

**SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION
OF EXPERIENCE 365**

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The aim of this thesis is to create effective sustainability communication strategies for Experience 365, a company in Kemi, Finland. Experience 365 provides various services catered towards tourists and locals, with a focus on providing ice and snow related experiences year-round. Their services include the SnowExperience365, the seaside glass villas, the icebreaker Sampo and the outdoor Winter Garden which can be experienced every winter season. The aim is to examine the company's sustainability communication efforts and determine whether customers prioritize sustainable practices when choosing a travel destination.

Developing sustainability communication at Experience 365 requires first examining current sustainability practices and planning a way forward. Qualitative research methods were employed in this thesis, including conducting interviews with the commissioner at Experience 365. Customers were invited to take part in a survey to provide feedback on their experience of sustainability practices at Experience 365.

The result of this thesis reveals the importance of sustainability communication in the tourism industry, especially for businesses like Experience 365. The study highlights the importance of effectively communicating sustainable practices to customers, consumers and stakeholders to build brand reputation, attract customers and contribute to a more sustainable future. It emphasizes the need for clear and engaging communication through various channels such as, company website and social media platforms to inform and engage audiences in sustainability. Ultimately the main result is the recognition of sustainability communication as a key factor in promoting sustainable tourism practices and enhancing a company's sustainability efforts.

Keywords Kemi, tourism, sustainability, responsibility, sustainability communication

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on kehittää vastuullisuusviestintää Kemissä sijaitsevalle yritykselle Experience 365. Yritys tarjoaa erilaisia palveluja matkailijoille ja paikallisille, keskittyen jään ja lumen kokemiseen ympäri vuoden. Palveluihin kuuluu ympärivuotinen SnowExperience365, lasihuvilat merenrannalla, jäänmurtaja Sampo ja talvipuisto, jonka voi kokea talvikaudella. Tarkoituksena on tutkia yrityksen vastuullisuusviestintää ja selvittää, onko asiakkaille tärkeää, että yritys noudattaa kestävän kehityksen mallia ja vaikuttaako se heidän päätöksentekoonsa matkakohdetta valitessaan.

Vastuullisuusviestinnän kehittäminen Experience 365:ssä vaatii ensin nykyisten kestävyttä edistävien käytäntöjen tutkimista sekä jatkotoimenpiteiden suunnittelua. Tässä opinnäytetyössä käytettiin laadullisia tutkimusmenetelmiä, mukaan lukien haastattelu Experience 365:n toimeksiantajan kanssa. Aineistoa kerättiin myös tekemällä kyselytutkimus asiakkaille, jotka vierailivat Experience 365:ssä.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tulos kertoo vastuullisuusviestinnän tärkeydestä matkailualalla, erityisesti yrityksille kuten Experience 365. Tutkimus korostaa kestävien käytäntöjen tehokkaan viestinnän merkitystä asiakkaille, kuluttajille ja sidosryhmille brändin maineen rakentamiseksi, uusien asiakassuhteiden kehittämiseksi sekä kestävämmän tulevaisuuden edistämiseksi. Se korostaa selkeän ja osallistavan viestinnän tarvetta eri kanavien kautta, kuten yrityksen verkkosivuston ja sosiaalisen median alustojen kautta, jotta voidaan tiedottaa ja sitouttaa yleisöä vastuullisuuteen. Vastuullisuusviestinnällä on keskeinen rooli vastuullisten matkailukäytäntöjen edistämisessä sekä yrityksen kestävyys-tehostamisessa.

Avainsanat

Kemi, matkailu, kestävyys, vastuullisuus, vastuullisuusviestintä

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is defined as operations that meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations (Drolet 2015). In business it means that the organization contributes positively to the environment and society, it is also a long-term commitment to sustainable actions (Business Finland 2023).

As climate change continues to affect life on earth, sustainable business practices are required. Besides the affect sustainability has on global challenges, it can also influence the company's success. Sustainability in business can mean for example that the company is using sustainable materials in the manufacturing process, they are optimizing supply chains in order to reduce emissions or they are relying on renewable energy sources in their facilities. The first thing a company has to do when driving change is to assess what sustainability as a concept means to the team (Spiliakos 2018). After that the company can establish their mission and once the company has a mission set out, they can start building their sustainable business strategy (Spiliakos 2018). A sustainable business strategy is a strategy that incorporates economic, environmental and social factors into an organization's practices and processes in order to create long-term benefits for the company and its employees while protecting resources (Tenney 2023). After the company has a business strategy, they can implement it and start assessing the results (Spiliakos 2018).

This thesis focuses on the sustainability communication at Experience 365. Sustainability communication is a business strategy for companies who are following sustainable practices and committing to them (Bhatia 2023). It is a way to show the customers, consumer and stakeholders about their business operations and how they do what they do using a sustainable approach (Bhatia 2023).

The commissioner in this thesis is a company in Kemi, Finland called Experience 365. They provide all-year-round tourism experiences with snow and ice and one of the key values for their organization is to promote sustainable practices. The company is already following a variety of different sustainable practices and with

the help of this thesis they can assess their current results and find development ideas. The commissioner found the idea of the thesis very topical to their current situation since they wish to further develop their sustainability communication and hopefully achieve the Sustainable Travel Finland- label at one point (Experience 365 2023). The purpose of the Sustainable Travel Finland programme is to provide companies in Finland a toolkit for sustainable travel (Business Finland 2022).

The aim of thesis is to help the company Experience 365 to develop their sustainability communication by studying their current situation with sustainability and sustainability communication, receiving data from customers and employees to see what their experiences are with the company's current actions and whether there is something they have left unnoticed. There is always room for improvement but with this thesis the company will get accurate information about their customers' experiences as well as employees' thoughts, which is a crucial part in the development process.

2 EXPERIENCE 365

Kemi, the city of Snowman is a town in north-western Finland. It lies along the Gulf of Bothnia at the mouth of the Kemi River. Kemi is a seaport, handling most of the export trade on the Gulf of Bothnia. (Britannica 2023.) The population of Kemi in 2022 was around 19 500 people. Kemi city covers in total 748 square meters, but only 95 square meters is land. (Kemi 2024.)

Kemin Tourism Ltd. is a tourism company owned by the City of Kemi. They operate, sell and market the services of the year-round Snow Castle area. The brands were merged under Kemi Tourism Ltd. in 2008. Kemi Tourism Ltd. has been awarded the Domestic Tourism Company of the Year in 2019 and the Future Tourism Growth Path Winner also in 2019. SnowCastle, SnowHotel, Snow Restaurant and Seaside Glass Villas have received several international awards called World Luxury Hotel & Restaurant Awards.Services. (Wematchu 2022.)

Kemi is mainly known for the snow castle, which is known to be the largest snow castle in the world. The Kemi SnowCastle is sculpted every year from ice and snow taken from the Gulf of Bothnia. (Experience 365 2023). Experience 365 also provides an all-year-round snow castle called SnowExperience365, it is an indoor exhibition also built completely of snow and ice. Inside the all-year round are there is an ice restaurant, ice and snow sculptures and an ice slide. The snow castle area also has a restaurant with a sea view called Lumihutale. At the restaurant they offer unique and modern but traditional Sea Lapland cuisine. At the restaurant it is important for the company to use local ingredients. Another service at the Experience 365 is the Seaside Glass Villas which is designed for the people who enjoy being in the nature in peace and quietness. It is also possible to see the stars and maybe even northern lights, since the glass villas has a roof made of glass. (Experience 365 2023.)

For Experience 365, sustainability is one of the most important values and their next goal would be to pursue the Sustainable Travel Finland label. Visit Finland has developed the Sustainable Travel Finland programme and the Sustainable Travel Finland label. The aim of the STF programme is to get more companies in Finland to commit to and sustain their sustainable development practices in order

to reduce their carbon footprint and take care of Finland's nature and people. The aim is to make decisions that are sustainable now and sustainable for future generations. Once a company obtains the STF- label, the companies are promoted on Visit Finland's website and channels, giving them more visibility. (Experience 365 2023.) Experience 365 does not yet obtain the Sustainable Travel Finland label, but they have addressed their interest towards it. The company is ready to make changes in its operations in order to get the Sustainable Travel Finland label.

For Experience 365, the most important value is sustainability in all-year-round tourism. It is important for them to support sustainable tourism. During the construction phase of the snow castle area, it was important for them to design the area in a way that supports sustainability. As a result, they were the first in mainland Finland to be awarded ISO14001 environmental certification. The snow castle area uses geothermal and natural cold for its operations and has Lapland's largest solar system on the roof of the building, the extra heat is used in the accommodation services to provide hot water. (Experience 365 2023.)

Restaurant Lumihutale always tries to order its ingredients from local producers. They also aim to use local labour and expertise as much as possible. Recycling is also an issue that the company adheres to, both among customers and employees, with the aim of trying to reduce paper use and instructing customers to recycle their rubbish. The snow castle itself, which is built during the winter season, is constructed in such a way that the building material, i.e., snow and ice, comes from the sea and returns to the sea. (Experience 365 2023.)

3 SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM

3.1 Sustainability

Sustainability as a concept means meeting one's needs and implementing actions in a way that does not jeopardize the needs of future generations. Sustainability focuses on the condition of Earth's biophysical environment, meaning that the natural resources should be depleted respectfully. It is about finding a balance between supporting the human population and economic growth without threatening the health of the earth, nature and animals. Sustainability should be implemented in a way that economy, equity and environment go hand in hand. In other words, the purpose is to achieve results in economy, equity and environment without sacrificing another. (Portney 2015.)

Sustainable tourism considers current and future economic social and environmental impacts, while responding to the needs of visitors, environment, industry and host communities (GST Council 2023). Sustainable tourism should use environmental resources in an optimal way, when the resources are used in a proper manner it maintains the ecological processes and helps to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity simultaneously. This should also be implemented in a way that supports and respects the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities while ensuring that the economic operations are distributed. It is crucial to ensure that there is still stable employment, income-earning opportunities and social services available to host communities. Sustainable tourism development still requires considerable amounts of attention and work and the stakeholders need to participate in the sustainability development process in order to build the company more sustainable in a way that the tourist satisfaction remains at a high level and at the same time raises the awareness of the tourists about sustainability issues as well. (UNWTO 2023.)

3.2 Ecological Sustainability

The best outcome of ecological sustainability in tourism is when the respect for nature enhances and the funds are channelled to a better cause, in this case to the protection of the environment. The purpose of ecological sustainability is to

cause the least amount of damage to nature as possible, while benefiting the local area and ensuring there will be resources for the future generations as well. (Business Finland 2023.)

Climate change refers to long-term changes in the temperatures and weather patterns on earth. Climate change can also happen naturally but since the 1800s, human activities have been the biggest cause for this change. (UN 2022.) Climate change is a result of the interconnected factors within the climate system that influence the physical, chemical and biological conditions on Earth. This system consists of the atmosphere, hydrosphere (including oceans, lakes, rivers and groundwater), cryosphere (including glaciers, snow cover, sea and lake ice and permafrost), biosphere (comprising living organisms), and lithosphere (the outermost layer of the Earth). These components interact to create the delicate balance of Earth's climate change to maintain the health and sustainability on the planet. (MOOC 2012.)

One of the purposes of ecological sustainability in tourism is to slow down climate change, this change requires long-term changes in the energy-production of the companies, this means for example that companies would have to calculate, how much consumption can the area handle and therefore decide how many tourists do they have capacity for. (UN 2022.)

3.3 Socio-cultural Sustainability

The main principle of socio-cultural sustainability is to preserve cultural diversity and development from one generation to another, also to have equal opportunities for everyone to live a balanced life and have fundamental rights. (UN 2022.) The actions that need to be taken in order to support and promote socio-cultural sustainability are conserving local culture and heritage, respecting and using local culture and heritage in a respectful manner in the operations of the company, hiring local staff and preferring local food products and other services. (Business Finland 2022.)

The focus in modern beach culture, bars, shopping malls and fast entertainment has taken the attention from authentic and culturally rich experiences from both locals and tourists. As a result, many tourism destinations today are

unsustainable due to rapid development and lack of consideration for environmental and community impacts. To achieve sustainability in tourism, culture must be prioritized and integrated into planning processes. (Venturini 2020.) The growing population, poverty, food and health, gender inequality are still tremendous challenges worldwide and meeting these challenges will require lots of effort from all countries and stakeholders. (Ministry of the Environment 2023.)

3.4 Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability means that companies are operating in a manner that directs most of the income to the local community and the areas surrounding it. It is all about supporting the locals, employing locals, buying ingredients and services from locals. Successful economic sustainability means the income goes to the operating area, there are jobs and careers for locals and ensuring that the business owners as well as all stakeholders alike benefit from it. (Business Finland 2022.)

At Experience 365, the concept has changed from having a seasonal snowcastle only during the winter season, to having a snowcastle all-year round as well as a restaurant and glass villas to have guests visiting all year round. Experience 365 has focused on having services all-year-round to ensure customer flow throughout the year. This means going from operating during one season to operating through all seasons, which naturally means more employment opportunities and income for the locals. Since Experience 365 wants to support local food producers and reduce their carbon footprint, they also help other stakeholders in the city while promoting their own business operations. (Experience365 2022.)

4 SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION

Sustainability communication refers to the communication of sustainability within a company. The purpose of corporate sustainability communication is to make consumers aware of the company's values, actions, and objectives. The approach to sustainability communication in a company is based on planning, marketing, and the right kind of communication. It is important to understand what the company is trying to achieve, what their values are and how they are trying to achieve them. Sustainability communication is therefore a continuous development process that requires planning and commitment to sustainability. (Sumuvuori 2022.)

Sustainability communication requires clear management and leadership, meaning that the development of sustainability is carefully planned, operated, and monitored. This requires taking responsibility and demonstrating the sustainability in an interesting and understandable manner in the company's operations. In the sustainability development process, a company must first define their values and areas of sustainability which they wish to highlight in their sustainability communication. Sustainability communication is not only singular campaigns or self-promotional social media posts, as the customers are increasingly looking for information about genuinely sustainable products and ethical services. (Meltwater 2021.)

The main purpose of sustainability communication for the company is to inform other stakeholders about the sustainable actions that the company is committing to, encourage others to be sustainable and to involve the consumer in the sustainability activities. These goals are there to add value to the company's business and to promote sustainable consumption. Sustainability communication is very crucial because it increases tourists' awareness of sustainability, and sustainable products and services, it also increases the sustainable behaviour during and after the trip. (Häikiö & Koivunen 2022.)

Nowadays, nearly everything takes place online, making social media channels the most effective way to communicate sustainability. Tourism companies communicate their sustainability practices also in their facilities, in the brochures

and in face-to-face customer service, but to reach the target audience and new customers it is best to communicate about sustainability online. The influence of social media can have a huge impact on the target group and new customers since it is more admirable to promote sustainable companies. (Häikiö & Koivunen 2022.)

4.1 Sustainability certifications and labels

As the interest of sustainable travel continues to rise, it brings about the importance of sustainable certifications. Travelers are becoming more aware of their impact on the environment and local communities, therefore they are looking for businesses and destinations that have reputable sustainability certifications. These certifications demonstrate a company's commitment to environmental responsibility, community engagement and ethical business practices, giving travelers assurance that their choices reflect their values. (Khidesheli 2024.)

Green Key, Green Globe and EU Ecolabel are some of many certifications option sin offer for tourism companies in Finland. The purpose of these certifications is to help the company further develop and keep developing their sustainability operations. There are also certifications that help the company develop and plan their path in becoming a sustainable tourism service provider. (Business Finland 2022.)

A Green Key certified establishment is recognized as a leader in sustainability, with verification based on the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Its standards go above and beyond legal requirements, with a focus on actively improving social and economic benefits while reducing carbon footprint. (Green Key 2024.)

Green Globe was established over 30 years ago and has since become the world's leading certification for sustainable operation and management of travel and tourism. Hotels, resorts, conference centers and attractions, among other industries, are certified Green Globe, making them the most secure and globally popular tourism businesses worldwide. (Green Globe 2024.)

The EU Ecolabel provides unbiased information on the reduced environmental impact of products and services, while also considering safety and quality. This official and internationally recognized environmental certification is a useful resource for consumers, businesses and suppliers. (EU Ecolabel 2023.)

4.2 Sustainable travel Finland label

Visit Finland has developed the Sustainable Travel Finland programme and the Sustainable Travel Finland label. The purpose of the STF program is to have more companies in Finland commit and sustain their sustainability practices in order to reduce the carbon footprint and take care of the nature and people in Finland. The purpose is to make decision that are sustainable now and sustainable for the future generations as well. Once the company is following the sustainability practices required, they receive the STF label. The companies are also being promoted on the website and channels of Visit Finland which ensures that the companies receive more visibility. (Visit Finland 2023.)

The Sustainable Travel Finland label became possible to achieve in 2020. Over 200 companies in Finland, already obtain the STF label. Lapland containing 70 of the STF labels. The graph below states how many STF label holders there are now and how many companies have applied to the STF program in the attempt to achieve the STF label. (Visit Finland 2023.) As seen in Figure 1, there are 762 companies who are in the process of achieving the STF label. It is a long process, but it is a positive sign to see that many companies in Finland have made the commitment to sustainability.



Figure 1. Current STF Labels & Total Companies. (Visit Finland 2023.)

5 RESEARCH PROCESS

5.1 Qualitative research methods

Qualitative methodology is information and data collected by understanding people's experiences and attitudes. Instead of focusing on statistics and numbers, the focus is on understanding the bigger picture and the way one thinks for themselves. (Demuth & Mey 2015.)

Qualitative research approaches involve utilizing different data collection methods, with some of the most common qualitative methods including observation, interviews, focus groups, surveys and secondary research. Observations involve recording experiences in detailed notes, while interviews involve asking individuals questions in personal conversations. Surveys contain questions that allow free-form responses and secondary research involves gathering existing data such as texts, images, audios or videos. (Bhandari 2023.)

The primary methods of data collection included an interview with the commissioner and a survey to customers visiting Experience 365. The interview with the commissioner aimed to gain a thorough understanding of the company's actions, values, characteristics and perspectives, specifically focusing on sustainability communication strategies. The interview findings were analysed across five key elements: knowledge of sustainability practices, content and actions, and values and challenges. The customer survey aimed to better understand visitors' experiences with sustainability at Experience 365, their general views on sustainability, its importance in decision making when choosing a travel destination and preferred channels for learning about sustainability practices of the chosen company.

5.2 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are crucial concepts in research and measurement. Reliability refers to how consistently a method measures something. When the same outcome can be consistently obtained using the same method, the measurement is considered reliable. Reliability is essential for ensuring that the

data collected is trustworthy and can be replicated. Validity ensures that research accurately captures what it is intended to measure. Valid measurement correctly represents the idea or concept under study. (Middleton, F. 2023.)

By ensuring both reliability and validity in research, researchers can have confidence in their findings and conclusions. These concepts play a critical role in the development of sound research studies and the advancement of knowledge in various fields. (Salomao, A. 2023.)

During the research period, the off-peak season affected the collection of customer feedback on sustainability at Experience 365. The customer survey was conducted from August 2023 to November 2023, with the high season starting at the end of December and ending in March. As a result, only 14 responses were obtained from the customer survey. However, it is worth noting that the responses came from local, domestic and foreign customers, providing insight into how sustainability communication at Experience 365 reached customers from various backgrounds.

The interview with the commissioner took place in July 2023, and since then, Experience 365 has likely made progress in its sustainability practices and communication. Noora Barria, the development manager at Experience 365, mentioned in the interview that she was collaborating with a colleague on sustainability and its communication. If an interview could have been conducted with the colleague as well, it would help validate the interview responses.

5.3 Knowledge of the sustainable practices at Experience 365

When looking at knowledge of the sustainable practices at Experience 365, it is evident that the establishment has a strong commitment to sustainability, integrating green values into their structure and operational strategies. They highlight the importance of incorporating practices, throughout their business to ensure long term sustainability. A key aspect of their approach is for reception staff to share information about the company's sustainability efforts, including recycling guidelines provided during guest check ins. They also emphasize that

sustainability goes beyond issues encompassing social responsibilities that are essential to their corporate identity and reputation influencing decisions made by partners and customers.

While they do not have a sustainability plan in place Experience 365 is actively working on developing one with the goal of obtaining the STF label and Green Key certificate, which would establish guidelines and benchmarks for them to follow. Their strategy focuses on communication of sustainability initiatives across all departments within the organization with a focus on seamlessly integrating sustainable practices into daily operations. They use social media to reach out to more people and get them engaged.

Noora Barria, the development manager at Experience 365, leads sustainability and communication initiatives along with a colleague and has independently gained knowledge about practices. In the interview with Noora Barria, it was mentioned that the company recognizes the significance of securing the STF label in order to adhere to regulations and potentially collaborate with organizations like Visit Finland.

On the STF path, things will be put in order. There are certain things you must follow on the STF path. Once we have completed it and we get the certificate, we will have the opportunity to have Visit Finland as a partner. Visit Finland requires that a company has the STF label to gain visibility through them. Resellers filter their partners according to who has a certificate and who does not. It is crucial for us to stay in the resellers' network (Interview with Noora Barria).

5.4 Content and actions

The subsequent crucial investigation centered around examining the substance of sustainability communications and practices at Experience 365. It was clear in the interviews with Noora Barria, the development manager and Päivi Paaso, the reception manager, that implementing sustainability into the everyday practices, was quidecennial for the operation both internally and externally. They embrace green ideals and give sustainability top priority in every facet of their operations, understanding that continuity depends on sustainability's long-term benefits. Receptionists are required by business policy to educate consumers about sustainability measures, highlighting the significance of these activities in all customer interactions. During the check-in process, information is distributed on

recycling policies. Moreover, Experience 365 aggressively promotes sustainability communication with both prospective hires and visitors, hoping that they would carry these habits with them after their visit. This strategy is in line with the company's philosophy, which sees sustainability as a social as well as environmental obligation. Understanding how important sustainability is to their brand, they work to put sustainable policies into place to make business operations easier.

Experience 365 is currently in the midst of revising its sustainability plan, yet even with this official documentation, they continue to progress in the direction of sustainability integration. They additionally strive to get certifications such as the green key certificate and the STF-label, which enhance adherence to particular policies and procedures. Internal distribution of measurements within departments and outreach to the public via social media platforms are both included in communication initiatives.

Despite some reluctance to directly impart sustainability practices to each employee, Experience 365 ensures integration into daily workplace routines through departmental leadership. The self-taught sustainable practices of individuals like Noora are viewed as a foundation, with the STF-label seen as instrumental in fostering broader organizational compliance and securing partnerships. The company's recognition of the importance of certification in maintaining affiliations with reseller networks underscores their commitment to sustainable practices as a core business principle.

5.5 Values

Sustainability is at the centre of Experience 365's fundamental values, which highlight the incorporation of eco-friendly practices into every facet of the company's operations. They place a high priority on long-term sustainability due to their understanding of how crucial it is to both environmental stewardship and commercial continuity. The organization maintains a commitment to social and environmental responsibility as it understands how important sustainability plays in maintaining its brand and reputation. Noora Barria emphasizes the importance of staff experience and local engagement in order to achieve successful

outcomes. She also stresses the significance of continuous improvement and ensuring that all certification requirements are met. These key principles are essential in order to deliver high-quality services and maintaining a strong commitment to excellence.

The general mission is to sell the main products, the Icebreaker Sampo Cruises as well as snow castle area year-round services. At the same time creating vitality for the town and the locals. The vision is to double the Icebreaker Sampo Cruises and to be a major conference and event venue in the Finnish Lapland. We also want to be a responsible employer; we make sure we are following those practices. Collaboration and sustainable operations are crucial for our company. Locality is also one major value for us, we want to stand out with what Kemi has to offer. We also want to improve the employee experience; it is also a part about being responsible and sustainable (Interview with Noora Barria).

At Experience 365, promoting sustainability is not only an internal effort but also an international one. Experience 365 values cooperation and communication in encouraging sustainable practices across all levels of the organization. By fostering cooperation both internally and externally, Experience 365 aims to create a culture of sustainability that extends beyond its own operations. Päivi Paaso, the reception manager explains that by engaging with stakeholders and promoting sustainable practices, the company is committed to making a positive impact on the environment and society.

Green values, recycling and sustainable practices are important, they are also important for the image of the company. We are trying to promote "green values" more, sustainability in everything. We are thinking about the future, as the world changes. We are considering the long-term effects of the sustainability practices to ensure continuity (Interview with Päivi Paaso).

5.6 Challenges

Both interviewees, Noora Barria, the development manager and Päivi Paaso, the reception manager, have stated that the company is currently in the process of updating its sustainability plan. Although the company is aware of and implements long-term effects of the sustainability practices to ensure continuity, they are still in the process of curating a full plan.

Furthermore, while sustainability is at the centre of their fundamental values, which highlight the incorporation of eco-friendly practices into every facet of the company's operations, they still lack formal documentation of its sustainability

practices, such as the STF-label and the green key certificate, to ensure full compliance with specific guidelines and standards required for further partnerships with other travel related organizations such as Visit Finland.

Noora Barria, in the interview, emphasized the importance of promoting sustainability and integrating it into the daily routines of all employees and customers. She compares it to Covid-19 pandemic and the rapid and effective response to this urgent matter, climate change requires similar attention and action. Barria noted the risks to both present and future generations, highlighting the urgent need for greater awareness and commitment to sustainability measures.

It is important to have people in charge in each department to be informed of certain measures that they must follow in their areas of responsibility and they will pass it on to other employees. For external communication, we could think about a specific visual design, we want to inform people about matters that deal with sustainability, e.g. every two weeks on social media we inform people about it (Interview with Noora Barria).

6 CUSTOMER SURVEY ANALYSIS

A survey to customers was carried out to learn how the customers experience the sustainability and its communication at Experience 365. The target audience for this survey consisted of foreign and domestic visitors. The survey was distributed to the target audience via a poster with a QR code that took the clients directly to the survey. The survey was conducted at Experience 365 during the off-peak season from August 2023 to October 2023, resulting in a total of 14 responses. These responses were provided by a diverse group of participants, including both domestic and international travellers, as well as those traveling for business or leisure.

A 14-question questionnaire as shown in Appendix 2 was used to perform the survey. The data gathered from the survey was divided into three different categories. These three categories are knowledge and awareness of sustainability, awareness of the sustainability practices at Experience 365 and the most important channels for communication.

The purpose of the survey was to learn how the customers view sustainability at Experience 365 and whether they find it as an important factor when travelling. It is also important for the commissioner to get a better understanding of what they need to improve in order to raise awareness of the sustainability at Experience 365.

6.1 Knowledge and awareness of sustainability

When looking into the knowledge and awareness of sustainability amongst customers it can be seen from the pie chart below (Figure 2) that all of the respondents are aware of sustainability and 50% of them are already more familiar with the topic.

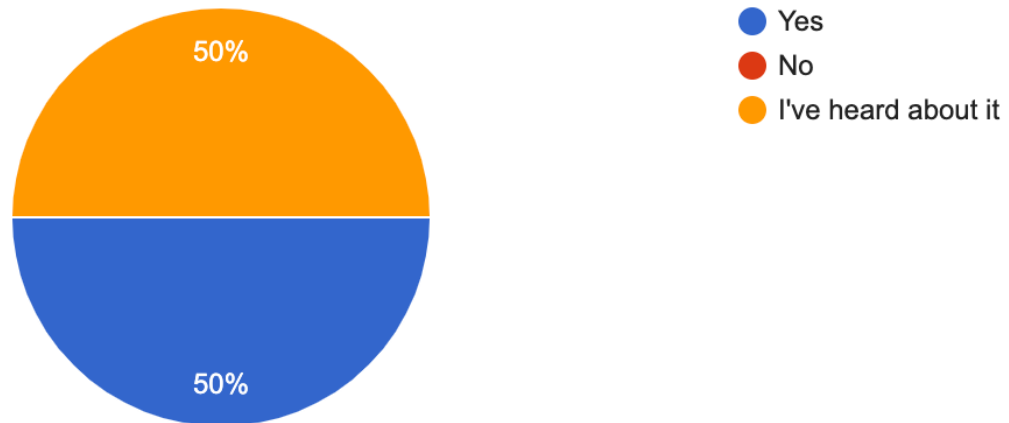


Figure 2. Familiarity of sustainability

It is quite challenging to know whether the sustainability of the company directly affects the customers decision to purchase a holiday, but as seen in the pie chart below (Figure 3) only 8,3% of the respondents has stated that they do not find sustainability as an important factor. Majority of the respondents believe that sustainability is an important factor.

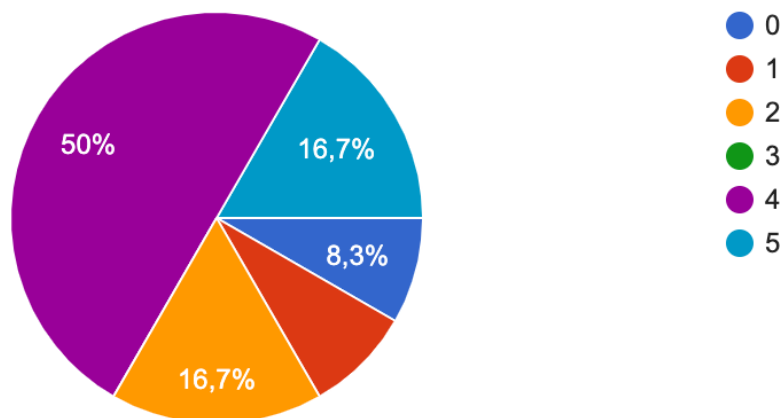


Figure 3. Importance of sustainability to customers

The pie chart below (Figure 4) shows whether sustainability plays a role in the decision making when booking a holiday. 50% of the respondents has stated that they would prefer buying services from a company that practices sustainability.

The other 50% of the respondents has stated that sustainability doesn't make a difference in their decision making. It is positive to see that the respondents would not prefer to buy services from companies that are not sustainable.

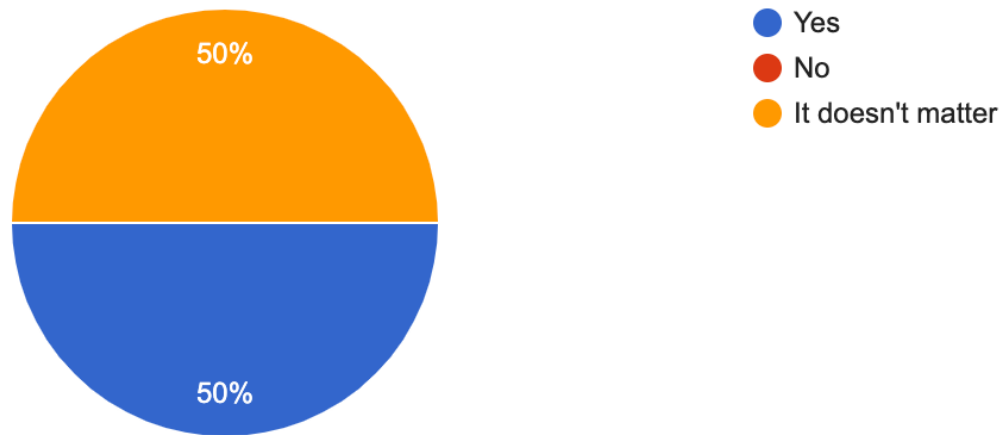


Figure 4. Importance of sustainability of the company in decision making

6.2 Awareness of the sustainability practices at Experience 365

The graph below (Figure 5) shows the viewpoint of the respondents with the sustainability at Experience 365. The numbers in the bottom represent whether the respondents find Experience 365 sustainable or not. (number 1 = not sustainable at all, number 5 = very sustainable). Half of the respondents said they believe Experience 365 is sustainable. Some of the respondents (25%) believe Experience 365 is somewhat sustainable and the rest (25%) believe Experience 365 is not very sustainable.

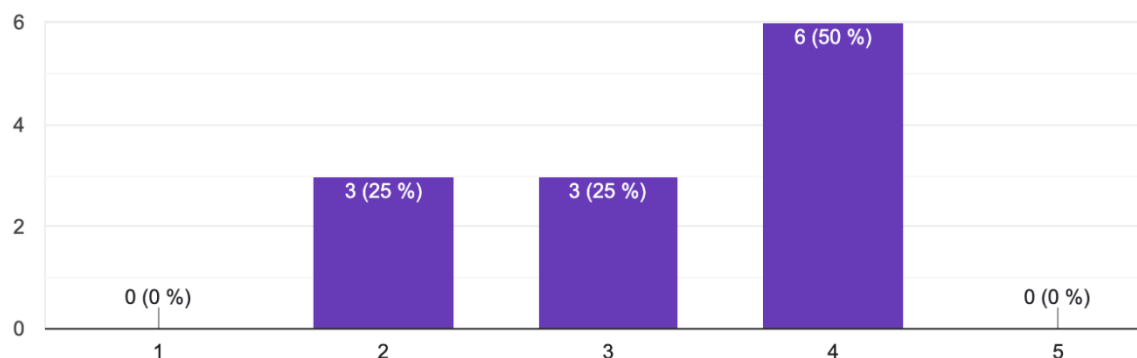


Figure 5. Customers viewpoint of sustainability at Experience 365

The following pie chart (Figure 6) shows whether the respondents are aware with the sustainability practices at Experience 365. Only 16,7% of the respondents have stated they are aware of the sustainability practices followed at Experience 365. Half of the respondents are somewhat aware of the sustainability practices at Experience 365 and 33,3% of the respondents have stated they are not aware of the sustainability practices.

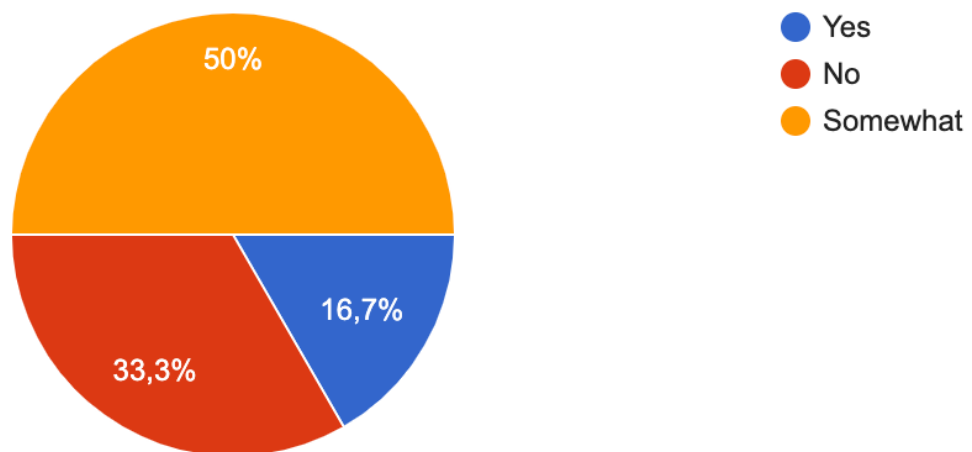


Figure 6. Awareness of the sustainability practices at Experience 365

6.3 Most important channels for communication

It was important to understand which channels the customers used to have raised their awareness about the sustainability at Experience 365. In the graph below (Figure 7) the results state that most of the respondents (77,8%) said they have become familiar with the sustainability practices followed at Experience 365 through the company website. The second biggest channel used to learn about the sustainability practices at Experience 365 was through social media. It was also possible to select other channels that was not stated in the options, and 22,2% of the respondents said they learned about the sustainability practices while they were visiting the premises of Experience 365.

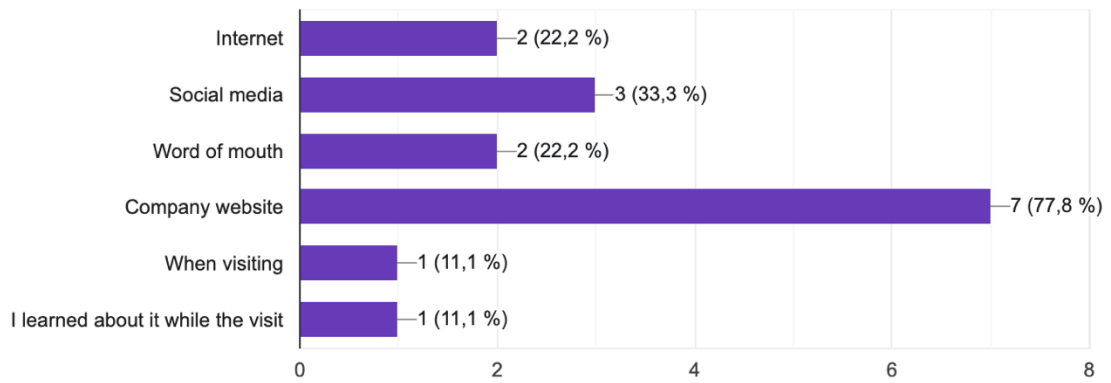


Figure 7. How customers learned about sustainability at Experience 365

It was also important to understand which social media channels the customers prefer as a source for information. In the graph below (Figure 8) it can be seen that all the respondents selected Instagram as one of the channels they would prefer to get information from, 91,7% of the respondents also selected TikTok as an important channel. TikTok and Instagram were the most famous ones of the options. Some of the respondents (25%) stated they would like to get information about the sustainability at Experience 365 while they are visiting the premises.

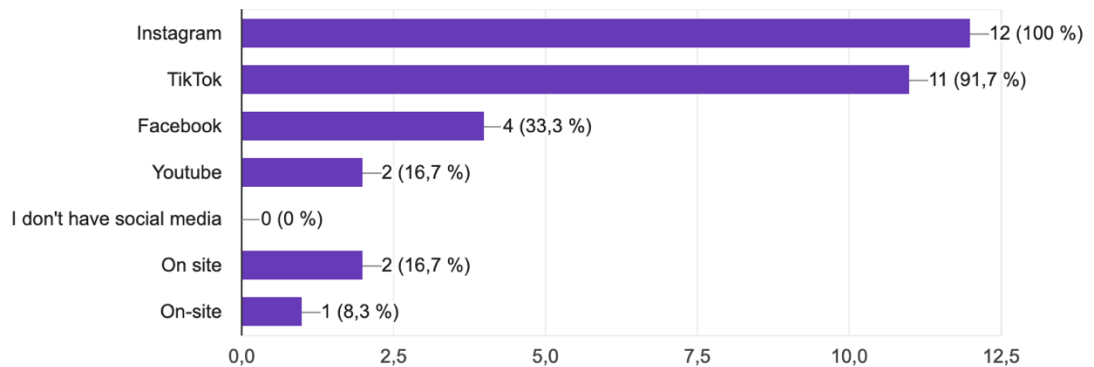


Figure 8. Preferred channels for sustainability communication

The survey participants had the opportunity to mention what kind of content in sustainability communication they would like to have. The answers in the graph below (Figure 9) have one thing in common, and it is that customers wish to have more visualizing and informative content on social media and on site.

The customer survey revealed that while the majority of customers find sustainability important, there is room for improvement raising awareness about the company's sustainability practices. By utilizing channels such as the company website, social media channels and on-site communication, Experience 365 can enhance their sustainability communication and further engage customers in their sustainable tourism offerings. Sustainability communication plays a crucial role in building brand reputation, attracting customers and partners, and contributing to a more sustainable future for the tourism industry.

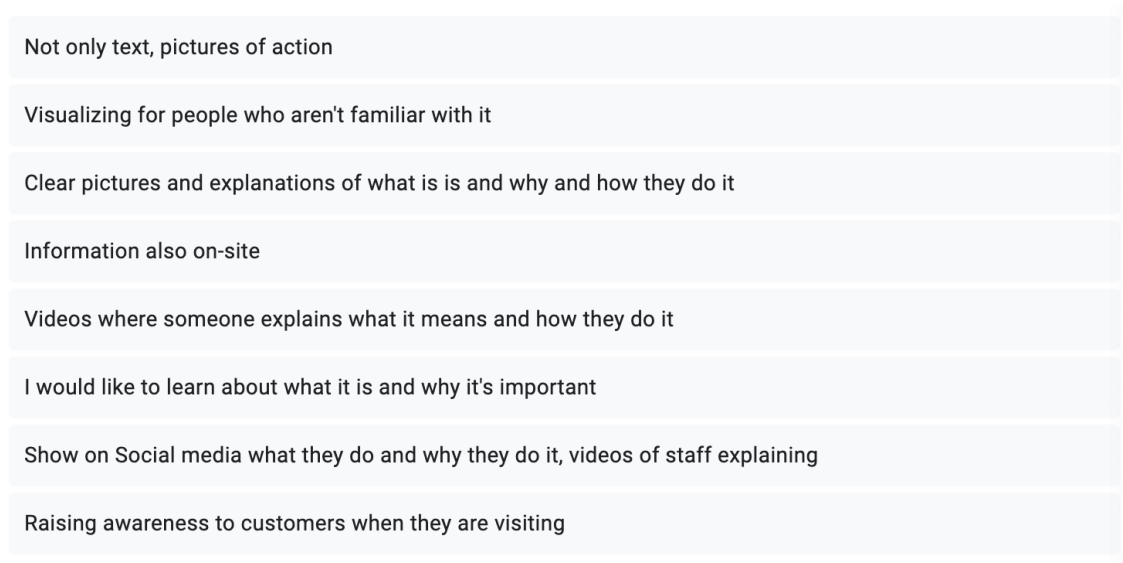


Figure 9. Preferred content in sustainability communication

6.4 Survey findings

Key findings from the conducted online survey on sustainability at Experience reveal that all respondents are familiar with the term sustainability, with 50% having more knowledge about the topic than the other 50%. None of the respondents claimed to be unfamiliar with the topic. While more than half of the respondents consider sustainability to be important, only 8,3% believe it is not important. Half of the respondents stated that a company's sustainability practices impact their decision-making process. Although most respondents believe that Experience 365 is sustainable, only 16,7% are aware of the specific sustainability practices that Experience 365 follows. The majority of the respondents (77,8%) learned about the company's sustainability efforts through

its website, with a desire for more content on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

In the context of tourism, sustainability plays a crucial role in economic, ecological, and socio-cultural aspects. Economic sustainability focuses on supporting local communities and ensuring that income benefits the operating area. Ecological sustainability aims to minimize damage to nature and reduce the carbon footprint. Socio-cultural sustainability involves preserving cultural diversity, respecting local heritage, and providing equal opportunities for all. It is evident from the survey findings that sustainability is an important factor for customers when deciding on travel destination. The majority of respondents find sustainability important and believe that companies should prioritize sustainable practices. This aligns with the trend of travellers seeking out sustainable and responsible businesses.

However, there is a disconnect between the awareness of sustainability and the specific sustainability practices of Experience 365. While most respondents believe Experience 365 is sustainable, only a small percentage are actually aware of the sustainability practices they follow. This indicates a need for better communication from Experience 365 regarding their sustainability efforts.

6.5 Development of sustainability communication at Experience 365

Experience 365 is making significant progress in their sustainability journey. They are actively pursuing certifications such as the Sustainable Travel Finland label and Green Key certificate to guide their sustainability initiatives. Through engaging in sustainability communication with both employees and customers, Experience 365 aims to raise awareness and promote sustainable practices.

While the company has a clear vision and direction for achieving their goals, Noora Barria, the development manager, mentioned in the interview that Experience 365 currently lacks a formal business strategy. A well-defined business strategy is essential for setting the organization's direction, establishing goals and guiding growth and success. It provides a roadmap for decision-

making, resource allocation and adaptation to changing circumstances, ensuring the company remains focused and prepared to achieve its objectives. (Dixon, P. 2023.) Implementing a business strategy could further solidify Experience 365's position as a sustainable company and employer, helping to identify the necessary resources for sustainability development and communication.

The customer survey revealed that while respondents value sustainability, they are not fully aware of Experience 365's sustainability practices, indicating a need for clearer communication. Noora Barria and her colleague are actively working on enhancing sustainability and its communication within the company. Developing a business strategy could enable them to assess resource requirements, potentially through training or hiring specialized staff in sustainability communication. This strategic approach could lead to improved communication on websites and social media platforms, expanding the company's reach and customer base.

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to create effective sustainability communication strategies for Experience 365, a company in Kemi, Finland. Experience 365 offers various services focused on ice and snow experiences year-round for tourists and locals. The study evaluates the company's current sustainability communication practices and customer preferences for sustainability in travel destinations. To enhance sustainability communication, an initial assessment of existing practices is followed by strategic planning.

Qualitative research methods, including interviews to commissioner and a customer survey, were used to gather data. The findings highlight the importance of sustainability communication in the tourism sector. Clear and engaging communication across various channels is crucial for building brand reputation and attracting customers. Sustainability communication is key to promoting sustainable tourism practices and advancing a company's initiatives. Experience 365's commitment to sustainability is evident in their operations, but better communication is needed.

To enhance the trustworthiness and accuracy of Experience 365's sustainability practices, it is important to implement rigorous measurements and evaluation processes. This can include conducting regular audits and assessments of their sustainability initiatives to ensure they are meeting their intended goals and objectives. Additionally, seeking third-party certifications and endorsements from reputable organizations can help validate the company's sustainability claims and demonstrate their commitment to transparency and accountability.

Experience 365 should focus on providing visual and informative content on social media and on-site. By improving communication channels and raising awareness about their sustainability practices, Experience 365 can further build their brand reputation, attract more customers, and contribute to a more sustainable future for the tourism industry.

Additionally, actively engaging with stakeholders, such as customers, employees, local communities and partners, to gather feedback and input on sustainability practices can demonstrate a commitment to accountability. By consistently demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and engaging in open communication with stakeholders, Experience 365 can continue to build trust and credibility in their sustainability efforts.

The thorough review of existing literature provided a strong theoretical base for the research, giving important insights into the topic being studied. By using different theoretical viewpoints, the study reached conclusions that guided the following practical research. A helpful interview with the development and reception managers gave key information needed for the case study. By surveying customers at Experience 365, the study gained more insights into customer needs and preferences, which were crucial for the development plan. Choosing qualitative research has been shown to be a reasonable decision.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview of commissioner at Experience 365

Appendix 2. Customer sustainability survey

Appendix 1. Interview of commissioner at Experience 365 on 3 July 2023

Interview for commissioner:

1. Introduce yourself and the company.
2. Sustainability practices at Experience365
 - a. Why is sustainability important for the company?
 - b. How is it defined at the company?
 - c. Is it taken into account in the strategy/business plan of the company?
 - i. Can you explain how?
 - d. What are the missions of the company, visions or/and values.
 - e. What is the current situation with the sustainability practices?
 - f. What are the biggest challenges in the company when practicing sustainability?
3. Development
 - a. What is required for the sustainability practices to develop further?
 - b. What influences the development of the practices and why?
4. Sustainability communication
 - a. How is sustainability communication taken into consideration in the company?
 - b. Do you have a communication strategy?
 - c. Do you have employees working on the development of sustainability communication?
 - i. How are the employees trained to carry out company's sustainability communication?
 - d. Can you please describe the content in that communication? Can you give examples?
 - e. Who is responsible for it?
 - i. Who has planned the actions and who implements them?
 - ii. How is it measured?
 - f. How are you marketing and advertising it? What are the channels?
 - g. Do you intend getting the STF label?
 - i. If yes, do you have a plan on how to pursue it?

Appendix 2. Customer sustainability survey

1. Why have you come to visit Experience 365?

Answer:

2. How many times have you visited Experience 365?

Answer:

3. Do you find sustainability as an important factor when choosing tourism company?

1 – not at all

5 – yes, very important

1 2 3 4 5

4. Are you aware of the sustainability practices at Experience 365?

Yes No Somewhat

5. If yes, how did you find out about the sustainability of the company Experience 365?

Internet Social media

Word of mouth Experience 365 website

Other, where?

6. What are the sustainability practices that you know Experience 365 are following?

Answer:

7. Based on your experience and knowledge, do you have any recommendations for other sustainability practices in the future that Experience 365 could follow?

Answer:

8. What kind of content of sustainability would you like to have and in which channels?

Answer:

9. How sustainable Experience 365 is in your opinion?

1 – not at all

5 – very sustainable

1 2 3 4 5

10. Please give reasons.

Answer:

11. Which social media channels do you use the most when trying to find information about the company's sustainability?

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instagram | <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TikTok | <input type="checkbox"/> Youtube |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have social media | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, what? |