that, people coming from different native backgrounds, may have different ways of understanding humor, due to the person’s age, sex, role, status, and even language.

It is the intention of this research to also rely on scholarly articles published by universities. Therefore, on the next page is a representation of the various research that has been made in the light of tourism and humor research, and within those research these two concepts have been linked together. This representation is brought in here to demonstrate, that there has been previous research made in the field tourism and humor research, and these have given the base for this research, in respect to ideas, methodology, or structure of research, analysis methods, or similar results presented in their studies.
**Table 1. Examples of Humor and Tourism Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Humor &amp; Tourism Research</th>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literary overview built on existing literature, about humor in tourism setting. Results: Humor is used to promote visitor comfort levels and aid visitor concentration levels. Tourism humor establishes social connections and commentary on tourism.</td>
<td>Pearce, P.A.</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive ethnographic approach with participant observation and conversations with key informants to document positive emotions in two mature adult tourism experiences. Thematic analysis revealed amusement from humor, warmth of friendship, interest in activities, and sublime reactions to loss. Importance of positive emotions to building a sense of community.</td>
<td>Mitas et al.</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualization of informal and formal humor in tourism. Reflects on tourist motivation and satisfaction levels in relation to humor related travel experiences. The paper considers the importance of understanding the role of humor in the tourist experience, particularly in relation to the management of formal humorous experiences such as comedy festivals</td>
<td>Frew</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature overview on tourism experience. Research focuses on how tour guides can produce a positive outcome on tourists’ knowledge and understanding of visited heritage site, feelings and emotions, satisfaction and likelihood of visiting other nearby heritage sites. Heritage and tourist information knowledge, service attitude, communication competence and emotional intelligence affected the experience.</td>
<td>Io</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a leisure trip provides opportunities for relaxation, detachment from work, mastery experience, and personal control. Tourism experiences as a stress reliever, focusing on the underlying psychological experiences associated with recovery. The results also revealed that even a weekend getaway can help people to recover from work stress, while longer trips provide more opportunities for recovery experiences.</td>
<td>Chen et al.</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies relationships between tourists’ motivation, experience, perceived value and revisit intentions to creative tourism destinations. Creative tourism has been viewed as a strategy to regenerate destinations physically, culturally and socially. Self-administrated questionnaires were distributed to participants who were systematically selected at the main gate of the study areas. In total, 417 questionnaires were collected. Result: On-site tourism experience was the most influential antecedent of revisit intention to creative tourism sites.</td>
<td>Chang et al.</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 SERVICE EXPERIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM

In 2011, the number of tourism companies in Lapland was 1,586. During the years 2006-2011 the businesses in this sector grew 6.4% in Lapland. New companies arise especially in the arena of event- and program services. Tourism economy is of great importance especially to remote destinations in terms of employment, in which services provided also benefit the locals in addition to tourists. Lapland is the most attractive international travel destination in addition to Helsinki (Lapin liiton arvio). According to Nikula (2016), tourism in Finland has grown at least at a speed of 4.5% in the past years, and Lapland does not see the reasons for it to stop.

3.1 Tourism product

When comparing with other products and services, tourism product slightly has different types of characteristics. Tourism products can be defined as an array of integrated products that are made up of objects and attractions, transportation, accommodation, and entertainment, where each of these elements of the tourism product is prepared by the individual companies, and therefore are offered separately to consumers. (New Atlantis 2016.)

A product can be described as an item offered for sale. It can be a service or an item. A product can appear in a physical or in a virtual or cyber form. Each product is made at a cost and each product is sold at a price. The price that can be charged depends on the market, the quality, the marketing and the segment that is targeted. Each product has a certain life cycle. (Economic Times 2015.) There are three elements that form a tourism product: 1. destination attractiveness, 2. facilities of destinations, and 3. ease of destination. Tourism product is something that can be offered to tourists to visit a tourist destination. Tourism products can be either natural, cultural or community handicrafts. (New Atlantis 2015.)

Murphy et al. (2000) describe the tourism product with another word, destination product, which can be agreed upon to serve for the similar understanding of a product meant for creating a tourist experience as a whole. Increased international competition has emphasized the importance of branding value and quality (Stevens 1992).
Concepts of destination, value, and quality are somewhat vague in the tourism literature. Pearce (1989) defines a destination as a mix of products and services available at one location.

On the next page is a modified conceptualization of what might be a (destination) tourism experience. The experience can be said to be composed of the different services, such as souvenir shops and shopping services, attraction and activities services, restaurant services, guided safari services, transportation services, and finally accommodation and hospitality services. These are then, affected by the macroenvironment, which on the other hand is affected by different factors, such as the: natural environment, political and legal factors, technological factors, economic factors, cultural factors and social factors. These all together, form the base, or the tourism destination environment, where the tourism experience can take place.

The original conceptualization was modified based on this study’s empirical context, by changing the title in the first layer of the model, to tourism experience, instead of tourist destination experience, because in this research tourism is understood to be already happening at the destination, so the destination needs not to be emphasized. Secondly, the middle layer of the conceptualization was modified by adding souvenir services to the repertoire of other services. The word recreation and activities services was changed to attraction and activities services, because there are attractions (places) to visit in the nearby tourist village. Also, guided safari services was added to the available service, because it applies to the case study. The original travel services was substituted with the word transportation, because it better characterizes the movement by car, minibus, bus, taxi, than plane travel service, and travel service, is a little bit vague in this context. In addition to the original accommodation services, hospitality service was included, since it provides a more holistic understanding of hotel service in general, to include generous and warm reception of tourists. The title of the original middle layer “service infrastructure” was changed to services, in order to give a more simplistic word to understand what the services are made of and to include. The environmental factors affecting the tourism destination environment were left unchanged, because they are taught to still apply, and furthermore, they will not be analyzed in the context of this research. However, the final title or layer at the bottom of the conceptualization, was changed from the original “destination environments” to
tourism environment, since it better characterizes the idea what lies at the bottom of the whole tourism experience, it is the environment in which it all happens.

Although, this research intends to understands what is a service experience, and what it is composed of; it is also important for the reader to understand, that one service experience experienced by the customer, may be a small part of the whole tourism experience that the tourist goes through during his or her stay at the location; this one service experience is very significant, since the service experience itself, accounts for the tourist’s satisfaction. It needs to be understood by the reader that the service experience has its roots in the environment in which the service takes place, and also may be affected by the different factors, such as the natural environment, technological factors, economics factors, social factors, and cultural factors. The reader must also understand, that there may be different types of service experiences in different services, although in this writing only concentrates on one service, Santa’s Hideout Cabin. It is necessary for the reader to understand, the holistic picture, that accounts for the total tourism experience. Only a small part of it, may be the service experience.
Jordan (2000: 16-18 via Aula et al. 2004: 3) sees that a prerequisite for a successful product is the ability of a product to produce delight and pleasure to the owner and user. On top of the functional properties, a selling product is also capable to fulfill the buyer’s requirements for the product, which might include social, psychological and ideological requirements. Although, this writing does not concentrate on the selling of a product, but rather a service, it is necessary to visualize the concept of an experience first, and then see where it applies, to the product or the to the service. For a successful service, the service must produce delight and pleasure for the customer. And the service must be capable to fulfill the customer’s requirements, in the aspects of social, psychological and ideological requirements.

Romppainen (2003: 25 via Aula et al. 2004: 4) states that products have their statues in everyday life and in social interaction. They have their own meaning in the formation of an experience. Products are not only tools, since with products people express their identity, bring about their wants to be part of a certain group and bring about their social status. Romppainen (2003: 32 via Aula et al. 2004:5) continues that the consumer of the future is ever more demanding and seen as an individual. Rather than mass customization, the world moves toward more personalized and customized products. Although products are being described, it can be agreed upon that perhaps services could be seen from the light of customization to the needs of the customer. Like Romppainen clarifies, he states that there should be more known about the person’s life, habits, attitudes and values. He takes the value of a designer and discussing the industrial design of goods, and says that the designer and the whole product development team, should better understand the individual’s purchase decision and their ways or means to use the product. Knowledge about the person’s age or how much the individual earns, is not enough data anymore. (Romppainen 2003: 32 via Aula et al 2004:5.) Although it can be seen that age and earning give a certain understanding of the customers at the moment, but in order to develop the product or service, perhaps personal opinions and stories of customers should be heard when using the product or service.
3.2 Service experience

Developing services and furthermore developing better service experiences for customers, are becoming more and more important parts for companies working in the travel and tourism industry. In order to attract and keep their customers, businesses need to pay attention to the experiences that they create for their customers.

3.2.1 Understanding service experience as a concept

Service is not a new invention, although the importance of it has risen to the top of the agenda of many companies. As Plato (via Vargo et al. 2011: 181) noted, in more understandable way, we are all similarly human beings serving one another, through exchange, for being mutually better off. According to Grönroos, (2007: 52) service is a process that consists of a series of activities, more or less intangible, that not necessarily always, but normally, take place in interactions between the customer and service employees, and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which serve as solutions to customer problems.

What is an experience one may ask? According to Merriam-Webster.com, an online Dictionary (2015) an experience is defined as: 1. “The process of doing and seeing things and of having things happen to you”. 2. “Skill or knowledge that you get by doing something”. 3. “The length of time that you have spent doing something (such as a particular job)”. Although all these three definitions provide quite a general definition of the word “experience”, it can be agreed upon the word ‘experience’ can be defined as a process, and involves the act of doing and seeing things. This is the most applicable in the context of writing here. It is also valid to say that experience forms to be a skill or knowledge when having done something. It seems that definition three is very similar to the definition of the second definition. It is almost like referred to work experience. However, it is necessary that experience is understood in the context of service, thus forms the word service experience.

According to two English Dictionaries (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003; Webster’s Dictionary, 2001 via Anu Helkkula 2011: 368) an experience can be defined as an “event”, “a process” a “phenomenon” or “change”. Also an individual,
community, a nation, or even humankind as a whole can be the subject of such an experience. The experience can be “real” and physical or “virtual” and observed. Maybe that a holistic phenomenon combines both real and virtual elements.

In a Danish report (ODA, 2006:30 via Mehmentoglu & Engen: 2011: 241), the following definition for an experience is offered: “An experience arises in a relation or in a dialectical relation between subject and object, both of which will have an impact on what is experienced. An experience is something extraordinary and stands out from [merely] experiencing.” This can be agreed upon, that it means, that in order for an experience to occur, there needs to be a subject and an object. The relation between these two, impact how the event has been experienced by both parties.

Boswijk et al. (2007: 20 via Mehmentoglu & Engen: 2011: 241) offer a distinction between “experiencing,” and “meaningful experiences.” They suggest that through our senses, we gather impressions of the world around us. The impressions that we gather through our senses, lead to an emotional response, feelings such as fear and joy. These emotions can lead to a meaningful experience. A complex of emotions that take place simultaneously or successively can be said to make up a meaningful experience. Meaningful experiences go beyond those that are merely memorable, and are related to the sum of our interactions with our environment and the lessons we learn from these during the process of experiencing. The term “memorable” is, incidentally, a key factor in Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) scheme of the staging and creation of experiences as well.

By better understanding what a service experience is composed of and characterized as, the easier it is reflected upon. What characterizes a service experience? There are at least two ways of understanding a service experience and the researcher will discuss the two of them, for a more in depth understanding of a service experience.

3.2.2. Four experience realms

There is a representation that will be brought into discussion. The representation is initially made by Pine II and Gilmore (1999: 30); the reseracher decided not to modify the idea provided by Pine II and Gilmore (1999) although it did occur as an idea,
because it did not account to be meaningful to change the categorizations already thought out by Pine II and Gilmore.

Figure 3. The four experience realms (Modified Pine II & Gilmore 1999: 30) Permission asked.

With the following figure, it is easier to understand how a service experience can be seen, since this model allows for the possibility to categorize an experience according to different ways. The different ways of categorizing an experience, which in this case is understood to be the service experience are: entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist. *Entertainments* occurs when people passively absorb the experiences through their senses, as tends to happen when watching a performance, listening to music, or reading for pleasure. Entertainment does not only provide the oldest form of experience, but also one of the most developed, commonplace and familiar. People will look in new and different directions for more unusual experiences. People will smile, laugh or in some other way enjoy themselves (Pine II & Gilmore: 1999.)

According to Pine II & Gilmore (1999: 32), the *educational aspect* of the experience means, that the student or customer absorbs the events unfolding before him or her. This type of experience involves active participation of the individual. The experience needs to truly inform the person and increase his knowledge, skills and the event must actively engage the mind and even body.
The escapist experience involves a much more intense immersion that the entertainment or educational experiences. It could be described as a “memorable encounter”. It could be seen as the pure opposite of entertainment experience. The guest or customer of the escapist experience is completely immersed in it, and actively involved. Examples of this type of environments include: theme parks, casinos, virtual reality headsets, chat rooms, or even a game of paintball played in the local woods. The individual becomes an actor in the environment, not just playing a passive role as a couch potato. (Pine II & Gilmore: 1999, 32.)

The final realm is the esthetic realm, in which the individual immerses him or herself in the event or environment, with little or no effect on it, leaving the environment essentially untouched. It can be understood as, the person just “is”. An example offered, is the one of the Rainforest Café, in which diners find themselves in the middle of rainforest like vegetation, rising mist, the noise of the waterfall and even can observe minor lightning and thunder. Customers are able to encounter live tropical birds and fish as well as artificial butterflies, spiders, and when really looked closely, a snapping baby crocodile. This experiences aims to stage and authentic and esthetic experience of the Rainforest Café. (Pine II and Gilmore 1999: 35.) However, the challenge here is to bring humor into the service experience.

Pine and Gilmore (1998:38 via Aula et. al 2004: 3) who state that an experience is not just some nonsense-concept, but rather an experience is distinguishable, independent commodity, that can be separated from a service, like services are distinguishable from products. Pine and Gilmore (1998: 46-49 via Aula et al. 2004: 4 ) in which he recognizes that the means by which to manage experience, are very scarce. It should be so that an experience should be able to be managed, other than by entrance fees. Pine and Gilmore continue that an experience should be categorized according to themes. On top of this, an experiences should sell memories, and an experience should utilize all senses. Let us refresh the senses: sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell.

However, another way of seeing a service experience, according to (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2005 via Mehmetoglu & Engle 2011: 242) “an experience pyramid” can be related to a service experience which consists of six different parts: individuality, authenticity, story, multisensory perception, the product’s representation (in this case
the service) to break off from routine, and the final part is interaction. However, this aspect is excluded from this study, because this study rather has a focus on the experience realms presented by Pine II and Gilmore (1999).

Furthermore, this research does not go into explaining another way to seeing a service experience, which Helkkula (2011: 370-371) already has done, by characterizing the concept of service experience as: phenomenological, process based, or outcome-based service experience. Briefly, Helkkula (2011) used content analysis as her methodology and analyzed 30 articles and two books published in the period from 2005 to 2007. She refers to service experience being a concept used in Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic, which regards service experience as the basis of all business (Helkkula: 2011 367). Rather, this research takes Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) way of seeing the experience realms, since they are more related to the context of the case study. However, Pine and Gilmore’s representation, is understood, even in more simple terms, by leaving out the immersion and absorption aspects, because they are difficult to observe in people, as the service was observed. It is interesting that the phenomenological point of view provides that the service experience is internal and subjective.

3.2.3 Customer experience

In Walter et al.’s (2010: 238) article, customer experience and service experience are given the same value, and treated equally. As a researcher, it is important to study consumer’s wishes, observations, preferences, and purchase behavior (which can be said to be part of marketing as a whole), and what kind of factors account for those. Certainly, each person and each customer is an individual who are driven by personal motives, emotions, wants, needs, and wishes, as well as expectations. One way of understanding the customer’s experience in this case study, is by interviewing the test group testing the service, during the focus group interviews.

According to an article (Kim: 2009), there has been efforts to conceptualize and measure customer experiences, and that these are certainly worthwhile, since these ways enable us to understand customer experiences better. However, it is the goal of this paper to understand customer service experience in the context of travel
experiences, through the conduct of two focus group interviews, in order to understand the overall opinions that the visitors/testers have of this new service taken into use at Ranua Zoo, with more in depth. Researchers have suggested that memory, which mediates behavioral intentions needs to be incorporated into the study of customer experiences. Level of motivation and involvement are high, when information is drawn from individuals’ past experiences (Kim 2009).

In an article by Walter et al. (2010) in a study in which they interviewed 122 interviewees, with favorable and unfavorable narratives about customer experiences. They later analyzed the results inductively and found out the frequent drivers of favorable and unfavorable customer experiences. They emphasize how important the interaction between the service provider and the customer is. They also emphasize that customer service experiences should be understood better as a process. Customers nowadays have a lot of information available so they can really choose to which company they are loyal to. (Walter et al: 2010: 236.)

3.3 Seven criteria for a good service

The understanding of a good service is made with integration of previous research and theoretical ponderings. When we look at the quality of the service, we can look at the next criteria of the service provider or service employee. The first criteria is professionality and skill. Customers understand that the service provider and its employees have the know-how and skills, operative systems, and physical resources, which are needed in order to solve the customer’s problems professionally. This is not directly related with service encounter, but is related to the quality of the service. This is related with the outcome of the service. (Grönroos 2010: 121.)

Attitudes and behavior is essentially important in the service encounter. Customers feel that service providers pay attention to them, want to help them solve their problems with friendliness and spontaneity. This is related with the process of the service. Also the criteria for a good service is easily approachable and flexible. Customers feel that the service provider, the location, opening hours, workers, and operative systems are created so that they are easily accessed and that the company is able to adapt to customer’s wishes and demands. This is related with the process
aspect. Customers know that what has been agreed upon with the service provider, can be trusted. Customers can rely on service worker’s word. One of the criteria is reliability. This could be seen as a process related aspect. Normalizing the service means that, always that something goes wrong, or unexpected things happen, the service provider makes required actions to take control of the situation, and in order to find a better and accepted solution. (Grönroos: 2010: 122.)

The last two criteria are the service view and reputation and creditability. These are not directly related with service encounter, but do affect the service quality experiences by the customers. Reputation and creditability are born, when customers believe that the actions of the service provider can be trusted, the service experience is worth the money, and the service provider has the performance criteria and the values that the customer can accept. (Grönroos 2010: 122.) All of these criteria, are related to this study, in the sense, that it is essential to know what influences good service encounter from the perspective of customers. It is essential to know, at least from a theoretical perspective, what influences a good service encounter from customers’ point of view.

3.4 Drivers of customer or service experience

The researcher utilized another categorization method by Walter et al. (2010) to demonstrate that there is another way of understanding a customer experience, although Walter et. al’s representation is left out in the analysis part of the thesis, due to the fact that Pine II and Gilmore’s (1999) representation of experience realms is used. In Walter et al.’s (2010) scientific article, a total of 122 customers are interviewed about their service experience, both favorable and unfavorable. From this data, the customer’s service experiences are grouped into eight main categories. The eight main categories in the writing are: 1. social interaction, 2. core service (at the restaurant) 3. physical environment 4. restaurant, 5. price and payment procedure, 6. the atmosphere, 7. the guest, and finally 8. the occasion. The researcher felt that it is not wise to go in depth in describing what is in each of these categorizations, since, this categorization was decided to be left out by the researcher. Instead she decided to use Pine II and Gilmore’s (1999) representation of the service experiences, to support empirical findings.
4 SERVICE ENCOUNTER

Personal interaction between the consumer and service employee is often part of the consumption of services. Research made in the past about services has mainly focused on the role of service employees, but excluded the role of customers, in the process. In Guiry’s (1992) research, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted in search to investigate how consumers want to participate in service experiences and how satisfaction develops as a function of their participation expectations. This relates to this study, in the sense, that it is essential to ask and know what the customers experience and think during the service encounter and service experience in relation to this case study.

4.1 Defining a service encounter

On the other hand, in a dissertation by Valkama (2013: 9), she distinguishes what is a customer encounter. In her dissertation she states that a customer encounter means affecting a customer or buyer. In this case, crucial factors are: the worker's essence; word choice; and the sensitivity of the situation; eagerness to assist customers in decision-making; and interest in the customer. These definitions can be understood to go hand in hand, because customers are needed in the service, and so are service providers. However, it seems, that more focus has been put on the service provider’s role in the interaction process, than the customer’s responsibility, and role in the service.

In an article by Bergeon & Vachon (2008: 376) related with a service encounter in a financial sector, it is stated that a good sense of humor by a financial advisor, has a positive impact on the clients’ view on trust, satisfaction, purchase intentions, service quality, and word-of-mouth inclination. In this article, the methodology used was a survey method, in which 400 seller-buyer dyads were participating. A dyad in a context of sociology, means two persons who are involved in an ongoing interaction or relationship.

Service encounter can be understood as the interaction between the customer and the service provider. In an article by Lin & Lin (2011) they state that employee inner
emotion, work group mood, and service environment all have a positive influence on employee affective delivery, which, in turn, positively influences customer emotion and service outcomes (2011: 183). In their research data had been collected by 217 employee-customer pairs in ten service industries. In the light of this research, in order for the service to be successful in the eyes of the customer, the service provider (tour guides, service personnel) have to enjoy they work so that they can deliver that to the service encounter with the customer and make their stay worthwhile. During service encounters, employees adopt certain strategies to regulate their emotions – such as surface acting (engaging in a superficial display of normative emotions without making any effort to change what they feel internally) and deep acting (trying to modify internal emotions to bring behavior and internal experience into alignment with organizational expectations for emotional display) (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Gosserand and Diefendorff, 2005; Grandey, 2003; Judge et al., 2009 via Lin and Lin 2011: 184). In many service industries, employees are supposed to demonstrate positive emotions to encourage even better customer service experiences.

4.2 Role of the staff and customer service in service encounter

Emotion is an important part, even in consumption activities. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993 via Lin and Lin 2011), they state employees situated in face-to-face alignment with customers, are required to show positive emotions, like warmth and friendliness, during service encounters. According to Lin and Lin (2011), words exchanged during the interaction, facial expressions used during the service encounter, and the tone of voice during the transaction affect service delivery. Although up to 90 percent of this affective delivery is communicated non-verbally (Dallimore et al., 2007 via Lin and Lin 2011).

Fromkin and Rodman (1983 via Lin & Lin 2011: 185) use the word emotional contagion, which is mostly unconscious and means that the emotions from the sender to the receiver are sent almost as in a flow like manner, and the recipient catches the emotions, the sender is sending or vibrating. When the customers are made feel good during the service experience, Lin and Lin argue that they will lead to more positive evaluations of the company and lead to behavioral intentions including consumer satisfaction (Lin and Lin 2011: 185).
Service employees are usually trained with regard to which emotions and expressions are appropriate in the service encounter. However, these emotions are not always what the employee is really experiencing at the time. Research on individuals show that certain moods heighten motivation to achieve particular outcomes, promote selective attention toward outcome-relevant information, and increase action readiness towards attainment of those outcomes (Forgas, 1995 via Lin and Lin, 2011: 186-187). Furthermore, they hypothesize, the more positive the customer’s emotion, the more positive is the service encounter satisfaction.

4.3 Effective staff management

According to Brooks (2008), he distinguishes eight different parts that drive effective staff management. This also helps drive service quality, when employers know what to do and how to behave around with customers. The first part is helping staff understand what kind of service experience customers are looking for. Secondly, knowing the type of person you need to hire to be able to deliver that experience. Third, hiring that person. Fourth, making sure that your products, services, and systems are introduced to new staff. Fifth, ensuring that all staff have the proper skills to be able to deliver the service experience for the customers. Sixth, understanding each staff member’s strengths and weaknesses. Seventh, looking after your staff, so that they willingly look after the customer. And finally, number eight on the list, making sure that staff understands and meets the needs of internal customers.

4.4 Different phases in a service encounter

Rautiainen & Siiskonen (2007) differentiate three different phases how the receptionist reacts upon the arrival of the tourist. The first step is: greeting the customer, filling customer’s personal data, and checking the booking and the payment choice. In the second step, the receptionist hands out the key of the hotel room to the customer and explains what is included in the price of the hotel room, and as the receptionist gives other necessary guidelines for the tourist. The final, third phase is telling about the other services available and welcoming the client. In the analysis part, this model is modified a bit to be understood, so that the first step is greeting the tourists by the service personnel and guides as they arrive to Ranua, and the tourists being instructed
about the gear that they are supposed to wear, prior to the snowmobile ride. The next step could be seen, as the guide (instead of the receptionist), explaining and instructing the customer about the use of a snowmobile, and explaining about their 10-minute ride to the Santa’s Cabin. The third part is when the Santa warmly welcomes the tourists. The final, step is added, since Rautiainen and Siiskonen (2007), do not include the farewell aspect in their model. So the last step is seen as the farewell or disengagement by the tourists with the Santa.

Furthermore, Mudie and Cottam (2010: 112) include six phases in their service encounter model. These are: access, check-in, diagnosis, service delivery, check-out and disengagement, and follow-up. In order to make a good impression in the eyes of the tourist, the service must be easily accessible (by telephone, fax, computer, personal visits). Free phone numbers, helplines, visible signs, parking availability, all encourage ease of access. Second step is, customer provides some personal details along with reason to contact the service provider. Crucial here is to making the customer feel welcome. Service personnel must be knowledgeable enough to know how to have customer’s needs met and how to best route them through the service process. Third phase is diagnosis, which means listening to the customer’s needs, and demonstrating an understanding of what customer wants and expects. Fourth phase is service delivery, which is the heart of the encounter, with all these other phases supporting this phase. Quality issues, arise usually in this phase. Fifth phase is the check-out and disengagement, which is the last impression, which is equally important as the first encounter. Anything that a service can do, at the point of departure of the customer, is to make him or her feel good about it, and provide an extra leaflet of additional information on the services, or asking to fill out a feedback form. Final phase is the follow-up, which is quite important as well. Ever more, organizations providing services are making contact with customers after service consumption, to determine levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. There are also drivers that drive service encounter; these are giving attention to the guest, personal service, good service attitude by the service provider, and manners (Valkama, 2013). Due to space restrictions, these will not be examined and analyzed more in depth.

This is the part where the current theoretical framework will be presented. In the analysis section, the customers’ perspectives are understood through this model.
Figure 4. The connection between time dimension, service experience, and the role of humor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Dimension of Service</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Experience Level</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>Eclectic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Educational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test Customers' experience on appearance of humor during the service experience</td>
<td>Appearance of humor</td>
<td>Appearance of humor</td>
<td>Appearance of humor</td>
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5 RESEARCH METHODS

This part of the paper explains more in depth which research methods have been chosen when designing the research, and how data has been collected. Four individual interviews with the Finnish employees of Ranua have been conducted. All were experts in their departments. Two semi-constructed focus group interviews were held with people testing this new service at Ranua. From the test customers, six were mostly international students with a background in tourism and research studies; two teachers were lecturers of tourism related fields, and one was the employee of the case company.

The researcher did not have a possibility to choose the sample of the focus groups since it was an already organized event with the case company and these school that the students were coming from. It can be argued that this is a good sample of the experts in their field, since all students are students in field of tourism and research related studies, and the teachers are lecturer in that area. Researcher had semi-structured interviews for both individual interviews and focus groups as well, which was a little modified for each person. (See appendixes 2-6).

Employee interviews were chosen to represent the personnel’s view on service encounter, use of humor and service experience in a tourism context. As well, as their views, on how humor can help in the service experience of customers. These interviews were transcribed, word by word. Parts of the interviews that serve meaningful to this research, are included in the context. All participants that were in the two focus group interviews, were given a Ranua animal print cup as a gift of participation.

5.1 Research approach

This research is conducted as case study, made up mostly of qualitative data. The reason for choosing qualitative data as my research method is, because in sciences that study human, the subjects of the study, and the meanings that the subjects hold are intertwined, and appear as qualitative. Qualitative data cannot be changed into quantitative data, without being idealized or rationalized, and that is when the content
is lost. Human, human behavior, and cultural phenomenon can be studied qualitatively (Varto: 1992). According to Given (2008: xxix), qualitative methods are used to answer and explain why certain events happen. On the other hand, quantitative research tries to answer who has engaged in behavior and what has happened. Rather, it is more important to understand and explore new phenomena, by capturing individuals’ thoughts, feelings, or interpretations of meaning and process.

The main focus of this case study is to observe the new service that will be provided at Ranua Wildlife Park. The service as a whole was recorded on video camera, and stored according to the rules of HURMOS-project. The name of the new service that is part of the empirical study is the Santa’s Hideout Cabin. The way in which this case study will be approached is observational research and as well as descriptive approach, as well as conducting two focus group interviews about the people who tested this new service. On top of this, four personal semi-constructed interviews were held with the employees of the company to grasp an understanding of their views as well. In observational research, the phenomenon of service experience is observed, through filming with a video recorder and writing down notes on students’ reactions, facial expressions, behavior, participation, and other forms of conduct that is seen important and worth noting down. Descriptive research describes what is happening.

According to an edited text, Laine et al. (2007), translates to English as “the art or skill of a case study,” states that the popularity of making case studies in social sciences has increased in the recent years, and internationally there has been quite a lot of publishing in the field of case studies (2007: 5). It is also said in this edited text (2007: 5) that the only way of learning how to make a case study is by doing it. The research question needs to be limited enough, so that the data received enables to describe and explain the phenomena; it needs to be known what is needed to be studied, and what kind of case fits it best.

Theory, concepts, and context of the case study have an important meaning (2007: 6). A case study involves a lot of different methods, and so a case study can be said to be a research strategy, in which a researcher can use different data and methods. In a case study the target is usually a process or phenomenon (2007: 6). Usually what characterizes a case study is: 1.) The holistic aspect of the phenomenon, 2. interest to
the social process, 3. use of many data and methods, 4. utilizes previous research, 5. the obscurity of the border of case and context (2007:10). A question we need to ask, is what can we learn from the case? The reason why case study has been used in this research, is because this research will compose of a variety of methods to understanding a phenomenon that happens in a service experience during an international service encounter and how humor can be utilized during the process. New and only little researched phenomenon should be approached from the literature review or through data collection. A case study that studies rather new phenomena’s, like the one to be said here could potentially create new theoretical perspectives. (Laine et al. 2007: 147). Humor and the usage of it in service experiences especially in Finland is rather little utilized and researched.

Table 2. Features of a case study and a statistical study (modified from: Hammersley et al. 2000, 4; Flyvberg 2001 via Laine et al. 2007. Permission asked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Statistical Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The subject of study is a small number of cases, sometimes just one.</td>
<td>The subject of study is a large number of cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data gathered about a large number of features of each case.</td>
<td>Data is collected from a narrow set of properties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject of study is naturally occurring events or cases. Main idea is not to control variables and measure their effects.</td>
<td>Material is selected such that it is representative of a broad population sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main data comes from qualitative data, but also quantitative data can be used.</td>
<td>Material is in the form of quantitative data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main idea is to understand the case. The general importance of the case can occur in two ways: 1.) the theory of question-ing, as a complementary or a new theory of creative case (analytical generaliza-tion) and 2) a naturalistic generalization.</td>
<td>Generalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 2, a comparison of a case study and a statistical study is made. In a case study the sample is rather small, sometimes just one, like in this case; the phenomenon being studied is the humorous service encounter when creating a service experience. And the main idea is to understand the case. In a statistical study, the subject of study is a large number of cases, and data is collected about a narrow set of properties. Material is usually presented in the form of quantitative data, and it may be generalized.
Below is Figure 2 (modified Haila 2006 via Laine et al. 2007: 27), which is a way of understanding a case study.

![Diagram of case study approach](image)

*Figure 5. Case study (adapted from: Haila 2006 via Laine et al. 2007: 27).*

The starting point of research is a phenomenon or case, which is the target of interest (the middle of the figure). The case in this case is the Santa’s Hideout Cabin, and the phenomenon that is under scrutiny is the appearance of humor during a customer encounter during a service experience. There is some previous knowledge on this (literature) and from this, a research problem arises. In order to solve this problem, more research questions are developed that lead to the empirical data. At the same time, it needs to be thought about, how this data will help answer the research question. Methods need to be thought hand in hand with the data, and data should be collected, with the research question in mind. The case, hand in hand with the research topic and research questions, define, the methodology used and data gathered. On the other hand the researcher’s previous knowledge, defines the target of research and research questions (Laine et al., 2007: 26).

However, the problem is that not all needed information exists; it is not known for example how the customer reacts to a new service that has not been implemented yet at the case company. It is important to evaluate secondary information (by the researcher) to make sure it is relevant, accurate and current (up-to date enough for
current decisions). By secondary information in this research is meant: scientific articles, books, and internet searches, and other data that is not collected by the user.

The empirical part consists of a two focus group interviews, in which the “test customers” share their experiences, views, and opinions about the humor they experienced during the service of Santa’s Hideout Cabin. Also employees’ answers are described as well as to support customers’ views about humor, service experience, and service encounter.

Other research may use survey methods (Bergeron and Vachon: 2008). Building a theoretical framework on relevant studies is also part of how earlier research have built a foundation for their target of study (Lin & Lin: 2011). Similarly, making a literature review to serve as a foundation for later interpretation, is also a method used in previous research (Io: 2013). Also, choosing to make this as a case study is in line with earlier research, because making a case study has also been a chosen methodology in past in tourism context research (Io: 2013).

5.2 Data collection method

Before the interviews were held, literature by Hirsjärvi & Hurme (1991) was read to make an initial understanding, of how to make a good interview, understand the possible costs of an interview, understand the planning of an interview and the content of it, as well as understand the formation of good questions. The interviews need to be selected well, in order to grasp as good of a representative sample as possible. The interviewees in the focus group were mostly international students in tourism research related studies. Compilation of this is on page Table 5. Employee selection and background is represented in Table 4. Also it was necessary to pick out the date, the place of the interview, determine the approximate duration of the interview, and have the equipment to make the interview. Also, material online (Eliot & Associates: 2005) was read in order to learn how to conduct a focus group interview, order to carry out a successful focus group interview, since it was first time for me. Also it was explained how to group the answers apparent in the focus group’s answers by themes. With the help of the university and by being part of the bigger project, HURMOS, it was easy to gather equipment, negotiate the times with the case company, and listen to the needs
of the company and go there on the date provided by them when they are testing the
service. Also the case company was hospitable enough to organize the trip for the
researcher and the project manager of HURMOS in order to conduct interviews and
observe the service situation itself. Also, an oral agreement to make an interview was
given, with the employee interviews.

In addition, both secondary and primary data was collected for this research. Primary
data is facts or information that is collected for a specific purpose (Kotler & Armstrong
2006: 107). For example, it is possible to include a Skype meeting that was held on
12.10.2015 with many of the company representatives, to grasp an initial
understanding of the service that they wanted to develop. This meeting was held to
create an initial understanding of the service to be developed. All the interviews
conducted, can be categorized as primary data. Researcher decided not to use a survey
form, since, such a small number of customers, would have been represented, and it
would have not given a comprehensive idea of the whole.

Secondary data includes with respect to this research: online databases, books,
academic journals, and articles. According to Kotler (2006: 107), secondary data can
usually be obtained quicker and for a cheaper price compared to primary data. And
secondary data usually is information that the case company cannot themselves collect,
or this information is not available to them or would be too expensive to collect on
their own.

Data was gathered with a video camera when observing the Santa’s Hideout Cabin at
Ranua. Also all the focus group interviews were videotaped. Also the Santa Claus
interview was videotaped. On top of this all the employee interviews, and the focus
group interviews were recorded with Olympus Digital voice recorder VN-8500PC. It
had up to six hours of recording space, and different folders in the apparatus to store
the interviews in. This apparatus was borrowed from University of Oulu and returned
back.
Table 3. Information about interviewees and transcribed data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
<th>Position and number of interviewee(s)</th>
<th>Place of interview</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Length of interview (min)</th>
<th>Amount of transcribed pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open phone interview</td>
<td>Employee (1a)</td>
<td>Helsinki/Ranua</td>
<td>15.11.2015</td>
<td>22.18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-structured interview</td>
<td>Employee (1b)</td>
<td>Ranua</td>
<td>1.12.2015</td>
<td>30.40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-structured interview</td>
<td>Employee (1c)</td>
<td>Ranua</td>
<td>1.12.2015</td>
<td>43.49</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-structured interview</td>
<td>Employee (1d)</td>
<td>Ranua</td>
<td>1.12.2015</td>
<td>15.50</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus-Group interview (group #1)</td>
<td>4 Students</td>
<td>Ranua</td>
<td>1.12.2015</td>
<td>42.21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group interview (group #2)</td>
<td>3 Student/ 2 teachers/part of the time one employee</td>
<td>Ranua</td>
<td>1.12.2015</td>
<td>39.23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 3, is a presentation of the types of interviews that were conducted for this research. There was one open phone interview with an employee, three half-structured interviews with employees, and two focus group interviews, with a total of seven students, two teachers, and one employee. The date of the interview is presented as well. The length of the interview recorded is portrayed in minutes of recording time. Also the number of pages of transcribed data is displayed. All of the interviews were held in Ranua, except one of the phone interviews was held over phone.

Table 4. Background information about employees interviewed (1a-1c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Current status in company</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee 1a</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>~50</td>
<td>Development manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee 1b</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sales manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee 1c</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Ballroom responsible</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employyy 1d</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Santa’s role</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 presents background information of the employees that were interviewed. Two of the employees were female, and two of the employees were male. The ages of three employees were 23, 35, and 50, and one of the employees chose not to say. All of the
employees can be said to be experts in their field or department. Also the current statuses within the company of the employees are presented. One of them is the development manager, one is sales manager, one is the ballroom responsible, and one employee is acting Santa’s role. All of the employees are of Finnish origin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Current status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Focus Group #</th>
<th>Area of Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Master degree in Tourism Research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Master in Tourism, Culture and International Management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Master degree in Tourism Research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Master degree. Tourism, Culture and International Management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 1a</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Uni Applied Sciences’, Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2b</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tourism management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3c</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Master Student, Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Development Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>~50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Teacher of e-Tourism</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lecturer at University of Applied sciences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 5, background in information of the test customers or students who tested the Santa’s Hideout Cabin service is displayed. As seen, majority of students come from other country than Finland. There is a student from: Lithuania, Poland, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, China, Russia, and one Finnish student. All of the students study tourism related studies. Two Finnish teachers also participate. The Employee 1a, is also very shortly in the group interview. The range of ages was from 21-51. For the focus group interviews, two male students, five female students, and two female teachers were present. The background of each student and participant might have an effect on experiencing the occurrence of humor during a service experience, but this will not be taken into account in this research. Permission of each interviewee was asked. The form is located in as the final appendix, appendix 7.
According to Kotler & Armstrong (2006: 112), there are two types of possible interview forms: individual and group interviewing. Individual interviewing involves talking with people either in their homes or offices, on the streets, in the shopping malls or so forth. These types of interviewing are flexible. Trained interviewers can guide interviews, explain difficult questions, and explore issues as the situation requires; these interviewers can observe customer’s reactions and behavior, for example, when introduced a new product or service. For this particular research, individuals were interviewed to rate and assess the service they received, and the appearance of humor in the service encounter during the service experience. Also a focus group or group interview was conducted. Previous literature was read about how to conduct a focus group interview and consent of each student was asked before making the interviews. All names are kept anonymous, due to the ethical questions that arise from this.

Planning and being in contact with organizers of the service-testing event was made mostly through e-mail. Some phone calls were made when informing the times and coordinating these with people involved. Communication was a bit challenging, but luckily two focus groups were able to be formed, in which questions were asked after the customers had the service experience. Researcher was the one who was in charge of the focus group interviews with some help from a doctorate student with the help of constructing the interview questions. The project manager of HURMOS videotaped the focus group interviews so that data could be recorded and transcribed later. It took some time to form the focus group questions, and employer questions.

In addition, preliminary understanding was gathered through small interviews targeted to other similar companies, of Ähtäri Zoo and Korkeasaari. There was e-mail discussion weather they have this similar type of humor in relation with the sightseeing of the zoo. This was done, at the very beginning of the research. It was found out that, these companies, use humor only spontaneously during sightseeing of the zoo, when the moments is right, and to overcome small blunders or embarrassing moments.

Why then, is quantitative data not considered in this research? According to Wilkie and Moore (2003 via Maclaran et al. 2010: 5), by the 1970s marketing science firmly dominated the discipline with a plethora of quantitative analysis techniques. The
development of computer technology had increasingly permeated the academy during the 1960s which enabled researchers to conduct much more complex statistical analyses. Hunt (1983 via Maclaran et al. 2010: 5) talks about that the concentration on method and technique led to criticism that marketers were too fascinated with ‘tool kits’, emphasizing technology rather than theory. Of course, each theory needs a base, but in my case empiric data is based qualitative data: on observation, and focus group interviews and describing the employees’ views about humor, service encounter, and service experience. Initially, the researcher also participated in the workshops organized by HURMOS-project, in which the use of humor was tested by having different activities in these workshops, and each participant could tell their stories in relation to humor. However, these workshops will not be analyzed in this paper, due to space restrictions.

5.3 Data analysis

The purpose of analyzing data is to see how well the interviewees’ answers respond the research questions, presented at the beginning of the thesis. Löfgren’s (2013) explanation of the qualitative analysis of an interview is used. Although this type of analysis is very general, it was chosen for this research as a way to analyze data, since the steps introduced by Löfgren (2013) prove to be sufficient enough. Step one includes: that each transcript is quickly glanced as a whole. Then, it is told to make notes about the first impressions. Rereading the transcripts is suggested, one by one, very carefully, line by line. The second step includes: labeling words, sentences, or sections. These labels can be about actions, activities, concepts, differences, opinions, or whatever the researcher thinks to be relevant. This process is called coding or indexing. By choosing what is relevant, can be chosen if certain themes are repeated in several places, they surprise the interviewer, or the interviewee states that it is explicitly important, or some other reasons. He even suggests that it possible to aim for description of how the interviewee responds.

As Löfgren (2013) suggests, the researcher is the interpreter of data and the phenomena, and certain themes are highlighted, because the researcher considers them important. The researcher tried to be as unbiased in her interpretations as possible. Step three includes deciding which co)des are most important. Categories (humor, service
encounter, and service experience created by bringing several codes (opinions, differences, activities, words) together. Löfgren (2013) suggests to go through all the codes created in the previous step, reading them with a pen in hand. New codes can be created, and not all codes need to be used. Keep the codes that are considered important, and create categories or themes. Categories do not need to be of the same type. He suggests to be unbiased, creative, and open minded. This part is conceptualizing the data. Step four, includes labeling the categories which are the most important, and connected to each other.

In this study, there is the time dimension aspect, the service experience, and humor. The categories, and the connections are the main result of your study. It is new knowledge about the world, from the perspective of the participants in the study. Step five, includes, among other options, drawing a figure that connects all the categories together. This is in a way a summary. This is what has been done here. This figure is called the framework. Step six is called, writing out the results. It is suggested to describe the categories, and stating how they are connected. This part includes a neutral voice, and not yet interpreting the results. In the discussion part, he suggest, is the interpretation of data. The results should be interpreted to the studies published in similar, previous studies in relevant scientific journals. The task includes making sense of a lot of unstructured data. Results should be interpreted as well in the light of theories or concepts in the field.

In this research, data is received in the form of interviews. Interviews were recorded with the Olympus voice recorder. Video camera material also serves as a visual material to support data gathered on top of voice recordings. The data files were exported to the computer, and listened through Windows Media Player. All of the interviews were transcribed word by word. Most of the suggestions of Löfgren (2013) were taken into account in the analysis part. The lengths of the interviews and the amount of transcribed pages, as well as the demographic information about interviewees’ are presented in tables 3-5.

The transcribed interviews were categorized according to themes that are based on theories. The data was categorized according to Pine II and Gilmore’s (1999) representation of four service experience realms: education, aesthetic, entertainment,
and escapist realms. Furthermore, Apte’s and Bradley’s views on the use of humor, and Rautiainen & Siiskonen’s (2007) and in addition to Mudie and Cottam’s (2010) combined idea of beginning, middle and end of a service will be tied together. The idea is to find a unifying link that bonds the three of these concepts.
6 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The data collected for this research is analyzed in this chapter. The findings within the interviews are reflected upon the literature and theory part portrayed earlier. The focus group interviews were conducted in English and transcribed in English. The four employee interviews were conducted in Finnish, transcribed in Finnish and understood in English in the context of this writing. Time dimension of a service, portrayed by Rautiainen and Siiskonen (2007) is utilized to understand the length of time in which the service experience takes place. Pine & Gilmore’s (1999) categorization of a service experience will be used. In addition McGhee’s (1979) and Apte’s (1985) understanding of the appearance of humor will be added into the framework. With the findings from empirical data and also the theoretical parts of literature, a new framework is constructed.

6.1 Ranua Wildlife Park

To introduce a bit, Ranua Wildlife Park is an attraction animal park, in which the zoo itself consists of about 50 wild animal special and 200 individuals. Ranua Wildlife Park is also a service provider of tourist experiences, such as: hospitality (accommodation), restaurant services, personal guides, outdoor equipment, audio tours, shops, barbeque shelters, dog parking, conference facilities, Holiday Village Gulo Gulo, Camp school of Ranua Wildlife Park. Ranua also has safari services (husky safaris and snowmobile safaris). These are also family friendly. During the summer time there is a domestic animal park in the park ground. Ranua Wildlife Park is Lapland’s leading tourist attraction for families (2015). Ranua has been chosen for this research, initially out of own curiosity, and in order to better understand tourism and service encounter in general, through theory. The motivation behind this study is not only to have my thesis written, and improve my research skills but hopefully help Ranua also to understand their customers’ service experiences and feelings, and on the bases of those, be able to create a new and better service experiences for customers, or enhance existing services, for tourists now and in the future.

In this research, Ranua Wildlife Park’s new service called Santa’s Hideout Cabin, is observed, described, and analyzed as a case study. The service provided includes
different points of service encounter, which this research investigates, and demonstrates how humor is apparent in those encounters.

The encounters that can be spotted at this service are: first the tourists are welcomed by the guides and other service personnel. The middle can be seen as, the guides instructing the students how to drive the snowmobiles, and some of the students are driven by the guides to the Santa’s Secret Cabin, located 10 minute driven away from Ranua WildLife Park. Meeting the Santa, is also seen as the middle of the service, in the context of this writing. The visit with Santa Claus takes approximately 20 minutes. After the visit, the guide drives the family back to the Holiday Village. And the final encounter is the farewell, with the Santa Claus. Total Duration of the Service is 45 minutes. (Appendix 1: Product Card Ranua 2015). The point of view taken on this, is how humor is seen throughout, the different points of customer interactions, from the point of view of customers.

6.2 Time dimension of the service experience

Analysis will be started from the time dimensional aspect, which means, going through the parts of the service experience, starting from the beginning, proceeding to the middle, and ending with the farewell aspect of the service experience. Therefore, the beginning, middle, and the end, as suggested by Rautiainen and Siistonen (2007), form the time dimension of the service experience. However, their model is used to give an idea about the time dimension, since they actually, leave out the ending, part, but rather, just concentrate on the warm welcome of the client. So, the ending or disengagement with the service, was added from the idea of Mudie and Cottam (2010).

6.2.1 Beginning of the service experience

To start off, it needs to be identified, what it means, to be the beginning of the service. The beginning of the service experience, and service encounter, in this context, is when the tourists (students or test customers) arrive first time to Ranua and they are greeted by the service personnel and guides. These guides later instruct the test customers about the right gear as they come to the tourism environment, since the test customers
need to be dressed up warmly, since the next step, is driving with the snowmobiles to the Santa’s Cabin.

“I think the whole experience actually started when we arrived in the beginning … then the whole kind of preparedness for these clothes and greetment (by the tour guides) and you could kind of feel that they are professionals and there for you and the way they give you the instructions you know and the equipment and umm so from that point it started very nice, then we went on the snowmobiles, it was even more exciting.” (Student 4)

From this student’s extract it can be understood, that the service experience started on the arrival of the students to Ranua, and with the warm greeting then by the personnel, and continued with the meeting of the actual tour guides. This could be seen as the beginning of the service. The beginning of the service encounter could be identified according to Pine II and Gilmore’s (1999) service criteria of *escapist*, since this particular experience realm, includes a person creating a memory, active participation, and the student being immersed in the environment in which the service is happening. The students are involved in the greetings process. The students need to participate in listening the instructions about dressing up with the ride gear. One test customer, even stated that:

“Our remember (memory) is fresh because we just have been there.”(Student 4)

This particular quote, refers to the creation of a memory which is significant, when it comes to categorizing the experience as escapist.

6.3.2 During the service experience

The middle or “during” of the service experience, could be seen as the interaction of the students (visitors) with the tour guides who teach them to ride the snowmobiles to the Santa’s Cabin. Some students are taken with the tour guides without having to ride the snowmobile, since some students did not own a driver’s license. Before the students could get to the Santa’s Hideout Cabin, they were given instructions about riding the snowmobiles there, since the weather conditions did not allow the use of a sledge since there was too little snow that could carry the weight of the students on one sledge. This part of the service, where the students had the chance to get to learn
to drive the snow mobiles, could be categorized as *educational* criteria in the model supported by Pine and Gilmore. However, the students did not mention or see this as an education criteria. But, when asked form the test customers, was there humor in this encounter when interacting with the guides, one student states the following:

“Especially when he (safari guide) did this kind of joke that ..Umm..There was this big swamp..Or big place where there was water and other guides came and transported the snowmobiles for us..And then the guide said, good that you are saw that, because on the way back you can do it yourself ….And he made this really ironic smile and everyone believed him and it was so hilarious ..Seriously and for some time when we are on the way back, I was thinking ok..if somebody is gonna end up in the mud, it’s gonna be me.” (Student 3)

Also, the interaction with the students and Santa Claus can be seen as middle of the service, since the service experience already started with the initial arrival of the students to Ranua, being greeted, and taken care by the safari guides. From the video-taped material, the arrival of the students to the Cabin, can be described that there was huge laughter and the sound of awe and surprise within the students as they arrived to the Cabin, which demonstrated wonder of the place. This could also be identified according to the *escapist criteria*, proposed by Pine and Gilmore, since the students were well participating in the experience, and most likely created a memory out of it, since they described their experiences well in the focus group interviews. This escapist criteria will be explained more in depth, in the following part 6.3.2.

### 6.3.3 Ending, or farewell and disengagement with the service experience

The actual farewell with the Santa Claus service (i.e. “ending”) can be seen as the customer receiving gifts from Santa, and saying goodbye to Santa. Also, the tourists had an approximate ten-minute ride back to Ranua premises with the safari guides.

“Like the ending of this this is a secret, this is my, and no don’t tell all I can give you now gingerbread and something, but please don’t tell anyone that.” (Student 1)

“You can come again please do come again and enjoy our… But don’t share it..that would be very personal yeah.” (Student 3)

In the final part of the service encounter with the Santa, the students hoped, that it is very personal, and even hoped, that the experience could be kept as a secret. This could
be categorized according to the *esthetic* criteria proposed by Pine II and Gilmore. In an esthetic experience, the person is present and leaves the environment untouched, and in this exact moment is rather passive in participation. This will be also explained in the following chapter, 6.3.2.

### 6.3 Service experience realms

Now that the time dimension aspect has be analyzed, the researcher wants to bring in deeper discussion, Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) categorization of four service experience realms: education, aesthetic, entertainment and escapist, and how humor is apparent in these categorizations. Previously it was identified, which parts of the service experience (beginning -> escapist), middle ->educational and escapist, and the end (farewell) -> esthetic) could be categorized according to Pine and Gilmore’s model.

Aspects of *education*, *aesthetics*, and *escapist* were seen. In addition to the time dimension, it will be analyzed how humor appears during each of Pine II and Gilmore’s (1999) service experience realms. Appearance of humor is identified as smiling, laughter, friendliness, warm welcome, a joke, a dance, a song, spoken words, behavior, and other instanced identified. We shouldn’t forget importance of friendliness, smile, and a warm welcome, during those interactions. From the time dimensional view, it is understood from the interviews, that humor in the service encounters (which is understood, as friendliness, smile, a small joke, a warm welcome, a song, or just trying to be funny), is seen throughout the whole service experience, in all the aspects of time: beginning, middle, and the end (farewell).

Again here, is the representation that was already expressed in Figure 4, with a minor modification of how the beginning, middle, or the end of experience can be categorized, either as escapist, educational, or esthetic.
6.3.1 Educational

According to Pine II and Gilmore (1999) for an experience to be identified as educational, the event needs to actively participate the student, and as well needs to truly inform the person and increase his or her knowledge and skills. In this part we will analyze the middle of the service, since it is categorized as educational. The middle part involves the guides teaching the snowmobile rides, and as well meeting with Santa. First, the snowmobile ride instructions by the guides will be explained, and later the Santa’s Hideout Cabin experience.

The educational aspect as stated, earlier, occurs in the middle of the service, as first the tour guides teach the students to teach riding the snowmobiles. However, the students don’t refer to this as learning, or educational, but rather, that it is something exciting, which could be even categorized in the entertainment category, but by the researcher, the instructions given by the tour guides, are seen as educational.

“…so from that point it started very nice, then we went on the snowmobiles, it was even more exciting.” (Student 4)

It was asked whether the students experienced humor in the encounter with the tour guides. Also, the students agreed that the safari guides did a lot in the very middle of
the service when they showed friendliness while instructing and showing how to ride the snowmobiles.

“The guides played really important role because he just you know showed us is there something that you see or he made those little jokes over there (on their way to the Santa’s cabin, with the snowmobiles) and umm.. I donno; I liked it a lot, even though I knew what was going to happen, who we are going to meet, somehow, so we were prepared for that…but still I really like the way that he came, he approached us (laughing).” (Student 3)

“For me overall, like I think the guide, with snowmobile, he was really good.” (Student, 1).

Much of the humor used by the guides was most likely improvised and made up at the moment of the encounter.

It seemed problematic, to categorize exactly what part of the service, is seen as the “middle”. So, therefore, it was decided by the researcher, that the two encounter, first the snowmobile guides teaching how to ride the snowmobiles and later taking the students to the Cabin. And then, actually meeting with the Santa, are both seen as the middle of the service. The snowmobile teaching session is identified as an education experience, while the Santa’s Hide Out Cabin experience is categorized as an escapist experience (this is explained in the Escapist section, further down). It was asked from the focus groups what did they learn from the Santa’s Hideout Cabin experience. Here are some of the responses.

“…Mmm; (pondering) it’s a very difficult question” (Student 1a).

“What did we learn? Yeah, I learned in a way, to appreciate the nature more, and I would … the Santa is of course important, but ummm..” (Teacher 1)

It seems, that the students and teachers wished to learn more in this particular service experience. Like has been suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999), an educational experience, involves active participation. Since this was a focus group interview, the participants collectively answered the educational or rather participation aspect of the experience. Furthermore, Pine and Gilmore (1999) state, that to be a truly educational experience, the experience needs to truly inform the person and increase
his knowledge, skills and the event must actively engage the mind and even body. What comes to active participation, the students state the following:

“It (participation) had to be initiated by us.” (Student 4)

The above statement refers to the experience that the students experienced in the Santa’s Hideout Cabin. Many of them wished, that the Santa would have been more interactive with the students, and the students stated that it was them who initiated the participation. It was interesting to see that the focus group formed in a way a team, that filled in the sentence the next person didn’t have time to finish, or jumped to a to mutual understanding of an idea. The humor aspect, was not so apparent in the category of learning. The elements of participation (educational aspect) could be seen in the Santa’s Hideout Cabin: introduction of selves (although the customers didn’t like the fact that it had to be initiated by them), the handing out of gifts (by Santa) to the students, although they didn’t like the fact that a plastic bag was used, when handing out the presents. And there was the participation aspect, when singing together, but the students would have liked to hear the Santa sing as well, and it was hard to come up with a mutual song, that all test customers knew, since everyone was from a different country of origin. However, if the criteria for the education criteria according to Pine and Gilmore is that the event should truly inform the person and increase his knowledge, skills and the event must actively engage the mind and even body; the experience was only to some degree, of this sort. The students also wished that the Santa would have known something from their countries of origin, before their arrival.

“…Or like the country they come from; he can pick up something from the country like from England or something like ohhh I like…”(Student 2).

“…Something like a little story.” (Student 3).

“…Yeah or foreign greetings because he claims to know the languages.” (Student 4).

During the service, which means meeting with the Santa. The students agreed in their conversation, that the Santa “tried to be” funny, but they felt Santa’s nervousness. They even suggested, that he could learn a script or a small dance.
“He can also make up you know some humor… humor out of it like little dance.” (Student, 4)

It seems that the test customers, experienced more humor and jokes with the tour guides, than in the actual service with Santa.

However, as the tourists encounter with the Santa’s Hideout Cabin service, it seems like it did not meet most of their expectations and many seemed to be critical about their visit (expectations) of Santa’s Hideout Cabin. The students were sent a product code describing the Santa’s Hideout Cabin service before they would test the service. This product code is also in the appendix of the thesis; Appendix 1. Below is a quote of the difference of expectation of the product code, and the actual setting.

“In the pdf file (product code) and umm.. the picture there, it really displays totally different thing. It displays…shiny, warm place.. with a very sofa.. ohh yeah and where you feel like home like huh and so, there it was kind of like in a cave very cold and and the place is not where it would be maybe that’s also the point ..if it’s a group of 7 or 8 ..it kind of already becomes...” (Student 4)

Below is photo, taken by me, the researcher, of the actual cabin. And in the appendix 1 is the photo of the product code, or marketed idea to the customers.

Students have quite many ideas about the improvement of the service and these are the students’ honest answers. It also seems that the students did not encounter so much humor in the service encounter with the Santa Claus as was maybe expected out of
them. Later in the text, are some ideas that the students had, for the Santa, to be more humorous and funny.

“…And then there is no Christmas music, it could have been like…voices of animals.” (Student 1)

“Mmm.. some owls reindeers somewhere like you can hear the bells.” (Student 3)

“..And then the customers have to ask the questions. I think he should the Santa should be playing the leading role and he must doing something and well.” (Student 1)

“He[Santa] didn’t well engage the conversation ..that much… it was us asking asking questions and sort of coming up when there was this awkward silence or something…for Finns maybe it’s okay but there were so many foreigners …you know there has to be a flow of conversation and and ….and I noticed that that he kind of waited somebody else would lead, take the lead and u know.” (Student 3)

“You could use also music and smell and then we wouldn’t then we would it would have been nice like to have something warm drink like glögi, he talked about glögi and gingerbread and he said he likes them and eats them but he didn’t have them ..have something” (to serve for tourists). (Student 1)

“…Really when he takes this plastic bag with the presents…” (Student 1)

“It was horrible …it was the worst” (Student 2)

“Yeah …It could have been somewhere where you have to look that I remember that I yeah, they left them somewhere here …the presents.” (Student 1)

6.3.2 Aesthetic

*Criteria of* Aesthetic that is brought up by Pine II and Gilmore (1999: 35) states, that the individual immerses him or herself in the event or environment, with little or no effect on it, leaving the environment essentially untouched. Aesthetics can be understood as, the person just “is”. In this case, the tourists could be said to find themselves, find themselves in the Santa’s Hideout Cabin. Customers are able to encounter with Santa Claus. This experiences aims to stage and authentic and esthetic experience at the Santa’s Cabin. However, the challenge here is to bring
humor into the service experience. As stated earlier, with reference to the time dimension, the farewell-part, could be seen as filling the aesthetic-criteria.

“In my opinion it was nice service if I’m seeing from outsider for the tourist. It’s really nice to come before the Christmas and to show the child and like wow he’s like preparing and and to give this mysterious mystery in the but yeah I miss the smell like you said, like the smell (gingerbread & glögi), coziness, like the warm something that it would create more, something for all senses so that’s…” (Student 2)

“But I still think, it was a little bit too dark over there in the cabin, it was…It felt..I donno well for me it was okay because I am an adult, but if I would be with my small kids for instance, I know that they would get a little scared.” (Student 3)

“…But as I feel it, as you enter it [the cabin] there was no, there was no any kind of story what he [Santa Claus] was gonna do and when you went in, it didn’t look like anyone lives there.” (Student 1)

“…If he [Santa] says he is living there, and then he, and then there is…real life and it should have been warm.. and it wasn’t warm so… yeah that’s um yeah or how is he gonna read there or like he said he is doing things, or like he said and its aa like outside and we were outside and were really couldn’t see any signs of that anyone is living there or doing there or no wood, no nothing… and he talked a lot about the animals and no prints, no prints of animals… and like he said that he read or something, there was no books, there was no… and then the customers have to ask the questions, I think he should the Santa should be playing the leading role and he must doing something and well.” (Student 1)

“You could use also music and smell and then we wouldn’t then we would it would have been nice like to have something warm drink like glögi, he talked about glögi and gingerbread and he said he likes them and eats them but he didn’t have them ..have something.” (Student 1.)

6.3.3 Entertainment

Entertainment is another category that can be seen, weather it is apparent in this context. According to Pine & Gilmore (1999), when people passively absorb the experiences through their senses, as tends to happen when watching a performance, listening to music, or reading for pleasure, they are said to be entertained. Entertainment doesn’t only provide the oldest form of experience, but also one of the most developed, commonplace and familiar. People will smile, laugh or in some other way enjoy themselves.
“I...I...love the ride itself, I really like it and ummm..I think in terms of humor, the
guide did so much” (talking about the snowmobile ride). (Student 3)

“It [Santa] should be a person who really enjoys and really and it’s not even acting it’s
like living ...(ää) character.” (Student 4)

“I mean like yeah, the whole experience be the Santa Claus, but for some people the
big experience might be just...(driving the) snowmobile...or witnessing the lonely
cabin in the middle of nowhere or so over all the idea is really good they just need to
put more authenticity in it put a little bit more on the (props) and yeah I mean, being
how do I say, being funny it cannot be trained I think it’s not it should be a person who
really enjoys and really and it’s not even acting it’s like living ää character .. being
santa,” (Student 4)

One of the students really refers to enjoying the snowmobile ride to the Santa’s
Hideout Cabin, and the other student responds how important it is, that the Santa
himself is enjoying his job, so that he can create the atmosphere for the clients to enjoy.
It could be said, that the middle of the service (meeting with the Santa) could be
categorized as entertaining.

It was asked from the students how they would rate their experience on a scale to 1-5
(one being worse) and five being the best. These were what the students said.

“Overall it would be maybe even four...not three.” (Student 4)

“I would rate between 4 and 5... I would give five...in that way, not it wasn’t perfect.
I would give a 4 ..maybe I wouldn’t pay that much money yeah cuz he needed to be
prepared a little bit at least.” (Student 2)

“I would give a four too cuz for me it really wasn’t the experience that’s the experience
you get every Christmas Eve *laughs* at home so for me it’s something new I would
say.” (Student 1)

Some of the students answered and even talked more about their reasoning for the
current rating. However, it is surprising that so good reviews were given to the service,
taking into account the improvements that the students had mentioned earlier.
6.3.4 Escapist

*An escapist experience* according to Pine II and Gilmore (1999) includes, a person creating a memory, and being much more intensely immersed in the experienced, compared to educational or entertainment aspect. Examples of escapist experiences include: theme parks, casinos, virtual reality headsets, or even chat rooms. The individual becomes an actor in the environment, and not just having a passive role. It was asked from the focus group if they felt like they could “escape” into this service experience from their daily routines. A participant agrees, that the Santa’s Hideout Cabin service could be identified as an escapist experience, since you could forget the daily routines, and experience something totally different.

“That’s true that’s true, yes you could.” (Teacher 2)

The teachers even stated the following:

“We could actually go there a little bit slower because when we went there it would have been nice if just to watch around… yeah to walk around, by yourself not just somebody telling you, go and take a peak …because I think the skiing things which were there…they were marvelous very old fashioned and I started to watch them when you went to the window; we were just missing some points that’s some way in a hurry.” (Teacher 2)

“Because well ääh even though we are from Finland the setting there is so beautiful that it would be just…” (Teacher 1)

“…Nice to watch and admire that.” (Teacher 2)

“…Take the time and …take a look around.” (Teacher 1)
Lin & Lin (2011) state that employee inner emotion, work group mood, and service environment all have a positive influence on employee affective delivery, which, in turn, positively influences customer emotion and service outcomes (Lin & Lin, 2011: 183).

The understanding of humor experience portrayed in Figure 1 will be used to understand the respondents’ answers. This understanding is built from the literature researched with relation to humor. Later these will be understood through the framework portrayed initially in Figure 4. According to McGhee (1979: 6-8 via Apte 1985: 14) also determines and defines the semantic boundaries, which means that humor needs to have the following characteristics: of “wit”, “comic,” “incongruity”, “amusement”, “absurdity”, “ludicrousness”, “ridicule”, “mirth,” “funniness” and “playfulness.” Could these be observed to arise from the experience of the participants in the Santa’s Hideout Cabin?

“He (Santa) could have learned dance from elves or something like this.” (Student 1)

“Let’s make…. like these current selfies (with camera) and everything makes some kinds of like jokes and umm interact together … like very very fast game.” (Student 2)

Although the sample size is quite small, it can be generalized, that humor is apparent in the service experience situations, through out.
The researcher analyzed the employees’ interview answers, and came into conclusion, that they support the customers’ views.

”…And of course, our guides make the experience, basing it on humor, in a way that it becomes exciting, but also know where to draw the line, so that it is not scary for the tourists. The humor is never to go over the limit.” (Employee, 1b)

”We are very much investing in this service, that we have a very personalized service, and that the person who lives with us, feels welcome, and that we can all be one big family.” (Employee, 1b)

“…Exactly that, it is a new, good addition to our event service, and that of course there is Santa Claus in Rovaniemi, but we are not competing with him.” (Employee 1b)

“All the time the Santa Claus is smiling.” (Employee 1d).

”Customer will get to experience something new, and ride the snowmobiles, and see a little bit different, what they don’t have in their countries…This is very good service especially for families with kids, and I could easily imagine that during Christmas, 6-7 families visit here.” (Employee, 1d)

These are some excerpts translated from Finnish to English, to the best of researcher’s translation skills. It can be understood from the texts that the employees see the Santa Claus Service a really good addition to their exciting event program. Also from the employees’ answers, they describe humor as something good, and innovative for themselves and for the customers. One employee mentions that the Santa is smiling throughout the whole service experience. One employee also thinks that the Santa needs to think what kind of humor he can use, depending on the age of the family; he states that with adults, some rougher humor can be used, whereas with kids, the Santa needs to be more careful.
7 CONCLUSIONS

In this last chapter, results are portrayed, in terms of the research questions. Results are also reflected on previous research in the field that has been studied. In addition, the results are reflected upon the constructed framework. Theoretical contribution is discussed along with managerial implications. After that limitations of the study are explored and later suggestions for future research. Also acknowledgements are written at the end.

7.1 Contribution

This research aimed to explore and understand in what ways humor can be utilized in a service encounter situation when creating a service experience. Some of the findings to the research questions are found from empirical data and others from a theoretical understanding. This research contributes to the invisible scientific society, by showing how customers perceive the importance of humor in a service encounter situation, during a service experience.

- Main question: How is humor utilized in a service encounter situation when creating a service experience?

Although, it was more difficult than initially approximated, to research how humor can be utilized in a tourism context, some results were evident from the empirical research conducted in this study. Although this research is based on consumers’ answers about how they experience humor in the service, the researcher, also observed, that the test customers laughed and showed signs of joy, when arriving to the Santa’s Hideout Cabin for the first time, although the customers’ answers, did not bring this view up in their responses. It was evident in this research, that the test customers enjoyed the encounter with the tour guides who took them to the Santa’s cabin, even more, than the Santa Claus experience itself. In these interactions (with the guides) humor was seen in the form of a smile, a small joke, or a laugh, which was evident, in the customers’ answers.
Some scientific and scholarly articles were used to delve deeper into how humor has already been utilized in tourism contexts. To answer this question, the answers to sub questions, framework based on literature, the frame constructed for this particular study, and the empirical findings, are all needed.

When reading the transcripts based on the interviews from the test customers, it can be said that humor appears in the actions of the service employees, especially with the tour guides. These humorous instances could be seen in the guides’ behavior; word choice; facial expressions; nonverbal communication; funny acts; jokes; friendliness toward the customers; warmly welcoming attitude; professionalism and skill; an ease of approachability; and not making fun of the customers in a bad way, and accepting the customers as they are. It can be used to form team spirit between customers, and increase motivation. However, the customers did not experience the interaction with Santa Claus as humorous as intended.

According to previous studies (Pearce 2009 & Frew 2006), humor is used to alleviate stressful situations and promote tourists’ comfort levels during the service encounter, in a tourism experience context. Humor makes customers feel more ease and not be left feeling scared or too nervous. These studies are supported in this case, since especially the tour guides succeed in their use of humor toward the test customers. It can also be said, that humor can be used as a playful manner to introduce new instructions to the tourists. Humor is also used to form team spirit between the customers, and motivate tourists. These results are supported by Pearce (2009), who finds out in his results that humor is used in a tourism context to promote visitor comfort levels, help tourists concentrate; establish connections, and allow room for commentary.

The results in this thesis are also supported by Mitas et al. (2012) in which his findings show the importance of positive emotions when it comes to building community between the participants, and to foster participation. The test customers in Ranua, portrayed team spirit, and motivation toward being participants in the actual service experience. The results in this thesis are also supported by Chen et al. (2014), in that a leisure trip provides opportunities for relaxation and detachment from work (escapist criteria).
Below is the framework, which has been constructed for this research. It ties together the time dimension, the different ways of experiencing the service, and the appearance of humor. With this framework, it can be understood, that the time dimension plays an important role in the service experience. This framework, helps the reader perceive, that there is a beginning, middle, and an end, to a service experience. Within that time period, there are instances, where humor can be used. The instances in the context of this research, are in the arrival of the students to Ranua Wild Life Park and being greeted by the service personnel. In this moment, humor can be utilized, as it was, by a warm welcome, and friendly approach by the service personnel. This constructed framework, helps the reader understand, in a new way, how also, each service experience can be categorized, according to different service experience realms; these, being: escapist, entertainment, educational, and esthetic.

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<th>Duration / Time Dimension of Service</th>
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<td>Service encounter realms</td>
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Figure 8: Constructed framework tying together time dimension, service experience realms, and humor.

- How does humor appear in the service encounter from point of view of customers during the service experience?

With the constructed framework, there is a space in it, that discusses the appearance of humor. In each time dimension, the appearance of humor could be perceived, depending on how the tourists experience their interaction with that given service personnel, at that given moment.
According to test customers, they would have wanted that more humor to be integrated in the current service. It was more complex than expected, to observe, and describe the moments where humor actually took place. The test customers’ answers will be supported by the employees’ answers. According to some employees, humor is seen as a positive addition to the service.

“…the humor is yes, a very important perspective, that has to be taken into account especially in the development of tourism…that humor like a topic, is in the very starting point, and yes … we are absolutely so in the beginning stage, when it comes to humor, so in my opinion, that humor can be cultivated in future and so in the times ahead, it requires that we have taken quite big improving steps and that we are sure, in what way we can present this humor, and I could think that when we first greet these upcoming tourist groups, that humor might not be the first one in mind…” (Employee 1)

Although, the test customers did see humor during the service experience, mostly with the interactions with the tour guides, they wished for more of it, especially with the interaction with Santa Claus. When asked from the test customers how they would characterize the service employees, in this case mostly the tour guides, they used words such as easily approachable, funny, professional, or warmly welcoming, when referring to the guides or service personnel.

It can be concluded, that humor appears in the service experience that the customers experience, especially with the tour guides, but not so much in the interaction with the Santa Claus. Also these experiences that the test group experienced during the beginning, middle, and the end of the service, can be categorized according to Pine II and Gilmore’s (1999) categorization of different experience realms: educational, escapist, esthetic, and entertainment. The beginning of the service could be categorized as escapist experience, the middle both as escapist and educational experience, and the ending as an esthetic experience.

Empirical data also supports Asforth and Humphrey’s (1993 via Lin and Lin’s 201) views that front-line employees are required to show positive emotion, like warmth and friendliness during a service transaction. In addition spoken words and acceptable facial expressions, and the tone of voice, are seen to affect service delivery, (multiple authors in Lin & Lin’s (2011) article.), although up to 90 percent of the interaction
during service deliver is communicated non-verbally (Dallimore et al, 2007 via Lin & Lin 2011). From the point of view of customers, the guides were humorous and easily approachable. In one of the focus groups, one participant says that the Santa was easily approachable guy, and one focus group agrees that the Santa tried to be funny. The quality of the interviews is understood how well the themes discussed in the interviews represent the overall idea supported by the literature mentioned above. The main focus of this paper is to examine how a humorous service encounter can be utilized when creating a service experience for customers.

- What are the key elements of a humorous service encounter that contribute to the successful service experience?

Apte’s (1985) research suggests and supports the fact that laughter and smiling are the most recognizable physiological indicators of a humor experience. Britannica Academic (2015) understands that there needs to be a stimulant for a humorous event to take place; this stimulant could be a joke, a smile, a funny act, or a funny comedy strip. These situations could be applied to a service encounter situation. Laughter arises when things that are incongruous or unfit but are united in the same collection of a story (Beattie 1778). Using humor could be said to alleviate stress also and to contribute to longevity (Mozes 2012). Using a smile, or making the customers laugh contributes to a humorous service experience, this is not of course as simple, as made sound.

Although humor is also thought as a serious matter, and those with the talent of it should be respected (Bradley 2015) and solely being funny for the sake of being funny, won’t cut it in the design world; maybe same could be said to apply to the service culture. It could be linked how the business could benefit from using a service with humor financially and strategically. Another way of seeing the “appearance” of humor in a service encounter situation, could be by paying attention to the word choice of the service provider.

Like McGhee (1979) suggests, that there are certain semantic boundaries which share some similar semantic properties as humor. These are: “wit” (nokkeluus), “comic” (koomisuus), “incongruity” (yhteensopimattomuus), “amusement” (huvi/hilpeys),
“absurdity” (järjettömyys), “ludicrousness” (naurettava), “ridicule” (virnuilu), “mirth” (iloisuus), “funniness” (hauskuus), “playfulness” (leikkisyys). This could be understood in the light of this research such that, when these words are applied to a service encounter situation, theoretically speaking, and a service provider were to apply these in a service encounter situation, he or she must be very careful and discreet when confronting the customer with humor in the situation. Furthermore Apte (1985) goes much deeper in how age, sex, role, and status affect the person’s understanding of humor. These should also be taken into account, when possibly interacting with a customer in a service encounter situation.

According to Bradley (2015) humor is built on: clash of context, tension and release, element of surprise, and incongruity. These could be observable when smiling or laughter happens, like Apte (1985) earlier states. Another way to observe the appearance of humor is by observing the “clash of context” that takes place when humor is used, or how tension and release in customers takes place, or how there is an element of surprise in a service encounter situation. Another way, of “seeing” humor happen in a service encounter situation, is by paying attention to the worker’s essence, word choice, sensitivity of the situation, and ability to assist customer in a decision-making process (Valkama 2013). Also, by observing the employee’s inner emotion, work group mood, and service environment, these can positively influence on the employee’s affective delivery, and which in turn positively influences the customer’s emotion and service outcomes (Lin & Lin 2011).

Also, having a good sense of humor in a service encounter, in a financial sector, by a financial advisor, had a positive impact on clients’ perceptions of service quality, trust, satisfaction, future purchase intensions and word of mouth propensity (Bergeron & Vachon 2008). In addition, employees in many service industries are often required to

In addition, in Lin & Lin’s (2011) research, in which other authors are referenced as well, they include that front-line employees are required to show positive emotions, like warmth and friendliness, during service encounters. Also spoken words, and facial expression that are socially accepted, as well as tones of voices are seem to affect the success in service delivery. Also 90% of this delivery is non-verbal communication. Also, emotional contagion is referred in their research, so when the customers are
made feel good during the service experience, it will lead customers to give positive evaluations of the company and most likely to lead to consumer satisfaction. Usually service employees are trained what kind of emotions and expressions are suitable in a service encounter situation, although these are not always the emotions the service personnel is experience at the time. Drivers of service encounter could be said to be: giving attention to the guest, personal service, and good service attitude by the service provider and manners (Valkama 2013).

Service encounter can be understood in the context of hotel business to consist of different phases. One way is: 1.) greeting the tourist and filling the personal data and checking the booking and payment choice. 2.) Receptionist hands out the key and gives other necessary guidelines for the tourist. 3.) This phase is telling the tourist about other service and welcoming the client. (Rautiainen and Siistonen 2007). Another model, contains six phases in the service encounter model: access, check-in, diagnosis, service delivery, check-out and disengagement, and follow-up (Mudie and Cottam 2010).

Furthermore, Walter et al.’s (2010) categorization of a successful service encounter includes the parts of: social interaction, the core service, the physical environment, “the restaurant” in this case the Cabin, the price and payment procedure, the atmosphere, the guest, and finally the occasion. It could be said, that Walter et al.’s research method can be supported in by this research, since all those categorizations need to be present in order for the service to be successful. The drivers of a successful service encounter are: giving attention to the guest, personal service, good service attitude by the service provider, and manners (Valkama, 2013). Valkama’s findings are supported in this research.

7.2 Managerial implications

Before starting with the managerial implications, it should be noted by the reader, that the tourism services are very distinguishable, from for example insurance services. In a tourism context, unique experiences are aimed to be sold for customers. Customers want memorable, stress-alleviating, and unique experiences. With this, it is possible to generalize, although the sample size for this given study is rather small, that humor is
an important addition to a service encounter situation when creating a service experience in a tourism context. Use of humor by the service personnel alleviates stress in tourists; it connects people; it may bring the customers back to the business, and it builds team spirit and motivation within the tourists. This study presents the following main managerial implications. First, it makes practitioners aware of the existence of humor and the possibility it holds as a tactical tool that businesses can use, when it comes to creating a service experience or a service encounter situation for its clients. Humor can be used in the behavior, actions, word choice, emotions, and also nonverbal communication. Secondly, this research enables practitioners realize that which factors account for a successful service encounter, and what creates a memorable service experience. Third, the interviews provide honest perspectives that the test customers and employees hold toward the service experience situation. Managers can use the quotations included here, in their service development process, to enhance even better customer or services experiences for their customers, and even better service encounter situation.

The research also portrays a more holistic understanding what a tourism product is composed of, that it can further help managers either to add humor to other services as well, if seen necessary. Finally, the framework proposed in Figure 4., as well as the theoretical framework based on literature, could help managers evaluate and understand better their own service, and the role of humor in it. Managers could also understand that there are different types of service experiences they can build. They should not forget the time aspect of the service experience, and the opportunity that humor holds in the service encounter situations.

7.3 Limitations of research

The empirical part of this research is based on the answers of ten participants in the focus group, and on top of this, there was an employee in the focus group who was an employed by Ranua zoo, and four employee interviews. Also four employee interviews are utilized to understand the role of humor in service encounter situations when creating a service experience. It is possible that the number of interviewees is small, when it comes to generalizing the results.
In focus group one, there is one male student from Uzbekistan, one female student from Poland, another female student from Lithuania, and a female student from Finland. The fact that students are from different countries could possibly affect the ways in which they have gathered their previous experienced in relation to service experiences, humor, or service encounters in general. The testers of the service interviewed in the focus group two, compose of a female student from Vietnam, a female student from China, a male student from Russia, and two female teachers from Finland. When it came to transcribing the interviews, it was sometimes hard to hear what was being said, since many of the testers spoke English as a second language.

According to Varto (1992: 118), reliability of data means the research’s freedom from scattered and irrelevant factors, especially when it comes to the collection of data and determining the scope of research and defining its limits. In the beginning of the research, it was hard to focus the research question to what was being studied. First the focus was to study the use of humor in the tour guide of the zoo, which was later switched to the improvement of the restaurant service with the use of humor, and thirdly the focus was to study village travel and humor, and toward the end of the year 2015, the focus of empirical research was to be the Santa’s Hideout Cabin service provided by the case company and to study how humor was apparent in that. In addition, the researcher was part of the HURMOS-project which consisted of three workshops that were supporting the understanding of humor in a business context. It was extremely hard to draw boundaries and limits as of, to what extend to study the concept of humor. This can be due to the inexperience of the researcher in this thesis.

However, this did not affect the theory part of the research since literature related to service experience, service encounter, humor, and tourism needed to be researched anyway. However, when it came to the collection of data, it was difficult to determine which kind of people to interview, and what kind of questions to ask from them. However, books on methodology (Varto, 1992), and books on making a focus group interview, making an interview, and books about analyzing the empirical data (Ruuusuvuori & Nikander: 2010) were read, to understand and grasp the most out of the correct parts that are needed in making research, and obtaining as realistic and natural results as possible.
Like any case study, this case study also studies a single phenomenon in one context, which is the humorous service encounter. In this research, the context was described in the case presentation. The empirical data was understood by categorizing it into themes, portrayed by Pine II and Gilmore (1999). These themes that were apparent in both the interviews were grouped according to themes.

In the analysis part, quotations from interviewees were included; after all interviews were made, they were word by word transcribed, which increases the reliability; also, each participant in the focus group was asked to fill out a Consent to participate in the interview (which is in the appendix). All participants in the focus groups signed this, and turned it in to the researcher. All interviews were recorded either by a voice recorder or a video camera. Also, a verbal consent or agreement to be interviewed was given by all employees interviewed before the interview. All participants’ names will stay anonymous; this is related with the ethical part of data. Also this related to the integrity of data, held by the researcher.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (1991), discuss the reliability of an interview. They discuss the importance of the equivalency of results and reality, as part of every research. Theme interviews can be considered as a “soft” method, which does justice to the multi-faceted reality. The goal of the research that study different phenomena is to understand them and their many characteristics and to be able to summarize them so that the descriptions of new dimensions portray the interviewees’ real thoughts and experiences. The methodology, and its utility is assessed according to scientific criteria: reliability. When assessing the reliability of an interview, the different stages of the interview need to be seen and how those affect the reliability. The actual interview, cannot be thought as a “separate” phase. The reliability check applies to the whole research process. Word by word transcription of data, and its categorization according to “concept groups”, could be thought to be very reliable data. Data in this research was grouped according to different themes that were apparent both in interviewees’ answers, and how those are reflected in the framework (Hirsjärvi and Hurme (1991: 128-129)).

The reliability of an interview means, if for instance, another interviewer was used, is the same result received. Or is the same result received by the same interviewer in the
same conditions. The theme interview moment, is a one time and unique opportunity and interviewing the same person, for a second time, would make the situation artificial. If it not possible to understand the phenomenon’s characteristics and qualities, or if it is not possible to derive the theory’s main concepts, the research’s concept validity is bad. This is seen in the weakness when defining the research’s main categories and the in the problem setting part. In addition, this is seen in the lacking and deficient in the planning of the interview. Afterwards, the concept validity cannot be improved (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 1991). The reality of this research is also good, since all the interview templates are at the end of this research, and the methods used is well described, so it would not make a difference if a different person were to carry out the interviews.

In the planning of research, the best concept validity is secured by familiarizing self with the group or people being interviewed, the concept system, use of language, and mainly orientating the research to the right direction by studying previous research and familiarizing self with the concepts. Although it is possible, theoretically to reach the core of the phenomenon, it is possible to fail when it comes to making of the theme categories, or when the initial questions are made to the interviewees. This means, that the asked questions, don’t reach the wanted meanings. In order to reach content validity, it is necessary to have enough questions, and enough questions in relation to each theme being studied, as well, as additional questions from each area. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (1991). It can be agreed, that the content validity of this research is good.

According to Ruusuvuori & Nikander (2010: 26-27), qualitative research should be analyzed systematically, and during the research, should explain, why certain choices have been made, why topic has been limited, and what drives the forward-going analysis. What are the strengths and limits of the data analysis? Validity on the other hand, means how the collected data, and the interpretations of it, validate each other. Has the right data been chosen, so that the research question can be answered? Are there any anomalies in the data? How transparent and generalizable are the results? The researcher thinks that the data is valid, since right data has been chosen, and the research questions can be answered.
The reliability of the theory part portrayed can be evaluated by the strength of sources used (the names of scientific journals, names of researchers, books used, how current the data is, and other online material used). Also, the reliability of theory can be assessed how well it answers the research questions portrayed at the beginning of the paper. The researcher argues that the sources are academically strong.

Since the participants in the test group are from different countries, it is also possible that the difference in the country of origin and background accounts for the different views that the interviewees hold of how humor is perceived in relation to a service encounter situation and a service experience in general. Also all the employees interviewed are Finnish, so it could be that their views represented are biased toward how important the use of humor is, without seeing internationality or language barrier a problem.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

Humor can increase customer satisfaction and make customers feel more like home during the service; however, risks and benefits of humor should be analyzed more in depth in a tourism context, before implementing certain humorous greetings into the service providers’ daily routines. It could also be another idea for future research, to interview real, paying tourists who have been to a service experience and have been in contact with a humorous service encounter. It would be interesting to find results, what kind of feedback and ideas, the paying tourists would give about this same service, Santa’s Hideout Cabin. It is possible, that service development could be considered as a view in future research. Future research is needed, in order to demonstrate how to write humorous scripts for service workers, so that they know beforehand what to say to tourists, how to greet customers, while taking into account the tourists’ background, culture, and nationality, so that the humor actually works and does not offend anybody.
8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES


OTHER PAPER REFERENCES


Appendix 1

Product Code of Santa’s Hideout Cabin

A Visit to Santa Claus in his Secret Hideout Cabin

In the commune of Ranua, close to the Ranua Wildlife Park, you have the chance to visit Santa in his very, very secret place, his Hideout Cabin in the wilderness. After your arrival or a little stay in Ranua, you will meet your guide who drives you and your family or your small entourage through the dark, snowy forest towards Santa’s secret place. Within merely a 10 minute ride, you will see a tiny light flickering from far away. The guide stops driving in order to discuss what the light might mean, what it could be — in the middle of the mysterious dark and darkness of just snow-covered trees all around. In a short moment the ride continues, now towards the light. As you come closer and closer, you will see a tiny wooden cabin appearing in the shimmering darkness, with candle lights flickering in the windows, smoke rising up from the chimney.

You stop here. At this point the children might go and peek through the windows to try and see who on earth could be staying in a sweet little cabin like this. The children, ever more curious of the sights they might have seen, courageously knock on the door. And who comes to open the door — but Santa himself, welcoming the family to step inside and stay awhile in the comforts of his cabin adorned with a fireplace, with handmade wooden sculptures and handicrafts all around, red blankets on the bed, his books and pens on the table. Santa explains that this is the place where he likes to come before all the Christmas work and hassle, to stay and relax, to enjoy the quiet of the woods and the nature around, where he comes after all the joy and delight of the Christmas festivities.

Santa continues explaining that he remembers the names of the children, that he knew they had arrived to Ranua and was expecting the family to perhaps even visit him, as many families, having gotten a little hint of a secret place in the woods, do visit him. And Santa takes his scrapbook toward aloud who has visited him lastly. Santa has plenty fun little stories to tell, and with the children he also discusses about the school, the family, and the manners of the children; if they have behaved well, what they have learnt during the past year. Santa also listens to the children’s questions, and answers them in his utterly unique, and always supportive, positive manner.

The visit takes about 20 minutes. After the farewells the guide drives the family back to the Holiday Village.

Price: Adults €100, children €80
Duration: 45 minutes
Appendix 2

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF FOCUS-GROUP #1

Focus group number 1: views on humor, service experience, and service encounter and tourism after experiencing the Santa’s Hideout Cabin

1. Please tell a little bit about yourself [name, (although you’ll stay anonymous), age, where you are from and your field of studies.]

2. What do you remember (what was memorable) from the Santa Claus experience?

3. Did you have a favorite part in this experience?

4. Do you have anything else you remember, besides mystery?

5. How do you feel now after the service experience?

6. What were your expectations (of the service)?

7. What would make a successful service experience in your opinion?

8. What is important in your opinion, what build a good service encounter?

9. What in your opinion is the role of humor and how could the Santa use humor?

10. How did you participate in the service experience?

11. Is it important to make it personal, like this experience?

12. How could the Santa Claus be funny? What are the ways?

13. How satisfied were you with the service, on a scale of 1-5? (One being worst, Five being the best).
14. Do you think the Santa used humor? Was he funny?

15. Can you actually learn to be funny?

16. How did you enjoy the whole service? How did you feel? (from moment of start to end)

17. Do you think this service fits Ranua’s other services? And do you know what the other services offered are?

18. What do you think about the restaurant? Have you been to the zoo? And what do you think about the safari?
Appendix 3

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUP # 2

Focus group number 2: views on humor, service experience, and service encounter and tourism after experiencing the Santa’s Hideout Cabin

1. Please introduce yourself (you will stay anonymous) and the country of origin, age, and what you are studying.

2. What do you remember from the Santa Claus service experience?

3. What was the best part of the experience?

4. What do you think in general about the service experience (the atmosphere, the cabin, the props?)

5. What are the pros about the Santa Claus (personality?)

6. Did you observe any funny things that the Santa Claus was saying or doing?

7. What kind of feeling did you have after the service experience?

8. Did the Santa Claus know anything about you, before hand?

9. Did the Santa make you laugh?

10. Can you identify any other feelings that you think are important in creating a successful and memorable service experience?

11. Did you feel like you participated in the service? How did you participate?

12. How satisfied were you with this new Service or the idea of the Santa? How do you think it fits Ranua’s other services?
13. Would you recommend this service when it is put for “real” customers?

14. And what do you think about English being the language used during the service?

15. What is your revisit intention in general to Ranua?

16. What did you expect from this service?

17. What did you learn from this Santa Claus experience?

18. What did you enjoy the most at the service?
Appendix 4

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW; EMPLOYEE 1D

Use of Humor when creating a new Service experience at Santa’s Hide Out Cabin – an employee’s viewpoint (Use codes)

1. What is the best part about the work you do at the moment?

2. What kind of attitude do you hold in relation with your current job?

3. How did you become a Santaclaus at the company?

4. Could you please describe the character of Santaclaus?

5. Can you say, what kind of humor can a Santaclaus use at their job?

6. Could you please describe the customer encounter of clients with the Santaclaus; how do you take into account international clients?

7. In what kind of situations can you say, that using humor is possible and worth the try?

8. How do you see this new Santaclaus service, of course among with other services?

9. In your opinion, what is good about this Santaclaus, new service that is provided?

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

11. Are you willing to develop the service, weather necessary?

12. Could you please describe what is the ideal Finnish Santaclaus?

13. What in your opinion is a good service composed of?
Appendix 5

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF THE EMPLOYEE 1C

Humor, Service experience, in a restaurant context- Restaurant service employee’s view

1. Could you please tell a little bit about your self, such as your current position?

2. What kind of education do you hold?

3. Can I ask you age? How old are you?

4. Could you please describe a little bit the current restaurant service?

5. How do you welcome customers to you restaurant service? Or are there certain repliques that you use?

6. Is there, a what is the customer painpoint when it comes to customer encounter in a restaurant service?

7. In what ways does humor and play show in the current customer service in the restaurant context?

8. From what countries do most tourists who visit this restaurant mostly come from?

9. In what situations can a waitress or personnel use humor in their work?

10. What kind of humor can a waitress use in this service encounter with a customer? In what kind of situation would you use humor?

11. What else would you like to add or is there something you think about humor or in general about developing a service?

12. Do customers usually remember, or do they come and thank for a really good service?

13. Are you aware about this Santaclaus service that is under development?

14. What do you think about it, that this kind of new service is on its way?
15. Do you think that a waitress should have a certain role on when working?

These were all the questions so far, thank you for your time.
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF EMPLOYEE 1B

Humor, Service Experience

1. Could you please tell a little bit about yourself (name, age, education)?

2. What was the starting point to create this new service, Santa’s Hideout Cabin?

3. What was the motivation behind to start developing this new service among many other services that Ranua has?

4. Where are you planning to market this new service?

5. How do you think humorous service helps develop the Santa Claus service, or service in general at the company?

6. Has there been a certain “pain point” in previous service encounter scenarios, which you now want to develop with the use of humor?

7. How do international tourists react to Santa Claus?

8. What were the different phases in making this Santa Claus service?

9. How do you see tourism from an employer’s eyes?

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Consent to Participate in Focus Group

1.12.2015 at Ranua

You have been asked to participate in a focus group carried by Hilla Lehtovuori, a Master’s Thesis student in the Department of Marketing at University of Oulu. The purpose of the group is to try and understand the role of humor during a service experience. The information learned in the focus groups will be used only for the purposes of completing a Master’s Thesis for University of Oulu. You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and stop at any time. Although the focus group will be tape recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report. There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each other, we ask that only one individual speak at a time in the group and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential. I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

Signed: ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________