THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF A FINNISH GOLF COURSE ABROAD AND HOW TO MAXIMIZE IT WITH DIGITAL MARKETING: CASE KOSKI-GOLF

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT

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Examiner: Junior Researcher, Bimesh Shrestha

ABSTRACT

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The attractiveness of a Finnish golf course abroad and how to maximize it with digital marketing: Case Koski-Golf

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Keywords: golf, digital marketing, branding, internationalization

This thesis examines the factors that makes a Finnish golf course attractive to international players and explore how digital marketing can promote this effectively. The case study focuses on Koski-Golf and aims to find ways to improve its visibility and appeal abroad.

The theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of understanding consumer behaviour, including motivations and expectations, to create targeted digital marketing strategies. By focusing on customer needs through digital marketing tools and channels, Koski-Golf can increase its visibility and attract more international players.

The research is conducted as a qualitative study, utilizing semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders, Finnish and foreign players as well as the CEO of a foreign golf course. The interview data has been analyzed using content analysis to answer the research questions.

The results show that Finnish golf courses are valued for their natural beauty, peace, and unique seasons. International customers expect high-quality facilities, excellent service, greenery, and courses in excellent condition. The study highlights social media marketing, search engine marketing (SEM), and email marketing as particularly effective ways to reach an international audience. Video content showcasing the unique features of Finnish golf courses and influencer partnerships also stand out as impressive strategies.

The research offers practical insights for Koski-Golf and other Finnish golf courses to expand their customer base and increase international appeal and visibility, especially in Europe.

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Kauppatieteet

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Suomalaisen golfkentän houkuttelevuus ulkomailla ja sen maksimointi digitaalisella markkinoinnilla: Case Koski-Golf

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Tämä opinnäytetyö tutkii, mikä tekee suomalaisesta golfkentästä houkuttelevan kansainvälisille pelaajille ja miten digitaalinen markkinointi voi edistää tätä tehokkaasti. Tapaustutkimus keskittyy Koski-Golfiin ja pyrkii löytämään tapoja parantaa sen näkyvyyttä ja vetovoimaa ulkomailla.

Teoreettinen viitekehys korostaa kuluttajakäyttäytymisen, erityisesti motivaation ja odotusten, ymmärtämistä kohdennettujen digitaalisten markkinointistrategioiden kehittämisessä. Keskittymällä asiakkaiden tarpeisiin digitaalisten markkinointivälineiden ja -kanavien avulla, Koski-Golf voi kasvattaa näkyvyyttään ja houkutella lisää kansainvälisiä pelaajia.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena puolistrukturoitujen haastattelujen avulla, ja haastatteluihin osallistui suomalaisia ja ulkomaisia pelaajia sekä ulkomaisen golfkentän toimitusjohtaja. Aineisto analysoitiin sisällönanalyysin avulla.

Tulokset osoittavat, että suomalaisia golfkenttiä arvostetaan luonnonkauneutensa, rauhallisuutensa ja ainutlaatuisten vuodenaikojensa takia. Kansainväliset asiakkaat odottavat korkealaatuisia palveluita, vehreyttä ja hyvin hoidettuja kenttiä. Tutkimus korostaa sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin, hakukoneoptimoinnin ja sähköpostimarkkinoinnin tehokkuutta kansainvälisen yleisön tavoittamisessa. Lisäksi videomateriaali suomalaisten golfkenttien ainutlaatuisista piirteistä ja vaikuttajayhteistyöt erottuvat toimivina strategioina.

Tutkimus tarjoaa käytännön vinkkejä Koski-Golfille ja muille suomalaisille golfkentille asiakaskunnan laajentamiseen ja kansainvälisen vetovoiman lisäämiseen erityisesti Euroopassa.

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1 Introduction

Golf has become a global hobby and sport, which is played by millions of people (Statista 2024a). It is not only hobby, but also destination for free time, tourism, and travel. In the 21st century, golf has become more and more popular hobby, and the sport has also increased its popularity among young people. According to Statista, registered golfers have increased by 2.4 million from 1990 to 2018 (Statista 2024a). The increase in interest in golf can be explained, among other things, by the diversity of the player base, different forms of the game, such as simulators and practice courses, and the recovery from the pandemic. Golf also combines both social and physical qualities. (Rudy, M. 2023)

Due to climate change, the summers of central Europe are getting warmer every year, and the attractiveness in the eyes of tourists is weakening. According to JRC study, the coastal areas of Southern Europe are expected to lose tourists by up to 10% during the summer seasons. The biggest losses are predicted for regions such as Greece, Spain, and Italy, while an increase in tourism is predicted for example for Finland, Sweden, and Denmark. The biggest winner in tourism in the future will be northern Europe. (European Commission 2023) Although tourism activity is currently limited, and Finnish golf courses are still relatively unknown to foreign customers, this could change in the future (Golfpiste 2013; European Commission 2023). For this reason, it is important to start branding companies in Finland, such as golf courses and their beauty as well as quality, more and more to foreign customers.

Competition in international golf tourism is tough, and standing out from other golf destinations requires strategic actions. Digital marketing plays a key role in trying to attract new customers and create continuous interest in international markets. In the 21st century, digital marketing has become a huge entity in the company's operations. Digital marketing is a widely used term that refers to the main digital platforms, like websites, email, and social media, used in marketing (Lahtinen, N., Pulkka, K., Karjaluoto, H. & Mero, J. 2022). Rudy (2023) also emphasizes how golf has become more accessible and attractive to a wider audience with the help of technology and social media, and partially due to this, the golf industry has also grown (Rudy, M. 2023). Advances in information technology have made

it possible for consumers to connect and communicate better and faster than ever before, and it is important that companies take advantage of this to get maximum results.

1.1 Goals and Research Questions

The goal of this thesis is to identify effective digital marketing methods that can increase interest in the golf course, Koski-Golf, among international players, with a particular focus on customers in Southern Europe. The key objective is to determine whether there is a market niche for a Finnish golf course in Southern Europe and how to brand it in an engaging way. The study will explore how branding should be done, what different marketing methods are particularly effective, and what foreign golfers expect when coming to play golf in Finland.

In order to facilitate this research, it is important to define what is being studied and what questions are to be answered. For this, research questions are drawn up. This thesis contains one main research question and three sub-questions. The main research question is:

What aspects of Finnish golf courses appeal to international golf enthusiast?

In order to achieve the goal of the study, three sub-questions, that are more specific than the main one, have also been prepared, which help to deepen the understanding of the topic. The sub-questions are:

1) *What are the unique features or services in Koski-Golf which attract foreign players?*
2) *What services or facilities does an international golfer expect when playing abroad?*
3) *Which digital marketing strategies, platforms, and methods are especially effective in reaching and engaging international golf enthusiasts?*

1.2 Delimitations and Research Methods

This study is limited to do research in Southern Europe. This region has a strong golf culture, great popularity as a travel destination, and a large number of golf courses and local golfers. Focusing the research on this area offers a significant pool of potential customers who value golf tourism, providing an opportunity for Finnish golf courses to attract international players.

This thesis also focuses only on some aspects of digital marketing. This study analyzes the benefits and use of social media marketing (SMM), email marketing, search engine marketing (SEM), video marketing, and influencer marketing in the given context. In addition, this research focuses on identifying tourists and enthusiasts who could be interested in Koski Golf's services and finding effective marketing methods and tools for this group. Professional golfers, among others, have therefore been excluded from the study.

Since the nature of this study, the research is intended to be implemented with qualitative research. This method is particularly suitable when the focus is on participants' perspectives, everyday practices, and their practical knowledge related to the topic being studied (Flick, U. 2007). Research data is collected through semi-structured thematic interviews from several interviewees, and the data will be analyzed using content analysis.

The subject of the study is one individual company, Koski-Golf, so the study is referred as a case study. The thesis is conducted with the objective of providing practical insights and recommendations directly applicable to Koski-Golf's digital marketing strategies, focusing on current strengths and areas for development in attracting international players, especially from Southern Europe.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis explores how consumer behaviour, specifically expectations and motivations, can be effectively addressed through targeted digital marketing strategies. To attract foreign customers to Koski-Golf, it is essential to first understand their motivations and expectations. By analyzing these factors, it becomes possible to define the right target audience and select appropriate digital marketing channels,

such as social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing (SEM), video marketing, and influencer marketing. These channels will be utilized to choose the best marketing strategies, ensuring the brand is aligned with the desires of the target market, ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction and engagement.

Figure 1 provides the theoretical framework for this study, serving a basis for structuring the thesis and for brainstorming and formulating the interview questions. Consumer behaviour, and therefore consumers' motivations and expectations, defines how international golfers behave during the decision-making process and reveals what golfers value and expect from Finnish golf courses. The chosen target market refers to international golfers, particularly in Southern Europe. The arrows stemming from it represent the digital marketing strategies selected for this study, which are considered the most effective in this context. The framework illustrates a process where consumer behaviour shapes customer expectations and perceptions, which Koski-Golf can meet through targeted marketing and digital marketing methods.

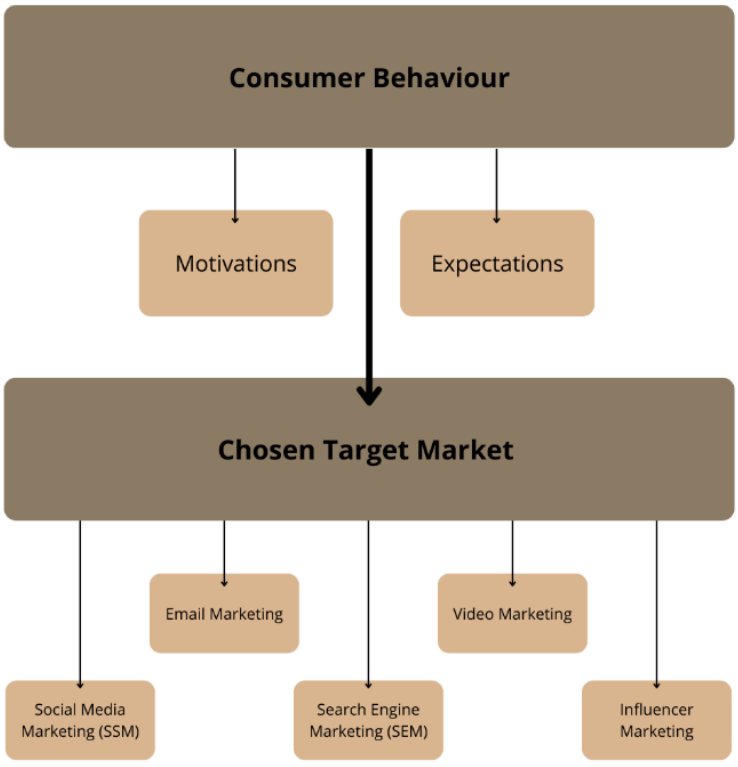

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

1.4 Structure of this Thesis

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. Thesis begins with the introduction. This chapter introduces shortly the topic of the study, the objectives of the research, research questions and methods as well as the theoretical framework. Second chapter is about theoretical background, which is divided into three main chapters: A. digital marketing in tourism industry, B. branding abroad and C. digital marketing tools in sport industry. Following that, the research methodology is discussed, explaining the methods used to gather and analyze data. This chapter also briefly introduces the case company Koski-Golf. Next are the findings, which present the results obtained from the interview data. The fifth chapter is about discussion, where the research results are compared to previous research and concrete proposals are presented to the case company based on the findings. Finally, the thesis concludes with the conclusions. It also discusses the reliability of the research and future research opportunities.

2 Theoretical Background

Digital marketing has become a key part of the tourism industry as companies competes for visibility and appeal in both domestic and international markets (Deb, S.K., Nafi, S. and Valeri, M. 2024). Businesses benefit from increased visibility and customer engagement through digital marketing channels, and it is also a significant platform from a marketer's perspective (Bulent Ozturk, A. & Hancer, M. 2022). Technology is constantly evolving and there are many different digital marketing tools, such as websites, social media, and virtual reality, which marketers should identify and utilize effectively to promote their business (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024).

The theoretical background of this study examines the impact of digital marketing on the international attractiveness of a Finnish golf course and digital marketing in general at the intersection of tourism and sports. The theoretical background is built on three main themes that support the research of the study.

A. Digital marketing in tourism industry

B. Branding abroad

C. Digital marketing tools in sport industry

All three of these topics are connected by digitalization and planning. The world is changing rapidly, and this must also be taken into account in various company activities, such as marketing and its planning. Technological developments are constantly offering new opportunities, which has brought challenges to long-term marketing plans. Standing out from the competition, building customer value, and strengthening the brand remain essential in today's market, forming the foundation for digital marketing. These principles create clear guidelines and boundaries for the company, within which finer details can be developed, and experiments conducted. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022) This theoretical framework is viewed particularly from the perspective of a digitalized world.

2.1 Digital Marketing in Tourism Industry

Especially in today's world, social media can perform a crucial role for travel decisions tourists make (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024; Trunfio, M. & Della Lucia, M. 2019). While digital marketing has naturally enabled companies to acquire a wider range of customers around the world, tourists also have the opportunity to explore potential destinations more easily and more extensively with digitalization. Deb et al. (2024) emphasizes how the success of a travel company largely depends on how the company utilizes digital technology and adapts it as part of its strategy. It is important to know the wishes and needs of customers and use digital tools to achieve these. Travelers value nowadays more and more personal experiences. (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024)

In order for a company to offer personalized marketing and personalized experiences to its customers, it must learn to understand its customers, individuals, and businesses, and their needs. This means analyzing consumer behaviour. Understanding consumer behaviour is a continuous process, but by dedicating resources to it, a company can gain deeper insights into customer needs and predict how they may change in the future. Companies need to keep up with changing customers and markets, and studying customer behaviour helps that. This also means that companies can better take into account customers' wishes and needs in marketing and create more personalized content. (Solomon, M. R. et al. 2016; Deb, S. K. et al. 2024) According to Solomon et al. (2016), to establish a good business, one needs to understand their consumers behaviour as it enables marketers to satisfy customer needs effectively (Solomon, M. R. et al. 2016).

Tourist and destination marketing has also been found to benefit from gamification and extended reality. These have been shown to be effective tools for *"stimulating tourists' interactions with destinations,"* and the authors believe that gamification is a tool that reflects engagement with a company's target market in a digitalized world. (Bulent Ozturk, A. & Hancer, M. 2022)

2.2 Branding Abroad

When a company attracts customers from geographically distant locations, digital marketing solutions play a key role in minimizing distances and optimizing time (Deb, S. K. et al.

2024). When a company brands its services or products to a wider audience around the world, the goal is to bring the services closer to the customer using digital channels and various digital marketing tools. (Perkins, L. 2015)

A brand is usually in the minds of consumers, which makes it difficult for companies to manage the mental images and partly beyond marketers' control (Schilhaneck, M. 2016; Lipiäinen, H. S. M., Karjaluoto, H., Karjaluoto, P. & Ulkuniemi, H. 2015). Since digitalization, consumers have had the power to compare and research companies before making any purchase decision. Therefore, business mistakes are becoming increasingly difficult to hide and fix. (Perkins, L. 2015)

It has also been shown that a sports club's brand has a significant impact on the club's financial success and that the strength of a brand is determined by three different dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, and brand loyalty. When talking about sports clubs, it is noteworthy how many different target groups there can be: daily visitors, sponsors, media, marketers, fans, and VIPs. The club must, therefore, achieve brand integration across all of these target groups. In such situations, it is necessary to utilize the appropriate marketing mix instruments comprehensively and in an interconnected manner. (Schilhaneck, M. 2016)

2.3 Digital Marketing Tools in Sport Industry

With digital marketing, companies can stay connected with customers and thus strengthen engagement. In order for companies to stand out from their competitors and engage customers with their services, companies should develop a strategy specifically to evoke an emotional connection with their customers. (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024) When used and utilized correctly, digital marketing is the best way for companies to communicate and attract customers. Not only is digital marketing an effective, but also an affordable way to ensure global visibility for businesses. (Bulent Ozturk, A. & Hancer, M. 2022)

In general, when planning a digital marketing strategy and a company's marketing communications, it has been considered important to have a consistent and unified message. All communication channels, such as social media, sponsorships, and advertising, should strengthen the customer experience and create a unified image of the company and its services. (Fullerton, S. & Merz, G. R. 2008) According to Baena (2016), a multi-channel

strategy in marketing, especially in digital marketing, can benefit the company significantly when the various platforms and methods are designed to work together and enhance one another (Baena, V. 2016).

Digital marketing should be built on critical analysis, especially in a constantly changing business environment. While specific methods within a strategy may quickly become outdated, having a clear and well-defined strategy ensures a consistent brand image and provides clear guidelines for action. Setting goals is a crucial part of this process, as it helps determine priorities. However, setting too many goals can lead to confusion and make it difficult to focus, while having only one goal may result in a strategy that is too narrow. Finding the right balance in setting goals lays the foundation for an effective digital marketing strategy and supports the overall objectives of the company. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022)

2.3.1 Social Media Marketing

Social media is an excellent and easy way to bring customers closer to the company, improve customer loyalty, and increase engagement (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024; Avnishkumar. B. & Nulkar, G. 2022). It has become a mainstream media platform used by a third of the world's population (Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J. & Goodman, S. 2017). Social media includes several platforms, such as Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Snapchat, with Facebook being the largest with almost 3 billion users (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022).

Storytelling and visuals are particularly effective in engaging audiences and customers (Bulent Ozturk, A. & Hancer, M. 2022). On social media, one of the main objectives of advertising is to increase brand awareness. To achieve this, a consistent and recognizable brand image, supported by a strong visual identity, is essential (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022). Using rich, memorable photos and videos is especially important in today’s digital landscape, as they not only capture attention but also present a story, for instance, about a company’s history or values. Effective communication with customers through these elements strengthens connections and enhances brand perception. (Diamond, S. 2020)

Social media also allows to create engaging content that offers customers an "experience" even before they visit the location or decide to purchase a service/product (Bulent Ozturk, A. & Hancer, M. 2022).

2.3.2 Email Marketing

"The more precisely the email list is segmented, the more relevant marketing a company can do", says Lahtinen et al. (2022). Marketing automation plays a particularly important role in email marketing, especially as the need for personalized email campaigns has grown with digitalization. With automation, more can also be achieved from email marketing when it is timely, personalized, and measurable. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022) In the digital world, people live in a constant flood of messages and information, so standing out from the crowd is becoming more challenging, but also more important than ever (Gunelius, S. 2018; Nisar, T. M., Prabhakar, G. & Patil, P. P. 2018).

Personalization in marketing, especially email marketing, is crucial. If segmentation has not been successful and the customer does not receive marketing that is appropriate to their interests, there is a high probability of losing the customer. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022) Success largely depends on what can be controlled, and one thing an entrepreneur or marketer can control is their email marketing list. This list is not just a collection of contacts, it is a way to reach an audience and customers that has chosen to hear from the business and its services or products. This gives a valuable chance to send personalized messages, see how people interact with them, and encourage actions like making purchases or promoting the brand to others. (Gunelius, S. 2018).

To get the most out of email marketing efforts, goals need to be defined. All email marketing channels are categorized into one of three types: acquire, nurture, or convert. Therefore, it is necessary to identify which type of email marketing is most suited for achieving business goals and where in the marketing funnel the audience is. The first type (aqcuire) focuses on acquiring prospective customer leads, aiming to attract new potential customers and obtain relevant email addresses. The second type (nurture) nurtures these leads over time, building relationships and trust. The third type (convert) aims to convert these leads into paying customers or encourages them to take a specific, desired action, such as signing up or making a purchase. (Gunelius, S. 2018)

The same principles apply in email marketing as in other forms of digital marketing. Interesting, informative content about a product or service must first be sent to potential customers before attempting to sell it to them. It is pointless, and just wasting time and money, to try to sell a product or service if the customer is not potential or does not know what is being discussed. (Gunelius, S. 2018) Table 1 shows which email funnel category a company should implement with different goals.

Goals	Email Funnel to Use
Small list and need to generate more leads to fill the top of the funnel.	Acquistion
Need to keep people who are on the list and in the middle of the funnel engaged so they move to the bottom of the funnel.	Nurture
Need to nudge people who are at the bottom of the funnel to act so there is a possibility to reach a specific marketing or business objective.	Conversion

Table 1. Email Marketing Funnel Matrix, adapted from (Gunelius, S., 2018)

2.3.3 Search Engine Marketing

Search engine marketing refers to marketing that takes place on a search engine, such as Google. Search engine marketing encompasses both search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM). SEO increases traffic to a website by improving the site's visibility in search engines, and SEM is advertising used in search engines, which is determined based on the search terms used by the user and their location. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022) It is especially important for smaller companies or companies that are unknown to their target audience in terms of increasing visibility (Bulent Ozturk, A. & Hancer, M. 2022; Dou, W. et al. 2010). This method allows businesses to effectively reach their target audience and create customer engagement (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024).

Search engines play a critical role in online visibility, with more than half of all website visitors now arriving via search engines rather than direct links. In addition to providing a platform for commerce, search engines can increase brand visibility and reach a global

audience. Even if users do not click on a search result, simply appearing at the top of search listings can have a positive influence on a brand's image. Consumers often associate top-ranked results with trustworthiness and high quality, which can have a significant impact on a company's brand image. (Dou, W. et al. 2010)

2.3.4 Video Marketing

Most purchasing decisions are based on emotions, and therefore companies should focus on stimulating an emotional connection with their customers (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024; Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022). Video is one of the most effective way to appeal to customers' emotions. Video is a relatively easy way to grab a customer's attention and, for example, teach them how a product or service works. Videos can also be used to recruit staff, break down a company's culture, or introduce a company and its staff, among other things. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022)

Videos are an effective and versatile way to do content marketing and therefore also a great tool for remarketing. When using videos as part of a company's marketing efforts, it is essential to understand who the target audience is for those videos. Longer, slower-paced videos are effective for engaging customers and driving conversions, such as signing up for a loyalty program or making a purchase. Short, faster-paced videos are more suitable for raising awareness about the company and its services or products. The task of remarketing is to attract the attention of customers and target groups, remind them of products or services, get them to click on an ad, and return them to websites, for example. Since the product or service is already familiar to potential customers in remarketing, companies should prioritize short videos in this context. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022)

2.3.5 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing refers to a company's collaboration with someone who has visibility and influence over people's behaviour. Influencers include celebrities, bloggers, and YouTubers who promote products and services to their followers and viewers through social media channels. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022)

According to a 2019 study presented by Lahtinen et al. (2022), 70% of 600 people trusted influencers as much or even more than their friends, and 78% trusted content created by influencers more than advertisements. Influencer marketing is also considered one of the most effective forms of advertising, according to various studies and sources. (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022) Influencer marketing has experienced explosive growth, and the global market size for influencer marketing in 2023 was over 21 billion USD (Lahtinen, N. et al. 2022; Statista 2024b). It is predicted that in 2024, this will increase by approximately 3 billion more (Statista 2024b).

In addition to influencers and social media influencers, people value reviews and recommendations from other consumers. These have been found to be beneficial for businesses and help build trust and maintain long-term customer relationships. (Ritz, W., Wolf, M. & McQuitty, S 2019; Deb, S. K. et al. 2024) When searching for suitable travel destinations and information, people are influenced by the opinions of others and trust, especially, real-time feedback. Thanks to digitalization, companies can provide their customers with the opportunity to see feedback from other customers. (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024)

3 Methodology

This chapter presents the research data and methods. The study was conducted entirely as qualitative research, which is particularly suitable when the aim is to gain a deep understanding of phenomena, examine the impact of individual actors in specific situations, or explore cause-and-effect relationships that cannot be studied in controlled experimental conditions (Metsämuuronen, J. 2008). The purpose of qualitative research is to analyze the data from a specific theoretical-methodological perspective, allowing focus on what is essential (Alasuutari, P. 2011).

Qualitative research was chosen for this study because it aims to explore what makes a Finnish golf course appealing to international golfers and how digital marketing impacts this appeal. Data was collected through semi-structured thematic interviews with five different interviewees. This method is suitable when exploring topics that are not well understood, when working with a small number of respondents, or when a deep understanding is required (Metsämuuronen 2008). In addition to primary data from interviews, existing literature and research on the topic were used to support the findings. This method was selected for its ability to provide a detailed understanding of the research topic by examining the experiences, opinions, and perspectives of different individuals. It allows for flexible exploration of what various groups value and how they perceive the subject.

3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured thematic interview was chosen as the data collection method for its flexibility and ability to elicit both structured responses and open-ended insights. Although a set of pre-determined questions guided the interviews, additional questions were used to explore further into relevant topics based on the participants' responses. This approach ensured that key themes were consistently addressed across all interviews and allowed for the exploration of unique perspectives and spontaneous insights.

Interviews were conducted with both Finnish and foreign golfers who have a broader knowledge of different golf courses and their services. In addition, the CEO of a foreign golf course were interviewed. When selecting interviewees, attention was paid to their

backgrounds. The interview data consisted of five participants who supported the research from different perspectives as presented in Table 2.

Interviewee 1	Finnish golfer, member of Koski-Golf
Interviewee 2	Finnish golfer, member of Koski-Golf
Interviewee 3	CEO of a foreign golf course
Interviewee 4	Foreign golfer
Interviewee 5	Foreign golfer

Table 2. Roles of the Interviewees

The interviewees were purposefully selected to come from different positions and participants who view this research topic from different perspectives, in order to make the study as relevant and valid as possible. However, the participants were consciously sought out to be people who all have experience with golf and playing it in several different countries and landscapes. This way, the interviewees had a broad understanding of the research topic, and their experiences and opinions were relevant to the research subject.

All interviews were arranged in person via Teams to adhere to the schedule and were conducted between 14.11.2024 and 21.11.2024. Some of the interviews were conducted in Finnish, some in English. Each interview was recorded and transcribed, and later manually completed to match the recording. The average duration of the interviews was 15 minutes, but since the interview question framework differed among interviewees, the number and content of the questions also affected the length of the interview. Care was taken to ensure the shorter duration did not limit the depth of responses by asking follow-up questions as needed. Three different interview question frameworks were prepared, one for each interview groups.

With Finnish participants, Koski-Golf's members, the focus was more on Koski-Golf itself, including its strengths and areas for improvement. In contrast, discussions with international participants addressed expectations and perceptions related to Finnish golf courses on a more general level. This ensured that the broadest possible view of the topic was obtained, and comprehensive answers were provided, taking into account the strengths and knowledge of each interviewee. The questions were also created with the research questions and theoretical

framework in mind. In addition, at the end of the interview, each interviewee was asked if they had anything to add regarding to the topic.

3.2 Content Analysis

The interview data was analyzed using content analysis, a method in which the key themes are categorized, their frequency and any outliers are identified, and the findings are interpreted systematically (Metsämuuronen 2008; Olander, H. 2024). The aim of this approach is to identify key themes and insights that emerge from the participants' responses and to provide an interpretation of the phenomenon or topic under study, for example by reducing or combining observations. (Alasuutari 2011) This approach is particularly suitable when the aim is to clarify what the data reveals, what it addresses, and what elements it contains (Olander, H. 2024).

After collecting the data through interviews and transcribing all of them, the analysis began by familiarizing with the data by reading it through several times. Once the interview data had become familiar, the main points from each interviewee were identified through transcription, and the most relevant information for the thesis topic was collected. After this, the responses and main points from all the interviews were organized into a table according to the interview questions. This allowed for comparison between the interviewees' answers and the identification of similarities. The table helped structure the data and its key themes in a logical order. Once the table was complete, it became easier to identify common themes and topics in the responses and classify them using keywords. The goal was to summarize and organize the data by identifying the key content, concepts, and themes across the interviewees.

3.3 Case Company: Koski-Golf

Koski-Golf is a golf course and a company offering golf services in Kuusankoski, Kouvola. The golf course has been in operation since 1989 and holds the position as the largest sports club in Kouvola, with approximately 1,500 members. In addition to the 18-hole course, the golf course area also includes practice areas, frisbee golf and football golf courses, a club restaurant and a golf shop. The golf course also features several conference and event spaces

in the area, that can be freely booked by both golfers and anyone else interested. (Koski-Golf 2024)

In recent years, Koski-Golf has increasingly integrated digital marketing into its marketing strategy. The company's main social media channels are Instagram and Facebook, but TikTok videos are also published occasionally, although it is not a primary focus. In addition, the website is actively used and kept up to date, with efforts to improve visuals and clarity.

Koski-Golf is not the only golf course in the area, as there are two 18-hole golf courses and one 9-hole course in Kouvola. When looking at Kymenlaakso, there are a total of three 18-hole golf courses and two 9-hole golf courses. (Golfpiste.com 2024)

Koski-Golf's main target groups are active golfers, beginners and hobbyists, companys and other groups, as well as families. Active players are experienced and regular golfers. Beginners seek accessible services and guidance, while businesses use the golf course for events and meetings. Families and leisure visitors enjoy not only golf but also other activities that Koski-Golf has to offer. (Niinimäki, M. 2024)

Koski-Golf aims to provide a top-tier golfing experience, attract new members and players with low-barrier events and golf courses, strengthen business partnerships, and create a strong sense of community through events for all members. (Niinimäki, M. 2024)

4 Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to explore into the research material, interviews, and present the results obtained from the interview data. The results are reviewed based on what is relevant from the perspective of the study and the research questions. The results obtained from the different interviews are used in a mixed manner. The review of the data is divided into three subchapters, foreign golfers' assumptions and thoughts about the Finnish golf courses and local golfers experiences about Koski-Golf, things to help Finnish golf courses to attract foreign customers to Finland, and finally, based on the data, the effective use of digital marketing at Finnish golf courses and in the case company is examined.

4.1 Expectations and Experiences of a Finnish Golf Courses

Before identifying effective digital marketing strategies or ways to attract international players to Koski-Golf, interviewees were asked about their expectations and experiences regarding Finnish golf courses and Koski-Golf, as outlined in the theoretical framework. Interviewees 1 and 2, Koski-Golf's members, had a clear understanding of the strengths of the golf course. Customer service at the course was perceived as excellent and pleasant, and helpfulness immediately created a better impression of the course, when the caddiemaster and other customer service was warm. Among the interviewees, Koski-Golf members also praised the restaurant services, noting they were on the same level or better than at other Finnish and international courses.

Additionally, interviewees 1 and 2 were asked, *"Is there anything that Finnish golf courses, and Koski-Golf, could learn from foreign golf courses to attract customers?"* The responses highlighted that Koski-Golf could better showcase its strengths and create a greater sense of luxury, for example, through the use of pictures on social media and the website. As a point of comparison, foreign golf courses were highlighted, where attention to small details and finer points has specifically elevated the courses to the next level. Interviewees 1 and 2 felt that foreign courses exude more sophistication and a sense of luxury, as the courses are finished, and greater attention is paid to comfort and details. *"When you arrive at the golf course, there's a certain elegance, even in the simplest details like flower arrangements and*

paving – it creates the feeling that you've arrived at a luxurious place, even if it's not necessarily anything extraordinary in reality," stated Interviewee 2.

None of the foreign interviewees 3, 4 or 5 had visited Finland or played on Finnish golf courses, but they were asked about their expectations regarding to Finnish golf courses in general. Their perceptions were strongly associated with nature and its greenery. Additionally, the interviewees mentioned that they assumed Finnish golf courses would be in excellent condition, partly due to the favourable weather conditions. Each interviewee noted that, based on their assumptions, courses in Finland and the Nordic countries appear completely different compared to golf courses in Southern Europe, making playing in Finland a completely unique and different experience.

In addition to their expectations, interviewees 4 and 5 were asked about the factors that influence their choice of golf courses and the specific wishes or needs they have when playing abroad. Interviewee 4 emphasized the look of the golf course and how the course has presented itself externally as factors impacting to the decision. Both interviewees mentioned that additional services, such as a restaurant, pro shop, and club rental options, play a significant role in their choice of golf courses. In addition to these factors, interviewee 4 assumed that in addition to beautiful nature, Finnish golf courses could offer river views.

In addition to interviewees 1 and 2 emphasizing Koski-Golf's excellent customer service, interviewee 3, the CEO of a foreign golf course, also highlighted its importance in creating the image and appeal of a golf course. According to the study done in Southern Europe, which the interviewee 3 has been involved in making, the second most important factor international golfers expect from golf courses, and one that fosters a desire to return, is service and customer experience. *"Because if we have a good golf course and good weather, but people are not comfortable here, they will choose another course. I think it's the customer service what brings players back",* interviewee 3 emphasized the crucial role of customer service in attracting and retaining players.

4.2 Attracting Foreign Golfers to Finnish Golf Courses

One of the most important objectives of the interviews was to explore the foreign interviewees' interest in Finnish golf courses and how this interest could be increased through

various activities and modifications on the course. All the interviewees had significant experience in playing golf, and each had been involved in golf course operations in some capacity, such as different associations and committees. Considering this, their perspectives of the topic could be compared with one another, as they all had a lot of knowledge about how golf courses work in general.

Based on the interviews, the attractiveness of Finnish golf courses and especially Koski-Golf is enhanced by factors such as the beauty of nature, calmness, unique landscapes, the quality of practice areas, and short transitions between fairways, different areas that players play golf in the course. As interviewee 1 noted, *"As for practice areas, having seen and tried many, I believe we have one of the very best. Of course, the surfaces need to be in good condition, but very few courses offer the possibility to hit from 100–150 meters to a green."* Interviewees 1 and 2 revealed that both considered the golf course's scenery, especially the river flowing alongside the fairways, to be Koski-Golf's most significant selling point, *"the wow effect"*. Both interviewees have played on numerous courses in Finland and abroad and regarded the river as a unique feature of the golf course. As previously mentioned, Koski-Golf's excellent and warm customer service was also highlighted as a strength in the interviews with respondents 1 and 2.

Finnish respondents, interviewees 1 and 2, were asked what could be improved at Koski-Golf to specifically attract more international visitors. Interviewee 1 mentioned courses finishing as an area that could elevate the course to the next level. Cleanliness and attention to details, such as the edges of paths and tee boxes, would create a more enjoyable environment and a polished overall feel. The other Finnish interviewee agreed, emphasizing that focusing on details and finishing touches would create a sense of luxury and exclusivity. Interviewee 2 also highlighted the importance of photographs on the company's social media and website, especially in digital marketing. Particularly showcasing the river in images could generate broader interest internationally, but also in general bringing out the best aspects of the golf course in pictures and videos.

Interviewee 1 also mentioned that climate warming has caused significant challenges in maintaining lush golf courses and minimizing drought in Southern Europe, and these have become an increasingly serious problem further south. This could positively impact the attractiveness of Nordic golf courses in the future. At the same time, interviewees 3, 4, and 5 identified greenery and natural surroundings as key strengths of Finnish golf courses, based

on what they had seen in pictures and videos, for example on social media, and what they had heard from friends and others.

Interviewees 3 and 4, who had not visited in Finland, mentioned the long days and extended daylight during the summer. Both had heard about Finland's nearly around-the-clock daylight during the summertime, and felt that this experience was something not found in many other places. This aspect made Finland, in their eyes, an intriguing and attractive destination for golf tourism. Finnish golf courses have the unique ability to offer an almost 24-hour golf experience, as mentioned by Interviewee 3.

Interviewee 4 pointed out the role of golf influencers and celebrities in enhancing the attractiveness and appeal of golf courses among international visitors. Additionally, the interviewee saw it as an advantage if the golf course could offer additional services, allowing non-golfing companions to engage in other activities available in the area. In addition, foreign interviewees mentioned that extensive language options on websites are a great advantage and even a requirement for a golf course when attracting foreign customers and golfers.

Interviewee 3 mentioned during the interview that many tourists and international customers are interested not only about the golf course, but also the destination itself. The company, golf course, should highlight what else visitors can experience in the area, such as other activities or restaurants. "*The destination itself is really important for the golfers. Lot of people look for other things than golf like restaurants, nightlife, beaches and weather",* interviewee 3 mentioned. Showcasing these aspects on the golf course's website and social media, as well as making the destination itself appealing and attractive, could increase interest among tourists and international golfers.

4.3 Effective Digital Marketing for International Golfers

All five interviewees were asked about digital marketing, active social media presence, how they find different golf courses, and what they would like to see on golf courses' social media platforms as well as websites. All interviewees were fairly aligned in their responses to questions related to digital marketing, which allows for generalizing the interview data and combining the answers from different participants.

All five interviewees agreed that social media marketing and its active use are a positive addition to a golf course's appeal and attractiveness. Interviewees 1 and 2 were asked how much they value the digital marketing of a golf course when selecting where to play and whether active social media visibility influences their decision to visit certain courses, both in Finland and abroad. Interviewee 1 felt that active use of social media is beneficial for visiting players, as it provides up-to-date information about the golf course, such as its condition and whether players get value for their money. Additionally, various marketing campaigns tend to capture their attention. Interviewee 2, on the other hand, favoured email marketing: "*For courses I haven't played much, receiving an email at the right time definitely influences my decision*." The interviewee 2 also emphasized the importance of attractive, appealing images and pointed out that everyday content, such as staff introductions, informative posts about competitions, and events, as well as updates about daily operations, are of interest.

Interviewees 4 and 5 were asked, *"In your opinion, what could Finnish golf courses do to stand out internationally?"* Both mentioned social media as an effective way to stand out and increase visibility in today's world. They had also come across TikTok videos created by Koski-Golf when asked if they had seen advertising or marketing by Finnish golf courses online. Interviewee 4 also mentioned influencer marketing as an effective way to increase the golf course's visibility across Europe. Collaborating with influencers who are followed by international audience could help promote the course more widely.

In addition to social media, email marketing and search engines were highlighted in the interviews. Interviewee 3 revealed that email marketing is by far the most effective marketing method in their golf course. After every round, players receive an email where they can rate their experience on the course and provide feedback. In general, they strive to collect as much feedback as possible and evaluate customers' experiences with different aspects. Interviewees 4 and 5, on the other hand, revealed that when searching for new courses, Google is the most likely option.

According to the interviewees, the type of content that works well in marketing, attracting customers, and reaching new ones includes clear and visually appealing images of the course and its surroundings. The images should highlight the best features and characteristics of the course, creating an "experience" for customers even before they physically visit the location itself. This helps set expectations, giving customers an idea of what to hope for, and what

kind of experience they can expect at the golf course. In addition to images, several interviewees emphasized the importance of videos alongside photos. Videos can convey much more information and provide a better understanding of the atmosphere and appearance of the place. Interviewee 4, for instance, mentioned videos where a player plays through a hole, which is then shared on social media. Such videos allow visiting players to get a sense of the course in advance and better prepare for their visit. Because in the end, that's like what I'm interested in. *"The more beautiful the golf course is, the more I want to play there, I think",* pointed out interviewee 4, highlighting the role of visual appeal in attracting players to a course.

Interviewee 5, in turn, felt that reviews, photos, and videos shared by other players and customers, especially on social media, are important when searching for information about new courses. Reviews and posts from other customers build trust and help visualize the location better from different perspectives.

Interviewee 3 was asked, *"How have you used storytelling to build your brand and attract international golfers?"* The golf course had recently hired a marketing agency that focused on storytelling as part of brand building and, more specifically, brand strengthening. The interviewee felt that while the customer experience was good, there had been room for improvement in communication and in showing people what they do. The main goal of storytelling was not to increase sales or acquire new customers, but to build a stronger brand for the golf course and, as a result, make people proud to be associated with it. The interviewee explained that through storytelling, they aim to tell people what they can expect and showcase all the great aspects and strengths of the course.

5 Discussion

The interview data closely reflected the literature and previous research reviewed earlier. This chapter analyze the similarities and differences between the findings from the literature, previous studies, and the interview findings. Additionally, it presents concrete actions and recommendations for the case company, Koski-Golf, on attracting and engaging international golfers and customers based on the interview data. The suggestions emphasize digital marketing and enhancing the customer experience.

When reading the results obtained from the interviews or the theoretical background, it is evident that social media and digital marketing play a crucial role in a company's operations today (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024; Trunfio, M. & Della Lucia, M. 2019). The similarities across the various data in this study are largely based on digital marketing and its effective utilization. The theoretical background highlighted how storytelling and visual elements are crucial in engaging customers (Bulent Ozturk, A. & Hancer, M. 2022). Interviewee 3 also emphasized how their golf course has recently invested in this marketing approach. The interview data revealed that storytelling has been increasingly utilized in their social media to show players and customers what they can expect from the golf course and to grow the brand into larger and more recognizable. This same point was also underscored in the literature review by Lahtinen et al. (2022).

There were also similarities in the use of videos and creating experiences through social media. Videos are one of the most effective ways to attract customers' attention and evoke emotions (Lahtinen et al. 2022). Interview data also highlighted the importance of videos in social media. Beautiful and engaging videos, along with captivating images, were considered by the interviewees to be one of the most significant factors influencing decision-making on social media, such as choosing golf courses or golf destinations. Videos showcasing the golf course and its fairways emerged from the interviews as particularly attractive marketing content.

The interviews also revealed the importance of creating experiences through social media. Storytelling was highlighted as a key approach to engaging customers and audiences, especially those who have not yet visited the golf course, contributing significantly to building a connection and enhancing appeal.

Similar findings were observed regarding influencer marketing in both the interview data and the literature. The interviews revealed that celebrities or golf influencers generate interest in golf courses and can help stand out internationally through influencer marketing. Based on previous literature, influencer marketing is also considered one of the most effective forms of advertising (Lahtinen et al. 2022). In addition to influencers and celebrities, the interviewees valued reviews and photos shared by other people when researching different golf courses. This aspect was also referenced in the theoretical background (Ritz, W., Wolf, M., & McQuitty, S. 2019; Deb, S. K. et al. 2024).

In addition to social media and influencer marketing, email marketing was highlighted as one of the most effective marketing tool for a golf course. Personalized marketing has become increasingly important, and customers now expect more tailored services and experiences. Email marketing is an efficient and straightforward way to meet these expectations (Lahtinen et al. 2022). Interviewee 3 shared that at their golf course, customers receive an email after each round to evaluate their experience on the course. Looking at the numbers, email marketing proved to be the most effective, not only in terms of sales, but overall, told interviewee 3 about their marketing results.

Google emerged as the most likely channel for finding golf courses and golf travel destinations. The importance of search engine marketing was also emphasized in the theory. Especially for smaller companies or those less known to the target audience, search engine marketing is crucial for increasing visibility and brand awareness (Bulent Ozturk et al. 2022).

The theoretical background revealed important points regarding the implementation of the company's digital marketing, which were not significantly mentioned in the interviews. Although these aspects were not significantly mentioned in the interviews, they remain valuable and applicable ideas and tools for the case company. While the interviews focused on practical and experiential perspectives, the theory emphasized the importance of developing a marketing strategy that evokes emotional responses, thereby fostering connections with customers and audiences (Deb, S. K. et al. 2024). Another aspect that could be beneficial for golf course marketing is gamification. Bulent Ozturk et al. (2022) highlighted in their book how gamification is a tool that helps engage target markets and promotes interaction between customers and the company. These theoretical insights align with the interview findings by providing actionable strategies to enhance engagement and emotional connection, both of which are relevant to achieving the goals of the case company.

The consistency between the interview findings and insights from previous literature and research enhances the reliability, relevance, and credibility of the results.

5.1 Practical Recommendations for Koski-Golf

Below are five concrete and tailored recommendations for Koski-Golf to enhance its international appeal and attract new customers internationally based on the research results obtained. These five steps not only contribute to increasing international customers at Koski-Golf but also support the overall development of online visibility and a strong digital marketing strategy.

A. Highlight the best features of the golf course and surroundings.

Highlight the course's best features, such as its unique landscapes, excellent customer service, and high-quality practice areas. Both Finnish and international interviewees emphasized the river as a unique and attractive element that sets Koski-Golf apart from other golf courses. Additionally, international golfers highlighted Finland's long summer days as a distinctive feature. Showcasing this on social media and the website can further increase interest among international customers.

International interviewees expressed expectations for Finnish golf courses to feature beautiful scenery, greenery, and the use of natural materials on the course. Presenting these aspects prominently on social media creates an appealing and inviting image of the course.

B. Improve course maintenance to create a luxury image.

The biggest area for improvement highlighted by Finnish interviewees was the need for greater attention to detail and finishing touches. This would enhance the overall atmosphere and contribute to creating a luxurious image. Consider investing in small but impactful details, such as flower beds, finishing the edges of pathways and tee boxes, and adding paving or other aesthetic enhancements to course maintenance.

Koski-Golf's digital marketing should also focus on creating a luxurious image in marketing materials in social media, websites and in other digital platforms. These efforts will elevate the golf course to a new level, creating the impression of a refined, pristine, and well-maintained course. This, in turn, offers customers a premium golfing experience.

C. Invest in visual and high-quality content to create an experience for customers through social media.

Focus on producing high-quality photo and video content for social media and the website that captures the best features and aspects of the course. Investing in professional materials and content allows you to effectively highlight the golf course's unique features and present it in a way that appeals to potential customers. By sharing visually captivating content, you can attract and engage potential customers, offering a glimpse of the experience they can expect at Koski-Golf and highlighting what the course has to offer for players.

D. Utilize Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Influencer Partnerships

There is currently limited awareness about the quality and popularity of Finnish golf courses, making it essential to enhance the visibility of the golf course through search engine marketing. Based on the interviews, many potential customers rely on search engines like Google to discover new and suitable destinations. By optimizing search engine marketing, Koski-Golf can ensure prominent placement in search results when international customers search for golf courses in Finland.

Leveraging influencers to increase visibility and enhance the company’s appeal is essential in today’s market. As observed in the study, potential customers tend to trust content created by influencers more than traditional advertising. Collaborating with influencers, especially those in the golfing community, can significantly raise awareness and attract new customers.

E. Develop Personalized Email Marketing

Enhance email marketing by focusing on personalized communication. Send tailored offers, event updates, and information about the course and its services to customers based on their

experiences and preferences. Email marketing can and should emphasize the course's unique features and highlight the elements that attract international players.

Email marketing is also an excellent tool for gathering feedback. At its best, it can help build stronger customer relationships, encourage repeat visits, and foster overall engagement and loyalty toward Koski-Golf.

6 Conclusions

This study explores the attractiveness and appeal of Finnish golf courses, with a particular focus on the case company Koski-Golf, in international markets, and identifies effective digital marketing strategies to maximize their appeal and determine what actions the company should take to increase international customers interest. A main research question and three sub-questions guided the qualitative research, which utilized interviews as the primary data source. The findings are presented by addressing the sub-questions first, leading to a comprehensive answer to the main research question. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the research's significance and impact.

First sub-question was "*What are the unique features or services in Koski-Golf which attract foreign players?"* As mentioned in the previous chapters, the Kymijoki River, which players can enjoy on almost every hole at Koski-Golf, is one of the course's most unique features (Koski-Golf 2024). Interview data highlighted the river as one of the best aspects of the course from a competitive advantage perspective. Additionally, the interviews revealed that Koski-Golf's exceptionally high-quality practice areas are unparalleled, both when compared to other Finnish courses and many international ones. Excellent customer service, restaurant services, and short distances between fairways were also mentioned as features that attract international customers to Koski-Golf.

The second sub-question was formulated as *"What services or facilities does an international golfer expect when playing abroad?"* Based on the interviews, it was revealed that international golfers particularly appreciate courses that offer beautiful natural surroundings, such as lakes, lush greenery, and wide fairways with extensive views when playing abroad. In addition, the overall condition and quality of the course, as well as services like practice areas, stood out as one of the most important features that international golfers expect and desire when traveling and playing abroad. On unknown, new courses, clear labeling and communication on the course were highlighted as a relevant feature.

When discussing additional services, the interviewees emphasized the importance of a restaurant, as well as facilities such as a clubhouse with a pro shop, a club rental option, and changing rooms. Beyond the golf course itself, accessibility, such as good flight connections, and the overall attractiveness of the destination are also critical factors for international

golfers. For example, international players and customers may look for example restaurants and nightlife, more than just golf.

The third and final sub-question of the study was *"Which digital marketing strategies, platforms, and methods are especially effective in reaching and engaging international golf enthusiasts?"* The CEO of a foreign golf course particularly emphasized the importance of email marketing. Additionally, several other interviewees, speaking from the perspective of players, found email marketing to be a pleasant and effective marketing method. Social media marketing was widely regarded by the interviewees as an excellent way to highlight the best features of a golf course and to show customers and players what the course has to offer and what they can expect when visiting. The interviewees felt that social media is a great platform for finding up-to-date information, such as the condition and appearance of the course. Furthermore, among international golfers, Google emerged as the primary channel for searching and researching new golf courses and destinations.

All the interviewees emphasized the importance of using beautiful and engaging images and videos in marketing. More than one also mentioned that a golf course should create an "experience" for potential customers even before their visit the golf course, for example, by utilizing storytelling. As one interviewee noted very well, the choice of a golf course or destination often ultimately depends on the images and videos presented.

With the help of the sub-questions, it is possible to answer the main question of the research, which was *"What aspects of Finnish golf courses appeal to international golf enthusiast?"* Finnish golf courses stand out positively from other European courses in several ways, making them an attractive destination for international golfers. Firstly, Finnish golf courses are deeply connected to nature, offering players unique golfing experience. Additionally, Finnish golf courses offer the opportunity for a nearly 24-hour golfing experience during the summertime. This unique feature allows international visitors to play golf almost around the clock, providing a completely different and unforgettable experience compared to other destinations.

Excellent customer service and a warm reception are also key factors that make Finnish golf courses appealing. Hospitality and the quality of customer service create a positive first impression and encourage a desire to return.

Due to the challenges posed by climate change, particularly in Southern Europe, Northern golf destinations are becoming increasingly attractive. Finnish golf courses offer reliable playing conditions in a green and clean environment, which contrasts with the courses in Southern Europe. This makes golfing in the Nordic countries, and in Finland, a completely different and unique experience compared to courses in Southern Europe.

6.1 Reliability of the Research and Future Research Opportunities

This study was limited to examining players and their preferences and expectations regarding Finnish golf courses. Additionally, the focus was narrowed to tourists and leisure golfers, excluding competitive players and professionals. The relatively small number of interviews conducted further restricts the scope and generalizability of the research findings. However, the interviewees were selected from diverse backgrounds to approach the research topic, aiming to obtain as broad and high-quality results as possible within the participants.

Due to these limitations, the results represent only the views and experiences of a small group and cannot, therefore, be generalized to the entire golf industry or considered a comprehensive study on the subject. This thesis provides only a preliminary exploration of the topic, which could be expanded and refined in various ways.

A survey-based study on the same or a similar topic, such as identifying the preferences and expectations of international golfers, could be conducted as a quantitative study. This approach would allow for a broader range of responses and enabling better generalization of the results. Additionally, the research could be deepened by investigating the long-term effectiveness of various digital marketing strategies, such as influencer marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and social media campaigns, in attracting international visitors to a golf course.

A topic like this offers numerous perspectives to explore, making it possible to develop a wide range of additional research topics. By broadening the scope of the study or focusing on specific aspects, such as regional differences or the effectiveness of individual marketing techniques, this research holds significant potential for further exploration. Furthermore, as the results of this study were presented at a fairly general level, since 60% of the interviewees had not visited Finland, future research could gain more detailed insights by including

international golfers who have visited Finland, or more specifically, Koski-Golf. This would allow for a deeper examination of Koski-Golf's strengths and areas for improvement in international markets.

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Declaration of AI usage

ChatGpt was used to help improve writing style and correct spelling mistakes.

The Teams transcription tool was used to help transcribe interviews.

Appendices

Appendix 1.

Interview Framework 1.
1. a) How is Koski-Golf different from courses you have experienced abroad? b) Is there anything special that you particularly appreciate about Finnish courses or Koski-Golf? 2. How much do you value a course's digital marketing and visibility when playing abroad and choosing courses to play in? 3. a) Does active social media visibility or digital marketing campaigns affect your interest in visiting other Finnish golf courses? b) Does a strong social media presence or digital marketing influence which foreign location you want to go to play, for example? 4. a) How do you feel about Koski-Golf's customer service and offerings compared to foreign golf courses? b) Is there anything that Finnish golf courses, and Koski-Golf, could learn from foreign courses to attract customers? 5. If you could choose one development proposal for Koski-Golf, focusing specifically on increasing its international attractiveness, what would it be? 6. What is the best thing about Koski-Golf from a competitive advantage perspective?

Appendix 2.

Interview Framework 2.
1. a) Have you heard anything about Finnish golf courses? b) How would you describe your preconceptions about Finland as a golf destination / Finnish golf courses? 2. What would you expect from a Finnish golf course or golf destination if you were considering a visit? (course design, facilities, natural surroundings, customer service) 3. a) What specific wishes or needs do you value when playing abroad? b) What factors influence your decision when choosing a golf course?

4. Which digital channels have the most influence on your choice of golf travel destinations, and how do you usually discover new golf destinations / courses?

5. Have you ever come across advertising or marketing for a Finnish golf course? If so, what caught your attention?

6. What kind of marketing content or campaigns catch your attention when researching golf trips or trips in general?

7. What kind of information do you need from a golf course's website or social media channels before visiting?

8. a) How important do you consider the additional services offered by a golf course (such as restaurants, accommodation or equipment rental)?
b) How do these influence your decision to play at the course?

9. What would make Finland an appealing golf destination for you, and would you consider visiting in the future; why or why not?

10. In your opinion, what could Finnish golf course do to stand out internationally?

Appendix 3.

Interview Framework 3.

1. a) What digital marketing methods have you used to attract international golfers?
b) Which ones have you found to be the most effective?

2. What kind of experiences / services do international golfers hope to recieve when visiting your golf course?

3. What factors strengthen their satisfaction and desire to return?

4. What special features could a Finnish golf course have to attract your players or international golfers in general?

5. a) What things are international players particularly happy with?
b) Is there something they often suggest for improvement?

6. a) How important do you find feedback from international customers?
b) How do you utilize in developing your field or in marketing?

7. Is there a marketing channel or style that is significantly more effective at reaching international golfers? (for example, social media versus email marketing)

8. a) How to stand out among over 100 golf courses in Finland in your opinion?
b) How do you try to stand out from your competitors?

9. How have you used storytelling to build your brand and attract international golfers?