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**THE AUDITORY DIMENSION OF TOURISM EXPERIENCESCAPES**

The role of sounds in marketing Christmas tourism experiences

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### **Abstract**

Meaningful experiences have been acknowledged as the core of touristic experiences. Researchers in the fields of social sciences as well as economics have studied the characteristics of experiences and defined the experiencescape as a multisensory dimension of experiences. Due to the increasing presences and possibilities of technological service components, marketing can be considered a part of each touristic experience. Thus, not only the experience itself but also the marketing activities for tourism experiences can involve a variety of senses, such as auditory elements.

This research is focusing on the auditory dimension of tourism experiences with a focus on Christmas tourism experiences. Since theming is a core element of both marketing and service design in tourism, the study aims to contribute to the research of the auditory sense and its ability to strengthen the Christmas theme of tourism experiences. For that aim, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with a professional as well as with international guests of a Christmas theme park in Rovaniemi, Finland. The data has been analyzed through content analysis.

The findings of this study indicate that the perception of sounds and their perceived Christmassyness tremendously depends on an individual's personal experiences and cultural background. Further, the results show an important role of other senses, such as visuals. Since social media has become an integral part of the touristic customer journey and offers a variety of multimedia elements to include in marketing activities, a focus on the auditory dimension of Christmas experiences within social media marketing provides an interesting angle for future research.

**KEYWORDS:** experiencescapes, christmas tourism, auditory marketing, sounds

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Contextual Background of the Research

*Rovaniemi is actually quite ugly.*

*Northern lights are not as spectacular and colorful as I thought.*

Those were two thoughts I spoke out loud when visiting Lapland for the first time, in February 2019. Now, three years later, I can gladly disagree with both of them. The fact that I have lived here and had the privilege to experience Rovaniemi and its surroundings, all the seasons and nature turned my perception of the place on 360° degrees compared to how I perceived it in 2019, when I just crossed the city center in a bus on my way to Kittilä. Today, I am shocked and almost sad about how negatively surprised I was when I saw the city and Rovaniemi and northern lights for the first time, since I was probably not the only tourist who had different expectations. As I am interested in marketing, I identified visual marketing material as the base for my personal expectations: When arriving at Rovaniemi's airport, travellers see photos of snowy forests and colourful northern lights already at the baggage claim, no matter if they arrive in summer or winter. I therefore expected Rovaniemi to be a small village of wooden houses in a romantic forest full of reindeers – and was disappointed to find out that I was wrong.

My interest in this topic derived from my interest in marketing research: aware of the importance of senses in marketing management, I wanted to conduct research about the sensory dimension of tourism marketing. Although visuals are crucial in tourism marketing (Pawaskar & Goel, 2014, pp. 259–260), researchers emphasize that other senses can make beneficial contribution to the marketing of destination and services as well (Ditoiu & Căruntu, 2014 ; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2004). The auditory sense is the sense I am most interested in when it comes to the role of senses in marketing, since it is one of the most influential senses but has still been neglected in branding research (Bartholmé & Melewar, 2009, p. 162; Agapito et al., 2012, p. 13). Especially when looking at the marketing material for tourism products and companies in Lapland, the impact of the visuals on the tourists' expectations seems tremendous. Relying on certain visual images can become a major challenge for tourism destinations, especially if the

image relies on external, such as meteorological factors: Studies have shown that Lapland is perceived less appealing as a destination in winters without snow (Tervo-Kankare et al., 2013, p. 309). This is a major issue for local tourism operators since climate change makes winter tourism destinations vulnerable (Hall, 2014 ; Lundmark, 2010 ; Rantala et al., 2019). To limit the dependency on snowy winters by balancing incomes through the whole year, tourism professionals are working on developing Lapland's touristic infrastructure towards a year-around destination and promote the area as such (Rantala et al., 2019, pp. 53-54). The dependency on snow and the strong focus on the winter season is the most noticeable for tourism services and destinations focusing their brand on the winter season and its implied climate and visual gaze of snowy landscapes (Rantala et al., 2019). This is the case for Finnish Lapland, where snowless can affect the perceived attractiveness of the destination (Tervo-Kankare et al, 2013, p. 309). Therefore, I focus my research on Christmas Theme Parks, challenging the assumption that it needs snowy landscapes to communicate the feeling of Christmas: Although visual communication plays a crucial role in destination marketing, communication should follow a multisensory approach (Ditoiu & Căruntu, 2014, p. 305 ; Pawaskar & Goel, 2014). By focusing my research on a sense that does in itself not depend on the climate, I hope to contribute to the shift of Lapland from a winter destination to an all-year-around destination (Rantala et al., 2019, p. 47). Further, applying a multisensory marketing concept instead of relying mainly on the visual sense could provide a more realistic image of the destination or service and therefore improve customer satisfaction.

## **1.2 Previous Research**

The base of the theoretical background for this study lies in the experiencescape in tourism and the role of senses for experience marketing in tourism. Although my research focus lies on Christmas tourism experiences and the auditory sense, previous research about the main concepts implied in my theoretical background are enriching for the theoretical base of this study. With their introduction of the "Experience Economy", Pine and Gilmore (1998) stated experiences as a new mode of consumption. Experience economies and their characteristics have been studied by several researchers afterwards, examining the differences and similarities between experiences and consumer goods

(Carter & Gilovich, 2010 ; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2013). Those and several other papers all state that the consumption of experiences is characterized by staged elements (Ellis & Rossman, 2008 ; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Further, researchers acknowledge Disneyland, the world's first theme park, as the pioneer not only of the global theme park industry but also experience economies, which is why Bryman (2004) speaks of a “disneyization of society”. Theme parks in general have thus broadly been studied and interpreted as a multisensory space of entertainment that invites guests to immerse into stories by consuming themed services (Davis, 1996 ; Dong & Siu, 2013 ; Kao et al., 2008 ; Kwang-Soo et al., 2009).

The concept of experiences is considerably related to the tourism field, since tourism services aim to offer experiences to tourists (Volo, 2010, p. 24). Accordingly, researchers have previously conceptualized tourism experiences and tourism as an experience economy (Aho, 2001 ; Ooi, 2005 ; Sternberg, 1997 ; Sundbo & Dixit, 2020). Research in this area acknowledged memorability (Bulencea & Egger, 2015 ; Kim, 2010 ; Sthapit, 2013) and co-creation (Stigala, 2016) as highly influential concepts within tourism, which affects the design of tourism experiences. By introducing the term *experiencescape*, researchers also emphasize the crucial similarities to service environments (O'Dell, 2005), which have previously been conceptualized as servicescapes (Bitner, 1992) based on Appadurai's (1996) interpretation of multisensorial spaces as *-scapes*. Further, the experiencescape as a research focus has been previously examined regarding the impact of senses on the tourist experiences: In Fesenko's (2019) research about sounds in dogsledding experiences, sounds are considered as a part of the experiencescape. He clearly considers tourism as a “(...) vivid example of an industry of experience economy.” (Fesenko, 2019, p. 16) Similar to Gilmore and Pine (2002) as well as Pretes (1995), Fesenko (2019) studies soundscapes as a part of the experiencescape as a dimension during the experience created by a service, namely dog sledding. Based on the experience pyramid by Tarssanen and Kylänen (2006), Fesenko (2019) emphasizes that a tourist experience is created on several levels within the pre-, during and post experience stages. Moreover, researchers have acknowledged that experiences' virtual settings, meaning digital communication, has a considerable impact on the perception of an experience (Boswijk et al., 2015). Thus, a focus on marketing as a (virtual) part of the

tourism experiencescape seems reasonable and presents the key difference between this research and Fesenko's (2019) work.

Marketing in tourism has been broadly researched (Botha, 2016 ; Correia et al., 2019, Frochot & Batat, 2013 ; Mossberg, 2007). Within the marketing perspective, the role of stories and storytelling (Åstrøm, 2020 ; Frias et al., 2019 ; Jolliffe & Piboonrungrroj, 2020 ; Mossberg, 2008) as well as sensual perception and multisensory stimuli have become an important focus in marketing research (Hultén et al., 2009 ; Krishna, 2011 ; Pawaskar & Goel, 2014). Due to the importance of experiences and their differences to other forms of consumption, researchers even stated a shift from traditional marketing to experiential marketing, which emphasizes the multisensory dimension as beneficial for marketing practices (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2004; Schmitt, 1999 ; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). As introduced previously, this research primarily focuses on the sense of sound. Sounds in marketing and service environments as well as its psychological and semiotic effects have previously been researched (Augoyard & Torgue, 2006 ; Cross, 2016 ; Meyers-Levy et al., 2009 ; Pádua, 2016 ; Schafer, 1993 ; Van Egmond, 2007). To my best knowledge, however, there is a lack of research on sounds in online marketing, although the impact of digitalization on marketing practices has been acknowledged (Foley et al., 2013 ; Frias et al., 2019 ; Hudson, 2013).

Christmas is nowadays more than a religious holiday, it is a season. Many researchers have examined the traditions, consumptions and values related to Christmas celebrations (Carrier, 1993 ; Gibson, 2019 ; Kuper, 1993 ; Miller, 1990 ; Prentice et al., 1978). Christmas has similar characteristics than what researchers describe as an experience, which is why it can be considered an experience on its own (Kylänen, 2006). The concept of consuming Christmas as a commodified form of nostalgia has been first examined by Pretes in 1995. He states that tourists aim to enter another world, which he explains with the concept of escapism, which derives from the field of social science. Hence, Pretes (1995) argues that tourists do not preliminarily value the actual place visited but the feelings that the services evoke, which clearly goes along with the experiential paradigm as well as what we call experience economy (Pretes, 1995). Several researchers also dedicated their focus on Christmas songs and carols as an integral part of Christmas

activities (Cooper, 2008 ; Jarman-Ivens, 2008 ; Whiteley, 2008). Due to its considerable effect on society, Christmas has become the core of many tourism services and even whole destinations. Those Christmas tourism experiences as a part of the experience economy have been studied previously (Hall, 2008 ; Hall, 2014 ; Pretes, 1995 ; Rusko et al., 2013 ; Tervo-Kankare et al., 2013). Tourism destinations offering a variety of Christmas-related tourism products are often located in the Northern hemisphere, since the climate and landscape in winter fits the image of Christmas (Rusko et al., 2013, p. 45). Finnish Lapland, the area this research focuses on, is known for its Christmas tourism infrastructure (Hall, 2008, p. 61) and has therefore been studied previously regarding Christmas tourism (Lavia, 2006 ; Pretes, 1995 ; Rusko et al., 2013). Further, Christmas tourism was researched previously with a focus on its dependency on the climate and the way it is affected by climate change (Hall, 2014 ; Tervo-Kankare et al., 2013). Based on the strong connection between Christmas tourism and climate, Hall (2008) moreover highlights the importance of environmental factors on the place branding of Christmas tourism destinations (Hall, 2014 ; Lundmark, 2010 ; Rantala et al., 2019 ; Tervo-Kankare et al., 2013).

Summing up the input of previous research for this thesis, the role of sounds has been preliminarily studied as a part of the physical experiencescape. However, to the researcher's best knowledge, marketing has not been clearly interpreted as a (virtual) part of the experiencescape, although the impact of sounds on marketing as well as on the perception of experiences has been studied previously (Agapito et al. 2012 ; Fesenko, 2019). Further, the literature found deals either with the multisensual dimension of marketing in tourism experiences or with Christmas tourism as a part of the experience economy – but is missing is the link between both as well as a focus on Christmas theme parks. Consequently, this research aims to reduce the lack of research connecting sounds with the marketing of Christmas theme parks.

### **1.3 Research Questions and Purpose**

Tourism experiences are strongly related to the experience economy (Fesenko, 2019, p. 16). As previously studied by Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 102–103), the integration of all senses within a themed setting ensures memorability of the experience, which researchers considered a key for qualitative tourism experiences (Kim, 2010). As argued previously, the role of sounds in marketing Christmas theme parks has been neglected in research. Therefore, this study will focus on the auditory sense as the most influential sense after sight (Agapito et al., 2012, p. 13). Acknowledging the important role of sounds within the tourism experiencescape (Fesenko, 2019), this thesis will focus on marketing as a pre-stage of tourism experiences. The aim of my research is to get a deeper understanding of the role of sounds in marketing Christmas theme parks as a part of the tourism experiencescape by understanding which sounds are associated with Christmas and which concepts and values those associations are based on. The results of this research can therefore have managerial implications for marketing practices regarding the use of auditory elements on digital communication platforms, such as social media.

The overall question is which role sounds play in marketing Christmas theme park experiences. Two research questions are established to find appropriate answers from the analysis of collected data.

RQ1: Which sounds are associated with Christmas?

Since sounds create associations in the listener (Huron, 2016) and theme parks aim to strengthen the guest's association with the theme (Lukas, 2013, p. 68), it is relevant for Christmas theme park's marketing activities to know which sounds are perceived as matching to the overall theme of Christmas. Due to a variety of sound categories (Krishna, 2011 ; Van Egmond, 2007), the following question derives in order to gain relevant results from this research:

RQ1.1 Are sounds perceived differently than songs?

With songs combining vocally and instrumentally created images in the listener (Cross, 2016, p. 23), non-vocal sounds should be separated from songs in order to get valuable data for the research.

RQ2: Does the perception of sound change with a matching visual representation?

The visual and auditory sense interact and complement each other (Bulkin & Groh, 2006, p. 415). Consequently, it is important to understand if Christmas-related sounds are perceived differently when supported with a corresponding visual stimuli.

By answering these research questions, the purpose of this thesis is to better understand the role of sounds associated with Christmas. Since Christmas has become a key theme for tourism services and theme parks, understanding which sounds match the guests' association with the theme can be beneficial for entrepreneurs. The insights resulting from this study can thus be relevant for Christmas theme parks' online marketing activities, since the technological possibilities of online marketing allow the use of auditory stimuli on digital platforms. This can further be a base for future research on sound in Christmas tourism marketing.

#### **1.4 Methods and Data**

The research focus of this study lies on the role sounds in marketing and their association with Christmas in the context of Christmas theme parks, focusing on Santa Claus Village as a provider for Christmas experiences. The aim is to get a deeper understanding of how different sounds are perceived and if the simultaneous visual support of the sound affects its perception by the listener. Following the understanding of an experience as an individually constructed personal sphere (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), the research is based on people's personal perception of the sense of sound within theme park experiences and therefore goes align with the constructivist paradigm (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 375).

Jennings (2010, p. 35) defines a paradigm as an understanding of how the world works and the deriving ontologist, epistemologist and axiologist characteristics of the paradigm as a base for the methodology applied in the research. Following the constructivist interpretation of a world consisting of multiple, individually and mentally constructed realities, the research will be qualitative in nature. To ensure the subjectivist epistemologic nature of constructivist research, data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews (Hollinshead, 2006, p. 45 ; Jennings, 2010, pp. 174-176). This

method allows to gather relevant data for the research while ensuring the flexibility to clarify answers (Jennings, 2010, p. 175). Further, semi-structured interviews provide a more relaxed interview setting and offer the possibility of using auditory stimuli for elicitation (Jennings, 2010; Fesenko, 2019). Music as a tool for elicitation in qualitative research has barely been studied, although music is said to be able to enrich interviews by giving interviewees the chance to express their answers based on individual associations linked to the music (Allet, 2010). Regarding the personal nature of tourism experiences, sound elicitation can be very enriching for the research of this thesis and has therefore been used for data collection.

For this research, two different interview settings have been used. The first one was a semi-structured interview with a professional from Santa Claus Village. The insights from a professional considerably affected the development of the second interview set, which was designed for (potential) guests. Initially, it was planned to interview more employees from Santa Claus Village. However, the insights from that one interview shifted the focus from my research considerably towards the perception on Christmas sounds and their consumption. It was thus a very enriching step for my research and the data collected during that interview have been analyzed accordingly. In addition to this interview with a professional, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted in Santa Claus Village with (potential) guests. Interviewees were asked both scaled questions as well as open questions to provide a variety of reliable data. However, also asking the scale questions, the interview was not completely structured in nature since it was possible to ask for clarification and give participants the chance to answer openly to all of the questions. Further, sound elicitation and photos were included in the interviews to strengthen interviewees' association to the sounds and the quality of their answers: After playing sounds and asking about their perception, a photo will be added to each sound in order to examine if the perception of the sounds change with the visual input. During the interviews the participants reaction to the sound elicitation and to the questions has been observed. Elicitation aims to overcome communication barriers and uncover deep feelings (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010, p. 3), which is why it helps to understand how participants construct their world, which goes in line with the constructivist approach to

this study. The chosen methods and their relevance for studies in tourism research will be examined in chapter 4 in detail.

### **1.5 Structure of the Study**

The following chapter aims to provide the reader with the theoretical concepts that this study is based on. Understanding the theory does not only help to understand the research, but also forms the perspective from which the research phenomenon will be examined.

For this thesis, the concept of experiencescapes as well as the auditory dimension of experience marketing build the base for the theoretical understanding of the study. Since both, theme parks as well as the multisensory nature of experiences are related to the concept of experiencescapes, I will first introduce the concept of tourism experiencescapes by introducing the experience economy and its connection to the tourism field. After outlining the characteristics of tourism experiences, I will take up theme parks as an iconic service environment of experience economies and tourism destination. This subchapter will clarify the connection between tourism, experiences and theme parks, which are the core elements of this research. Approaching my research topic further, I will afterwards examine the concept of soundscapes by outlining the different perceptual sound domains, which are an important base for the data collected for this research. Further, the soundscapes of theme parks will be covered briefly. Combining those aspects, the third subchapter of the theoretical framework will give an understanding of the role of sounds in marketing for tourism experiences. I will clarify the role of marketing in the tourism experiencescape, stating the implication of the characteristics of experiences for marketing. The role of senses in tourism marketing will be covered in order to provide the necessary knowledge explaining the relevance of this research topic. Due to the increasing effect of digital communication on tourism, and the aim of this research to provide results that are beneficial for online marketing, the role of social media in tourism will be examined as well. Since my research focuses on Christmas theme parks, I will take a look into Christmas tourism by examining the values present in Christmas celebrations and Christmas songs. In that way, it becomes clear why tourism

experiences focus on Christmas and which role songs play in Christmas season. Finally, Christmas tourism in Lapland will be introduced.

The third chapter aims to explain the methodological choices made for this study. Here, I will also explain why Santa Claus Village serves as a case study for this thesis and in which way it affects the data collection. After pointing out and explaining the applied methods, I will consider the research ethics as well as the reliability of my research methods. When analyzing the data in the fourth chapter of this thesis, I will base my data analysis on the research questions this study is based on. Not only will I distinguish here between different kinds of sounds used in Instagram Marketing, but also differentiate between different content types such as stories and posts. Finally, I will outline my results and critically evaluate the methodology I chose. Based on my findings, I will consider the research's implications for future work in this field.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Experiencescape

Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 98-99) introduced the notion of experience economies at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stating that creating experiences presents a new form of economic offerings that can be distinguished from commodities, goods and services. Experiences now play a tremendously important role on the global market and have become a broadly researched field within academic contexts (O'Dell, 2005, p. 12; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013, p. 7-8). Since tourism experiences and their marketing are the theoretical core of this research, the following chapters aim to deliver an understanding of tourism experiences and their characteristics. Before outlining the tourism experiencescape and theme parks as a concrete concept of it, it is necessary to briefly define experiences.

The term *Experience* has different meanings. While in other languages, such as German and Finnish, one can use different words for the experience regarding an event (*Erlebnis/Elämys*) and experience as a consequence of learning something (*Erfahrung/Kokemus*), the English term *Experience* includes both of those meanings (Jantzen, 2013, pp. 150-151; Pine & Gilmore, 2013, p. 32; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013, pp. 2-3). However, Pine and Gilmore (2013, p. 32) emphasize that the term *Experience* as it is used for their work regarding the experience economy includes both meanings, since experiencing an event does not necessarily exclude the process of learning.

Experiences can clearly be distinguished from other forms of economic offerings. “When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages (...) to engage him in an inherently personal way.” (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, p. 3) While commodities, goods and services are “made to fill a specific, concrete purpose”, the emotional outcome of an experience can only be evaluated afterwards and on a highly individual scale (Carter & Gilovich, 2010, p. 158). Consequently, experiences cannot be perceived or tried before a person decides to consume it (Andersson & Andersson, 2013, pp. 86-87): “Satisfaction is measured not against a mental checklist of discrete attributes but emerges over the time frame of the

whole visit.” (Morgan et al., 2009, p. 203) Since experiences are a mental construct built on an emotional or physical engagement through staged services, they are individually perceived and therefore unique (Andersson & Andersson, 2013, pp. 86-87; Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 99).

Experiences are consumed in a space that can be planned and designed (O’Dell 2005, p. 16 ; Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 102). Those spaces organized by producers and consumed by guests can be referred to as *experiencescapes* (O’Dell, 2005, p. 16). Arjun Appadurai (1996, pp. 45–46) metaphorically related the term landscape to globalization: He argues that the process of globalization is a flow that unites people on different cross-boundary and therefore non-physical dimensions which he described by using the suffix *-scape*. One key characteristic of *experiencescapes* is that the space of the experience can be influenced by its physical environment, although the experience itself is created subjectively in its consumer’s mind (Hultén et al., 2009, pp. 15-16 ; O’Dell, 2005, p. 18 ; Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 99 ; Sundbo & Dixit, 2020, pp. 19-20). Therefore, tourism companies cannot create experiences as such but can offer experience propositions by providing the environment for creating experiences (Sundbo & Dixit, 2020, p. 23).

### **2.1.1 The Tourism Experiencescape**

The tourism industry can be described as a “service ecosystem” consisting of different services that build the tourists’ customer journey. Within the numerous touchpoints with the different services, tourists seek for memorable experiences (Stickdorn, 2013, p. 334). Experiences are the core of the tourism industry and therefore play and have played a central role in tourism research (Sternberg, 1997, p. 954 ; Sundbo & Dixit, 2020, p. 19). Generally, a tourist experience can be considered any experience happening outside of the usual physical environment of a person (Sundbo & Dixit , 2020, pp. 20-21). In order to contextualize the role of social media as a part of christmas theme park experiences, it is helpful to outline the process of tourism experiences and locale marketing within this process later in this thesis. Aho (2001) developed a model of tourism experiences, outlining not only the characteristics but also the process of tourism experiences. Although every event between sensation, perception and memory can be considered an experience (Volo, 2010, p. 21), the notion of experience needs to be narrowed down since

this research focuses on theme park experiences as a specific touristic offer. Therefore, experiences will be considered in this work as a temporary activity as a part of a touristic trip. Through the past decades, researchers affirmed a continuous development in the nature of experiences, which consequently affects the tourism sector due to a change of value-creation and service environments of tourism experiences. This chapter's nature in structuring the process and characteristics of tourism experiences is based on Aho's model and complemented by further researcher's work.

### Motivations and developments of tourism experiences

Tourism experiences start by motivations to travel. One of those motivations lies in the *need to escape*: Tourists want to experience an environment that is different to their home and therefore seek for experiences that differ from their daily life (Batat/Frochot, 2013, p. 112 ; Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 10). "The tourist is a kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other 'times' and other 'places' away from that person's everyday life." (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 10). While Urry & Larssen (2011) understand authenticity as a term to describe something as "real", Ooi stresses that tourists' perception of authenticity is strongly related to their expectations and previous knowledge regarding touristic sites and activities (Ooi, 2005, p. 63). Another motivation for travelling is *nostalgia*. According to Pretes (1995), nostalgia can be perceived as the subconscious longing for childhood (p. 13) but also by entering a different time period (p. 4). Generally, nostalgia can be described as a sentimental emotion "(...) about objects and situations that have either disappeared or are no longer common." (Gyimóthy, 2005, p. 112). In any case, nostalgia arises from the tourists' personal attachment to the tourism experience (Gyimóthy, 2005, p. 113). Although motivations for tourism experiences can be defined concretely, researchers noticed a change in the nature of experiences regarding their approach to value-creation. Neuhofer & Buhalis (2013) define this development as a shift from Experience 1.0 to Experience 3.0. *Experience 1.0*, which describes the shift from a consume-oriented to an experience-oriented consumption of products and services, as introduced by Pine and Gilmore in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Creating experiences was a tremendously beneficial way to gain competitive advantage through added value and differentiation (Neuhofer/Buhalis, 2013, p. 126). However, experiences shifted from the

predominant role of the companies to create value by staging experiences to a co-creation of the experience by both consumer and producer, which can be considered as *Experience 2.0*. (Neuhofer/Buhalis, 2013, p. 126). In 2004, Vargo & Lusch described this development as an emerging new dominant logic. They describe experiences as a bilateral co-creation of value, where firms make value propositions and consumers evaluate the value of the experience by using and co-creating it (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 7). The co-creation of experiences is considerably facilitated by technology, since only communities encourage the dialogue between consumers and producers (Van Limburg, 2012, p. 131), which enables interaction between both parties already in the beginning of the value chain. However, the active involvement of the consumer in online communities before the interaction with the producer presents a low controllability of the expectations towards the experience for the producer (Van Limburg, 2012, p. 121). Due to the increasing use and technological advancing invention within information technology, the internet nowadays does not only facilitate communication and value-creation within tourism experiences, but even presents an environment for the value-creation of experiences in all stages of the experience, both virtually and on-site (Neuhofer/Buhalis, 2013, p. 131). Consequently, in *Experiences 3.0* the use of technology is not only an (optional) add-on to the experience, but an integral part of it. As both the integration of technology in the experience and the proactive value co-creation by consumers are the main characteristics of Experiences 3.0, the shift from Experience 1.0 to Experience 3.0 has a considerable impact on marketing tourism experiences. The concrete impact on marketing practices will be examined in chapter 2.3.1.

### The phases of tourism experiences

According to Aho (2011), tourism experiences have three broad phases: A pre-trip phase, the trip as such and a post-trip phase. Since the notion of experiences within the tourism sector is not limited to whole trips (Oh et al., 2007, p. 120), those phases will be considered *pre-experience phase*, the *experience as such* and the *post-experience phase* within this thesis. During the *pre-experience phase*, a traveler gets first interested in and then attached to an experience (Aho, 2001, p. 35). From an economic point of view, the anticipation of a tourism experience is a highly competitive but potentially very valuable

phase for tourism firms, since the communication between company and potential client is individual and cannot be imitated (Ooi, 2005, p. 65 ; Volo, 2010, p. 24). Today, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a highly influential dimension of the pre-experience phases of tourism experiences (Sundbo & Dixit, 2020, p. 19 ; Rossal et al., 2019, p. 102). It affects the decision-making of tourists by giving an impression of the experience, making them want to experience the same themselves (Frochot & Batat, 2013, p. 35). Since consumers use the internet to compare and evaluate experiences before the booking decision, experience providers have to compete for the consumers' attention (Hudson, 2013, p. 478), which makes communication an important dimension of the pre-experience phase. Also after a booking decision, the interaction between experience consumer and provider affects the experience by engaging consumers (Frias et al., 2019, p. 175) and creating expectations and imaginations regarding their upcoming experience (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 29). Tourists' reaction on the communication before the actual experience is cognitive, while the feelings come up during the actual experience and is different for people who already know the experience (Frochot & Batat, 2013, p. 23). Nonetheless, the pre-experience stage is an important phase to communicate the anticipated experience and the feelings it might evoke in tourists (Frochot & Batat, 2013, p. 35 ; Volo, 2010, p. 22). Further, experience providers can communicate information that helps tourists to put the upcoming experience in a wider context, which has an impact on the tourists' actual experience ((Frochot & Batat, 2013, p. 35 ; Mandabach, 2020, p. 112 ; Volo, 2010, p. 20). During the *actual experience*, the tourist is in the service environment provided by the producer. Through mutual interaction, value is co-created by both tourists' and experience producers (Prebensen, 2013, pp. 27-29). While the experience is created in the tourist's mind, the experience producing company can stimulate the tourists' perception by providing the service environment and stimuli (Sundbo/Dixit, 2020, p. 23). For example, information communicated to the tourists within the interaction between consumer and producer can give a fuller meaning of the experienced (Frochot & Batat, 2013, p. 36). After the experience, in the *post-experience phase*, tourists reflect the experienced activity. Mandabach (2020) states that, unlike during the actual experience, it is in the post-experience phase that actual emotions are perceived. Social Media plays an important role in the reflection process, since sharing related content brings back the memory of the experience through (audio)visual media

(Mandabach, 2020, p. 112). This connection to the experience can cause the feeling of nostalgia (Gyimóthy, 2005, p. 112). Another possibility for tourists to make past experiences tangible are souvenirs (Mossberg, 2007, p. 68).

### **2.1.2 Theme Park Experiencescapes**

Deriving from medieval outdoor festivals in Europe and agricultural fairs in North America (Milman, 2010, p. 222), theme parks are nowadays a “cultural icon” of North America (Davis, 1996, p. 411) and an “omnipresent fixture in tourism’s landscape” (Davis, 1996, p. 399). The opening of Disneyland in 1955 marked the birth of the concept of theme parks: Amusement parks whose organization, structure and design relates to an overall theme (Milman, 2010, p. 224 ; Wong/Cheung, 1999, p. 320). Due to nowadays’ global presence of theme parks, Walt Disney can be considered a pioneer in experiencescapes, creating the world’s first theme parks (Pine/Gilmore, 1999, p. 3). Bryman (2004) even speaks of a “Disneyization of society”, referring to the presence of the principles applied in Disney’s theme parks also in other domains of the society (Bryman, 2004, p. 8). It is worth outlining the role of themes to better understand the popularity of theme parks as well as their role within the tourism industry. Themes can turn services into experiences (Gilmore & Pine, 2002, p. 21). Since themes can be defined as “an idea or point central to a story, often summed up in a few words” (Jolliffe & Piboonrunroj, 2020, p. 2019), theming is closely related to storytelling. Stories can give a purpose to places (Lukas, 2013, p. 49). In the context of theme parks, a theme can be considered a story that unifies and harmonizes the servicescape (Åstrøm, 2020, pp. 248-249) and therefore gives meaning to the experienced (Bryman, 2004, p. 21). The unification of the story hereby relates to the coordination and connection of multisensual signals in a way that it matches the story (Milman, 2010, p. 221 ; Mossberg, 2007, p. 69 ; Mossberg, 2008, p. 69). The theme with its values, characters and places is reflected in the design of the theme park experience, both in its physical environment and in marketing activities (Bryman, 2004, p. 25 ; Mossberg, 2008, pp. 2003-2005 ; Muñoz et al., 2005, p. 224). Lukas (2013, pp. 68–76) emphasizes that associations with the theme play a crucial role in letting the guest dive into the story. While themes can be derived from places, time periods, sports and many other topics (Bryman, 2004, p. 23), they all

have the common characteristics of providing an environment that differ from the visitors' everyday reality and therefore meet tourists' need to escape (Pretes, 1995, p. 6). The theme is present in several places within a place and matches with the corporate identity of the hosting company (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, p. 73). To strengthen the theme-related associations and invite guest to escape from reality, the overall theme is present in all attractions (Kao et al., 2008, p. 165 ; Sun & Uysal, 1994, p. 72 ; Wong & Cheung, 1999, p. 320). However, the single places within the experiencescape might have their own story (Bryman, 2004, p. 25 ; Jolliffe & Piboonrungraj, 2020, p. 226). Another crucial characteristic of theme parks is participation: By meeting the need for active participation, theme parks can draw guests into their space by getting them involved in the experience (Dong & Siu, 2013, p. 543 ; Kao et al., 2008, p. 166 ; Lukas, 2013, p. 136). This involvement happens through the guest's interaction with the theme, for example through the contact with the personnel. Since characters are an essential part of a good story (Mossberg, 2007, p. 69), theme park personnel representing fictive characters can be understood as emotional labor (Bryman, 2004, pp. 100-101 ; Mossberg, 2008, p. 196) of the theme park experience or even as actors of the story (Kao et al., 2008, p. 172). Kao et al. (2008, p. 172) conclude that the personnel has a considerable effect on the quality of the experience. Guests hereby do not necessarily seek for authenticity (Pretes, 1995, pp. 2–3). Letting themselves dive into an artificial world, theme park visitors seek sensory and emotional rather than functional value in the experience (Schmitt, 1999, p. 55): The overall aim is to turn adults into enthusiastic visitors by letting guests involve in another place and time through the three-dimensional and multisensorial communication of a theme (Bryman, 2004, p. 25 ; Lukas, 2013, p. 76 ; Milman, 2010, p. 221).

With the idea of letting guests immerse into another time and/or place, theme parks are closed, artificial environments, contradicting the idea of geographical place (Wong/Cheung, 1999, p. 320). Constructed and designed as a “place in a place”, theme parks present a very condensed tourism product (Wong & Cheung, 1999, p. 320). They are designed as a clusters that offer a variety of services, such as shops, accommodation and restaurants, so that guests would not have to reach out to competitors in order to spend several days in the theme parks (Davis, 1996, pp. 405–406 ; Sun & Uysal, 1994, pp. 74–

76). This makes theme parks an important driver for local tourism economy and creates competition between local service providers (Sun & Uysal, 1994, pp. 76–77).

## **2.2 Soundscape**

Sounds can be understood as an ambient condition of servicescapes (Bitner, 1992 p. 60). Put in a wider concept, the sounds of human environment and their effect on humans can be considered a soundscape, since senses can be seen as scapes that describe the relationship between the human body and its environment. “In this sense, the term soundscape does not simply refer to a “sound environment”; more specifically, it refers to what is perceptible as an aesthetic unit in a sound milieu.” (Augoyard & Torgue, 2006, p. 6) Consequently, sounds can create a whole environment on their own (Augoyard & Torgue, 2006, p. 6) while contributing to servicescapes’ physical environment as well (Bitner, 1992 p. 60). In any case, researchers consider sounds as one of the sensual dimensions of perceiving and interacting with a physical environment (Bitner, 1992 p. 60 ; Urry & Larssen, 2011, pp. 197-198). Within a service environment, sounds can affect consumers in many ways. Bitner (1992) argues that sounds have an impact on the perception of and beliefs about service environments (Bitner, 1992 p. 62). This makes auditory elements very important for marketing: sounds affect consumers’ evaluation of products and services as well as their advertisement, which is due to the associations between sounds and their meaning (Krishna, 2011, pp. 341-342). For example, marketers use sounds to attract people to their service environment, but also to facilitate customers’ sense of orientation within the environment (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 78 ; Van Egmond, 2007, p. 69). However, auditory stimuli do not only enable the communication of brand values communicated by the company but also allows consumers to create their own brand associations based on sounds (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 69-70 ; Krishna, 2011, p. 334).

### **2.2.1 Perceptual Sound Domains**

When talking about sounds, it is important to acknowledge the variety of sounds. In research, sounds have been categorized into perceptual sound domains based on their different characteristics and effects on human perception (Van Egmond, 2007, p. 71). The three domains of musical, speech and environmental sounds include several subdomains of sounds such as music, ambient sounds, voices and signature sounds (Krishna, 2011 ; Van Egmond, 2007) and will serve as a structure for the following subchapter focusing on the categorizations of sounds.

### Speech sounds

Speech sounds include the sound of speaking and therefore both musical speech (singing) as well as non-musical speech (Van Egmond, 2007, p. 71). With language being considered as our most important communication system (Klempe, 2016b, p. 319), words present the vocal translation of our conscience (Pádua, 2016, p. 228). Moreover, the phenomenon of sound symbolism describes the process of attaching a meaning to a subject based on the sound it produces (Krishna, 2011, p. 341) or the spelling of the word describing the subject (Meyers-Levy et al, 2009, p. 140). Even tiny linguistic variations, such as front vs. back vowels, but also the tone of the voice speaking it influence the perception (Krishna, 2011, p. 341 ; Meyers-Levy et al, 2009, p. 140). Besides the vocal expression itself, also the individual sound of the speaker affects the perception of what is said. Therefore, voices can create positive brand associations and strengthen the brand identity (Hultén et al., 2009, pp. 72-74).

### Musical sounds

Due to its variety and, nowadays, broad accessibility, music can serve as a way of identification: “Depending on our mood, the weather, or even the day of the week, we express ourselves through different types of music (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 70). Supporting the understanding of music as a medium of communication, researchers further acknowledge similarities between music and language in its ability to create meaning (Cross, 2016, p. 23 ; Klempe, 2016b, p. 320). Since songs are a combination of lyrical and auditory images and therefore present a “mosaic of sensorial characteristics” (Pádua, 2016, pp. 227–228), it is undeniable that sounds and speech affect each other (Van Egmond, 2007, p. 71). Although its meaning is perceived on an individual cognitive level by the listener (Cross, 2016, p. 23), Klempe (2016a, p. 107) argues that “(..) music is rational if it is applied due to its characteristics (...)”. Accordingly, companies can use music to strengthen the identity of their brand (Hultén et al., 2009, pp. 75-76). Within the service environment, music and its variety in melodies, pace and volume can further be used to affect the consumers’ behavior, such as the choice of products, the length of their stay within the service environment or their walking pace within the environment (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 75 ; Meyers-Levy et al., 2009, p. 146).

## Environmental sounds and product sounds

The third perceptual dimension of sounds is environmental sounds. Environmental sounds are the unity of different sounds that shape a place's soundscape. The nature of environmental sounds highly depend on the physical environments and its characteristics, such as nature and infrastructure. Additionally, environmental sounds do not only describe the totality of different sounds in a soundscape, but also include product sounds (Van Egmond, 2007, pp. 69–71). Product sounds can be described as the sounds created by physical objects and their use. They can be consequential, meaning a consequence of use, or intentional, meaning that the sounds are artificially added on purpose sounds (Van Egmond, 2007, p. 71). Product sounds can give information on the object, such as its size or location, and can consequently affect the product experience. Van Egmond (2007, pp. 71–72) therefore highlights the beneficial effects of sound design. Many brands have acknowledged the benefits of sound design and successfully included product sounds in their communication strategy: Coca cola, for example, based their audio branding on the consequential sound of opening and drinking a coca cola bottle (Paramount, 2017).



*Figure 1: The Intrinsic Soundscape of Coca Cola (Paramount, 2017).*

### **2.2.2 Soundscapes of Theme Parks**

Theme parks' soundscape can include a versatile mixture of the abovementioned sound genres. As in every servicescape, they play an important role in the perception of the

environment and therefore affect the customers' experience (Bitner, 1992, p. 60). Generally, sounds contribute tremendously to the memorability of experiences (Hultén et al., 2009, pp. 74-75) which has been considered a key goal in tourism service design (Bulencea/Egger, 2015 ; Sthapit, 2013). However, sounds have an additional beneficial effect on theme parks due to their ability to support the theme (Macinnis & Park, 1991, p. 162 ; Hultén et al., 2009, p. 77) and to strengthen the brand identity (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 75). Further, sounds allow customers to navigate between the attractions and enhances the memorability of experiences (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 78).

Within a theme park environment, many sounds can be controlled, such as the music played in the background, the bells attached to animals or the sound resulting of the underground's material. Nevertheless, peoples' voices can only partly be controlled: Since the personnel might represent a fictive character (Mossberg, 2008, p. 196), playing their role might include a (conscious or subconscious) change of voice in order to support the storytelling (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 73) as an important aspect of tourism experiences (Frias et al., 2019 ; Mossberg, 2008 ; Jolliffe & Piboonrungrroj, 2020, p. 226). However, the voices of customers' as well as the languages they speak cannot be controlled by the experience producers. This aspect should not be neglected when reflecting on a service environment's sound scape since languages have their own symbolizations: "English (...) has come to suggest a social stereotype – a symbol of modernity, progress, sophistication and a cosmopolitan identity, whereas the primary (or first) language is likely to have high levels of "belongingness" associations which connote a stronger sense of closeness (...)." (Krishna, 2011, p. 341)

### **2.3 Marketing in the Tourism Experiencescape**

Also online communication can be considered a virtual experience setting (Boswijk et al., 2015, p. 9), the consideration of marketing as the pre-stage of each experience has been widely neglected (Kim, 2010, p. 792 ; Sundbo & Dixit , 2020, p. 19; Volo, 2010, p. 24). However, due to tourism services' intangibility, marketing has a crucial rule in creating an identifiable image of the services that helps (potential) customers to anticipate the experience beforehand (Wong & Cheung, 1999, p. 322). Within the past years, tourism

marketing goals, such as memorability (Kim, 2010, p. 791) have shifted from a traditional marketing approach towards an experiential approach.

### **2.3.1 Experiential Marketing and Senses in Tourism Marketing**

Tourism researchers have taken the characteristics of tourism experiences into account and described the shift from traditional marketing to an experience-oriented approach as *experiential marketing* (Batat/Frochot, 2013, p. 110). Since experiences are all about senses, sensory marketing is an important tool to communicate the experience accurately as possible (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2004, p. 3). A key difference between the traditional and the experiential approach to marketing therefore lies in the stimuli used for the communication. Since experiences are evaluated by pleasure and memory, rather than satisfaction (Batat & Frochot, 2013, p. 111), experiential marketing is less rational and “engineering-driven” than traditional approaches (Schmitt, 1999, p. 55): While traditional approaches focus on verbal stimuli, the experiential approach highlights sensory stimuli, also non-verbal ones, with the goal to maximize the tourists’ emotional benefits (Batat & Frochot, 2013, p. 111). According to Hulten, senses help to process information and understand what we experience (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 18) “The more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be.” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 104) By including sensorial elements to the marketing strategies, tourism firms can address tourists’ need for emotional & hedonical engagement (Batat & Frochot, 2013, p. 120). Since feelings are not searchable, tourism services cannot be depicted in the exact same way the customer will experience them – but multisensory presentations of the experience support the decision-making by conceptualizing the experience through senses (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2004).

### **2.3.2 Social Media Marketing in Tourism**

Social media contributes considerably to the digitalization of the tourists’ customer journey (Sigala, 2016, p. 93) in all stages of tourism experiences. Since companies can communicate with tourists (Hudson, 2013, p. 476), the two-sided communication on social

media can be considered integral part in experiential marketing + experience 3.0 (virtual co-creation) (Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2013, p. 131 ; Sigala, 2016, p. 94). By co-creating the experience, “(...) it is no longer the sole responsibility of the marketing department to construct the brand meaning - the consumer is a key partner in this process.” (Foley et al., 2013, p. 140)

In the *pre-experience* stage, social media can have a considerable impact on travelers’ decision making: the platform can be considered as mechanisms of electronic word-of-mouth, meaning that user-generated content showing tourism experiences inspires other users to experience something similar or even the same (Foley et al., 2013, p. 143 ; Rossal et al., 2019). Hudson (2013) emphasizes the importance of this stage for marketers, highlighting the fact that customers make their (booking) decision before they are able to evaluate the product or service based on their own personal experience (Hudson, 2013, p. 478). During the *actual experiences*, tourists can use social media to share the experience with friends and family (Foley et al., 2013, p. 146). Also experience providers can benefit from social media’s possibilities by providing live reports of their experiences or even organize completely remote experiences: A Finnish dog-sledding company offers remote husky tours (Parpalandia.com, 2020) while Rovaniemi’s Santa Claus Village provides a continuous livestream of their main square on YouTube (Youtube, 2020). After the experience, social media can serve as review platforms, providing feedback that can affect the decision making of other potential customers (Foley et al., 2013, p. 146, Figure 11.1). Further, users can upload photos or videos as a “personal digital souvenir” of their experience (Classen, 2017, p. 137) Facebook, Youtube Instagram and Tiktok are the social media platforms with the most users with Instagram providing the greatest variety in its possibility to share and consume different types of content (Ang, 2021).

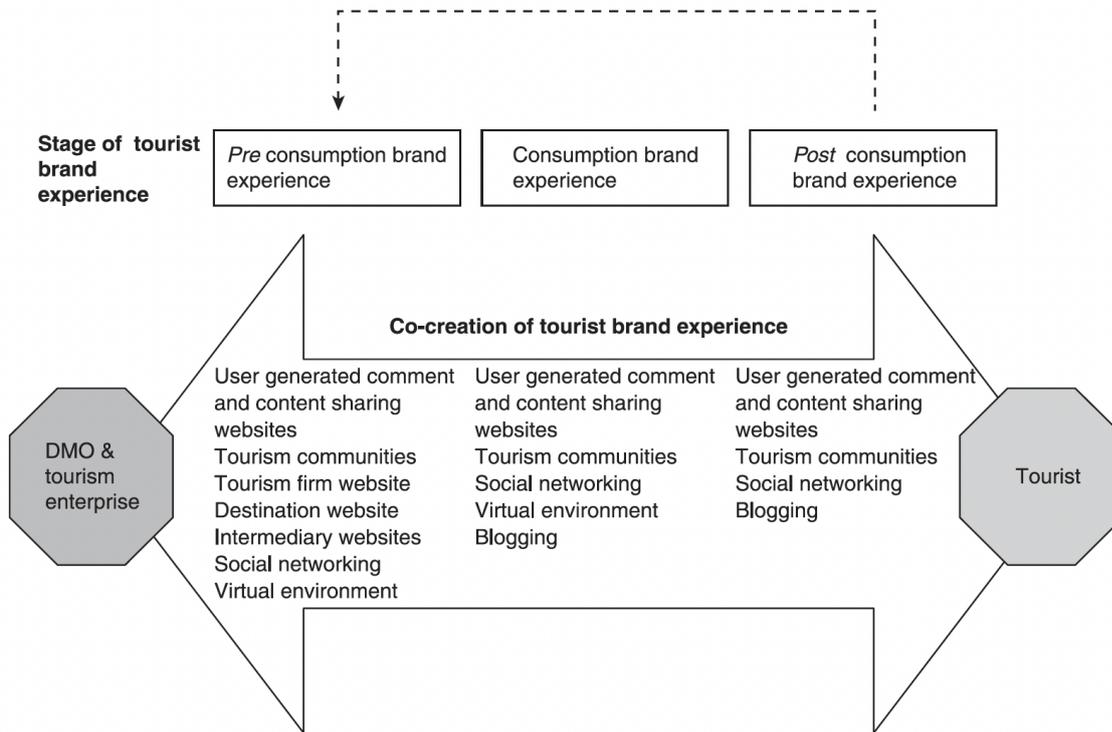


Figure 2: 1 Stages of Tourist Brand Experience and the Social Media (Foley et al., 2019, p. 145)

## 2.4 Christmas Tourism Experiences

As a holiday derived from the Christian religion, the Christmas season is celebrated not only in relation to the fictive character of Santa Claus, but also as a seasonal holiday. By its own seasonal traditions, Christmas culture reflects society and its values (Löfgren, 1993, p. 58), which will be discussed later in this chapter. Although limited on one to three days in December, depending on the country and culture, Christmas traditions such as decoration and the consumption of Christmas-associated products can cover a period of several months between late autumn and the first months of the new year (Studwell, 1998, p. 138). Since Christmas celebrations are experiential in nature (Kylänen, 2006), tourism experiences can be related to the theme of Christmas in many ways. Based on the Christian celebration of Christmas as Jesus' birth, related destinations such as Bethlehem "(...) [make] effort to develop Bethlehem as a "Mecca for Christians" (Isaac, 2010, p. 28)." However, in many Western countries the Christmas season is celebrated independently of the religious background of the holiday. Christmas markets in Europe, for example, derived from history rather than from religion (Spennemann & Parker, 2021, pp. 1821-1822). It is the Christmas atmosphere created by stimuli of all senses, "(..) this combination of a multisensory collective that gives these markets their own unique intangible heritage." (Spennemann & Parker, 2021, p. 1832). Christmas tourism moreover includes tourism experiences based on the fictive character of Santa Claus and its representation. Experience providers commonly invite tourists to immerse in the spirit of Christmas which awakes childhood memories (Pretes, 1995, p.14). Those memories are often very strong, since children's belief in Santa is often supported by parents by regular rituals, such as presenting a poem to Santa Claus. Childhood memories on Christmas and Santa Claus are therefore strongly multisensual in nature (Prentice et al., 1978 pp. 619-620). Although the character of Santa might seem very contradictory to Christ, there are certain parallels between both in the values and concepts they represent as well as the way we interact with them (Carrier, 1993, p. 55). Arruda (2003 as cited in Hall, 2008, p. 60) even considers Santa Claus as the world's strongest brand: "his brand attributes are clear and desirable to virtually everyone. Even parts of the world that have no connection to the holiday know who he is and what he stands for." Accordingly, there are many Santa Claus themed tourism activities and amusement parks across the globe –

some of them even focus on the summer season (northpolecolorado.com, 2022). From the popularity of tourism experiences offering a representation of the fictive character of Santa Claus, Pretes concludes that by consuming Christmas tourists buy the feeling of nostalgia (Pretes, 1995, p.14)

#### **2.4.1 Christmas Values**

Christmas is a holiday associated with positive values such as peace, kindness and togetherness (Whiteley, 2008, pp. 102–107). However, Christmas is a holiday that can also lead to negative feelings such as stress (Kasser & Sheldon, 2002, pp. 324–325) and the longing for something we do not have (Whiteley, 2008, p. 106). This contradiction between the romantic discourse around Christmas and the negative associations with the holiday can be described as a paradox (Kuper, 1993, p. 170 ; Miller, 1993, p. 75), an alternative reality (Kuper, 1993, pp. 171–172), a domestic fantasy (Sands, 2001, p. 56) or even an utopia (Löfgren, 1995, . 219). Put in harsh words, Christmas is “(...) the time for both joy and suicides, of materialism and also its repudiation, of family togetherness and family quarelling.” (Miller, 1993, p. 26). The change of society that contradicts with traditional Christmas values (Kylänen, 2006, p. 116) however, can be seen as an important driver of optimism in uncertain times (Whiteley, 2008, pp. 110–111). Examining what researchers state as core values of christmas and in which way they reflect the society’s behavior is not only interesting, but also crucial for understanding the role of music within Christmas’ ability of differing from other seasons and holidays.

One of the strongest values associated with Christmas is togetherness: Christmas is by nature a collective experience since many people experience it as the same time (Kuper, 1993, p. 157 ; Kylänen, 2006, p. 104). Further, it is a very family- and child-centred event that the people celebrating it usually spend with their family (Kuper, 1993 ; Whiteley, 2008, pp. 108–110). However, the positively connotated concept of togetherness in many cases implies a potential for conflicts of different kinds. Not only do the often untypically composed family meetings cause tensions (Jarman-Ivens, 2008, p. 11 ; Löfgren, 1993, pp. 224–226 ; Searle-Chatterjee, 1993, p. 186), but also the expectation of spending Christmas with the family imposes organizational challenges in nowadays’ society:

People split their Christmas to several family visits and duplicate Christmas eves to meet their own and other peoples' expectation of spending Christmas together (Kuper, 1993, p. 170 ; Löfgren, 1993, p. 226). Another value that in itself is perceived positive but can lead to negative emotions is giving. Generosity, giving and kindness are important concepts characterizing the Christmas spirit (Jarman-Ivens, 2008, p. 115 ; Whiteley, 2008, p. 104) and reflect in the habit of giving gifts. Carrier (1993, pp. 55–56) describes giving gifts as an expression of affection which includes not only materialistic objects but often also trusting part of your own identity to someone else. However, the process of making gifts does not make a positive contribution to people's Christmas feelings (Kasser & Sheldon, 2002, p. 324).

So what is the role of songs in those contradictory realities of Christmas? From an economic point of view, they play an important role in promoting values that are in favor of consumption, such as giving as a form of affection. Playing Christmas songs as a background music in stores and malls is therefore an effective marketing tool (Cooper, 2008, p. 95 ; Jarman-Ivens, 2008, p. 114). However, it is worth taking a deeper look in the messages and characteristics of Christmas songs. Nowadays that traditional carols "(...) become intertwined with Christmas hymns and songs of all types" (Cooper, 2008, p. 88), it is hard to clearly define what is a Christmas song. While traditional Christmas songs used to be very easy to sing, in accordance with the concept of community and togetherness (Jarman-Ivens, 2008, pp. 115–116), the Christmas songs nowadays cover a variety of music genres, including those which are hard to sing along to, such as rock (Jarman-Ivens, 2008, p. 121). Whiteley (2008, p. 101) sees an ideological tension between Christmas songs as a transmitter of community feeling and the quietness of the holiday by its religious focus on the birth of Christ. However, she notices Christmas music's power to convey human values and even political messages such as calling for peace in times of war (Whiteley, 2008, p. 102). By supporting the romantic discourse of Christmas by highlighting concepts such as family, charity, romance and happiness (Jarman-Ivens, 2008, p. 115, figure 3 ), Christmas songs make a contribution to conserve Christmas as a time clearly separated from the everyday reality: "In a period of uncertainty and worldwide conflict, optimism, however framed, is surely worth preserving." (Whiteley, 2008, p. 111)

<u>Concepts</u>	<u>Songs</u>
Traditional, religious	‘Mistletoe and Wine’ ‘Do You Hear What I Hear?’ ‘Mary’s Boy Child’
Nostalgia	‘White Christmas’ ‘The Christmas Song’ ‘Winter Wonderland’
Children	‘Santa Claus Is Coming To Town’ ‘Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer’ ‘Frosty the Snowman’
Romance, Desire for heterosexual union	‘Merry Christmas Darling’ ‘It’ll Be Lonely this Christmas’ ‘Last Christmas’ ‘All I Want For Christmas Is You’
Friends, Party	‘I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day’ ‘Step Into Christmas’ ‘Rocking Around the Christmas Tree’
Goodwill to all men	‘Do They Know It’s Christmas?’ ‘Happy Christmas (War Is Over)’ ‘A New York City Christmas’ ‘Let’s Unite The Whole World At Christmas’

Figure 3: Christmas songs and their relation to Christmas-associated concepts (own illustration based on Jarman-Ivens, 2008, p. 115)

#### 2.4.2 Christmas Tourism in Lapland

Snowy winters, remote areas and reindeers make the northern hemisphere a real-life representation of the myth of Santa Claus (Rusko et al., 2013, p. 45). The Finnish region Lapland can be considered a “Santa Tourism Superpower” with its biggest city Rovaniemi having the (...) greatest concentration in Santa Claus related infrastructure”

(Snellmann, 2006 as cited in Hall, 2008, p. 61). In the 30 most popular Christmas tourism destinations, Finnish Lapland is one of the only two destinations offering Christmas-related tourism activities year-around (Rusko et al., 2013, p. 42). Accordingly, Lapland's key tourism season is the Christmas period (Tervo-Kankare et al., 2013, p. 296). Christmas tourism in Lapland has been developed since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on a radio commentator's statement that Santa Claus would live on a fell in Lapland (Pretes, 1995, p. 8). Since the formation of a Santa Claus Work Group initiated by the Finnish tourism board in 1984 (Pretes, 1995, p. 9 ; Tervo-Kankare et al., 2013, p. 297), Rovaniemi as a tourism destination branded itself based on being the official hometown of Santa Claus – which creates competition to other Nordic destinations (Hall, 2008, pp. 61-62 ; Pretes, 1995, p. 9). Despite being an internationally leading destination for Christmas tourism (Hall, 2008, pp. 61-62), the strong focus on Christmas season within the local tourism sector creates economic challenges and risks. Since the whole tourism concept of Rovaniemi is built on Santa Claus (Rusko et al., 2013, pp. 44-45), Christmas tourism makes the sector depending on the winter season and therefore very vulnerable to changing climate conditions (Tervo-Kankare et al., 2013, pp. 296-297).

### Santa Claus Village

Santa Claus Village is a Christmas theme park in Rovaniemi, Finland. Open 365 days a year, the park consists of shops, restaurants, accommodation, and activities, such as reindeer sledding. Further, guests can visit Santa Claus in his official office and send post card from the park's own post center (Santa Claus Village, 2022). The park is part of Santa Claus Village's Cooperative, which consists not only of companies present in the park itself, but also in Rovaniemi and its surroundings. Within this thesis, we consider Santa Claus Village as the physical location on the arctic circle in Rovaniemi, close to but not to be confused with the underground park SantaPark, which is located close to Santa Claus Village. Santa Claus Village was opened in 1985, after the Finnish Tourist Board instructed a Santa Claus Work Group to support the image of Lapland as the home of Santa. The location outside of the center of Rovaniemi was chosen due to the arctic circle crossing the area on that spot. At that time, the village consisted of a workshop, a postoffice, a reindeer enclosure and shops (Pretes, 1995, p. 9). Although Santa Claus was said to live in Korvatunturi, Santa Claus Village serves as Santa's workplace, where

people can visit him due to a better accessibility (Lavia, 2006, pp. 12–13). Today, Santa Claus Village’s cooperative contains around 50 partners, such as restaurants, shops and hotels and counts more than 500.000 annual visitors ([visitrovaniemi.fi](http://visitrovaniemi.fi)). With the overall present theme of Christmas in its services, Santa Claus Village represents the fictive story of Santa Clause by making the intangible story tangible in a physical environment (Pretes, 1995, pp. 12–13). “The authenticity of Santa Claus Village lies in its representational connection to the idea of Christmas and Santa Claus.” (Lavia, 2001, p. 17)

### 3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS METHODS

#### 3.1 Choice of Methods

This research follows a constructivist approach, assuming that “(...) each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes (...)” in order to understand reality (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 375) and that everyone’s perception of reality is also socially constructed (Misoch, 2015, p. 26). Consequently, I chose data collection and analysis methods that allow to get an insight into each participant’s perception of their reality, giving them the chance to express their very own perceptions freely. Accordingly, this research aims to be open towards different realities (Allen, 1994, p. 38), also in the analysis process. The data was collected through a mixed method of semi-structured interviews with sound elicitation. At first, I planned to interview not only Christmas theme park guests, but also employees to that I would get a multidimensional picture on the role of sounds in marketing both from the consumers’ and producers’ perspective. Conducting and analyzing one interview with a professional brought interesting insights on different aspects regarding Christmas music and their use in the theme park which affected the design and focus of the interviews conducted with participants. With a stronger focus on the perception of Christmas sounds, rather than on participants’ use of social media, the insights from guests seemed more valuable for my research than further insights from professionals. However, the interview with a professional was highly enriching for my research since it brought up thematic aspects which I did not cover in my research process earlier.

Within qualitative research, the main goal is to understand the reality (Misoch, 2015, p. 35). To provide each participant to express their individual reality as open as possible, the data is collected through semi-structured interviews. Generally, interviews have been considered by researchers as a staged conversation with a concrete purpose (Jennings, 2010, p. 171). “It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge.” (Kvale, 1996, p. 6) While some researchers consider interviews as an active conversation initiated by both parties, interviewer and interviewees, others stress that the interviewer should rather take a listening and answer-

encouraging role in the setting (Jennings, 2010, p. 171). The role of the interviewers will be discussed in detail later in this paper.

Semi-structured interviews are, as indicated in the term itself, partly structured. The term structure hereby refers to the extent to which the interview questions and their order during the interview have been planned by the researcher beforehand. The structure for the interview therefore might contain the detailed wording of concrete questions or just bullet points. Conducting semi-structured interviews can be both enriching and challenging for the research. One of the chances of semi-structured interviews lies in the nature of the structure itself. Since the degree of structurization of the interview can reach from concrete questions to simple bullet points, this method can be used for different research questions by both experienced and unexperienced researchers (Misoch, 2015, p. 66). Further, this interviewing method can present a for the research project appropriate balance between using a structure to ensure comparability and covering relevant topics but still having the flexibility to react to the interviewee's responses, for example by asking further questions for clarification (Jennings, 2010, p. 175). On the other hand, choosing semi-structured interviews as a data collection method can be challenging as well. The flexibility in structuring the interview and the possibility to ask follow-up questions makes each interview setting individual, limiting the ability to compare the data: "(...) [T]he social interaction between the researcher and the participant/co-researcher is a snapshot view of interaction influenced by the type of day, the setting of the interview and the social circumstances surrounding both the researcher and the participant / co-researcher." (Jennings, 2010, p. 175) However, knowing those challenges gives the opportunity to critically evaluate the reliability and validity of the data when analyzing it.

As briefly outlined previously, the interviewer is an essential part of the conversation and therefore has a considerable impact on the data collection and analysis. Kvale (1996, pp. 3–5) points out that there are different ways for interviewers to position themselves regarding the purpose and process of data collection. Using two metaphors, he argues that the interviewer can act as a miner who is strategically digging for information or as a traveler who wanders and lets every conversation and its outcome affect the further

journey and the way the traveler sees things (Kvale, 1996, pp. 3-5). During the interview situation, the way the interviewer leads the conversation and presents himself has a considerable impact on his conversation partner: It should be the interviewer's goal to make the interviewee feel comfortable throughout the whole interview to ensure open answers to the questions. Further, there is a risk of bias – especially since semi-structured interviews give the flexibility for interviewers to actively affect the responses (Jennings, 2010, p. 176 ; Rapley, 2004, p. 19). A critical evaluation of this method regarding the actual collected data for this research will follow in the last chapter of this thesis.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Data has been collected in two interview settings: One has been an online interview conducted in Microsoft Teams with a professional from Santa Claus Village and 14 interviews took place in Santa Claus Village. The semi-structured interview with the professional took 30 minutes and gave enriching insights in the use of sounds in a Christmas theme park from a professional perspective. Those insights, especially regarding the challenges, have brought up aspects that highly affected the design of the participant interviews. Those insights will be covered in the analysis chapter.

To have a great demographic variety among participants, I decided to conduct the participant interviews in the premises on Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi. The interview setting was located in “Santa’s Gifthouse”, right next to the main square of the village. I approached the guests directly when they passed the house, quickly explaining that I look for participants for my thesis and asking if they would have around 15 minutes time to take part in the interview. Further, I told them that they could get a postcard for free, since I printed postcards from my own photos of Rovaniemi as a little gift for participants. Fortunately, only one guest declined my request for participation and the overall feedback of participants was very positive and encouraging. Data has been collected through semi-structured 1-on-1 interviews including sound elicitation. 14 interviews have been conducted with an average length of 16 minutes with the shortest taking a bit over four minutes and the longest a bit over 23 minutes. Interviews have been

documented through voice-recording and simultaneous notes. Participants showed a great demographic variety:

Participant	Age group	Gender	Nationality	Interview Duration (min)	Visited Santa Claus Village before?
Participant 1	≤ 30	f	Finland	23:40	Yes, 25-30 times
Participant 2	≤ 30	f	Finland	18:22	Yes, ca. 30 times
Participant 3	≤ 30	f	Spain	19:13	Yes. 3 times
Participant 4	≥ 51	m	Finland	06:35	Yes, 100+ times
Participant 5	≤ 30	f	Austria	26:10	Yes, 1 time
Participant 6	≥ 51	m	Germany	07:48	No
Participant 7	31-50	f	US	12:11	No
Participant 8	≥ 51	f	Netherlands	08:49	No
Participant 9	≤ 30	m	Germany	10:07	No
Participant 10	≤ 30	m	France	18:19	Yes, 20-30 times
Participant 11	≤ 30	f	Germany	19:02	Yes, 8-10 times
Participant 12	≤ 30	f	Finland	19:43	Yes, ca. 8 times
Participant 13	≤ 30	f	Estonia	21:07	Yes, 10-15 times
Participant 14	≤ 30	f	Japan	19:48	Yes, ca. 3 times

The interview consisted of both open questions and multiple-choice questions, where in both cases interviewees were encouraged to reply to the question as open as they want. By including scaled questions, I aimed to enhance the participants' ability to express their perception, since the staged nature of interview situation can cause communication barriers (Misoch, 2015, p. 92). With the same aim to overcome those barriers (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010, p. 3), I decided to include sound elicitation in the interview. Elicitation can be described as the use of stimuli, for example through providing probes of products (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010, p. 3) or using metaphors for the description of associations with a product or brand (Zaltman, 2003, p. 6) in order to encourage deep thoughts (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010, p. 3). The interview was structured in three main parts: Firstly, I asked questions about general Christmas association, Christmas songs and the appropriate

time to start listening to them. Afterwards, for the sound elicitation, interviewees used headphones to listen to two times five sounds, 15 seconds each sound. In the first round, participants listened only to the sound and have been asked about the feelings the sound evoked and how strong they would relate this sound to Christmas. In the second round, participants listened to the same songs and have been asked the same questions as before but in this round a photo has been shown to them at the same time. After the elicitation part followed questions about the difference in perception of songs and sounds as well as traditional and modern Christmas songs. Before ending the interview, participants were asked if they had anything to add on the topic.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

For both interview settings, content analysis has been used to analyze the empirical data. Content analysis “seeks to analyze data within a specific context in view of the meanings someone (...) attributes to them.” (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 403) Although the focus usually lies on the meanings attributed, rather than on the literal description of content, (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 404) the verbal expression of those meanings helps to analyze and therefore understand the meanings expressed in the qualitative data: Through coding, researchers can find schemes and relations between the communicated data, which helps to understand how research subjects make meaning to certain research phenomena. However, the coding process highly depends on the approach to content analysis that the researcher has chosen for the research project. According to Hsieh & Shannon (2005), a conventional content analysis starts with the observation of the phenomenon, for example through the data collection. Without any previous theoretical insights on the topic, the researcher enters the data collection and analysis somewhat openly, deriving the codes only during the data analysis and not beforehand. When conducting a directed content analysis, codes are defined not only during but also before the data analysis – in the latter case based on theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1286). Codes can be described as a “(...) word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based visual data.” (Saldana, 2016, p. 3)

In the case of my research, this language-based visual data are transcripts from semi-structured interviews conducted for the purpose of this thesis. After transcribing all interviews, I summed them up in a separate document, putting all participants' answers to the same caption right next to each other, so that I would not have to skip between documents in order to read the answers to the same questions. As a next step I marked the main words or expressions that participants used to express their feelings or opinions on the topic. Writing down all the codes separately showed that there are certain repetitive (sub)categories deriving from the single codes, which made it easier to structure the analysis and the meanings that people gave to the concepts around Christmas and Christmas sounds. Further, I compared the findings of the empirical data with the previously outlined theoretical findings.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

This thesis follows the responsible conduct of research implemented by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. Guidelines for ethical research aim to ensure that the research conducted is accurate, benefiting for different parties and not violating any rights of the parties involved in the research process (Jennings, 2010). I will briefly state how the principles of responsible research have been applied in the different stages of this study.

Following the guidelines for ethical research, it is essential to recognize the work of other researchers. Therefore, especially for the theoretical framework of this thesis, I studied other researchers' work on my thesis topic and outlined their results by citing them accurately, to my best knowledge. Citations are necessary to transparently communicate the intellectual origin of the matter in question. Further, research should follow the concepts of transparency and integrity. Those can be reached by presenting the research project to the participants before the data collection. I therefore briefly informed potential participants about my research when asking them to participate. However, since participants did not get an invitation to participate beforehand but have been contacted on the spot, it needs to be considered that participants did not have much time to reflect about the participation. To still ensure transparency for all parties, I stated that they can always ask for more information during or after the interview. When conducting research, it is

moreover important to respect the rights of all parties involved in the research process. Consequently, the privacy of participants within the collection of empirical data needs to be respected. Thus, I clearly informed the interview participants that participation is in any case voluntarily and that participants have the possibility to withdraw even after the interview by contacting me. Since participants talked about their personal experiences and impressions, the interviews have been anonymized so that it is not possible to relate the answers to the participants' identity. Moreover, the data collected within this research project, both notes and voice recordings, will not be used for any other purpose. Participants read and signed a letter of consent stating the above-mentioned information on the use of their data for this study and their possibility to withdraw. During the interview, I tried to be as sensitive to participants' answers as possible by listening carefully and asking for clarification, if needed. I gave each participant the time to answer to the question as open as possible, so that participants could take the time they needed. Besides a selfmade postcard to show my appreciation of their participation in the study, I gave a little card to every participant with my personal contact details, so that they have the possibility to get in touch afterwards. Since research should be transparent and accessible, the thesis will be published on the university's own platform.

## 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will introduce the findings of this study interpreted from the data and their relation to the previously outlined theory. The first part of this analysis focuses on the perception of different sounds regarding their ability to bring up associations in the listener and their perceived “Christmassyness”. Participants repeatedly used the adjective *christmassy* to describe how strongly they associate something with Christmas, which is why the notion of Christmassyness in this analysis refers to the extent to which feelings, subjects or associations are related to Christmas. These aspects are crucial to understand the overall perceived value of Christmas sounds and the motives of listening to them. Based on those understandings, I will analyze the practical dimension of the sound perception, namely in which time period Christmas songs are listened, which aspects affect this period and in which way coherent visuals change the perception of Christmas sounds. Consequently, the first part of the following analysis aims to give an understanding of how sounds and their relation to Christmas are perceived while the second part outlines characteristics of the way Christmas sounds are and can be consumed.

### 4.1 The perception of Sounds and their “Christmassyness”

#### 4.1.1 Christmas Associations

The interpretation of the collected data showed that Christmas sounds can be perceived through feelings or associations. Although participants have been asked about the feelings brought up by certain sounds, the answers contained rather associations, such as concrete memories, activities or settings. Therefore, not only the way the sounds made participants feel but also the associations they brought up have been considered in the analysis. Broadly, the interpretation of the data revealed that the perception of the sounds can be categorized into individual, behavioral and environmental perceptions: Individual perceptions referring to (inter)personal perceptions, behavioral perceptions related to activities and environmental perceptions in relation to the characteristics of physical environments. Before discussing the perception of Christmas sounds, it is enriching for the understanding of the data to analyze what participants associate with Christmas in general.

### Individual perceptions

On an individual level, participants communicated a variety of feelings to describe what Christmas means to them. Many participants mentioned spending time with people they love, such as their family. While the majority gave broad answers on Christmas being the time to spend with the family and people you love, several participants pointed out that Christmas is a time to see family members that they do not often see otherwise:

*When I'm at home visiting my parents over the holidays, then I associate Christmas with like spending time with family and seeing not just my closest family but like extended family. (Participant 11)*

*(...) I have time for people that I otherwise do not see the whole year. (Participant 9)*

Consequently, feelings associated with Christmas include love, caring and excitement. Christmas as a time of love, goodwill and togetherness has been acknowledged by theory accordingly (Jarman-Ivens, 2008, p. 115). However, previous research revealed stress as a further feeling related to Christmas, often caused by family conflicts and the pressure of making gifts (Kasser & Sheldon, 2002, pp. 324–325). Accordingly, participants of this study described mainly positive Christmas associations, but two participants mentioned stress as well. While one of those two did not specify in which way Christmas causes stress, the other one mentioned that buying Christmas presents late would be a stressful aspect of Christmas every year:

*I relate [Christmas] with a lot of positive feelings, sometimes with a little bit stress, like in the pre Christmas time buying Christmas presents, I'm usually late with that, so it's even more stressful then. (Participant 5)*

Moreover, most participants mentioned childhood and childhood memories as a core attribute of Christmas:

*Christmas...it's my childhood. You know, it's a moment when all your family is together. We have very good moments which are enjoyable moments. So I think when I'm thinking about Christmas, I think about my childhood and...or my family. (Participant 10)*

As stated by previous publications, Christmas as a holiday is very child-centered (Whiteley, 2008, pp. 108–110) and nostalgia is a core concept of Christmas (Pretes, 1995, p.14) – two aspects that, combined with each other, define childhood memories. The analysis of the perception of sounds in the following subchapter will reveal the effect of memories on the perception of Christmas sounds.

### Behavioral perceptions

Another perception category that derives from the interpretation of the data deals with the feelings and association based on activities during Christmas. According to Whiteley (2008, p. 111), the societal value of Christmas lies in its strong separation to everyday life through its idealistic and romanticized discourse. Accordingly, participants have talked about certain rituals and activities that they do only on Christmas, such as work in the tourism sector or going to church. More emotional responses included reflecting on life or resting from exhausting periods:

*(..) I would associate it with always like this warm feeling and you don't have like any rush and it's like it's the time to calm down after, for example, half year of busy work time or studying or something like that. (Participant 12)*

Many of the mentioned activities are (local) cultural traditions, such as going to the graveyards in Finland or visiting Christmas markets in Germany and Austria (Spennemann & Parker, 2021). A participant from Japan stated that Christmas is clearly a culture coming from abroad, which is why it is not celebrated as a public holiday, but it reflects in shops' decoration and product range:

*Um, in my culture, it's not something traditional, something that we got from the US or other cultures. Uh, it's just a marketing business thing in my country. But it*

*always excites me when Christmas comes (...) although we don't get any holidays.  
(Participant 14)*

Consequently, the separation between Christmas and the everyday can happen in different dimensions, such as activities, decorations or the contact to people who we do not meet often throughout the year. By doing so, we make Christmas an alternative reality which is clearly apart from the everyday (Kuper, 1993, pp. 171–172).

### Environmental perceptions

The interpretation of the data reveals that Christmas is a holiday that strongly refers to physical environments, such as climate:

*Well, the first thing that I associate with Christmas, which is also why I like living in Finland, is snow (laughing), having a white Christmas. (Participant 11)*

*And [Christmas] is always in my head when (...) December starting, then I'm excited. I'm already excited (laughing... but mostly also like the snow and everything around it and Christmas music (...)) (Participant 13)*

Snowy landscapes as a symbol for Christmas has been acknowledged by researchers as well (Rusko et al., 2013, p. 45) and the effect of winter attributes such as snow on the perceived Christmassyness of sounds will be discussed later. Other responses referred to the setting in which Christmas eve is celebrated or the warmth or cold of the air. In that context, several participants stated that they associate Christmas with coziness:

*It feels like home, not in a general sense of coming home, but really this cozy feeling of being with people you love, being with people you know. (Participant 5)*

*(...) Christmas feels cozy mostly...makes me think of like sitting on the couch with, like, fuzzy socks, drinking tea. (Participant 11)*

*Coziness, cold (..) and being with maybe a fireplace and homemade food.  
(Participant 3)*

Interestingly, participants pictured very concrete settings and situations, mostly about how they spend Christmas time inside, to describe their feelings and associations related to physical environments. This supports Pine's and Gilmore's (1999, p. 104) argument that experiences are more memorable if they are perceived with many different senses. This seems to be the case when participants described what they feel (coldness, coziness), smell (fireplace, food) taste (tea) and see (people) when thinking of Christmas. Summing up the findings on Christmas association, one can conclude that the variety of associations can be categorized based on what the concrete association is based on: Individual associations include personal memories and habits, while environmental associations refer to the characteristics of the physical environment of the associated situation, such as the temperature. A third dimension presents behavioral associations, which are based on the activities that participants stated to do (exclusively) on Christmas. The main findings of this subchapter, which are both supported by theoretical arguments, are that memorable experiences are those perceived with several senses (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 104), that Christmas is associated with a winter scenery (Hall, 2014, p. 31) and that Christmas is clearly separated from everyday life through certain traditions and activities (Kuper, 1993, pp. 171–172).

#### **4.1.2 Ambiance Sounds**

During the sound elicitation part of the interview, participants listened to three ambiance sounds: bells, walking on snow and fire cracking. All sounds have been played for 15 seconds and did not contain any music or speech.

##### Bells

The sound of bells evoked different feelings in the listeners. The interpretation of data reveals a strong correlation between the association created by the sound and the feelings this association evokes. Two participants from Austria and France, in whose family or

culture it is a tradition to ring the as a sign to open the presents, felt excited when they listened the sound of bells:

*It sounds like present for me, like getting presents. Because my grandma used to have like this small bell and...you would like wait in the kitchen as a child and be like really like getting hyped for... Yeah, not Santa Claus, but Christkind in Austria, and then once you hear the bell, you were allowed to, like, leave the kitchen and go into the living room where then there was the Christmas tree with like the candles and the lights on and like the presents below. Like, oh, my God. So that bell is... It's like a Christmas Eve. (Participant 5)*

*It's (..) my childhood. Because when I was a kid, my mother used to ring the bell to do the ring in the Christmas morning. So that's why it made me think at this kind moment, before I opened my eyes to my gifts. (Participant 10)*

Another participant who moved from Germany to Finland permanently expresses how different her associations with the sounds of bells are, depending on the geographical context:

*It made me think of...reindeer (laughing) or like being at a Christmas market in Germany. (...) That were the two like, if I think of Finland and this sound, it reminds me of reindeer and like, I guess Santa Claus Village in general. And when I think of, like, Germany and that sound, it's mostly Christmas market that comes to my mind. (Participant 11)*

Consequently, traditions affect the associations created by the sound of bells. Another common association with the sound of bells were reindeer or a reindeer sleigh. Participants expressing this association overall perceived the sound as calming and relaxing and as a typical sound for Lapland. However, a participant working in Lapland's tourism sector expressed a personal relation between the sound and her work experience.

While several persons stated they associate the image of reindeer rather with winter in general, the sound can also be associated very concretely with Santa and Christmas eve:

*The bells are ringing which means hey, come home, come inside. Then comes the sleigh and drives right in front of the house or the kitchen. And this is, I think, the visual image of this sound. (Participant 9)*

However, not all participants had clear associations. The pure sound of bells, without any speech or music, caused feelings of confusion or annoyance for some listeners as they stated to have been waiting for something to happen or changing their association from Christmas to something completely different:

*I guess at first I was kind of like, Oh, yeah, Christmas bells. And then I started to get annoyed because it reminded me of Salvation Army people. I kept going. It wouldn't stop. (Participant 7)*

*Like, if I know that it's a Christmas song, then it's a beginning of the Christmas song. Then I might have start feeling, like, excited and feeling, but just continuing bells so I just thought it can be anything (Participant 14).*

This supports the argument that sounds are perceived less accurately without the complementation of other senses (Bulkin, 2006, p. 415), since participants did not have any other information about the setting in which the sound comes up. As participants also listened to Christmas songs which include the sound of bells in the background, it is important to note that at this stage, participants did not listen to any other sound before but still related the sound of bells to Christmas songs and music.

### Fire cracking

Similar to the sound of bells, fire cracking is a sound that can be perceived in many different situations and seasons. Although all participants said that the sound evokes positive feelings such as coziness, warmth and calmness, the extent to which this song represents Christmas to them strongly depends on the associations with the sound. Several

participants emphasized that a fire(place) is not special nor a symbol of winter for them, because they could experience in all seasons:

*(...) in France in the summer, it's really hot and we are doing some barbecues and [fire cracking] can also be the the sound in summer for barbecues or just like the people who are doing fires outside on the beaches. (Participant 10)*

*Oh, this is maybe not even a winter thing for me. It's just a fire. (Participant 12)*

Consequently, those participants rated the Christmassyness of the sound of fire lower than those, who explicitly associate the fire cracking with Christmas. The sound evoked very strong Christmas feelings for those who use a fireplace on Christmas eve:

*The sound of a fireplace is of course clearly Christmas. That's what I know from home. (Participant 9)*

*(...) my parents, they have a fireplace. And so I know that, like, every year at Christmas, we would put on the fireplace. (Participant 11)*

Summing up, the pure sound of bells and fire cracking can be experienced in many different situations. The data reveals that the feelings which the sound evokes depends on the context in which participants associate the sound, rather than the sound itself. This fact that participants told concrete memories and situational associations with the sound clearly supports the theoretical assumption that there is a strong relation between sounds and memories and that we create personal associations based on sounds (Hultén et al., 2009, pp. 74–78).

### Walking in the snow

The sound of walking on the snow differs from the sound of bells and fire cracking in that sense that it can be experienced only in one context, namely walking on the snow. Consequently, as all participants understood where the sound comes from, they associated similar environments (cold and snowy). Thus, the environmental perceptions of this

sound are more similar from participant to participant than the context in which bells and fire cracking is experienced. All participants guessed that the sound comes from walking on the snow, although two were confused if it is really that sound or something else:

*I think what I was hearing was people walking in the snow, but I wasn't sure. So I felt a little confused at first, probably. (Participant 7)*

*First intuition was that it's walking on snow, but more than like I listen more than it little bit like I got distracted that it's like eating something, but I like it still. I trust my first intuition that it was walking on snow. (Participant 13)*

When listening to the sound, participants expressed the feeling of coldness, calmness and coziness. Although especially the latter has been used by participants frequently to describe Christmas, most participants stated that walking in the snow is a strong association with winter, but not necessarily with Christmas:

*I think the sound for me is more like winter and not so much Christmas. I would be like, it's this winter time, a cold time, a time where it's like cozy inside and exciting outside. But I would not say immediately, Oh yeah, it's Christmas. (Participant 5)*

In this point previous research stated a stronger relationship between snow and the Christmas feeling, especially regarding Lapland's attractiveness for Christmas tourism due to snowy winters (Rusko et al., 2013, p. 45) and the potential risk for Lapland of losing its touristic attractiveness due to warmer winters (Hall, 2014 ; Tervo-Kankare et al., 2013). Moreover, the country of origin affects the perceived connection between snow and Christmas:

*I would say that this is not necessarily Christmas but rather winter. And since it anyways doesn't snow on Christmas, at least in Germany, there is not that*

*connection between winter and Christmas for me. It is rather January-February and that's why it's not really Christmassy for me. (Participant 9)*

Residents of regions with rather warm temperatures on Christmas explain that they do not associate Christmas with snow, whereas a Finnish resident associated snow with the traditional walk to graveyards on Christmas. Due to its correlation with the season of winter, the sound of walking on snow can also cause negative associations. A participant from stated:

*It gives me all the image of winter and the coldness. (...) Yeah, calm and...Well, since I'm now living in Finland, it just reminds me of the darkness (laughing). (Participant 14)*

The person associating the sound with the yearly walk to the graveyards on Christmas was the only participant ranking the sound as evoking very strong Christmas feelings, whereas the participant associating the sound with Finnish winter and therefore with darkness was the only one stating that the sound did not awake any Christmas feelings. Summing up all those findings on the perception of sounds, the data reveals that the expressed feelings towards the sounds are not evoked by the sounds themselves, but rather by the associations the sounds bring up. Those associations can be considerably influenced by a person's personal previous experiences, such as family traditions, but also local cultural impacts seem to affect the perception of ambiance sounds and the perceived relation to Christmas. Marketing professionals should therefore consider that perception of the same sounds can differ from customer to customer.

#### **4.1.3 Songs**

Before listening to the different sounds, participants have been asked what makes Christmas songs special and how they differ from other songs. Regarding the musical aspects, several participants mentioned that the sound of bells in the background is characteristic for Christmas songs, which matches with several participants' assumption that the sound of bells, which they listened to, would be the beginning of a Christmas

song. However, participants emphasized the crucial role of the lyrics when it comes to communicating the feeling and context of Christmas:

*I think they're more universal and we all listen more or less at the same to the same songs and whether we are in a warm cold or a house or wherever we are. So I feel like we all feel related to them, almost in the same way. (Participant 3)*

Thus, participants perceived songs as more universal and independent of the (physical) environment, which makes Christmas songs a global and common marker of Christmas holidays, a “collective Christmas experience“ (Participant 5) that you share with many people in different countries at the same time (Kuper, 1993, p. 157). As outlined previously, pure sounds without any music or lyrics can evoke very different feelings in the participants, based on the associations with the sounds which are strongly influenced by culture and personal experiences. By clearly referring to feelings and situation through the use of words, songs have a stronger ability to concretely communicate a certain context and create meaning (Cross, 2016, p. 23 ; Klempe, 2016b, p. 320). Accordingly, participants emphasized that songs evoke stronger Christmas feelings than sounds:

*(...) for example with this fireplace, it can be any...any situation. But if it's like a song where it says like a Christmas or Santa Claus, then you automatically just think Christmas. (Participant 12)*

The interpreted data clearly approves what Cooper (2008, p. 108) states, namely that the lyrics of Christmas songs “remind us of what we should be doing (...) and what we should be feeling.“ With their ability to concretely communicate a context, lyrics can further complement the music and strengthen the overall feeling that the songs aim to communicate. One participant explained that Finnish Christmas songs do not convey warmth through the tonality of the music, but rather through the lyrics:

*(...)I have noticed that, for example, my own nationality's, songs, Finnish songs, are quite melancholic and usually in the minor key, so they sound sad. But if I compare, for example, to American songs, they are much more positive. So I think*

*in both of these cases it's still like the kind of the warm feeling because even with the melancholic songs (...) still the warm feeling comes from...(...) more like the lyrics is giving it. (Participant 12)*

Talking about the feelings of songs, participants expressed that Christmas songs evoke an overall feeling of nostalgia due to the repetitive consumption of the songs every year during Christmas season. Although the interviewees mentioned bells and a Christmas context of the lyrics as characteristic for Christmas songs, they stated it is the fact of listening them during Christmas which makes the songs feel like Christmas, rather than the songs themselves:

*I would say it's not even the songs in particular, (...) if you look at it from just a song perspective, they're quite like generic pop songs. (...) It's maybe not the song itself that's special. It's more like the overall feeling and the overall situation that I associate with the songs that make it...makes it special. (Participant 11)*

*(...)There's overlap between Christmas music and other music even like generally. So I think it's more (...) about the context, I would say. (Participant 7)*

Accordingly, Jarman-Ivens (2008, p. 116) stated that Christmas songs on a musical dimension do not differ from other genres. Since participants also said that the songs bring up certain memories, such as singing the songs in a choir or listening to them on Christmas eve, one can conclude that it is also the personal memories of interacting with the songs during Christmas season which creates the relation between Christmas songs and Christmas feelings.

### Modern Christmas song

When listening to a “Mistletoe”, released in 2011 and sang by Justin Bieber, an internationally known artist, participants expressed a wide range of feelings and associations evoked by the song. The song was perceived as happy and positive and many participants stated that they listen to that song every year, which is why it feels familiar.

Also, the song evoked concrete memories, such as childhood moments. Further, several participants concretely commented on the artist:

*(...) it made me think that my boyfriend hates Justin Bieber. But I could I could listen to this alone, you know, and vibe it, you know, even though I'm not a big fan of Justin Bieber either. (Participant 1)*

*That definitely threw me back into childhood, Justin Bieber (laughing). (Participant 11)*

Another participant said she would have rated the Christmas feelings evoked by this song as very strong but that “Justin Bieber's voice makes it go down“ (Participant 2). Consequently, the artist and its recognizability by the voice affects the perception of the song, which has also been acknowledged by Whiteley (2008, pp. 101–102). Several participants stated that the song is a “not so iconic” (Participant 10) “commercial” (Participant 3) and “generic pop song” (Participant 11), which would not be associated with Christmas without the lyrics:

*well, I know this song that it's Christmas songs so (..) it keeps the Christmas spirit of it to me. But when I heard of this song for the first time, I didn't think that it's a Christmas song. So, yeah, I just (...) got used to it. (Participant 14)*

However, many interviewees explained that the fact that they listen to the song every year still evokes Christmas feelings.

### Traditional Christmas song

The second song participants got to hear was “Santa Claus is coming to town” by Frank Sinatra, published in 1948. This song evoked positive associations for all participants and several interviewees consider the song as a classic Christmas song:

*I feel like this is the classic, classic song of Christmas. Yeah. So, yeah I see, maybe I feel like I would listen maybe to this I'm walking on the street. For Christmas.*

*That would be the sound, sound in the streets. Maybe even the shopping procedure. Yeah, maybe just the general vibe in the city of Christmas, that's what reminds me this song. (Participant 3)*

Some participants mentioned that they consider this song as traditional for Christmas because they hear it frequently in radio and TV shows during the Christmas season. Further, several participants stated that this song is the first Christmas song they hear in the Christmas season. Generally, participants had a less critical opinion on the song regarding its Christmassyness than for the modern Christmas song. One of the perceived differences between traditional and modern Christmas songs lies in the values they reflect:

*I think the old traditional songs are maybe more Christmasy and about the time to relax and being with family. But then the modern songs are more about that partying. (Participant 2)*

However, Jarman-Ivens (2008, pp. 116–120) argues, that values such as sex and capitalism are subjectively perceived as inappropriate and not matching with the core values of Christmas, although they derive from the core values of love and caring. Accordingly, most participants still considered the modern song as Christmassy, although the values and concepts attributed to modern Christmas songs differ from participants' description of traditional Christmas song.

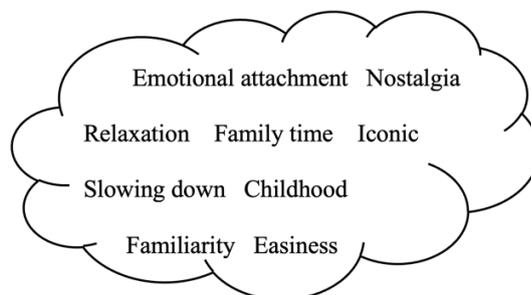
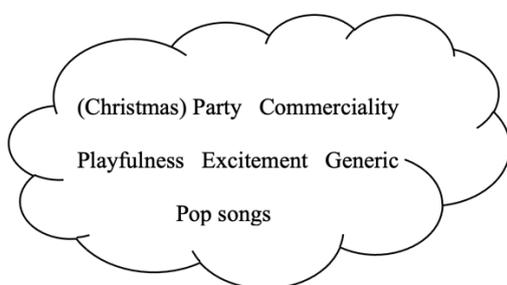


Figure 2: Associations with modern Christmas songs    Figure 3: Associations with traditional Christmas songs

Another frequently mentioned aspect is the familiarity with traditional songs. Participants noted that the traditional songs are so familiar the emotional connection to the songs are stronger than to modern songs:

*I think with the traditional older...Uhm, they are easier. At least I'm not such a critic or maybe objective even with those songs, because this is mostly emotions and memories that come. But with the new songs, I think we are more critics and we like we just try to, um, yeah... Just, uh, think if they are good or not, if we accept them or not. (...) And I feel like Christmas is more a feeling and sensations. So [the feelings] come after listening to a song, many, many Christmas' so with the new songs you don't really get that. (Participant 3)*

Consequently, it seems that it would take many years or even decades for people to consider a song as traditional, since the feeling of tradition and familiarity comes from a multitude of memories connected to the song. Accordingly, one participant explained that it takes time to get used to a song to an extent that it is possible to dance and sing along:

*it's like easier to listen [traditional songs] because you know already, like you can dance and sing along. It's new song, then you have to learn everything again. (Participant 13)*

However, the reason why traditional songs are easy to sing along to lies in the music itself, since songs communication strong Christmas values, such as community, are on purpose composed in a way that they are easy to sing for everyone, even for children or untrained singers (Jarman-Ivens, 2008, pp. 115–116). A professional working for Santa Claus Village accordingly mentioned a certain dilemma for professionals between inventing new and innovative sound concepts and keeping traditional sounds as a part of the soundscape:

*Because those...traditions, they are so strong and changing something, uhm, you have to do it very carefully. But, uhm, from my point of view, we are repeating*

*those same elements all the time. Are people, mostly people, if they are satisfied with them, they are expecting that. That, that we are supporting those very traditional elements and we don't change those vital items or sounds or songs. Those might be the same all the time. But of course, we try to develop our marketing, but we have to be very careful with the changes. It should be modern, but at the same time, it should be old fashioned. (Professional)*

Summing up the findings of the perception of sounds, the data reveals a strong connection between cultural and personal associations and the perceived Christmassyness of the sound: The perceived feelings are evoked by the association with a sound, rather than by the sound itself. Accordingly, Pretes (1995, p. 13) argues that Christmas is strongly related to the feeling of nostalgia by bringing up a variety of memories. This applies especially to the perception of sounds, which do not contain words and can therefore trigger a variety of different associations such as different seasons or situations in which the sound is heard. Sounds that can only be created in a wintery context, such as the sound of snow which is created in snowy environments, are clearly associated with winter, but not necessarily with Christmas. While Christmas songs refer concretely to Christmas through contextually matching lyrics, the interpretation of the data revealed that Christmas songs are perceived as Christmas songs because we are used to listening them on Christmas, rather than because the music itself is Christmassy. Further, it can be concluded that it takes many years for a modern Christmas song to be considered traditional, since there are yet less personal memories related to the song. Regarding the research question 1 (Which sounds are associated with Christmas?) the findings reveal interesting answers: First, it can be concluded that both ambiance sounds and songs can be associated with Christmas. However, the data showed that ambiance sounds can evoke a variety of different associations, which might not be related to Christmas, depending on the personal relation of the listener to the sound. This relation can be affected by the listener's culture, personal habits or memories. Consequently, ambiance sounds that the listener experienced in a Christmas context are associated with Christmas. Second, the data reveals that both modern and traditional Christmas songs are associated with Christmas. Although the lyrics of the songs strengthen the Christmas context (Cooper, 2008, p. 108) the data showed that the associations with Christmas also come from the

habit of listening the songs every Christmas season. Consequently, traditional Christmas songs are more likely to be associated with Christmas than modern songs, due to the fact that they are newer. Therefore, the answer to research question 1.1 (Are sounds perceived differently than songs?) is that songs can communicate the Christmas context through lyrics, so the listener clearly understands the theme of Christmas in the song. However, the listener's personal perception of Christmassyness of the song depends on how familiar the song is as a song listened during Christmas season. The main difference in the perception of sounds and songs consequently lies in the greater variety of possible associations with the sounds, due to the missing vocal contextualization through lyrics. Managers should therefore consider that the associations evoked by ambiance sounds are highly personal, which can lead to a contradiction between the intended perception of a sound in the service environment and the actual perception between the customer. The beneficial ability of sounds to support the company's brand or theme (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 69-70 ; Krishna, 2011, p. 334) could therefore be missed due to a misleading choice of sounds.

## 4.2 Findings on Christmas Sounds in a Practical Context

### 4.2.1 Time for Christmas Songs

To get to know the contexts and habits of participants' consumption of Christmas songs, they have been asked how many months before Christmas they start listening to Christmas songs and why they would not listen to it earlier than the mentioned time frame. This question revealed interesting aspects regarding the relation between Christmas music and other habits during the Christmas season. 57% of the participants stated to start listening to Christmas music maximum a month before Christmas, 29% 1-2 months before and 14% 2-3 months before Christmas. None of the participants said to start listening to them 3 months or longer before Christmas. Cultural, environmental and personal impacts seem to explain participants' perception of an appropriate time period for Christmas music.

On a cultural level, many participants explained that the pre-Christmas season in their home country starts with the end of the previous cultural holiday, such as Halloween or Thanksgiving. A participant from Japan explained that Christmas is seen as a holiday adapted from foreign culture, rather than a holiday anchored in their local culture. However, the time frame and the way shops start to sell Christmas-related products and decorate accordingly seems to be a yearly tradition on its own:

*So I think, uh, one of the characteristic of [Japanese] culture is that we would like to like dramatically change the seasonal elements, the decorations at the shopping malls. So, for example, when the Christmas ends, we immediately change it to the New Year's decoration. Like in one day or something. Yeah. So I guess it's pretty important for us to, like, make a division between the seasonal...(...) And also the merchandise we sell like Halloween related stuff until the end of October and then like in November we change it. (Participant 14)*

Participants also mentioned the month of December as the main month of Christmas season, for example that they want to have the house decorated for December and that is why they start listening to Christmas songs end of November. A participant from Germany, where the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Christmas, marks the national beginning of the pre-Christmas period explained that he strictly does not want to listen any Christmas

music before that period. Another impact on the perceived appropriate time to listen to Christmas songs lies in the environment. Many participants stated that they do not want to start listening to Christmas songs before the weather is Christmassy, with Christmassy referring to winter weather:

*I would say when, when it looks like Christmassy outside, like it's winter and uh, the city, of course, they get the lights. And when you walk to the street like, okay, Christmas is coming. (Participant 1)*

*I think it has to be, like, cold enough or it has to be like a crisp in the air. (Participant 11)*

Consequently, there seems to be a contradictory perception between Christmas songs and warm temperatures causing a lack of snow. Lack of snow and its negative effect on the attractiveness of Lapland as a Christmas and winter tourism destination has been studied previously. Researchers argue that the imagery of winter in the northern hemisphere, including snow, underlies the Christmas values (Hall, 2014, p. 31). One reason why participants claim that it is appropriate to start listening to Christmas songs in cold weather conditions might be the fact that many Christmas songs intentionally match “(...) the necessary contrast between inside warmth and outside cold that characterises the northern hemisphere’s Christmas.” (Whiteley, 2008, p. 107). Through their lyrics, songs have the ability to create the visual image of a wintery scenery (Whiteley, 2008, p. 107), which might be the reason why participants decouple ambient winter sounds (without lyrics) from Christmas associations but still state wintery climate as an important driver for beginning to start listening Christmas songs. Most participants, regardless of their preferred time frame for listening Christmas songs, stated that they want to keep the period of listening Christmas music short, so that it is something special:

*I think they would lose a bit of their magic if you would listen to them like all year round. (Participant 5)*

Although cultural and personal influences affect the individual perception of an appropriate time to start listening Christmas songs, the main argument of participants was to keep the period for Christmas music short – no matter if that is 1 month or 3 months before Christmas. This clearly supports Kuper’s (1993, pp. 171–172) understanding of Christmas as an on purpose inauthentically over-romanticized period with the goal of differing from everyday life. Accordingly, one participant described Christmas as „the relaxing days where you don't have to check any emails or you don't have to engage with work things or anything because it's just this safe bubble of being in the Christmas period.“ (Participant 5) Also the interviewed professional from Santa Claus Village noted that playing Christmas songs in summer has a negative effect on the guests’ experience:

*We receive feedback from visitors during summertime. They, some of them, are asking different kind of music summer time. They are, they are not pleased with the Christmas songs. They think that the it's not the right time for play them.  
(Professional)*

It can thus be concluded that people avoid listening Christmas songs in summer because they perceive the warm climate and consequently non-wintery environment as not matching the Christmas songs. This is supported and can also be explained by Christmas songs’ “evocative images which have an immediate impact on the imagination, conjuring up the necessary contrast between inside warmth and outside cold that characterises the northern hemisphere’s Christmas.“ (Whiteley, 2008, p. 107). By keeping the period of Christmas music as short as possible, where the time period is affected by personal and cultural impacts, participants want to keep Christmas as a timely limited and therefore special period, which supports previous researchers’ interpretation of Christmas as a “alternative identity” that clearly differs from everyday life (Kuper, 1993, pp. 171–172). Marketing professionals should therefore consider limiting the use of Christmas songs to the winter months to avoid negative perceptions of the service environment’s soundscape, which can affect customer satisfaction (Bitner, 1992, p. 60)

#### 4.2.2 The Effect of Visuals

After listening to the sounds without any visual input, participants listened to the same sounds again and watched a photo at the same time. Showing a photo of a (touristic) reindeer sleigh on snowy ground revealed that some participants had a very different association with the sound of bells, such as a person ringing the bell. Seeing the photo changed the perception towards the feelings they generally have regarding reindeer sleds and Lapland:

*it felt a little bit less familiar [than without the photo]. Because we don't really have the same types of sleds back home or reindeer. Yeah. So I guess, like, it felt a little bit more exotic. (Participant 7)*

One can conclude that participants can identify less with the sound, if the picture clearly differs from the image they created themselves when listening the pure sound. Another participant accordingly explains:

*I get it that it's a Christmas association, but it would not be my personal Christmas association with that one. (Participant 5)*

However, participants stated that reindeers are a symbol for Christmas and the sound of bells together with the photo would still evoke Christmas feelings, even more than without the photo if they previously associated the bells in a non-Christmas context. Further, several participants had the image of reindeers in mind even when they heard only the sound. The sound of walking on the snow showed that the perception of the sound was for some participants less clear or even a bit confusing without the picture so that the picture of someone walking in the snow presented a certain solution, so that participants were less distracted by wondering what sound they are actually hearing:

*It was definitely better with the picture. Then it's just the sound. So now I can right away imagine that it's actually walking in the snow. But obviously, like, for me, it would be better if I see the person walking now. I was just stuck there. But I think it was a little bit better to hear and see the picture than it was just hearing it. So I*

*knew that it's not some someone eating something. Yeah. So I wasn't so distracted.*  
(Participant 13)

These findings confirm that visual and auditory stimuli complement each other and create the most accurate perception together (Bulkin, 2006, p. 415). Even though the sound of fire cracking has been clearly recognized as such, the participants expressed certain differences between their own image and the actual picture they have been showed, for example because there was no christmassy background setting visible in the photo of a fireplace. However, many participants stated that the photo strengthened the feeling of warmth and calmness.

A noticeable aspect that the interviews brought up is that participants considerably paid attention to the details of the photos they have seen. They stated that the fireplace would have been more “old-fashioned” (Participant 7) than imagined and that the person walking through the snow seems to carry “something for a mother's day“ (Participant 5) or “Valentines Day” (Participant 7). A similar observation has been made regarding the photo that has been shown for the modern Christmas song “Mistletoe”, since the photo does not show a mistletoe, but a Christmas tree. Although in this case that detail did not change the perceived Christmassyness, it becomes obvious that several participants critically evaluated if or to what extent the photo matches the sound. In those cases where participants expressed a contradiction between the photo and their own image or the sound, the photo either did not change or even lowered the perceived Christmassyness of the sound, which might have valuable implications for audiovisual marketing practices.

To conclude, participants had overall stronger feelings in case the sound was supported by a photo, which answers the research question 2 (Does the perception of sound change with a matching visual representation?). However, several participants stated that the details of the photo or the fact that the photo contradicted with their personal image created previously by the pure sound changed their feelings evoked by association with the sound. Thus, marketing professionals should consider that the details of the visuals might affect the perception of the sound, especially if it contradicts the sound.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of sounds for marketing Christmas theme park experiences. Thus, the relevant research questions were which sounds are associated with Christmas, if there is a difference in perception between sounds and songs and if the perception of a sound or song changes with the simultaneous presence of a visual stimuli, such as a photo. The following chapter does not only outline the research results and managerial implications regarding those research questions but also includes a reflection on the applied methodology as well as a perspective on further research on the topic.

This study revealed the importance of sounds for marketing Christmas tourism experiences in different ways. First, previous research highlighted that meaningful and memorable experiences are all about senses ( Hultén et al., 2009, p. 18 ; Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 104), which is has become a main goal for today's tourism marketing (Kim, 2010, p. 791). The empirical data of this study accordingly revealed that the memories evoked are multisensory in nature. Second, the soundscape of theme parks can strengthen the theme (Macinnis & Park, 1991, p. 162) and with websites being recognized as the virtual setting of experiences (Boswijk et al., 2015), auditory elements in online marketing can be considered as a part of the experience. Third, due to an increasing digitalization of travelers' customer journey (Sigala, 2016), today's technological possibilities allow a variety of ways to include auditory elements to marketing practices (Paramount, 2017) , which goes hand in hand with the shift from traditional to experiential marketing (Bata & Frochot, 2013, p. 111). Accordingly, the findings of this study showed that participants listen to Christmas music yearly and stated it as a tradition for the Christmas season, which can be explained by Christmas music's intentionally romanticized lyrics that communicate popular Christmas values and traditions (Whiteley, 2008).

Further, Christmas has been acknowledged as a global holiday which is celebrated beyond its religious roots with its very own traditions that reflect society's values (Löfgren, 1993, p. 58). This study shows that people's memories on and traditions related

to Christmas are highly personal and to a certain extent affected by their culture. The analysis of empirical data further supports the argument of Christmas being a holiday that is separated from everyday life through a highly romanticized discourse (Kuper, 1993, pp. 171–172), as participants keep the period for Christmas music as short as possible to preserve Christmas as a limited and therefore special season. The tourism industry supports the globally present discourse of Christmas as a family- and love- centered holiday (Jarman-Ivens, 2008, p. 121 ; Kylänen, 2006, p. 116) by designing different tourism activities around the theme of Christmas. Lapland in northern Finland provides a high density of Christmas-themed tourism services (Snellmann, 2006 as cited in Hall, 2008, p. 61), since the image of winter in the northern hemisphere fits the imagery of Christmas (Rusko et al., 2013, p. 45). However, the findings of this study show that (ambiance) sounds associated with winter do not necessarily evoke Christmas feelings, while wintery weather was stated as a condition for starting to listen to Christmas songs. Further, this study revealed that the perception of ambiance sounds as Christmassy depends on the listeners personal experiences and cultural impacts, while Christmas songs' lyrics concretely communicate the context of Christmas.

### Managerial implications

The findings of this study have several managerial implications when it comes to marketing Christmas tourism experiences, such as Christmas theme parks. First, marketing professionals should consider that listening Christmas sounds outside of the Christmas season can be perceived as inappropriate, since people try to keep the Christmas period as short as possible. Playing Christmas songs in summer can therefore cause customer dissatisfaction, as a professional from a Christmas theme park stated. Second, this research showed that ambiance sounds, without any music or speech, can evoke a great variety of associations, which might lead to an association very different from the one that is intended to be evoked. Thus, there is a risk of contradiction between the intended and actual association by a sound. Third, it should be considered that wintery sounds are not always associated with Christmas and that sounds might be mistaken if they are not supported by coherent visuals. Finally, when supporting a sound with a visual, it should be taken into account that people pay attention to the details of the visuals

and critically evaluate if the visual fits the sound. However, this research has shown that visuals make an overall positive contribution to the perception of sounds since it makes the association clearer and the evoked feelings stronger.

### Evaluation of the methodology

All in all, the methodology chosen for this research seems appropriate in its ability to provide answers to the fundamental research questions of this study. Collecting data through semi-structured interviews provided an enriching way to understand participants' perception and associations related to Christmas and sounds. In many interview situations I asked participants for clarifications and was able to support a comfortable interview through spontaneous comments and reactions on their answers, which would not have been the case to the same extent if I would have conducted structured interviews. Further, sound elicitation was a beneficial way to get answers about the perception of sounds on a concrete level but still being able to conclude more general findings about the perception of (Christmas) sounds. However, as all research project, this study has its limitations. One limitation is that participants knew that Christmas would be the main topic of the interview. With the interviews being held in the premises of Santa Claus Village, participants' answers might have been affected by the Christmas-themed environment and the fact that all of the interview questions were related to Christmas. Moreover, the insights from a professional are limited to responses from one interview. Although this interview brought enriching insights and highlighted important aspects that I otherwise would not have considered in the study, it would have been even more beneficial to get insights from several professionals to get a more complete understanding on the topic from both the customer and the professional perspective.

### Implications for future research

This study's findings revealed the importance of sounds for marketing Christmas theme parks by examining why sounds are an important part of the touristic experiencescapes, which sounds are associated with Christmas and how Christmas sounds are consumed. Consequently, there are practical implications that can be applied in online marketing activities, since auditory elements can be integrated in online marketing in many ways. However, I think it would be beneficial if future research would focus on sounds on social

media more specifically. Although the findings of this study can be applied to social media, it would give more concrete insights in the habits of perceiving sound on social media if social media would be the main focus of the study on the empirical level as well. Finally, it would be interesting to learn more about the difference between auditory and visual marketing elements when it comes to creating expectations. As stated at the very beginning of this thesis, I chose the focus on the auditory sense to contribute to a shift towards a multisensory representation of tourism services and destinations to avoid dissatisfaction based on visually stimulated expectations, as I experienced it myself. This study showed a great importance of sounds in contributing to and remembering meaningful experiences, which is why I hope to see this area being researched further to enhance tourism marketing's effectiveness and consequently travelers' satisfaction.

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## Appendix 1: Interview structure (guests)

### Interview Questions about Christmas Sounds

#### Opening questions:

*What does Christmas mean to you? What does it feel like?*

*When is it appropriate to start listening to Christmas songs?*

less than 4 weeks/ less than a month before Christmas

4-7 weeks/ 1-2 months before Christmas

8-11 weeks / 2-3 months before Christmas

more than 12 weeks/3 months before Christmas

Why would you not listen to it earlier? (unless chosen more than 12 weeks before)

*What makes christmas sounds special?*

*So without this feeling of X it wouldn't feel like christmas?*





### Stage 3: Preferences

*Do sounds or songs awake stronger Christmas feelings? Why?*

*If we talk about sounds: rather nature (walking in snow) or subject sounds (bells)? Why?*

*If we talk about songs: rather traditional (santa claus is coming to town) or modern (mistletoe by Justin Biber)? Why?*

### Stage 4: Ending

- *Anything to add?*
- *Thanking for participation (postcard)*

### Demographic questions:

**Gender:** (m /f /d)

**Age:** up to 30 / 31-50 / 51 or older

**Country of origin:**

**Visited Santa Claus Village before?** (yes / no) If yes: \_\_\_\_\_ times

## Appendix 2: Interview structure (professional)

Semi-Structured Interview as a part of the Master's Thesis  
*The Auditory Dimension in Tourism Experiencescapes: The Role of Sounds in  
Marketing Christmas Theme Park Experiences (working title)*

Interviewee: Antti Nikander

Interviewer: Vanessa Hylton

### Opening Questions about Santa Claus Village

- Why do people come to Santa Claus Village?
- how can people immerse here in the feeling of Christmas?

### The sound of Christmas

- what does Christmas sound like? How do Christmas sounds differ to other sounds?
- how do sounds contribute to the Christmas feeling?
- In your opinion, which sound represents Christmas the best?

### Sounds in the context of Santa Claus Village

- Why does Santa Claus Village use sound effects (for example music)?
- Have atmospheric sounds (also non-electronic, such as the cracking when walking on the wooden path to Santa) been considered in the service design?
- How are sounds considered in Santa Claus Village's online marketing?
- Do Santa Claus Village and Christmas sound the same?

## Appendix 3: Letter of consent



LAPIN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND

### LETTER OF CONSENT



Dear Participant,

My name is Vanessa Hylton. I am Master student at University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland under the supervision of Associate Professor Mitja Gorenak (mitja.gorenak@um.si). You are invited to participate in my master thesis study with the working title *The Auditory Dimension in Tourism Experiencescapes: The Role of Sounds in Marketing Christmas Theme Park Experiences*. The purpose of the study is to examine the perception of sounds and their association with Christmas. The result of the study will be published as part of my master thesis. The thesis is conducted as part of the Master's Degree Programme in Tourism, Culture and International Management (TourCIM).

By signing this letter, you give consent to use the interview material, including the records of the interview, confidentially and exclusively for research purposes. The research follows the principles for responsible conduct of research dictated by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research. **The data will be handled anonymously.** Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw your permission even after signing this document, by informing the below mentioned contact person.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Hylton  
TourCIM Master student  
Phone: +358 40 665 64 83  
Email: vhylton@ulapland.fi

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I give consent to use the interview answers (both recorded and written) as data for the purpose mentioned above.

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Signature

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Date

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Print Name