

UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND
Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies
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**DEVELOPING NEW VIRTUAL TOURISM EXPERIENCE
BASED ON CUSTOMER VALUE
Case Experience Kalevala**

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Tourism Marketing & Management
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Abstract

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Title Developing new virtual tourism experience based on customer value: Case Experience Kalevala			
Main subject Tourism Marketing and Management	Level Master's Thesis	Date 29.4.2021	Number of pages 89 + 2
Abstract <p>Virtual tourism allows people to see and experience the world without physically travelling to the destination. Due to the travel restrictions caused by COVID-19 pandemic, virtual tourism has been growing rapidly and new types of virtual tourism experiences have emerged, such as guided live virtual tours. These types of virtual tours are filmed in real environment and guided in real-time, but additionally might include some pre-recorded materials such as videos and images.</p> <p>The objective of the study is to examine the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours for the purpose of developing new Kalevala-themed virtual tour for Experience Kalevala tourism development project. Additionally, the study aims to discuss the importance of customer value as a starting point for new service development (NSD), as virtual tourism products are considered as experiential services, and customer value is the core of the service, referring to the service concept.</p> <p>The research was conducted using qualitative methods. The data was collected through focus group discussions. A total of three focus group discussions were conducted, with 4-5 participants in each group. All the participants were Japanese who had previously participated in guided live virtual tours. The data was analysed with qualitative content analysis, where inductive approach was used, meaning that there was no specific customer value theory used as a basis for the analysis.</p> <p>The findings reveal that the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours consists of novelty/epistemic value, emotional/experiential value, togetherness, and functional/practical value. The main expectations of the participants are related to experiencing the local culture and way of life, feeling of actually being in the destination (sense of connection), social interaction and active participation. These factors make the virtual tour feel realistic. Besides the expected customer value, the findings also revealed the most desired content for Kalevala-themed virtual tour. Based on the findings, the prerequisites for a new Experience Kalevala guided live virtual tour were created. As there is no previous research about guided live virtual tours, this study brings valuable insights of the phenomenon from the customer perspective. Tourism businesses can better understand the concept of guided live virtual tours, and what customers expect from these types of services, and hence can better meet their expectations. The study did not reveal any completely new customer value dimensions.</p>			
Key words virtual tourism, virtual tourism experience, guided live virtual tour, experiential service, new service development (NSD), customer value			

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Tiivistelmä <p>Virtuaalimatkailemisen avulla ihmiset voivat nähdä ja kokea maailmaa matkustamatta fyysisesti kohteeseen. COVID-19 pandemian aiheuttamien matkustusrajoitusten vuoksi virtuaalimatkaileminen on ollut kovassa kasvussa, ja sen myötä on syntynyt uudenlaisia virtuaalimatkailemiskokemuksia, kuten opastettuja live virtuaalikiertoja. Tämänlaiset virtuaalikierrat kuvataan todellisessa ympäristössä ja opastetaan reaaliajassa, mutta ne saattavat lisäksi sisältää joitain valmiiksi nauhoitettuja materiaaleja, kuten videoita ja kuvia.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää opastettujen live virtuaalikiertojen odotettavissa oleva asiakasarvo uuden Kalevala-aiheisen virtuaalikierton kehittämiseksi Kalevala kartalle -matkailuhankkeelle. Lisäksi tutkimuksen tavoitteena on keskustella asiakasarvon merkityksestä uuden palvelun kehityksen lähtökohdaksi, sillä virtuaalimatkailemisen tuotteita pidetään elämyksellisinä palveluina, ja asiakasarvo on palvelun ydin, viitaten palvelukonseptiin.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisilla menetelmillä. Aineisto kerättiin fokusryhmäkeskustelujen avulla. Fokusryhmäkeskusteluita järjestettiin yhteensä kolme, joissa oli 4–5 osallistujaa kussakin ryhmässä. Kaikki osallistajat olivat japanilaisia, jotka olivat aiemmin osallistuneet opastetuille virtuaalikiertoille. Aineisto analysoitiin kvalitatiivisella sisällönanalyysillä, jossa käytettiin induktiivista lähestymistapaa, tarkoittaen, ettei mitään tiettyä asiakasarvoteoriaa käytetty analyysin pohjana.</p> <p>Tulokset paljastavat, että opastettujen live virtuaalikiertojen odotettu asiakasarvo koostuu uutuus/episteemiseen arvosta, emotionaaliseen/kokemukselliseen arvosta, yhdessä olemisesta ja toiminnallisesta/käytännön arvosta. Tärkeimmät odotukset liittyvät paikallisen kulttuurin ja elämäntavan kokemukseen, tunteeseen, että on oikeasti kohteessa (yhteyden tunne), sosiaaliseen vuorovaikutukseen ja aktiiviseen osallistumiseen. Nämä tekijät saavat virtuaalikierton tuntumaan realistiselta. Odotetun asiakasarvon lisäksi havainnot paljastivat myös Kalevala-aiheisen virtuaalikierton halutuimman sisällön. Löydösten perusteella luotiin edellytykset uudelle Kalevala kartalle virtuaalikiertokokemukselle. Koska opastetuista live virtuaalikiertokokemuksista ei ole tehty aiempaa tutkimusta, tämä tutkimus tuo arvokasta tietoa kyseisestä ilmiöstä asiakkaan näkökulmasta. Matkailuyritykset voivat paremmin ymmärtää opastettujen live virtuaalikiertojen käsitteen ja sen, mitä asiakkaat odottavat tällaisilta palveluilta, ja voivat siten paremmin vastata heidän odotuksiinsa. Tutkimus ei paljastanut mitään täysin uusia asiakasarvon ulottuvuuksia.</p>			
Avainsanat virtuaalimatkaileminen, virtuaalimatkaileminen, opastettu live virtuaalikierto, elämyksellinen palvelu, uuden palvelun kehittäminen, asiakasarvo			

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Appendix 1. Group discussion guide.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

The development of new technologies has had many impacts on tourism, and a significant role in transforming the whole tourism industry (Cheong, 1995; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Guttentag, 2010; Wang, Law, Guillet, Hung, & Fong, 2015; Ali, 2016; Wei, 2019), and therefore information and communication technology (ICT) has been an important subject in tourism research. There have been several studies especially related to the emerging sectors of virtual reality (VR) (e.g., Guttentag, 2010; Kim, Lee & Jung, 2018; Wagler & Hanus, 2018; Kim & Hall, 2019) and augmented reality (AR) (e.g., Kounavis, Kasimati & Zamani, 2012; Han, Jung & Gibson, 2013; Tussyadiah, Jung & tom Dieck, 2018) in the tourism context. However, virtual tourism where VR or AR technologies are not part of the experience but focus on virtual experiences that include content from real environment and interaction with real people, has not been much studied.

Different technologies can easily be adopted in tourism products and services, and such adoption has been proved to enhance the tourism experience, the competitiveness of products, and the engagement towards the destination and tourism businesses (Karadimitriou, 2020), meaning that virtual tourism is mainly used for marketing purposes of the destination or enhancing the experience in the destination. However, it has not been proved that the use of such technologies could be potential option for replacing real travel (Law, Buhalis & Cobanoglu, 2014). For example, Guttentag (2010) states that tourists do not easily accept virtual reality as a substitute for real visit. Nevertheless, in future research it would be important to investigate what kind of benefits virtual tourism could provide for people who have some travel restrictions such as financial problems or physical disabilities (Sung, Lee, Kim, Kwon & Jang, 2000).

This leads to the fact that tourism and travelling has recently faced many changes and challenges due to COVID-19 outbreak, and at the time of this thesis there are many global travel restrictions which prevent people from travelling (OECD, 2020, pp. 2-3). The coronavirus pandemic has hit the tourism industry hard as the international tourist arrivals decreased by 74% in 2020, while putting 100-120 million tourism jobs at risk (UNWTO, 2021). The outlook for recovery still looks very uncertain. Domestic travel has helped to maintain jobs in some

countries, but actual recovery will be achieved only when the international tourists return. (OECD, 2020, pp. 2-3.) Most tourism professionals predict that the international tourism will not return to pre-COVID levels before 2023 (UNWTO, 2021). The global travel restrictions and lockdowns force tourism companies to come up with innovative solutions to survive during the pandemic as well as post-pandemic (Kwok & Koh, 2020). According to researchers, virtual tourism could provide solutions for businesses for easing the impacts of the pandemic (“Is virtual tourism the new way”, 2020).

Due to the pandemic, tourism businesses have already invented new types of virtual tourism services and experiences, and many of these new experiences seem to happen through live connection. As an example, there are many online experiences and virtual tours offered on Doerz (<https://fi.doerz.com/>) website and AirBnb (<https://www.airbnb.com/>) website. Similarly, Naantalin Matkakauppa (<https://www.naantalinmatkakauppa.fi>) offers virtual tours to foreign destinations for Finnish tourists, and SaimaaLife and Eco Conscious Japan organize virtual tours to Finland for Japanese tourists (“Finland turns to virtual”, 2020). What all these experiences have in common is that the tours are guided in real-time and recorded in real environment, although they might have components that are filmed before-hand. Additionally, customers are paying for these experiences so virtual tourism is a new way of doing business.

There is also a lack of research regarding virtual nature tourism experiences. Several studies are in fact investigating virtual nature experiences in general (e.g., Valtchanov, Barton & Ellard, 2010; Annerstedt et al., 2013; McAllister, Bhullar & Schutte, 2017), but only few studies are underlining these experiences in the context of tourism. Karadimitriou (2020) provides examples and suggestions of extended reality applications that can be used in nature tourism, and Potter, Carter and Coghlan (2016) explore the application of virtual reality in nature-based tourism. Nature tourism is rapidly growing segment in tourism, and in Nordic countries nature plays extremely important role as it is the key attraction factor there (Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). Business Finland (2020) states that nature is one of the main pull factors in Finland. However, COVID-19 has had a significant impact also on nature-based tourism, and even though the domestic demand in Finland has increased, it is not enough to compensate the decreased international demand. The development of new business models is the key to survival, and virtual travel brings great opportunities for this. (LUKE, 2020.)

This all being said, there is a clear research gap about recently emerged virtual tourism experiences that are filmed in real environment and include real-time interaction with the guide

and other participants – and that people are consuming as experiences. These types of tours are already organized by tourism businesses but there is not any existing research about them as they are such a new phenomenon, and traditionally virtual tourism is seen mainly as a marketing tool. However, virtual tourism has great potential for generating new business opportunities. For this reason, there is a need for developing these types of virtual tourism services and experiences even further so that the tourism companies in Finland could attract international customers to buy their services both during and after the pandemic.

Virtual tourism can provide solutions for companies also in the future by offering more sustainable option for traditional travelling (e.g., to protected areas where the carrying capacity is small), by enabling tourism experiences for those who have travel restrictions, and by presenting the destination and its offering to help tourists in their decision making. Virtual tourism will also bring solutions in the case of other possible global crisis affecting tourism industry. Understanding the customer's perceptions and expectations is crucial in order to develop the virtual tourism services for the future. This is because understanding customers' needs is important part of new service development (Edvardsson, Kristensson, Magnusson, Matthing & Gustafsson, 2006, p. 4).

The positioning of the study is presented in Figure 1.

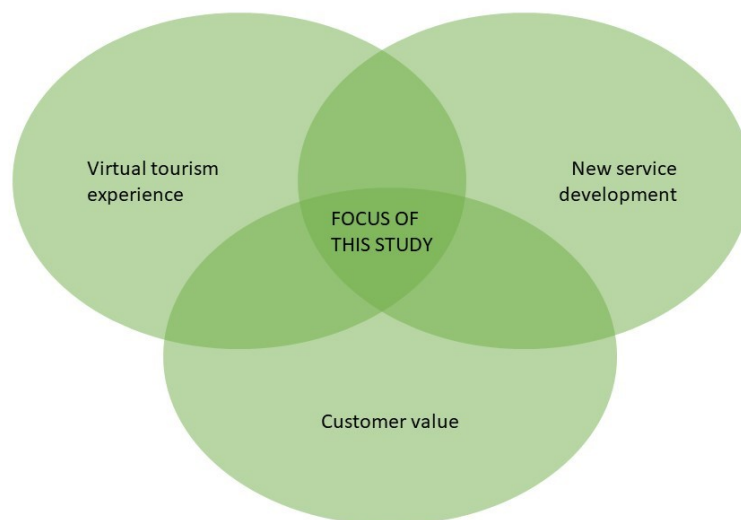


Figure 1. Positioning of the study.

This study is done as a part of tourism development project called Experience Kalevala which aims to design authentic travel experiences by combining Finnish nature, culture, and stories of Kalevala (Kalevala kartalle, 2020a). One goal of the project is to develop a virtual tourism experience, a guided live virtual tour, that utilizes all the factors just mentioned. Therefore, the development of new virtual tourism experience based on customer value was chosen as the topic of this thesis. The target group of the pilot project are Japanese customers (Kalevala kartalle, 2020b), and thus Japanese customers are also the target group of this specific study – more precisely Japanese customers that have already participated a virtual tour, so they already have an idea about virtual tourism experiences. This study provides more insights of this target market by exploring their expected customer value and other expectations, and by developing the virtual tourism experience based on their expectations.

1.2. Objectives and research questions

The objective of this study is to increase the understanding of virtual tourism experiences, as well as to investigate the customer value and expectations of guided live virtual tours. There is previous evidence that customer value is the core of tourism product, and the development of tourism products should be started from customer value (Komppula, 2005). For this reason, the study aims to examine what kind of value customers expect from guided live virtual tours in order to provide information for service development of new virtual tourism experience. Besides this, the customers' expectations and desires of the services (and the content of the services) are explored in more detail. In other words, the customers are involved in the development process. Additionally, this study aims to explain the importance of understanding the customer value in new service development.

As virtual tourism as an experience itself is not much studied – especially the type of virtual tours that are guided (includes interaction with other people) real-time, present content from real environment and can be accessed online – this study is exploratory and aims to discover something new about the subject. The research questions are presented below. Based on the customer value and expectations found in the empirical research, the prerequisites for a new Experience Kalevala virtual tourism service are created.

The main research questions and supportive questions are the following:

- What is the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours?
 - What kind of value customers have previously experienced?
 - What kind of expectations and desires customers have?
 - What do customers expect from a Kalevala-themed virtual tour that combines Finnish nature and culture?

This study can bring new insights to the concept of virtual tourism experience, as well as help the Finnish tourism businesses and enterprises that are now struggling because of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Finnish news, virtual tourism is a way for people to experience Finland even during this exceptional situation, and it is a new source of income for tour operators and especially for those targeting international customers (Rantala, 2020a). The results from this study will be useful even after the pandemic, as it is believed that virtual tourism will remain as one way to do business also after the times of corona (Rantala, 2020a). Although the research is carried out as part of a specific project, the results of the research can also be utilized by other operators in the tourism industry. As already mentioned before, the empirical research targets Japanese customers.

1.3. Description of the Experience Kalevala project

Experience Kalevala (*Kalevala kartalle* in Finnish) is a tourism development project that is running from January 2020 to June 2021. The purpose of the project is to create an experience concept based on the stories of Kalevala, the Finnish national epic (collection of thousands of poems by the writer Elias Lönnrot). (Kalevala Kartalle, 2020a.) In the pilot phase of the project, the perceptions of Finnish tourism service companies regarding the promotion of international tourism are examined. The aim of the project is to develop, grow and internationalize the tourism industry in Finland by focusing on the improvement of service branding, marketing, and collaboration across industry boundaries. In this project, safety, clean air, pure nature and of course the stories of Kalevala are considered as the key selling points of a new tourism service concept in Finland. The output of the project is an experience concept that combines Finnish nature, culture, and storytelling together. (Kalevala kartalle, 2020b.)

The aim of the project is to provide authentic tourism experiences for those who are interested in discovering the Finnish culture in the nature as well as in urban surroundings, and for those who are seeking travel experiences online. The target group of the project's pilot phase are Japanese, after which the concept is adapted to suit other target groups. Japanese were chosen as the target group as Finland is well-known in Japan, and Japanese are interested in imaginative stories, nature, and Finnish exotic. (Kalevala kartalle, 2020b.)

The project manager Mimosa Sukanen says that one output of the project will be a guided virtual tour that combines Finnish nature and culture. There will be parts of the experience that are filmed before-hand, mostly images and 360-degree videos, and this will be done in June 2021, but otherwise the online tour will be guided in real-time for the customers. Experience Kalevala online tour will probably also include discussions in smaller groups (between the participants), possibility to ask questions from entrepreneurs performing on the online tour, and the use of an online map. The actual virtual tour will start running before the end of the project, but it still needs to be developed further. For developing this virtual tourism experience, it would be ideal to study the experiences of those customers who have already participated some type of guided virtual tour. (personal communication, December 21, 2020.)

1.4. Key concepts

Virtual tourism

Virtual tourism is a type of tourism experience (Wu, 2020) or online experience (Jarratt, in press) that is based on some type of technology (Wu, 2020). Virtual tourism differs from traditional tourism as the tourists can experience different scenes and the beauty of the world (Wu, 2020), as well as culture, history, and other aspects of tourism (Ali & Frew, 2014) through internet and computers, without leaving home or actually visiting the destination (Ali & Frew, 2014; Wu, 2020). Virtual tourism offers a substitute for a physical visit, involving simulation, immersion and/or interaction (Jarratt, in press).

Guided live virtual tour

Guided live virtual tours are such a new phenomenon that there is no official definition of them in the literature. These virtual tours became a phenomenon due to travel restrictions caused by COVID-19 pandemic (Rantala, 2020b). Guided live virtual tours

can also be called for example live virtual tours, guided virtual tours, live online tours, digital tours etc., as can be seen from several websites. Guided live virtual tour is a type of virtual tourism experience that customers are paying for, and the tour involves for example live connection, tour guide, videos, and photos (Rantala, 2020b).

Tourism experience

Tourism experiences are set of activities and interactions that engage individuals in a “personal way” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 12), and happen outside of their usual environment and daily routines (Komppula & Gartner, 2013). Tourism experiences can include both ordinary and extraordinary (peak) components and can range from positive experiences to negative experiences (Walls, Okumus, Wang & Kwun, 2011; Komppula & Gartner, 2013). The type and degree of tourism experiences are different and subjective for each individual as the experiences are determined by individual’s characteristics and situational factors (Ryan, 2010; Komppula & Gartner, 2013).

Experiential service

“An experiential service is an economic activity in which a service provider provides prerequisites that enable a consumer, through involvement, to experience something that is internal and emotionally engaging or affective and appeals to consumer’s hedonic and/or eudemonic motivations, leading to experiential value” (Konu, 2016). Tourism companies are providing experiential services when they consider the customer experience as the core of the services (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2011). Experiential services can be evaluated only after the consumption (McColl-Kennedy & Fetter, 2001).

New service development (NSD)

The term new service development (NSD) refers to a process that consists of several stages and aims to develop new services and service offerings (Johnson, Menor, Roth & Chase, 2000; Menor, Tatikonda & Sampson, 2002; Konu, 2016). The early stages of the process (Alam, 2006) and the involvement of customers in the process (Alam, 2002; Alam & Perry, 2002; Alam, 2006; Edvardsson et al., 2006, p.2) are considered as important parts of new service development. Hence, new service development relies on

understanding the customer needs by interacting with the customers through the process (Edvardsson et al., 2006, p. 4).

Customer value

Customer value means a trade-off between give and get components (Zeithalm, 1988), or between the quality and benefits received, and the sacrifices made (Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991). Customer value always involves a use of a product or service (Komppula, 2005), and it depends on the perceptions of individuals (Woodruff, 1997). It is also said to be interactive, comparative, personal and situational preference experience (Hollbrook, 1999). Customer value is often divided into different value dimensions (Komppula, 2005).

1.5. Structure of the study

This paper consists of five main chapters. The first chapter, introduction, explains the importance of the topic and meaning of the study by introducing the background, research objective, research problems, context and key concepts. The second chapter concentrates on the theoretical background of the study. It consists of literature review about virtual tourism, development of new services and customer value. The section on virtual tourism reviews what virtual tourism is, what types of virtual tourism experiences exist and what the opportunities offered by virtual tourism are. The section on service development explains experiential services, prerequisites for tourism services, new service development and service design. The aim of that section is to provide understanding of the importance of customer value as a starting point for service development. After that the theory section moves on to customer value, explaining the concept and dimensions of customer value, as well as previous studies of customer value in virtual tourism context. The third chapter, methodology, introduces and validates the research approach and the used data collection and data analysis methods in more detail. In the fourth chapter, the findings from the empirical study are presented and hence the research questions are answered. The last chapter concludes the whole study by discussing about the findings in relation to previous studies and theory, and by providing prerequisites for the new virtual tourism experience. Additionally, the theoretical conclusions, managerial implications, evaluation of the study and future research suggestions are discussed.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Virtual tourism

Virtual tourism does not have universally accepted definition (Mura, Tavakoli & Sharif, 2017), probably because virtual tourism is sometimes also called *virtual reality tourism* (Kim & Hall, 2019; Stainton, 2020) and therefore the term is often used almost as a synonym for the term *virtual reality*. This is because virtual tourism emerged in the 1990s due to the fast development of virtual reality technology and its integration with tourism (Wu, 2020). However, virtual tourism is much more than just experiencing a virtual (non-real) world with virtual reality glasses on but instead can happen also in the real environment and make use of other types of technologies. In this chapter, virtual tourism and virtual tourism experiences are discussed in more detail.

2.1.1. Definition of virtual tourism

The term *virtual tourism* can mean a comprehensive online journey to a traditional tourism destination, or more precisely its virtual equivalent, but more often it refers to cases where the virtual experience only complements more traditional forms of tourism (Krug, 2006). Virtual tourism is most often used for marketing and promotion of products and destinations, but it can also be used for fulfilling cultural, educational, and recreational functions (Voronkova, 2018). To add to this, the term virtual tourism includes a large scale of different experiences (from watching marketing videos of a destination to technology-enhanced experience in a destination to experiencing a whole holiday online), so it can be defined simply as “the use of technology to artificially enhance or create a tourism experience” (Stainton, 2020).

Virtual tourism is said to be a type of tourism experience activity that is based on one of the following technologies: virtual reality, computer technology, touch screen, Internet multimedia, 360-degree panoramic technology, 3D animation or other similar type of technology (Wu, 2020), such as augmented reality (Stainton, 2020). Virtual tourism is different from traditional tourism as the tourists can experience beautiful sceneries from all over the world through internet and computers, without leaving home (Wu, 2020). Similarly, Ali and Frew (2014) state that virtual tourism is internet-based, and it allows people to experience for example culture,

history, and other aspects of tourism visually and interactively without having to visit the destination. Matala (2003) claims that virtual tourism is “almost like” tourism; tourism by means of an electronic device without physical movement from one place to another.

According to Jarratt (in press), virtual tourism is an online experience which offers a substitute for a physical visit, involving simulation, immersion and/or interaction. He states that these experiences are often enabled through complex technologies, such as virtual reality. At the same time Jarratt (in press) also claims that the definitions of virtual tourism are often too limited and focus only on virtual reality, but this should be changed, and the definitions of virtual tourism should be modified to accommodate also more simple technologies that are only providing a “window” to a real environment.

As stated, virtual tourism differs from real tourism, as it does not necessarily include any physical movement. The definition for tourism always includes some kind of physical movement – for example, the internationally agreed definition for tourism from 2000 by UNWTO starts with “Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment...”, and therefore some argue if virtual tourism can be recognized as a form of tourism at all (Guttentag, 2010). Based on this definition, virtual tourism would be considered tourism only if the customer had first travelled outside their usual living environment to get the virtual tourism experience there (Guttentag, 2010). Therefore, the previously described definition of virtual tourism as a tourism experience enhanced or created with the use of technology works here. The concept of *experience* is significant leading to a conclusion that maybe we should not even try to consider virtual tourism as a form of tourism but rather as a tourism type of experience.

Mura et al. (2017) propose a different perspective of virtual tourism by including to the definition both digital and non-digital alternative worlds in which people can travel without physical movement. With this they mean that besides technological devices, virtual tourism experience – travelling without a body movement – could be driven also by human fantasy or imagination and does not necessarily need to include any digital device. With this broader definition for example books, religious texts and paintings would be considered as representations of virtual worlds and could thus provide virtual tourism experiences with the help of human imagination. Despite of this, the technological devices, and their role in providing virtual tourism experiences do not want to be denied. (Mura et al., 2017.) In a similar way, Krug (2006) states that although virtual tourism is related to computer age and

postmodernism, the term also evokes written and visual traditions long before the computers were invented.

Most of the other definitions, however, specifically emphasize the role of technology and digital tools in providing virtual tourism experiences, and for that reason the use of technology is considered as a crucial part of virtual tourism in this paper as well. Nevertheless, the technologies enabling these experiences do not need to be only complex technologies such as virtual reality but can also include more simple technologies – as can be seen from the recently emerged virtual tourism experiences that utilize video images from real environment, some easily accessible online platforms and real-time internet connection.

2.1.2. Types of virtual tourism experiences

Milgram and Kishino (1994) propose a reality-virtuality continuum, which shows the order of different realities as seen from the Figure 2. On the other extreme of the continuum is real environment and on the other extreme virtual environment (Flavián, Ibáñez-Sánchez & Orús, 2018). Real environment covers the reality itself, and it can be experienced directly or indirectly (for example when displayed as a video) (Milgram & Kishino, 1994). Virtual Reality (VR) is a presentation of virtual environment as VR is totally computer-generated environment that provides simulated experience (Guttentag, 2010).

The level of computer-generated stimuli increases the more we move from left (real environment) towards right (virtual environment). In between of these extremes is the mixed reality (MR), which includes Augmented Reality (AR) and Augmented Virtuality (AV). In mixed reality the virtual and the real objects merge. (Milgram & Kishino, 1994; Flavián et al., 2018.) AR modifies the real environment by overlaying computer-made virtual objects there, so it is happening in the real environment (van Krevelen & Poelman, 2010; Flavián et al., 2018). AV, in contrast, places real-life elements on the virtual environment, but this is much less studied (Flavián et al., 2018), and there are no examples of the use of AV in the tourism context. Other realities mentioned here are however utilized in virtual tourism. All these technologies, VR, AR and MR, are considered to be Extended Reality (EX) technologies (Karadimitriou, 2020).

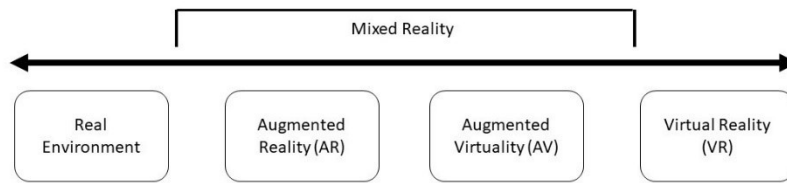


Figure 2. Reality-virtuality continuum (Milgram & Kishino, 1994).

VR & AR in tourism

Virtual Reality (VR) is nowadays commonly used in tourism sector and therefore also widely studied subject in tourism research, but despite this there are many inconsistencies regarding the definition of virtual reality (Guttentag, 2010), just like there is regarding the definition of virtual tourism. The most often used and accepted definition, which is also adapted to this paper, describes VR as a computer-generated immersive 3D environment in which the user can move around and interact with, and thus it provides simulation for the user's senses (Guttentag, 2010; Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2017; Wei, 2019; Loureiro, Guerreiro & Ali, 2020). In other words, VR is entirely synthetic world that is a representation of either the real world (location that exists now or existed in the past) or some completely invented world (Loureiro et al., 2020). The terms virtual world and virtual environment are commonly used in VR research (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2017).

Besides referring to the systems that provide the simulative experiences, the term VR can also refer the technology and devices that enable these experiences, or the experience itself (Beck, Rainoldi & Egger, 2019). There are many different visual output devices that are used for displaying VR to the users, from simple devices to more complex ones. Probably the most essential output device is the head-mounted display that can be in the form of goggles, glasses, or helmet. (Guttentag, 2010.) Beck et al. (2019) state that VR can be a) non-immersive, when the content is displayed for example on a computer screen, b) semi-immersive, when the content is displayed on large screens on the walls and sometimes also on the floor, or c) fully-immersive, when the user is fully isolated from the real world and the content is displayed with VR headset. The term Virtual Reality is sometimes "overused" (Beck et al., 2019), for example when talking about "VR-type technologies" that are not actually real VR (Guttentag, 2010).

Beck et al. (2019) provide an overall definition for VR in tourism context, explaining that VR “creates a virtual environment by the provision of synthetic or 360-degree real life captured content with a capable non-, semi-, or fully-immersive VR system, enabling virtual touristic experiences that stimulate the visual sense and potentially additional other senses of the user for the purpose of planning, management, marketing, information exchange, entertainment, education, accessibility or heritage preservation, either prior to, during or after travel.” This definition includes the content captured from real environment to VR, if it is presented in 360-degree form. This would not fit to the definition of VR being entirely computer-generated 3D environment where the user can navigate, but 360-degree technology is still often considered as a part of VR. The 360-degree panoramic videos and images are explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Augmented Reality (AR) presents layers of computer-generated objects (such as images, videos, and text) over real environment (Guttentag, 2010; Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2017; Loureiro et al., 2020). AR is an important tool for tourism and destination managers for enhancing the customer experience (Loureiro et al., 2020). An example of AR used in tourism could be a mobile application where AR is integrated to city guides (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2017). With AR, the user mainly sees the real environment and some virtual objects overlaid on it, whereas with VR the user interacts with completely virtual environment (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2017), and therefore VR and AR are not identical in their actual meaning (Guttentag, 2010; Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2017; Wei, 2019). Also, the reality-virtuality continuum by Milgram and Kishino (1994) supports this, as VR and AR are almost on the different ends of the continuum. Nevertheless, AR is often considered as a type of VR (Guttentag, 2010), which is why the two areas are reported together in several research papers (e.g., Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2017; Wei, 2019; Loureiro et al., 2020).

Both VR and AR are increasingly being used in various areas of tourism and hospitality – there are many examples but probably the most well-known areas are theme parks, cruises, and museums, as well as tourism marketing and promotion. The VR and AR applications can enhance the customer experience by providing more immersive, interactive, diverse, and novel experience. (Wei, 2019.) These technologies are experiential in nature, so they provide realistic information for potential tourists (Guttentag, 2010), and thus allow customers to get to know places and products in a new and interesting way (Wei, 2019). For destination marketers it is an opportunity to increase tourist satisfaction and attitude towards the destination and to build

the destination brand image (Wei, 2019). Guttentag (2010) adds that besides marketing and entertainment, these technologies provide opportunities for destination management, education, better accessibility, and heritage site preservation.

Virtual tours and 360-degree videos as marketing tools

The term virtual tour is widely used on tourism organization websites, even though there is no clear consensus about the term (Cho & Freisenmaier, 2001; Cho, Wang & Freisenmaier, 2002). Virtual tours are said to be presentations of existing (or previously existed) locations, often consisting of series of videos and photos. They can also include other multimedia elements like sounds, speech, music, and text. Virtual tours are however distinguished from the programs presented on television. Virtual tours often allow people to explore the environment in a similar way they could do in real life, but it only happens through computers and the exploration of space is limited only to points that are defined in advance. (IGI Global, 2021.) In other words, there is no possibility for free navigation (Guttentag, 2010). Virtual tours are also said to be specific type of virtual experiences that include computer-mediated interaction when exploring destination (Cho et al., 2002).

Another definition refers virtual tour as a type of application in which people can explore the environments through 360-degree panoramic videos and images (Guttentag, 2010; IGI Global, 2021). In 360°-videos, several overlaying images are attached together to form 360° panoramic scenes (Beck et al., 2019) that allow viewers to see in all directions but without any interaction with the video or moving through the imaginary (Gardonio, 2017; Beck et al., 2019). 360-degree videos are often classified into VR category because these videos are traditionally watched with virtual reality headsets. However, 360°-videos can be watched also without VR headset for example on Facebook and YouTube by clicking the imaginary with computer's mouse or by moving a smartphone's screen around with a finger. (Gardonio, 2017.)

In tourism industry, virtual tours and 360-degree videos are traditionally used for promoting tourism destinations. Virtual tours closely simulate the actual experience and thus can create the most realistic image of a destination. Virtual tours allow tourists to evaluate the destination and its experiential attributes more precisely as they allow tourist to have direct "trial" of the actual experience in the destination. (Cho et al., 2002.) Pasanen, Pesonen and Mikkonen (2019) point out the same advantages about 360-degree videos and VR technology in general, as these

enable customers to try the experience in advance, and this can further increase their interest towards the destination. In fact, both traditional videos and 360-degree videos increase positive emotions and willingness to travel to the destination, but 360°-videos provide more information, so they work better to showcase the expected travel experiences (Pasanen et al., 2019). Wagler and Hanus (2018) support this by suggesting that 360-degree videos provide close simulation of real-world experiences.

Through virtual tours tourist can be more confident about their destination choice and that their expectations will be met when they take the actual trip. Virtual tours also allow people to plan better what they can and want to do in a destination before actually travelling there. (Cho et al., 2002.) One can for example explore the possibilities that Finland has to offer and plan their stay by taking a virtual tour around Finland (Visit Finland, 2020). As an example of 360°-videos in tourism context, on the website of VirtualTraveller (<https://virtualtraveller.com/>) there are various 360-degree videos from different destinations around the world, offering free virtual travel experiences for the customers using the platform. On the website of Virtual Outdoors Finland (<http://virtual.outdoorsfinland.com/>) people can watch both normal and 360-degree videos of Finnish nature, cottage life and activities.

Cho et al. (2002) state that the destination marketers should improve the web-based virtual tour experience by increasing the level of vividness and interactivity, and thus get the tourists to become active participants, “players”, instead of passive participants, “watchers”. This enables them to acquire more information about the experiential attributes. The destination marketers should also provide possibilities for the tourists to actively choose content and activities that they are genuinely interested in as this makes the tourists more involved and increases their understanding of the destination. In other words, instead of offering a static and linear experience, the virtual tour should be dynamic and selective. As virtual tour provides the tourists with a trial of the actual experience, the destination marketers should not manipulate the virtual tour experience itself. If the virtual tour does not match the real experience, the tourists might feel dissatisfied. (Cho et al., 2002.)

Guided live virtual tours – new way to make business

All the different types of virtual tours and videos of destinations have so far been mostly free to access for the consumers, because as stated, they have been used as tools for promoting the

destinations or tourism products. However, a virtual tourism that customers are paying for is a new phenomenon raising from the corona pandemic (Rantala, 2020b), so it is a new way to make business for tourism companies. As customers have not been able to physically travel, they are replacing their physical holidays with virtual experiences. Tourism companies are offering so called *live virtual tours*, *guided virtual tours*, *live online tours*, *digital tours*, *live online experiences* etc., as can be seen from several websites, and customers are indeed paying for these experiences. The live connection is new development step on virtual tours (Rantala, 2020) and it seems to be compelling attribute for the customers.

Yukie Tonuma, the owner of Eco Conscious Japan, has been organizing and guiding already several live virtual tours for Japanese customers. She says that these virtual tours are utilizing live connection but include also pre-recorded videos and images from the real environment (including also 360-degree videos in some cases), as well as interaction with other people because the tours always involve a guide and other participants (personal communication, January 8, 2021). In addition, these virtual tourism experiences are not very expensive as, for example, a two-hour virtual tour to Finland cost about 20 euros for Japanese customers (Rantala, 2020b). Yukie Tonuma also points out that in these live virtual tours, the guide takes customers to pre-determined locations, so the customers cannot navigate around themselves - however, the guide can tell interesting facts about the places and activate the participants in other ways (personal communication, January 8, 2021). As these types of live virtual tours are such a new phenomenon, there is no existing academic research or any previous definition of them.

Webcam-travel

Webcam-travel is a concept proposed by Jarratt (2020), meaning “the act of viewing places or attractions through a webcam”. This definition for webcam-travel was formed very recently when Jarratt (2020) studied the experience of webcam-travel after noticing a remarkable increase in the use of webcams due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Place-based webcams allow people to connect with different places and nature around the world very quickly by accessing the webcams online. The webcams are often filming a certain fixed point from real environment, and usually they are located in some natural surroundings (such as wildlife cameras) but can also transmit video from urban surroundings (city cameras), attractions or

holiday resorts. Many individual organizations are streaming these types of real-time and unedited video images on their websites from where people can easily access them. (Jarratt, 2020; Jarratt, in press.) As a result of COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdowns, people started to increasingly and more frequently follow webcams from around the world.

Jarratt (in press) claims that webcam-travel does not easily fit into the current definitions of virtual tourism due to many differences between them, but it could be considered as a sub-category of virtual tourism. Webcam-travel relies on more simple technology than virtual tourism, it operates in real-time in the material world (real environment) and does not include interaction. Virtual tourism, in contrast, often operates in simulated or augmented virtual environments, is immersive and interactive, and often does not happen real-time. The definition of virtual tourism should be re-conceptualized so that it would also include webcam-travel and other similar types of virtual experiences. (Jarratt, 2020.) However, as stated before, there is no consensus about the definition of virtual tourism, and while many of them focus mainly on virtual reality, not everyone agrees to this. For this reason, webcam-travel could be seen as a part of virtual tourism.

The different types of virtual tourism experiences, and the environments that virtual tourism is operating in, are presented in the Figure 3. The figure sums up what has been said so far in this chapter about virtual tourism. It illustrates what is considered about virtual tourism in this paper, as there are differing opinions on the matter, as noted above. From the figure it can be seen that virtual tourism is a tourism experience that is enhanced or even completely created with the help of technology and which utilizes both real environment as well as virtual environment. The types of virtual tourism include VR experiences, AR experiences, virtual tours (both live and pre-recorded), promotional videos, and webcam-travel. The 360-degree panoramic videos and images could be considered under “reality”, as the imaginary is captured from real environment, or, on the other hand, under “virtual reality” as it is considered as virtual reality technology. Some other technologies, such as computer technology, would also overlap between different types of virtual tourism experiences, and therefore these technologies are leaved out from the figure.

The context of this study is the new phenomenon that has arisen due to the corona pandemic, guided live virtual tours. In more detail, it focuses on live virtual tours that are combining pre-recorded videos and images from the real environment, real-time guiding, as well as interaction between the participants, the guide and the tourism companies which are part of the virtual

tourism experience. The aim is to develop these types of live virtual tours based on customer value.

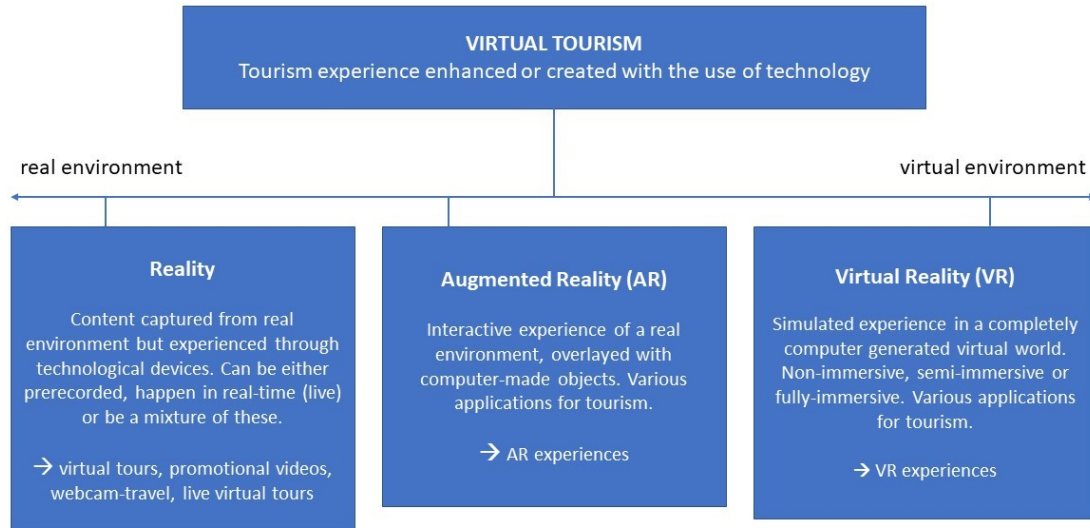


Figure 3. Different types of virtual tourism experiences.

2.1.3. Virtual nature and cultural experiences

Experience Kalevala virtual tour will offer an experience that combines Finnish culture and nature, and therefore it is important to shortly point out what virtuality can bring to nature tourism and cultural tourism. There is evidence that virtual nature experiences can provide similar benefits as being surrounded by actual nature, such as restorative effects and decreased stress levels (Valtchanov et al., 2010; Annerstedt et al., 2013). In the context of nature tourism, the adoption of technologies can enable economic growth, environmental protection, improvement of product and service offering, as well as attraction of new market segments (Karadimitriou, 2020). For the customers, virtual nature experiences provide information, education, and entertainment (Potter et al., 2016), as well as awareness and accessibility of the nature activities (Karadimitriou, 2020). Nature tourism videos, and especially 360-videos of nature, arouse positive feelings and interests towards nature tourism in the destination which is why they are exceptional tool for promoting the destination (Pasanen et al., 2019). Virtual nature tourism experiences can also increase visitation to unknown destinations (Karadimitriou, 2020).

What it comes to cultural tourism experiences, there are several studies showing that the use of technology enhances how the culture is experienced (Bekele, Pierdicca, Frontoni, Malinverni & Gain, 2018). The use of different technologies can especially bring great benefits for culture heritage sites by enhancing the customer experience (e.g., Garau & Ilardi, 2014; Jung & tom Dieck, 2017). According to Wiltshier and Clarke (2016), Virtual Cultural Tourism is used for the purposes of interpretation (information exchange and education), control (planning and conservation concerns), and accessibility (inaccessible sites and access for disabled people). Technological innovations can help to sustain the heritage and cultural sites for future generations and increase the potential markets (Wiltshier & Clarke, 2016). Hua, Chen, Fang and Wang (2018) state that internet-based virtual experience for cultural tourism is playing an important role in creating intercultural communication and sharing cultural heritage, and the importance of this is increasing continuously.

As can be seen, virtuality brings similar positive effects to both nature tourism and cultural tourism. These include enhancing the customer experience, providing more information and education, protecting the sites and environment, attracting new market segments, and providing better accessibility.

2.1.4. Future of virtual tourism

As stated before, virtual tourism has developed steadily since the 1990s. The adoption of different technologies in the tourism industry has been beneficial as it improves the customer experience and thus also brings a lot of benefits and exceptional possibilities to tourism enterprises (Karadimitriou, 2020), which is why virtual tourism has been utilized more and more all the time. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, people were forced to stay home, and they started to replace their physical holidays with virtual tourism experiences, such as live virtual tours streamed online (Stainton, 2020), webcam-travel (Jarratt, 2020) and VR experiences (Sarkady, Neuburger & Egger, 2021; Schiopu, Hornoiu, Padurean & Nica, 2021). Before the pandemic, it was believed that virtual tourism cannot be accepted as a substitute for traditional travelling (e.g., Guttentag, 2010), but the coronavirus outbreak changed this. In Finland, the supply of virtual tours and virtual experiences slightly increased due to the corona pandemic, but the progress has been surprisingly slow, and it seems like there is more demand than supply for virtual travel during the pandemic (Massinen, 2021).

However, the real question is, what virtual tourism will look like in the future and if people are still willing to consume virtual tourism experiences after the pandemic. Only few research papers have addressed this issue. Sarkady et al. (2021) state that tourists use VR experiences as a travel substitute in the times of travel restrictions caused by external and environmental circumstances such as the coronavirus pandemic, and even after the pandemic. Sarkady et al. (2021), as well as many other research papers (e.g., Kim, Park & Morrison, 2008; Huang, Backman, Backman & Moore, 2013; Huang, Backman, Backman & Chang, 2016; Schioppa et al., 2021), have applied the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to examine the acceptance of new technologies in the context of tourism. TAM was first proposed by Davis (1989) to explain how perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use define person's opinions about the use of technology (see Huang et al. 2016). TAM is useful tool for studying the acceptance of technologies and virtual experiences as a substitute for corporeal travel also in the future.

Another factor determining the acceptance of virtual experiences as a substitute for travel is the perceived authenticity (Guttentag, 2010; Schioppa et al., 2021). Schioppa et al. (2021) state that the more authentic individual perceives virtual tourism experience, the more willing he or she would be to use it. As authenticity is not depending on any specific criteria, but rather is subjective and influenced by user's personal characteristics, it is likely that some users can perceive virtual tourism experiences authentic even though they "would not be authentic in the strictest sense" (Guttentag, 2010). The finding of the study by Mura et al. (2017) show that virtual tourism was not perceived totally authentic, as it would require physical involvement of the body and senses for experiencing authenticity. The authenticity of virtual experiences can also be influenced by user's general acceptance of technologies, and there might be strong variation between different cultures in this (Guttentag, 2010).

In the future, virtual tourism could be used as a substitute for visiting specially protected areas or some places that are completely closed from visitors (Voronkova, 2018) due to them being too vulnerable, dangerous, remote, or expensive to access (Guttentag, 2010), as well as destinations that are suffering from over-tourism (Bec, Moyle, Schaffer & Timms, 2021). Virtual tourism could target mainly disabled people – elderly and those who have some other physical limitations – offering them new experiences that they could not otherwise attend to (Guttentag, 2019; Voronkova; 2018). As virtual tourism is sustainable way to travel, it would probably arouse interest in environmentally conscious people who want to reduce their carbon footprint (Chen, 2020), develop themselves, meet new people and increase their well-being

(Massinen, 2021). Virtual tourism could provide customers experiences with lower costs and greater safety, and without weather concerns, language limitations or need for visas (Guttentag, 2010).

Virtual tourism is unlikely to ever replace corporeal travelling completely, but it can offer wide range of possibilities for enhancing and creating experiences (Chen, 2020). There is room for example for experiences that can start the whole tourism experience before the actual departure and serve as a memory after the trip (Viinikka, 2021). It is also believed that in the future, virtual tourism can remain as a way to do business and bring additional value for the companies (Rantala, 2020a; Viinikka, 2021). Juho Pesonen, the head of e-tourism research from the University of Eastern Finland, states that virtual tourism has great potential, and it is likely to increase in the following years. He points out that arranging virtual tours is not a big risk for an entrepreneur, it does not require any huge investments, and it would be relatively easy to film and organize the virtual tours. Pesonen also claims that Finland has all the possibilities to be the leading country in virtual nature tourism. (Massinen, 2021.) The summary of the opportunities that virtual tourism can offer in the future are presented below in Figure 4. There are several opportunities, and hence tourism companies and destinations should pay attention in developing virtual tourism experiences.

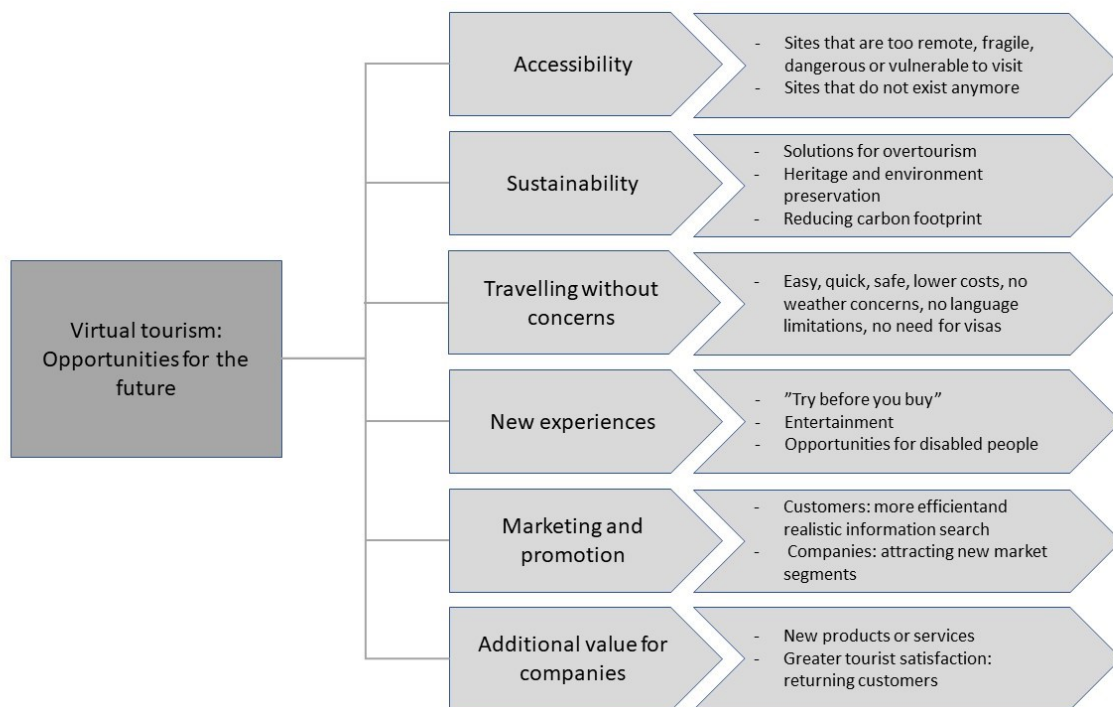


Figure 4. Future opportunities of virtual tourism.

2.2. Developing new tourism services

As the service sector is increasing in importance, there is need for approaches that focus on the special characteristics of services, such as the new service development (NSD), especially in the case of tourism services which are considered to be experiential services (Konu, 2016). However, there are only few studies concentrating on NSD and customer involvement in NSD in the tourism context. This chapter focuses on the development of new tourism services. The concepts of experience and experiential service are defined, and prerequisites of tourism services are discussed. After this the paper takes a closer look on new service development process, customer involvement in NSD, and finally, service design.

2.2.1. Experiential services

Tourism product refers to customer's emotional experience that is subjective for every customer (Komppula, 2005). The experience is formed when the customer utilizes the services of the company by taking part in the creation process of the product (Komppula & Boxberg, 2002; Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010), and thus generates the final outcome, the experience (Smith, 1994; Konu et al., 2010). In other words, customer experience can be seen as an outcome of the consumption process. The production process, during which the outcome is created, is organized by a service company (Edvardsson and Olson, 1996). Tourism products and services are said to be experiential (Williams, 2006), which is why tourism products are referred as experiential services (Konu, 2016). As the consumption of virtual tourism is also experiential, this paper applies this to the virtual tourism context and refers to virtual tourism products as experiential services.

The concept of experience is challenging to define, and there are various approaches and definitions of the concept of experience in different disciplines (Walls et al., 2011). Schmitt (1999) defines experiences as personal events that happen as a "response to some stimulation and involve the entire being". According to Pine and Gilmore (1999, p. 12), experiences are set of engaging activities and interactions, and that customers find "unique, memorable and sustainable over time". Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) add that besides being memorable, experiences are engaging and enjoyable for those consuming the events.

Tourism experiences happen outside of individuals usual environment and daily routines (Komppula & Gartner, 2013), and they can include both ordinary and extraordinary (peak)

components and can range from positive experiences to negative experiences (Walls et al., 2011; Komppula & Gartner, 2013). Walls et al. (2011) present a hospitality and tourism consumer experience framework that includes ordinary and extraordinary components, cognitive and emotive components, as well as elements impacting the customer experience; physical experience elements, human interaction elements, individual characteristics and situational factors. This means that the type and degree of tourism experiences are different and subjective for everyone as the experiences are determined by individual's characteristics and situational factors (Ryan, 2010; Komppula & Gartner, 2013).

Companies in leisure and entertainment industries pay attention to the experience of their customers, as an experience is their main offer (Voss & Zomerdijk, 2007). These companies systematically develop and manage their customer's experiences throughout the whole service delivery, and therefore they offer *experiential services* (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2011). This means that they want to pay attention to the customer experience, not just on the functional value of the services (Voss & Zomerdijk, 2007). A tourism product is an experiential service, meaning “an economic activity in which a service provider provides prerequisites that enable a consumer, through involvement, to experience something that is internal and emotionally engaging or affective and appeals to a consumer's hedonic and/or eudemonic motivations, leading to experiential value” (Konu 2016). This definition proposed by Konu (2016) is illustrated below in the Figure 5.

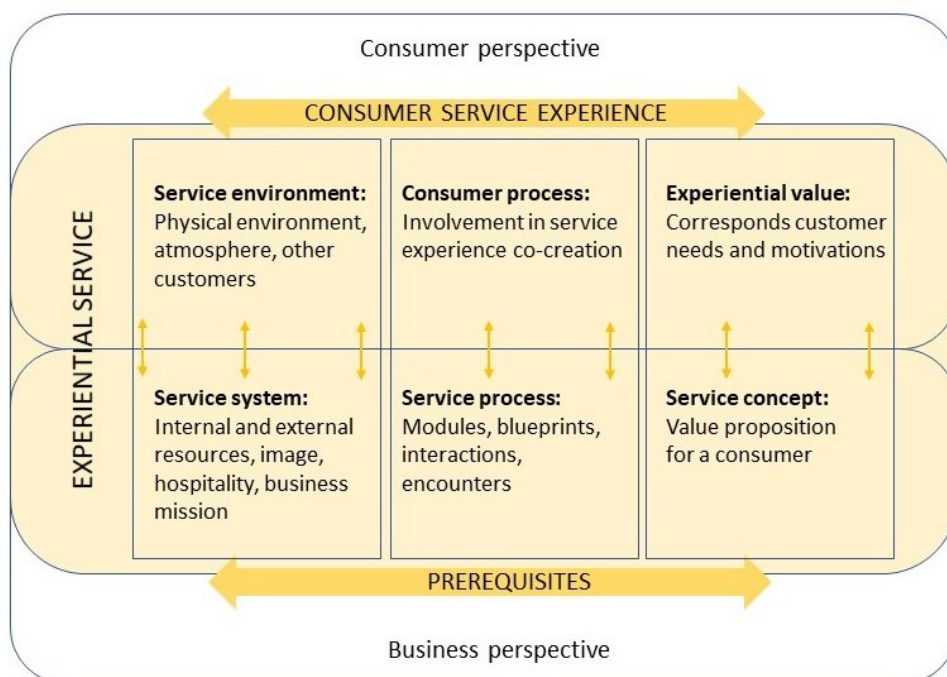


Figure 5. Consumer and business perspectives of an experiential service (Konu, 2016).

The figure presents both customer perspective and business perspective of an experiential service. The customer perspective refers to consumer service experience, including the components of service environment, consumer process and experiential value. The business perspective refers to the prerequisites, including service system, service process and service concept. Konu (2016) states that from the customer point of view, the centre of the service is experiential value which corresponds to customer's needs. From the company point of view, the centre is the service concept, which refers to the value proposition for the customer (Konu, 2016). These are closely connected to each other. For this reason, when developing experiential services, the development process should start with understanding what customers want and need, and what might bring experiential value for them (Konu, 2016). This means that for businesses, the starting point should be the development of the service concept (Konu, 2016).

Konu (2016) argues that it would be extremely important to involve customers to the experiential service development process, particularly when developing the service concept. This is because the service concept is about the value that the service aims to produce for the customers (Konu, 2016). This notion is important for this paper, as it points out why it is important to study the customer value, or experiential value, from the customer perspective, when developing new services. When understanding the customer value, it is possible to create the value proposition and service concept, and thus create the prerequisites for the whole service. In the following sections, the prerequisites and the new service development process are explained in more detail.

2.2.2. Prerequisites for a tourism service

Edvardsson and Olsson (1996) state that service companies “do not provide the service but the prerequisites for the services”. Companies are selling opportunities for services, which are created during customer processes. The right prerequisites are presented with a model that includes three components. These components are service concept, service process and service system. The correct prerequisites are formed as an end-result of service development process. (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996.)

Service concept relates to the needs of the customers, and it explains how these needs can be fulfilled with the design of the service package or the content of the service (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996), so in other words it relates to customer value (Komppula, 2005; Konu et al.,

2010). Service process means a series of sequencing functions that should operate accurately so that the company can provide the service. By focusing on the important functions, the correct quality at a rational price can be achieved. (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996.) The last component, service system, relates to the resources that are available for the service process (Konu et al., 2010), for making the service concept possible (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996). The resources might include for example the staff, physical and technical environment, customers, and organization structure (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996).

Komppula and Boxberg (2002) adapted the model of the prerequisites for the service to tourism context and presented prerequisites for a customer-oriented tourism service. This model has been used in several tourism papers since (e.g., Komppula, 2005; Komppula; 2006, Konu et al., 2010). The model adapted by Komppula and Boxberg is presented below in Figure 6.

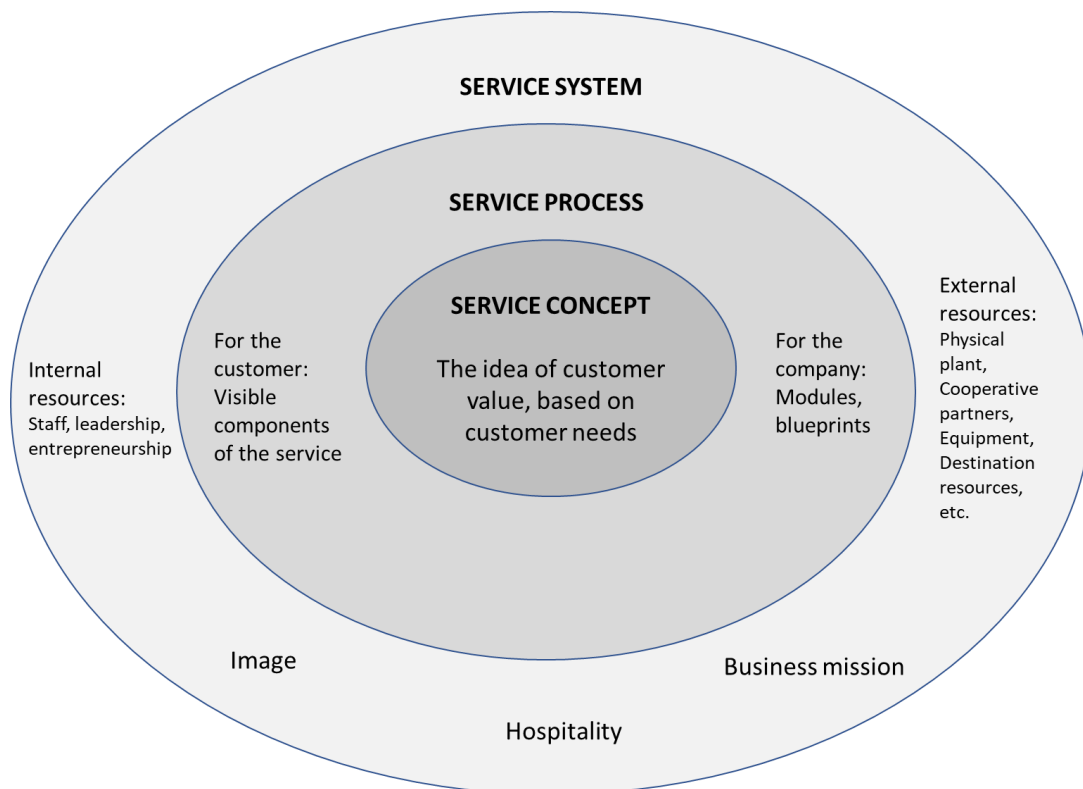


Figure 6. Prerequisites for customer-oriented tourism product and service (Komppula and Boxberg, 2002).

As can be seen from the figure, the service concept is in the core of everything. The service concept refers to the idea of the value that customers desire (Komppula, 2005). In other words, it is the answer to customer's expected value (Konu et al., 2010). For this reason, the empirical research in this paper aims to find out the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours, so that the service concept for Experience Kalevala online experience can be developed. Around the service concept is service process. For the customer it means the visible components of the service, expressed for example in the form of a brochure, while for the company it means the chain of activities which can be presented for example with blueprints (Komppula, 2005). The service system for tourism product includes internal and external resources, hospitality, image and business mission. Together these three mentioned components create the prerequisites for tourism experiences (Komppula, 2005).

2.2.3. New service development (NSD)

According to Komppula (2005), the right prerequisites for a service are created as a result from service development process. New service development (NSD) aims to develop and generate new services and service offerings (Johnson et al., 2000) through various development phases (Johnson et al., 2000; Menor et al., 2002). NSD models are often based on new product development (NPD) theories, and hence they include many similar phases (Konu & Komppula, 2016). However, the NSD process is different from new product development process as it might be more complex to develop services, and the process can include many overlapping stages (meaning that you can move on to the next stage even if the previous stage is not ready), and can require collaboration with others (Johnson et al., 2000; Menor et al., 2002; Alam, 2006). The early phases of the process are considered as important parts of new service development (Alam, 2006).

Konu et al. (2010) presented a NSD framework for tourism services. This framework follows the previously explained prerequisites for a tourism service. According to Konu et al. (2010), the phases of new tourism service development are service concept development, service process development, market testing, commercialisation and post-introduction evaluation. The service concept development is divided into four smaller phases that are idea generation, core product screening, concept testing and concept development. The idea generation can be both internal and external. The idea of the service is created into main modules, and these modules are then tested and developed by the staff. After creating the core idea, the service process can

be developed. In this phase, all the modules are blueprinted as chain of activities, prototype is tested by the personnel, and finally, the blueprinting is made from the formal product. In the market testing phase, an external group of people are testing the service concept and process. (Konu et al., 2010.)

Figure 7 presents the service development process for new Experience Kalevala virtual tour. The first idea generation phase is done by the Experience Kalevala project staff. The service concept development is finalized through focus group discussions with Japanese customers, so basically it is a market research. Zomerdijk and Voss (2011) state that market research is crucial for developing experiential services. After creating the core idea, the initial prerequisites for the whole service are created based on the information obtained from the group discussions. These two most recently mentioned phases are circled in the figure as they are the focus of this paper. After this, the development process will be continued by the Experience Kalevala staff. They will plan and develop the service further, modify it based on internal testing, organise external market testing, plan the marketing activities, and in the final phase, launch, sell and evaluate the final product.

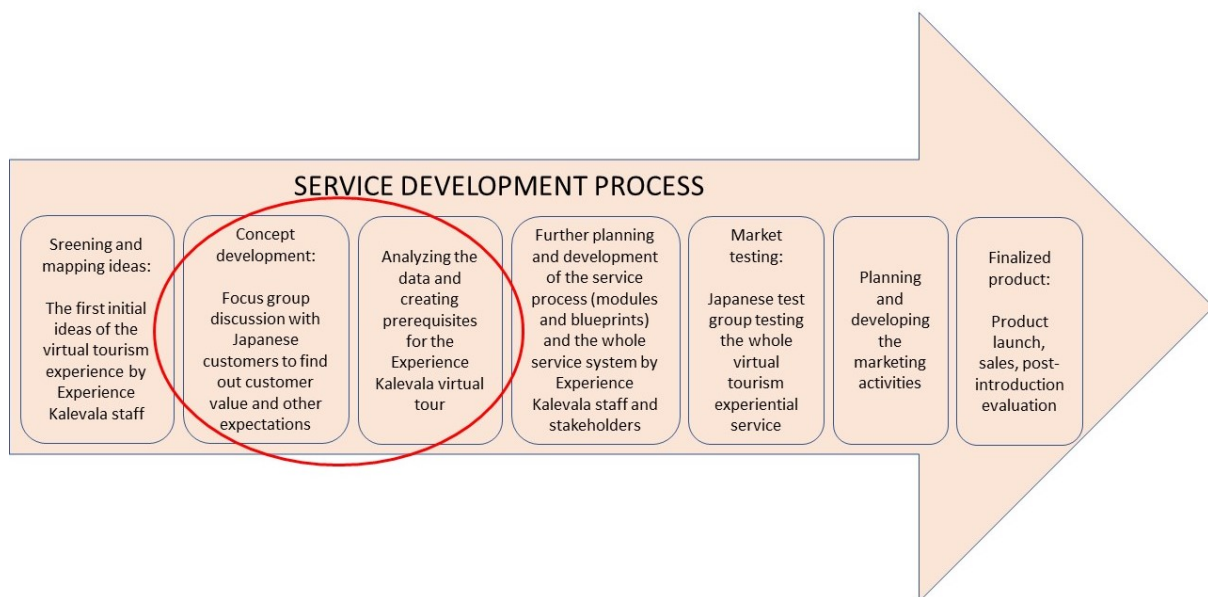


Figure 7. The service development process for new virtual tourism experience (adapted from Konu, 2015a; Konu, 2015b).

New service development relies on understanding the customer needs by interacting with the customers through the process (Edvardsson et al., 2006, p. 4), and hence the involvement of

customers in the service development process is critical (Alam, 2002; Alam & Perry, 2002; Alam, 2006; Edvardsson et al., 2006, p.2). This is especially true in experiential service development (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2011). By involving customers to the process, and understanding their needs, it is possible to develop services that match those needs (Alam & Perry, 2002), and thus it has positive effect on the performance of services (Alam, 2006).

There are many ways to include customers to the process. Customers are often involved only in the later phases of the development process (e.g., when doing a market testing), even though it is emphasised that it is important to involve customers already in the early stages, and throughout the whole process (Konu, 2015a). Edvardsson et al. (2016) claim that there are two ways to involve customers. The objective of the first one is to gain more knowledge about the customers (their needs, preferences, wishes, and values), and thus get deep understanding of what creates value for them. The second way uses customers as innovators with diverse techniques. (Edvardsson et al., 2016.) The first type of customer involvement is utilized in this paper.

2.2.4. Service design

The purpose of service design is to create new services or develop the existing ones, and this way make the services more valuable, usable, and attractive for customers, and more effective for companies (Moritz, 2005). Service design is a new way of thinking and it has multidisciplinary approach, as it is combining methods from various disciplines (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011, p. 17). It is closely related to the term design thinking, which is human-centred approach to innovation and problem solving, combining human needs, technological possibilities, and economic viability (Kurokawa, 2015, p. 10). However, design thinking refers more to the mindset, the way of thinking (Kurokawa, 2015, p. 12), while service design applies the design thinking in practice (Clatworthy, 2017), using different methods to develop services.

According to Stickdorn and Schneider (2011, p. 20), service design thinking is user-centric (meaning that it would be important to view the service from the user's perspective), co-creative (performing the design activities together with stakeholders), sequencing (visualizing the service as a series of related functions), evidencing (visualizing also the immaterial parts of the service), and holistic (paying attention to the whole service environment). These are referred as service design principles (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011, p. 20). Later Stickdorn, Hormess,

Lawrence and Schneider (2018, pp. 72-73) modified this, and proposed new principles, them being human centred (viewpoint of all the persons influenced by the service), collaborative, iterative, sequential, real, and holistic. Stickdorn et al. (2018, p. 73) state that service design is “human-centred, collaborative, interdisciplinary, iterative approach which uses research, prototyping, and a set of easily understood activities and visualization tools to create and orchestrate experiences that meet the needs of the business, the user, and other stakeholders”.

Service design process includes many phases, and during the process there are various service design methods and tools that can be used (Moritz 2005). Stickdorn and Schneider (2011, pp. 82-89) state that the phases of service design process are exploration, creation, reflection, and implementation. The aim of the exploration phase is to identify the problem and understand the situation from the perspective of current and potential customers. In the creation phase, the concept is designed by creating ideas, testing, and retesting them. After developing the ideas and concepts, it is time for prototyping and testing again. After the reflection phase comes the implementation of new service concept. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2011, p. 82-89.) Stickdorn et al. (2018, pp. 183-184) identified similar stages of the process; research, ideation, prototyping and implementation.

As can be seen, in service design process there are some similar phases as in NSD process, such as generating ideas, testing, and developing the service further. The difference between these two is that service design is often considered to be only a phase of NSD, focusing on the early phases of the development process (Yu & Sangiorgi, 2014). Service design is actually focusing on prerequisites and thus making it a critical stage of NSD (Edvardsson, 1997). This thesis is also focusing on the early phases of the new service development and on creating the prerequisites for a new virtual tourism experiential service. However, service design is concentrating on design activities, which includes using specific tools and methods, (Johnson et al., 2000), while NSD describes the theories associated with the entire process of service development, rarely providing any concrete examples of tools applied through the process (Kaner & Karni, 2007). This thesis is not implementing any specific service design tools but creating the prerequisites for the service based on the findings from the empirical study.

2.2.5. Designing virtual tourism experiences and services

When developing virtual tourism services, similar development stages must be considered as when developing other services. However, there are some additional things to consider, for example the technologies, devices and platforms involved to the experience. There are many guidebooks and software solutions related to the design and implementation of virtual tours (not the guided ones, but the traditional virtual tours). It is stated in a virtual tour design guide by Worcester Polytechnic Institute (2006) that the process for designing virtual tours starts from understanding the types of virtual tours, to deciding the content, creating the actual tour, deciding how customers can access the tour, and updating the tour. Critical stages include identifying the audience, outlining the story of the tour, including users in the design process, considering the technology requirements, determining the accessibility and evaluating the virtual tour service (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2006).

Salmond and Ambrose (2013, p. 58) talk about the concept of user experience design (UX design) in the context of museums and theme parks. They state that the objective of UX design is to stimulate multiple senses in order for the customers to create purposeful experiences for themselves. Additionally, the aim is to produce settings that transfer the customers to another mindset and make them feel like they are not in their usual surroundings and daily life. The design is often divided into four parts which are distinctiveness, enablement, relevancy and space. (Salmond & Ambrose, 2013, p. 58.) The relevancy refers to understanding what is relevant to the audience, meaning that it is important to involve the customers to the design process (Salmond & Ambrose, 2013, p. 59). Research-based knowledge about the customers is key element for the design (Salmond & Ambrose, 2013, p. 180).

Kow (2020) interviewed some tourism industry professionals that are organizing guided live virtual tours and virtual experiences. The professionals stated that the development of virtual tours includes deciding the equipment and software for running the tour and generating and developing the ideas and the content for the virtual tours together with the staff. It needs to be understood by the company, that guided virtual tours are very different from the in-person tours – the company cannot simply record the existing tour and put it online, they must develop a whole new product. The professionals also state that the development of virtual tours should be started from understanding what brings value for the customers. (Kow, 2020.) So, as can be seen, understanding customer value and involving customers to the development process is crucial also in virtual tourism services.

2.3. Customer value

As already mentioned, customer value is the core of a tourism product and hence it should be the starting point for service development in tourism (Komppula, 2005). The concept of customer value is often studied and discussed topic in business research (Komppula & Gartner, 2013). There are several definitions of the concept of customer value, and various value dimensions that are proposed by the researchers. Therefore, in this chapter, the customer value is defined, and different dimensions of customer value are discussed. The last section focuses on customer value in virtual tourism products and services.

2.3.1. Definition of customer value

There are several related terms of customer value that occur in research literature (Komppula & Gartner, 2013), such as consumer value, consumer perceived value, service value and experiential value. However, it is important to distinguish the term *value* from the term *values*. Hollbrook (1994) states that *value* is “an outcome of assessed judgement”, while *values* are “the rules, standards, criteria, norms, goals and ideals”, and the judgement is done based on these values. Therefore, values refer to individuals’ personal values, while value is perceived and experienced from products and services. Zeithalm (1988) has proposed one of the most frequently cited definitions of value, stating that “value represents a trade-off of the salient give and get components”. This type of give-and-get idea is included in several definitions (Komppula, 2005).

Dodds et al. (1991) claim that customer’s perception of value is formed from a give-and-get between the received quality or benefits and the made sacrifices. Butz and Goodstein (1996) describe value as emotional connection that is formed between the consumer and the product, after the consumer has used the product. Holbrook (1999) determines consumer value as interactive, comparative, situational and personal experience. He emphasizes the interaction between the consumer and the product, meaning that customers buy products and services for reaching value-related goals (Komppula & Gartner, 2013).

According to Woodruff (1997), customer value is “customer’s perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer’s goals and purposes in use situation”. This definition refers to desired value (the value that customers want and expect to obtain as a result),

as well as received value (the value that customers actually experienced when interacting with the products, services and service providers) (Woodruff, 1997). By adapting Woodruff (1997), Komppula (2005) introduces three stages of customer value, which are expected value, perceived value and experienced value. Expected value reflects customer's desired value, referring to their needs, objectives and motivations. Perceived value refers to the observations and experiences that the customer encounters prior to the service, as well as meanwhile the service is performed. Experienced value reflects the experiences that happened at the time of the service and after the service process is over, so it refers to customer satisfaction. (Komppula, 2005.) This type of time perspective is relevant when studying the value of services, as in services the value is formed during the process (Komppula, 2005).

As can be seen, there are several approaches to the concept of customer value. However, there is consensus of the definition as well. Komppula (2005) states that customer value involves the use of some product and a trade-off between the received outcomes and sacrifices. The third area of consensus is that customer value is always based on individual's own perceptions (Komppula, 2005). To get deeper understanding of the customer value concept, the different value dimensions need to be discussed in more detail.

2.3.2. Dimensions of customer value

Dividing customer value into several dimensions is a typical way of examining the concept (Komppula, 2005), referring to multidimensional approach to customer value. There are different value dimensions proposed by different researchers. According to Komppula and Gartner (2013), two of the most often cited customer value theories in tourism studies are Holbrook's (1999) typology of consumer value and Sheth, Newman and Gross's (1991) consumption value theory. Both of them include several value dimensions.

The consumption value theory by Sheth et al. (1991) is presented in Figure 8. This theory identifies five different consumption values that are affecting consumer choice behaviour. It explains why consumers choose to buy or not to buy a certain product or a brand (Sheth et al., 1991). The identified values are functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value and conditional value (Sheth et al. 1991). Sheth et al. (1991) define functional value as functional, practical and physical attributes or characteristics of a product (such as reliability or price). The social value refers to status and evoked images, so it is perceived from products and

services that evoke social image in a specific group, and from products and services that are shared with others. The emotional value refers to feelings and emotions aroused from the consumption of the product, and it can be perceived for example from aesthetic alternatives. Epistemic value is obtained from curiosity, new experiences (novelty) and from the desire of knowledge/learning (as in the case of experiencing other cultures). The conditional value is dependent on specific situation or circumstance, for example different seasons. (Sheth et al. 1991.)

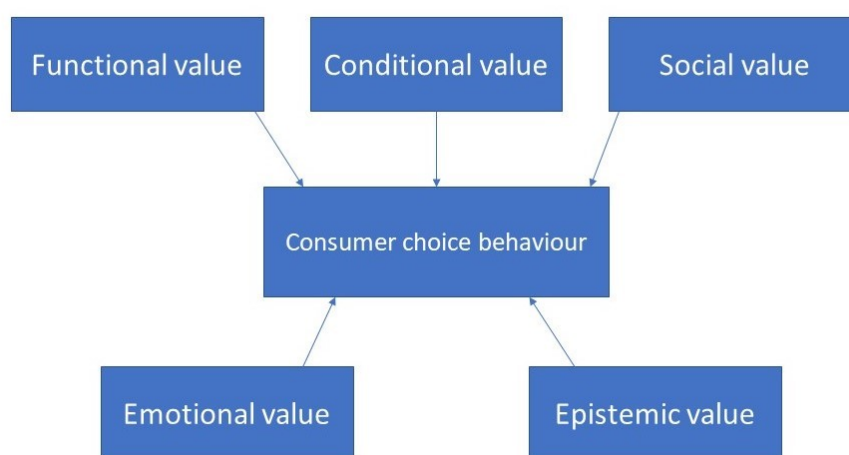


Figure 8. The value dimensions of consumption value theory (Sheth et al. 1991).

Williams and Soutar (2000) analysed this consumption value theory in tourism context, and in their study all the other value dimensions except the conditional value were visible. The functional, social, and emotional values have been mentioned also in other customer value studies (e.g., LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1999; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Wang, Lo, Chi & Yang, 2004). To these three values, LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999) added also epistemic value (knowledge) and image, while Wang et al. (2004) added “perceived sacrifices” as one of the dimensions. Sweeney and Soutar (2001), on the other hand, divided the functional value into two different dimensions – quality and price. Mattsson (1991), as well as de Ruyter, Wetzels, Lemmink and Mattson (1997) suggest the following value dimensions; practical (or functional), emotional and logical. In adventure tourism context, the two dimensions suggested were utilitarian (including functional value and value-for-money) and socio-psychological (including emotional value and novelty value) (Williams & Soutar, 2009).

Holbrook (1999, 2005) states that consumption experience can generate value for the customer. He proposes the typology of consumer value, which includes three underlying dimensions (Table 1). These are extrinsic and intrinsic value, self-oriented and other-oriented value, as well as active and reactive value (Holbrook, 1999). Extrinsic value is obtained when a product or service serves instrumentally to a further end (obtaining something else), while intrinsic value is obtained when the consumption itself brings value as such. Self-oriented value is based on individual's own interests and preferences, which are influencing how the individual perceives the experience. The other-oriented value can be obtained when the consumption influences others. Active value is obtained when participating an interactive service, while reactive value is obtained from more distanced participation and individual response. (Holbrook, 1999; Holbrook, 2006). The value types presented in the typology are efficiency, excellence, play, aesthetic, status, esteem, ethics, and spirituality (Holbrook, 1999; Holbrook, 2005). The dimensions of these values can be seen from the table below.

Table 1. Holbrook's typology of consumer value (Holbrook, 1999, 2005).

		Extrinsic	Intrinsic
Self-oriented	Active	Efficiency (O/I ratio, Convenience)	Play (Fun, leisure)
	Reactive	Excellence (Quality)	Aesthetics (Beauty)
Other-oriented	Active	Status (Success, impression, management)	Ethics (Justice, virtue, morality)
	Reactive	Esteem (reputation, materialism, possessions)	Spirituality (Faith, ecstasy, sacredness, magic)

In his later study, Holbrook (2006) organized the types of values into four general value categories. These categories are 1) economic value, including efficiency and excellence, 2) hedonic value, including play and aesthetics, 3) social value, including status and esteem, and 4) altruistic value, including ethics and spirituality. Sánchez-Fernández, Iniesta-Bonillo and Holbrook (2009) also modified the typology and proposed a model of consumer value which includes the dimensions of efficiency, quality, social value, play, aesthetics, and altruistic value.

Komppula and Gartner (2013) suggested that *togetherness* should be added to the typology as a one type of value (intrinsic, other-oriented, reactive value).

Mathwick, Malhotra and Rigdon (2001) introduced the typology of experiential value, which is also based on Holbrook's (1994) typology. The typology of experiential value includes four dimensions of value: consumer return on investment, service excellence, playfulness, and aesthetic appeal (Mathwick et al., 2001). Consumer return on investment (CROI) involves the investment of resources that possibly generate return. Customer can obtain the return in the means of *quality* or in means of utility that is derived from *efficiency*. (Mathwick et al., 2001.) The other three dimensions of experiential value refer to different kinds of emotional experiences (Komppula & Gartner, 2013). The value gained from service excellence refers to overall consumer appreciation of a service provider through the expertise and performance associated with fulfilling its promises. Aesthetics refers to the *visual appeal* as well as to entertaining or dramatic aspect (*entertainment*). Playfulness is derived from *enjoyment* that is achieved from pleasant activities, or from *escapism* that allows the consumer to "get away from it all" temporarily. (Mathwick et al., 2001.) Smith and Colgate (2007) referred with experiential/hedonic value to experiences, feelings, emotions, senses, enjoyment, play/fun, excitement, social-relational value and epistemic value.

Closely related to the concept of value is the concept of experience. Some similar dimensions of customer value presented above are identifiable also in the often-cited framework of experience components, introduced by Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007). They state that customer experience consists sensory, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle, and relational dimensions (Gentile et al., 2007). Pine and Gilmore (1999) claim that experiences include entertainment, educational, aesthetic and escapist components. Similarly, Memorable Tourism Experience Scale developed by Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012), includes several dimensions: hedonism, recreation, novelty, social interaction and local culture, relevance, knowledge and participation.

Table 2 presents a summary of the dimensions of customer value. In this paper, there was not any specific customer value theory used as a basis for the study, as this study has inductive approach. However, it is crucial to understand into what kind of dimensions the customer value possibly may be distributed before starting the empirical study. As can be seen from the table, many studies have revealed very similar types of customer value dimensions.

Table 2. Summary of the dimensions of customer value.

Author	Term for value	Dimensions of value
Sheth et al. (1991)	Consumption value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social value • Emotional value • Functional value • Epistemic value • Conditional value
LeBlanc & Nguyen (1999)	Consumer perceived value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional value (want satisfaction) • Functional value (price/quality) • Epistemic value (knowledge) • Emotional value • Social value • Image
Sweeney & Soutar (2001)	Consumer perceived value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional value • Social value (enhancement of social self-concept) • Functional value (price/value for money) • Functional value (performance/quality)
Wang et al. (2004)	Customer value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional value • Social value • Emotional value • Perceived sacrifices
Mattsson (1991); de Ruyter et al. (1997)	Service value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical/functional • Emotional • Logical
Williams & Soutar (2009)	Customer value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilitarian: functional value and value-for-money • Socio-psychological: emotional value and novelty value
Smith & Colgate (2007)	Customer value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional/instrumental value • Experiential/hedonic value • Symbolic/expressive value • Cost/sacrifice value
Holbrook (1999, 2005, 2006)	Consumer value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extrinsic vs intrinsic value • Self-oriented vs other-oriented value • Active vs reactive value → Types of values: efficiency, excellence (economic value) play, aesthetics (hedonic value) status, esteem (social value) ethics, and spirituality (altruistic value)
Sánchez-Fernández et al. (2009)	Consumer value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency • Quality • Social value • Play • Aesthetics • Altruistic value
Mathwick et al. (2001)	Experiential value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer return on investment • Service excellence • Playfulness • Aesthetic appeal

2.3.3. Customer value in virtual tourism products and services

There are not many studies concentrating on the value or customer value of virtual tourism. Cranmer, tom Dieck and Fountoulaki (2020) explored the perceived value of augmented reality, but this was done from the perspective of tourism experts, so the aim was to find out the value *for* tourism industry. The dimensions of value found in the study were marketing value, organizational value, economic value, tourist value and epistemic value. However, this study is not very useful from the perspective of this paper, as it did not concentrate on the customer perspective.

Another study conducted by tom Dieck and Jung (2017) explored the value of augmented reality at cultural heritage sites, and this study was done from the stakeholder perspective. The external stakeholders included some visitors, so the study also includes the customer perspective. Therefore, the findings of the study are useful for this paper as well. The perceived value dimensions of AR that were found in the study were economic, experiential (e.g., interesting, interactive and enjoyable experience), social (e.g., social interaction), epistemic, historic and cultural, and educational values (tom Dieck & Jung, 2017). Jung and tom Dieck (2017) also studied the co-creation of value for the visitor experience at cultural heritage sites when using AR, VR and 3D printing. In their study, they found out that customer value is obtained through enhanced memorableness, active involvement, interactive hedonic experience, personalized experience and social experience with peer visitors (Jung & tom Dieck, 2017). These are the only studies focusing on customer value in virtual tourism context.

Jarratt (2020) studied the webcam-travel experience and found out that it provides the customers a sense of freedom, nostalgia, and connection, and therefore it had a positive impact on their subjective wellbeing. He didn't mention any dimensions of customer value by name, but as his findings refer to feelings, the customers experienced emotional value or hedonic value. Besides this, they experienced conditional value, because their consumption of the experiences was dependent on the corona situation. According to Kow (2020), some virtual tourism experts claim that for example live Q&A sessions, videos of hidden spots and joyful experiences may provide value for customers. Virtual tours that give different approach than company's traditional tours may provide value also after the travel restrictions caused by corona pandemic are removed (Kow, 2020).

2.4. Framework

Figure 9 summarizes the literature review and presents the theoretical framework for this study. It starts with understanding the concepts of virtual tourism and guided live virtual tours, as well as the characteristics of experiential tourism services. Besides this, the theoretical framework consists of the prerequisites of tourism services, new service development (NSD) and customer value. The objective is to understand the importance of customer value in NSD in the context of virtual tourism. This is leading to the empirical study, which aims to find out the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours, as well as the desired content for Kalevala-themed virtual tour. Based on the findings of the empirical research, the prerequisites for Experience Kalevala virtual tour service are created.

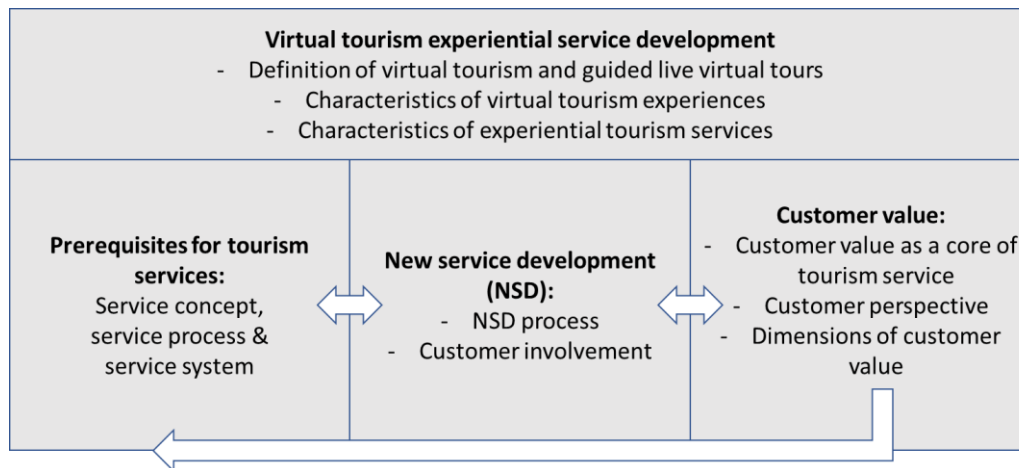


Figure 9. Theoretical framework for the study.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research approach

The research approach for this study is qualitative approach. Qualitative research approach is used when the studied phenomenon requires holistic understanding (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 4). The qualitative approach was chosen for this study as the purpose of this study is to understand the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours from the perspective of Japanese customers, and develop a new service based on their expectations and perceptions. Although there are several studies concentrating on the customer value in tourism context, there are no previous studies regarding guided live virtual tours, and therefore deeper understanding of the phenomenon (from the customer perspective) is required.

Qualitative research is often used in social sciences and business studies as the first phase of study, before conducting quantitative phase (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 4). Qualitative studies can also be used as a way to provide deeper understanding of topics that have not come clear in quantitative studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 4). In qualitative research the data collection and data analysis are sensitive to social and cultural context, while quantitative research uses more standardized, structured and abstracted modes of collecting and analysing data. Therefore, qualitative research approach deals with interpretation and understanding of the issues through social and cultural meanings, whereas quantitative research is about explanation, hypothesis testing and statistical analysis. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 4.)

As a reminder, the research question to which this empirical study seeks to answer is “*What is the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours?*”, and the supportive questions are:

- *What kind of value customers have previously experienced?*
- *What kind of expectations and desires customers have?*
- *What do customers expect from a Kalevala-themed virtual tour that combines Finnish nature and culture?*

As the development of new virtual tourism experience is done for a specific project, this study is an intensive case study research. Intensive case study research explores one case in-depth by providing holistic and contextualized description of it (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 133). However, the answer to the main research question also produces more general information. In

this qualitative research, the data is collected through focus group discussions and analysed through qualitative content analysis. This methodological framework for the empirical study is presented in Figure 10. Data collection and data analysis methods are presented in the following sections.

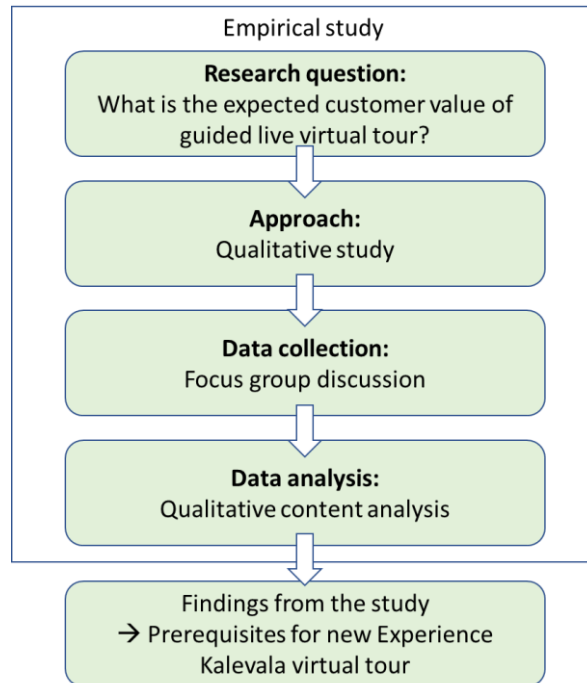


Figure 10. Methodological framework for the empirical study.

3.2. Data collection methods

In this study, the data was collected through focus group discussions. Focus group discussion refers to a data collection method where a group of people is “focused” on discussing a specific topic or issue (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 181). Focus groups are commonly used in academic marketing research to study consumer behaviour, including customers’ attitudes, needs, perceptions, preferences and choices (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 181), as well as opinions, values, expectations and perspectives (Jennings, 2005), and therefore it works well as a data collection method in this empirical study. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, p. 183) state that focus groups can be used in three ways; as an only method, when the focus groups are the only source for empirical data, as a part of multi-method qualitative research, or as a supplement to a survey. In this study, the focus groups were the only data collection method.

When collecting data through focus group discussions, the interest is not only on the content of what has been said but also on the emotions, tensions, interruptions, conflicts, and body

language of the participants (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 181). For this reason, it would be important to encourage the group of people to interact with each other and express and share their points of view freely (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 183), as was done during the focus group sessions of this study. The advantage of focus groups is the interaction between participants as it allows to explore some unexpected issues, and the members can seek clarification from each other and adjust their opinions as a result from interaction (Jennings, 2005). As the members have time to consider what others have said, it might bring out new viewpoints, which could remain unsaid in personal interviews. Disadvantages of focus groups include too dominant personalities, and on the other hand, shy people who are not comfortable with talking in a group. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 183.)

The aim in this study was to collect the data by organizing two to three group discussions, with four to six participants in each group. Typically, a focus group includes a topic of interest, two to ten participants, and at least one facilitator (often the researcher) who is asking the questions and guiding the interaction between the participants (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 183). Most often there are four to eight people in a group, as four participants should be enough to have differentiating viewpoints, and eight is still well manageable number of participants. However, as only one group is not enough, two groups is considered as a minimum. To obtain even more diverse data, three or more groups would be ideal. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 186.)

The participants are always selected based on the objective of the research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 186). The purpose of this study was to recruit Japanese people who had previously participated a guided live virtual tour. For this reason, the researcher contacted a person who was familiar with this target group – a virtual tour guide from Japan. The participants for group discussions were recruited through her networks, as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, p. 187) state that participants can be recruited for example through a contact person who knows the target group well. The researcher wrote an invitation to participate in the study, and the Japanese contact person shared this invitation for her previous customers. A total of 15 people enrolled to the study, but one of them had to cancel on the last minute. In the end, three group discussion sessions were conducted. In two of those groups there were five people, while in one group there were four people. The group discussion sessions were organized online, using Zoom platform, as the current COVID-19 situation prevented physical meetings. The participant information is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Focus group discussion participant information.

Group	Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	How many times has participated a guided live virtual tour	To which destinations has taken a guided live virtual tour
G1	P1	40	Female	Freelancer	1	Denmark
	P2	49	Female	School assistant	7	Japan, Tunisia, Libya, Denmark, Finland, Bangladesh, Myanmar
	P3	45	Female	Freelancer, interior coordinator	5	Iceland, Denmark, Australia, Singapore, Japan
	P4	51	Female	Consultant	10	Finland, Germany, India, Spain, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Norway
	P5	56	Female	Construction company worker	1	Finland
G2	P6	60	Female	High school teacher	8	Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark
	P7	30	Female	Part-time worker	5	Denmark, Finland, Hawaii, Japan
	P8	45	Female	English teacher	3	Finland, Denmark
	P9	28	Female	Web editor	4	Helsinki, Denmark, India
G3	P10	56	Female	Interior coordinator & life coach	2	Denmark, Finland, New York
	P11	35	Female	Travel agent	30	Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, Iceland, England, "around the world" tour
	P12	61	Female	Architect	15	Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, India, Libya, Germany, Hawaii
	P13	50	Female	Teacher	10	Nordic countries, England, Switzerland, Italy
	P14	26	Female	Local official	2	Finland, Denmark

Besides the discussions, the participants were asked some background questions with a separate form. All the participants of the group discussions were females, so unfortunately no male perspective on the matter was included to the study. The positive factors were that the age range as well as the number of virtual tours taken had wide range. Participants' age ranged from 26 to 61. The number of times participants had taken a guided live virtual tour ranged from one to even 30. In addition to these factors presented in the table, the participants were asked if they were interested in participating guided live virtual tour again, and if they were interested in participating a virtual tour also after the pandemic when there are no more travel restrictions. Everyone answered to both of these questions with "yes". They were also asked if they would consider replacing a holiday trip with virtual tours, and 12 out of 14 answered "yes" to this as well.

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, p. 189), focus group discussion should be started by introducing the main topic and purpose of the discussion and by asking one or more warm-up question, so this was done also in this specific study. The facilitator takes care that the discussion is going on by asking general, open-ended, and conversational questions during the session, based on a topic guide (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 189). In this study there were two facilitators; one of them was the researcher herself, focusing on taking notes during the sessions, while the other one was the "main" facilitator that kept the conversation going on. The researcher, however, was the one opening the session by introducing the topic and the "rules" of the discussion. The roles were discussed before-hand so both facilitators had clear idea of their roles.

Besides the general questions and discussion, the session can also include some materials (such as product prototypes, audio data or visual data) and techniques (such as brainstorming, word sorting or campaign development) (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 189). According to Jennings (2005), focus group discussions involve semi-structured questions. Based on these sources, the group discussion guide with semi-structured questions were formed for this study. The group discussion guide can be found in Appendix 1. Before the last question, some photos and videos were shown to the participants in order to give them an idea of Kalevala. Other materials or special techniques were not included as they would have been complicated (or at least too time consuming) to arrange through Zoom. Jennings (2005) states that the duration for focus groups is usually one to two hours, while Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, p. 187) claim that two hours is optimal. However, due to the time limitations of the participants, one hour was

reserved for each group in this research, and this was told to the participants in advance. It was enough to go through all topics in the group discussion guide, as the facilitator made sure that all the topics were discussed during the sessions. All the sessions were videorecorded, and before they could be analysed, they needed to be transcribed, including all the non-verbal notions.

3.3. Data analysis methods

The data was analysed through qualitative content analysis, as it is often used for drawing together and comparing focus group data, and it aims to provide a holistic picture of the studied subject (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 119, p. 192). Content analysis is a flexible method of analysing written, verbal, or visual data, and it is used for systematically describing a phenomenon. (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). It can be used in both qualitative and quantitative studies, and in both inductive and deductive ways. The purpose of the study determines the used approach. The inductive way is recommended to use if there is not enough previous information about the phenomenon, whereas a deductive approach is used when the structure of analysis is based on previous knowledge and the purpose of the study is theory testing. (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008.) In qualitative content analysis the coding categories are commonly derived inductively from the data, meaning that the coding scheme is generated with the help of data, and this allows to create new theoretical and conceptual ideas (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 119). Therefore, an inductive approach was used for analysing the data in this study. The inductive approach is also described as a conventional approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

First, all the group discussion sessions were transcribed. This included also all the non-verbal notions that the researcher made, e.g., body language, emotions, and non-verbal agreements and disagreements. The data analysis started with reading through the transcripts several times and getting familiar with the data. This was done to achieve a sense of the whole data set (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The familiarizing is referred to as the preparation phase, after which comes the organizing and reporting phases (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Once the researcher was familiar with the data, it was time to move on to the next phase. The organization stage started by going through the text again and underlining phrases, sentences or expressions that were relevant to the study. This is also known as coding (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 119), and it was done manually on a Word document.

The researcher first underlined those statements that were either common or exceptional. From the focus group data, it would be important to analyse issues that are repeated by several participants or by several groups, and in the other hand issues that are disagreed by several people or discussed by only one group (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 192). As in these specific group discussions there were not any clear disagreements, attention was paid to the commonly repeated issues, and different issues between the groups. Special concentration was also paid to the situations where someone brought out an issue, and then others in the group demonstrated agreement verbally or non-verbally, as well as situations where someone brought out an issue with unusual importance (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 192). Once the whole data set was coded, the codes were collected on a separate Excel sheet, and then grouped together to create categories. A lot of similar types of answers emerged from the data, which made the categorization easier. In the last phase, the created categories were again grouped together to create bigger main categories. This is known as abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The qualitative content analysis does not necessarily require coding, but can rely also on intuition, mind mapping and memo writing (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 119). Hence, there are no systematic rules for doing the qualitative content analysis, but the main idea is to reduce and reorganise the big data set by classifying the important parts of the text into categories. Inductive approach first focuses on specific smaller instances, which are then combined into more larger and general statements (categories). (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008.) In other words, the inductive qualitative content analysis process includes breaking down the data into small parts, and then combining these parts into bigger themes to obtain holistic description of the phenomenon and answer to the research question. In the next chapter, the findings (categories) of the analysis are presented according to themes in the group discussion guide, including direct quotations from the discussions. In the end, the abstraction process of the findings related to customer value with main categories (value dimensions) are illustrated as a figure.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Previous experiences

To find out the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours, it is necessary to understand customers' previous experiences, and to study what kind of value they had experienced on their previous guided live virtual tours. The findings from previous experiences relate to their decisions to participate in a guided live virtual tour, to their perceived benefits in comparison to traditional travelling, as well as to the factors they mentioned as the most memorable, meaningful, and enjoyable. These are explored closely as the experienced value has an impact on customer expectations and desires, and it helps to understand the overall customer value of the guided live virtual tours.

The findings are illustrated with the help of tables and figures. Participants who have either mentioned the matter themselves or indicated their strong agreement with it either verbally (e.g., *"I agree with that"*, *"I agree with what she said"*, *"yes, exactly"*) or non-verbally (e.g., by nodding) are marked in the tables with "X" or included to the figures as the times the matter was expressed in each group. The categories are presented in the tables from the most expressed to the least expressed. The categories that are presented in the tables and figures are then examined in more detail by explaining what the participants have said about a specific category in the group discussion sessions.

4.1.1. Decision to participate in a guided live virtual tour

The participants of the study were asked to discuss about the reasons why they decided to take part in a guided live virtual tour previously. The participants started to discuss about the factors that affected their decision, and things what they were seeking to get from the experience. Their answers are considered as the drivers of virtual tourism experiences (Table 4). As can be seen from the table, there were many similarities in the answers, but at the same time the answers were quite distributed – there was nothing on which everyone would have fully agreed, but instead everyone seemed to have their own reasons for participating a virtual tour. However, the most common answers to this question are related to one's desire to travel, but which is not possible due to corona pandemic situation, as well as to enjoyment and having fun.

Table 4. Drivers of virtual tourism experiences.

	G1					G2				G3				
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14
Desire to travel but not possible due to corona situation		X		X		X		X	X		X	X		X
Enjoyment & having fun	X		X	X		X		X		X		X	X	
Desire to learn about destinations and cultures	X		X		X			X			X	X	X	
Nostalgia					X			X	X		X	X	X	
Getting new experiences	X		X				X				X		X	
Personal interests (towards a certain destination or theme)	X				X		X			X				X
Spending time with family/friends		X		X						X			X	
Escaping hectic life						X		X	X					

Unsurprisingly, **desire to travel but not possible due to corona situation** was one of the most commonly repeated answers. Participants (P2, P4, P6, P8, P9, P11, P12, P14) expressed their intentions and interests towards travelling, but as they could not actually travel due to the travel restrictions and lockdowns caused by the corona pandemic, they decided to try virtual travelling instead. For example, a participant in the G1 stated:

“Well, first of all, we were stuck to stay at home because of all the restrictions. -- We had to cancel our trip to Denmark in February, and we didn’t have the chance to go there at all. But last summer I found out that one travel company offers online tours to Denmark, so we decided to take that virtual tour.” (P2).

Other participants mentioned that *“I just wanted to travel there (to Finland) again but at the moment it is not possible, so that is why I participated an online tour there”* (P9) and *“I just love travelling but as it is not possible now since the pandemic, I joined a virtual tour instead”* (P14). Even though the corona situation was one of the most important drivers for the virtual tourism experience in the first place, it is not considered as important factor in the future, as all

the participants said they are interested in participating a guided live virtual tour also after the pandemic when there are no more travel restrictions, as mentioned in the chapter 3.2.

Several participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P10, P12, P13) in each group also mentioned or agreed on **enjoyment and having fun**. They stated for example that *“I was just looking for to have some fun and enjoy my time, and virtual tour was one of the things I found on internet”* (P3) and *“I wanted to enjoy myself and the feeling virtual travelling brought to me”* (P12). These responses were quite straightforward and did not require a greater interpretation.

The next most expressed driver was **desire to learn about destinations and cultures**. Some of the participants wanted to know more about the destinations in general, for example: *“I have visited Finland and Denmark for several times, but I wanted to know even more about the countries”* (P13), *“I wanted to get information about the countries, how to people and are, and so on”* (P3) and *“It was great to visit places that only the locals know and thus get deeper information about the destination”* (P5), while some others were more interested specifically about the culture of the country: *“I wished I would learn more about Finnish culture”* (P8).

Nostalgia, in this situation, refers to one’s feelings of nostalgia towards a country or destination. The feeling of nostalgia arose in the cases where the participant had travelled to the country before (one or several times), had enjoyed her time there or even “fell in love” with the place, and therefore missed the country and/or wanted to go back there and feel connected to the place again. The same participants that expressed the feeling of nostalgia, often also expressed their desire to learn something “more” or “deeper” about the place or its culture. Very similar statements were made in all groups:

“I participated a virtual tour because I travelled to Finland two years ago, I really liked it very much and I always wanted to visit Finland again, but it did not happen.” (P5)

“I have been missing Finland so much. – So, whenever I find anything about Finland, I want to experience that, so for that reason I took the virtual tour there.” (P8)

“I have been to Finland once, and I really loved it and I miss it. I was searching from Google about Finland and travelling there, and then I found the virtual tour to Finland. It was something that I really wanted to do. I was able to feel nostalgic and connected to the place again.” (P14)

Besides being nostalgic, people also wanted to **get new experiences**. With this they were either referring to the virtual tourism experiences and guided live virtual tours in general, such as “*it was something totally new to me, so I wanted to check out what was virtual guided tour*” (P7), or the technology and online tools involved with the experience: “*I really wanted to try using these kinds of tools as I had not been using them before*” (P3).

They were also driven by their own **personal interests**, which were either towards a certain destination or a certain theme/topic. The personal interest towards a certain destination was expressed as “*I have always wanted and wished to visit Denmark*” (P1) and “*also, I am very interested in Northern Europe countries, so that is why I wanted to take virtual tour there*” (P7). P10 talks about her personal interest towards a certain theme: “*I joined a tour that included a Danish architect and designer, because I have always been very interested in his work and architecture in general, so the theme of the tour was extremely interesting for me*”.

All the drivers mentioned so far were included in the discussions in each focus group. However, **spending time with family/friends** was discussed only in the G1 and G3, while **escaping hectic life** was discussed only in the G2. These were still considered as important drivers as they were expressed by more than one people in a group. As an example, “*a friend of mine asked me to join with her*” (P4) and “*my first online tour was with my parents*” (P2) was said about the spending time with family and friends, while “*joining a virtual tour was a good way for escaping my daily life, which is sometimes quite stressful*” (P6) was said about escaping hectic life.

4.1.2. Perceived benefits compared to traditional travelling

During the group discussions, participants were also asked if they felt that they got any benefits from guided live virtual tours compared to traditional travelling, and what kind of benefits those were. This was asked to find out the value that virtual tourism experiences can provide for the customers in comparison to traditional tourism experiences. These findings are valuable as they help to understand the reasons why people would continue to participate in virtual tours, although they could travel normally. Understanding this makes it easier to promote virtual tourism services. The findings show that when compared to traditional travelling, guided live virtual tours are perceived as low cost, easy, time saving, informative, carefree, and safe (see Table 5). Most of these are referring to functional or practical value, which was to be expected

as traditional travelling provides a lot of hedonic and experiential value. Guttentag (2010) stated already several years ago that virtual tourism offers experiences with easy access, lower costs, and greater safety, but without other concerns.

Table 5. The benefits of guided live virtual tours compared to traditional travelling.

	G1					G2				G3				
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14
Low cost	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Easiness	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Time saving	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X				X
More detailed information					X	X						X	X	X
No other concerns						X	X		X		X			
Safety						X			X		X			

Almost all participants felt that the main benefit of virtual tourism is its **low cost** and affordability, as they said that “*there were lots of benefits, for example the price, of course*” (P13), “*it is less expensive*” (P6) and “*there is no need to consider about the budget*” (P8). P1 pointed out that especially with a big family the cheap price is an important factor to consider:

“By taking a virtual tour, I can save time and money. Especially as I have three children, so normally it is too expensive to take all my kids to travel to a distant country. But with virtual tours it is possible for the whole family to join as it does not cost that much.”

The next most important benefit was **easiness**, as it was also discussed in all groups by several participants. This was expressed in the means of easy access: “*It is just easier to join the tour*” (P6), as well as in the means of easy preparation: “*I love the ease with which I can go on a trip after getting ready for the trip in 5 minutes*” (P4) and “*the ease of going on a trip from home for example in pyjamas if I wish to do so*” (P7). Children were again mentioned, as P8 brought out the easiness of virtual tours when participating with children:

“Of course, it is easier to take virtual tour from my house, especially as I have kids, so I do not have to worry about anything myself on a tour.”

As already seen in one quotation, **time saving** is one of the perceived benefits. Especially in the G1 it seemed to be an important matter, as all the participants in G1 mentioned or agreed on it. In that group it was often mentioned together with the price: *“I can save time and money”* (P1) and *“I agree, it saves time and money”* (P2). P9 stated that there is no need to reserve time for a long holiday even if one wants to travel some destination far away: *“You do not have to take a long vacation, you can just “go” everywhere even in one day.”*

More detailed information refers especially to these live virtual tours being guided (by a professional virtual guide). Participants thought that the guide can tell more detailed facts about the place, and it is also easy to ask questions about things one wants to know more about. For example, P13 stated that:

“As it was a guided virtual tour, it gave me more information than travelling independently. Professional guide can tell the participants some interesting details and some rare information about places. Additionally, you can ask clarifying questions from the guide and from locals. You can also get information that cannot be understood from guidebooks and tourist sites alone.”

P6, on the other hand, suggests that virtual tours make it easier to focus on what is being said by the guide, as there are no distractions, and therefore one can learn more:

“You can focus continuously on the tour, focus on what is being said by the guide, so you do not miss any interesting information the guide is sharing.”

No other concerns as well as **safety** were mostly discussed in the G2, although they were once mentioned also in the G3. The answers regarding safety did not need greater interpretation, as people clearly stated that *“it is safe when you can join from your home”* (P6), *“virtual tours have a greater sense of security”* (P11) and *“I also think it is safer as there are no pickpockets or other thieves”* (P9). “No other concerns” refers to other issues which should be taken into account when traveling normally, but not when taking a virtual tour, for example: *“we don’t need to get any complex visas or anything”* (P7), *“I can go anywhere without a visa or complicated procedure”* (P9), *“no need to worry about that you are falling behind others, or the weather”* (P6) and *“usually, you need to take transportation, get an accommodation, buy a guidebook, and so on, but on virtual tours you do not need to take care of those”* (P11).

4.1.3. The most memorable and meaningful factors

This section presents the findings of the factors that made the guided live virtual tour memorable and meaningful for the customers. The participants were asked to describe their experiences, and especially those parts of the experience that they thought were the most memorable, important, or enjoyable for them. The findings are presented in Figure 11, from which it can be seen that the most memorable factors are the realistic feeling of actually being there (in the destination), interaction with other people, experiencing local culture and way of life, interesting content and tools, as well as freedom to go anywhere in the world. The figure shows how many people in a group mentioned or agreed on the factor.

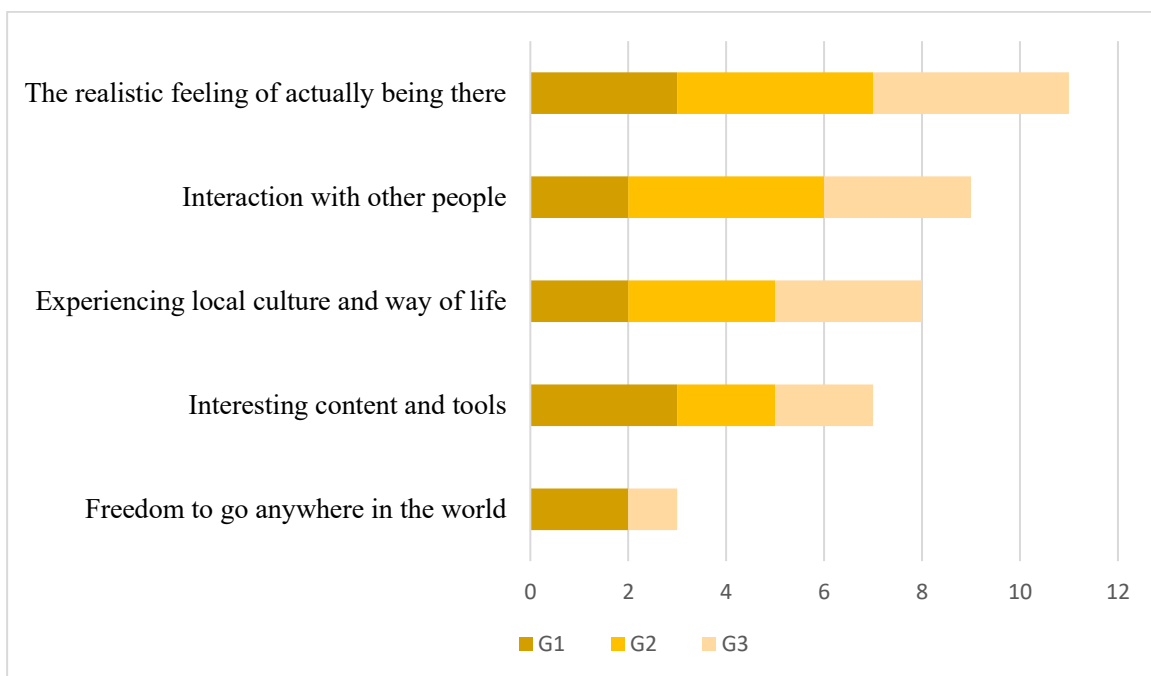


Figure 11. The factors that made the guided live virtual tour memorable and meaningful.

Almost all participants agreed that it was surprising how realistic and authentic the guided live virtual tours felt, and it was also perceived as one of the most important things that made the tour memorable. **The realistic feeling of actually being there** (in the destination) was therefore interpreted to be one of the factors. It was widely discussed in all groups. When mentioning this factor, the participants often brought out some other memorable factors at the same time – for example, they often discussed about a certain content of the tour or some activity during the tour, which made the tour feel more realistic. In other words, the realistic feeling was strongly

connected to the other memorable and meaningful factors mentioned in the figure. The reason for the realistic feeling was depending on the participant, so there were quite many different things mentioned that led to the feeling of actually being in the destination. The participants said for example the following about the realistic feeling of actually being there:

“It was good that there were local people included to the tour, as it made the tour more realistic. I actually never thought the virtual tour would feel so real, so I was quite surprised that I would feel like we were actually travelling there, and like we were actually meeting those people.” (P8)

“When we watched a video and the guide told us that the video was filmed today, it felt very realistic, like we would be there ourselves.” (P9)

“Even though it was virtual, I could feel like as if I was there. So, even though I was at home, but I could still feel like I was in the destination, and I could feel the atmosphere of the place.” (P12)

Interaction with other people was also widely discussed factor in all groups. With this the participants were either referring to interaction with the other participants of the guided live virtual tour, as it was stated that *“having small group discussion with other participants was memorable” (P6)* and *“I was very impressed, and it felt memorable, to have the group talks” (P11)*, or with the local people involved in the tour, as it was stated that *“I was also able to talk to the local people directly, which was very exciting for me” (P1)*.

Those who were referring to the interaction with local people, also felt that **experiencing local culture and way of life** is a meaningful factor in the tours. They were referring especially to local people’s life and learning about it by meeting locals. For example, P1 was mentioning the interaction (discussion) with local people, but she also said:

“I would say that being able to experience the lives of local people was most memorable. It was interesting to see and visit a local home, as we visited Danish architect’s private home, and learned about his life.”

Another participant in a different group stated quite similarly but added that it was interesting to experience the local culture in general: *“We did a home visit to Danish architect’s home, and I was very inspired to see the lifestyle and also get a touch of the local culture and traditions” (P10)*. It was also stated that the most interesting part was to see a *“place that only locals know”*

(P14). Therefore, experiencing local culture and way of life could be also called “live like a local” experience. Participants were discussing that normally when travelling, it would not be very common or easy to get these types of experiences.

When discussing about the most memorable and meaningful factors, the participants were mentioning some content and online tools that were involved in the virtual tours. All of these were categorized under **interesting content and tools**. The content and tools that made the virtual tour memorable were for example videos (“*all the videos made the tour interesting*” -P9), videos filmed from certain angle (“*the angle and movement of the video was memorable*” -P10), images (“*sceneries presented in pictures and videos*” -P7), sounds (“*I was especially impressed by the sound of löyly, the steam*” -P14), quizzes (“*also, some quizzes were interesting*” -P7), online map (“*I really enjoyed to fly virtually to the country with the help of Google Earth*” -P12), online platforms (“*the tools and platforms used made it memorable*” -P3), and so on. The desired content is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Freedom to go anywhere in the world is the last factor which was perceived as meaningful. Of course, as the people were not physically going anywhere when participating a virtual tour, this refers to the *sense* of freedom. This was not discussed in all groups, but only in the G1 and G3. It was also mentioned that virtual tours provide this feeling of freedom to elderly and physically disabled people:

“You just feel so free when you can go any destination far away, anywhere in the world, and just arrive there in few seconds, and this makes the tour memorable. I also think that virtual tourism brings many opportunities to disabled people, who physically cannot travel to places. Virtually they can travel anywhere they want to go.” (P3)

4.2. Expectations and desires

After discussing the participants’ past experiences, it was time to move on to their expectations and desires. The participants were more ready to talk about their expectations, when they had first been thinking about the previous guided live virtual tours that they had attended to. This part was the most crucial in order to understand the expected customer value. However, the findings also provide other essential information of guided live virtual tours (about the content of the tours), which is especially valuable for the service development purposes. The findings from expectations and desires relate to participants general expectations of the tours (what is

As seen from the table above, the most commonly expressed expectations are related to **experiencing local culture and way of life, feeling of actually being there (connection) and interaction with other people**, which were considered also as most memorable factors on previous virtual tours. Experiencing local culture and way of life (e.g., *“I would like the tour to focus mainly on local people and their culture, as I really want to get the local experience”* - P13) was mentioned or agreed on by all the participants. All but one participant agreed on the feeling of actually being there (e.g., *“I want to be able to experience as if I was there”* -P1) and on the interaction with other people (e.g., *“like she said, interaction with others is very important”* -P9). As these were already explained thoroughly in section 4.1.3., they will not be discussed in more detail here.

Active participation (through live connection) was the next most frequently expressed expectation regarding guided live virtual tours. The participants were stating that they do not want to just watch and listen, they want to be involved somehow themselves, and actively participate to the tour. This is possible through the live connection, as the participant can discuss, ask questions, and participate in activities in real-time. It is pretty much what Cho et al. (2002) stated about web-based virtual tours; it is important to make customers active participants, “players”, instead of passive participants, “watchers”. These findings prove that this is also expected from the customers’ side. Participants stated for example the following:

“I expect the guide to involve everyone on the tour, and not just to talk about the places like keeping some kind of presentation.” (P9)

“What I want is an interactive experience, rather than a one-sided reception like watching a TV. I want to feel like I am actively participating the tour.” (P4)

“This was mentioned before, but having short surveys or quizzes makes us feel like we are actually participating the tour. Because if we are only looking at the photos and videos, or listening to the speakers, it would not really feel like we are on a tour.” (P8)

The participants also expected to get **new and deeper information** about the destinations and places. “New” information refers to information about destinations that are not familiar to the participants – they wanted to learn something new. This was perceived as useful for planning the future travels, as one can take a pre-tour to the destination and learn about it. For example, it was said that *“I expect to get general information about the destination, and I want to learn about the place before I go there in real life”* (P3). “Deeper” information refers to cases when

the participants have already been to a destination, but they want to learn something more about it. For example, P3 continues:

“Other option would be to take virtual tour to a destination where I have already been, and then I would want and expect to get more deeper information about the place.”

New destinations could be considered under new and deeper information, but the researcher decided to keep it as its own category, as the participants did not only want to *learn* about new destinations, but they stated that they want to choose virtual tours to destinations that are totally new to them, and to destinations they would not normally travel to. For example, P6 said: *“I would also choose to go on a virtual tour somewhere I would not usually or normally go when travelling.”*

Special theme/topic refers to participants interests towards a certain theme or topic. They expect virtual tours to have different themes as then it is easier to choose the most interesting tours according to one’s own interests. As an example, P10 stated: *“My interests are interior and design, so if the tour has interior as its theme, I would like to participate that tour.”* P8 was also interested in specific topics on virtual tours:

“More detailed topics. I think there are many tours that provide basic information for the people who are new to online tours, but now there are more and more returners. So personally, I am more interested in tours with more detailed themes.”

Another thing participants were expecting from guided live virtual tours is **visual appeal**. Although this was not mentioned or expressed by many participants, it was still discussed in all groups. Visual appeal came out in the discussions for example in the following ways: *“beautiful sceneries are very attractive”* (P7), *“sceneries and beautiful nature are something I would like to see”* (P13), and *“just viewing the nature landscapes”* (P5). In other words, they expected to see something visually appealing, such as nature sceneries and landscapes, presented in videos or images.

Quality was discussed in the G1 and G2, while **enjoyment and having fun** was expressed in the G2 and G3. Quality refers either to the overall quality of the tour, the content of the tour or the professional guide, for example: *“I expect high quality experiences, including the quality of the content and the quality of the guide”* (P6) and *“I want to feel satisfied with the help of professional guide”* (P5). In the means of quality, it was also important to have Japanese

Group discussions		X		X		X		X	X	X	X	X		X
Hidden spots/places			X		X					X	X	X	X	X
History and culture of the place		X	X	X			X				X	X	X	
Q&A sessions	X	X				X	X		X		X	X		
Storytelling		X		X	X			X			X			
A “flight” with an online map			X	X		X				X				
Real-time videos							X	X	X					
Home visits	X				X					X				
Activating tasks (quizzes, surveys)							X	X	X					
“Souvenir”							X	X						

Videos and images of real places were desired by all participants, so those can be considered as important content to include to the tours. All the participants wanted to watch videos and images while on the virtual tour. The desired *content of the videos themselves* was varying according to the participant, but all of them wanted to see video image from real environment, such as nature, buildings, attractions, and so on. Videos of nature sceneries was most often mentioned: *“video clips of nature, for example going to the woods step by step, as it would feel realistic”* (P6). As can be seen from that example, the videos often make the tour feel more realistic, as if the customers would actually be there. In the discussions, there were no mention about the types of videos, and no preferences for example for 360-degree videos. However, this might be because they had not seen these types of videos on their previous virtual tours.

Meet and greet with local people was also often expressed among the participants, because all but one participant mentioned it or agreed about it. For example, the following statements were made: *“the kind of content I seek from virtual tours is meeting local people”* (P12), *“for me, it would be fun to communicate with local people in real-time”* (P2), and *“I would also want to talk to the locals”* (P1). Therefore, it would be crucial to always include local people to the virtual tours, so that the participants can meet and talk to them.

Group discussions refer the discussions with other participants of the virtual tour. The participants of the tour are usually divided into smaller groups, where they can talk with each other and share their experiences. For example, P11 said that: *“It was so much fun to discuss and talk with other people in the group, so I would desire that also from my future virtual tours.”*

Hidden spots/places were discussed only in G1 and G3, but it was expressed quite intensively, so it seemed like an important factor for the participants. However, the “hidden spots/places” could be also placed under “videos and images of real places”, as most probably these hidden spots would be presented through videos. In other words, the hidden spots and places could be considered as a form of video. The following was said about hidden spots and places:

“I would not want to see only well-known touristic places, but I would like to visit some hidden place or secret place that only the guide or the local people know about. If these kinds of places would be included in the tour, I would definitely choose this kind of tour.” (P14)

History and culture of the place were clearly stated by the participants as they were saying that *“for me, the history of the countries, and culture, are very attractive”* (P7) and *“for me, the history and background of the place are desired”* (P13). When thinking about the prerequisites of guided live virtual tours, the history and culture refer more to the service system, rather than to the service process.

Q&A sessions were again talked about in all groups. Discussions in small groups and with local people seemed not to be enough, as the participants wanted to have time specifically reserved for questions and answers sessions. Besides the local people, they wanted to ask questions also from the guide and from the companies included to the tour. As an example, it was stated that *“I want to ask questions from them about the place and about the life there”* (P2) and *“I want to ask many questions, so I also prefer having enough time for asking and answering to these questions”* (P11).

Storytelling was also desired content, as participants said that *“I would be also very interested in hearing the stories”* (P2). A **“flight” with an online map** (a 3D presentation of the Earth) was also expressed few times, for example: *“If flying with an online map tool, we are able to see the geography of the place from the top, like actually flying with an airplane”* (P12). **Real-time videos** were discussed only in G2 but expressed with unusual importance. It was stated that at least some of the videos should be filmed in real-time, as it makes the tour feel more real: *“For me video is always good, especially if it is filmed real-time or at least during the same day”* (P9). Real-time videos could be placed also under “videos and images of real places”. Similarly, **home visits** could be in that category. It was stated that *“I would for example like to visit their (locals) homes”* (P1).

Activating tasks (quizzes, surveys) as well as **“souvenir”** were discussed only in the G2. However, also these were expressed with unusual importance. For example, P7 said that *“the quizzes were so much fun, and made us feel like we are participating, that I would like to have those in the tour”*. “Souvenir” does not necessarily need to be any physical item, but just some kind of memory from the tour. It was said that *“after the tour it would be nice to get some kind of “souvenir” or “gift” as a memory from the tour”* (P7), *“I agree, it would be nice to get something afterwards, even if we would need to add some money to it. I was thinking that for me it would be nice to get even some tasks to do afterwards”* (P8) and *“yes, and it does not need to be something expensive or some concrete goods but can just be something that is linked to the experience – recommendations of movies, art or even music. Something that you can explore by yourself afterwards”* (P6).

4.2.3. Expectations of Kalevala-themed virtual tour

The last theme in the discussions was the expectations regarding Kalevala-themed guided live virtual tour. Before discussing this, the participants were shown some videos and images related to Kalevala so they would get better idea of the theme. This was done because for most of the participants Kalevala was completely strange concept. After watching the videos, the participants discussed about their expectations and desires of these types of virtual tourism experiences. All of them stated that Kalevala-themed virtual tour sounds very interesting.

Table 8. Expectations of Kalevala-themed guided live virtual tour.

	G1					G2				G3				
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14
Stories of Kalevala	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sceneries of Finnish nature (lakes and forests)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Finnish culture and history	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Sounds of nature									X	X		X		X
Traditional food and recipes	X					X	X		X					
Traditional Finnish music						X	X			X				
Sauna					X				X					X

All the participants wanted to hear **stories of Kalevala** during the Kalevala-themed virtual tour, for example: *“I am very interested in hearing the Kalevala stories and mythology, and also the background of Kalevala”* (P11) and *“I want to hear more about Kalevala and how the stories connect to the nature”* (P13). However, it was not stated that in which forms the stories should be presented, as the participants just said they want to *hear* the stories. The stories could be still presented together with videos, images or 3D presentations to make them even more appealing.

All the participants also expected to see **sceneries of Finnish nature (lakes and forests)**. This was expressed for example as *“viewing the lakes and forests”* (P5) and *“seeing nature and forests”* (P14). **Finnish culture & history** was desired by almost all participants. One of them stated that *“the more we hear about the history, culture and Kalevala stories, the more we can learn from your current culture and life”* (P2). All in all, the connection between Kalevala, the Finnish culture and nature seemed to be very interesting for the participants. Related to the nature, they also desired to hear some **sounds of nature** to feel more connected to the place. For example, P14 stated that: *“Being in the nature and hearing birds singing, it would be very relaxing. – If I close my eyes and listen to the sounds, I could feel like being there.”*

Traditional food and recipes were mentioned in two groups, similarly as **traditional Finnish music**. It was stated that *“it would be interesting to learn how to cook traditional food”* (P7), and *“it would be nice to hear traditional Finnish music”* (P10). The last expectation was related to seeing traditional **sauna**: *“also, for example traditional sauna in the Finnish nature would be interesting”* (P14) and *“sauna element would be interesting, related to the culture, and how it is connected to Kalevala”* (P5). As participants were not familiar with Kalevala, there might be some other possible elements related to Kalevala, that should be included to the tour, but the customers had no expectations of. The organizer of the tour should take this into consideration when developing the tour further. P14 stated: *“Kalevala is unknown to me. If you can teach us the relationship between Finnish culture and Kalevala with realistic experience, it will be a chance to know a new side of Finland.”*

Some of these expectations regarding Kalevala-themed virtual tour were similar with the desired content of guided live virtual tours in general, and some factors of the desired content were overlapping with each other. For this reason, the researcher combined the findings from desired content and expectations of Kalevala-themed virtual tour and organized them again. As a result, the most desired and attractive content for Kalevala-themed guided live virtual tour was created (Figure 12).

CONTENT FOR KALEVALA-THEMED GUIDED LIVE VIRTUAL TOUR	
Videos and images of real places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Nature (forests and lakes), hidden spots, local homes, sauna •At least some of them filmed in real-time
Storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Kalevala stories and mythology •History and culture of Finland
Meet and greet with local people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Discussing with local people •Seeing local lifestyle
Discussions in small groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Discussing with other participants of the virtual tour •Sharing experiences
Q&A sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Time reserved specifically for questions and answers (involving the guide, companies and local people)
Activating tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Quizzes and short surveys •Feeling of actively participating to the tour
Sounds of nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •E.g. birds singing, water running, wind blowing •Even more impressive with eyes closed
Traditional music and food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Listening to traditional Finnish music & instruments •Seeing local food and recipes - possibly cooking together
A "flight" with an online map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Flying to the destination e.g. with the help of Google Earth •3D presentation of the destination
Additional: "Souvenir"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Some kind of memory from the tour •Not necessarily a physical item
Possible other elements related to Kalevala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Something that customers have no expectations of •Surprising element

Figure 12. The most desired and attractive content for Kalevala-themed virtual tour.

4.3. Summary of the findings: value dimensions

This section summarizes the findings regarding customer value (Figure 13). The categories presented previously in this chapter were first gathered and then grouped together to create bigger categories. As a result of this abstraction process, dimensions of customer value were found. The grouping (the decision of which categories should be grouped together to create main categories) was done based on the researcher's knowledge of previous studies and theories regarding customer value dimensions, which were discussed also in this paper in the section 2.3.2. All the findings related to content are excluded from the figure as one type of content may provide various types of customer value. The connections between the customer value and desired content are examined later in the discussion and conclusions chapter.

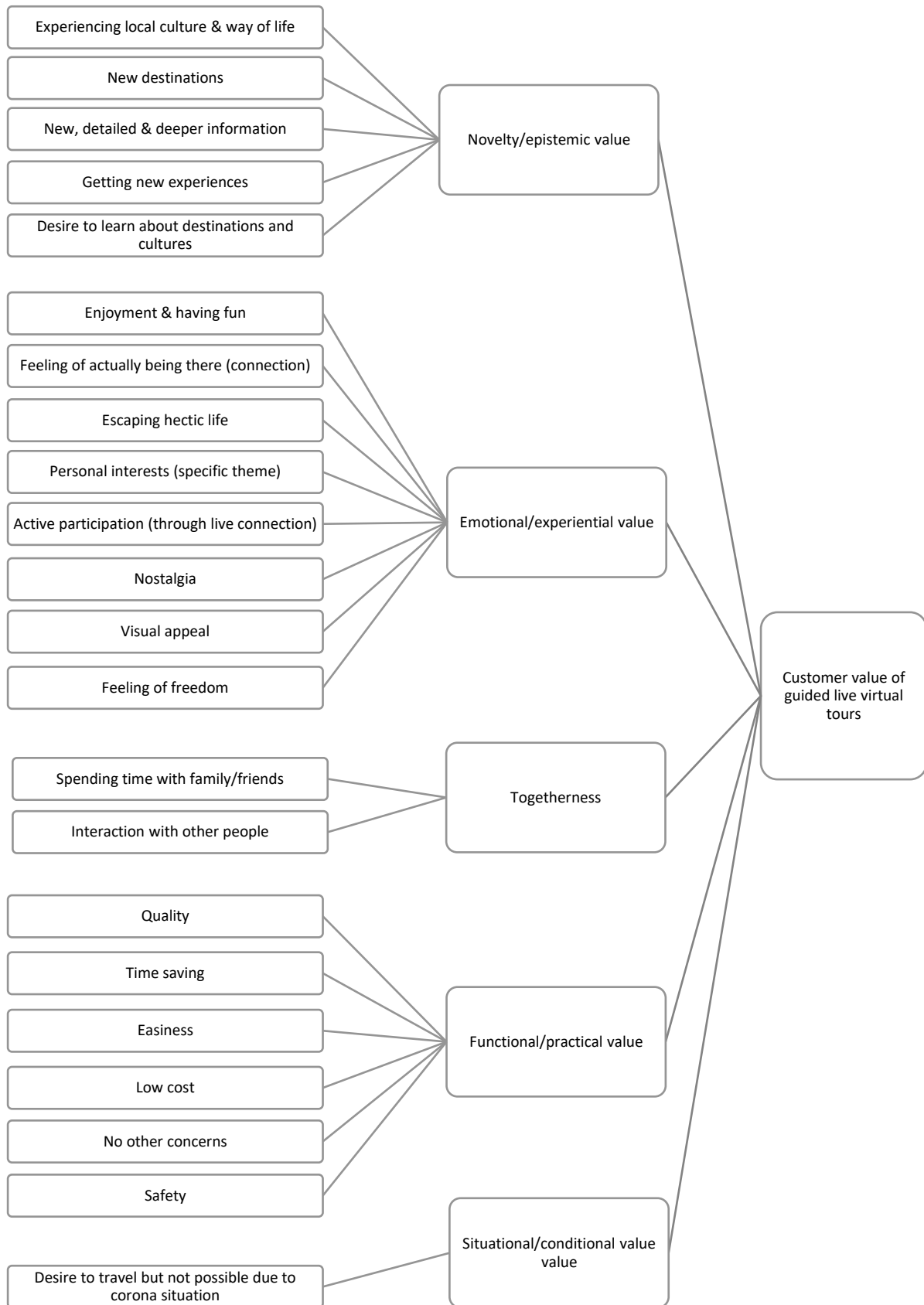


Figure 13. Abstraction of the findings (customer value).

The figure presents the overall customer value of the guided live virtual tours. As can be seen from the figure, the found customer value dimensions are novelty/epistemic value, emotional/experiential value, togetherness, functional/practical value, and situational/conditional value. Novelty/epistemic value refers to new experiences, desire to learn about other cultures and countries, and curiosity towards new destinations and cultures. Emotional/experiential value refers to different emotions, feelings, and interests, as well as to aesthetics and playfulness. Togetherness value is obtained from interaction with other people and from spending time with other people, even though in virtual tours people are not physically together. Functional/practical value refers for example to price, quality, convenience, and other practical and functional elements of the service. Situational/conditional value is dependent on a specific situation, and in this case, it refers to the COVID-19 situation.

When considering the *expected customer value*, the factors that were most often mentioned and agreed in all groups, and several times during the group discussion sessions, were the following: experiencing local culture and way of life, feeling of actually being there (connection), interaction with other people, and active participation (through live connection). From the figure it can be seen that these factors provide novelty/epistemic value, emotional/experiential value and togetherness value.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Discussion of the findings

The purpose of this study was to determine what kind of value customers expect from guided live virtual tours in order to develop a new Kalevala-themed virtual tour. Customer expectations and desires of the content of the services were also explored in more detail. The main research question of this study was “*What is the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours?*”, and the findings succeeded in answering this question. In this chapter, the most important findings are discussed in relation to earlier studies. However, as there are only few studies related to customer value of virtual tourism experiences, the discussion of the findings is also reflected towards customer value theories in general.

Expected customer value of guided live virtual tours

The expected customer value was studied through three supportive questions. The first supportive question was about the value that customers had previously experienced, so it referred to their previous experiences. The second sub-question studied customers’ expectations and desires, and the last one was focusing on their expectations of Kaleva-themed virtual tour. The expectations regarding Kalevala-themed virtual tour were similar to other expectations, but naturally there were some additional expectations regarding the content of the virtual tour. The content is discussed later in this chapter, and therefore at this point the discussion is linked to the first two supportive questions, and the findings of customer value.

All the customer value dimensions presented in the Figure 13 were visible in the discussions related to *previously experienced value*. The novelty/epistemic value was seen as the driver of virtual tourism experiences, as people wanted to learn about the destinations and cultures and get new experiences. They also think that one of the benefits of guided live virtual tours is the possibility to get more detailed information. Additionally, one of the most memorable factors in their previous tours was when they got to experience the local culture and lifestyle. Emotional/experiential value is especially visible in the answers related to the drivers and the most memorable factors. They wanted to have fun, feel nostalgic, get experiences related to their personal interests and escape their hectic life. They also feel that realistic feeling of being

in the destination and feeling of freedom are memorable factors. Togetherness came up in the answers as people wanted to spend time with their family/friends, and interaction with other people is meaningful to them. Functional/practical value is related to the benefits when comparing with traditional travelling, as people perceive virtual tours as low cost, easy, time saving, carefree and safe. Situational/conditional value is mentioned as the driver, as the current corona situation was affecting the decision to participate in a virtual tour.

The focus group discussions revealed that *customers' expectations* regarding the future guided live virtual tours is related to all other value dimensions except the situational/conditional value. This means that the corona situation affected their decision before, but as they enjoyed their experience so much, it is not important factor for them anymore. Novelty/epistemic value is expected in the means of experiencing local culture and lifestyle, learning new and experiencing new destinations. Emotional/experiential value is expected as a feeling of being there (sense of connection), active participation, specific theme linked to personal interests, visual appeal, and enjoyment. Togetherness is expected from interaction with others, and functional/practical value is expected in the means of quality.

When comparing the found customer value dimensions to earlier studies, it is noticed that there are many similarities. The value dimensions identified by Sheth et al. (1991) were functional, emotional, epistemic, conditional, and social value. All of these except the social value were visible in the findings of this study. Social value refers to status and evoked images in other people (Sheth et al., 1991), which was not mentioned by the participants in this study. In the findings of this study, social value is replaced with togetherness, which is a type of customer value that Komppula and Gartner (2013) suggested in their hunting tourism related study. They state that togetherness refers to social interaction and to a person that is motivated by the need to offer and share experiences with others (Komppula & Gartner, 2013). This value was clearly visible in the findings, and although customers are not physically together when participating the virtual tour, they are still sharing experiences with others and interacting with them.

The value dimensions in Holbrook's (1999) typology of consumer value are extrinsic vs intrinsic value, self-oriented vs other-oriented value, and active vs reactive value. All the findings of this study are related to the self-oriented values. Self-oriented extrinsic values are efficiency (active), and excellence (reactive) (Holbrook, 1999). Later these two values were categorized as economic value (Holbrook, 2006). The economic value was visible in this study, referred as functional/practical value. Self-oriented intrinsic values are play (active), and

aesthetics (reactive) (Holbrook, 1999), later referred as hedonic value (Holbrook, 2006). These were also revealed in this study as a means of having fun, active participation, and visual appeal (referred as emotional/experiential value). Other-oriented values such as status, esteem, ethics, or spirituality were not visible. However, as Komppula and Gartner (2013) suggested, the togetherness would be placed to other-oriented values as an intrinsic reactive value.

There were also similarities with the study conducted by Williams and Soutar (2009) as they suggested that customer value involves utilitarian value (including functional value and value-for-money), and socio-psychological value (including emotional value and novelty value). Similarly, this study suggests that virtual tourism experiences have functional value, emotional value, and novelty value. On the other hand, Mathwick et al. (2001) presented the value dimensions of experiential value: consumer return on investment (CROI), service excellence, playfulness, and aesthetics. As the findings of this study suggest, the playfulness was visible in the means of enjoyment and escapism, and aesthetics was visible in the means of visual appeal. CROI was also visible in the means of quality. However, in this study quality was not placed under the emotional/experiential value, but under the functional/practical value.

There are only couple earlier studies focusing on customer value in virtual tourism context. The perceived value dimensions of AR at cultural heritage sites were suggested to be economic, experiential, social, epistemic, historic and cultural, and educational values (tom Dieck & Jung, 2017). With social value they were referring to social interaction, which in this paper is placed under togetherness. Economic, experiential, and epistemic values were also revealed in this paper. Participants expected to learn about history and culture, but in this study, these were placed under the novelty/epistemic value, not as their own value dimensions. Jung and tom Dieck (2017) stated that customer value is obtained from memorable, interactive, personalized and social experience, which includes active involvement. This study supports these findings, as customers especially wanted to have memorable and interactive experiences that include social interaction and active participation.

The findings also support the findings of Jarratt (2020) regarding webcam-travel, as people wanted to get the sense of freedom, connection, and nostalgia. From these, the sense of connection to a place was most important for the participants. During the virtual tours, they wanted to be active players, not passive watchers, like Cho et al. (2002) stated about web-based virtual tours. Additionally, the virtual tourism experiences are perceived as easy, low cost, safe, and without concerns, just as Guttentag (2010) proposed about VR experiences.

Development of Experience Kalevala virtual tour

The most emerging expectations were related to experiencing local culture and way of life (novelty/epistemic value), feeling of actually being there (emotional/experiential value), social interaction (togetherness) and active participation (emotional/experiential value). Hence, it can be interpreted that these customer value dimensions are the most important when the customers decide to participate in a guided live virtual tour. Therefore, these findings are used as a basis for developing the Experience Kalevala guided live virtual tour. The expected customer value is referring to service concept (Konu et al., 2010), which is corresponding to customer needs (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996).

The findings regarding desired content for Kalevala-themed virtual tour was presented in the Figure 12. The desired content is referring to service process, as according to Komppula (2005), for the customer the service process means the visible components of the service. As there is no previous academic research about guided live virtual tours, the findings on the desired content cannot be compared with earlier studies. However, virtual tourism experts have claimed that Q&A sessions, videos of hidden spots and joyful experiences can provide value for customers (Kow, 2020). The findings of this study support these statements, but add that also storytelling, discussions with other group members, meetings with local people, activating tasks, all types of videos (including real-time videos), sounds, traditional music and recipes, 3D presentations, as well as some “souvenir” of the tour may provide value for customers.

The factors mentioned above would work for all types of guided live virtual tours. However, customers prefer that virtual tours have some kind of theme or topic, like in the case of Experience Kalevala virtual tour, whose theme is Kalevala. The expectations regarding Kalevala-themed virtual tour (which was the third supportive question) refer to hearing the stories of Kalevala, seeing sceneries of Finnish nature (lakes and forests), hearing nature sounds and traditional music, learning about Finnish history, culture, and traditions, and experiencing Finnish saunas. Nature is much desired element, which is not a surprise as Business Finland (2020) has claimed nature to be the main attraction factor in Finland. The findings also support the statement that virtual tourism brings a lot of opportunities for nature-based tourism in Finland (LUKE, 2020).

Based on the results of this study, the prerequisites for a Kalevala-themed virtual tour can be created. Figure 14 summarizes these prerequisites. The service concept of Experience Kalevala

virtual tour refers to the expected customer value. All the customers expected to experience the local culture and way of life, get the feeling of actually being there, interact with other people and participate actively during the tour. The value for the customer comes from the service process (Komppula, 2005), which at this point consists of the desired content. The tour guide is the one who controls everything during the virtual tour and decides when something is shown, when participants are divided into groups and so on. Service system, the resources available for the service process (Konu et al. 2010), are added to the model partly based on the findings and supplemented based on the personal discussion with Experience Kalevala staff.

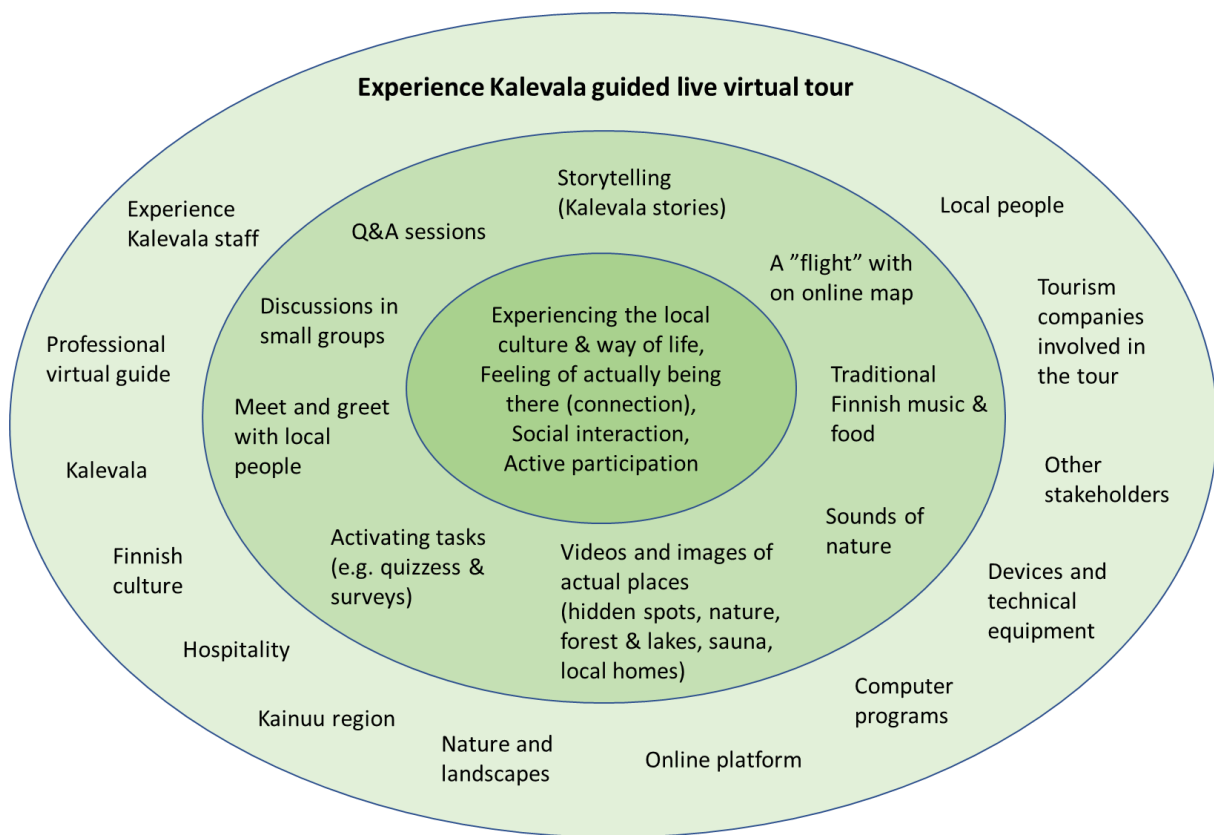


Figure 14. Prerequisites for Experience Kalevala guided live virtual tour.

It must be noted that as customers were not familiar with Kalevala, there might be some additional elements related to Kalevala, that should be still added to the tour – something that customers had no expectations of. This could be done with the help of technology, for example with 3D presentations. Additionally, the findings did not reveal any preferences towards 360-videos, but these should be still considered to be included to the virtual tour, as previous studies have revealed their close stimulation of real-life experiences (Wagler and Hanus, 2018; Pasanen

et al., 2019). Hence, these results provide only a good basis for the service development of Experience Kalevala virtual tour, but the service process and service system should still be further planned and developed by the Experience Kalevala staff. The connections between the customer value (service concept) and desired content (current components of the service process) are presented in the Figure 15. It gives more accurate idea of how each desired content contributes to expected customer value.

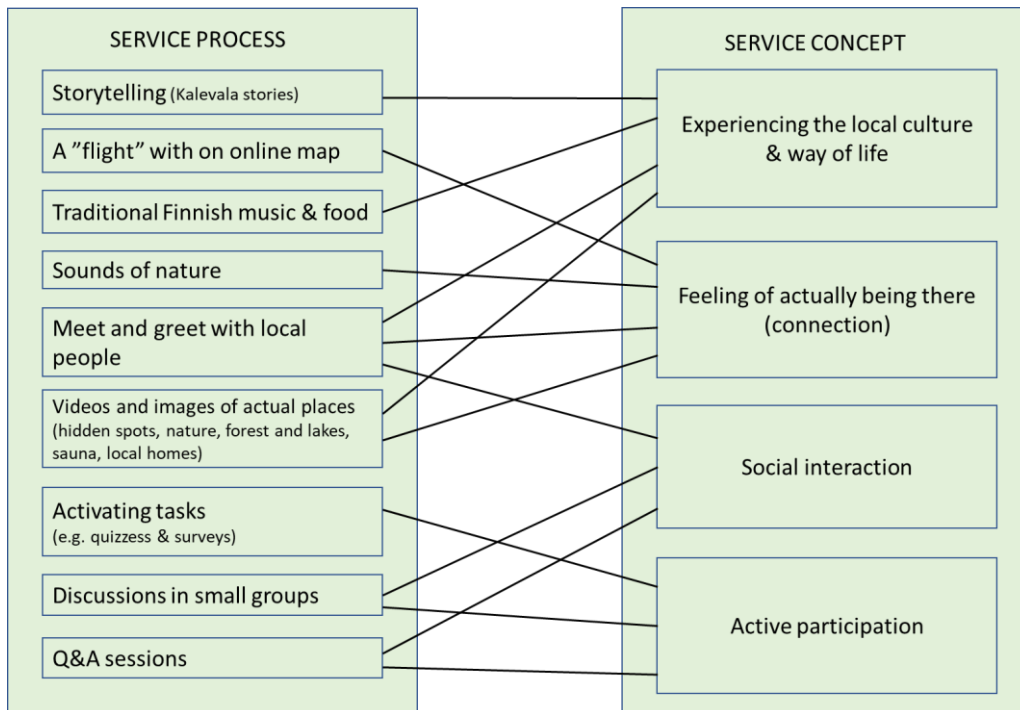


Figure 15. Connection between the content (the components of the service process) and the expected customer value (the service concept) which is corresponding to customer needs.

5.2. Theoretical conclusions

To conclude, the answer to the main research question is that the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours consists of novelty/epistemic value, emotional/experiential value, togetherness, and functional/practical value. The main expectations of the participants are related to experiencing the local culture and way of life, feeling of actually being in the destination, social interaction and active participation. These factors make the virtual tours feel realistic. Besides these, they also expect to learn new, experience new destinations, enjoy themselves, and see something visually appealing. Additionally, customers expect the guided

live virtual tours to be high quality, low cost and easy to access, and to have some specific theme or topic. The value is obtained through interesting content of virtual tours, which the guide controls throughout the tour, and explains to the customers in their own language. Corona situation affected customers' decisions before (providing them situational/conditional value) but as they have enjoyed their virtual tourism experiences so much, they are willing to participate in guided live virtual tours also after the pandemic when normal travelling is not restricted anymore. According to customers, virtual tours are also great way to explore and get to know the destination before travelling there in real-life.

As there is no previous research about guided live virtual tours, this study brings new and valuable insights of the phenomenon from the customer perspective. The study did not find any completely new dimensions of value, as all of them fit into previous studies. The customer value dimensions found in the study support in the findings of tom Dieck and Jung (2017) about AR experiences in the means of economic, experiential and epistemic value, as well as social interaction. However, it is argued that the social value should be called togetherness, and that cultural and educational values should be placed under epistemic value. This study also partly supports the consumption value theory by Sheth et al. (1991) but argue with the social value as it was not at all visible in the findings of this study. Instead, the study suggest that social value should be replaced with togetherness, supporting Kompola and Gartner (2013) who stated that it is an important customer value in tourism products and services.

Besides virtual *tourism* experiences, there are many other types of virtual experiences (virtual events, games, classes, etc.) enabled with the help of technology. These other types of virtual experiences may provide interaction with others, active participation, and in some cases also learning about other cultures (e.g., in the means of traditional recipes in a cooking class), but they are often lacking in providing the sense of connection to the destination and realistic experience of the local lifestyle. On the other hand, VR experiences are pre-recorded and often displayed with VR headset, so they might not allow real-time interaction with other people and are not so easy to access. Hence, the uniqueness of guided live virtual tours becomes from the special combination of all of these; "live like a local" experience and the sense of connection to the destination through content from real environment, while also including discussions, guiding and active involvement through real-time connection, and easy access from home through internet connection and web-based platforms. Japanese customers perceive guided live virtual tours authentic, and therefore accept them as a substitute for traditional travelling.

As a conclusion, it can be said that virtual tourism experiences provide unique customer value as they allow people to experience the culture and atmosphere of the destination country and other realistic aspects of tourism in an interactive way by means of technology, without physically visiting the destination, such as Ali and Frew (2014) stated. Virtual tourism is thus capable of providing realistic tourism experiences, even though it takes place through technological devices. The study confirms the findings of Jarratt (in press), stating that people can feel present, transported and connected to a place by watching real-time video images (without physical mobility).

5.3. Managerial implications

The results of this study help the tourism businesses to better understand the expected customer value of guided live virtual tours. Besides answering the research question, this study also increases the understanding of guided live virtual tours and virtual tourism experiences in general. This study is especially valuable for tourism businesses that are now struggling because of corona pandemic, as virtual tourism can be a new source of income for many companies. The results will be useful also after the pandemic, as virtual tourism will most likely remain as a way to do business (Rantala, 2020a) – at least the participants of this study expressed their interest in participating virtual tours in the future. People will most likely travel again when it is possible, but guided live virtual tours provide them possibility to take a pre-tour to the destination and get to know the place before travelling there. Although this study was conducted as a part of Experience Kalevala development project, the results can be utilized also by other businesses and organizations in the tourism industry.

Additionally, this study succeeds in explaining the importance of understanding the expected customer value when developing new virtual tourism services. It agrees with Komppula (2005) who states that the development of tourism products and services should be started from customer value. The same should be done also in the case of virtual tourism services by including customers to the development process. Komppula (2005) stated that tourism organizations should try to develop service processes and service system (and provide best possible prerequisites for the service) so that customers can experience the expected value. In other words, by knowing what customers expect, the tourism businesses can better meet these expectations, and provide attractive services for the customers. It is also more efficient to

promote the products and services by expressing what kind of value the customers can expect and experience.

Experience Kalevala project benefited from this study as they got valuable information about the expected customer value and desired content of guided live virtual tours. Based on the findings, the new Experience Kalevala virtual tour can be developed. This paper already suggests the prerequisites for Experience Kalevala guided live virtual tour. However, the service process (modules and blueprints) and the service system (deciding the equipment and software) still need to be developed further from the organization and stakeholder perspectives. Experience Kalevala staff should take into consideration that Japanese customers are not familiar with Kalevala, so there might be some additional elements related to Kalevala that should be added to the tour. In addition, a clear description of the theme should be written when promoting the tour to Japanese customers. After developing the service process and service system, the development process should continue with market testing, planning the promotion of the product, and finally launching and selling the product.

As the author of this thesis is from the University of Eastern Finland, it is also crucial to evaluate the applicability and exploitation of the results specifically in Eastern Finland tourism companies. The results of the study contribute to the internationalization of tourism businesses in Eastern Finland, as these businesses can develop their own virtual tourism experiences and thus attract and get more international customers to buy their services both during and after the pandemic. They can use the results of this study as a basis for the service development (especially in virtual tours aimed for Japanese customers), but they need to take into consideration their available service system and create their own service modules and blueprints, as well as plan their next development steps in more detail. They should also build the guided live virtual tour around a specific and unique theme (with comprehensive description of the theme). For example, Karelian culture (which has been greatly influenced by Kalevala), traditional food, or nature attractions would be interesting themes of virtual tours for international customers. If the Eastern Finland tourism companies decide to develop guided live virtual tours, they should make sure that the virtual tours are affordable and can be easily accessed through online platforms. If the tour is targeted to Japanese customers, the guide of the tour should preferably be Japanese speaking.

5.4. Critical evaluation of the research

The evaluation of this study was done throughout the research process, as the continuous evaluation improves the transparency of the research and allows the researcher to highlight the strengths and limitations of the research more efficiently (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 303). Qualitative studies can be evaluated with the criteria of trustworthiness, which contains the aspects of dependability, transferability, credibility, and conformability (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 307). Dependability refers to logical, traceable, and well documented research process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 307). This paper follows the guidelines given for master thesis studies and qualitative studies and explains the whole process for the reader in a logical order – starting from introduction of the topic and research problem, moving on to the theoretical background and previous studies of the phenomenon, then explaining the used research methods (what was done and how it was done), and lastly introducing the findings and conclusions.

Transferability of the research refers to showing connection between the findings of the conducted study and earlier research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 307). As the topic of this research is not commonly studied, and there were only few previous studies concentrating on the customer value of virtual tourism experiences, it was not very easy to compare the results extensively with other studies. However, there were some similarities and links found with those few previous studies, and the researcher succeeded to present these connections. Similarly, connections with the customer value theories in general was discussed.

Credibility means the researcher's familiarity with the topic and with the collected data, and if there are logical linkages between the observations and the categories. The credibility also evaluates if other researchers could come close to similar findings and conclusions based on the same data set. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 307.) Before conducting the empirical study, the researcher explored the subject from many perspectives to get deep understanding of the topic. Additionally, the data set was read through several times to get familiar with it, after which it was coded. The categories were created from the codes, and further abstraction of the main categories was done based on the knowledge of the subject. It is believed that other researchers would come up with relatively similar conclusions and agree with the claims of this study, and therefore this study can be considered credible.

The last aspect of the criteria is conformability. It refers to ability to connect findings and interpretations to the research data so that it can be easily understood by the readers (Eriksson

& Kovalainen, 2016, p. 307). In this paper, the interpretations were linked to the research data with direct quotations. There were quite many quotations so that the connection could be clearly seen by others. Additionally, there were many tables and figures included in the findings section, aiming to present the interpretations and findings in an easily understandable manner.

There are also some other things to consider when evaluating this study. The focus group discussions were conducted through Zoom platform (online) as the physical meetings were not possible due to COVID-19 pandemic. Even though it is possible to conduct interviews through online platforms, and it was easy and convenient to arrange the focus group sessions in Zoom, the researcher could not find any previous evidence in focus group sessions conducted online. It is possible that the group interaction is not that strong when the sessions are not conducted face-to-face. It was also harder to see the body language of the participants. Additionally, it was not possible to include special techniques to the discussion sessions as they were conducted in Zoom. However, all the sessions were performed successfully, probably because Japanese customers are so familiar with using online platforms. In the groups, some participants were more talkative than others, but the facilitators made sure that everyone participated to the discussion.

It also must be noted that this research was limited only to Japanese customers, providing insight from this specific target market. The expected customer value might be different when studying other markets, and therefore these findings cannot be generalized to all customers. Generalization would also require more participants, meaning a quantitative study. As stated, Japanese customers can be familiar with using technology, and this might affect their perceptions of virtual tours. On the other hand, Japanese customers do not necessarily know what Kalevala is, and therefore they might not know what to answer when asking about their expectations regarding Kalevala-themed virtual tours. For this reason, the researcher showed them some videos and photos with explanation, so that they would understand the concept better. Additionally, all the participants of the discussions were females, so no male perspective on the matter was included to the study. However, the females were different ages (26-61) and had different backgrounds (occupation and number of virtual tours). Despite all these notions, the study succeeds in answering the main research question and in providing valuable information for the Experience Kalevala project and for other tourism businesses in Finland.

5.5. Suggestions for future research

As guided live virtual tours are such a new phenomenon, there are no previous studies about the phenomenon or any official definition of it in the literature. These new types of virtual tourism experiences have gained popularity very recently due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is believed that virtual tourism can remain as one way to do business also after the pandemic (Rantala, 2020a), and hence, further research of the phenomenon is needed. The future research could concentrate on the conceptual foundations of phenomenon, different markets (for example European markets), or totally different perspectives on the matter (for example perceptions of the tourism industry, tourism companies or tourism professionals), as this study only provided insights from Japanese customers perspective. In the future, it would be important to include also male perspective to the study.

When asking background question in this study, all the participants stated that they are interested in participating a guided live virtual tour also after the pandemic, and 12 out of 14 would consider replacing a traditional holiday trip with virtual tours. However, the demand for these types of services in the future could be further studied through quantitative study, as it would give more generalizable results from a bigger sample. The future studies could also concentrate on other types of virtual tourism experiences, not just guided live virtual tours. It would be interesting to study the customer value of other types of virtual tourism experiences such as VR and AR tourism experiences. It is also stated that in the future it would be necessary to investigate what kinds of benefits virtual tourism could bring to those with physical disabilities (Sung, Lee, Kim, Kwon & Jang, 2000), and if virtual tourism brings some extra value for them. To conclude, there are various possibilities for future research regarding virtual tourism, virtual tourism experiences, the value of virtual tourism and the development of virtual tourism services.

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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction to the topic:

Hello and welcome to our group discussion session. Thank you all for joining us. My name is Rosa Repo, and I'm from the University of Eastern Finland. Assisting me is Yukie Tonuma.

The aim of this research is to increase understanding of virtual tourism experiences and their customer value by exploring your experiences, perceptions, expectations, and desires of these types of experiences. The study is done as a part of tourism development project called Experience Kalevala which aims to design authentic travel experiences by combining Finnish nature, culture, and stories of Kalevala. Kalevala is the national epic of Finland - it is a collection of thousands of poems by writer Elias Lönnrot, and it is based on Finnish mythology and folklore. One output of the Experience Kalevala project will be a virtual tourism experience, and this study aims to provide information for the product development and service design. You were invited to this session because you have previously participated in a guided live virtual tour.

I want to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers, only different opinions, and points of views. All your opinions are important so please feel free to share and express your thoughts and viewpoints even if they differ from what others have said. We are interested in hearing both positive and negative comments about your experiences. The idea is that there will be open discussions between all of you. This session will be recorded as we don't want to miss anything from the discussion. In the research report we won't use any names. Let's begin with the discussion.

Opening the discussion: First we can get to know each other better. Please tell us your name, and something else about yourself, for example where are you from or where are you working at.

Previous experiences

1. For what reasons did you decide to take part in a guided live virtual tour in a first place?
2. How would you describe the experience?
 - What was particularly memorable and meaningful?
 - Is there anything you would have changed or added to the experience?
3. Compared to traditional travelling, what kind of benefits virtual travelling brought to you?

Expectations and desires

4. Please describe your general expectations for guided live virtual tours.
 - Next time you decide to purchase a virtual tour, what do you especially expect from the experience?
 - What are the most important factors for you?
5. What kind of content in the virtual tours would be most desired or most attractive for you?
6. *After showing some photos and videos of Finnish nature and Kalevala:* What would you want to particularly experience in a virtual tour that is combining the elements of Finnish nature, culture, and Kalevala?

Ending question: Is there anything else to add?

Thank you all for your time!