

Outi Mäkinen

**SELF-SERVICE TECHNOLOGY**  
**IN HOTEL RECEPTION:**  
Finnish Customer Perceptions

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Author: Outi Mäkinen

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**Abstract:**

Services have been the interest of research since the 1960's. After the 1990's the development of technology became an interesting research area along with other service research. There are two customer service concepts that this study is discussing. These are traditional human based customer service and self-service technology based customer service. According to earlier studies, high service quality is a result of human interaction where people are seen as the key to company's success. However, since technology has had its impact on services the overall image has changed companies as well as customers. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century self-service technology has become a new interest of research.

The purpose of this study is to find out whether Finnish young adults choose to use self-service technology instead of interaction with a receptionist in a hotel reception. Furthermore, purpose of the study is to discover what Finnish young adults want from the customer service nowadays. The research method of this study is a quantitative research with survey method of the primary research. Questionnaire is designed to find out customers' expectations, experiences and future concept views. The sample was young Finnish adults and the data was collected through online and as a paper version and finally analysed with statistics. Results were positively surprising. Majority of the respondents would use self-service technology (SST) instead of traditional human interaction. However human interaction was also revealed to be the most important aspect of customer service. Therefore, this study suggests that instead of replacing traditional customer service entirely with self-service technology, it would be offered as additional service concept in future receptions.

**Keywords:** service concept, customer service, self-service technology, service quality

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

We are living in a service society. It is the most popular employment sector in the whole of Europe including Finland. For a long period of time services have been the only sector in the economy that has continuously brought employment and productivity to society. (See, for example Pesonen, 2002, p.17 & Tuorila, 2002, p.1) Services comprise the major part of the world's economy. (Kandampully, 2002, p.5) Yet, the idea of a service society seems distant to Finnish people and rather than a service society, Finland could be called as self-service society. Finnish people have always been very independent, hardworking and initiative. And the reason for this has probably been the history of labour shortage and lack of services. (See, for example, Tuorila, 2002, p.1) Even though self-service is common in everyday life in Finland, only a small number of hotels in Finland have adopted the system. It is no surprise in this global world that technological advances have their own effect on service industry. Service organisations have gone through enormous change in relation to service transactions. The traditional service transaction is called human-based interaction and it happens between a service employee and a customer. Yet some tourism organisations such as airports, tourist information centres and even hotels have adopted new service transaction alternatives to serve tourists. These alternatives to traditional service systems are self-service technologies (STTs). (See, for example, Oh, Jeong & Baloglu, 2011, p.692)

The importance of technology will continue to grow every day and in future it is likely that all employees with simple work tasks will be replaced with automated machines that can easily take care of the same tasks humans used to do. This can eventually be the case with hotel receptions in Finland too. Nevertheless even if technology will take over many areas of work, skills that only people have will be even more appreciated. These skills are sense making, critical thinking, decision making and social intelligence. Human skills are indispensable and the question is: Will technology ever be able to interact with customers the way people can? (Institute for the Future, 2001, p.3–8)

Every business needs innovations and changes in their functions to keep up with the competitive and busy world of business. Companies need to differentiate from other

competitors and they need to have something special to offer in order to remain successful. Hotel businesses are already unique as and differ greatly from other service businesses. In hotels, customers are guests who use services that are provided by the employees who are hosts rather than salesmen. The host's task is to take care of their guests, make sure they are satisfied, happy and want to come back. (Tisch & Weber, 2007, p.44) Hotels' main purpose is to provide quality services to customers and be as profitable as possible. Customers are at the epicentre of the whole business and without them there is no business to run. (Alakoski, Hörkkö & Lappalainen, 2006, p.11) All Hotels today have a common problem, how to satisfy customers enough. One reason for this struggle is the contemporary hectic world which has changed customers' needs. They are not comfortable with getting services that only satisfy their basic needs anymore, such as hearing the information about hotel services at the reception before getting the keys to the room. In other words getting only information that is needed in order to utilise the services available. Instead, customers have become greedier with everything. Instead of just getting a service they want an experience with the service. (Tisch & Weber, 2007, 2–3)

There are many different ways for companies to differentiate. Many service strategies are based on price and the idea that saving money is the best option for success. But there are other ways to differentiate especially for hotels that are heavily dependent on satisfying customers. All hotels have the same purpose; to accommodate customers and make them satisfied in a way that builds a strong and loyal relationship with them. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008 p.66–68) Because of all the hotels having the same purpose, the competition is huge. Differentiation is hard but with a right strategy it can give lots of opportunities with creating experiences that fulfil customers' needs. (Tisch & Weber, 2007, p.2–3)

Another problem though, almost everything can be copied. For example a hotel having strategy based on price will give a competitive advantage for a while but sooner or later other hotels are imitating this. Hotel service is all about customer service and focusing on that can be a key to success because every service is unique and therefore cannot be copied. (Tuulaniemi, 2011, p.18) Therefore, building a successful customer service is a good way to differentiate (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008).

## 1.1 Previous studies of the topic

Services have been the interest of research for a long period of time. Starting from the 1960s research was focused on the whole phenomenon of services and thinking about the right definitions. The idea of services was that they were related to service companies and they were only offered by them. After the 1980s research was not focused so much on definitions anymore but researchers realized the complexity of it and also agreed that there is more than one definition to describe the whole process. (Grönroos, 2009, p.76–77) Same goes with research on the quality of service, there is much research but even more opinions how to define it precisely (See Steward, Hope, & Muhlemann, 1998, p.211). Service quality is not something to take granted for. Customer service process needs to be well planned and designed in order to be managed successfully. There is a strong connection between management and service quality. (Martin, 2002, p.1–2) It is not a surprise that everything that is related to services is hard to explain when service itself is already such a complex process. The most important result and realisation of service research is that service is a process of interaction where the essence is on interaction part. (Grönroos, 2009, p.78) This means that the most important part of the service is the intangible element that happens between service provider and a customer and it is defined as service encounter. Interaction between these two parts defines whether the service is good or bad and every service encounter has its opportunities for companies' success and failure. Many researchers have agreed on this definition. (See for example Bitner, Brown and Meuter, 2000, p.139)

Service creates an experience, which is a strong part of service and many researchers have declared that services have become as the new focus on economy. (See for example Walls, Okumus, Wang & Joon-Wuk Kwun, 2011, p.168) Pine and Gilmore states "Each experience derives from the interaction between staged event and the individual's prior state of mind and being". This means that the unconscious feelings and thoughts that individuals have before coming to the place where the service happens affects the result and overall experience of service. Therefore, experience is always unique and there are no two totally same experiences because every human being experiences them differently. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.12) After the 1990's the importance of information technology had its contribution to the research area of



services (Grönroos, 2009, p. 78). and the use of technology has been growing in service situations since then.

Self-service management is a very new concept in service management. It has only been recently when it was discovered as one important research area. Most of the research in the self-service area is focusing on the users of self-service and the role of technology in improving the service quality. (See Meuter, Ostrom, Bitner and Roundtree, 2003, p.900) Technology-based self-service means concept where a customer is using technology to complete the service on her/his own. (See, for example, Panda, Dash, & Rath, 2011, p.100)

In hotels high service quality has traditionally been connected to customer service being highly personalized and involving a lot of interaction with the service staff at the hotel. Today's hotels have to manage new things as the self-service technology has become involved in service situations and it is a difficult task for them to maintain customer satisfaction levels the same as before. There are many good reasons for hotel managers to choose self-service systems instead of using traditional human-based services. Hence further research is needed in this sector to understand the positive and negative sides of the self-service technology in the hotel industry. (See Fisher & Beatson, 2002, p. 62–64)

According to Anckar, (2008, p. 42) there is one hotel chain that is a forerunner in self-service technology innovation and that is Finnish Omena Hotels. It offers customers a high class hotel stay in the city centre location with low prices supported by information communication technology (ICT). According to Anckar, Omena Hotels are unique and no identical concepts are found in anywhere in Finland. Therefore there is a lack of research in the area of perceptions of technology based self-service in Finnish hotels.

## **1.2 Study purpose and aims**

This thesis is part of the author's wider service design project where the aim is to design a new customer service concept for hotel receptions in Finland with self-service technology in mind. Service design is a modern approach for companies who wish to change or develop their services or create new ones. (Stickdorn, 2011, p. 29) Service

design has 4 different phases in the design process and the first phase is a deep background research that aims to define the current situation in the 'area' that needs a change (Stickdorn, 2011, pp. 128–129). The background research is very important part of service design in order to understand what needs to be done later in the service design process and how (Tuulaniemi, 2011, p. 130). It is important to get a good understanding of the present situation, in this case the customers' opinion about the self-service technology, before the process can continue to the design phase. (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2011, p.128)

The role of this master's thesis is to be the background research. The study is divided into secondary research as theoretical framework and primary research as empirical research with survey method. Theory part will deal with the key words of the study. These are: service concept, customer service, self-service technology and service quality. Hypotheses are based on the theory and the purpose of them is to help to create the questionnaire which aims to find out the current situation in Finland about service quality in Finnish hotel receptions; tourists' expectations, experiences and satisfaction. Hence, the research question is: Are Finnish customers ready for self-service technology in future hotel service encounters?

The hypotheses of the research are listed below and they will be discussed further after theory part of the research.

*H1. "Customers who are likely to use self-service technology in hotel receptions are motivated by extrinsic rather than intrinsic reasons."*

*H2. "Customers who are likely to use self-service have experienced a problem with traditional customer service before."*

*H3. "High quality service means human interaction and customized service"*

The interest for this study was fueled by the author's previous experience in the hotel business and her personal interest towards customer service, service transaction methods, service innovations and service design. After working for a couple years in a hotel as a receptionist and a waitress, the author realized how big influence employees have on customers' satisfaction through customer service. Hotel reception is the place where customers enter at first and everything in that place gives customers the first

impression of their stay in a hotel. Therefore, reception is the centre of the hotel and it should be functional and smooth without too much hassle around.

The author not only realized the importance of the service employees in the reception, but also all the problems and challenges that face them in the working area. These were influencing the author in her research and therefore are listed above:

- Receptionists have a huge amount of responsibility in relation to customer satisfaction, customer safety and general knowledge about anything that is related to the hotel and customers.
- The first impression customers get about a hotel will be formulated on their interaction with the receptionist.
- A hotels success very much depends on the receptionists' working skills and attitude.
- Receptionists not only handle the whole customer service process with a customer during their visits in hotels, but they also regularly listen to customer complaints, and often have to use their initiative when solving customer problems.

Because this study is one part of the author's service design process, there is one chapter that introduces the service design concept in detail. This will help readers to understand the reasons for choosing this topic and also understand the service design process better.

In Finland many trends and development ideas to services come from abroad. These trends are popular for a while and people are excited about them for a certain period of time. However, it is very common that people lose their interest of using these new trends and the actual meaning of the new developments disappear very quickly. One reason for this is the difference of Finnish people's behaviour and taste of things compared to other nationalities. (Valvio, 2010, p.29) Some foreign people think that Finnish people has odd and distinctive taste. Finnish people are famous for liking things that have two opposite factors combined together, such as salty liquorice with salt and sweet and hot sauna with cold jumps into water in between. Here just to mention a couple. (Bosworth, 2013) Trends such as technological innovations need a good background research before they are introduced to customers. It is important to take customers' needs into a consideration before bringing solutions to the services. (Valvio, 2010, p. 34)

In this study, a careful research about customers' opinions about customer service encounters will help to accomplish the development of service concepts better. After the research, the aim is to know what Finnish people want from customer service and whether they are ready for self-service technologies in hotels. Therefore, this study is a customer research about the perceptions of customer service quality in hotel receptions in Finland.

### **1.3 The structure of the study**

This study starts with introduction part as chapter 1. It explains the purpose, structure and aims of the study and reasons behind choosing the topic. It also explains the topic generally giving some background information and previous studies of it. In introduction part the hypothesis made after literature review are already introduced but will be discussed later in the study. After the introduction, chapter 2 is the secondary research of the study where the purpose was to find the most pertinent information and published data on the subject of the study. The first sub chapter of the study is explaining the service concepts in hotels in Finland generally. After the general view the study discusses more of the hotel receptions in Finland and defines the service precisely. The next sub chapter is introducing the customer service in hotel reception. After that it is the most important part of the theoretical framework, the self-service technology, as it is the main focus on this study. At first SST (self-service technology) will be defined and then the focus will be on the users view; why would customers use it and why not. The sub chapter 2.4 is about the service quality in customer service. That consists of three different parts and they are customer expectations, customer experiences and the importance of communication inside the company. In as much as satisfaction is big part of forming service quality author has decided to leave that out of the thesis. The reason for this is that customer satisfaction is a very wide concept and it would need more than a few pages to explain about it and therefore it has been excluded. Also this part focuses more on the process of forming the customer satisfaction than the actual outcome of it.

Because this research is part of author's service design project, the role of service design is visible throughout the thesis and therefore explained in sub chapter 2.5. That sub chapter will also explain how customer service concepts can be developed further. In this chapter the focus is on service concept and what does it include and what makes customer service concept successful. The next chapter 3 explains more about the hypotheses of the study. Chapter 4 is the methodology of the study. It introduces the methodological approaches to the research and the research process. Chapter 5 is the results and analysis of the empirical research and the final chapter 6 is conclusion of the study.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Hotel service concepts in Finland**

The purpose of a hotel is to accommodate guests and offer high contact personalized services. (See, for example, Fisher & Beatson, 2002, p.62) Hotel business in Finland has polarized since moving to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (See Alakoski et al. 2006, p.183) Polarization, which means that there are either very big hotels chains or smaller private hotels, is very common to hospitality business. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen, 2006, p.34) There are growing numbers of hotels becoming part of different chains and many of them are under foreign ownerships (See Alakoski et al. 2006, p.183). Chain hotels in Finland are such as Sokos Hotels, Omena hotels, marketing chains such as Finlandia chains and franchise chains where the example is International Hotels Group (Rautiainen & Siiskonen, 2006, p.34). Hotels are unique service business when comparing them to others. Every hotel is different and gives different service experience to customers. (Tisch & Weber, 2007, p.3) Hotels aim to produce services that are as profitable as possible but also keep mind the needs of customers. Customers are the essence in business of hotel operations. (Alakoski et. al, 2006, p.11)

Reception is the centre of communication and therefore very important factor in a hotel. Reception communicates with different departments of hotel such as the management, sales and cleaners. (Alakoski et al. 2006, p.125; Rautiainen & Siiskonen, 2006, p. 106) All the information comes to reception or at least it should, because good communication is prerequisite for quality customer service. (Alakoski et al. 2006, p.125) The Receptionists are the employees of reception. Other employees in reception are receptionists' managers such as shift managers and reception managers. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen, 2006, pp. 107–108) First of all the purpose of a receptionist is to serve customers the way they need, expect and want. (Alakoski et al. 2006, p. 12) They don't only have to provide quality customer service but also have good skills of selling, communicating and expertise in many areas. These are such as operational skills and the most important of these are making bookings, checking customers in and out, being cashier, taking care of invoices, and as an outcome, provide excellent customer service. Addition to these, customers' safety issues need to be well assimilated also. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen, 2006, pp. 108-109) Receptionists are responsible for their customers and

they have to make sure everything is going well with them from the moment they check in to the moment they check out. Hotel is always open and employees have to take care of the guests regardless of the situation. (Tisch & Weber, 2007, p 3)

Omena Hotels is the only hotel chain in Finland that doesn't have traditional service concept. The unique fact about Omena Hotels is that they don't have any reception desks in the hotels but instead they are using innovative Information Communication Technology (ICT) in its service operations. Because of no reception Omena Hotels doesn't have any reception personnel either. The concept idea is to offer high class accommodation in good locations with low prices and everything from booking the hotel to the checking out is handled through internet and technology. Customers will pay the accommodation in advance and receive a 5 digit entry code that works as a key to the rooms and also as a pass through the main door. (Anckar, 2008, p.39–40)

According to many researchers, a service is intangible process of some sort of interaction between a service provider and a customer (Grönroos, 2009, p. 79; Stickdorn, 2011, 36; Pesonen, 2002, p. 23) and it takes place in physical environment (Stickdorn, 2011, 36). Gilmore (2003, p.4) adds that “services are economic activities that create ‘added value’ and provide benefits for customers (consumers or organizations)”. A service concept is not only very complex but there are many different kind of services available (Gilmore, 2003 p.3; Grönroos,2009, p. 76; Rautiainen & Siiskonen,2006, p.89) and anything can become a service if the outcome meets the needs of customers (Grönroos, 2009, p.76). According to Bitner et al. (2000, p.140) services are either customer services, free value-added services that are improving the sales and relationships of goods and the actual products for sale such as accommodation in hotels. Definition of services by Bitner et al. indicates how important they are in companies’ strategies regardless of industry.

Services are defined by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007, p.15) as

*“economic activities offered by one party to another, most commonly employing time-based performances to bring about desired results in recipients themselves or in objects or other assets for which purchasers have responsibility. In exchange for their money, time, and effort, service customers expect to obtain value from access to goods, labour, professional skills, facilities, networks, and systems; but they do not take ownership of any of the physical elements involved.”*

In tourism there are three types of services, those that are received at the tourists' place of origin such as travel agency's service and advices before a trip, services that are while tourists are travelling such as transportation, food and beverage and finally the services that are offered at the destination such as the accommodation, attractions and activities. Hospitality industry consists of different areas such as accommodation, food and beverage and entertainment and hotels normally include all of these services. (Kandampully, 2002, p.11–12) As mentioned in the last chapter, when service is defined as the process of some kind of interaction between a service provider and a customer (See, for example, Grönroos, 2009, p.77), customer service can be defines as the interaction that happens in the process. (Eräsalo, 2011, p.14)

## **2.2 Customer service in hotel reception**

Customer service means executing customer's wishes and orders, responding customer inquiries, and interacting with customers as taking their wishes and providing help to them (Bitner et al. 2000, p.140). In the service customer is not always directly interacting with the service provider but alternatively it can happen indirectly. (Grönroos, 2009, p.77) For example, a situation where a customer wants a dinner served to his/her hotel room, the whole process is a service and the part where customer either orders the meal via phone or via reception is customer service. Conversely, the aim is to fulfill customers' needs and make them happy. Customers may want a service or a product or they may want a solution to their problem. Whichever is the case, the aim is to provide customer service that leads to a customer satisfaction (Lehtonen, 2002, p.59,62) without it being too complicated process (Oh et al. 2013, p.694). One way to understand customer service, and probably the most reasonable, is to think of own past service experiences and situations to remember what actually happened and what it felt like being in that customer service situation, because after all every service experience is unique and based on personal expectations and perceptions. (Martinez and Hobbi, 2008, p.4) Often customers see the service as the moment of interaction with the company. It is 'the moment of truth' where their perceptions of the company are developed. Academic terms this 'moment of truth' is service encounter. (Bitner et al. 2000, p.139) Service encounter is the moment of service where customer is directly



interacting with the service provider (Fisher & Beatson, 2002, p.60). Addition to this customer service is all about sales work. Companies need customers to get profit and manage the business. (Eräsalo, 2011, p.15)

Human based customer service means a traditional service encounter where the customer is interacting with an employee. (See, for example Fisher & Beatson, 2002) Also it is called as interpersonal customer service (Bitner et al. 2000, p.140). According to Eräsalo (2011, p.14) customer service is in its best when it happens face to face with an employee. Because customer interacts directly with a service employee, employee's personality and behaviour are in the most important position in this kind of service. A service employee in human based customer service represents the company and in hotels receptionists represent the hotel. Receptionists' behaviour in service situation is directly influencing customers' opinions about the hotel. The way they interact and serve customers tell all the answers to customers about the hotel such as how it respects customers and keeps promises to them. (Eräsalo, 2011, p.14) The skills that are expected from receptionists are sometimes overwhelming for them. Hotel management is expecting employees to work hard, to work fast and as efficient as possible where as customers are expecting personalized service with time and courtesy. (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007, p.310) Customer service is about providing happy service with smiling face even in situations where customers are wrong or mean. Hence, service employees feel sometimes their job requirements too challenging. Customers can have a bad day but customer service employees can never show their own true feelings to customers. (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007, p.314)

Addition to this, another very important skill that employees can have in customer service is empathy towards customers. The skill of understanding how customers are feeling at the moment of a service situation is very crucial in order to deliver the customer satisfaction. (Lehtonen, 2002, p.59) Daniel Goleman's concept of social intelligence describes the new science of human relationships. It requires different kinds of intelligence and skills to work with customers in everyday business life. Customer servants not only have to be good listeners but also respond quickly and have excellent social behavior skills. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p. 30–32) The General rules for being a good customer servant are to have skills of good communication, friendly and helpful persona, positive manners and flexible and effective working skills. Addition to these the aim in the job is to connect with customers on emotional level and satisfy

customers' needs. For that reason they need to know well who their customers are and what they want. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, pp. 30–31)

Martinez and Hobbi (2008, p.73) are strongly thinking people as the differentiators in service business and addition to this they think services only happen because of people. Customers want someone to listen to them, to provide a solution to a problem or to give advice about something but after all they think service is all about interacting with people. According to them there are many options for companies to differentiate but the problem is that almost everything in the business world can be copied and that makes competition hard. If a hotel wants to be different from other hotels the only way to do this is to focus on people, because people cannot be copied. People such as employees, associates, partners and customers are valuable assets of a company. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p. 69–71)

In hotel customer service happens through different channels; via phone, email, internet and face to face. (Lehtonen, 2003, p.64) In the reception the interaction of customer service occurs usually between a customer and a receptionist but because of the technological developments customer service can alternatively happen between customer and technology. This is also customer service but instead of interacting with a human being interaction occurs between customer and computer with self-service technology involved. (See, for example Beatson, Coote & Rudd, 2006; Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p.73) The original description of service encounter being “high-touch and low-tech” is altering because of the effect of technology (Bitner et al. 2000, p.138). In tourism those tourists, who use all types of technology on their own before travel, during and after travel, are called self-service tourists (Stockdale, 2007 as cited in Oh et al. 2011, p.692).

## 2.3 Self-service technology

Information communication technology (ICT) offers many new opportunities to companies and it has become very important part in the travel industry (Anckar, 2008, p.38). It enables companies to alter their business models and hence changes the interaction between customers and organisations. In travel organisations, airports have perceived the opportunity with self-service technology in the form of self-service kiosks where tourists can check in without having to interact with a service employee. (See, for example, Ku & Chen, 2013, p. 87) In the hospitality sector it was introduced little bit later than to other areas of tourism. And still in hospitality it is mostly used to support the business rather than replace the traditional models. (Anckar, 2008, p.38) However, the self-service technology has had a rapid development in the industry providing customers more options and for service companies more opportunities. (See for example, Lema, 2005, p.154) The self-service technology (SST) means a service method where customers deliver the service by themselves with the help of technology and without interacting with an employee (See for example Meuter et al. 2000 as cited in Beatson et al., p.854).

An accommodation sector has been as a conservative business what comes to the new ideas and developments. Nevertheless, some hotels have realised the need of innovative business models too. (Anckar, 2008, p.38) An example of a hotel like this is already mentioned Finnish hotel chain; Omena Hotels. The specialty being an ICT-based concept where there is no reception or personnel in the hotel is one of a kind in Finland. In Omena Hotels customers are dealing with self-service in very advanced form. Without a reception, there is no human interaction between customer and the hotel. (Anckar, 2008, p. 38)

Having a self-service system in customer service has advantages and disadvantages. (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007, p.246) The research in the area has shown positive effect between SSTs and customer satisfaction (See for example, Buell, Campbell and Frei, 2010, p. 679). The advantages from hotel's point of view are savings of cost and time. Furthermore, it is flexible, is located conveniently, can be more customized and service provider can control the service delivery easier. Customers benefit from this too, they save time and they might enjoy the SST use for different reasons. (Lovelock & Wirtz

2007, p.246) For example, customers who prefer doing things on their own prefer self-service. It enables customers to get service 24/7 without the need of an employee. (Bitner et al. 2000, p. 141) When customers use technology in service situation they are co-working with the technology and they can handle the service on their own pace. Technology also makes customization in services easier. (See Bitner et al. 2000, p.143–144)

After the 1990's companies started realising the possibility of technology to solve many of the problems in the service environment. These were such as minimising the waiting time and labour costs with the help of the SST. When customers are busy and don't want to wait they prefer the self-service. Hence the self-service is a good alternative to traditional customer service in certain situations, such as hotel's busy hours. (Lambert & Wonjae Lee, 2008, p. 101-103) Service companies can easily benefit from SSTs by providing cheaper and speedier, less heterogeneous transaction method alternatives (Wejters et. al, 2007 in Kokkinou & Cranage, 2015 p. 1182).

The adoption of the self-service systems is not easy and according to researches there are various factors that influence attitudes towards it (Sparks & Weber, 2008, p. 117). These are such as service companies' global reputation and perception of employees and customer's knowledge of related technologies (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007, p. 246).

One way to understand whether tourists would rather use self-service technology or human based services can be explained by motivations. These motivations are divided into two different groups; extrinsic motivations and intrinsic motivations. (See for example, Oh et al. 2011) Webster & Martocchio (1992, as cited in Oh et al. 2011, p.693) defines the extrinsic motivations as motivations that allow users to achieve the outcome without direct connection between the act and the motivation. These are such as economic reasons, where people use the service only to get what they need and not because it satisfies them. For example, a person who uses SST wants to go through the service quickly without personal opinions involved. Time saving and avoiding congestion are the basic extrinsic motivators to use SST. (See Oh et al. 2011, p.693) The intrinsic motivations are the opposite of the extrinsic and they are acts that are motivated by emotional needs such as enjoyment, challenge and fun. Hotel guests who desire to try new technology regardless of its cost and effectiveness are motivated by intrinsic reasons. They want to try new service technologies because they enjoy trying

new things or they want to challenge themselves. Intrinsic motivations are inherent and something that are in straight connection with the acting itself. For example a desire to interact with a human being is an intrinsic motivation. (See, for example Oh et al. 2011, p.693) Some tourists prefer social interaction with an employee and service for them means developing a relationship with a service provider. (Bitner et al. 2000, p.147)

Previous studies show that there are both positive and negative advantages of SST use in the service situations. The disadvantages are that some people don't see it as fun and exciting but instead feel stressed and anxious to use SST. (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007, p.246) Oh et al. (2011, p.693) suggest that tourists who are likely to use the SSTs in hotels are likely to have extrinsic motivations and those tourists who rather interact with the staff have intrinsic motivations. That is explained by the social and system pressures. When the atmosphere in the hotel environment is busy, and there are queues, customers feel uncomfortable to use their intrinsic motivations to use the self-service systems. (Oh et al. 2011, p.693) In other words, social pressure by other customers might make customers anxious by using the SST. This so-called technology anxiety makes potential customers feel fear and apprehension and therefore is unlikely that they use the SST. (Meuter et al in 2003 in Cranage & Kokkinou, 2015 p.1184) Moreover, technological systems are programmed in a certain way and they don't have the appreciated human skills (Martinez and Hobbi, 2008, p. 73). If the SST has poor design and it is too difficult to use, customers will get frustrated and angry by using them. (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007, p.247) Some companies might want the self-service technology to prevent customers blame towards the employees if service is not satisfying them, but if technology is not working the way it should or customers get frustrated for any reason at all they might still blame the service provider and change service because of this. (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007, p.248)

However, according to Lovelock and Wirtz (2007, p.247) there are customers who prefer using SST. The accessibility and flexibility makes SSTs popular and the performance makes transaction faster than traditional service transaction method. According to them customers who are more confident and experienced are more likely to use it. They can save time and effort by using SSTs. Waiting time in services is very crucial factor when measuring service quality. According to many researches customers' waiting time is influencing strongly on customers feelings and satisfaction about the service. (Lambert & Wonjae Lee, 2008, p.103) Snellman & Vihtkari has done

research (2003 as cited in Sparks & Weber, 2008, p.117) about complaints of self-service and traditional service concepts. The results show that there are not big differences between those two but it seems that customers who complained about the technology received better response from the service provider than those who complained about the traditional service. People are different and experience situations in their own way. Some people see customer service encounters/situations as social situations with need to talk with a human being whereas others see them situations they need their problems just solved and they try to avoid a human contact. Customers' previous experiences and previous images of hotel employees have huge influence on forming this perception. (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007, p.246)

Successful customer service is about knowing what customers expect from the interaction. And if SST service transaction is well managed, it can be as successful as human based service if not better. (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007, p.247) However, if customers are forced to use SSTs without other options available it can result in negative impacts. Therefore a service situation where customer can decide whether to use self-service or interpersonal service is ideal service encounter. In a situation where both concepts are available customers are in control of deciding how to process the service and that way they can decide their service experience on their own. (Bitner et al. 2000, p.147) According to Kokkinou and Cranage (2015, p.1192) having both options not only provide ideal service encounter but also encourage customers to use SST when that option is also available.

## **2.4 Service quality in customer service**

Managing quality is very important if not the most important factor in the tourism industry. The idea of a quality management is that the service will be delivered as perfectly as possible. To follow customer's requirements and to avoid making mistakes are the essence in quality management. (Williams & Buswell, 2003) There are different views of how to define service quality. According to Williams and Buswell service quality is all about knowing who your customers are and understand them but also it is about having good knowledge of the industry. The knowledge of these will define

services' both success and failure. William and Buswell point out that service quality is also very difficult to define through literature. According to them even some service quality theorists and experts of service industry have had different opinions and thus difficulties with the term. (William & Buswell, 2003, p.47)

The study of service quality started in the 1980s (Oh & Parks, 1997 as cited in Lambert & Lee, 2008, p. 96–97) and there were two leading schools of study. These were Scandinavian school and North American school. Both of the leading research groups had background in marketing but with different views of marketing definitions. Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry were the leading researchers from North American school and they defined marketing as 4 Ps (people, place, position and promotion), whereas Scandinavian researcher's Grönroos and Gummesson had more of a holistic view of marketing of services. Their approach to marketing was a personalized service where the essence is to build customer relationships. (William and Buswell, 2003, p.48, 54) Service quality defined by Zeithaml et al. (1990 as cited in William & Buswell, 2003, p.55) is: "Excellence determined by the extent of discrepancy between customer expectations and their perception". Service quality for the group of North American school of service quality is about excellence. Their service quality model is SERVQUAL, "service quality expectations equal perceptions". This means that only customers can judge the service quality and this is the way for customer satisfaction. Their model SERVQUAL has been in use of measuring quantitative research in Tourism. (See for example William and Buswell, 2003, p. 56) It is the most commonly used instrument measuring service quality in any organization. It has 5 dimensions; tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy. (Parasuraman et al. 1988 as cited in Ekinci, 2001, p.311)

According to William and Buswell, (2003) Grönroos defines service quality as total quality that is formed by two different dimensions and their result: technical quality of the outcome 'what' and functional quality of the process 'how' and the third part; the image which is affected by the traditional marketing activities, word of mouth and tradition before the final result is formed; the total quality. After this Grönroos's 'total quality' evolved to a 'total perceived quality' with a help of members from Nordic school; Sandelin and Lehtinen. This newer version was more of a holistic view and affected by more external factors such as customers' needs and word of mouth from others. It is still widely used in Tourism services. Gummesson also designed a model to

explain service quality. The 4Q model of Gummesson have 4 different parts of quality; design quality where the effort is to design the service to meet customers' requirements, production quality to focus on the manufacture issues, delivery quality with consistently making sure the standards promised to customers are met, and finally the relational quality which means the interaction between customers and the organisation but also interaction within the organisation. (William & Buswell, 2003, p. 51–52)

Martinez and Hobbi (2008) support Gummesson's view about the importance of the organization and an interaction within the employees and customers. Communication is one of the important aspects forming the service quality. According to them there are two types of customers; internal customers and external customers. The external customers are customers outside of the company, also known as 'normal' customers and internal customers are the people working inside the company, known as employees. As important as it is to provide an excellent external customer service, it is also very important to treat your co-workers well. Employees in the company need as much as attention than 'normal' customers. If company's internal customer service is been taken care of the external customer service will work well and other way around. In other words everything affects to everything in service business. If the atmosphere in the work environment is good and employees are happy to work with each other, the external customer service will have a better chance to be successful and therefore service quality improves. Where as in a company, where employees are not connecting well with each other, the customer service towards customers outside of the company is usually poor too. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, pp. 18, 35–37)

In every service organization there are internal services that are crucial to the organisation. However, support and communication is often very poor between employees and service is often defined as actions rather outside than inside of an organization. This can lead to big problems providing poor customer service to customers. (Grönroos, 2009, p.413) The first step of changing employees' service attitudes and assumptions is to understand the importance of internal customer service, in other words the internal communication. (Gronroos, 2009, p.414) Employees have expectations and they need to be appreciated and recognized in the same way than they are with other customers. Employees do not only want to get along with people but also to build quality relationships with each other. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p. 46–47)



In the 1980's Herb Kellerher, Southwest airline's founder thought that the answer for the successful customer service is within employees. His company had slogans that were understood the way that customer can only be external, but after a while he changed the way of thinking and the slogans. According to him the priority is employees and their wellbeing in the company. Once employees are happy, customers will be satisfied too. This is so-called 'Inside out mentality' .(Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p.37–38) Whereas, Scandinavian airlines' president Jan Carlzon changed the company's direction to success at about the same time by bringing out message that internal customers are as important as external ones. He pointed out that not everyone in the organization is directly communicating with the customers but this doesn't mean they could not communicate with internal customers. Hence, everybody working in the company is actually working in customer service. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p.37) As a result, Communication between departments is the key to provide quality customer service (Alakoski et al. 2006, p.125).

According to Bitner's work (1992 as cited in Walls et al. 2011, p.169) physical environment and employees' and customers' behaviour influence on customer experience. It is the environment where the social interaction and the emotions and opinions of customers happen. Bitner thought that there must be a connection between happy customer and positive service environment. According to Martinez and Hobbi (2008, p.73) people are a key to wellbeing in the workplace and when relationships inside the company are good the positive atmosphere will reflect to outside of company too.

As explored so far, customers interact very much with the hotel staff. These interactions play a significant role constructing customer's perceptions of service quality and finally forming customer satisfaction. However, the difficulty today with the hotels is to retain customer service levels the same with self-service technology being involved in the service encounters. (See, for example, Fisher & beatson, 2002, 62) The outcome of the service is what customers are paying for rather than just the product such as a hotel room. In other words, customers pay for customer satisfaction (Kandampully, 2002, p.13). In Finland service that is fast, effective, punctual and trustworthy is regarded good quality service and receptionists' smile and eye contacts with customers are very important (Rautiainen & Siiskonen, 2006, p.101). The most important thing in the

reception is to notice customers right away when they arrive in hotel (Rautiainen & Siiskonen, 2006, p.115).

Other definitions of service quality have evolved since the early schools of service quality. According to Oh and Parks, service quality is an attitude that directly impacts on the services' success (Oh & Parks, 1997 as cited in Lambert & Wonjae Lee, 2008, p.96–97) and it is a part of service value. (See Martin-Ruiz et al. 2012, p.40) Quality in service is what customers' experience. (Grönroos, 1998, p.62) There are many attributes to describe successful customer service. As simple as it is customer service has been successful when the customer is happy and wants to come back. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p.31) Addition to Grönroos's earlier models of service quality, he defines it by six features. These are employees' professional skills, service attitude and behavior, flexible and approachable personality and customers' needs are taken care of, trust and credibility, normalization which in turn stands for employees' problem solving skills and the final one, reputation which is the values of service. (Grönroos, 1990 as cited in Rautiainen & Siiskonen, 2006, p.100) According to Lehtonen (2002, p. 95) service quality means all the features that fulfills customer's expectations. Company has reached the goal in service quality when customer is happy with the service in every way. (Lehtonen, 2002, p.95)

As been mentioned now there are different views of the service quality definition and many models have been made of it and two of them discussed earlier. It is clear that service quality has been difficult to define exactly and it will be ongoing dilemma. However, all the models and definitions made by researchers so far share a common aspect and according to Martinez and Martinez (2009, p.29) "They propose a multidimensional service quality conceptualization that is inherently linked to the measurement of consumer quality perception." Hence, literature has the basis for understanding the concept as well as how to measure it. (Martinez & Martinez, 2009, p.29) Hence, quality is associated with customer expectations (Grönroos, 1998, p.62) and customer experience (Lehtonen, 2008, p.31) and when service quality has been very good service has reached the customer satisfaction (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p.31).

Customers have expectations before they arrive in a hotel. These expectations are composed of the purposes, needs and motives of the stay. Also earlier experiences have influence on expectations. (Alakoski et al. 2006, p.12) The purpose of a service is to

meet customers' needs (Stickdorn, 2011, 36). However, defining the needs of hotel customers can be challenging because the purpose of the need for accommodation can be anything from funerals to weddings. There is no particular client group as many other service companies have. Hotel guests can be anyone and the reason for their visit can be anything and it is unlikely that these are known before their arrival to the hotel. (Tisch & Weber, 2007, p 3–4) Common for all customers however is to be treated as guests who are important, unique and not strangers to the organisation. They might want to handle transactions on their own or rather communicate with employees and feel like they are at home, feel welcome and appreciated. The importance of being able to handle some transactions on their own makes them feel self-controlled and it satisfies them. This is called transparency, although, company offering transparency and safety at the same time is a challenge. (Tisch & Weber, 2007, p. 113–114,124) According to researchers about customer expectations customers want flexibility and customization. They appreciate service employees who use their own common sense with things and don't follow the rules too strictly. Hence, Employees' situational awareness is important which means that employee doesn't need an instruction book of how to act or behave in service situations. This ability is also seen linked to good customization. (See Bitner et al. 2000, p.142) It is not a secret that customers' expectations have changed while the world has become more globalised. Customers have become more sophisticated and demanding. They can access to information easily online, view customer reviews and give feedback. This has given them power to expect more and more from the services available. (Tisch & Weber, 2007, p. 2–3, Briggs, Sutherland & Drummond, 2006, p.1007)

Companies in service industry are usually following the service marketing approach in their business and this means focusing on quality issues and trying to be as productive as possible. However, in order to be successful, which includes making customers satisfied and be part of the consumer evaluation, these companies also need to take account of the psychological environment of the service situation. It means focusing on the subjective and personal feelings customers have when they are in a service situation. This situation is called the service experience. (Orsingher & Marzocchi, 2003 as cited in Martn-Ruiz, Barroso-Castro & Rosa-Diaz, 2012, p.37) In marketing research the focus of understanding and evaluating service experience is in the perceived quality and consumer satisfaction (Martin-Ruiz, Barroso-Castro & Rosa-Diaz, 2012, p.38).

However, according to Orsingher and Marzocchi (2003 p.203 as cited in Martin-Ruiz et al. 2012) the evaluation of an experience is more complex than that and attributes that form the evaluation may instead to be connected on the set of consumer's values and consequences. According to the research of Martin-Ruiz et al. (2012) there are components of different levels that form the service experience in a hotel. The first level components are the service attributes, employees, processes, servscape, service equity and service convenience and price fairness are the second level and third level components are the most important; wellness, routine scape and sense of control components.

Wellness and routine scape are most likely to influence on service experience. According to them, wellness in experience means such as relaxation, privacy, safety, freedom and feeling of taken care of. This means that customers value feelings and comfort. They want to feel safe, relaxed and free and also privacy is important when they are guests at the hotel. They also want to escape from their routines and stimulate themselves with new things around them. According to the research service process and price fairness have weaker effect on the creation of service experience. This is explained as service process being more concentrated about avoiding problems and price fairness being important before the hotel visit. And these are not seeing so important factors during the service delivery when the experience happens. Another interesting factor of the research is that the role of employees and service convenience, such as time and effort savings, in the hotel don't have huge effect on the service experience rather they only have average effect. The research shows that the sense of control is important to those customers who have experienced a problem in the service before. (Martin-Ruiz et al. 2012, p. 49–50)

According to Martinez and Hobbi (2008, p.7) bad experiences are easier to remember than the good ones because bad experiences have more of intense emotions involved and in order to define a good customer service, there is a need to identify the bad experiences too. For example a customer service situation in a hotel where a receptionist makes a mistake that hurts the customer's feelings can be so harmful to the service experience that the customer won't remember any good things about it. Since customer service is connected to emotions it is very important to have employees who have good working skills in order to provide a service that satisfies customers. These working skills are such as great human manners and people skills to communicate with

each other. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p. 12) According to Martinez and Hobbi (2008, p.12) every person can learn good customer service skills and therefore training, coaching and education are in the essence of providing excellent customer service in the companies.

## **2.5 Service design**

To define service design, it is a human focused design style where the idea is to understand the nature of the relationships between different stakeholders in the businesses and create a value with the co-creation. (Kimbell, 2011, p.46,51) Service design is about making mistakes and finding as many mistakes as possible in order to find the best solution to the services. (Stickdorn, 2011, p.130)

The best way for hotels is to differentiate is by developing and personalizing the customer service (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008). In reception this would be a customer service concept that is designed by keeping mind customers' needs and what customers think as quality service in the service process. (Grönroos, 2009, p.223) There are several important factors to consider when designing a new service concept to a reception in a hotel. These are such as the functionality and technical aspects of service process and the way how customers have experienced them in the service process. (Grönroos, 2009, p.223) The way how people experience a situation can be the key of differentiation. Therefore, one good way is to focus on design and delivery of service experience. Furthermore, experiences are good way for companies to differentiate from other companies. (Yuan & Wu, 2008 as cited in Walls et al. 2011, p.169) To become a successful service company, companies need to listen to how customers evaluate their experiences (Martin-Ruiz et al, 2012, p.50).

Before designing a service there is a need for a good research about the topic. Services are for customers and therefore research on customer needs is essential. (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007, p.93) Successful companies are those that have unforgettable brand names with iconic products but beyond that are offering something extra to their customers (Tisch & Weber, 2007, p.207–208). The hotel customers who get pleasant experiences in a service situation without expecting them are truly satisfied. These spontaneous

surprises are the best way to make customers happy and ensure their loyalty to the company. (See Bitner et al. 2000, p.146)

In the beginning of this chapter it was explained the definition of service and now it is time to explore more about the service concept. Services are seen as systems that offer values to customers through products. This means that when people buy these products their deeper purchasing purpose is more than just the actual product, it is the outcome offered by these products and the services that are delivered to them by the products. Service is a system consisting of different components also known as touchpoints such as products, interactions and actions. These touchpoints are forming the concept of service. (See Stickdorn, 2012, p.17) This concept of service has two different types of services. These are core services and peripheral services. (Normann, 2000 as cited in William & Buswell, 2003, p.88; Grönroos, 2009, p.222) For example, a hotel is the core service with reception being the peripheral service. (Grönroos, 2009, p.222)

Core service satisfies the basic need of customers (Koivisto, 2011, p.44) but peripheral services make hotels more unique. (Grönroos, 2009, p. 223) Hotel guest is expecting to get a room and that is the core service of a hotel and if there is reception with amazing service, customer has experienced a peripheral service. Another example, a hotel guest who checks into a hotel is expecting to get the keys and information needed. But if the guest gets something extra with this as a peripheral service it can be the differentiator of the whole service experience. The differentiator in service is the process, how the service happens. (Grönroos, 2009, p.87) Customers' are expecting to have a good service as a core service and everything else that comes as extra, is enhancing the quality of the service and the experience of it (Koivisto, 2011, p.44).

Peripheral services are also divided into two different groups, the augmented services and the potential services. Augmented services are something that customers might not even recognise but are still extras. Organisation usually spends on money more on these service extras and they are usually needed in order to use the core service. (See Miettinen, 2011, p.44; William & Buswell, 2003, p.88). An example of this kind of service is the front desk at the reception. Customers might not notice how useful the desk in the reception is but it definitely makes the service easier and smoother. The other group of peripheral services is the potential services that are offered over customers' expectation, for example telling extra information to customers about

something that can solve their problem or just give them more suggested options such as where the best restaurant in the city is. Customers can be happy about the whole customer service experience over some little extra information receptionists think is good idea to tell them. Another example of potential peripheral service could be a free breakfast. Peripheral services help companies to differentiate from similar services available. (See William & Buswell, 2003, p. 88)

There are five principles of service design thinking in service design process. Firstly it should be user-centred where services are experienced the eyes of the customer, tested with the customer and improved after testing with the customer. In this way services satisfy better the needs of the customers. To find out the customers' needs different tools and approaches are processed. The next important principle is to be co-creative and holistic. It is important to take account the whole environment and stakeholders that are involved. Then finally service design thinking needs to be evidencing and sequencing by visual actions. (Stickdorn, 2011, p. 36–45)

Since service design is so broad concept there is not just one way to precede the method but instead there are certain steps that are important to take into account to get successful in service design. These steps are iterative in the whole service design process. (Stickdorn, 2011 p. 124)

The first step in the iterative design process is to explore the company's situation and find out what is the goal and culture of the organisation, in other words do the background research. This means that there is a need for putting much effort on the research part in the beginning to gain a full understanding of the company's situation from the perspective of current and potential customers. In this way designers will identify the real problem in the company or organisation. Service designers use different tools from different disciplines to gather the data and get inspirations. These tools and methods are such as ethnographic research, phenomenology, human centred design and experience design (Stickdorn, 2011, p. 128–129). Also quantitative methods are used, as it depends a lot about the research aim what type of method is needed (Tuulaniemi, 2011, p.142–143). Designers can experience the situations as customers or as employees depending on the organisation and where the main design focus is. There is a big challenge to design services as they are intangible performances or acts rather than objects and they occur in the physical environment. They are dependent on interactions.

(Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011, p.16) In this stage design thinking means the ability to think as a customer and see the service in her/his eyes. Good design thinking is to feel empathy towards the others around and notice things that no one else notices. It is about following own instincts and research on human behaviour. (Miettinen, 2011, p.31–32)

After an intensive research process designers have enough details and information to start the creation process. This means building and creating ideas with keeping mind co-creation and iteration. Iteration means prototyping, testing, analysing and refining the work in progress and co-creation means the collaboration between users and the service provider and make sure all the stakeholders are involved in the design process. Service design is about testing and making mistakes and repeating this until everything works well. (Stickdorn in Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011, p. 130–131)

The third step in the design process is a reflection which involves iteration process of testing the ideas and concepts (Stickdorn, 2011, p.132). This step is very challenging, because services are intangible and therefore hard to test. Creating a mental picture, with keeping mind the importance of emotions, for tourists about the service is hard but there are different methods to use in order to generate a vision that corresponds the actual service the most. These methods are such as prototyping, roleplaying and combining a story through a comic strip, story board, videos and photos. (Stickdorn in Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011, p.132–133)

The final step is the implementation where the outcome of the process is a new service or more likely a process of change. The change management has a huge role in this part of the service design process. There are three valuable steps in change management and these are planning the change, implementing the change and reviewing the change. This change will happen after many tests and consumer reviews and after implementation it is likely to continue back to the exploration process to evaluate the concept again which describes the actual core point of the whole service design process well; repeat the phases until it is good enough and change is ready to happen. (See Stickdorn, 2011, p. 134–135)



### 3. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

*H1. Customers who are likely to use self-service technology in hotel receptions are motivated by extrinsic reasons”*

Oh et al. suggest that tourists who would use SST are not thinking about the process and emotions related to it. The important thing to them is the outcome. Extrinsic motivations are such as: time saving, self-control and avoiding congestion. And when tourists rather interact with a human being they are motivated by emotions and things that are connected to emotions which are called intrinsic motivations. Customers won't use intrinsic motivations to use SST because there is social pressure in the hotel reception. (Oh et al. 2011, p. 693)

*H2. “Customers who are likely to use self-service have experienced a problem with traditional customer service before.”*

The research shows that the sense of control is important to those customers who have experienced a problem in the service before. (Martin-Ruiz et al. 2012, p. 49-50)

*H4. “High service quality means human interaction and personalized service”*

Good quality means fulfilling customers' wants and needs.

According to researchers about customer expectations customers want flexibility and personalization. They appreciate service employees who use their own common sense with things and don't follow the rules too strictly. Employees' situational awareness is important which means that employee knows how to act and behave in service situations. (See Bitner et al. 2000, p. 142) Another justification is that customers want employees to connect with them on emotional level and give them unique service. (Martinez & Hobbi, 2008, p. 30-31) In hotels high quality service has traditionally been connected to customer service being highly personalized and involving a lot of interaction with the service staff at the hotel. (See Fisher & Beatson, 2002, 62-64)

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methods and tools of this study, to who this study is targeted to and what the reasons behind these methodological choices are. This study is consisted of a secondary research, in the form of literature review, with hypothesis based on the theory and primary research, in the form of survey method with questionnaire being the survey tool.

Although this study is part of author's service design process, the methods used are not following the normal service design practice. In service design the most common approach to study techniques is qualitative approach with ethnographic research (Hämäläinen, Vilkka & Miettinen, 2011, p.64). The qualitative research is seen as better option because the idea is not to rush to find a solution right away when designing new services but instead to develop something step by step and with slow pace. (Stickdorn, 2011) However, this study required a quantitative research method regarding the nature of it. In quantitative research the amount of data is more important than the quality of it. Research is structured, data is collected in numbers and analysed with statistics. An important, if not the most important, difference to qualitative research method is that, in quantitative approach the focus is to pay attention to the bigger picture of the research problem when analysing the results rather than to focus on one or two aspects of it, in other words quantity counts more. (Finn et al, 2000, Lewin, 2005)

In this study it was very important to author to get familiar with the theory and understand the key concepts and only after this phase to design and to plan the empirical research based on the theory. Therefore, the approach to the theory was deductive. Deductive approach is frequently used in quantitative data. (See Finn et al. 2000, 15, 40–41) It means that after developing the theory the hypotheses are formed and they create the basis for the primary research. In that sense, secondary sources were very crucial for this research before collecting the primary data. The reason for author to use both the hypotheses and research question is obvious. Hypothesis of the study made designing the questions for questionnaire much easier. Questionnaire tested the hypotheses and after analysing the data with statistics, the results from questionnaire analysis brought the answer for the research question as well. Testing the hypotheses not only tell whether hypothesis are right but also if they are wrong and that makes the

research more interesting. (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007 pp. 117–118) Statistics are used in large numerical datasets (Lewin, 2005, p.215) to summarize the information from huge quantities to easier readable data (Hanneman, Kposowa & Riddle, 2012, p.5). According to Hanneman et al. (2012, p.5) describing variations and covariations, inferring population, testing hypothesis and predicting are the main ways to use statistics in social sciences.

#### **4.1 The view of a quantitative researcher**

Many researchers define themselves for the methodological choices they make. According to Muijs (2004 p.4) this has lead world of scientific researchers to be divided into two different worldviews also called as epistemologies. The view of the researcher in quantitative research is to be realist or even sometimes called as positivist. A realist use objective research methods and is as detached with the research as possible. A qualitative researcher is called ‘subjectivist’ and is opposite to realist. (Muijs, 2004, p.4)

Within quantitative views it is possible to reveal the ‘truth’ when doing research with maximising the objectivity. In practice this means that researcher tries not to be involved with the research by taking any sides and with right methodological choices can find the true answers to the research problems. But that is more or less radical thinking in this epistemology. (Muijs, 2004, p. 4-5) In real life research, such as in this study, it is very difficult task to be very detached with the study. In this study author has used her own experience as a help by understanding the theory and research problem better. Hence, there is some involvement seen already in the earlier stages of the study. But as Muijs describes the radical ‘realistic’ or ‘positivist’ view, research of this kind is very problematic. Researcher is part of the world that is being observed and therefore is already involved in it and that makes it impossible to be totally detached. Researches done in the past have proved that everything affects to everything, in other words, researcher’s opinions and beliefs are influenced to the research results and the way research has been done. And not only the researcher’s own mind affects to the research but also the ever changing political and social environment has their influence. (Muijs, 2004, p.4–5)

Therefore, in this study the author's view is more or less complex than what has been described above. A better name for this type of view can be called as post-positivism, where researcher accepts that it is impossible to be totally objective or detached and instead of 'finding the truth' more important is to present the reality as it is, as best as she/he can. (Muijs, 2004, p.5–6) Author of this study explains this as finding out the opinions of Finnish young adults about service quality in the present day. As mentioned in the introduction of study aims: "It is important to get a good understanding of the present situation..." in other words, the reality.

## **4.2 Sample of the study**

The target population for this study is Finnish young adults aged between 20 and 35. As ideal it would be to research the whole population of Finnish young adults, it is impossible and too time consuming. Therefore, only part of the population has been taken. This is called a sample, which is defined as a subset of the population (Hanneman et al, 2012, p.5). The idea of a sampling is that generalization can be made by making inferences about variation in a population based on the information about the sample (Hanneman et al, 2012, p.5). It is important to select the sample well because that group will represent the whole population in statistics. Statistic is "the corresponding value of the sample". (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasab, 2010, p. 51)

Since the core purpose of the study is to discover the opinions of Finnish young adults about service quality in customer service situations in hotels and find out whether they are ready for the self- service technology in there in future, it is only natural that the sample unit is Finnish young adults. The reason behind choosing them is that they are the future users of hotels and their opinion matters the most in this study.

In this kind of research, where the aim is to make generalisations and the sample should be as representative as possible, probability sampling method would have been the best option. Probability sampling means a sampling technique where all the units in this case people in the population have equal chance to be selected as a participant to the research, and this technique is called simple random sampling. (Lewin, 2005, p.217) There were little bit over million young adults (ages between 20-34) in Finland in the

end of 2014 (Statistic Finland, 2015) Therefore, the total random sampling would have been impossible in this research, not to mention about studying the whole population. Author faced challenges also with time and financial issues when collecting the data. Therefore, instead of choosing one or the other author is used both the probability sampling and the non-probability sampling. Part of the questionnaires was conducted online and part traditional way. Traditional way enabled author to choose participants following the random sampling technique. Whereas conducting survey online was limited to the email list of University of Lapland and Facebook. This method followed the convenience sampling technique, where the access to the respondents was most convenient. (Lewin, 2004, p.219)

### **4.3 Data collection**

The tool for survey method was self-completed questionnaire, which is the most used research style in tourism research. Questionnaire was ideal for this kind of research where the aim was to collect as much answers as possible in a short period of time and make generalisations to the population (Finn et al. 2000, 4) Nature of the survey method was cross-sectional. This means that the questionnaire measures at least two variables in one point in time and the sample group is analysed as a whole group. (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, 216)

Questionnaire was divided into three sections. It was designed by author's view based on her secondary research (already published information) of service quality in customer service and the reasons likely to use self-service-views. In service quality view inspired by Grönroos (2009) service quality consists of two parts, expectations of the service and the actual experience of the service. This view comprised the first and second part of the questionnaire. The third part of the questionnaire was about future views and this was inspired by a view from Oh et al. (2011) about self-service users being motivated by either extrinsic or intrinsic motivations when using SST (Self-service technology). Hypotheses of the study had a big part of designing the questionnaire. They were formed during and after the theory and had a huge supportive place with research question in questionnaire design.

The language of the questionnaire was Finnish as the participants of the survey were Finnish and it was the best way to get as reliable answers as possible. Almost all of the questions in the questionnaire were closed questions with pre-coded answers with only two questions with a space to leave an answer. This made questionnaire clear and not complicated to follow. (The Finnish questionnaire and English version of the questionnaire are attached in the appendices part in the end of the thesis.)

The first part of the questionnaire measured the expectations of a customer service in the hotel reception. The questionnaire was designed for respondents not to be aware of what was the main research question. The reason for this was that their answers would be honest and not to be focused on what was the reason behind the questions, instead to focus on every question individually. Hence the results were interesting to analyse. All of the questions in two of the first parts of questionnaire were to measure customers' opinions generally about customer service quality in hotel receptions in Finland. The last part of the questionnaire was the most important part for the study. It measured whether respondents are happy to change from human based service to self-service technology in future hotel receptions if this was an alternative service concept. The question, where respondents could leave their own answer, also called open-ended question, was why respondents would or would not use SST in future. As this was the research question, it was important that respondents had an opportunity to explain themselves better if theory had not covered it yet.

The questionnaire was designed carefully by using Webropol software online and it was delivered through different channels, online and traditional way. These channels were Facebook, University faculties' email list, email, and as a paper version. The paper version was conducted in the city of Tampere, Finland. The main reasons for choosing Facebook as the main channel was its' speed of getting answers and also its sustainable nature. Facebook was originally created by Zukerberg in order to help students to identify other students online. Since this, it has expanded across the users worldwide and in present day it has become the easiest socialising network between all age groups. But because of its original idea, it is extremely popular within young adults. (Kirsner & Karpinski, 2010, p. 1239)

The pilot testing for the questionnaire was conducted in Tampere in March 2014. The time for pilot testing was one day and people were chosen for the test using the random

sampling technique. Pilot testing is very important in survey method. It tests the validity and reliability and also the overall quality of the questions and whether they are well understood and designed. Without piloting the questionnaire researcher wouldn't get a feedback and or chance to correct the mistakes. (Finn et al. 2000, 102) There were couple changes made in the result of feedback and then testing it again made it better and entirely understood from respondents' point of view. This was essential to do at this phase. It was very important that the questionnaire was well designed and it was clear and easy to understand the questions, because when conducted online there was no possibility to ask any further instructions.

This quantitative study was non-experimental research. It means that it took place in a real life setting rather than a staged place, such as laboratory, and researcher was not able to control the variables in any way. (Muijs, 2004, p. 13)

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

After conducting successful 476 answers it was ready to start the analysis of the study. This was done with statistics using SPSS programme to describe and interpret data. SPSS stands for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. (Lewin, 2005, p.221) It is widely used in different fields, such as governments, businesses and academic institutions around the world. (Finn et al, 2000, p.164)

There are many statistical methods and the biggest challenge in SPSS analysis is to choose the right technique in order to get wanted results (Lewin, 2005, p. 226). In this study it was very important to understand the theory well and the purpose of the research problem before choosing any statistical techniques. The purpose of the empirical research was to find out the current situation in Finland rather than explain the reasons of the phenomenon. And this is the essence of descriptive statistics. (Lewin, 2005, p.215) Addition to this descriptive statistics allow data to be discovered before any further analysis is taken place and that was also important for study like this. (Lewin, 2005, p.215) Therefore, the first step of data analysis was to use descriptive statistics to create frequencies tables and graphs. This part of the analysis belonged to

the univariate analysis, where the analysis is focused on individual variables. The questionnaire included nominal and ordinal variables also called as the levels of measurement. Nominal variable refers to values that are not able to put in any kind of order. These were such as gender and residence in the study. Whereas, ordinal variables stand for values that can be put in order. (Muijs, 2004, p 97) Examples of ordinal variables are, for example, questions that ask respondents to provide opinion with an agreement level. After descriptive statistics, the next step was bivariate analysis, where the statistical method was cross-tabulations. Bivariate analysis describes two variables and the importance is in the relationship of these two. (Muijs, 2004, p.113) There are two questions where respondents had a possibility to describe their answer by words. These open-ended questions were analysed also in SPSS by first identifying common themes of the answers and then coding them up in the data sheet.

Hypotheses of this study were based on the theory and they were used as a help to design the questionnaire. In probability sampling hypotheses are tested by inferential statistics but because this study was not entirely based on probability sampling, results would not have been statistically valid. Inferential statistics stands for techniques in statistics to tell if the results of the study are statistically significant and by testing the correlation, it tells if generalisations can be made to the population. (Finn et al. 2000 p. 216–218) Therefore, the results are not totally reliable when making generalisations but they are definitely giving author a good direction.

#### **4.5 Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are important aspects to consider when conducting the empirical study. These two aspects define the quality of the measurement in the study; how valid and how reliable the study measurement is. (Muijs, 2004, p. 65)

When designing the empirical part of the study, in this case the questionnaire, it was very crucial to know the theory well and put time and effort to understand the actual meaning of the study purpose. It sounds like it should be the very basic knowledge and easy for researcher to know her own study well enough to design the questionnaire the



way it is equivalent with the theory. But this is not the case. It is actually very challenging to design something that matches exactly what needs to be measured and gives valuable answers to the researcher. And that is the validity of the study. (Muijs, 2004, p. 65) Validity of the questionnaire tells how applicable the questions in the questionnaire are and do the questions clarify what the study is about and what the purpose of the study is. (Finn et al, 2000)

There are different aspects of validity and important one is to test the questionnaire with participants before conducting the real study. This practice involves couple participants, researcher and the questionnaire. It tests the content of the study, how long the answering to it takes, what type of problems there might occur and whether there is any mistakes, to mention a few. (Muijs, 2004, p.66)

Another important aspect of the quality of measurement is reliability. It is divided into two parts; repeated measurement and internal consistency. Repeated measurement refers to the idea that the measurement in this case the questionnaire should always give the same result with a same participant. For example, if researcher is asking participant to take another go with the questionnaire another day, the results should be the same as the other day. (Muijs, 2004, p.72) Whereas, internal consistency refers to questions asked in the questionnaire and their correlation with the scale score. This means that every question in the questionnaire should be related to the purpose of the study. And whether there is questions that are not related it lowers the reliability. (Muijs, 2004, p.74) In other words, reliability of the measurement means the reliability of the results. (Finn et al, 2000) This is challenging especially when measuring opinions, because people may change their views from day to day. With the aim of receiving reliable results the key is to design the questionnaire very carefully making it simple and clear. According to Muijs, (2004, p.74) measuring attitudes, questionnaires with 4 to 10 questions are sufficiently reliable.

## **5. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

This chapter explains the key findings of the empirical study. These findings are displayed by tables and graphs, created by SPSS programme. The first part presents the results of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. These were measuring expectations of customer service in hotel reception, past experiences in hotel reception and future views about hotel reception. The first two sections area cover a description of the service quality from respondents' point of view and the third section finds out the answer for the research question. The second part discusses whether hypotheses are agreeing with the study results.

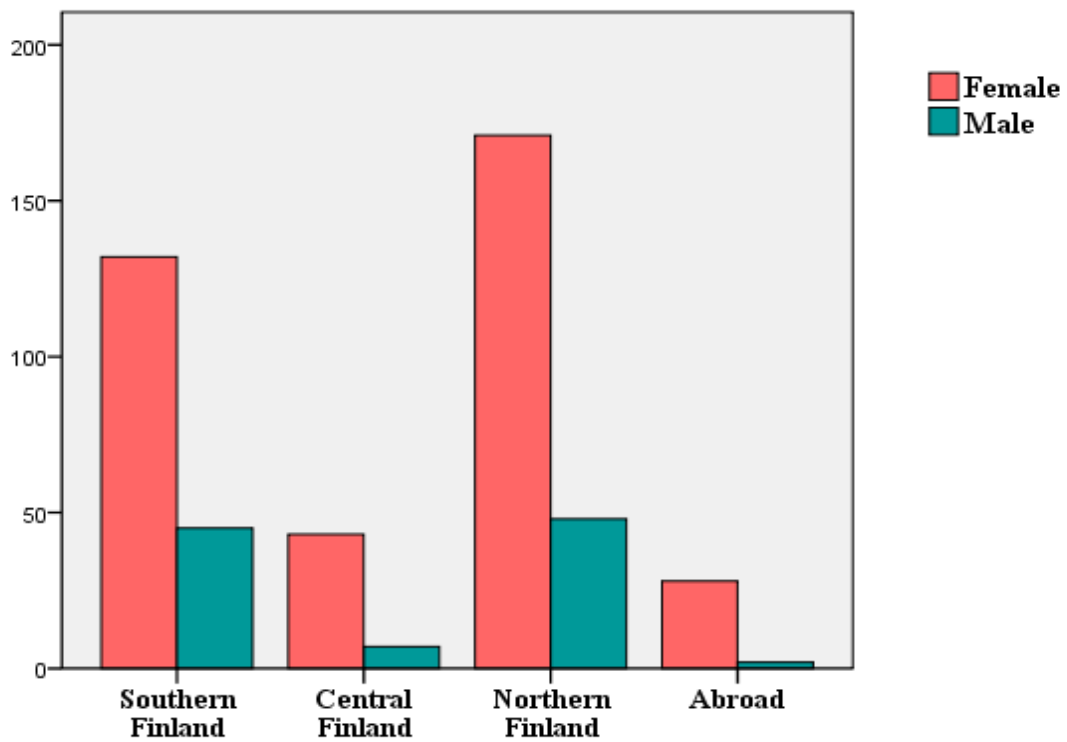
The purpose of this study was to find out the current situation in Finland about service quality in Finnish hotel receptions; tourists' expectations, experiences and satisfaction towards receptionists working abilities. The research question was, whether Finnish young adults are ready for self-service technology in future hotel receptions in Finland. All the questions in the questionnaire were to measure the respondents' opinions about reception customer service generally in Finnish hotels.

### **5.1 Questionnaire results**

In total, there were 476 answers both online and paper version included in the study results. Figure 1 illustrates the sex distribution in this study. Female responds were dominating by 78.6% of the whole amount of the study and male responds had 21.4% in total. According to statistics of Finland there are slightly less women than men in the age group between 20 and 34, (Statistics Finland, 2014) which makes it interesting to notice that in this study the sex distribution was the opposite. Most of the respondents were from Southern and Northern Finland. This is displayed in figure 2.



**Figure 1: Sex distribution of the study**

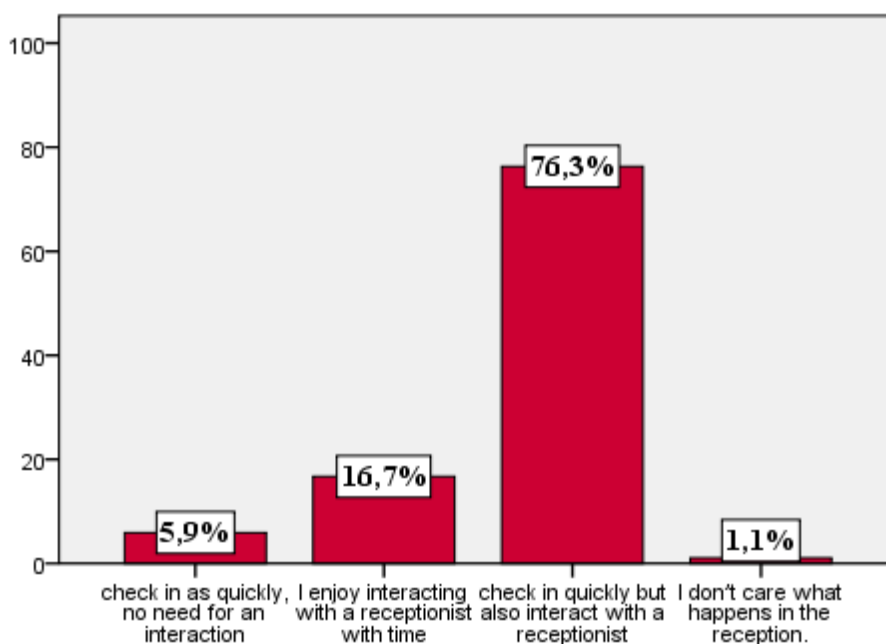


**Figure 2: Respondents' residence distribution**

The reason for this may be the channels survey was conducted with. The paper version was conducted in the Southern part of Finland and the link shared to the questionnaire via email was sent to the people of University of Lapland. Therefore, it makes sense that the residence of the respondents was distributed around these areas. However, Facebook was considered as the main channel for questionnaire distribution and the residence of Facebook users is unknown.

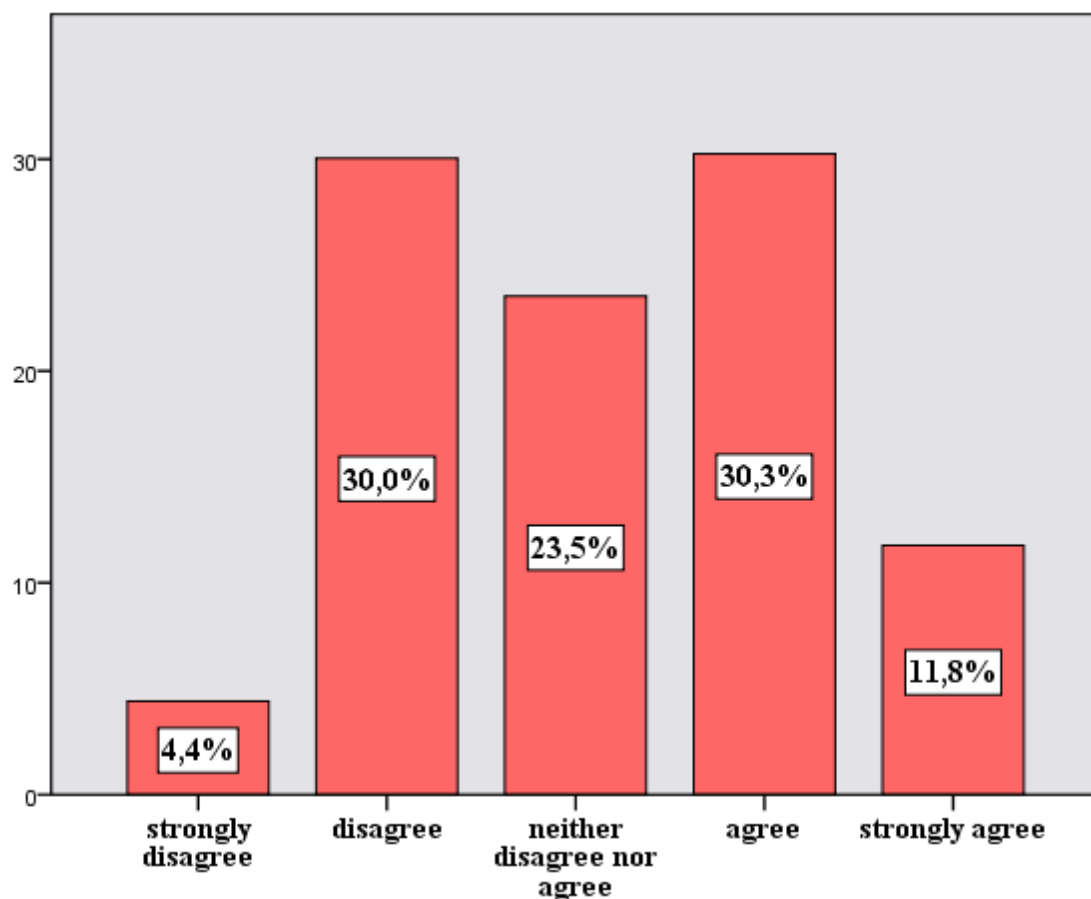
The rest of the personal information asked in the questionnaire was respondents' age and nationality. These criteria were used to make sure respondents belonged to the right sample group. When a questionnaire is conducted online, it is sometimes difficult to limit the answers only to those that are wanted. Hence, those that didn't belong to the desired sample group were deleted in the beginning of SPSS analysis. Fortunately there were enough respondents belonging to the right sample and the quantity of respondents was still above expectations. The age group of the respondents were between 20 and 35.

The first part of the questionnaire was to measure the customer expectations of customer service in hotel reception, when customer arrives at the hotel. In this part the focus was to find out whether customers in Finland expect to have interaction with a receptionist, how important this interaction is for them and is it essential part for their stay at the hotel.



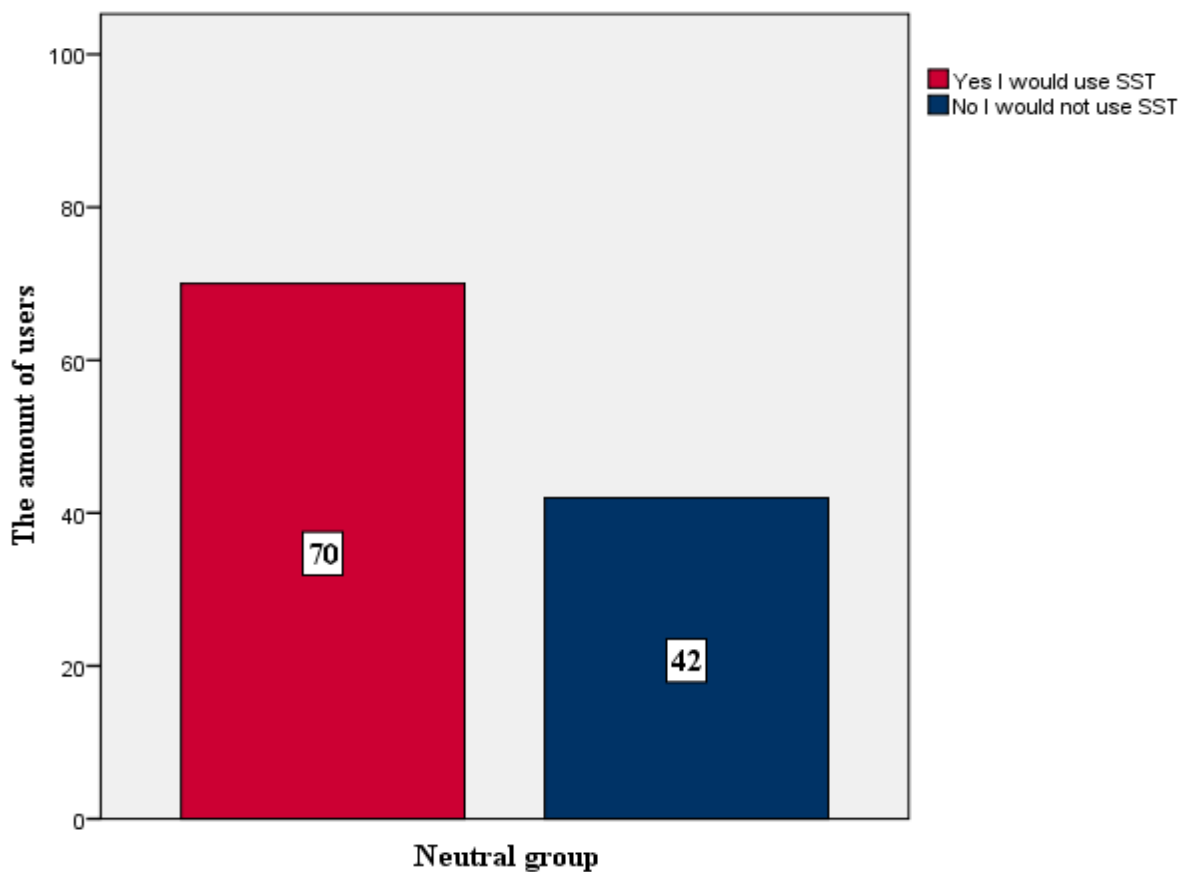
**Figure 3: Customer perceptions of check in situation**

Regarding this, as illustrated in figure 3, 76.3 % of the respondents want to check in quickly but also interact with receptionist. 16.07 % of the respondents enjoy interacting with receptionist with time, in other words customers in this group of respondents want to hear as much as information about hotel and its services the receptionist can provide and interaction with receptionist is an essential part of the visit. Only very few, 1.1 % of the respondents don't care what happens at the reception at all as long as they get their keys to the room. And 5.9 % don't have any need for interaction with a receptionist. This implies that most of the customers in this study find interaction with receptionist in a hotel important and essential to their visit in hotel. The majority of the respondents want to have an interaction with the receptionist but instead of hearing all the information about services, they want the check in to be quick.



**Figure 4: The degree of agreement whether check in should be simplified and quicker**

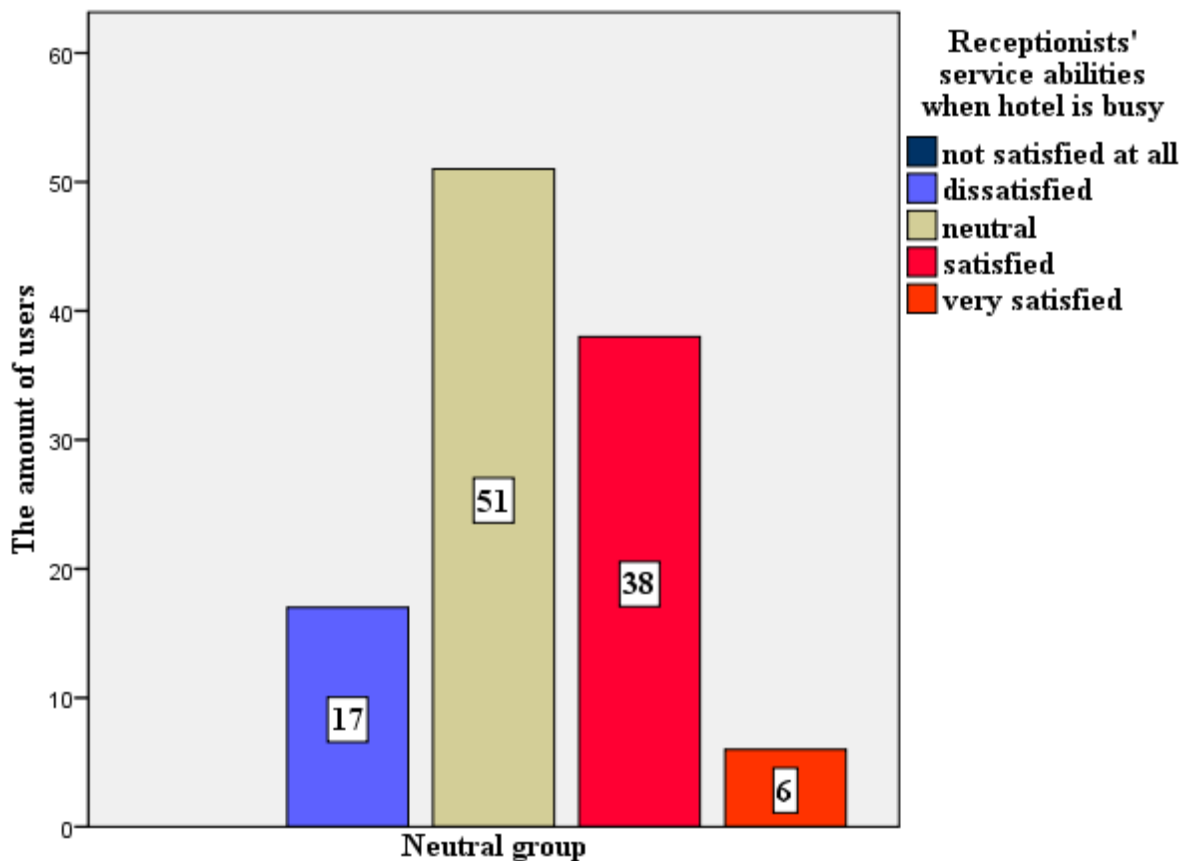
Figure 4 displays the levels of agreement about whether the check in process should be quicker and simplified. 42.1 percent of the respondents agree that check in should be simplified and quicker than it already is. In which 11.8 percent of these strongly agree with it. The quantity of respondents who agree to this is very similar to the quantity of disagreeing with it. Those respondents who agree are 30.3 percent of all the respondents and respondents who disagree are 30 percent of the total. The significance is between those who strongly agree to those who strongly disagree. The group of respondents who strongly agree is much bigger compared to the group of respondents who strongly disagree. Respondents who are neutral about this are also significant in the sense of responses. Whether these respondents are more likely to agree or to disagree is not acknowledged and therefore need to be taken into consideration. Comparing this ‘neutral group’ to other answers can give a right direction whether they are more likely to disagree or agree.



**Figure 5: Relationship between respondents who neither disagreed nor agreed whether check in should be simplified and SST use**

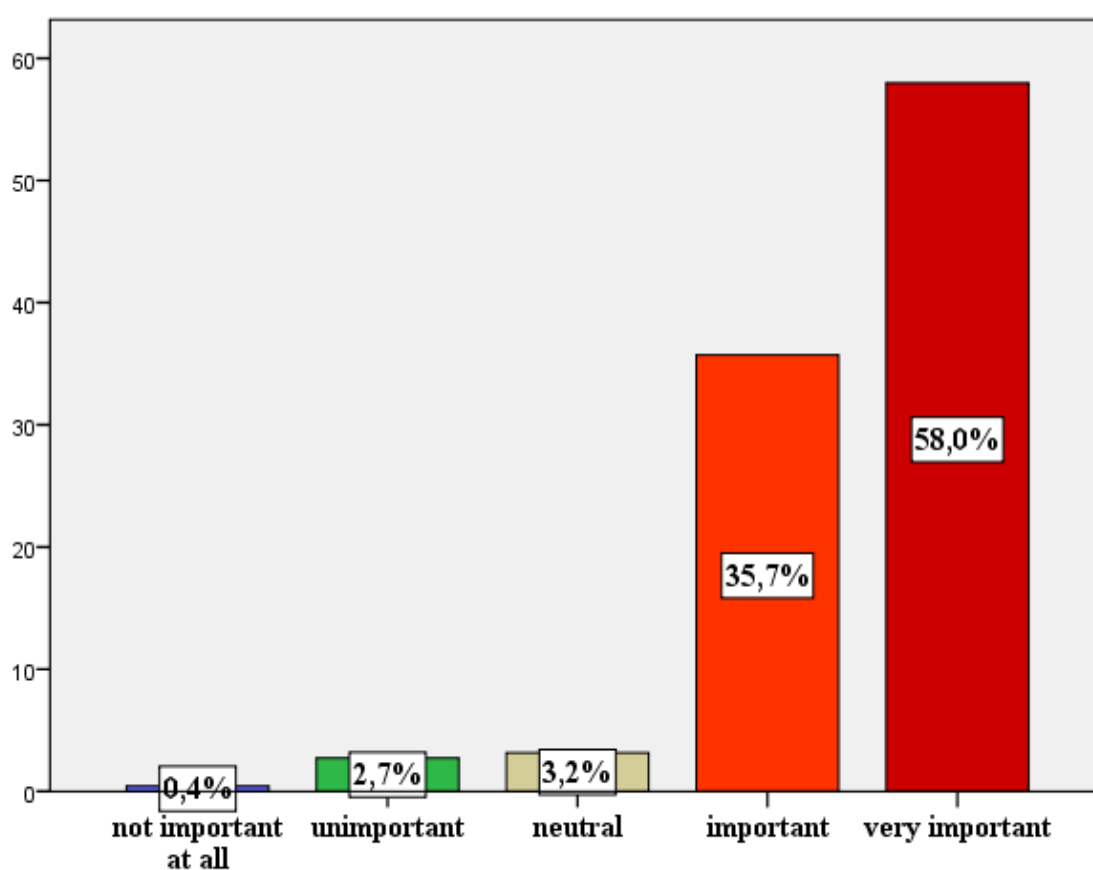
For example, Figure 5 displays a neutral group of answers with its association with SST use. There are 112 responses of ‘neutral group’ in total and majority of the respondents of this group would use SST instead of human interaction in a hotel reception.

When measuring a neutral group with the experience variables such as receptionists’ service abilities when hotel is busy, most of the responses were neutral again. This is displayed in figure 6. The second largest responses were satisfied with receptionists’ when hotel being busy. With being satisfied with customer service in general the results show that neutral group is mainly satisfied. Therefore, according to the results neutral group of respondents regarding to the question about check in process functionality would use SST more likely instead of interact with receptionist but are also satisfied with overall service experience with receptionists. Because of this it is unlikely that neutral group is against SST.



**Figure 6: Relationship between respondents who are neutral about check in to be simplified and whether they are satisfied of the service abilities when hotel is busy**

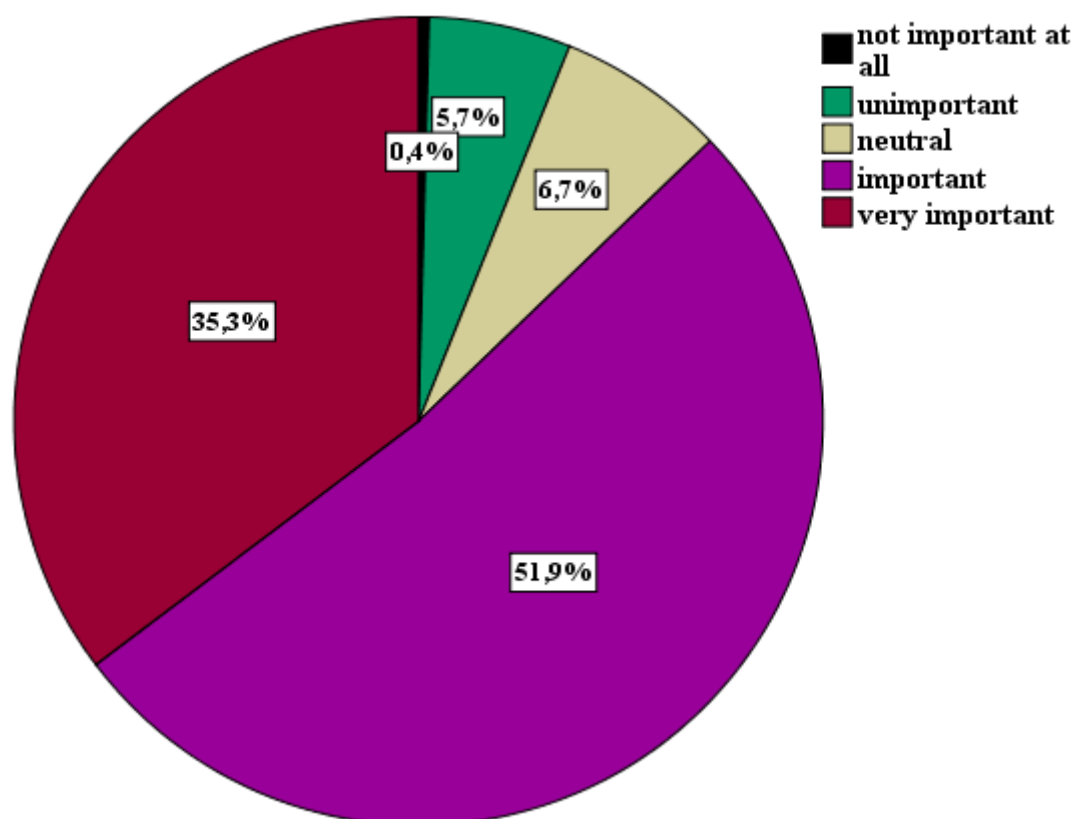
Regarding to the interaction with receptionist over 90 percent of the respondents are agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is in very important position when arriving in to hotel. Only 3 percent of the respondents don't see interaction with receptionist important in customer service. This is displayed in Figure 7. It is also well associated with the other questions in this section about the importance of receptionist.



**Figure 7: The degree of importance about interaction with a receptionist**



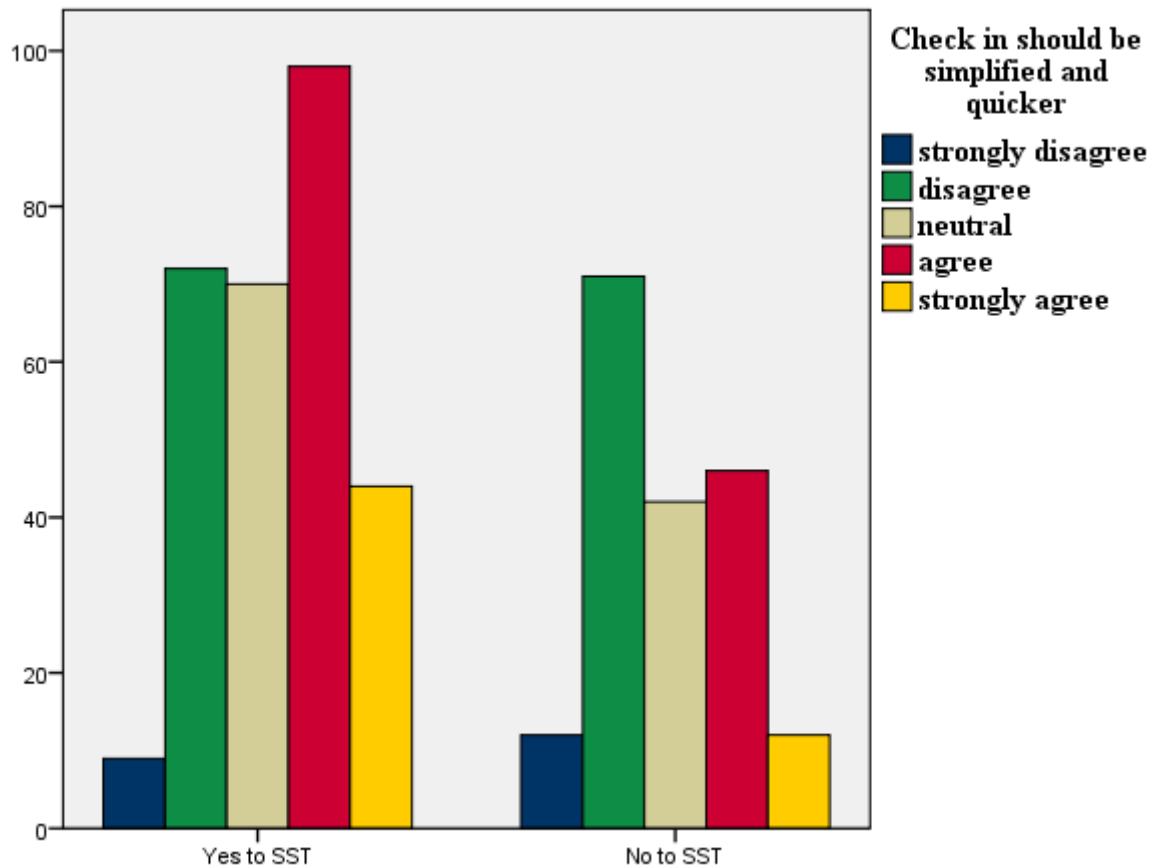
Almost 90 percent of all the respondents see the reception environment and atmosphere important. 35 percent think it is very important. Around 5 percent don't think the environment and atmosphere is important at all and the rest of the respondents didn't know whether it is important or unimportant. This is displayed in figure 8.



**Figure 8: The degree of importance of the environment and atmosphere of the reception**

Those customers who would prefer SST instead of human interaction agree with the statement that check in should be simplified and quicker. This is presented in figure 9. But respondents who would not use SST disagree with this. This means that majority of the respondents who prefer traditional customer service rather than interacting with receptionist do not see any reason why check in situation in hotels should be simpler

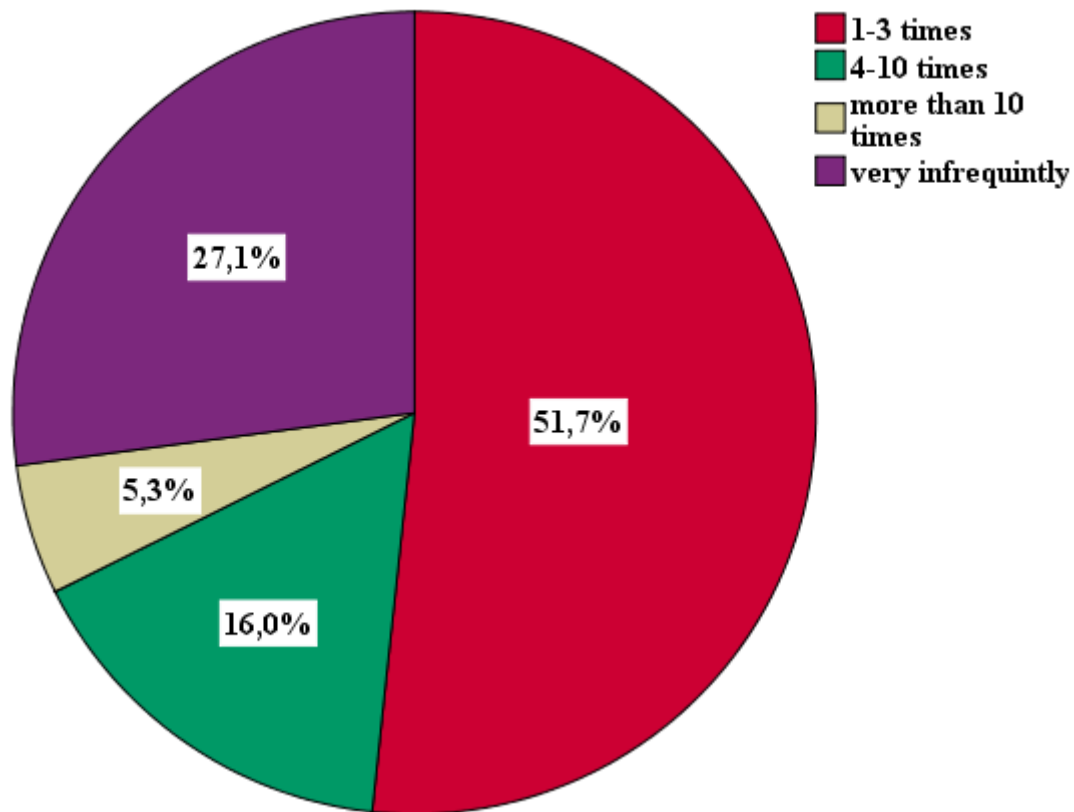
than it already is. Surprisingly though, some of the customers in this group strongly agree with the statement.



**Figure 9: The relationship between respondents' degree of agreement about check in and whether to use SST or not**

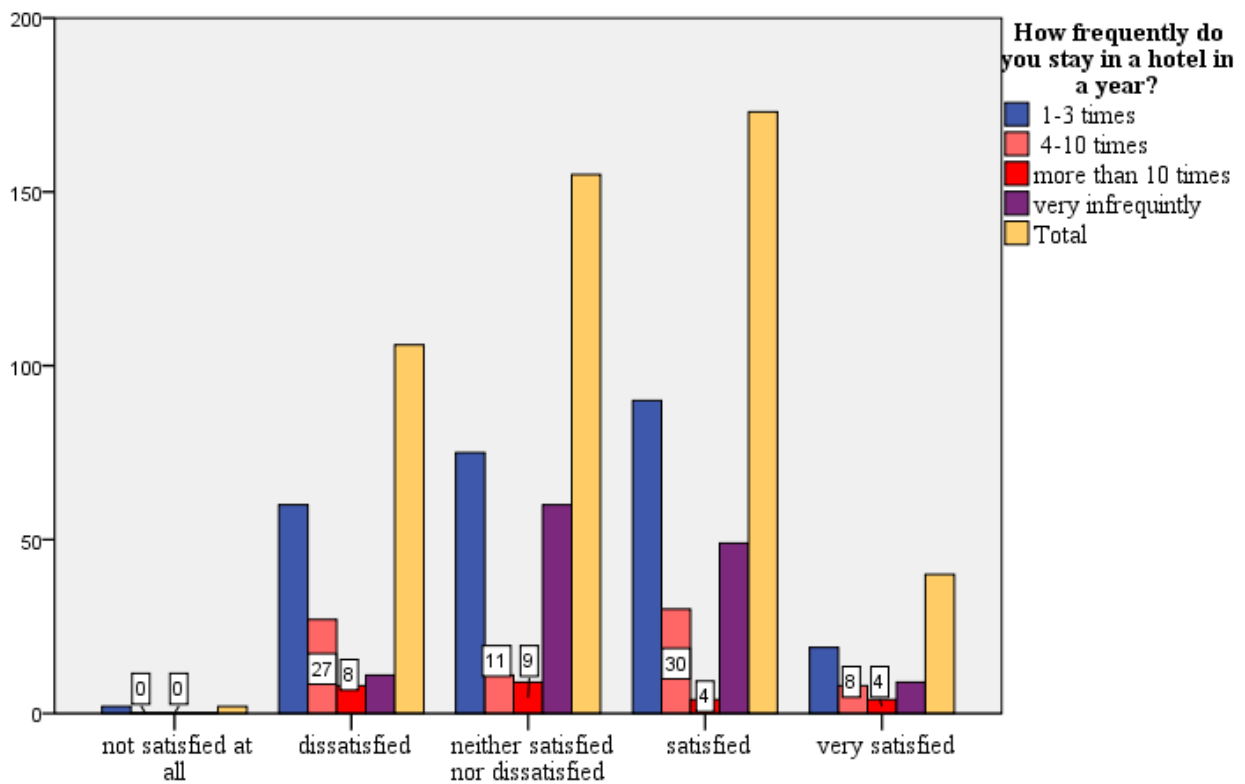
When measuring past experiences visiting a certain place, it is vital to know how often respondents deal with issues asked in the questionnaire. This not only helps the researcher to analyse the responses but also give reader an idea of the customers' frequency of visits. As figure 10 shows over 50 percent of the respondents use hotels around 1 to 3 times in a year and 16 percent 4 to 10 times in a year. This shows that fairly majority of the respondents in the study use hotels in Finland quite frequently and as a result their view of past experiences in hotel receptions is valid. This means that results of this part can be more reliable than those would be who only use hotels very

infrequently and therefore have not very many experiences of interacting with receptionists.



**Figure 10: The amount of times respondents stay in a hotel in a year**

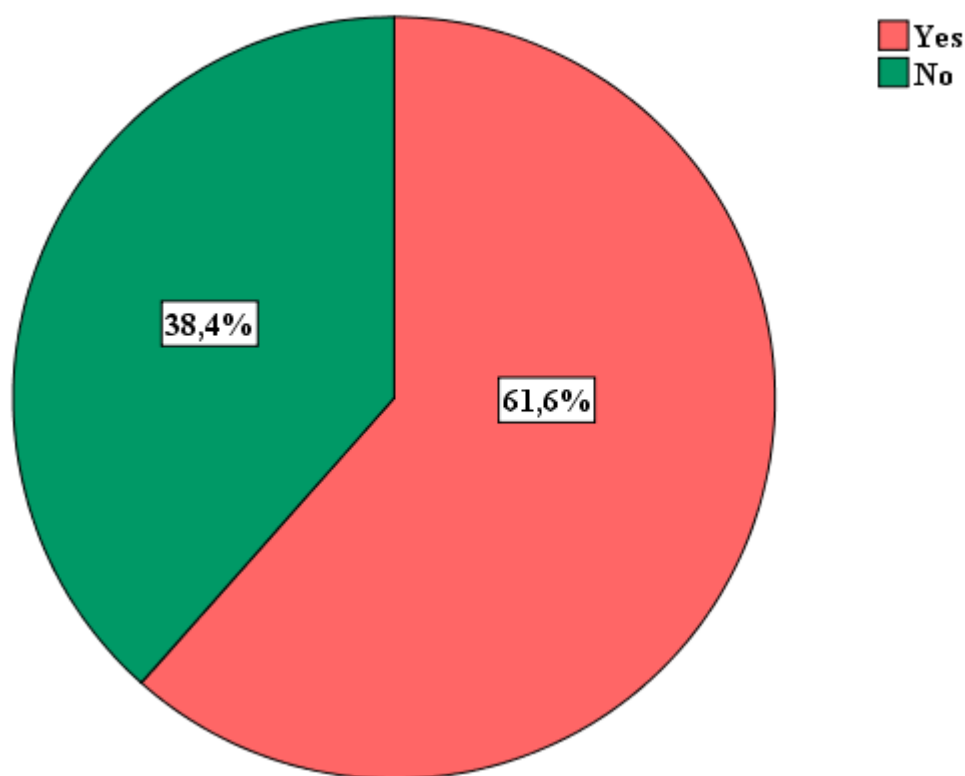
Hence, the questions about the experience of interacting with receptionists were analysed considering the fact that some has visited many times and others not so often. The questionnaire measured the following variables by customers' point of view; receptionists' positive attitude when resolving problems, their ability to resolve problems quickly, their general problem solving abilities, their service abilities when hotel is busy, customer service skills and their professionalism in customer service situation. Overall, customers' satisfaction towards receptionists according to results was good. Responses did not show any differences relating their visiting times in a year except in the situation where hotel is busy. The average answer for all the other situations was satisfied.



**Figure 11: Customer satisfaction of receptionists' service abilities when hotel is busy**

However, description of a situation, where the hotel environment is busy, was interesting referring to those customers who visit hotels more than 10 times and also those who visit 4 to 10 times in a year. Both groups displayed a high level of dissatisfaction when compared to their total amount of answers. Respondents who visit hotel the most are both satisfied and dissatisfied about the receptionists' abilities to serve well in a busy hotel. This factor would not have been noticed without dividing respondents in to groups of how frequently they visit hotels. This is displayed in figure 11.

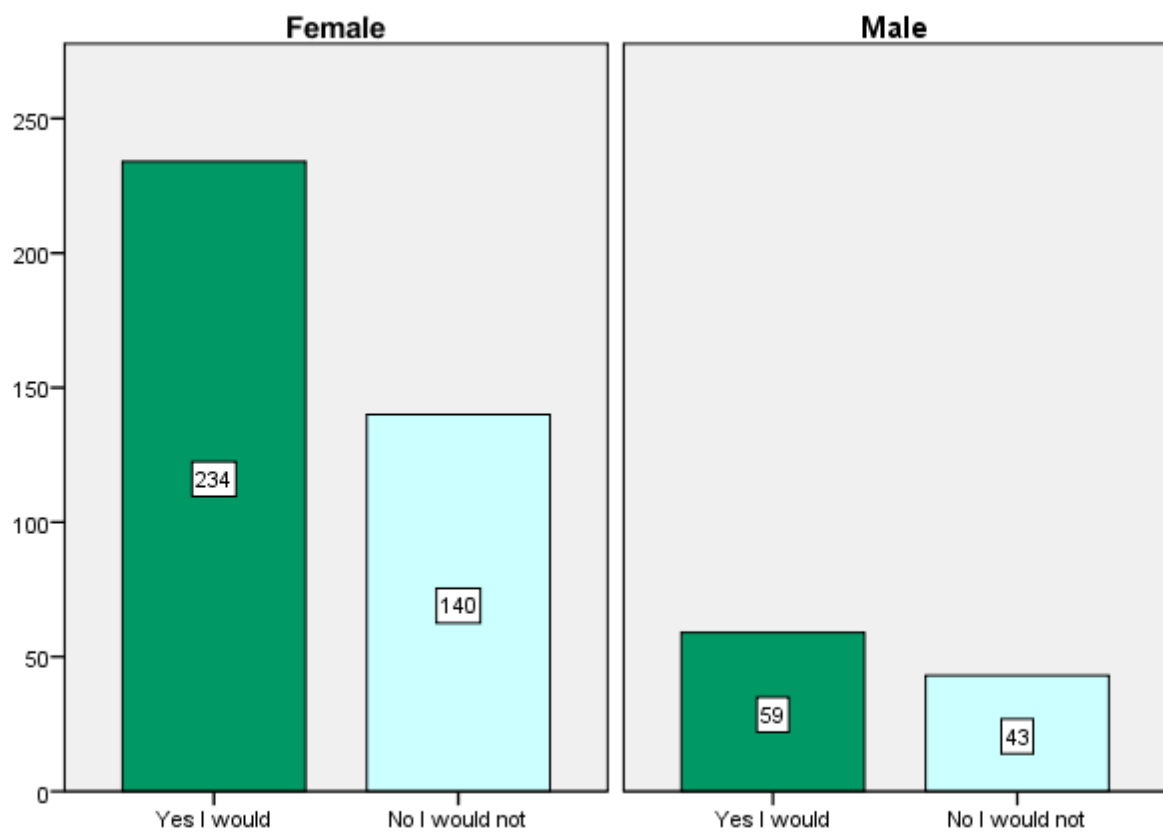
The final section of the questionnaire was to measure the customers' views on future service concepts in hotel reception. The most important question in the questionnaire, as well as the research question, was to find out if customers would choose self-service technology (SST) in future instead of a human interaction in hotel receptions. The important aspect was not to reveal this question in the beginning of the questionnaire in order to avoid leading respondents' opinions to any particular direction in the first two sections of the questionnaire. And because of this, the results were quite surprising,



**Figure 12: The amount of people who would use SST and who would not use it**

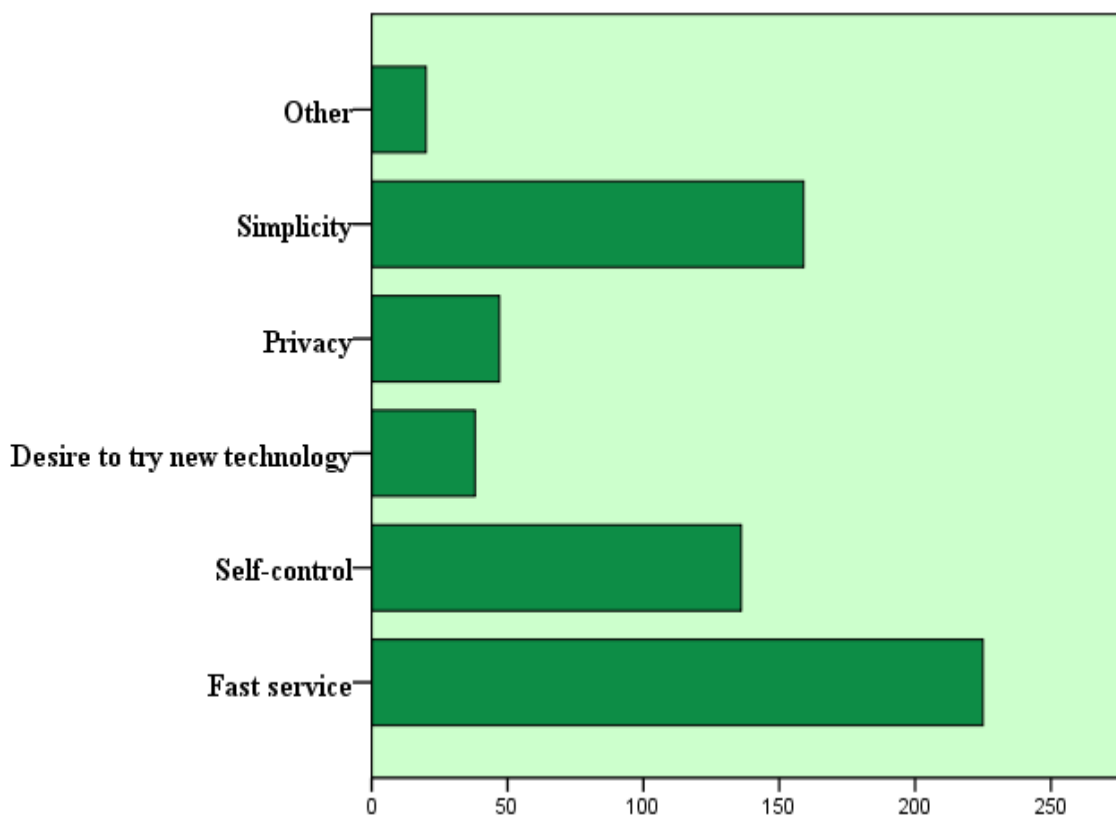
However, to get to the core of this study, results expose that the majority of the respondents would choose to use SST instead of receptionist when arriving in to hotel. This is displayed in figure 12. Over 60 percent of all the respondents would use SST

instead of interacting with a receptionist. The question does not tell whether the receptionist is totally replaced by SST in this situation, but it is not relevant in this study. The only thing that matters in this study is that 293 out of 476 responses would choose SST over human interaction. As figure 13 displays, there was a low level of difference between male and female responses in this question. About half of both sex responses were either against the SST use or unsure of its value.



**Figure 13: Sex distribution of respondents who would use SST and those who would not use it**

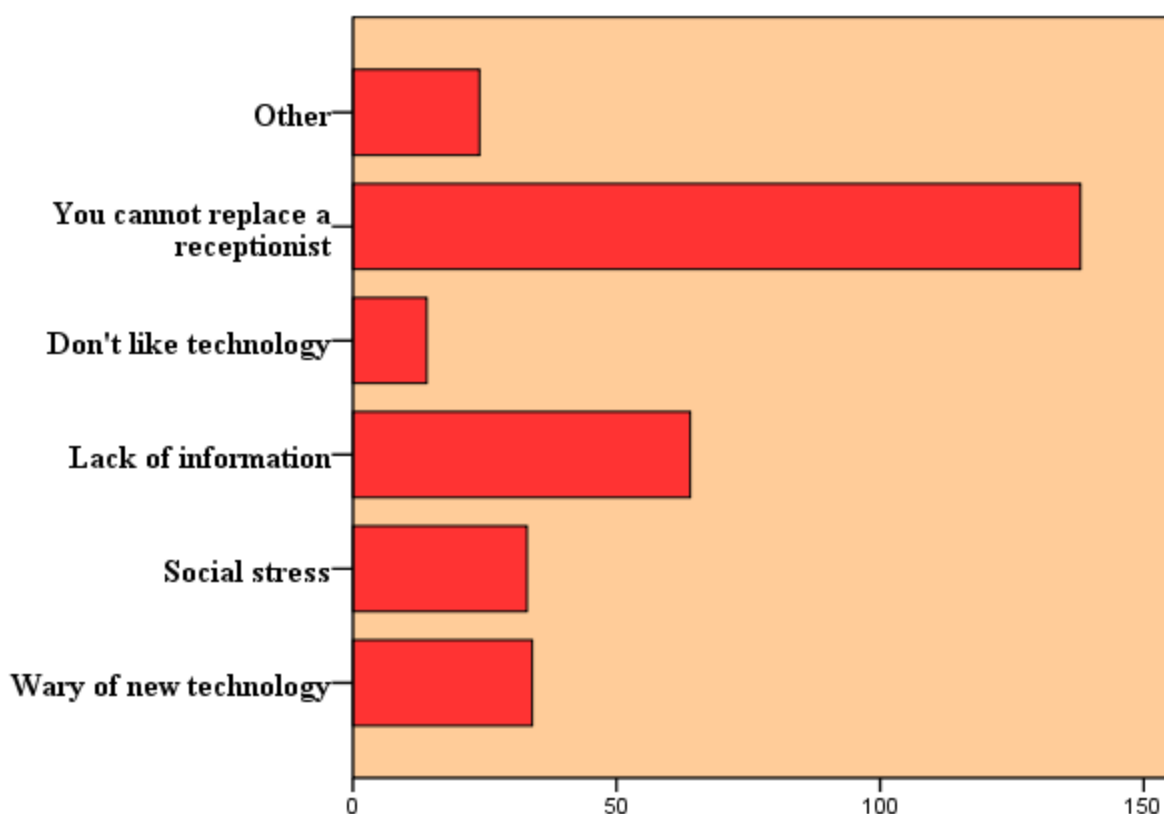
The biggest reason for their choice was fast service. This was chosen by over 70 percent of respondents. The next most relevant reasons were the simplicity and self-control of the service. Over 50 percent of respondents identified simplicity as the reason to choose SST and 46 percent would use SST to have control of it. According to results of the study, privacy accounted as a reason for only 16 percent of the respondents and only little bit over 1 percent would use it because of the desire to try new technology. This is displayed in figure 14.



**Figure 14: Display of reasons to choose SST**

The biggest reasons why not to choose SST according to the results were the importance of receptionist. This is displayed in figure 15. 29 percent of all the respondents in this question think that it is impossible to replace receptionist to SST. The next reason, lack of information accounted for 13.4 percent of the responses. Respondents in this group of answers think they would not get the information they

would normally get from receptionist. Social stress had 6.9 percent and wary of technology 7.1 percent of the total responses. Social stress refers to situations where customers get anxious about using the technology in present of many people such as people queueing. Wary of technology also connected to the anxiety of using technology. Those people using SST are scared of not knowing how to use it correctly and therefore get frustrated and anxious. The lowest percentage of responses was 2.9 percent and this was related to the fact that these customers are against new technology and there can be various reasons for this. The option other refers to open-ended answers and this had 5 percent of total responses.



**Figure 15: Display of the reasons not to choose SST**

The study included 46 answers in an open ended style question. 18 answers were in reasons why respondents would use SST and 28 answers were those that would not use SST. This was very important for the study to ask respondents' own view of the reasons why to use or why not to use, in case there was not appropriate option already available. Regarding to the reasons to use SST most of the answers indicated the importance of



this being as an option in reception rather than replacing employees totally. The next biggest group of answers were those who would rather use technology in order to trust the service quality. This was very interesting regarding to the core focus on study. A couple of answers referred to the bad customer service by receptionist and therefore would rather use technology to ensure the satisfaction of a service. Other reasons worth mentioning were the check in time flexibility, lower price and finally the most interesting reason, the wary of interaction with a receptionist. These are displayed in table 1.

**Table 1: Answers for open-ended questions why to use SST**

Reasons to use SST	Amount	Percent
Good additional service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when hotel is busy</li> <li>• when travelling for business</li> <li>• when familiar with the hotel</li> </ul>	6	33.3
Can trust the service quality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personal issues would not affect the service quality</li> <li>• customer service generally is very low quality in Finland</li> </ul>	5	27.8
Flexible check in time	3	16.7
Lower price	3	16.7
Wary of interaction with a receptionist	1	5.6
Total	18	100.0

**Table 2: Answers for open-ended question why not to use SST**

Reasons not to use SST	Amount	Percent
The importance of human interaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interaction more important than technology</li> <li>• personalized service</li> <li>• technology has no humanity, it is clinical</li> <li>• fear of forgetting something (e.g. payment)</li> </ul>	14	50.0
Safety risk	4	14.3
Receptionist's professionalism	4	14.3
Hotel has got no personality	3	10.7
Loss of employment	3	7.1
Self-service is no service	1	3.6
Total	28	100.0

Regarding to table 2, the biggest reason for respondents not to use SST was the importance of human interaction. This was found in 50 percent of all the answers in this question. Some of the respondents explained this further in their answers. Technology was described too clinical and without any humanity the hotel was seen cold and with no personality. Interaction with a human is more important than interacting with a technology. One response explained the fear of forgetting something when dealing with technology such as payment of some sort. Safety risk was seen as one of the factors. Customers could feel unsafe using technology. Other responses included hotel without personality if receptionists are replaced with technology and loss of employment due to the fact that technology replaces them. This was upsetting for the couple of respondents. And one of the interesting answers was about self-service not defined as service in the first place and therefore not considered even an option.

## 5.2 Discussion of the results with hypotheses

*Hypothesis 1. “Customers who are likely to use SST in a hotel reception are motivated by extrinsic reasons and customers who would not use SST are motivated by intrinsic reasons.”*

As discovered in the theory, motivations are a good way to analyse why customer would use SST instead of interacting with receptionist in traditional service. And this analysis was also used in questionnaire design. The results of this study agree with Oh et al. (2011) about the extrinsic motivations such as time saving, self-control and avoiding congestion to be the reason for customers to choose SST. The most important reason was fast service with over 76 percent of total answers. The next most important reason was simplicity which is strongly connected to the extrinsic reason, the functionality of the SST. The more simple the process the quicker it is. Third most important reason was self-control, which is also one popular extrinsic reason. The other options to choose were privacy, desire for new technology and other as referring to those open-ended responses. Privacy and desire are connected to intrinsic reasons and as the results demonstrate, these options were not popular among the respondents. Only 1.3 percent chose the desire to try new technology. Desire is strongly connected to emotions, the way customer feels and therefore part of intrinsic reasons. This means that customers who would use SST are not motivated by intrinsic reasons. According to the study results customers who would use SST are more concern about the functional outcome rather than emotional feelings related to the use in other words their reasons are extrinsic motivations.

The main reason for respondents choice of not to use SST was their thought of receptionists being irreplaceable. Other reasons did not reach anywhere near this but are connected to the answer also. The purpose of this question was to measure whether respondents can relate to these intrinsic reasons when choosing answers why not to use SST and as the results show they are in agreement with the hypothesis. Intrinsic reasons are connected to customer’s emotional level and therefore they give customers enjoyment, challenge and fun.

*Hypothesis 2. "Customer who are likely to use SST have had previous problems with receptionist before"*

As mentioned in open-ended question the respondents who chose to use SST were concerned about service quality being bad if interacting with receptionist. Some of the respondents mentioned the bad experiences in the past relating to interactions with receptionists and therefore would rather use SST to avoid that happening again. This answer agrees with the hypothesis. It was very useful regarding to the results to ask other answers for this question by open-ended question, because without doing so, these results would not been discovered.

The variables author had used in this study to measure this was taken from experience and these were the importance of satisfaction concerning receptionists' abilities in various situations. The average response in almost each of the situations in total was customers being satisfied with receptionists working abilities. The only situation where respondents were almost dissatisfied as satisfied was receptionist's service abilities when hotel is busy. The other way of measuring this was to see if there is relationship or association between those who would use SST and those who were not happy about the past experiences with receptionist. But according to results regarding to this group, they did not have difference to the results compared to the total amount of responses.

However, to answer the hypothesis it agrees with the results at some level. But because of the very little amount of answers it is very hard to say if this is valid. According to the measures of experience variables there is only one situation where respondents were not satisfied. This proves that the hypothesis can be partly true, but overall satisfaction with receptionist has nothing to do with the reasons to choose SST over human interaction.

### *H3. “High service quality means human interaction and personalized service”*

Interaction with receptionist is very important to respondents in this study. Because the majority of the results regarding to the importance of interaction show that almost everyone in the results want interaction (these being over 90 percent), it shows relationship with other questions in the questionnaire. For example in customer experience section, most of the respondents were happy about customer service in general and their problem solving skills in hotel receptions and this means that these respondents were also finding interaction with receptionist very important.

In the secondary research it was discovered how service quality is highly connected to customer service being personalized and how human interaction is the essential part of it. It was not surprise to find out the reasons why respondents in the other group would not use SST. Half of the reasons were because of the importance of human interaction. And some of the respondents described the reason wanting personalised service by receptionist. As discovered earlier in the results, interaction with a receptionist is highly important to respondents of this study. Only 3 percent of all the respondents did not think interaction with receptionist was important for them when arriving into hotel and the other 3 percent were neutral about it. This is very small quantity compared to those respondents who find interaction very important.

Open-ended questions discovered that the respondents would choose SST especially for the reason to guarantee the service quality. This proves that not only interaction with receptionist would mean high service quality but also using SST has its possibilities. However, the amount of respondents choosing SST because of the disappointments with receptionists is 28 percent of the total quantity of respondents in open-ended question about why to choose SST. And in the opposite group the respondents for not to choose the SST because of the importance of human interaction was 50 percent of the total. But overall the group of respondents in this study that would use SST, instead of interacting with a receptionist, was noticeably larger. Therefore results regarding to this study agree with hypothesis, but also question it. It is obvious that high service quality means interaction with receptionist but whether high service quality can be the outcome of using SST only is not thoroughly excluded.

According to the results of this study majority of the respondents would choose self-service technology instead of interaction with receptionist. However, regarding to the other areas of the questionnaire results, receptionists are very important if not essential in hotel receptions. The biggest reason for respondents to choose SST over interaction with receptionists (according to open-ended question) was to do with the fact that it would be useful as an additional service. Suggestion for the answer of research question according to the results is that, young Finnish adults in this study are ready for SST but without losing interaction with receptionists. Hotels are about service and service is about interaction with human being and as results confirm, interaction with human being means high quality service.

SST would be good as additional service with receptionist also available, people could decide whether to use SST or to interact with a receptionist. This way they could not blame the service if they have chosen the method themselves. It is just a matter of time, when there are more hotels that have SST as additional service and then it will be easier to find out whether customers think it is high quality.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Many service trends and development ideas come from abroad and often trends are popular only for a short time before people lose interest on them. This is the reason why before placing a new service idea into practice it is important (in this study) to do a competent background research about what customers expect from a service, how satisfied they feel about the service and whether they are ready for changes with the service. Overall what their view of quality customer service is. The purpose of this study is to find an answer to the research question whether Finnish young adults are ready for the self-service technology in future hotel receptions in Finland and to find out the current situation in hotel receptions regarding to the service quality perceived by customers. In addition to the research question, the study aims to answer research hypotheses that were designed after the theory part. The reason behind the topic choice is author's own work experience as a receptionist in a hotel, her interest towards customer service and excitement about service design.

Services are all around us but according to Tuorila (2002, p.1) Finnish people identify themselves living in a self-service society rather than in a service society. This may be because of the theory that Finnish people are used to hard work and some explanation says they are used to do things on their own because of the lack of services in the past. But according to the research on self-service technology (SST) it is not common in everyday life yet. Research starting in the 1960's on services used to focus on defining the service and defining the whole phenomenon. After this in the 1980's it was agreed that there are more than one definition to it and in the 90's technology was included in the research of services (Grönroos, 2009, p.76-78) In the 21<sup>st</sup> century self-service became as a new research area of services. (Meuter et al, 2003, p.900) Omena Hotels is the only hotel chain in Finland using self-service technology. The research in the area of self- service in Finland is therefore limited.

There are two customer service concepts; traditional human based customer transaction and SST. Human based customer service means traditional service where the customer is interacting with an employee. (See, for example Fisher & Beatson, 2002) And SST is also customer service but instead of interacting with a human being interaction happens between customer and technology. (See, for example Beatson et al. 2006) According to Martinez and Hobbi (2008, p.73) successful customer service is only happening because

of the people interacting in it. According to them customers are in need of interaction and they want a human being to listen to them and solve their problems.

But the development of Information communication technology (ICT) and the use of it in travel industry enables companies change their business models which also changes the interaction between customers and organisations. In travel organisations, airports have perceived the opportunity with self-service technology in the form of self-service kiosks where tourists can check in without having to interact with a service employee. (See, for example, Ku & Chen, 2013, p. 87) Self-service technology (SST) has evolved as a customer service concept providing customers more options and for service companies more opportunities. (See for example, Lema, 2005, p.154)

SST has advantages and disadvantages and the different reasons for customers to use it and to avoid it. The main advantages for companies are the cost savings and time benefits. (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007, p.246) The advantages for customers are self-control, flexible service times, (Bitner et al. 2000, p. 141) and faster service especially in busy hours, (Lambert & Wonjae Lee, 2008, p. 101-103). According to Oh et al. the reasons why customers would use SST or not is explained by motivations. These motivations are divided into two different groups; extrinsic motivations and intrinsic motivations. (See for example, Oh et al. 2011) Having extrinsic motivation to use service means that customer is using the SST for the reasons that is not connected to the emotions. Customers using extrinsic motivations use service because of the outcome and not because of the enjoyment or satisfaction of using them. Intrinsic motivations are opposite of extrinsic and these are such as excitement to try new service because it gives pleasure or desire for human interaction. For example, customers who prefer human interaction are motivated by intrinsic reason. According to Oh et al. customers who are likely to use SST are motivated by extrinsic reasons and customer who want to interact with receptionist have intrinsic motivations. (See Oh et al. 2011, p.693)

The main disadvantages of using SST is the social stress and wary of technology. Some customers feel anxious if they need to use SST because of frustration. (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007, p.246) Oh et al. explains this by social pressures. When the atmosphere in the hotel environment is busy, and there are queues, tourists feel uncomfortable to use their intrinsic motivations to use the self-service systems. (Oh et al. 2011, p.693). In other words, social pressure by other customers make customers anxious by using the



SST. But according to Lovelock and Wirtz (2007, p.247) customer who find SST as better alternative is usually more experienced as a customers and confident with technology.

Service quality has a clear connection to customer experience (Grönroos, 1998, p.62) and customer expectations (Lehtonen, 2008, p.31) and high service quality will lead to customer satisfaction (Martinez and Hobbi, 2008,p.31).

The research method of this study is a quantitative research with deductive approach. This means that after developing the theory, the hypotheses were formed and they created the basis for the primary research. The research method for primary research is a survey method and the survey tool is self-completed questionnaire. The sample for this study was Finnish young adults aged between 20 and 35. The sampling method was both probability sampling and non-probability sampling because of the nature of the data collection. Questionnaire was divided into three sections. These were customer expectations, experiences and views of future concept. It was designed by author according to her secondary research inspired by researchers such as Grönroos and Oh et al. The analysis of the results was done with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS by descriptive statistics using univariate and bivariate analysis.

There were altogether 476 answers and these were conducted both online and as a paper version. The quantity of results surprised positively. According to the results 61 percent of the respondents would use SST instead of interacting with receptionist. However, over 90 percent of all the respondents view interaction with receptionist very important. Some of the responses suggested that SST should be as additional service rather than replacing the receptionist. This also agrees with the theory. According to Kokkinou and Cranage (2015, p.1192) an ideal service situation would be having both concepts available, this not only would help customers to choose the transaction but also would possible encourage customer to use SST. The results agree that customers who would use SST are motivated by extrinsic reasons as well as customers who want to interact with receptionists are motivated by intrinsic reasons.

Interaction with a receptionist is very important to respondents in this study. And majority of the respondents not wanting to use SST chose the importance of human interaction as the main reason. And some of the respondents described the reason

wanting personalised service by receptionist. According to the results addition to interacting with receptionists also SST can provide high service quality in some level. Self-service technology is indeed becoming a trend and as the results display most of the customers in this study are ready to embrace this trend but without losing the option to interact with receptionist also.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire used in the study

**KYSELY VASTAANOTON ASIAKASPALVELUN LAADUSTA, ODOTUKSET JA KOKEMUKSET HOTELLEISSA SUOMESSA YLEISESTI. Vastauksesi ovat täysin luottamuksellisia ja tuloksia käytän vain tässä tutkimuksessa.**

Outi Mäkinen, [oumakine@ulapland.fi](mailto:oumakine@ulapland.fi), Matkailututkimus, Lapin yliopisto

#### Osa 1. Odotuksesi vastaanoton asiakaspalvelusta hotelleissa Suomessa

1. Ole hyvä ja ympyröi alla olevista väittämistä mielipidettäsi lähinnä oleva vaihtoehto. (1= täysin eri mieltä 2 = melko eri mieltä, 3 = en osaa sanoa, 4 = melko samaa mieltä 5 = täysin samaa mieltä)

Toivoisin että sisäänkirjautuminen (check in) hotelliin olisi nopeampi ja yksinkertaisempi	1	2	3	4	5
Haluan että minut huomioidaan kun saavun hotelliin. Esim. toivotetaan tervetulleeksi.	1	2	3	4	5
Haluan että vastaanottovirkailija kertoo minulle perusteellisesti missä sijaitsee hotellin eri tilat kun saavun hotelliin. Esim. aamupala, sauna	1	2	3	4	5
Toivoisin että uloskirjautuminen (check out) hotellista olisi nopeampi ja yksinkertaisempi	1	2	3	4	5

2. Kuinka tärkeänä pidät seuraavia seikkoja kun saavut hotelliin. Ole hyvä ja ympyröi mieleisesi vaihtoehto. (1 = ei ollenkaan tärkeä, 2 = vähän tärkeä, 3 = en osaa sanoa, 4 = jonkin verran tärkeä, 5 = erittäin tärkeä)

Vastaanoton viihtyvyys ja ulkonäkö	1	2	3	4	5
Vuorovaikutus vastaanottovirkailijan kanssa	1	2	3	4	5
Vastaanottovirkailijan tervetulo-toivotus ja hymy	1	2	3	4	5
Vastaanottovirkailijan ohjeet ja ehdotukset talon palveluista check in -tilanteessa	1	2	3	4	5

3. Mikä seuraavista väittämistä kuvastaa sinua parhaiten saapuessasi hotelliin. Ole hyvä, valitse yksi väite ja merkkää se rastilla.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Haluan kirjautua sisään mahdollisimman nopeasti. Haluan tietää koska on aamupala ja sauna, muut asiat otan selville myöhemmin.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Haluan vain kirjautua sisään ja saada avaimet. En kaipaa jutustelua siinä hetkessä, sillä on kiva päästä pian huoneeseeni.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nautin siitä, että saan jutella vastaanottovirkailijan kanssa saavuttuani hotelliin. Haluan että minut huomioidaan ja tunnen itseni tärkeäksi sekä tervetulleeksi. On erittäin hyvä tietää kaikki mahdollinen tieto hotellista ja alueesta jo saavuttuani hotelliin, jotta saan



	lomasta/matkasta kaiken irti.
	Minulle on aika sama mitä vastaanotossa tapahtuu kunhan vain saan avaimet ja pääsen huoneeseeni.

## Osa 2. Kokemuksesi hotellien vastaanoton asiakaspalvelusta Suomessa

4. Kuinka usein käytät keskimäärin vuodessa hotellipalveluita Suomessa? Ympyröi oikea vaihtoehto.

1-3 kertaa      4-10 kertaa      useammin kuin 10 kertaa      harvemmin kuin kerran vuodessa

5. Merkitse taulukkoon tyytyväisyytesi seuraavissa tilanteissa

(1 = erittäin pettynyt, 2 = joksikin tyytymätön 3 = en osaa sanoa, 4 = melko tyytyväinen 5 = erittäin tyytyväinen)

Vastaanottovirkailijoiden positiivinen asenne ongelmatilanteissa	1	2	3	4	5
Vastaanottovirkailijoiden nopea ongelmanratkaisukyky	1	2	3	4	5
Vastaanottovirkailijoiden ongelmanratkaisutaidot yleisesti	1	2	3	4	5
Vastaanottovirkailijoiden asiakaspalvelu yleisesti	1	2	3	4	5
Vastaanottovirkailijoiden nopeus ruuhkatilanteissa	1	2	3	4	5
Vastaanottovirkailijoiden ammattitaitoinen asenne	1	2	3	4	5

## Osa 3. Tulevaisuuden näkemyksesi asiakaspalvelusta

6. Jos hotellissa olisi mahdollisuus kirjautua sisään itsepalveluna vastaanottovirkailijan sijaan teknologian avulla, käyttäisitkö palvelua? ympyröi oikea vaihtoehto.

Kyllä      En käyttäisi

Jos vastasit kyllä ole hyvä ja ympyröi mielestäsi tärkeimmät syyt miksi haluaisit käyttää. Ympyröi yksi tai useampi.

- A Palvelun nopeus
- B Palvelun itsehallinta, saa sen tiedon mitä itse haluaa
- C Uuden asian/laitteen viehätys
- D Yksityisyys
- E Palvelun yksinkertaisuus
- F Jokin muu mikä? \_\_\_\_\_

Jos vastasit ei, ole hyvä ja ympyröi mielestäsi tärkeimmät syyt miksi et haluaisi käyttää. Valitse yksi tai useampi.

- A Pelkään että en osaisi käyttää
- B Sosiaalinen paine (esim. ruuhka ja jonot)
- C En saisi niitä tietoja joita tarvitsen
- D En ole sujut teknologian kanssa
- E Minusta vastaanottovirkailijaa ei voi korvata
- F Jokin muu, mikä? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Osa 4. Henkilökohtaiset tiedot

ympyröi oikea vastaus

7. Sukupuoleni :               Nainen               Mies  
8. Ikäni:                       Alle 35 vuotta     yli 36 vuotta

#### Appendix 2: English version of the questionnaire

#### QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT SERVICE QUALITY IN HOTEL RECEPTION,

This questionnaire will ask about your experience and expectations about customer service in hotel receptions in Finland. Think about your visits in hotels generally.

Please answer the following questions. If you don't know the answer you are free to leave it empty. All the answers are anonymous and completely confidential and only used in this research. Your help is crucial for me.

Outi Mäkinen, [oumakine@ulapland.fi](mailto:oumakine@ulapland.fi), Tourism Research, University of Lapland

#### Part 1 Expectations

1. Please provide your opinions of the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree (Neutral), 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly agree) Circle the right option.

Check in should be simplified and quicker	1	2	3	4	5
I want to feel acknowledged and welcomed when arriving into hotel	1	2	3	4	5
I want all the hotel services explained well by a receptionist	1	2	3	4	5
Check out should be simplified and quicker	1	2	3	4	5

2. Please indicate how important the following aspects are for you when you arrive in hotel. (1 = Not important at all, 2 = Unimportant, 3 = Neither important nor unimportant (Neutral), 4 = Important, and 5 = Very important)

The environment and atmosphere of the reception	1	2	3	4	5
Interaction with a receptionist	1	2	3	4	5
The hospitality of a receptionist: e.g. welcome wish and smile	1	2	3	4	5
Explanation of the services at check in by receptionist	1	2	3	4	5

3. Which of the following statements describes you the best when you arrive in hotel. Please choose one only.

	I want to check in as quickly as possible. I don't need any interaction with a receptionist.
	I enjoy interacting with a receptionist. I want to feel welcome and hear all the information about the hotel.
	I want to check in quickly but also hear the main information by receptionist.
	I don't care what happens in the reception as long as I get my keys to my room.

**Part 2. Experience**

4. On average, how frequently do you stay in a hotel in a year? circle the right answer.

1-3 times            4-10 times            more than 10 times            very infrequently

5. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the following customer service aspects generally in Finnish hotel receptions?

(1 = Not at all satisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Neutral), 4 = Satisfied and 5 = Very satisfied)

Receptionists' positive attitude when resolving problems	1	2	3	4	5
Receptionists' ability to resolve problems quickly	1	2	3	4	5
Receptionists' problem solving abilities	1	2	3	4	5
Receptionists' customer service skills in general	1	2	3	4	5
Receptionists' service abilities when hotel is busy	1	2	3	4	5
Receptionists' professionalism	1	2	3	4	5

**Part 3. Your view on future concepts**

6. In hotel reception, would you prefer to use self-service technology (SST) instead of interacting with a receptionist? Circle the right answer.

Yes            No

If you answered yes, please circle the most important reasons why. You can choose more than one.

- A Fast service
- B Self-control of the service
- C Desire to try new technology
- D Privacy
- E Simplicity
- F Other \_\_\_\_\_

If you answered no, please circle the most important reasons why not. You can choose more than one.

- A Wary of new technology
- B Sosial stress (e.g. queues behind)

- C Lack of information
- D Don't like technology
- E You cannot replace receptionist
- F Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 4. Personal information**

- 7. Sex:   Female            Male
- 8. Age: \_\_\_\_\_